Understanding the Roles of Aboriginal Women in Cree Traditional Narratives

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in Indigenous Studies
University of Regina

by
Melissa Joan Blind
Regina, Saskatchewan
July 2006
Copyright 2006: Melissa J. Blind
All Rights Reserved
NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.
Melissa Joan Blind, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts, has presented a thesis titled, *Understanding the Roles of Aboriginal Women in Cree Traditional Narratives*, in an oral examination held on July 28, 2006. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: Professor Gail Bowen, Department of English, First Nations University of Canada

Supervisor: Dr. Neal McLeod, Department of Indigenous Studies, First Nations University of Canada

Committee Member: Dr. David Miller, Department of Indigenous Studies, First Nations University of Canada

Committee Member: *Dr. Winona Wheeler, Department of Indigenous Studies, First Nations University of Canada*

Chair of Defense: Dr. Jan van Eijk, Department of Indian Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, First Nations University of Canada

*Attended via Teleconference*
ABSTRACT

The need for incorporating Indigenous oral histories and philosophies within academic research has garnered increased attention in recent years (Ermine, 2000; McLeod, 2005; Stevenson, 2000; Wilson, 2005). This thesis takes such incorporation further, adding Indigenous women's narratives to the academic literature. The strength and determination of women are often forgotten in the midst of narratives concerning men or great events involving men. Narratives of women or involving women classified as traditional, family, life, and counseling narratives, provide the foundations for recognizing and acknowledging the roles of women in Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies. The Cree narrative "The Bear Woman" (Bloomfield, 1930) is representative of a traditional narrative focusing on the importance of kinship, hard work, and resourcefulness, as well as women's responsibilities. The "Woman Who Married a Beaver" (Michelson, 1974) further focuses on Ojibwa and Cree values relating to kinship, reciprocity and change. The six versions of "The Rolling Head" (Ahenakew, 1929; Skinner, 1919; Colomb and Michel with Translator Merasty in Brightman, 1989; Bloomfield, 1930; McLeod, 1977) discuss the consequential actions of women who neglect their own families. Louise Halfe's interpretation of "The Rolling Head" (2004) explores the consequential actions of individuals who pass judgment on others and their circumstances in the absence of sufficient situational information. These themes are further represented throughout discussions of my own family and life narratives. Narratives like those discussed herein help to make sense of the world and aid in understanding the evolving roles of women in society. Women's narratives or narratives involving women, as interpreted by women, need to be recognized and liberated to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
empower women and transform stereotypes within the general public. Drawing upon narratives of women in traditional stories, as well as women within one's own family can lead to a greater understanding of modern life for all women, as it has for me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed their time and knowledge to this thesis. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Neal McLeod for his support, thoroughness, and invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank my research committee, Dr. David R. Miller and Dr. Winona Wheeler, for their insights, recommendations, and encouragement. Their timely and extensive reviews are greatly appreciated.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Maria Campbell, Joseph Naytowhow, and Louise Bernice Halfe, for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet with me. Their time, effort and patience have contributed to my understanding of Cree narratives and practices.

I am extremely grateful for the funding provided to me by so many sources. All of my educational pursuits have been supported by Touchwood Post Secondary. I have been fortunate to have scholarship funding from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and the Department of Indigenous Studies. The work opportunities afforded by my professors at First Nations University of Canada have provided much more than a source of funding, they have provided a foundation of experience for my future research.

I would also like to offer a special thanks to my work colleagues in Financial Services at the University of Regina, particularly Joyce White, who supported my educational pursuits by allowing me to work as many or as little hours as I needed to complete and finance this thesis. I also offer my thanks to my friends and family for their support and understanding over the course of this work. Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Nick Carleton. His patience, insight, and encouragement are at the very heart of my success.
This thesis is dedicated to all the women in my family,
who encouraged me and guided me
through their stories, their laughter,
and their actions.
CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments .................................................................................... iv
Dedication ................................................................................................ v
Table of Contents .................................................................................... vi
List of Illustrations ................................................................................... vii

Chapter
1. Introduction ..................................................................... 1
2. Oral Narratives and its Impact on Identity ............... 9
   Definition and different genres of oral narratives
3. Traditional Narratives Coming to Life: An In-depth
   Look at "The Bear Woman" and
   "The Woman Who Married a Beaver" ......................... 36
   In-depth analysis of "The Bear Woman" and
   "The Woman Who Married a Beaver"
   Common themes between the narratives
4. Reinterpreting the Narrative of "The Rolling Head" .... 62
   Recreation of "The Rolling Head"
   Interpretation and Analysis
   kistesinaw / Transformer narratives
5. A Contemporary Understanding of "Rolling Head" ..... 99
   Louise Halfe's interpretation of "The Rolling Head"
   Traditional and Contemporary Understandings
   Western theories and Indigenous paradigms
6. Conclusion ....................................................................... 124
Cree Glossary .............................................................................. 128
Bibliography ................................................................................ 130
Appendices .................................................................................. 142
ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1. A Traditional Cree Model</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. Five Stages of Colonialism</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3. Western Theories and Indigenous Paradigms</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The narratives that individuals tell, read, and live make up their life. Narratives and stories shape how individuals interact, react, and respond to certain events or occurrences in their lives. Individuals' interactions, reactions, and responses may change over time to include and incorporate further education, and experiences, while improving how he or she understands either his or her own and other cultures.

However, culture has different meanings for different people. The term "culture" in this thesis is used to look at the beliefs, practices, and worldviews of a people belonging to a specific ethnic group. To understand various cultures one must first understand that cultures are not static. Charles Stewart states, cultures "are porous; they are open to intermixture with other, different cultures and they are subject to historical change precisely on account of these influences." Cultures adopt and adapt certain elements from other cultural groupings, while retaining the core of their uniqueness, their worldviews, and their narratives.

Cultural blending and continuity exists within most multicultural families. Children of these unions often encounter their cultural backgrounds through food, music, dance, and through relatives' storytelling. As such, the children may use elements from the different cultures they encounter to make sense of the world around them. Personally I have often blended elements from both sides of my family to question or make sense of certain events or situations. I come from a diverse family and identify myself as a Cree-Different meanings for "culture" can be found in Edward Sapir, Culture, eds., Regna Darnell, Judith Irvine, Richard Handler, (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999); Benedict R. O'G Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. (New York: Verso, 1991).

Ukrainian woman, with English, Polish, and Hungarian roots. My father is of Cree and English descent – his mother is Cree and his father is English. My mother, on the other hand, is part Ukrainian, Polish, and Hungarian. I identify as a Cree-Ukrainian woman – as opposed to simply Cree or Ukrainian, or even any of my other cultural backgrounds – because of my connection to beliefs and practices passed on by my relatives.

The majority of my mother's family lives upon farms in the Touchwood Hills area (posâkanâcîhk3 "at [the] Touchwood Hills") north of Cupar, encompassing the Lestock and Punnichy4 communities in Saskatchewan, as did my paternal grandfather's family after their immigration from England. My paternal grandmother's family is from Gordon's First Nation, also situated in the Touchwood Hills, approximately five miles south of Punnichy.

Both sides of my family's narratives show a mutual and respectful co-existence. My ancestors lived together and interacted because my maternal and paternal grandparents and great-grandparents were so concerned with surviving and providing for the general well-being of the children. Because of this "survivance,"5 different cultural skills and tools relating to domestic chores, medicinal properties, or even hunting and trapping were welcomed simply because they aided their survival and prosperity. That is why the majority of the narratives I remember from both sides of my family involve narratives of change, resistance, and survival. As a result, I am also drawn to a variety of narratives that deal with these dynamics.

3 In Cree Standard Roman Orthography capital letters are not used in the spelling of Cree nouns.
4 Punnichy is derived from the Cree word "pandcay." This was the nickname of a mixed blood (German and Cree) trader in the area. The nickname means "the yellow hairs of a chick that poke through," as the trader had little yellow hair on his head like a chick.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The narratives discussed in this thesis focus on change, survival—and depending on how the reader views the narratives—they also look at resistance. The focus of my thesis revolves around the roles and actions of women in the Cree and Ojibwa narratives of "The Bear Woman," "The Woman who Married a Beaver," and "The Rolling Head." My connection to these narratives stems from how I see myself as well as the women on both sides of my family. To clarify the effects of this complicated cultural and literary mixture, I am using Cree narratives, "The Bear Woman" and "The Rolling Head" and Ojibwa narratives, "The Woman who Married a Beaver" and "The Rolling Head," focusing on the roles of women to see how these narratives relate back both to me and to the specific Cree, Ukrainian, Polish, and Hungarian women in my family. The interspersion of the traditional narratives with my own personal family narratives provides a deeper understanding of how these traditional narratives relate to contemporary situations. This personal approach to understanding the traditional narratives exist "outside of the standard forms of academic writing," yet offer a broader understanding of how narratives influence and become part of our own lives.

Many bands were multilingual and multi-cultural, incorporating various cultural practices from other groups. Many bands in Saskatchewan are composed of multilingual groups—such as the Cree and Ojibwa. The Cree and Ojibwa both belong to the

---

6 As brought to my attention by many people, including my committee members.
Algonquian language family and have a similar language structure. The two groups took part in similar customs regarding birth, marriage, and as well as other ceremonies. In some cases, these groups purchased or traded ceremonial practices, songs, dances, or stories. In addition to having similar customs, the Ojibwa and Cree share similar narratives involving the character of the trickster, *wisahkēcāhk* in Cree narratives and *nanabush* in Ojibwa narratives. These similarities can be seen throughout the select narratives collected by Alanson Skinner in "The Plains Ojibwa Tales" and Edward Ahenakew in "Cree Trickster Tales." The connection between the Cree and Ojibwa extends beyond language, customs, and narratives to include alliances and partnerships throughout the fur trade, the signing of Treaties, and settlement of reserves. Since this thesis concentrates on the roles of women in the traditional narratives of the Cree and the Ojibwa, the alliances and partnerships between the two cultural groups will not be discussed.

Women's roles in traditional narratives provide one with a clearer understanding of the division of labour within a culture. Women's narratives are important because they

---

provide details relating to everyday life events. The themes covered throughout the three narratives focus on duties and responsibilities relating to household chores, child rearing, and relationships – including human, animal, and spiritual relationships. Women's experiences and responsibilities are essential to understanding women's roles in the culture, community, and individual lives. By focusing on women's narratives and their roles and responsibilities, I am able to convey how these narratives can be related to contemporary life.

The themes within the traditional narratives discussed in this thesis — relationships, work ethic, as well as physical and spiritual responsibilities — can all be related to contemporary life. By analysing and relating women's roles in traditional and life narratives to a contemporary understanding of these narratives, the narratives act as beacons of strength. Women in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, often must juggle relationships, children, domestic and spiritual duties, with professional or educational pursuits. Knowing that women before – either through traditional or life narratives – have dealt with similar situations, brings strength, determination, or courage to women addressing new or stressful situations today. By celebrating and acknowledging women's narratives, future generations of women will recognize their own importance, as women, to contributing to a healthy and balanced future.

My thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter titled, Oral Narratives and its Impact on Identity, focuses on what oral narratives are, including the different genres and how these narratives impact a person's identity. In looking at the different genres I include narrative examples from my own life and family to elaborate how these
narratives have had an impact on my own identity. By including my own life and family narratives I am situating how I view and interpret the narratives in the following chapters.

The second chapter is entitled, Traditional Narratives Coming to Life: An In-depth look at "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," where I concentrate upon the role of women within the two narratives. My attention was drawn to the characteristics the women within the narratives embodied. The positive characteristics relating to women's adaptability, strength, perseverance, and courage reminded me a great deal of the women within my own family. The positive characteristics of the women in the narratives also contribute to the common themes found throughout the narratives. The common themes of kinship, hard work, women's responsibilities, and spiritual responsibilities, highlight aspects of Cree and Ojibwa worldviews in an easy to understand format.

In the third chapter, Reinterpreting the Narrative of "The Rolling Head," I draw upon six versions of the narrative, expanding this to include my own interpretation. The narrative of "The Rolling Head" is intriguing because, on a superficial level, it contradicts all of the positive characteristics found in the women from both "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver." "The Rolling Head" narrative, however, needs a more comprehensive examination, taking into account the narratives following "The Rolling Head," as well as the consequences that arise from actions in the narrative of "The Rolling Head." The narrative of "The Rolling Head" challenges our perceptions and ideas relating to relationships, interpersonal conflicts, and potential consequences of our actions. Because the narrative challenges our more selfish and impulsive desires, it
works as a deterrent to the members of the culture - or anyone who takes the time to understand the meanings behind the narrative.

In the fourth chapter, A Contemporary Understanding of "Rolling Head," I explore Louise Halfe's interpretation of "The Rolling Head" through bridging Indigenous paradigms with literary theory. Halfe's interpretation exists outside the six narratives discussed in the third chapter. "The Rolling Head" as interpreted by Halfe, looks at the misinterpretation of the woman's actions by her husband. His misinterpretation of his wife's actions leads him to behead her, kill her pets, and send the children on a long journey to escape the head. Halfe's interpretation challenges the reader to think about the narratives in a holistic frame of mind and not just focus on one side of the narrative.

The three traditional narratives discussed in this thesis, teach and provide the listener and reader with the worldviews, beliefs, morals, and histories of the Cree and Ojibwa. "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver" emphasize positive attributes - such as kinship, hard work, responsibility, and adaptability. The six versions of "The Rolling Head" emphasize negative consequences of the woman's actions. The positive attributes and negative consequences demonstrated throughout the three narratives also exist in the twenty-first Century. By learning and analyzing these stories in light of a contemporary understanding of women's roles and responsibilities, women today will be better equipped to address new or stressful situations in their own lives. The ability to handle new or stressful situations positively, builds confidence, which contributes to a healthy and positive understanding of women's roles and responsibilities.
The scope of this thesis covers three main objectives. The first objectives examine the importance of oral narratives and how they relate to an individual's identity. Oral narratives — including all the different genres discussed in the first chapter — aid in understanding the history of an individual's cultural heritage and family, the creation narratives, and correct ways to act. The second objective focuses on understanding and applying traditional narratives in light of contemporary situations. The narratives and analysis in this thesis serve as examples for understanding women's roles and responsibilities in light of contemporary life. These examples can be further applied to other narratives, drawing additional parallels to a contemporary understanding of women's roles and responsibilities. The third objective discusses using these contemporary understandings of the narratives as a decolonization method. Discussing and analysing narratives in light of a contemporary understanding of the narrative or situation, allows the listener or reader to question or reformulate previous assertions of the narrative or situation.
CHAPTER 1

ORAL NARRATIVES AND ITS IMPACT ON IDENTITY

As children, individuals often encounter stories about far away places, beginnings of time, and worlds where humans and animals could speak with one another. Individuals learn how important these stories are at a very young age. As a child I asked my mother to read or tell me stories of magical places.

Perceptions of time and place did not matter, and questions pertaining to my identity seemed rather easy to answer. I was simply, the daughter of Greg and Audrey Blind, granddaughter of Tony and Elsie Benko and Irene Blind and Lawrence Blackbeard. Everyone I saw was introduced to me as an aunt, an uncle, or a cousin. As I grew older the question "who am I?" grew harder to answer. I was still a daughter, granddaughter, niece, and cousin, but my role changed slightly to include sister, student, friend, and the older I got the more cognizant I became of my various cultural identities, such as Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish, English, and Cree.

As a child I knew nothing about being “Indian,” let alone being part Cree. My Cree heritage comes from my father’s mother, Irene Blind, who was from posákanačíhk (at [the] Touchwood Hills/ Gordon’s First Nation) and worked as a cook in the Gordon’s Residential School kitchen, but I remember relatively little about my paternal grandmother. As a young child I spent most of my time with my mother’s family and my father’s father. I remember quite a bit about going to my maternal grandparents’ farm, and I remember eating corn with my paternal grandfather.

For a long time I thought my grandmother Blind did not like me. I got this impression from my first memories of her when my younger brother Eric was born. My
brother Eric was born with dark skin, dark eyes, and dark hair, while I had fair skin, green eyes, and blond hair. When my family went to the reserve to show Grandma Blind my new baby brother — she was at work at the time and came out to see him — she was so thrilled to have a little “Indian grandson” that she took him in to the school to show her co-workers. My mother and I, on the other hand, sat in the car and waited. Only recently did I learn that after I was born my grandmother came to the Lestock\(^1\) hospital to see me, and was so proud to have a little “white Indian baby” that she took me to show off to her co-workers as well.\(^2\)

As time went by, my perception of what it means to be part Cree changed even more. What I read in school, what I saw in movies and the news, and what I heard from my friends and their parents confused me. I learned that the so-called “real Indians” were vanishing, and the “new Indians” were lazy drunks, looking for a handout. From what I knew and what I saw, my dad did not conform to either of these stereotypes — my dad had two jobs, custom spraying during the spring, and shop foreman for Keyser Farms. Likewise, my grandmother was an extremely hard worker and from what I heard — most of my dad’s cousins were very well educated with important jobs, in education and policy creation working to benefit other Indigenous people, including myself and my family.

While I heard some stories of my Blind family, I did not hear stories in depth until I entered university. The classes I have taken and the professors I have worked with have used the stories of the people to introduce me to several aspects of Cree history and culture. My interest in oral narratives stems from my love of listening and learning through stories. Oral narratives allow me to learn different aspects of my culture,

---

1 Lestock, Saskatchewan, is in the Touchwood Hills area. Lestock is situated 8 miles from my maternal grandparents’ farm and approximately 20 miles from Gordon’s First Nation.

2 Audrey Haumschild, personal email (27 February 2005).
including where we are from, where we are now, and where we may be going in the future. Furthermore, oral narratives allow me to conceptualize certain problems and solutions in my life through listening or reading of the experiences of others. By looking at oral narratives while considering the academic standards, the different genres, and how these genres can be used, I will discuss why Cree narratives are important to a proper understanding of Cree culture and identity.

Within the discipline of Indigenous Studies we as students are often encouraged to write in a narrative or first person format. In contrast, within the larger academic realm we are encouraged to research and write on different theories, methodologies, and historical works written by other scholars. However, we must also acknowledge that up until the last thirty to forty years most of the literature regarding Indigenous people in North America was written by non-Indigenous people and did not reflect Indigenous experiences. This does not mean that these works are not important in understanding historical events or different aspects of cultural groups, nor is this meant to imply that early non-Indigenous writers were all wrong in their interpretations of different cultural practices. However, these works do not fully appreciate the perspective, beliefs, and narratives of Indigenous people, which results in an incomplete historical record. By incorporating Indigenous oral narratives into our writings and research we are able to provide a more accurate and complete view of Indigenous life, culture, history, identity, and ways of knowing.

---

1 Donald Fixico, "Methodologies in Reconstructing Native America History" Rethinking American Indian History, ed. Donald Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 118.
The incorporation of Indigenous oral narratives in Indigenous research and writing allows the Indigenous orator to present their culture, history, and way of knowing through their own words. The researcher is able to draw upon the beliefs, experiences, and stories of Indigenous women and men that have passed away by using oral narratives that have been recorded and used by various students for research purposes for over a generation, such as the Oral Film History Project that is housed at the First Nations University of Canada. By preserving these beliefs, experiences, and stories of the previous generations, future generations are able to search for any answers their parents or grandparents cannot answer. For example, Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart's decades-long collection of oral narratives gathered from older relatives and elders, gives great insight into how the narrators remembered their childhood, younger years, marriage, middle age, and older years. kôhkominawak otâcimowinwâwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives, As Told In Their Own Words draws on the grandmothers' stories address the many differences between the experiences of their youth and those of today's youth.

Defining Oral Narratives

Oral narratives consist of creation stories, sacred stories, personal stories, teaching stories, and communal or tribal stories. Oral narratives are not limited to existing within an individual orator, but live within recorded and transcribed texts such as the Freda

---

5 The Oral Film History Project is a collection of Elder interviews dating from the mid-1970s to the mid 1980s in the Treaty four and six areas in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The collection was initiated by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart texts—in addition to continuing within alternate forms of media—such as voice recordings as found on the Métis Museum website—or video clips as found within various libraries. The use of oral narratives is not just restricted to the discipline of Indian Studies, but is also used in other disciplines such as Women’s Studies.7

Oral narratives as told by Indigenous peoples can shape the knowledge of their cultural group’s past, present, and potential future. In order better to understand both the culture and ourselves, we need to understand the stories that surround the culture and our lives. Julie Cruikshank writes about the importance of understanding all the aspects of the past, including the landscape, mythology, and everyday events, to understand the present and the future.8 This statement is further supported by Amy Schulz, Faye Knoki and Ursula Knoki-Wilson, who state, “ontological narratives, or the stories that ‘actors use to make sense of their lives’, help to define who we are, providing a framework for understanding our place and our actions in the world.”9 Our own stories and those of our friends, family, and our collective cultural communities provide insight into how we see the world, including why or how we make some of the decisions we do.

One of the most contested issues revolves around whether oral narratives ought to be studied as tradition, or as history. I will explain these further concepts through the

8 Julie Cruikshank, Life Lived Like a Story, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1-10
writings of Jan Vansina and Elizabeth Tonkin. Through using the term, "oral tradition," oral narratives Robert Lowie believes that oral narratives belong strictly to the classification of oral tradition. According to Lowie:

The general conclusion is obvious: Indian tradition is historically worthless, because the occurrences, possibly real, which it retains, are of no historical significance; and because it fails to record, or to record accurately, the most momentous happenings.

By negating the veracity of these stories ("possibly real") and by asserting that they fail "to record or to record accurately," Lowie is applying the western concept of time and history to Indigenous oral narratives.

The imposition of western concepts of tradition and culture are also evident in the writings of Jack Goody and Ian Watt. Goody and Watt claim that "oral cultures are static and homogenous in comparison to literate cultures." They argue that: "In non-literate society every social situation cannot but bring the individual into contact with the group’s pattern of thought, feeling and action: the choice is between the cultural tradition-or solitude." From this, we can infer that an individual within an oral culture is bound to the collective consciousness of the group and cannot question or critically examine or interpret the narratives of their culture. Linda Tuhiwai Smith further states: "at the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot

12 Neal McLeod, "Exploring Cree Narrative Memory" Ph.D. dissertation. (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2005), 44.
recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous.” This belief in authenticity confines Indigenous people from exploring and examining their own histories and stories.

The argument about what constitutes oral tradition versus oral history expands to include notions of acceptability and applicability. Oral traditions, according to Jan Vansina, “are oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least a generation old” and that oral history is composed of “reminiscences, hearsay, or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants.” According to Tonkin, oral history also includes childhood reminiscence, dreams, visions, and myths. The word "myth" is used in this sense to refer to the creation and transformation stories of the culture, limiting the scope of the narrative to a single isolated story that is connected to the body of oral narratives in that genre. Tonkin views the incorporation of reminiscence, dreams, visions, and myths as important to understanding how certain narratives changed a person’s life.

Elizabeth Tonkin, on the other hand, does not differentiate between "oral tradition" and "oral history." Tonkin agrees with Vansina’s view that oral history remains relatively stable over time and argues against his idea that oral tradition must be at least a generation old. According to Tonkin whether the message is transmitted across a number of generations or over the same generation – does not matter, the message still needs to be examined and compared to others’ messages to find stability.

---

16 Ibid., 12.
17 Ibid.
The debate of whether oral narratives are tradition or history, within the western sense, has been further refuted by Indigenous scholars. Angela Cavender Wilson states:

From a native perspective, I would suggest instead that the definition of oral history is contained within that of the oral tradition. For the Dakota, “oral tradition” refers to the way in which information is passed on rather than the length of time something has been told.19

For Cavender Wilson, oral narratives can traverse the boundaries between tradition and history imposed by western ideology. Oral narratives are dependent on the mode of transmission; the term "tradition" signifies the passing of narratives from one generation to the next.

We must understand that there is a dynamic relationship between the collective aspects of memory and the individual aspects of memory. Neal McLeod in discussing Jim Kâ-Nipitēhtêw's description of the Treaty Six narratives, states:

While there may be versions of oral narratives which are very close to the verbatim versions, Old People hesitate to claim that they know a narrative completely... People did not believe that they had power over the narrative; rather, they believed they were conduits, that there was a balance between individual and tradition.20

The collective narratives belonged to the cultural group, while the unique interpretations were that of the individual and would change with each person and his or her experiences. Multiple versions exist because no individual understanding can ever be complete.

Multiple versions of the same collective narrative are common in that narratives are alive and transmitted across many generations. One can see the collective narratives through the traditional and sacred stories, as well as defining family and community

---

19 Angela Cavender Wilson, “Power of the Spoken Word,” 103.
20 McLeod, "Cree Narrative Memory," 36.
narratives as revolving around specific events or occasions. Telling and listening to narratives such as these, ties the individual to the collective memory. Even though the collective memory of the culture holds the narrative, differences in how the individual interprets the narrative will most likely be based on their own experiences.

This transmission and reinterpretation allow the listeners or readers to gain a broader understanding of the events that took place. According to Peter Nabokov, "keeping many versions of its primordial claims and cultural experiences fluid and available for discussion enables a society to check and adjust its course through uncertain times." The different versions or interpretations of the stories do not take away from the stories or the storytellers, but simply add to the exchange of cultural knowledge. In order to gain a clearer understanding of oral narratives we need to understand where the story is coming from. Who is the teller of the stories, and where did the storyteller gain the right to tell the stories? Neal McLeod discusses this concept in his dissertation "Exploring Cree Narrative Memory," stating "I can only understand Cree narrative memory through the stories that I have heard and through the relationships which sustain these stories." The narratives have life and unfold through our relationships with others.

The process of sharing experiences and narratives is central to receiving and understanding oral narratives. This is important because in disciplines such as Indigenous Studies, Women's Studies, and Cultural Studies, the researcher generally includes the people they are working with or who have guided them in some way into the

text of their research. By crediting our teachers, elders, storytellers, as well as the people who shape our lives throughout the research we ensure that their thoughts, actions, and words are being interpreted correctly. As an Indigenous woman I need to be aware of my actions as an insider to the Cree culture and community. As an Indigenous researcher interviewing other Indigenous people I also need to be aware of my actions to ensure I follow the protocol for properly asking and learning about the stories. As Tuhiwai Smith states, “insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities.”

If we fail to adhere to the proper protocols surrounding oral narratives, then we risk isolating ourselves, our families, our colleagues, and potentially our community from further research. The term "protocol" as defined by Walter Lightning can refer:

> to anyone of the number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request. The protocols differ according to the nature of the request and the nature of the individuals involved.

This includes, but is not limited to offerings, fulfillment of obligations, informed consent, and ensuring all parties are involved in the editing process to confirm the validity and interpretation of the material being used.

Different Genres of Oral Narratives in Cree Culture

Winona (Stevenson) Wheeler in Decolonizing Tribal Histories, and Freda Ahenakew in Stories of the House People, outline six major genres of narratives within Cree culture. These include ātayohkēwin (sometimes translated as “spiritual history”),

23 Smith Decolonizing Methodologies, 137.
sacred stories, that provide the foundation of a culture's worldview through examining the creation of the world and certain animals as we see them today. This chapter will briefly address the átayohkêwin. The next genre, as outlined by Wheeler, is classified as kayâs-áćimowina, the old stories, which include events that happened in the generations preceding the tellers of the stories. Within the old stories one can hear and read Cree narratives of dreams, kinship, and place names. The great stories, or kihci-áćimowina, revolve around events that may have impacted either the community or the course of history to some degree. Examples would include stories concerning war, or the signing of the Treaties.

Life and family narratives, áćimisowina (literally stories of oneself / autobiographical), will be discussed and explained in one section. Finally counseling narratives will be discussed separately from the family and life narratives. Through explaining and providing examples of counseling narratives, kakéskihkêmowina – stories that provide examples of how to live properly or how to deal with certain situations – separately, the importance of each of these narratives will become evident. The wawiyatáćimowina, humorous stories, tall tales, or the "funny little stories," are derived from personal experiences and can act as an ice breaker or to alleviate stressful situations.

---

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
The atayohkewina, sacred stories, include stories of Creation and of the world prior to modern human beings. These stories will only be discussed briefly within this section, as they will be covered more thoroughly in the next two chapters. The creation stories help to define and make sense of the world in which we live. Most of these stories involve the character of the Trickster, in Cree this character is referred to as wisahkēcāhk or cāhkapis, in Ojibwa as nanabush, and in other cultures the Trickster is known as Crow or Coyote. The first stories, the sacred stories, allow us to think about our world, our creation, and our existence as both Indigenous people and human beings.

In the Teslin area of the Yukon, in the creation story "The Birth of Crow," Crow transforms the world, sharing the sun, moon, stars, and land with the rest of the animals and humans. The narrative begins with a powerful man who keeps his daughter up in her room all the time. The father has the sun, moon, and all the stars hanging in his house, leaving the rest of the world in darkness. Young men come and ask for the daughter's hand in marriage, but the father thinks she is too good for all of them. Crow, wanting to be born, transforms himself into a pine needle that finds its way into the daughter's water cup. The daughter refuses the water with the pine needle four times; finally she throws the pine needle out of the cup and drinks the water. The pine needle, however, blows into her mouth and she swallows it. Soon after, she is pregnant. The baby grew fast and soon after begs to play with his grandfather's sun. After playing with

---

29 cāhkapis is the name used in some locations for wisahkēcāhk in the summer because the name wisahkēcāhk is not used in the summer.
the sun for a while the child rolls it out the door. The child subsequently proceeds to ask for and lose the moon and the stars. After the sun, the moon, and the stars are freed from the hands of one man, Crow disappears, taking these elements with him. Crow releases the sun, the moon, the stars, and daylight, ensuring that no one man can control these elements again. The act of sharing these elements that aid in our survival is important to how we view and act in the world.

Narratives such as "The Birth of Crow," as well as other traditional and sacred stories, help us understand the structures of the society, including roles and responsibilities of normative values such as sharing. The traditional and sacred stories also help ground us in our beliefs and actions. Marta Weigle explains the importance of remembering the designs that were passed down to the Navajo people from Spider Woman as a way of helping people think: "So we keep our thinking in order by these figures and we keep our lives in order with the stories. We have to relate our lives to the stars and the sun, the animals, and to all of nature or else we will go crazy, or get sick."31

To be able to live in harmony with ourselves, our culture, our universe, it is essential to learn from them, in order to understand the world around us, and consequently, we need to internalize the stories.

The Cree átayohkêwina were told to entertain and teach values and beliefs. The narratives classified as átayohkêwina explain where we come from, how we are related to the rest of creation, as well as correct ways to live and act. The relationships between animals and humans – by way of marriage narratives in this thesis – examine kinship relations, spiritual connections, visions, dreams, and expected roles and actions, such as

reciprocity. The stories of *wisahkēcāhk* taught individuals about how not to act through negative examples. By listening and understanding these narratives, individuals learn the expected roles and behaviours within the culture, including taboos and consequences from engaging in deviant behaviour.

*kayas-ācimowina Old Stories*

The old stories provide the listeners and readers with narratives from previous generations. These stories help explain some of the happenings of both the people and the culture. The Saulteaux\(^{32}\) book *Earth Elder Stories* as retold by Alexander Wolfe from his grandfather, Earth Elder, is an excellent example of old stories. The narratives from *Earth Elder Stories*, are Saulteaux in origin, and come from of the Goose Lake people – Sakimay First Nation – which is surrounded by Cree and Nakota First Nations. One of the stories reflects upon how Earth Elder dreams of a medicine that would help him survive smallpox and later go on to help his people survive the influenza epidemic of 1919:

One night as I slept an animal came to me and said, 'Many more winters will pass in your life if you do what I will tell you. The scent that I carry will save you and the fat from my body will heal you.' The animal who spoke to me was a skunk.\(^{33}\)

These stories are not only important in understanding how Indigenous people coped with the effects of colonization, but also how Indigenous people interacted with the physical and spiritual worlds.

In the story of “My First Gun,” Earth Elder connects to the spiritual world through the dream he has about the skunk.\(^{34}\) Dreams are sources of power, guiding

\(^{32}\) Saulteaux is a term used in Saskatchewan to refer to Plains Ojibway.

people in knowledge about plants, animals, prophecies, as well as providing clarity to personal or current situations. According to Lee Irwin:

Through dreaming, the temporal immediacy of everyday consciousness is unbound from its immediate sensory and empirical conditioning and flows into an altered awareness in which past, present and future can merge into meaningful atemporal continuities. And this past manifests as the indefinite and powerful imagery of our shared spiritual and cultural history. 35

The collective memory and knowledge of animals, people and the various elements exist within the spirit world, allowing past, present, spirit, animal, and humans to communicate.

The collective remembrances that make up this story are clearly seen in the segment following the small pox epidemic which had killed a number of the men travelling from a trading expedition. One of the men in the group seeks a vision to explain what is happening: "In the vision he had been told that a strange sickness brought to this land by the whiteman would kill us all except for one man. And that person would survive with aid from an animal." 36 Narratives such as these, involving dreams, dream helpers, and prophecies, help explain the connection and receptiveness Indigenous people have to the energies of physical and spiritual worlds.

This connection and receptiveness to the energies of the physical and spiritual realms is strongly seen in the connection between Indigenous people and the land. 37 Deanna Christensen in her book Ahtakakoop, discusses the story of mistasiniy, the big rock that resembles a sitting buffalo, near the elbow of the South Saskatchewan River, and how "a great many people started coming. Saulteaux and Cree came from the east.

34 Ibid., 21.
36 Wolfe, Earth Elder, 24.
37 momdhtawisin — tapping into the energy of land.
Cree and Assiniboine from the South, Blackfoot and Cree from the west. And Cree came from the north to hold their Sun Dance and pray in the vicinity of the rock.\textsuperscript{38} The connection to the land also stems from living off and having knowledge of the land—such as berry picking patches, traplines, and collection of plants for medicines.

This is similar to Keith Basso’s observation about Apache place names, when he states:

Apache constructions of place reach deeply into other cultural spheres, including conceptions of wisdom, notions of morality, politeness and tact in forms of spoken discourse, and certain conventional ways of imagining and interpreting the Apache tribal past.\textsuperscript{39}

The names and stories of the land teach the people how to live in harmony with each other and their surroundings.

In describing the origin story of "Men Stand Above Here And There," Basso explains how a young woman fails to adhere to the customs of her people during a puberty ceremony, wearing her hair in plastic curlers instead of loose, as was expected, for the purpose of demonstrating respect for the ceremony and the people who have staged it.\textsuperscript{40} Two weeks later, at a birthday party gathering, the girl’s grandmother recited the story about the place of “Men Stand Above Here and There” to the group. In this story an Apache man kills a white settler’s cow to feed his people. An Apache police officer arrests the man for killing the cow. The arresting police officer goes to take the man to the head army officer at Fort Apache twice, but forgets why he is there, because

\textsuperscript{38} Deanna Christensen, Ahtahkakoop, The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Struggle for Survival, 1816-1896. (Shell Lake: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000), 45.

\textsuperscript{39} Keith H. Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), xv.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 56-57.
someone is “working with words on his mind.” According to Nick Thompson, the narrator of the story,

Although Western Apaches find portions of this story amusing...they understand it first and foremost as a harsh indictment of persons who join with outsiders against members of their own community and who, as if to flaunt their lack of allegiance, parade the attitudes and mannerisms of whitemen.

By wearing the plastic curlers, the young girl was perceived to be acting like a person from white culture, disrespecting the customs of her people during the puberty ceremony. When asked by Basso a couple of years later about the place where “Men Stand Above Here and There,” the young girl responds that the place "stalks" her everyday — reminding her of her cultural customs and responsibilities.

The land and the names associated with the land help us remember the stories and events that happened there, both individually and collectively. Within my own family, just saying the names of particular pieces of land in and around the farm where they grew up brings back many memories and life lessons.

Stories of asotamatowin (Treaty Stories)

The great stories as well as the old stories can show how the culture or the individuals within the culture have engaged in events such as war (which will not be discussed in this paper), and Treaty negotiations. Stories characterized by these events shape the history of the Indigenous people. The oral narratives surrounding the negotiations of treaties provide a different perspective from the written version documented by either the British Crown or the Canadian Crown. For example, the

41 Ibid., 54.
42 Ibid., 55.
43 Ibid., 57.
question surrounding the surrender of land and mineral rights differs greatly between oral and the written versions of the treaty.

Treaty Six was negotiated at Fort Carlton, with the same terms being agreed to at Fort Pitt, and signed in 1876, between a portion of the Cree people residing in the North West Territories, what became central Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the Canadian Crown. Within the oral terms of the Treaty, the commissioners, acting on behalf of the Dominion, only wanted three things from the First Nations people: "use of the land to the depth of the plough for the Queen’s subjects to farm, trees to construct houses, and grass for the animals brought by the settlers." Similar views are held by Toussait Dion from Frog Lake, Jim Yelloweyes from Sunchild Reserve, Alberta, and Alexander Metchewais from Cold Lake, Alberta. Metchewais in discussing the Government's request for land states:

What we [the government] want is land. Six inches deep, trees, and grass. That's all we came to buy from you. Anything that you lived from will still be yours. These all belong to you. We're not concerned about these. And never mentioned any minerals that are under the ground to have bought those. These will all be yours." And the lakes too, he never mentioned if he wanted those too. And the mountains. It is never known if he had bought them. And we own these mountains yet. We have to consider that we still own them. We own all this land yet. And we still do. And anything that is under the ground, oil, and all the minerals, we should be asked first if they're going to drill for oil. 47

This understanding is shared by Charlie Blackman from the Cold Lake Reserve, Alberta, who also tells us that the commissioners stated: "What we want is land. Six inches deep, trees, and grass. That's all we came to buy from you. Anything that you lived from will still be yours. These all belong to you."48 Paul Snakeskin from Thunderchild First Nation explains further that the First Nations people only gave up surface rights to the land and not the minerals.49 The significance of this oral history is that it explains that the land was never to be used for anything more than farming. Any benefits or profits that came from the land were supposed to be redirected towards the First Nations people.50 Without the narratives surrounding the negotiation of the treaty, present and future generations would not know the importance of this event, or the implications on the relationship between the Indigenous people and the Canadian government.

**acimisowina** (literally Stories about oneself – Life / autobiographical) Family Stories

Family narratives and life stories provide us with the history of our ancestors, as well as with stories of everyday life stories of survival. By learning about the past we are able to understand the roles our ancestors played in ensuring our future as Indigenous people. Likewise, we must also do our part in preserving the stories to give hope and life guidance to future generations of Indigenous people. Neal McLeod states:

---


50 SUMMARY OF ELDERS' INTERVIEWS, Treaty Six. IH-221 Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in FNUC library. Source: OFFICE OF SPECIFIC CLAIMS & RESEARCH WINTERBURN, ALBERTA. Summary by: Lynn Hickey, et al. Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.
Stories are the vehicles of cultural transmission, linking one generation to the next. They are the vehicles through which a culture survives and transmits meaning. Stories have many levels and many functions. They link the past to the present, and allow the possibility of cultural transmission and of coming home in an ideological sense.51

The idea of “coming home,” in my mind, traverses the boundaries creating by fixating on the problems between colonizer and colonized. “Coming home,” as I understand it, allows both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to learn and grow from the events of the past, in order to achieve harmony and strength from the stories. In achieving harmony and strength from the stories, one is able understand one’s identity and position within the community.

The telling, listening, or reading of family narratives allows individuals to learn about both where they come from, and their role and responsibility within their family and community. I recently found out that the Indian agent took my Great-Grandfather, John Blind, from his mother and placed him in a residential school when he was roughly four years old. When I asked my aunts about his parents and his family they said that he never really talked about his parents and perhaps he did not remember their names. This gap in the collective memory of the Blind family may be attributed to my Great-Grandfather's traumatic removal from his parental home. Winona Wheeler looks at the loss of collective memory of the Ochekwi Sipiy [ocikwi-sipiy – Fisher River] people in her dissertation, claiming that trauma experienced from certain events impact the collective memory of the culture.52 Therefore, this traumatic event in my great

52 Winona Stevenson “Decolonizing Tribal Histories,” 296.
Grandfather's life may have been pushed aside, forgotten, or censured to reduce questions relating to his removal.

My Great-Grandfather was taken to residential school when he was a young child. According to my cousin, Todd Blind, my Great-Grandfather was taken in by the Peigan family on Pasqua's when he was eight years old. My Great-Grandfather was going from house to house asking for work. According to my cousin, who talked with Willie Peigan about our Great-Grandfather, old man Peigan could not believe what a hard worker this young boy was. It was on Gordon's where he eventually met my Great-Grandmother, Ethel Pratt, daughter of Victoria Bird and Charles Pratt. They were married and lived on Gordon's First Nation. After visiting with my aunts, Suzy, Edna, and Laverna, I learned that my Great-Grandfather was one of a handful of farmers on the reserve. He lived in a five bedroom house that used to belong to the Indian Agent. My Great-Grandparents had nine children and approximately 50 grandchildren, spreading the Blind family name far and wide.

The story of my paternal grandmother and my grandfather is a little more difficult to trace. My grandmother and her two small children went to live with my grandfather, Lawrence Blackbeard, on his farm approximately seventeen miles north of Cupar. She stayed with him for a number of years, during which time she gave birth to my father, Greg. When it was time for the two older children to go to school, my grandparents tried to send them to Cupar School, but a school board member would not allow "Indian children" to ride on the bus. My grandmother then left my grandfather and moved back to the reserve, placing her children in the Muscowequan Residential School until she got a job and a house for them to live in. According to my aunts, if the bus incident had not

53 Original name was pākan ("nut")
happened my grandmother and grandfather would probably have stayed together. My grandparents were both hard workers and recognized the importance of education; my grandmother knew that she had to leave my grandfather to provide for the wellbeing of her children.

I remember my grandmother as always laughing and teasing someone. In addition to her laughter I remember her generosity. She was always getting small things for my cousins and I to wear or play with. Apparently, she was generous with all her nieces and nephews. This past Christmas, 2005, while visiting with my aunts, Suzy, Edna, and Laverna, they recalled how my grandmother always made everyone feel welcome in her house. My grandmother passed away the spring of 1992, when I was 13. It was at her funeral that I remember meeting most of father’s cousins. I knew a couple of his male cousins from when they would come to town to visit with him, but I knew relatively little about his female cousins. A lot of the women I met were well educated and held powerful jobs.

The summer of 2004, at my father’s sister’s funeral, I was able to meet with many of those same women. Many have earned graduate degrees or second Bachelor’s degrees. My aunts Edna and Suzy both have their M.A. degrees and my aunt Laverna is working towards a second degree in education. I admire their accomplishments greatly. This time, however, I was able to gather the courage to ask for email addresses so I could keep in touch with them and learn a little more about my father’s side of the family. Family histories can provide one with a greater sense of wholeness in knowing one’s identity.

On a smaller scale, life narratives can detail many aspects of a person’s life within the broader context of what was happening at a particular period in time. My first
teachers include my mother, her sisters, and my Baba (my mother's mother and my
grandmother). These women have taught me a great deal about survival, perseverance,
creativity, and strength. In my earlier writings I have often left out narratives of my
family, particularly from my mother's family because they are not of Indigenous descent.
I have come to realize, though, that a large portion of my identity is shaped by these
women, their experiences, and their stories. Drawing upon Angela Cavender Wilson,54
Amy Schulz, Faye Knoki, and Ursula Knoki-Wilson,55 these narratives allow me to make
sense of my life, including who I am, and where I come from. In acknowledging that I
come from a Cree - Ukrainian family with a strong background in living off the land
through farming, I am able to draw strength from all my family's narratives.

My mother, my aunts, and my grandmothers have always been pillars of strength
for me. I have great memories of my aunts, my Baba, my mother, and I working in one
of my Baba's many gardens, butchering chickens or pigs, playing cards, or even picking
apples or berries, the times seem to be filled with laughter, teasing, and joking. Further, I
learned that as a young woman I was expected to learn and partake in many different
duties and chores. The words and action of my Baba, my aunts, and my mother all
stressed the importance of being self-sufficient and self supporting. The stories of my
Baba, my aunts, and my mother have taught me how to carry on and be strong during
times of difficulty, as well as how to laugh and find the positive light in certain situations.
All of these stories have helped shape who I am today and how I conduct myself.

54 Angela Cavender Wilson “Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of oral
History in a Dakota Family” Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians,
The counselling narratives are often used by the elders to teach valuable lessons to the younger generations. These stories often act as moral guidelines, demonstrating how to conduct oneself, how to show respect to others and themselves, and how to live properly. Angela Cavender Wilson, along Gerald Vizenor, Keith Basso, and Jim Kâ-Nîpîtêhtêw, all state that stories serve as moral guidelines, and provide examples of how to live correctly.  

Paula Gunn Allen expands on this idea, stating:

The stories are woven of elements that illuminate the ritual tradition of the story teller’s people, make pertinent points to some listener who is about to make a mistake or who has some difficulty to resolve, and hold the listener’s attention so that they can experience a sense of belonging to a sturdy and strong tradition. 

People often search for meaning in stories when they are faced with difficult situations, but do not want others to tell them what to do. Through listening to stories of one’s culture, they are often able to hear the answers they need to make sense of their own situations.

The relationships built through the telling of stories – particularly in the counselling narratives – are, in my opinion, just as important as the stories themselves. The counsellor needs to know a certain amount of information about the individual in order to counsel that individual. The trust built between the teller and the listener allows the message to be transmitted in a non-confrontational manner. After the story has been

56 Cavender Wilson, “Native Oral Traditions,” 104-106; Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 11-16; Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places, 39-41; Jim Kâ-Nîpîtêhtêw, Cree Elders Workshop 2, IH-431, Indian History Film Project.

told or the message has been transmitted it is up to the listener to choose what to do with it. As shown in Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places*, the grandmother recites the story, “Men Stand Above Here and There” in the presence of her granddaughter as a way of commenting on the girl’s behaviour.58 These stories are used as “word arrows” to guide people in the right direction or path of life.59 According to Jim Kâ-Nîpîtêhtêw, the best way to reach the younger generation is to:

Tell him of a story from using some other young person as an example. Tell them what this young man did to get himself the trouble he has now. How the parents worry and this way the children won’t think we are shouting at them, trying to get something across to them...Today we have to make our lectures softer, more like telling a story.60

Teaching through stories allows the listener or reader to reflect on their own life and any current situation they are faced with. Stories of the past, even if it is from the recent past, are important as teaching examples for the present.

Teaching traditional beliefs, values, and culture through stories allows the listener to interpret the message in an unobtrusive manner. According to Leavitt, “in Native communities, parents and elders maintain the integration of knowledge as they teach younger people by sharing experiences with them.”61 Through the sharing of such experiences, younger people are able to interpret and apply this information to occurrences in their own lives. Walter Lightning expands on this position, stating:

The way that the Elder told the stories was a way of giving me information that would become knowledge if I thought about the stories in the right way. The

---

60 Cree Elders Workshop 2, IH-431, Indian History Film Project.
stories were structured in such a way that each story’s meaning got more and more complex and rich as I thought about it.\textsuperscript{62}

The stories may not always present the listener or the reader with an immediate answer or even understanding. However, perhaps in such situations it is more important for the individual to listen and remember the stories, than to try to decipher the story’s meaning. Over time the meaning or the message of the story unfolds in our everyday life experiences.

Conclusion

A culture’s continuation is dependant on the survival of its narratives. These stories provide the individual with the means to understand their place in both their culture and the world. In learning about my maternal and paternal families stories, I am better able to understand my own identity and how I interpret different narratives based on the stories I heard through both sides of my families. For example, through learning the Creation and sacred stories I am able to have a better understanding of the beliefs and practices of my ancestors and how I have come to receive these beliefs. The stories of the land have the ability to connect the individual to the history of his or her ancestors and explain the importance of the land. Both my maternal and paternal families have resided in the Touchwood Hills for a number of generations, building strong connections to the land. The great stories can be used to examine our relationships with other groups.

Narratives, including all of the different genres discussed, contribute to a broader understanding of a culture, their history, as well as how they interpret events of the past and plan goals for the future. In expanding on Willie Ermine’s idea of researching to

learn about and partake in the culture, instead of just research and writing to publish articles and books to sit on a shelf, we should incorporate how we have come to interpret our own experiences through the process of working with narratives. My interpretation of "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver," in the following chapter incorporates my family's and my own narratives and experiences in understanding the roles of women in atayohkewina, sacred stories. The two narratives provide positive examples that are related to contemporary life narratives of women both inside and outside my family. Understanding traditional narratives in light of contemporary narratives and experiences may help us understand our own outlook and actions in life.

---

CHAPTER 2
TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES (atayohkêwin) COMING TO LIFE: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT "THE BEAR WOMAN" AND "THE WOMAN WHO MARRIED A BEAVER"

The Cree atayohkêwina, sacred and traditional stories, open the doors in understanding more about the culture and the roles of men and women living in the culture. Within the narratives the listener or reader is presented with the culture's worldview, beliefs, morals, and history. The traditional and sacred stories, according to Agnes Grant, are "an attempt to explain what otherwise would be unexplainable." The traditional and scared stories help explain not only where we come from, but how we are related to the rest of creation. The narrative classified as atayohkêwina, include stories of wisahkecahk and relationships between animals and humans. The narratives, "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," fall under the second category.

Both "The Bear Woman," a Cree narrative, and "The Woman who Married a Beaver," an Ojibwa narrative, revolve around the kinship relations between humans and animals. These narratives are important because they show how Cree and Ojibwa worldviews are embedded in kinship, spiritual connections, visions, dreams, and expected roles and actions, and values such as reciprocity. The themes within both stories — normative kinship behaviours, hard work, women's responsibilities, and spiritual responsibilities — are also seen within women's contemporary life stories. The entire

---

1 Agnes Grant Our Bit of Truth: An anthology of Canadian Native Literature. (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1999), 1.
4 Bloomfield Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree, 57-61.
narratives of both "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver" are presented in Appendix A and B respectfully. Each of the narratives is subject to a detailed analysis, including a break down of the themes as shown in the stories.

I chose "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver," because both narratives reminded me of the women in my life. The strength, determination, and creativity of the woman in "The Bear Woman" reminded me of my mother and grandmothers' creativity, both around the home and outside. The ability to adapt in times of change in "The Woman who Married a Beaver" reminded me of my grandma Blind and my aunts. Both of these narratives allowed me to reflect upon the women in my life and their stories. These stories, both the traditional narratives and the life narratives of the women in my life, are precious to me because they help me triumph over difficult situations. By using the traditional narratives to reflect upon our own lives, individuals can use this combination of traditional narratives and life narratives as examples to reflect upon their own lives and situations.

The Bear Woman

The first story I examined is "The Bear Woman," as narrated by Coming Day in 1925, from the Sweet Grass reserve, in the Battleford Agency, Saskatchewan. This narrative was recorded, transcribed, and translated by Leonard Bloomfield during his five week stay on the Sweet Grass Reserve during the summer of 1925. "The Bear Woman" narrative explores the importance of kinship, hard work, resourcefulness, dreams, visions, and women's responsibilities. These themes are important in understanding the values, beliefs, and practices of Indigenous people (see Appendix A for the text of the narrative).
The first time I read this story I was intrigued by the courage, strength, and resourcefulness the woman at the center stage in the narrative demonstrated in order to help her family. The strength, courage, and determination of women in this story and in our everyday lives is truly inspiring. In today's fast paced, disposable society many people run themselves ragged trying to make ends meet, trying to climb the social ladder, or even trying to buy the next gadget that is supposed to make their lives easier. In such instances women, both young and old, related or not, may feel like they are in competition with each other over their education, career, family lifestyle and management, economic prestige, and time management. Stories such as "The Bear Woman" demonstrate the need to look after each other and help each other in times of difficulty.

Upon first reading this narrative, I found it odd that the woman waits to show herself to the man. If she came across his lodge and found it devoid of a female presence, then why would she clean, gather firewood, and prepare moccasins only to hide herself from him for a couple of nights? This practice of not immediately showing oneself seems common in other narratives where the woman is a spiritual being or an animal. For example, in the story of "The Ten Brothers," the youngest of ten women, who is a thunderer woman, is sent by her father, a chief, to take care of the ten brothers, who have neither parents nor women to help them. The young woman comes to the men's lodge during the day when they are out hunting to gather fire wood, sweep the floor, and leave

---

moccasins for the youngest of the men. When the youths later questioned why she did not stay during her previous visits, she answered that her father told her to "First go there several times to work." By watching the youth's reaction to her coming and working several times, the woman was confident her company was wanted. A similar reasoning can be applied to the story of "The Bear Woman."

The fundamental interdependence of men upon women, and vice versa in division of labour within Cree society is reenacted. The man in the story of "The Bear Woman" lives by himself and has no one to help him or keep him company. The woman's father may have sensed his loneliness and taken pity on him by sending his daughter to care for him. Coming to his lodge during the day to clean and gather firewood, leaving before he comes home she is able to watch how he reacts to having a woman in his home. The woman is further able to judge the man's reaction by leaving moccasins for him as a marriage offering. When the man accepts the gift the woman is confident she will be safe and accepted.

In traditional Cree marriage practices, the parents usually arranged for their child to marry someone they considered worthy. By arranging their child's marriage, the parents ensured their future son or daughter-in-law would be able to provide for their family. In Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words, Glecia Bear recalls that she did not even know her husband when her father arranged their marriage:

I was sixteen years old, when my dad went threshing over there at Battleford with his horses. And there he must have met the man I married, it must have been there that my dad arranged to marry me off. I did not even know the man whom it was arranged that I would marry. 

---

7 Coming Day "The Ten Brothers" in Bloomfield 1930:221.
8 Ibid., 230.
9 Ahenakew, Grandmothers' Lives, 211.
Such stories are not uncommon. Another example appears in the narratives of Emma Minde, who also did not know her husband prior to marrying him. 

Further, it is evident in both "The Bear Woman," and "The Ten Brothers," where the fathers sends their daughters to the places of men they are to marry. Upon entering into marriage, both the man and the woman accept a certain amount of responsibility for their in-laws and extended family. This responsibility contributes to both the family's and community's wellbeing by gathering food and resources. According to Irene Calliou, when the men made large kills they distributed and shared the meat with all the people. 

According to David Mandelbaum, when the man married the daughter he was "obligated to contribute as much as he could to his father-in-law." This obligation was realized once the woman told her husband of her family's troubles. The man hunted everyday and killed many buffalo that his wife prepared and took back to her family.

On the day they left for her father's camp, the woman laid out their belongings and food-supply in a row, stepping on each bundle, making them disappear. Upon reaching the spot her husband picked for camp she was able to unload their possessions by stomping the ground. I interpreted that this mode of transportation came from her powers as a bear. The bear is seen as possessing great strength and stamina, as well as an exceptional level of intelligence, "equaling or exceeding that of humans." According to Brightman, "Bears are significant to Crees as omnivorous scavengers, hibernators, fierce fighters, animals whose meat can satisfy the need to eat, owners of marketable hides, and

---

11 Ahenakew, Grandmother's Lives, 159.
12 Ibid., 147.
13 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 32.
sources of spiritual power, and in many other respects.\textsuperscript{14} The bear’s intelligence, strength, and sources of power may be part of the reason the bear is able to transport all of their belongings.

The timing of the woman’s arrival is not explained but could be significant. If the man realized his wife and her family were bears after spring had come, then she may have appeared to him before the fall, before the bears hibernate, or even during their hibernation; this could explain the great need for food.

By analyzing the story of "The Bear Woman," I looked at the entire narrative and not just specific details within the text. Further looking at the outline of the text, it is evident that Coming Day frames the story with a clear beginning - “Once upon a time a man lived all alone and never saw any people”\textsuperscript{15} – and ends the story by stating, “That is the end of this sacred story.” Because of this framework we are led to believe that the story is closed off from any subsequent narrative. Drawing from Greg Sarris, who comments on Robert Oswalt’s Kashaya Texts, Coming Day may have reproduced the story with a clear beginning and end for language recording purposes, not necessarily for the story itself. Sarris states Oswalt wanted “linguistic units that he could study and translate.”\textsuperscript{16} The storytellers, in turn, produced “texts for a literate situation safe within the boundaries of that situation’s expectations.”\textsuperscript{17} If Coming Day told the story expecting it be used to study the Cree language and not the story itself, then presumably the story should either lead into another narrative, or have a non-ending – meaning that the story does not have an abrupt or conclusive finale.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{15} Bloomfield Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree, 59.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
In *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*, Lee Maracle, a Salish-Cree woman from the Sto:lo Nation, tries to integrate Indigenous forms of storytelling with the European story tradition. According to Maracle, the difference between the two forms of storytelling is that the European story has a "plot line, a climax and a conclusion, all of which are held together by a single metaphor which weaves itself through the fabric of the story." Indigenous storytelling, on the other hand, does not always have a clear plot line, climax, or conclusion. Maracle further states that "most of our stories don't have orthodox 'conclusions'; that is left to the listeners, who we trust will draw useful lessons from the story - not necessarily the lessons we wish them to draw, but all conclusion are considered valid." "The Bear Woman" utilizes both of these models. Coming Day presents the reader with a clear and concise beginning and ending for the story, beginning with, "Once upon a time" and ending with, "That is the end of this sacred story," as in a European story or fairytale. Within the second model, consistent with Indigenous storytelling, the reader or listener is able to learn many valuable lessons and concepts from Cree culture, its beliefs, and its values. The reader or listener can take as much or as little from the story as they want.

Given this information, we can presume that the story is not isolated. Rather, the narrative can be looked at with other narratives concerning bears, spiritual guides, or human-animal marriages. For example, the man's love for the bear woman may have influenced his diet, by not eating bear meat or by following strict protocols when in

---

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
contact with bears or their carcasses. If the woman was a bear, her spiritual significance may be as protector and pawâkanak or "spiritual helper." 21

While bears were significant to the Cree and Ojibwa as symbols of intelligence, strength, spiritual powers, and — through their meat and fur — the ability to provide for the needs of the people, the beaver was also considered a valuable animal to both cultures, especially throughout the fur trade. Brightman notes,

Beavers originally a terrestrial race of great wisdom and power and immune from predation from humans and other species, were said to have been driven into the water by the transformer, reduced in power, and assigned the role of providing pelts for humans and food for other animals. 22

The beaver pelts were used to make felt hats Europe's fashion industry. In addition to providing pelts for the fur trade, the beaver meat, including the tails were used for food and medicines by the Cree and the Ojibwa.

The Woman Who Married a Beaver

"The Woman Who Married a Beaver," told by J. B. Penesi [pinêsi], and recorded by William Jones, speaks to Ojibwa human-animal relationships in a traditional context and in relations to the fur trade. 24 European goods such as metal tools, kettles, guns, cloth, and decorative materials, were first introduced to Indigenous societies in the late sixteenth century — at first this trade would have been nominal. The Indigenous peoples processed furs and materials hand assisted the newcomers adjust to the North American environment. The food sources, medicines, and talents of the Indigenous

21 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 87-91.
22 Ibid., 193.
23 pinêsi is translated into Thunderbird
people—particularly the women in preparing the hides, clothing, and food—helped the newcomers survive in the harsh conditions they might encounter.

The fur trade in North America exploded when the demand for felt hats increased in Europe. The fine hairs of the beaver were considered the best felting material available to make luxurious hats suitable for gentlemen of the day. The increased demand for beaver by the traders and trading posts in the east also led to the over hunting of fur bearing animals in the east. By the seventeenth century, traders travelled westward seeking out the highest quality of fur bearing animals in hopes of expanding trade with Indigenous groups.

"The Woman Who Married a Beaver" is an important narrative because it attempts to make sense of the new roles people adopted in the fur trade (see the text of this narrative in Appendix B). This narrative blends core traditional beliefs—such as spirituality, respect, kinship, and reciprocity—with modern elements of the fur trade, such as the adoption of metal trade goods. The fur trade signified an important era in the relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations people. It introduced Aboriginal people to European goods, hierarchical ideas, and beliefs. Within Canada, in addition to the Aboriginal groups, the British and the French empires were the two major factions of the fur trade. Each empire had different protocols for dealing with Aboriginal people. The French traders were encouraged to intermarry with the Aboriginal groups and learn their language and customs. The British, on the other hand, were strongly discouraged from intermarrying with the Aboriginal groups. Because many of the traders were isolated from their families or superiors, intermarriage often occurred to alleviate
the traders' domestic duties, while guaranteeing trade alliances amongst Aboriginal groups.25

The First Nations women played an important role in the fur trade, acting as economic producers and liaisons between the Aboriginal groups and the traders.26 Aboriginal women “actively encouraged the spread of the fur trade, by contracting marriages with fur traders and acting as guides and interpreters.”27 The kinship connections the traders and the Indigenous women and their families made were invaluable to both parties.

During the fur trade, the women actively sought out these kinship ties, often to alleviate their situation. Sylvia Van Kirk postulates that the women had it easier if they lived with the traders,28 because they would not have to move much, and almost everything they needed they could find around the fort. By actively participating in the fur trade, the Aboriginal women could adopt and integrate European consumer goods into their everyday domestic chores. The iron kettles and tools were a convenience for Indigenous women, while the specialty items, such as glass beads, provided the women with a wider variety of materials for decorating and beading clothing, ceremonial costumes, and bundles.

In "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," the woman sets out on a vision quest. During this quest, the spirit-being appeared as a human. The woman went with the man thinking he was her spiritual helper. This is interesting because, as Mandelbaum notes,

28 Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 76.
within Cree narratives, "The spirit helpers usually, though not always, appeared to
women as females, to men as males." 29 According to Brightman, "one explanation for
the woman's inability to perceive her husband as a beaver is that she is 'enchanted,' the
beaver having changed his form so as to appear to her as human." 30 The characteristics
of a beaver are similar to those of humans in that they are monogamous, skilful, and
purposefully arrange their dwelling space. 31 The woman soon realized she married a
beaver, but continues to live with her beaver family. Her perception of her husband does
not change just because their appearances are not the same.

This narrative is important for understanding how animals are important to
Indigenous people. After the woman realized her husband and children were beavers, she
noticed that they often leave with a mysterious human, only to return home with items
such as "kettles and bowls, knives, tobacco, and all the things that are used when a beaver
is eaten." 32 By giving these offerings the hunter is showing respect to the beaver for
giving up its life. This story shows the reciprocal relationship between humans and
animals. If the human shows respect and follows the proper protocols, the beavers would
regularly make themselves available for the humans to hunt. However, if the human
failed to show respect, spoke ill of the beavers, or failed to follow the proper protocols
the beaver may not choose to make itself available for the humans.

In the Cherokee narrative "The Bear Man," 33 a man leaves his village to hunt for
wild game in the mountains. The man comes across a spiritually powerful bear, who can
talk and read the thoughts of people. The man tries to shoot the bear numerous times with his arrows, but the bear refuses to die. Finally the bear speaks to the man, explaining that the man cannot kill him, but that he will show the man how the bears live. The bear takes the man to his den where the man lives with the bear for many moons. As time passes, the man becomes more like a bear, adopting the bear nature, eating habits, and growing bear-like hair. One spring the bear has a vision that the hunters from the man's village will soon come to hunt. The bear explains that the men will come to the bear's den, kill the bear, and cut him up, but would spare the man and take him back to the village. The bear tells the man that he must cover the bear's blood with leaves, then, if the man watches as the others drag him back to the village, he will see something. The bear further tells the man that once he returns to the village he must isolate himself and not eat or drink anything for seven days. By following these instructions the man will rid himself of his bear nature. If the man does not follow these instructions he will die.

Within a couple of days the bear's vision comes true. The hunters from the village come kill the bear, and cut him up. The man covers the bear's blood with leaves before they depart for the village. On his way down the mountain the man looks behind him and sees "a bear rise up out the leaves, shake himself, and go back into the cave."34 In this story, the bear sacrificed himself so the man could be taken back to his village. Since the man did not follow the instructions of the bear, by neither isolating himself, nor eating or drinking anything for seven days to rid him of his bear nature, the man dies and the bears claim him. This narrative shows the transformative power of animals and the consequences of not following the proper procedures and protocols. The bear is able to renew its bodily form after the man spreads leaves onto the bear's blood. The bear is also

34 Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
able to claim the man's body after he dies. The animals choose when they will die and who will be able to kill them, while the hunter is responsible for renewing the animal spirit by performing the proper protocols.

The Cree also had to follow proper protocol when hunting specific animals. Certain protocols relating to first kills by young men and women were followed to ensure successful hunting and trapping in the future. Minnie Fraser describes how upset her late husband was when his first big kill was distributed amongst the community, instead of being frozen and stored for the long winter ahead. However, by sharing the meat from the youngster's first kill, the man's mother was teaching her son by publicly giving thanks to the animal for giving itself to her son. This sign of respect is important for continuing the reciprocal relationship between the hunter and the animal. By not showing respect for the animal, the hunter may lose his ability to attract the animals and kill them.

The importance of performing the proper protocols shows throughout the narrative of "The Woman Who Married a Beaver." After the death of her husband, the woman returns to her people and tells them of her time with the beavers. She teaches her people that the beavers chose who could and could not kill them. If a person spoke ill of or showed any contempt towards a beaver, the beaver would not show itself to that person. However, if a person respected and never spoke ill of a beaver, then they would be very lucky in killing beavers. This narrative shows the relationships between animals and humans, while explaining that respect needs to be shown in order for the animal to give itself to a human. Without this show of respect, the reciprocal relationship does not exist, and the human will be a very unlucky hunter.

35 Ahenakew, Grandmother's Lives, 105-117.
Hunting Beliefs

The connection between humans and animals extends beyond hunter and prey, developing into a reciprocal relationship based on respect and kinship systems. The Ojibwa human-animal relationships within the narratives closely resemble the Cree human-animal relationships as documented by Brightman.36 These relationships could take place in the form of love relationships, where the animal appears in human form to help their human companion. According to Brightman, these marriages between animals and humans “represent physical and behavioural differences between humans and animals as appearances masking an underlying resemblance.”37

Within the Cree culture, the bear is considered to possess the following characteristics: strength, stamina, cleanliness, speech, and intelligence, and is able to understand the Cree language.38 In the beginning of "The Bear Woman," the woman's ability to clean, cook, and make moccasins for the man, as well as being able to transport their belongings to her father's camp in a timely and efficient manner illustrate these characteristics. These characteristics make her appear as a human being to the man. The marriage narratives between humans and animals in both Cree and Ojibwa culture during the Fur Trade era, demonstrate ceremonies, protocols, and the importance of kinship. Narratives, such as "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," are important in learning how cultures dealt with and incorporated colonial change.

Human dependence on the animals further illustrates the relationship between humans and animals. In return for the animals' self sacrifice, the humans were to follow

36 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 163-166.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
certain protocols in the hunting or trapping of animals. Keno Linklater, from Pukatwagan, Manitoba, states

People used to do something when they killed an animal, you know. Long ago, our forefathers used to throw something into the fire as a sacrificial offering. Whenever my grandfathers killed something, I saw them make a burnt offering like that. They would throw in a piece for their grandfathers so that they would be given something in return.39

By following certain protocols, Cree and Ojibwa hunters and trappers honoured the spirit of the animal that gave itself to the people. The reciprocal relationship between humans and animals was still followed during the fur trade, is shown by the narrative "The Woman who Married a Beaver." However, the gifts presented to the animal spirit during the Fur Trade included European items such as kettles, bowls, knives, cloth, and tobacco.

The relationships between the Cree, the Ojibwa, and the animals, while still adhering to certain protocols upon killing an animal, changed during the fur trade. Soon the Cree and the Ojibwa began hunting and trapping the animals in a commercial manner. Animals, such as, the beaver, were trapped and processed in exchange for European goods. While the animals were still fully utilized, the numbers began to decrease due to the rates of demand and supply in the course of the trade.

Common themes between the two stories

Kinship

The theme of kinship is portrayed in the relationships between human and animal, husband and wife, as well as daughter and her family in the story of "The Bear Woman."

Kinship is also present throughout "The Woman Who Married a Beaver," in the relationships between the humans and the Fur Traders, the woman and her husband, and the mother and her children.

The kinship relations between humans can also be seen in the relationships between humans and animals. These relationships are an important aspect of Indigenous beliefs and worldviews. Within Cree and Ojibwa cultures, humans appear to be equal with the rest of creation — unlike Western concepts, such as the Great Chain of Being, which places humans above animals, birds, and the elements.\(^{40}\) In traditional societies, if a hierarchal system was implemented humans, arguably, would appear near the end because of their dependence on animals and birds for food, tools, shelter, as well as their dependence on the elements. As a result of their dependence, humans are expected to treat the earth and all its creatures with respect. Respect can be shown through various offerings and ceremonies given to honour the animal, spiritual being, or Creator. By following the protocols, one maintains the reciprocal relationship between humans, animals, and the rest of Creation.

The reciprocal, as well as love relationship, between animals and humans is important in "The Woman Who Married a Beaver." The woman is told that "the beaver [are] very fond of the people and visit them often."\(^{41}\) If the people showed the beaver respect, the beaver would give themselves to the people. However, if the people did not show respect, or if proper protocols were not followed, then they would not have luck.


\(^{41}\) White "Woman Who Married a Beaver," 178-221.
killing them. The relationships between the beaver and humans are inter-dependent, similar to those between humans.

The inter-dependent relationships between humans and animals appear in the marriage stories, such as in "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver." According to Brightman, "all these marriage myths represent physical and behavioural differences between humans and animals as appearances masking an underlying resemblance." Aside from the surface appearances, the characteristics of the animals are similar to the characteristics of humans. For example, beavers are intelligent, monogamous, and very skilled. These characteristics appear in the narrative "The Woman Who Married a Beaver." The beaver's skills and intelligence are evident in the way he provides for his wife and children, while monogamy is evident in the fact that he always comes back to his family.

Hard work

The importance of hard work and resourcefulness in both the men and the women is another theme. It was the man's responsibility to hunt and provide food for his family – including his wife's family. Only by killing many buffalo for his wife's family, was the man successfully able to fulfill his role as a provider. The woman demonstrated hard work and resourcefulness by chopping wood, cooking, and later by gathering all the materials and transporting them back to her father's camp. According to Richard Preston, young girls were given wooden axes and small loads of wood to carry on their backs to teach them that their "chore would be cutting firewood when [their] husband

42 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 167.
was out hunting.\textsuperscript{43} This lesson was one of many that young girls must learn to prepare for their later years as women.

Women's Responsibilities

There are many recordings, translations, and transcripts of oral narratives that illuminate the roles of women in Cree society. Although many of these narratives discuss contemporary life, they are still important as examples of the physical roles and responsibilities of women, as well as the resourcefulness of women. The physical responsibilities of women as demonstrated in the narrative of “The Bear Woman,” include cooking, cleaning, sewing and mending moccasins and clothing, as well as transporting goods.\textsuperscript{44} These duties represent a number of responsibilities expected of women within the Cree and Ojibwa cultures. The examples used discuss the lives of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries. For example in Wood's Cree Elder narratives, Rosie Colomb recalls making her family's footwear, clothing, mattresses, and blankets, out of the hides and furs. Rosie also explains that women had to make use of what was available to them, for they did not have access to many store bought goods.\textsuperscript{45} Irene Calliou, Mary Wells, and Glecia Bear in kôhkominawak otâcimowiniwâwa: Our Grandmothers’ Lives as Told in Their Own Words also explain some of their, their mothers' and grandmothers' duties as Cree and Métis women growing up. According to Irene Calliou, her mother and grandmother cleaned and prepared the animals and the hides, sewed, cooked, snared small game, picked berries and medicinal


\textsuperscript{44} Bloomfield Sacred stories of the Sweet Grass Cree, 60-61.

roots and plants, and hand washed the laundry.\textsuperscript{46} Mary Wells discusses similar experiences and includes the fact that her and her mother often washed the wooden floors with ashes; the combination of ashes and water made the floors spotlessly clean.\textsuperscript{47} Glecia Bear also mentions as responsibilities: cutting wood, looking after the farm animals, sewing, taking care of her children, as well as using willows as brooms and ashes bundled in cloth for cleaning.\textsuperscript{48} The women were not only responsible for cooking, cleaning, and preparing clothes and other good, but were also responsible for their family's and community's survival.

Women's responsibilities include helping their family and community survive and prosper. In Robert J. Castel English–Cree Dictionary and Memoirs of the Elders, Wood's Cree elder, Domithilde Castel, from Pukatawagan, Manitoba, recalls a number of things her family did to make a living.\textsuperscript{49} Castel tells that her and her family trapped muskrats and other animals for food.\textsuperscript{50} Woods Cree elder Margaret Sinclair, also recalls surviving off the wildlife by hunting and trapping.\textsuperscript{51} When big game meat was scarce, the women trapped small animals and fish to provide food for their family. These narratives of women's responsibilities, resourcefulness, and hard work in both the past and present, show future generations how women have endured, created, and survived throughout the ages.

These traits are important to both traditional Cree and contemporary life. The resourcefulness these women displayed when transporting goods can be used to show

\textsuperscript{46} Freda Ahenakew & H.C. Wolfart, Grandmothers' Lives, 145-157.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 165-193.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. 65-83.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
people anything is possible — some tasks simply need more thought and creativity to work. The amount of hard work demonstrated by the man and woman provide positive examples of how men and women should operate. By working hard one is able to provide for both themselves and their family. Further, hard work can also be a tool for keeping both the mind and the body out of trouble. By not allowing the mind or the body to remain idle, the man and the woman are not tempted or led astray as in the story of rolling head in the next chapter.

The characteristics the woman embodies reminds me of the women in my own family. My mother, fifteen years ago, for example, babysat fourteen kids to put food on the table and pay the bills after my father’s business went broke. Instead of dwelling on the potentially negative situation, my mother did what was needed in order for us to survive, as her mother before her did when she left her first husband with four small children in tow. The stories of our lives, as well as the stories that we hear or read that relate to our life experiences (borrowing from Thomas King) "act as medicine." The stories can impart strength and help us overcome obstacles. I was drawn to the story of the Bear Woman for the strength, creativity, and resourcefulness the woman portrays. Both this story and my mother’s story continually influences my outlook on life. Whenever a situation seems nearly impossible or hopeless, I use these stories as beacon of strength from which to carry forward.

Women’s spiritual responsibilities

---

The spiritual responsibilities of Cree and Ojibwa women derive from their ability to create life. In her dissertation, Morris discusses the spiritual power of women. Morris writes that women have access to two sources of Manido [manitow] (spiritual power). The first source is considered innate in all women because after their first menstruation they have the ability to give birth and thus create life. During her first menstruation, the youth was isolated from the rest of her community and lived in a small lodge visited by older women. Lizette Ahenakew remembers her mother preparing an old shack by their place during her first menstruation. Lizette stayed in the shack for a week with an old aunt of hers, who woke Lizette up early every morning to make her breakfast. During this time the old lady also taught Lizette handicrafts, such as beading and sewing moccasins, and taught her about sex and pregnancy. When Lizette asked her mother why she did not tell her about all of this, her mother replied, "Well, this is an area where in reaching your womanhood that you have to get this education from the grandmother." By the time they were teaching the young girls about women's responsibilities, family responsibilities, and reproductive health, the grandmothers were past menopause.

The responsibilities women learn during this seclusion help them raise and care for their own families later on in life. During the first menarche, women also learned about the power stemming from this life giving force. According to Morris, the Ojibwa on Parry island attributed women's Manido to a female spirit Grandmother moon, wabenokkwe [wäpan-ihkwê], ruler of the East, sister of the

54 Lizette Ahenakew Interview IH-120/121 Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in FNUC library. Date of Interview: June 21, 1983. Location of Interview: Waterhen Lake Reserve Saskatchewan. Source: Welsh / Snowsill. Interviewer: Christine Welsh. Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
sun over whom she had charge, and said that every month the moon renewed the Manido in women.\textsuperscript{57}

The monthly renewal of manitow allowed women to give and promote life. Seclusion during this time ensured that the spirit's power would not take away life-giving powers of pregnant women, or reduce men's ability to hunt and provide for their families. Harriet (Jacob) Blackned, in an interview with Preston, discusses how an old man "didn't care and used a kettle [that belonged to a menstruating woman] and had a bad sickness, breaking out on his body."\textsuperscript{58} As stated in Mandelbaum, old women had to ensure that no men where around when the youth were secluded from the rest of the community. If the girl looked at a man during this time, he was sure to lose his supernatural guardians.\textsuperscript{59}

Dreams

The second source of manitow, or spiritual power, was dreaming and fasting, similar to how men received manitow. By dreaming and fasting women could receive songs, long life, and knowledge concerning plants and medicines, as well as different patterns, dances, or clothing. In the narrative of "The Woman who Married a Beaver," the woman who goes out to fast, receives valuable information concerning the protocols of trapping beaver from her beaver husband. In exchange for these dreams and visions, Morris notes that certain things needed to be done:

\textldots{} [A] price was paid before the transfer of Manido, in the form of a certain amount of hard work and suffering by the person who wished to receive the Manido. After the Manido had been transferred, those who received the gift of Manido were required to pay in the following ways: must act with respect; must

\textsuperscript{57} Morris "Gifted Woman Light Around You," 52.
\textsuperscript{59} Mandelbaum, The Plains Cree, 145.
carry out any instructions which had been given by the spirit beings, and give offerings at appropriate times; [lastly] they must accept adult responsibilities.60

By following the protocols and acting with respect, individuals were often able to overcome great hardships. This is particularly evident when looking at the narratives surrounding the transfer of knowledge concerning plants and medicines through dreams and visions.

**Spiritual Helpers, mimikwisiwak, pawákan**

Dreams, visions, and spirit helpers were often used to make certain remedies and medicines. Of course, not everyone received dreams or visions about how to obtain knowledge about plants. According to Francis Harper, "dreams depend on what kind of nationality, what kind of person you are, and if you are good hearted."61 In Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart’s book about Alice Ahenakew, Alice recalls that her husband received a dream telling him how to make a medicine that would help doctor people.62 The belief that the spirit world helped Aboriginal people in obtain specific knowledge regarding uses for plants was strongly followed.

According to an Elders Conference in Ontario in 1980, plants as spirit helpers were discussed:

> Each one of the rooted plants have a duty. And a spirit that carries on that duty. [...] And so I've been wondering how it happened that Indians could have such a complete knowledge of what the plant life could do. And so that leads me to think that the spirits that have been appointed to help out the human beings have been at work in the past and are still at work as we have had lots of personal testimony about that. [...] So each one, each person who has take on a responsibility of the knowledge about medicine and using medicines, they have

---

61 Francis Harper. IH-037-039, Indian Film History Project.
62 Freda Ahenakew & H.C. Wolfart, They Knew Both sides of Medicine, Cree Tales of Curing and Cursing told by Alice Ahenakew (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 2000), 63-81.
had [a] vision and they have had communication with spirit people. And the spirit people have been probably passed on the... [occurs in original] or have introduced them to the various spirits of the plant life. 63

Some of these spirit helpers worked in the form of little people or mimikwisiwak, who showed some Aboriginal people the many different usages of plants.

The mimikwisiwak were described as smaller beings, around three feet tall, with no noses. According to an interview of Josie and Helen Whitehead conducted by John and Ida McLeod, the mimikwisiwak knew many herbal remedies, and used roots and plants for medicinal purposes. 64 The mimikwisiwak often came to people in their dreams. In these dreams, the people would learn where to locate the mimikwisiwak in order to receive their help. 65 Similarly, Robert Goodvoice, a Dakota narrator, tells of a man who also came to people in a dream, telling them of different uses for plants: “[there was a] dream about a man that stood on the waters and told them [the people] about the Red Path. This man also showed them a hundred and fifty different kinds of roots. Roots, leaves, flowers, and the stick plant that is good for every part of the body.” 66 These accounts give insight into the symbiotic relationship the Aboriginal people had with plants, animals, and the spirit world.

The relationship between Indigenous people and animals is not only shown in traditional narratives, but also in life narratives and ethnographies, allowing one a wider scope of interpretation. For example, by looking at the pawakan, or dream helpers, in the ethnographies, I will provide a clear interpretation of the role of the bear and the beaver.

---

63 1980 Elders Conference. IH-OM.12/.12.1, Indian Film History Project. Date: August 27, 1980; Location: Birch Island Reserve.
64 Mr. and Mrs. Whitehead. Interview conducted by Mr. and Mrs. John McLeod. June 24, 1978.
65 Ibid.
66 Robert Goodvoice 6, IH-108/109, Indian Film History Project. Date: October 7, 1977; Location: Wahpeton Reserve.
in the narratives of the "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman Who Married a Beaver."
The pawakan, according to McLeod, "links a person to the rest of the world, to the rest of creation."67 The pawakan initially comes to an individual during a fast or a dream and takes pity on those that were seeking help or power. The pawakan could be anything, from a small being to a large animal, rock or element.68 The pawakan could offer protection or give its human counterpart powers for hunting, finding or making medicines. In return for these gifts, the individual had to follow certain protocols and offerings to his or her pawakan. Bears were seen to be especially powerful pawakanak. An individual who had a bear for a pawakan was often successful in hunting and trapping. Consequently, in "The Bear Woman," certain elements of the narrative infer that the man had a bear for his pawakan. The first clue that the man has a bear for his pawakan stems from his success in hunting. Every time the man sees a buffalo he is able to kill it. His success in hunting is further demonstrated by his ability to kill a large number of game for his in-laws. Often, when an individual first dreamed of their pawakan, the pawakan appeared as a human. In the case of "The Bear Woman," the man may have been so lonely for companionship that the bear appeared in the form of a woman to comfort and give the man purpose. This is supported by Brightman, who states: "The pawakan is sometimes talked about as 'loving' its human dependent and concerned to promote his or her welfare."69 Near the end of the narrative the man discovers that his wife and her family are actually bears.

67 McLeod, "Cree Narrative Memory," 57.
68 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 87-90.
69 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 89.
Conclusion

"The Bear Woman" and "The Woman Who Married a Beaver" introduce the reader or listener to the Cree and Ojibwa cultures' worldview. These worldviews are evident in kinship, reciprocity, and responsibility, as these features are outlined by the women in the narratives. The two traditional narratives analyzed have many complex layers, which are not necessarily evident in the first hearing or listening. In order better to understand these layers, the individual relates the narrative to another narrative they know or heard or experienced. The themes throughout "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver" – kinship, hard work, women's responsibility, and spiritual responsibility – all exist in women's contemporary lives. The traditional and life narratives reflect women's creativity, strength, and determination, both in the narratives and in daily life. By relating elements of these traditional narratives to contemporary situations we are able to draw strength from previous women's experiences.

The relation between women's roles in traditional and contemporary situations is carried forward in the next chapter. The narratives in the following chapter expand upon the ātayohkēwin genre by examining "The Rolling Head." "The Rolling Head" draws upon human-animal relationships and the actions of a young wisahkēcāhk. The wisahkēcāhk stories typically teach moral and lessons through negative example. With wisahkēcāhk being a young boy, the negative examples are shown through the actions of the mother. These negative examples are used as deterrents, to challenge people to think about their actions and consequences stemming from their actions.
CHAPTER 3

REINTERPRETING THE NARRATIVE OF "THE ROLLING HEAD"

"The Rolling Head," cihcipiscikwán, explores the human-animal relationships and wisahkêcâhk's transformational abilities by focusing on the actions of the mother. The actions of the woman in the six versions of the narrative in this chapter differ significantly from "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver." The narratives in the previous chapter teach positive attributes of a Cree and Ojibwa worldview, historical information and entertainment, information detailing daily activities, as well as provide and uphold lessons, morals, or values. The narrative of "The Rolling Head," in this chapter, differs by teaching through negative example — what not to do.

"The Rolling Head" narrative first caught my attention a number of years ago. I was drawn to the graphic imagery throughout the narrative. Over time I came across multiple versions of this narrative and started to compare them to one another. My comparisons of the versions, which are presented in a chart in the appendices, were based on common details relating each text — the affair, the woman's beheading, and the elements used against the pursing "Rolling Head." I drew on six versions of "The Rolling Head," all of which are presented as full narratives in (see Appendix C). From these six

---

versions I recreated my own summary of the narrative, with additional commentary and comparisons interspersed with the recreation.

By expanding upon the original narratives and recreating a summary of the narrative, as opposed to summarizing the six versions separately, I am providing my interpretation of the woman's actions through the woman's voice. Rather than retelling the story through a third person narration, I opted to use the voice of the woman to initiate the thought processes and actions of the woman and how these can be related to contemporary situations. Following the recreation of the narrative, an explanation relating to the different storytellers, writers, and interviewers, are discussed to provide an explanation of the differences within the versions. The background of the narrators and the writers add to the understanding of the different interpretations.

The different versions are a part of the atayohkewin genre and the wisahkécâhk narratives. By outlining the roles of the wisahkécâhk narratives, explanations relating to the transformation of the earth and certain animals, as well as examples of how not to act are presented to the listener or the reader. "The Rolling Head" narrative incorporates both the transformation of the land and examples of how not to act. The summary, explanation, and purpose of the narrative can all be applied to a contemporary understanding of what happens when individuals do not fully think about the consequences of his or her actions. By presenting the narrative in this manner, "The Rolling Head" challenges the reader to think about his or her perceptions relating to his or her self, relationships, actions, and potential consequences of those actions.
"The Rolling Head": A recreation and summary of the narratives

In this section I recreate a summary of "The Rolling Head" narrative by drawing upon all six versions. In some of the narratives, the voice appears to be coming from the older brother, wisahkécâhk. By expanding on the narrative form, rather than just providing a summary of all six versions, I recreate a summary of the narrative from the voice of wisahkécâhk's mother, who later becomes "The Rolling Head." The name Rolling Head is given to the severed head after it begins chasing after the boys. This name may just be indicative of "Rolling Head's" actions and nothing more. My interpretation and summary of the narrative is written in a narrative format below and is indented and single spaced. Additional comments and comparisons to the original six versions appear after each indented paragraph.

Long ago I lived with my husband, and our two sons, one who was half grown and the other who was only a toddler. We were happy. My husband was a good hunter and provided for all our family's needs. I, on the other hand, kept busy watching after our children, preparing the skins my husband brought home, as well as making all the clothing for the family.

This beginning, in which the husband, wife, and two children live together in the woods is fairly consistent within all of the narratives. Ida McLeod's narrative is the only one that names the mother, father, and eldest son as well as providing substantial information on the wife's daily activities.

---

2 I do not claim to be a storyteller. I'm just trying to connect the stories without giving preference to one story over another. A complete version of each narrative is available in the appendix.
3 Please keep in mind this is my interpretative summary and I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions.
4 The following authors introduce the family and activities of the man - Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 309; Skinner, "Plains Ojibwa Tales," 280; Colomb, "Rolling Head," 9; Michel, "Rolling Head," 59; Moosomin, "The Birth of Wisahketchkahk," 8; Ida McLeod, "Rolling Head," 2-3; McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3, concentrates on the role of the woman. See chart in Appendix.
After a while my husband had to go farther and farther away from home to hunt. As a result he was gone for longer periods of time. For the most part I was able to keep busy, watching the children, keeping up on the daily chores, as well as preparing and mending all the hides and clothing. One of the projects I was working on was a beautiful dress, decorated with dyed shells and quills. In time I finished working on all the hides, as well as my beautiful dress, and only had my daily chores left to keep me busy. At night I would put on my dress and hope and wait for my husband to come home and see what a beautiful family he had.5

In all of the narratives, the husband goes out hunting. In the Bloomfield, Ahenakew, Skinner, Colomb and Michel's narratives, the husband appears to go out everyday. In the McLeod narrative the husband eventually has to hunt farther and farther from home in order to bring meat home for his family. The McLeod narrative provides the most information regarding the duties of the woman.

Sometime thereafter, I found myself wearing my beautiful dress day after day, completing all of my daily chores in the dress. One of my chores included going into the woods to cut firewood for our daily use. I found myself going into the woods several times a day, constantly being drawn to one particular stump.6

McLeod mentions the details of the dress and how the woman eventually came to wear the dress everyday.

Louis Moosomin, who was recorded by Bloomfield, and Skinner make reference to the woman preparing herself for her meetings with her lover. Moosomin mentions the woman dressing up in her "finery" before going to the serpent, while Skinner states that the woman combed her hair and painted her face before succumbing to the embraces of a man who lived in a tree. In all the narratives, the woman's duties include cutting

---

5 Man goes out hunting in all six narratives; woman working on the dress appears in McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3-4.
6 Woman putting on her finery - McLeod, "Rolling Head," 4-5; Moosomin, "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12; Skinner, "Plains Ojibwa Tales," 281-282; woman drawn to stump - McLeod, "Rolling Head," 4-5; Moosomin, "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12; Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310; Michel, "Rolling Head," 59.
firewood for her family's daily use. These duties start to be neglected when the woman is
"constantly being drawn to this one particular stump." This trance-like state where the
woman appears to be under the possession of the snakes, is portrayed in three of the six
narratives, including that of Edward Ahenakew's, "a strange light in her eye"; Ida
McLeod's, "for he was sure his mother was possessed by a power that would destroy
them all"; and that of Jeremiah Michel's, "opawâmîwin ('her dreams/visions') did that to
her."

In this stump I found a den of snakes. These snakes became my world,
consuming my entire attention. Everyday, I would go to the stump and hit
the base with my axe. When I did this the snakes would come out and
surround me. My mind was so preoccupied with the snakes that I basically
abandoned my children, coming home late in the day and completing only a
small amount of my daily duties. 7

The act of going to the woods everyday consumes the woman who increasingly fails to
complete all her chores. In three of the six narratives, the woman appears to neglect her
daily chores or to pass them off to her children.

Ahenakew, McLeod, and Colomb all mention the woman's diminishing
commitment to her daily chores. Edward Ahenakew states, "Every now and again she
could get up and go for wood in a nearby bush. This she did repeatedly, even when it
seemed altogether unnecessary." 8 The McLeod narrative supports this by stating, "Each
day she returned later and later and brought home less and less firewood. Wesakechak
was kept busy looking after his brother. More and more of his mother's daily tasks
became his." 9 The final narrative that reaffirms the woman's negligence in her daily

7 Woman goes to see the snake everyday appears in Moosomin "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12; Ahenakew,
"Cree Trickster Tales," 311; McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3-4; Colomb, "Rolling Head," 9; Michel, "Rolling
Head," 59;
8 Edward Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310.
9 Ida McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3.
chores comes from Colomb. Here, the woman was so preoccupied with the snake she had no time to cook, "dry meat or fix up the place, y'know. Always busy in the bush." In the Bloomfield, Skinner, and Michel narratives, the authors do not mention the women's workload or whether she is failing to keep up with her daily chores. Given the dynamic relationships and the expected roles of men and women, it is evident that the woman was not living up to her commitments as a caretaker and equal partner in maintaining the domestic household chores.

My oldest son must have suspected something was wrong, for some reason though I did not care. Most of my chores were passed off to him, until the day my human husband came home. Fear overcame me. I knew I would no longer be able to spend my days at the stump with my snakes.

In the McLeod narrative wisahkécăhk becomes suspicious of his mother's trips into the forest. One day he follows her and sees her hitting the stump and how the snakes crawled around her. Once wisahkécăhk's father comes home, wisahkécăhk tells him everything. The oldest son knows of the mother's affair in two of the narratives. In the other four out of the six narratives, the husband actually catches the wife having the affair. In Skinner's Ojibwa narrative, the woman is having an affair with a man, not a snake: one day the husband returns early, catches the wife with the other man and kills them both instantly. When the husband's arrival home from his hunt is the last time the woman sees the snakes alive.

My husband told me of where he went and that he shot a moose, which I was to go and retrieve the meat. I tried to go and tell the snakes, but my husband ordered me to go immediately and retrieve the dead moose. As I was leaving I tossed a piece of sinew into the fire to try and shorten my trip. My husband

11 Son tells the father in McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3-4; Colomb, "Rolling Head," 9.
must have seen this and reversed the effect of the sinew, for my trip seemed longer than ever.\textsuperscript{12}

It was the wife's responsibility to retrieve and cut up the meat from a hunt. In Skinner's version of the narrative the woman was killed after the husband catches her with the other man. In the other five narratives, the woman goes and retrieves the meat, allowing the husband time to prepare for her return. In two of the narratives, Ahenakew's and Colomb's, the use of medicine or magic is used to shorten the distance of the wife's trip in one narrative and the distance of the husband's trip to try to kill the snakes in the other narrative. The other narratives make no mention of the woman using any kind of medicine or magic to change the length of her trip.

I ran all the way to the location my husband told me of. I quickly dressed the animal and ran all the way home with it. I was so anxious to see my lovers that I didn't even stop to see how my children or husband were doing once I got back. As I was running to the stump, a feeling of dread came over me. All but one of the snakes was dead, brutally killed. The one that was spared was the smallest of the bunch. He told me that it was my husband who killed the rest of my snakes, leaving him, the smallest one as a reminder that snakes should be "small and easily conquered"\textsuperscript{13} by men.\textsuperscript{14}

In two of five narratives, those of Bloomfield and Ahenakew, depict the wife immediately running to the forest to check on her lovers. The other three narratives show the husband confronting the wife and trying to make her drink the blood of her lovers. I chose to portray the wife running immediately to her lovers upon her return in order to signify her clouded frame of mind. By going immediately to her lovers, the wife is

\textsuperscript{12} Woman tries to go and tell the snakes in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310; magic is used to shorten the trip in Colomb, "Rolling Head," 10-11; Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310;

\textsuperscript{13} Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310.

\textsuperscript{14} Woman running straight to the stump appears in Moosomin "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12-13; Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310; sparing one snake as a reminder is taken from Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310
showing where her priorities lie. These priorities are with her lovers and not her family. This further distances the woman from everything that the family stands for.

I was beyond furious. I raced back home ready to wreck vengeance upon my husband, my children, and anyone else that dared stand in my way. As I rushed through the doorway my body got caught in some kind of net. Only my head went through the opening. My husband must have suspected that I would try to kill him, for he was waiting for me and severed my head from the rest of my body with an axe. 15

After the woman found her dead lovers she was furious. She wanted to hurt, possibly to kill her husband at this point. The husband knew that the woman would not be of sound mind and was prepared to kill her before she killed him. This section of the narrative is interesting in that it forces the reader to interpret the man's actions in one of two ways. One can argue that the man was only trying to defend himself, knowing that she would hurt him, as well as their children. That this was an act of self-defence can be argued further in that the woman was unstable, showed clear changes in her personality, and displayed unpredictable behaviour. In certain narratives the woman was under the possession of the snakes. Therefore, any outbursts or sudden aggressive acts should be considered a severe danger, leaving the man with no other choice than to defend himself and his family by killing the woman before she killed them.

Alternatively, the husband planned to cut the wife's head off, without fully knowing her intentions. By planning to cut her head off the man was intent on in uxoricide, the killing of one's wife. In this case, it can be further argued that the man created "The Rolling Head" and all of the damage and destruction that came with it. How

15 Woman's body caught in a net appears in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310; man cut woman's head off in dwelling Moosomin "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12-13; Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310; McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3-4
the reader or listener interprets the rest of the story and the characters within it depends on which way the situation is viewed.

After the wife is decapitated, she becomes "The Rolling Head." Rather than continuing in the voice of the woman protagonist, I shift the narrative voice back to the third person, drawing heavily upon the narratives of McLeod and Ahenakew, for the remainder of the narrative. My reason at this point in my analysis for shifting the narrative voice to the third person results from the obvious change in the woman. The woman's whole foundation of being a wife, mother, and a contributing member of society, disappears when she becomes "The Rolling Head." "The Rolling Head" appears to be consumed by rage and devoid of her human / womanly qualities. By continuing to interpret the narrative through the voice of the woman, I would be ignoring the fact that she is no longer the same person. Instead, by losing her head, whether it is interpreted literally or metaphorically, the woman is transformed into "The Rolling Head."

After the head was separated from the body the head came to life, becoming "The Rolling Head," and ordered the body to kill the husband. The husband then rose to the sky to become the Big Dipper while the body of the wife chased after the husband to become the Little Dipper.\(^{16}\)

In all the versions the Head comes to life after it is severed from the mother. As stated earlier, in five of the six narratives the father rises to the sky and becomes either the north star or the Big Dipper. As the Big Dipper, the husband is protected from the body of the woman by the North Star, who apparently loves "her husband and therefore is ready to protect him"\(^ {17}\) from the body of the wife.

\(^{16}\) The man becomes the Big Dipper in Colomb, "Rolling Head," 11; Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 311; man becomes the North Star and the body of the woman becomes the Big Dipper in McLeod, "Rolling Head," 3-4; man becomes a star in Moosomin, "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12-13.

\(^{17}\) Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 311.
As the body was chasing after the husband, "The Rolling Head" began to roll after the two boys. "The Rolling Head" was calling out to the sons trying to get them to stop. wísähkécáhkh remembered his father's warning and kept running, ignoring the cries of "The Rolling Head." "The Rolling Head" continued to gain on the boys when all of a sudden wísähkécáhkh remembered the advice of his father and threw the first of his gifts. This first gift he threw behind him was a bone awl. All of a sudden "a thick wall of thorn bushes appeared." Even though this seemed to stop the Rolling Head for now, wísähkécáhkh knew he had to continue onward.

"The Rolling Head" was furious after finding there was no opening through the thorny bushes. Seeing that she needed to get around the bushes in order to catch the two young boys, "The Rolling Head" pushed her way through the bushes, emerging on the other side cut and bleeding.

The thorny bushes are used first in three of the six narratives. In one narrative no items are used against "The Rolling Head." In the McLeod version, "The Rolling Head" promises to marry the worm upon helping it get through the bushes. Once the worm makes the hole big enough for the head to get through "The Rolling Head" goes forward and crushes the worm in the process.

The bleeding Rolling Head carried on after the two boys. wísähkécáhkh, looking back, felt sick to see "The Rolling Head" coming closer. His inability to escape "The Rolling Head" led him to use his next gift from his father against the pursuant Head. wísähkécáhkh threw the dried piece of wood behind him. Large twists of flame broke loose, creating a wall of fire that separated "The Rolling Head" from the two boys.

In only two of the versions the wall of fire is the second element used. In the Ahenakew version wísähkécáhkh throws a piece of rock behind him, creating the Rocky Mountains.

A mountain range used to separate "The Rolling Head" from the two boys is used in four of the six versions, but is only used as the second gift in the Ahenakew version.

---

19 The head calls out to the boys in Moosomin, "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12-13; Skinner, "The Magic Flight," 292; McLeod, "Rolling Head," 4-5; Colomb, "Rolling Head," 11; the head threatens the boys in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 312. Thorn bushes are the first gift in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 312; McLeod, "Rolling Head," 4-5; Colomb, "Rolling Head," 11.
20 The head pushes through the thorns without any help in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 311.
21 Fire used as second gift in McLeod, "Rolling Head," 4-5; Colomb, "Rolling Head," 11.
22 Edward Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 311.
wisahkêcâhk continued on, knowing it was only a matter of time before the Rolling Head would be upon them once again. "The Rolling Head" looked for a way around the wall of fire, but could not see any safe passage. After seeing there was no safe way through, "The Rolling Head" made its way through the flames. It emerged on the other side "burnt and blackened" and even more determined to capture and kill the two boys. 

In Ahenakew's narrative regarding the wall of fire "The Rolling Head" only hesitated for a short time before it emerged on the other side "burnt and blackened." The next line Ahenakew states is: "A man were dangerous in such a plight; but no creature exists that can exceed the fierceness of a woman, thwarted in her vengeance and humiliated at the same time." This is interesting for many reasons. Firstly, he continues to denote "The Rolling Head" as a woman, even though she no longer exists as a full bodied woman. Furthermore, Ahenakew's version closely resembles a popular phrase from the seventeenth century play "The Mourning Bride" by William Congreve. Ahenakew may or may have not read the play but it is well known that the phrase "Hell hath no Fury like a Woman scorned," had popular use to describe the wrath of a jealous or enraged woman. The fact that he applied this phrase to his version of the narrative of "The Rolling Head" shows the influence of western culture in his writings.

wisahkêcâhk knew "The Rolling Head" would be even more determined to capture the boys and thus used the third gift his father gave to him. wisahkêcâhk threw a flat stone over his shoulder creating a barrier of mountains. As "The Rolling Head" approached this new obstacle she tried to find a way around. As with all the other obstacles there was no way around the barrier of mountains. Tired and exhausted "The Rolling Head" stopped for a brief moment until it heard a sound coming from within the mountain itself. A giant worm was gnawing a hole through the rock. "The Rolling Head" was so excited at this opportunity to continue her quest after

23 Ibid., 312.
24 The head pushes through the fire without any help appears in McLeod, "Rolling Head," 4-5; Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 311. Moosomin, "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 12-13;
25 Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 311.
26 Ibid.
the two boys, that once the hole was big enough she rolled through it crushing the worm in process.\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{wisahkēcâhk}, tired and exhausted continued on, carrying his little brother who had cried himself to sleep. \textit{wisahkēcâhk} only had one gift left to try and stop the "Rolling Head from catching them: a swift flowing river. As \textit{wisahkēcâhk} stumbled along with his little brother in tow, he fell, causing the fourth gift to tumble in front of him. \textit{wisahkēcâhk} was trapped. The gift meant to separate him and his brother from "The Rolling Head" held him on the same side as the homicidal "Rolling Head." \textit{wisahkēcâhk} ran up and down the river bank looking for another way across. In his pursuit he saw two great Cranes sitting on either side of the river bank and begged them to help him and his brother across. At first the Cranes refused but after \textit{wisahkēcâhk} told the Cranes what would happen to them if "The Rolling Head" caught up with them they took pity on the boys and agreed to help them across. The two Cranes stretched their necks out to form a makeshift bridge for the two boys.\textsuperscript{29} Soon after the two boys were safely on the other side of the river, "The Rolling Head" tried to convince the two Cranes to do the same for her. \textit{wisahkēcâhk} begged the Cranes not to help "The Rolling Head," but "The Rolling Head" knew all the right things to say to persuade the Cranes to help her. As "The Rolling Head" was crossing on the Cranes outstretched necks she began to bounce up and down. This brought the Cranes a great deal of pain, causing them to pull up their necks and toss "The Rolling Head" into the river. \textit{wisahkēcâhk} used this opportunity to throw a rock into the water in which "The Rolling Head" disappeared while yelling out the word "\textit{namēw! namēw!}" (Sturgeon), and transformed the head into a fish.\textsuperscript{30}

In all but Michel's narrative, the river is the last gift that \textit{wisahkēcâhk} uses against "The Rolling Head." The last gift used to create the fast flowing river ends up in front of \textit{wisahkēcâhk}. This problem ends up being resolved when some bird or serpent agrees to help \textit{wisahkēcâhk} and his brother across. Unfortunately, "The Rolling Head" also convinces the birds and the serpent to help her across. The only reason she is not able to make it to the other side to slay the two boys is because of her impatient nature. In the

\textsuperscript{28} The barrier of mountains is used as the third gift in Moosomin, "Birth of Wisahketchahk," 14-15; McLeod, "Rolling Head," 8. Giant worm gnawing a hole through the rock appears in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 317
\textsuperscript{29} Two patriarchs (birds) helped in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 318; pelican in Skinner, "Plains Ojibwa Tales," 292; swan in McLeod, "Rolling Head," 9; and Colomb "Rolling Head," 12.
\textsuperscript{30} The head turns into a sturgeon in Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 318; Colomb "Rolling Head" 13; Moosomin "Birth of Wisahketchahk" 20; McLeod "Rolling Head" 11.
five narratives, when "The Rolling Head" is about to make it across the river, she starts bouncing up and down or rolling against the neck of the being carrying her across. According to the Ahenakew version it was the Head's "naturally wicked nature [that] was her own undoing." This act of selfish impatience lands "The Rolling Head" in the river, where she is turned into a sturgeon in four of the six narratives.

In examining the Rolling Head's transformation into the sturgeon, a couple of questions need to be addressed. First of all why did "The Rolling Head" turn into a sturgeon as opposed to any other fish? The reason why "The Rolling Head" may have turned into a sturgeon as opposed to a walleye or pickerel might have to do with the character and sheer size of the sturgeon. The sturgeon can survive in both salt water and fresh water environments. Since the sturgeon has no teeth, it lives off the bottom of ocean, river, or lake beds scavenging insect larvae, clams, or whatever else can pass through its suction tube mouth. The sturgeon has a lifespan of between fifty to one hundred years. As for the size, depending on the type of sturgeon, some species can grow quite large – the largest found was twenty feet and over two thousand pounds. The Shovelnose Sturgeons and Lake Sturgeons are much smaller, and grow to between two and six feet long and weigh anywhere from four to two hundred pounds. While the sturgeon is an interesting species, the story does not explain why "The Rolling Head" turned into a sturgeon. In order to interpret why "The Rolling Head" turned into a sturgeon instead of any other fish it is useful to go back to the basic tenets common to atayòhkéwin narratives.

31 Edward Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 313.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
The ˈatayōhkəwin narratives often make sense of changes in the landscape, characteristics of animals, as well as of the relationships between humans and animals. In drawing upon the tenets of ˈatayōhkəwin narratives, the transformation of "The Rolling Head" into the sturgeon can be explained through the reverse roles imposed on the sturgeon. By transforming "The Rolling Head" into the sturgeon "The Rolling Head" has to play a much humbler role. Rather than having the ability to bring harm to others, the sturgeon has no teeth and is therefore confined to a life of scavenging the bottoms of oceans, lakes, and river beds. "The Rolling Head," though small and determined, brought much fright and angst to young wisahkēcāhk and his little brother.

The transformation the Head into a sturgeon, the sturgeon is able to bring prosperity in times of hunger. Sturgeon played a key role in the Cree diet. The larger lake sturgeons could feed a whole family, while the larger river sturgeons could feed a few families. Traditionally the whole sturgeon was fully utilized, unlike "The Rolling Head." The skin of the sturgeon was thick and oily and was tanned as leather, the meat was abundant, the eggs from the fish were considered quite delicious, and the swim bladders from the sturgeon were used as waterproofing agents. 

While the sturgeon differs from "The Rolling Head" in many ways as discussed above, there are similarities. The life span of a sturgeon is similar to the life span of a human, both on average, can live up to eighty years old. The female lake sturgeons like human women, reach sexual maturity between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three and

---

only spawn every four to six years. The atayóhkéwin narratives help us make sense of why "The Rolling Head" transforms into a sturgeon. "The Rolling Head," which caused much fear and destruction, is transformed into a being that gives life and nurtures the people with its entire body. The sacred stories teach us about balance and how negatives can be transformed into positives.

**Reasoning behind the Telling of "The Rolling Head"**

The narrative of "The Rolling Head" can be used to address several themes. "The Rolling Head" narrative explains wisahkécähk's existence and gives life to his future predicaments. Depending on the version of the story, the listener or reader is introduced to wisahkécähk, his brother, mother, and father, all of whom seem to live in relative isolation from any other people. Common themes, as addressed in earlier stories, include kinship, division of labour—duties associated with men and women, such as hunting, gathering firewood, taking care of children, cooking, sewing, and spiritual power. The presence of mamáhtáwisíwin, or extraordinary power or “ability to tap into the mystery,” as displayed in subsequent wisahkécähk stories, appears to be first given or shown to wisahkécähk by his father. The events following the father’s discovery of the mother’s affair have far reaching consequences that could still occur today. After the father kills the mother, five out of the six narratives depict the husband rising to the sky to become either a star or in two of the narratives the big dipper with the body of mother chasing the father. In the one narrative, which does not explicitly state that the father has

---

become a star, it does state that the sky would turn red if he was killed, linking the father to the sky.

The link between the father and the sky can be used to expand upon Vizenor's statement that "Tricksters are the translation of creation." Certain elements in the story can be seen as physical and visual markers for the Cree, giving life and explanation to atayôhkêwin narratives. The recreation of the landscape can be further seen in the items the father gives to wisahkêcâhk. The reformation of Turtle Island using the various elements used against "The Rolling Head" is discussed thoroughly in the Edward Ahenakew version of the narrative. Depending on the narrative, one of the first elements used against "The Rolling Head" is the wall of fire. The result of the wall of fire is believed to be a desert-like area stretching from Arizona to Nevada. The great mountains that spring up and separate "The Rolling Head" from wisahkêcâhk and his little brother can be interpreted as the Rocky Mountains and the continental divide. The last element that the father gives the boys is the swift flowing river. This river is believed to be the Mississippi River. These elements give birth to physical barriers and changes in the landscapes that are used as means to escape the destructiveness of "The Rolling Head."

The naming and description surrounding the changes to the landscape introduce another key feature of Indigenous worldview. Indigenous worldview in relation to oral narratives, as discussed in chapter one, encompasses the importance of place. By naming the land, Ahenakew gives life to the story and relates the gifts that changed the land in the

---

38 Vizenor 1994 Manifest Manners, 15.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
story to our current landscape today. This style of storytelling not only provides
continuity of place, but provides information as to how certain geographical regions exist
today.

Narrative interpretations

The six versions of "The Rolling Head" differ in that some narratives are more
descriptive than others, but the general theme of the narrative remains fairly constant –
such as the mother having an affair, the father beheading the wife, and the father giving
the children gifts to protect them against "The Rolling Head." The differences that occur
within the narratives can be attributed to the different storytellers or authors writing the
story, and where they come from, who they previously heard the story from, as well as
how comfortable they feel with the content in the story. The recording and transcribing
of the narratives also needs to address issues such as time constraints, trust relationships,
as well as circumstances surrounding the telling of a particular narrative. The author's,
narrator's, or editor's personal experiences also may influence what is included or
excluded from the final version of the narrative. For example, Ida McLeod's narrative
provides the most detail in describing the transformation of the woman from a good and
kind mother and wife to the relentless Rolling Head. She may provide so much more
detail than the other versions because of the fact that she is a woman and therefore feels
more comfortable writing about women's lives and responsibilities. Neal McLeod states:

The version that is eventually transcribed does not necessarily represent the
totality of the knowledge that an individual speaker has of the narrative. The
occasion of speaking, the demands of the audience and the time in which the story
is communicated, alter the way in which the story is presented.\footnote{\textsuperscript{42}McLeod, "Cree Narrative Memory," 41.}
All of these elements influence the method of the telling, as well as how much of the narrative is told at any given time.

It is important to keep Neal McLeod’s term "the occasion of speaking" in mind when assessing the multiple variations of the narratives. The different versions of "The Rolling Head" narrative include Leonard Bloomfield’s writings and transcriptions of Louis Moosomin, Edward Ahenakew, Alanson Skinner, Ida McLeod (edited by Stan Cuthand), and Robert Brightman’s transcription of Cornelius Colomb and a second narrative told by Jeremiah Michel and translated by Pierre Merasty. Five of the six versions of the narrative are from a Cree background, two are from a Woodlands Cree community, one is from a Plains Cree community, two are from a Plains Cree perspective, and written by Plains Cree individuals, and one is from an Ojibway community.

The narratives recorded by Robert Brightman and Leonard Bloomfield were told to them by Cree narrators. The narrative recorded by Bloomfield came from Louis Moosomin, a Cree speaking middle aged man from the Sweet Grass First Nation. According to Bloomfield, Louis Moosomin was blind from childhood: “a man of middle age, uses many archaic expressions, and dictates well, except that in the process of slow speech he often gets muddled in his construction.” Bloomfield, who was a linguist, spent five weeks on the Sweet Grass Reserve, Battleford Agency, Saskatchewan, during the summer of 1925. All of the narratives Bloomfield recorded are presented in the Cree language – as none of his collaborators spoke English – and are followed by the English

---

43 Ibid.
translation. Bloomfield spoke and understood a rudimentary amount of the Cree
language, having worked on other Algonquian languages.

The Sweet Grass First Nation is located 26 kilometres west of North Battleford.
Sweet Grass, though introduced to Christianity in the mid to late nineteenth century, may
be grounded by the stories surrounding the culture due to a large hill, wisahkécåhk’s
hill. This hill is sloped in such a way that it appears as if someone has slid down the
hill. The spirit of wisahkécåhk is still said to reside in the hill. The spiritual connection
to the elder brother, as well as to any stories that may have been told on or around the
hill, may have greatly influenced Louis Moosomin’s version of the narrative.

The narratives recorded by Robert Brightman came from Cornelius Colomb and
Pierre Merasty translations of Jeremiah Michel. Brightman, an anthropologist, has
worked extensively with the Cree and the Cree language, and has researched theories of
culture and history. In 1977, Brightman worked with members from the Mathias Colomb
Band in Pukatawagan, as well as with individuals from Granville Lake.

Pukatawagan is located approximately 210 kilometres north of The Pas.
Granville Lake is situated further north along the Churchill River system. While working
with Johnny Bighetty, a Cree trapper from Granville Lake, Brightman was immersed in
the language and the culture of the northern Rock Cree. This immersion in the Cree
language and culture grounded Brightman in Cree worldview, including the importance
of narratives.

45 First heard this in Neal McLeod’s Indigenous Studies 100 class, Fall 2005 First Nations University of
Canada, Regina, Saskatchewan. This story is reported in a community profile of the Sweet Grass First
March 2006).
The Pukatawagan area was and still is fairly isolated from the general population. Historically fur traders and missionaries used the Missinippi river system, which has connections from the Rocky Mountains flowing into the Hudson Bay, to come through the area as early as 1794. According to Brightman, "Most Crees at Pukatawagan accepted Catholicism and 'converted' in the late 1800s, reproducing in this context an Indigenous receptivity to new forms of spiritual expression. As a result, Catholicism is now a Cree 'tradition.'" The introduction of Catholicism led to the priests' complete disapproval of all Indigenous cultural beliefs. Indigenous people may have been able to balance the new religion with their old traditional practices due to the basic philosophies practiced in everyday Indigenous life. This blending of traditional beliefs with new religious practices seems to be quite common amongst Indigenous people.

In Cornelius Colomb's version of "The Rolling Head," Brightman presents the story as the author told it. The story is not edited to conform to Standard English prose. Jeremiah Michel's version of the narrative differs from all the other narratives in that the story does not mention *wisahkēcāhk* at all. Rather the story as told by Jeremiah Michel views "The Rolling Head" narrative as being detached from the transformer cycle. In most of the narratives, "The Rolling Head" is the first of a series of narratives explaining the rise and eventual destruction of the earth by the great flood. According to Brightman, Michel's omission of "The Rolling Head" narrative from the rest of the *wisahkēcāhk* cycle may,

\[\ldots\] represent an ideological change in progress. Mr. Michel regarded "Rolling Head" as a powerful and wicked" story, sentiments which are shared by some other persons who explicitly disassociate it from the Wisahkēcāhk cycle. Conjecturally, those who find the story's content objectionable are motivated to

reject or deny the connection, a tendency which could, under the appropriate circumstances, encompass other of the hero's exploits as well.47

As with any story or event, the narrator may not feel comfortable with the content and may censor or even omit parts, or the entire story from a certain group of works – as did Jeremiah Michel. The fact that Michel regarded "Rolling Head as a powerful and wicked story" suggests that Christianity influenced his interpretation. In analysing the different versions of "The Rolling Head" narrative one needs to keep in mind that while general themes remain the same, certain stylistic elements and influences of each story-teller differ.

The lone Ojibwa narrative was provided by Skinner, who was also an anthropologist. Skinner was deeply interested in the material culture, social organization, mythology, and religion of Indigenous cultural groups.48 His work with the Plains Ojibway was collected from the Long Plains Reserve, Manitoba, during the months of June and July, 1913. According to Skinner, the narratives represent "the folk-lore of one of the Western bands of Ojibwa in contact with the Plains peoples, and themselves in a transitional stage between plains and forest culture."49 The narratives collected in 1913, from Long Plain were most likely influenced by their Cree neighbours to the west, as well as by any missionaries that would have entered their territory.50

The Long Plain Reserve in Manitoba is located 23 kilometres southwest of Portage La Prairie. Since the community of Long Plain is located along the Assiniboine River, contact with different cultural groups, including the Dakota, as well as many fur

47 Brightman, Acaoohktwina and Acaimowina, 72.
traders and missionaries, was inevitable. The community of Portage la Prairie was originally a French based fur trading outpost named Fort la Reine first established in 1738.\textsuperscript{51} Between the 1700s and 1851, when Reverend William Cochrane began a settlement at Portage la Prairie, contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups evolved from relationships between the Indigenous groups and the fur trader, to relationships with many more newcomers to the land, including missionaries and new settlers.

As missionaries and new settlers made their way across what is now Canada and interacted with Indigenous groups, many cultural practices were adopted and adapted into Indigenous life. Chief Piapot, of the Piapot First Nation, was "described as the leader of the 'pagan element' on his reserve" and was incarcerated after performing the piercing ritual of the Sun Dance on twenty young men under section.\textsuperscript{52} The piercing ritual was prohibited under section 114 of the \textit{Indian Act}. However, Chief Piapot was charged with "drunkenness"\textsuperscript{53} and not the piercing ritual. Even after Piapot's prosecution for practicing the Sun Dance and other "pagan" rituals, he accommodated Christians in "his own extended family and community by offering his lodge for Christian services."\textsuperscript{54} By offering his lodge for Christian services Piapot was demonstrating tolerance and respect for individual freedom of religion. In his old age Piapot learned about Christianity but preferred not to singularly belong to one religion, stating: "I will belong half to the Christian Religion and half to the Indian, because you may turn out to be wrong after all, and the Indian Religion might happen to be right and then I would have nothing to fall

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 16.
back upon."55 This practice of learning the Christian religion while still retaining traditional Indigenous beliefs was undertaken by many First Nations people. The blending of certain cultural practices with new religious forms, referred to as syncretism, can also be witnessed in the narratives of Alice Ahenakew.

The blending of certain cultural and religious beliefs and practices could extend everyday acts of kindness, respect, and reciprocity, to explain or bridge old beliefs, such as creation stories, with new beliefs and stories. According to Charles Stewart, cultures "are porous; they are open to intermixture with other, different cultures and they are subject to historical change precisely on account of these influences."56 The intermingling of cultures does not detract from either culture. As Stewart further states, "to phrase it more accurately, syncretism describes the process by which cultures constitute themselves at any given point in time. Today's hybridization will simply give way to tomorrow's hybridization, the form of which will be dictated by historico-political events and contingencies."57 In our day to day dealings, it is only natural to incorporate what we know and what we come across in how we see the world. Since it is inevitable that individuals will incorporate new beliefs and experiences in their outlooks on life, then it is plausible to assume that whole cultures may also absorb what they know and what they come across into how they see the world.

In the narrative, "The Priests Bear Medicine," Alice Ahenakew tells of her husband, an Anglican Minister, having a vision of a bear that has come to offer his body

55 Ibid.,16.
57 Ibid.
and help him and help the sicknesses in others. Andrew Ahenakew was cautious of this vision at first and did not want to upset the Anglican bishops over this use of Cree medicine. Over time, however, Alice Ahenakew convinced him that the Cree rites and ways of worship could be used in connection with Christian beliefs. Alice Ahenakew states, "And to this day I think extremely highly of this myself, these forms of worship – the Anglican liturgy, the Roman Catholic liturgy, and the Cree rites, these are the three for me." The adopting or adapting of different cultural practices into Cree culture does not make the Cree culture any less Cree. Rather, many of these different cultural practices were reinterpreted to reflect Cree values and beliefs. For example, Ahtahkakoop, a member of the worthy young men's society (okihcitawak) and the mitewiwin, an Ojibwa ceremony given to the Cree, converted to Christianity in hopes that this new way of life would help his people survive. This does not mean that old beliefs and practices such as taking care of others, being generous, and respecting the earth and all its creations were discarded. Rather, certain beliefs and practices may have been joined together.

Ernest Tootoosis, during an Elder's Conference in 1981, explained the incorporation of certain cultural beliefs through expanding on the connection between the teachings of wísahkécâhk and Jesus Christ:

And as I said here this morning, we all pray to the same Creator, the mother of the earth and the spirits. All people. That's because I think we had the same beginnings only we went. I would like to continue part of that. We have a copy of that, you know.

59 Ibid., 81.
Some of those legends we talk about, the legends are very important for us to be educated with in learning our spiritualism. Legends were just like Bible is to the Christian people. You need to know that really to understand, because that's where you get the teachings, why these things came to be. And I hear my brother mention - that's what I was told by elders, too - that I do believe in Jesus and that he was sent over there to our other brothers to help those people. But we must pray to Jesus, too. About these two brothers, Wisakedjak and Jesus. That one was sent here and the white man got our brother, Jesus. That's where he went. And he come from the same place, doing the same thing on a different island. In fact, if you just to think about what did Christ want the white man to do, be saved to the next world. And love one another and share. Almost precisely the way our people lived. So I think really the intention of the Great Spirit was, those people that got lost in their garden that used to live like our people, had their beginnings the same way, they lost that. And I think he was going to renew that. What he told these. And he did give spiritual power to the white man. Because he said, "Walk in my footsteps, I am the only way." He touched the sick; he commanded the dead; they came alive. If that isn't spiritual power, man, that....So these people that were given that teaching, they should be able to do that here. Not, didn't spoil that, if they did not make it any better than it was, they usually do. They've ruined it. That's why they've got no healing powers. Very few people have that. But basically I think that's the same thing that they were trying to get, they were trying to be given.61

The adaptation and interpretation of certain Christian practices can be equated to the adaptation or interpretation of narratives.

The adaptation of Christian ideology in certain areas of the narrative can be seen in the two versions written by fluent Cree speakers, Reverend Edward Ahenakew and Ida McLeod. These two versions of the narrative of Rolling Head provide the most description. Rev. Edward Ahenakew, from the Sandy Lake, also known as the Ahtakakoop Reserve, was born in 1885. This year signified a major change in the relationship between the Canadian government and First Nations people. The uprising of


The members of Ahtahkakoop were not involved with the events of 1885 and were classified as loyalists during this time. The Sandy Lake people were seen as forward looking in their actions and beliefs. Chief Ahtahkakoop converted to Christianity and adopted agriculture as a new means of survival. Ahtahkakoop recognized that times were changing and that his people would have to adapt to some of these new changes in order to survive. One of these changes included education. Ahtahkakoop saw education as the new buffalo — as able to help the people survive and support themselves. This belief in the importance of education was passed on to the people of the community.\footnote{Christensen, \textit{Ahtahkakoop}, 273-277.}

The importance of education was introduced to Edward Ahenakew, member of the Sandy Lake First Nation, at a young age. Edward Ahenakew's life as a student began at the residential school in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. After completing his secondary education, Ahenakew went to Wycliffe College in Toronto, and then graduated from Emmanuel College in Saskatoon in 1912 and became a Priest in the Anglican Church of Canada. During the influenza epidemic of 1918, Ahenakew went to Edmonton to study medicine. Ahenakew believed that by becoming a doctor he would be of better service to his people. After becoming quite sick himself during his second year of school, Ahenakew went to the Thunderchild reserve where he recuperated for a year. While on the Thunderchild reserve Ahenakew recorded the events of Chief Thunderchild's life in 1923, and subsequently wrote a collection of Cree narratives. Ahenakew's collections of

\footnote{\textcopyright 2023 by the author. Reprinted with permission. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.}
narratives were most likely told to him throughout his childhood and also during his time spent with Chief Thunderchild. Ahenakew's version of "The Rolling Head" differs from some of the other narratives in that he had the chance to format and edit the story as it was written. Within this story the characters are drawn out a little more. In addition, Ahenakew treats the reader by explaining the reasoning behind the North American landscape as we know it today.

Ida McLeod, a Cree educator and linguist, was also from the Sandy Lake Reserve. McLeod probably grew up hearing many of the same stories that Edward Ahenakew heard. Her version of the narrative was edited by Stan Cuthand, an Anglican Minister who served in Sandy Lake before assignment elsewhere. Cuthand worked and continues to work quite extensively with the Cree language, and has even translated portions of the Bible into Cree. McLeod, a leader in Indian Education, established the Indian Language Program at the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon. McLeod's narrative is the most descriptive on the subject of the eventual decline of the mother. In this version of the story, all the characters are named. White Feather is portrayed as a good mother and wife. tâwaham (translated by Wolvengrey as s/he hits s.t. with a missile; s/he hits s.t. (as a target), s/he hits the mark) is seen as a good husband, father, and provider. Only the elder of the two boys is named in this version — wiśahkêcâhk. After taking a Cree class, I discovered that it was considered taboo to refer to a person or family member by name. Rather than referring to a person by name, a kinship term was used to denote the relationship between the person being referred to and the speaker. Since the narratives

---

65 Solomon Ratt, class lecture, Cree 102, Fall 2005, First Nations University of Canada. Regina, SK.
following "The Rolling Head" focus on the actions of *wisahkecàhk*, the storyteller may have used the kinship term of *nisìmis* (younger sibling) as a sign of respect.

The reason these two versions of the narrative provide the most complete description can be attributed to the fact that both authors belong to the culture and have an intimate connection to the stories passed on from their parents, grandparents, and elders. In addition to having this connection to the stories, both Ahenakew and McLeod were able to write the story in the way they wanted it to appear to the rest of the general public. This may have included developing the characters a little more or even leaving out certain aspects that may have sparked more questions from the reader.

The story of "The Rolling Head" is interesting because on its own it looks at familial roles and responsibilities and how one person's actions can cause much damage and despair. However, in order to understand the full meaning of the narrative, it should be examined in the context of the full story surrounding it. The longer version of the story — in Bloomfield, Ahenakew, and McLeod — includes "Contest with *wimisosiw*"66 and "The Flood. In the "Contest with *wimisosiw*"67 and "The Flood *wimisosiw*, *wisahkecàhkh*s future father-in-law, is an old man with two younger daughters, who tricks *wisahkecàhkh* into getting into his boat. Once *wisahkecàhkh* is in the boat, *wimisosiw* carries him off, leaving *wisahkecàhkh*s little brother on the shore. The younger brother turns into a wolf, while *wisahkecàhkh* is taken to the house of *wimisosiw* to marry one of his daughters. As mentioned in chapter two, traditionally, the father-in-law and the son-in-law could not speak directly to each other unless the son-in-law presented his father-

67 Ibid.
in-law with a great gift, displaying his bravery.\footnote{Mandelbaum, \textit{The Plains Cree}, 147.} \textit{wimisisiw}, tries to kill \textit{wisahkécâhk} by leaving him as bait for large animals or by burning his clothes and leaving him to freeze to death. According to Ahenakew, \textit{wimisisiw} was a bad one. His one great desire was to kill whatever came within his reach. In allowing the union between \textit{wisahkécâhk} and his daughter, he had an ulterior motive. It would give him a hold on the young man and many opportunities would be his to bring about his death.\footnote{Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 315.}

\textit{wimisisiw}'s constant attempts to kill \textit{wisahkécâhk} finally lead to his own death.

After \textit{wisahkécâhk} kills his father-in-law, he sets out to find his brother. Shortly after finding his brother, the wolf, \textit{wisahkécâhk} warns him never to follow an animal into the water. The younger brother forgets this warning and is killed by sea lions.\footnote{As referenced by Ahenakew "Cree Trickster Tales," 309-353.}

\textit{wisahkécâhk}, angry about the death of his brother, seeks revenge by killing or injuring some of the sea lions who were playing with the lifeless skin of his brother, the wolf. The next day, a frog, passes by \textit{wisahkécâhk} while singing and chanting and says that she is going to doctor the sea lions. \textit{wisahkécâhk} inquires as to the procedure the frog will perform and then kills the frog and takes its form to kill the remaining sea lions. Once all the sea lions are killed a great flood begins and covered the earth's surface. In "The Flood and The New Earth," the earth is created anew after the muskrat swims to the bottom of the water and brings up a little bit of mud in his claws.

Although the sequencing of the stories does not always follow a certain format, narrators may choose certain sequences to provide "cohesion between consecutive stories."\footnote{Brightman, \textit{Ácaoóhkiwina and Ácimówina}, 72.} According to Robert Brightman, "Rolling Head appears to be recognized as the beginning of the \textit{wisahkécâhk} cycle in most Western Woods Cree and Plains Cree..."
This story tells of wisahkécâhk's childhood, the roles of men and women, the transformation of his parents, as well as the possession of mamâhtâwisîwin or extraordinary power.

*kisténanâw* ("our older brother") / Transformer Narratives

The narrative of "The Rolling Head" is a part of a larger body of narratives classified as *ātayóhkêwin* or as a sacred stories. wisahkécâhk narratives within *ātayóhkêwin*, sacred stories, help define and make sense of the world in terms of creation and the contemporary existence of humans and animals. wisahkécâhk is called the transformer because of his ability to transform himself and the landscape to aid in the survival of mankind. For example, in the narrative of the "The Rolling Head" wisahkécâhk is able to transform the landscape of Turtle Island through throwing the gifts his father gave him to defeat "The Rolling Head," creating thorny bushes, whose remnants are now known as cacti, as well as the bare plains, mountainous ranges, and a fast flowing river. The term transformer can be employed to describe wisahkécâhk's ability to shape existing materials, objects, and landscapes to conform to his wishes and demands.

The term trickster, is a relatively new characterization of wisahkécâhk. According to Maria Campbell, "wisahkécâhk was never referred to as trickster by the old people...Old people when I was child always called him kistaysino [kistesinâw] (elder brother) and although they laughed at his stories they spoke reverently about him." The

---

72 Brightman, Acaoolikwina and Acimowina, 6.
73 Discussed in Chapter One, page 16.
74 Maria Campbell, personal email, 12 January 2006.
concept of the elder sibling showing us through his or her examples can be shown through examples within our own lives.

The stories and teachings of the "elder brother" from most Indigenous cultures throughout North and South America were recorded, grouped together, and analyzed by anthropologists, linguists, folklorists, and even psychologists. In grouping together the narratives of Indigenous cultures from North and South America, researchers were able to find similarities and analyze the differences between the narratives. The classification of narratives involving the actions and motives of the elder brother may have led to the term trickster narratives. While this term has been employed by non-Indigenous scholars to examine the intricate role of the culture hero within the culture or the unconscious impulses of the culture, this term has also been adopted and adapted by Indigenous people today.

The term trickster is used to describe cultural heroes in most Indigenous cultures within North and South America. The trickster often uses his or her wit to overcome larger adversaries. For example, in the story of the Great Skunk, wīsahkēcāhk, disguised as a wolverine, tricked the Great Skunk, who was in the disguise of a human, into thinking that he was going to hunt beavers with the wolverine. After the Great Skunk looked towards the area where the beavers were, wīsahkēcāhk bit the Great Skunk on the

---

76 Ibid.
mouth. In this story *wisahkêcâhk* uses his abilities to trick the Great Skunk to give another animal enough time to kill him before he killed the rest of the animals. This is one example in which *wisahkêcâhk* uses his abilities to trick the larger and more powerful Skunk. *wisahkêcâhk*'s ability to trick larger adversaries is also used to satisfy his own wants and needs.

"*wisahkêcâhk* Preaches to the Wolves" provides a further example of *wisahkêcâhk* using his abilities to trick others. *wisahkêcâhk* urges the Frenchman to give him credit for clothing, a gun, and poison and promises to repay his debt in a short while. *wisahkêcâhk* takes some grease from his wife and goes out to find a wolf. Once *wisahkêcâhk* finds a wolf he employs the wolf to gather all the other wolves and foxes to come to a sermon that would preach of good tidings. The wolf goes about and brings back many wolves and foxes. *wisahkêcâhk* tells them that if they accept religion they will live a long life. However, if they do not accept religion someone will kill them. The irony, of course, is in the fact that *wisahkêcâhk* is trying to kill the wolves and repay his debt. *wisahkêcâhk* rolls the poison in the grease and gives it to all the wolves and foxes telling them that if they accept these pieces of fat they will live long lives. All the wolves and foxes take *wisahkêcâhk*'s "medicine" while *wisahkêcâhk* gives his religious instructions. As *wisahkêcâhk* sat there, "all the wolves leaped up in the air and fell down, poisoned, and they all died." By tricking the wolves *wisahkêcâhk* was able to satisfy his own greed for material goods.

---

78 I heard another version of this story some time ago, I do not remember who told the story, but it was much more graphic. The "mouth" that the wolverine is biting is actually the Great Skunk's backside, to keep the Great Skunk from spraying the rest of the animals and killing.
79 Bloomfield, *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree*, 32.
80 In the 1870s American Wolfers used poison to kill large game.
Wisakhecahk’s role as transformer or trickster is evident in different narratives. In narratives, such as "The Rolling Head" and the narratives immediately following this creation story, Wisakhecahk’s actions as a transformer are based on his will to survive and help others. Wisakhecahk’s role as a transformer can be seen through the stories of "Wesakaychak kills the Crimson Eagle,"81 "Wesakaychak Destroys the Great Moose,"82 and "The Beaver."83 In all these narratives, the transformed animals are either equal or potentially superior to humans. In the narratives of the Crimson Eagle and the Great Moose, these two beings almost kill Wisakhecahk. In the narrative revolving around the first Beaver, the beaver were very intelligent, powerful, and were also "immune from predation from humans and other species."84 Wisakhecahk changed these animals to ensure that they could not harm the humans and instead of harming them, provided for the well-being of the humans.

During times of transformation the story displays Wisakhecahk’s will to help and survive, rather than his will to trick people. In the narrative of "The Rolling Head," Wisakhecahk is a young boy who is portrayed as a good son helping his mother take care of his little brother, helping with the chores, and listening and being respectful of his father. This characterization of Wisakhecahk differs significantly from narratives of his later behaviours. In the narratives following the Great Flood, Wisakhecahk is often been seen as tricky, foolish, and ubiquitous. Brightman states that Wisakhecahk “combines

81 Ahenakew, “Cree Trickster Tales” 315.
82 Ibid., 316.
83 Brightman, Grateful Prey, 193.
84 Ibid.
attributes of sacredness, spiritual power, altruism, maliciousness, cleverness, and stupidity.  

These attributes as shown in the stories gives further examples of the worldviews, beliefs and values of the culture. According to Gerald Vizenor:

The trickster is reason and mediation in stories, the original translator of tribal encounters; the name is an intimation of transformation, men to women, animals to birds, and more than mere causal representation in names. Tricksters are the translation of creation; the trickster creates the tribe in stories, and pronounces the moment of remembrance as the trace of liberation.

The terms trickster and transformer, as used to describe the cultural hero's actions resulting from trickery or transformation of the self, the landscape, or of larger adversaries into smaller more manageable beings, have been employed by Indigenous writers and scholars in today's society. The term, "Trickster narratives," is employed to reinterpret previous events and narratives and gives new life to narratives of survival.

The transformer / trickster, not to be confused with the Creator, gives life to the stories, to explain the physical and character differences between animals, and between men and women, as well as to explain certain formations of the land today. Brightman explains that wisahkecahk is said to have fixed certain areas so that humans could survive. For example, wisahkecahk put curves in the rivers so the flow would slow down and the people would be able to navigate them. In addition to explaining physical and character differences, trickster narratives can be used to guide people against doing certain things. Neal McLeod states "the Trickster allows people to think outside of narratives, and to critique social practices." Trickster narratives allow individuals to see

---

85 Brightman, Acaoohkiwina and Acimowina, 61.
86 Vizenor Manifest Manners, 15.
87 Brightman Acaoohkiwina and Acimowina, 61.
88 McLeod, "Cree Narrative Memory," 50.
past predetermined roles and mores. As Creek writer Craig Womack states, "Trickster stories are the one means of testing the waters, seeing what communal limits are, how far one can go, where the boundaries really lie."\(^8^9\) The role of the trickster can be seen through his or her ability to challenge social norms throughout the past, present, and future.

**Conclusion**

The narrative of "The Rolling Head" is meant to challenge our perceptions and ideals relating to everyday life. The first challenge the listener or reader is presented with is that of the relationship between the woman and her husband and children. In the Ida McLeod version the woman prepares herself for her husband's return. When the husband does not return for several days or weeks, the woman is continually disappointed by his absence. This disappointment may lead her to think about her own abilities as a wife, and perhaps to blame herself for her husband's absence. In discussing relationships with Louise Halfe we examined the emotions that arise in relationships.\(^9^0\) If an individual is unhappy with his or her self or his or her relationship, he or she may experience feelings of jealousy, abandonment, uncertainty, and unappreciated. This perception that one person's love, looks, or abilities ought to be enough to keep his or her partner happy or at home may cross many people's minds from time to time. This belief that we should be enough for our partner often stems from our own insecurities about the relationship. These insecurities may then lead one to search out other venues in order to assure one's

---

\(^8^9\) Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 152.

\(^9^0\) Louise Halfe, personal communication, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 22 February 2006.
self that one has not lost whatever it was that made one special to one's partner in the first place. The problem with this is that the person with the insecurity often fails to think about his or her situation in a reasonable manner. For example, imagine a man and woman who are married with children and find themselves coming home at night absolutely exhausted. Any time that they do have to spend together is spent watching the kids' activities or mindless television shows. The wife one night tries to talk and be playful with her husband, but the husband is too tired to respond and pulls away and goes to bed. If the wife recognizes that her husband may not have had a good day or if this week has been more exhausting than most, she probably will not think anything of him just wanting to go to bed. However, if the wife starts to believe that the husband does not appreciate her or does not feel the same way about her as when they first got married, she may start to feel insecure about their relationship.

The second teaching presented by the narrative can be seen in interpersonal conflicts that we have with each other. If the woman is feeling insecure about her relationship with her family, she may then try to reassure herself by trying extra hard to please her husband or her family. This is exemplified when the mother puts on her finery every night and waits for husband. The problem with this situation is that the insecure person does not talk to his or her partner about what he or she is feeling. Instead of trying to talk or think through the potential situation in a rational manner, the insecure person will bottle his or her insecurities inside him or herself even more, thinking that no one appreciates everything they do. This of course leads to the insecure person needing outside reassurance. Since the woman in the narrative of "The Rolling Head" has no
adult friends or family members to go to, she seeks the assurance of someone else. In most of the narratives it is a snake and in one of the narratives it is a man.

The third teaching the narrative forces us to look at is the potential consequences of our actions. The woman's affair leads to her demise as a loving, caring, generous human being and to the destruction of herself, her marriage, and her love for her children. The themes and challenges found throughout the narrative can show us how our actions can affect our relationships, our families, and our sense of self. In thinking about the narrative we are taught appropriate and inappropriate social and family relations. Perhaps the message is not that all women are evil and destined to have an affair and leave their families, but that we, all women and men, need to be aware of our emotions, and possible insecurities. Through knowing what triggers feelings such as jealousy, insecurity, lust, and rage, we are better able to cope with these emotions. In recognizing and trying to cope with these emotions we are less likely to lead ourselves down a path of self-destruction.
CHAPTER 4
A CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF "ROLLING HEAD"

The narrative of "The Rolling Head" challenges listeners and readers with its use of intricate relationships, responsibilities, and consequences. The narrative, as discussed in the previous chapter, addresses the possible challenges in dealing with our relationships, perceptions of self, as well as the consequences of our actions. While the interpretations from the previous chapter imply that the woman is responsible for her actions leading to her beheading and the perceived terrorization of her sons, the interpretation of the narrative in this chapter presents a different perspective of the woman. Louise Halfe, Cree poet and poet laureate in Saskatchewan for 2005, from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and raised on the Saddle Lake First Nation, also challenges our perceptions and ideals relating to everyday life with her interpretation of "The Rolling Head." As opposed to simply challenging our perceptions of ourselves, Halfe urges the listener or reader in thinking about situations and people surrounding us.

The narratives of "The Bear Woman" and "The Rolling Head" deal with many different issues. They converge on certain themes, such as kinship and the roles and responsibility of women, yet diverge on how each of these themes are shown. Oral narratives are important because they make us think about our lives in terms of roles, relationships, responsibilities, and expectations. Chapter One, showed how the acknowledgment and understanding of these roles, relationships, responsibilities and expectations within our own cultural narratives can help us understand how we fit into family and culture. Chapter Two shows how the roles, relationships, responsibilities, and
expectations are connected to Cree and Ojibwa worldviews, kinship responsibilities, expectations of individuals within the culture, as well as physical and spiritual roles and responsibilities of men and women.

Chapter Three displays the roles, relationships, responsibilities, and expectations largely through negative example. In showing the consequences of potential actions, as described in the six versions of "The Rolling Head" the listeners or readers are taught about taboos, laws, and the consequences of disregarding these laws. This chapter will display the roles, relationships, responsibilities, and expectations through Louise Halfe's interpretation of "The Rolling Head." In addition to discussing Halfe's interpretation, I will also look at Indigenous scholars responsibilities in using Indigenous paradigms when discussing theories of interpretation. By bridging Indigenous paradigms with western theories, analysing and understanding Indigenous narratives in light of today will be more reflective of Indigenous culture today.

Louise Halfe's interpretation of "The Rolling Head"

The narrative of "The Rolling Head," as interpreted by Louise Halfe, revisits the actions of the mother and the father. In the previous chapter I interpret the wife's meeting with the snake and her beheading as stemming from her behaviour and possible insecurity. Halfe, on the other hand, questions the behaviour and insecurities of the husband.\(^1\) The following is a summary of Halfe's interpretation of the narrative. Halfe's interpretation of "The Rolling Head" begins in the same fashion, with the family being secluded, and with the father going out hunting, the mother tanning hides and the oldest

son cutting wood. After some time, the husband finds that less and less chores are being completed while he is away and asks his sons what their mother is doing during the day. The eldest boy says, "After she feeds us and gives us our chores she instructs us never ever to follow her." The son then points to the trail the mother took leading into the forest.

The father follows "his wife's every movement. He shadowed among the trees. One day he took his tobacco pouch, stone ax and arrows, and strung his bow with fresh sinew." The father takes his sons aside, giving them instructions to flee along with four elements to use against their mother in case he did not return. He sets off again to follow his wife's movements.

He watched his wife move among the trees like a deer. She sniffed, ensuring her moccasins were gentle where dew rolled off the grass. The plants, wise in their knowing, called the wind to bend their backs. She untied her raven braids till the freed strands kissed her cheeks. He followed, each movement watched.

The wife is sitting on a log singing and drumming on the wood, when a large snake comes out and slithers up her body and rubs its head on her cheek. Smaller snakes also crawl out of the log and slither along her feet. The husband, watching all of this, is filled with rage and jealousy. The following day, the father sets out much earlier than usual and goes to the log where his wife was the previous day. The husband drums the log and cuts each of the snakes' heads off as they slither out of the log. The husband then takes the largest snake home and makes a broth for his wife to drink. After feeding the broth to his wife, the husband tells her that he killed her snakes. The wife is upset for the loss of her pets and soon becomes very angry, fighting with her husband. The husband

---

2 Ibid., 3.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
"eventually severed her head from her body with his axe, and threw her torso into the sky."5 The husband also rises to the sky to become the North Star, while the head remains on earth. Halfe states, "In the distance the boys watched the sky. When they saw it turn blood red, and heard the thunder, they rechecked their bundles and ran."6

The mother's head chases after the boys, wanting to comfort them, but the words of the father kept pushing them onward. The first element the oldest boy used against the head was a sharp bone that creates the mountains as an obstacle for the head. As the head tries to manoeuvre through the steep mountains and valleys, a fox sees her and leads her through a path. Once through the path, the head continues chasing after the boys, begging for them to stop and come home. wisahkêcâhk throws the second gift his father gave him – a sharp file. "The brambles, burs and rosehip thorns awoke. Sharp-chewed poplar stumps arose and crowded the rolling head. Trees lay everywhere."7 The head continues through the barrier, suffering cuts and gouges in the process, while trying to reach the boys and comfort and convince them to come home.8 The third gift wisahkêcâhk uses against his mother's head is the flint which creates a large fire. The head, unable to stop, rolls through the fire, burning her face and hair in the process. Even after these three obstacles, which are meant to stop the mother's head from reaching her sons, the head continues following and calling after her sons, hoping to bring them home: "My babies. My babies. My tired babies. Come home. Come home. Come home to your mother's heart."9

5 Ibid., 4.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 5.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 6.
The boys, tired, hungry, and fearful, continue on, finally throwing the last of their gifts between them and the "Rolling Head." The fourth obstacle is the beaver's tooth, which creates a great lake. A large water bird offers to help the head across the lake if the head remains still, "for the bird's back suffered some lonesome bones. Any movement caused great pain." The head tries to cling to the feathers of the bird, but is unable to hold on, and crashed against the bird's back. The bird cries out and flings the head into the lake. The boys are then left on their own to fend for themselves.

Halfe's understanding of "The Rolling Head," is further discussed in her book of poetry, Blue Marrow. Halfe writes:

The boys have been running
They are old and wrinkled hearts
They've eaten leathered flesh
Knuckles gnawed to the bone,
They run.

The boys keep running until they are old and wrinkled. As I understand it, this passage can be seen to represent wisahkêcâhk's future pursuits and conquests. From a psychological point of view, the reason behind wisahkêcâhk's roaming is that he does not find comfort in his mother. After the "Rolling Head" is tossed into the water and turns into a sturgeon, the boys continue wandering the earth. As discussed in the previous chapter wisahkêcâhk is carried off by wimisosiw, who tricks him into getting in wimisosiw's boat, while the younger boy turns into a wolf. In the six versions discussed in Chapter Three, the younger brother remains nameless, while in Louise Halfe's version, the younger brother is called mahikan (wolf) though she states, "however this detail is not

---

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
known at the onset of the story. After wisahkecâhk defeats his father-in-law to go and find his brother, they are faced with yet another obstacle. wisahkecâhk's brother is killed by sea lions. In order to bring his brother back to life, wisahkecâhk seeks revenge by killing the sea lions. This results in a flood and wisahkecâhk has to recreate the earth with a bit of mud recovered by the muskrat. Following the recreation of the earth, wisahkecâhk roams the earth, testing the boundaries of humans and animals.

Traditional and Contemporary Understandings

In Halfe's interpretation, the narrative voice changes to that of the woman after the husband has cut off her head. In the six versions discussed in Chapter Three, after the head is severed, the narrative voice is either that of wisahkecâhk or of a third person narrator. When the voice is detached from the mother, the listener or reader is more inclined to question why the woman would act in a certain way. By having the narrative voice change to that of the woman, the listener or reader is able to understand the thoughts and actions of the woman. By portraying the "Rolling Head" calling after the boys, trying to comfort them, Halfe portrays the woman's humanity. This humanity is shown through her pain and suffering when her children run away from her. This interpretation is important in that it makes us think about the relationships between women and their children today. For example, if a child acts out, runs away, or falls into a life riddled with bad choices, it does not necessarily mean that the mother, or the family did not care about the child or try to help the child.

---

13 Halfe, "The Rolling Head's 'Grave' Yard," 3.
By bringing the woman's voice to the forefront, Halfe's interpretation of the narrative demonstrates how one-sided our outlook of society has become. This one-sidedness is exemplified by colonial systems, such as Christianity and the *Indian Act*. The influence of Christianity, as well as the imposition of the *Indian Act*, has devalued women's power and influence. Indigenous women’s independence and control over the household, the land, the children, and marital status worked against the beliefs and teachings of the Europeans and missionaries. The image of women, within Christian doctrine, is either pure and virginal or immoral and scandalous. In the story of the Garden of Eden, Eve brings about the downfall of women by disobeying God and eating the apple from the sacred tree, thus condemning all women to a role of subservience. Women were judged on their ability to serve, listen, and never talk back. If a woman embodied these beliefs and practices, she was depicted as good and virtuous. On the other hand, if a woman was strong willed and independent, she was often branded a troublemaker.

Within Cree society, the division of labour between women and men served the community. The women’s roles and duties were just as important as the men’s roles and duties. In comparison, the roles of women within Christian European culture were to first serve the needs of men, and then the needs of society. According to Winona Stevenson (Wheeler), the “European ideal of womanhood, or the “cult of true womanhood” revolved around female domesticity.” Further stating,

The ideal of woman was characterized by the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. She was defined as a nurturer, providing selfless, gentle, benign, and human support for her family. She was further burdened with the responsibility

---

of socializing her children, of transmitting the cultural disciplines, morals, and values
of her society to the next generation.\textsuperscript{15}

Within European culture, women were seen as weak and dependent on men, whereas, in
Aboriginal culture, women were seen as strong and independent. Furthermore, while
European women carried the burden of raising the children, within Indigenous culture
responsibility for childrearing did not fall solely on the mother. Rather, the whole
community helped with raising children.\textsuperscript{16}

Colonial influences of patriarchy can also be found in governmental policy. Prior
to 1850, all persons, regardless of gender, who intermarried with persons otherwise
qualifying as Indian and who lived with Indians, were entitled to Indian status.\textsuperscript{17} In 1851,
the legislation was changed to exclude an Aboriginal woman’s husband from claiming
Indian status, and restricting the status to her and her children. In contrast, at this time, if
an Aboriginal man married a non-Aboriginal woman, the woman and their children
would gain Aboriginal status.

The discriminatory section of the Indian Act continued to change over the years to
further isolate Aboriginal women from their communities and their identities as
Aboriginal people. In 1869, the \textit{Gradual Enfranchisement Act} was established.

According to the Royal Commission of Aboriginal People (RCAP), the new policy
discriminated against Aboriginal women because it “made their identity as Indian people
increasingly dependent on the identity of their husbands.”\textsuperscript{18} Section 6 of the \textit{Indian Act}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Kathleen Jamieson, “Sex Discrimination and The Indian Act,” \textit{Arduous Journey: Canadian Indians and
\item \textsuperscript{18} Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Final Report vol. 4 (1992): 28. see discussion of Women’s
Perspectives.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
membership in her home community and the right to pass on status to her children. In addition, if a status woman married a status man from a different band she, as well as her children, became a member only of her husband’s band. After the Indian Act of 1876, Indian descent was openly and officially traced through the male lineage. In addition to tracing the lineage through the male, the Indian Act took women's voices away by only allowing males over the age of twenty-one to vote for chief and council.

Throughout Canada, colonialism has sought to, and has had some success with, changing the way traditional Aboriginal societies function. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith: "Colonialism facilitated this expansion [in markets and capital investments] by ensuring that there was European control, which necessarily meant securing and subjugating the indigenous populations," Securing and subjugating Indigenous people though patriarchal systems has decreased Indigenous women's autonomy within their culture and limited most of women’s power to the private sphere of the home.

The impact of colonialism and Christianity on women's power and roles can even be seen in the interpretation of narratives. In discussing the origins of "The Rolling Head" Halfe states: "This story is ancient. No one knows its origins and no one knows how much of it has been framed to suit the needs of a society in transition. Unfortunately Catholicism continues to wave its twisted tongue and confuse our stories and our beliefs." Transcriptions of narratives have changed to incorporate Christian beliefs and

attitudes such as hierarchies and dualities — good versus evil, heaven and hell, civilized and savage, the interpretations, and translations. The Edward Ahenakew version, discussed in the previous chapter, is a prime example of the influence of Christianity. In Ahenakew's version, such influence can be seen in how the man viewed the snake; "In him was born all that human abhorrence of the snake." 24 This suggests that all humans should loathe the presence of a snake. Whereas in the Cree creation dynamic the snake represents the earth and what is below in a constant struggle with all that is above represented by the eagle.

In Halfe's interpretation, the snake can be seen as a companion, a pet, or even a helper or giver of medicine. In referring to the affections shared between the snake and the woman, Halfe states:

Perhaps they responded to her air of alienation or her loneliness. Her husband provided well, but apparently was unavailable otherwise. If you leave things or people to themselves they go elsewhere for nourishment. Hence the snakes reciprocated her affection and took pity upon her. Perhaps they rewarded her with medicines to heal her people, for snakes are closest to the earth. They feel the vibrations of the earth, hear her heart-beat, know her touch, know her sounds, and know her scents and medicines. 25

Halfe's reference to the snakes rewarding the woman with medicines could be related to the fact that Halfe's grandmother was a healer. "She used snake skins to heal those in times of need, yet, she received more fear than respect in spite of the healing that occurred." 26 This fear may be linked to the fact that people in the community view the snake as being evil or terrifying. The role of the snake, according to Maria Campbell, is neither good nor bad. 27 The snake could be used to tempt others or to help others. The

24 Ahenakew, "Cree Trickster Tales," 310.
26 Ibid., 8.
27 Maria Campbell, personal communication Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 9 December 2005.
way we perceive the snake is based on our thoughts, actions, and reactions towards snakes.

The nature of snakes can be seen as two-fold. Snakes are creatures of prey, and as such could be viewed in a negative light based on certain stories, situations, or events. For example, in the story "wisahkécáhk and the Rattler Snake," as told by Joseph Naytowhow, who heard it from Maria Campbell:

wisahkécáhk was walking along and heard a rattler snake. The snake was stuck and asked for help. wisahkécáhk told him no that the snake would bit him. The snake promised that he wouldn't bit him. So wisahkécáhk picked him up and took him up the hill. As soon as they got to the spot wisahkécáhk went to put the snake down and it bit him. The snake said that it was his nature. wisahkécáhk starting down the hill and asked everyone for help. After wisahkécáhk was saved they went up the hill to check on the snake. The snake said that was his nature. If he bites someone they will die. So wisahkécáhk and the rest of the animals tricked the snake and had him trapped under a rock.²⁸

In this story, it is the snake's nature to protect itself and lash out or bite anyone or anything that disturbs him, even when the snake asks for help. Perhaps, though, the snake sensed wisahkécáhk's apprehension about helping him and bit him because he thought wisahkécáhk would drop him, instead of setting him down nicely. Snakes could also be viewed as an essential part of nature, by the fact that they maintain the balance between predator and prey.

Aside from maintaining the balance between predator and prey, snakes are considered to be closest to the earth and aid in nurturing the earth by moving through and breaking up the earth. In addition, snakes help control the population of insects, worms, small birds and animals, such as rodents. The snake also sheds its skin as a part of a renewal process that allows the body to grow, as well as to heal from mating or giving

²⁸ Joseph Naytowhow, 27 November 2005, guest lecture, First Nations University of Canada. Story that he attributes to story told to him by Maria Campbell at a workshop.
birth. The shedding of skin can occur quite frequently for young snakes, while the older
snakes shed less frequently. Halfe points out that women, in a sense, shed their own skin
through menstruation and menopause.29

Rather than shedding the outside skin like that of a snake, the inside lining of the
uterus is shed during the menstrual period. As discussed in Chapter Two, women in the
community and culture were seen as being quite powerful during this time. According to
Maria Campbell and Winona Wheeler, the blood associated with a women's womb,
whether it was from the menstrual cycle or the afterbirth, was life giving.30 The Cree
word for—mihko means the food of life and encapsulates many other words, stories, and
ceremonies associated with this life giving force.31 This differs significantly from
Christian ideas about menstrual blood, which is considered as proof that women are
cursed by Eve's sin of eating the forbidden fruit.

A Traditional Cree Worldview Model

A model recently presented by Maria Campbell and Winona Wheeler, represents
the worldview of the Cree prior to colonization including the differences between western
Cree beliefs relating to women, including those of woods and plains Cree, and Christian
beliefs relating to women.32 This model outlines the roles and responsibilities of men,
women, children, and the elderly. In addition to representing the roles and
responsibilities of the members within the community, the model also includes the
seasons, as well as the formative responsibilities that accompany the changing of seasons.

---

29 Louise Halfe, personal communication, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 22 February 2006.
30 Maria Campbell and Winona Wheeler Presentation. at the University of Regina, College West, Regina,
Saskatchewan, May 18 2006.
31 Ibid.
32 See figure 4.1
The model also illustrates the balance between the women and men in the society with the Grandmother and the Grandfather each owning half of the circle. Maria Campbell's visual depiction of "A Traditional Cree Worldview," and Winona Wheeler's "Five Stages of Colonialism" model, each represent a clear, easy to follow, understanding of the impact of colonization.
Figure 4.1 A Traditional Cree Model

33 Maria Campbell Cree traditional worldview presentation, Awasis conference, April 21, 2005 and University of Regina lecture May 18, 2006.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The four circles represent the *awásis* - children, *kéhté-áyak* - elders, *iskwéwak* - women, and *napéwak* - men. Within this model, the innermost circle represents the children, who are the future generation and inheritors. The next circle represents the *kéhté-áyak*, or the old people, who preserve the knowledge of the past. These two circles are the most important because they hold both the past and the future of the group. The *awásis* are protected and taught by the *kéhté-áyak*. The next circle represents the *iskwéwak*, or the women, who are the first line of protectors for the old people and children. The last circle represents the *napéwak*, or the men, who were the protectors and providers of the community. Each circle has ceremonies and teachings that are associated with each stage of life. The women's and men's ceremonies are separate and closed off from one another. The four doorways, or Grandfathers, in the circle represent the four stages of life as well as the four seasons. The circle is further divided in that Grandmother has half the circle and the Grandfather has the other half of the circle, creating a balance between the two sides.\(^{34}\)

Women, according to Maria Campbell and Winona Wheeler, are the keepers of stories. Joseph Naytowhow reiterated this point, stating that stories come from the *nótóhkwe-átayóhkan* (Old Grandmother Spirit).\(^{35}\) The stories are told to entertain, as well as to teach the worldview of the Cree, including values and beliefs relating to kinship relationships, hunting, trapping, gathering, and daily responsibilities. The narratives told in the fall were meant to show children how not to act. These stories often depicted the elder brother being lazy. The narratives grew progressively worse after winter solstice. The stories depicted the elder brother not being so nice, and there were

\(^{34}\) All information describing details of the chart from Maria Campbell 2006 presentation.

also stories of abuse and how the community would deal with people who committed these abuses. These stories taught the laws and taboos of the community. The stories stopped in the spring when the birds, frogs and other animals returned to the land. The spring was a time for being outside and listening to the animals. In the summer, the stories would resume with stories of the landscape, as well as positive teaching narratives.36

After the arrival of the Europeans this steady state began to change. Winona Wheeler looks at the impact of contact through the five stages of colonialism, as outlined by the circle below.37

Figure 4.2 Five Stages of Colonialism38

The steady state represents the previous model as outline by Maria Campbell. After first contact, the Cree were introduced to European goods, diseases, and alcohol through the fur trade, as well as to the Christian religion along with its beliefs regarding women through the missionaries. After the fur trade declined, the Cree, along with Indigenous people throughout North America, were seen as impediments to civilization and expansion. In Canada, Indigenous people were moved onto reserves and subjected to the

36 Maria Campbell and Winona Wheeler 2005 "Towards a Cree Understanding of Colonialism" Awasis Conference April 20-22, 2005 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. and University of Regina lecture May 18, 2006.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
Indian Act, in which the women were only included through the extension of their husbands or fathers. The children, who were used to being looked after and protected by the old people, were forced into Residential schools in order for the assimilation process to take place. After a while, these colonial impacts start to become ingrained in our communities. This leads to internalized colonialism, whereby some Indigenous people oppress, abuse and victimize their own people. Examples of internalized colonialism are apparent in the abuse of women and children by members of their family or community, the misappropriation of band funds by chiefs and councillors, or even the scare tactics used to silence members of the community against speaking out about injustices.

Generations of colonialism has greatly impacted Indigenous people's lives. This move from a steady state to internalizing colonial practices that undermine and undervalue the beliefs, values, and practices of the people, has impacted all people and all stages of life, including the narratives. This is evident in the historical trauma.

According to the Information Centre on Aboriginal Health, "the concept of historical trauma has developed as a natural consequence of tragic historical events affecting the psyche of Indigenous peoples." Examples of historical trauma are generational effects of the residential schools in terms of loss of language, loss of identity, as well as loss of cultural and spiritual practices. By attempting to move towards decolonization, we need to be aware of our actions and our perceptions of the past. This includes bringing forward Indigenous interpretations of past events, as well as narratives and different interpretations of the narratives. Obviously, narratives will change with time as they are

39 Ibid.
40 "Historical Trauma" Information Centre on Aboriginal Health found at <http://www.icah.ca/content/en/topics/subtopic/section.php?tcid=103&stcid=133>, (25 May 2006)
passed from one generation to the next. Each storyteller may add his or her own style to
the narrative.41 Some storytellers may be more conservative, leaving certain parts out of
their version of the story. Narratives, whether told or written are often interpreted or
internalized by the listener or reader. By interpreting or internalizing the narrative the
listener or reader is able to make sense of the narrative in terms of their own life
experiences.

By interacting with the narratives, as opposed to just citing them, we are able to
make sense of the narratives in terms of our lives. Elder Louis Sunchild, a Cree man
from the Sunchild Reserve, west of Rocky Mountain House, spoke of how the listener
was not supposed to understand all levels of the story right away. Instead the story would
unfold over time, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding as we develop as people.42
If we are to understand all the different levels of the narrative over time, then we may be
able to interpret parts of the story as we came across events like them in our own lives.

Bridging Western Theories and Indigenous paradigms with Interpretation

By using Indigenous practices and paradigms to explain or make sense of
western theories, Indigenous scholars can work towards coming up with new theories that
will encompass their culture's worldview. In figure 4.3, I show how concepts within the
western theories can be seen in light of Cree paradigms. By bridging western theories
with Indigenous paradigms, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers can work
together, building mutual understandings and overcoming any traditional boundaries that
may have kept them apart.

41 Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 29.
Concepts within Theory

| Concepts understood within Indigenous Paradigms, including worldview, kinship, narratives, and life histories. |

| Prosaic\(^{43}\) — view of the world | Cree worldview – understanding grounded in what we know, heard, grounded in the culture and narratives. For example narratives of Rosie Colomb from the Wood’s Cree Elders discussed in Chapter 2 |

| Unfinalizability\(^{44}\) - ability to change and adapt or adjust, rules out any sense of finalization | understanding over time – unfolding of narratives over time. Example Elder Louis Sunchild, as discussed above. |

| Dialogue\(^{45}\) | narratives, counselling narratives, multiple versions, respect for individuals |

| Surplus of Vision\(^{46}\) | Multiple versions add to history of culture. Example of the six versions of "The Rolling Head" |

| Horizon\(^{47}\) — our situatedness in the world | Worldview, kinship. Examples of kinship and worldview in "Woman who Married a Beaver" |

| Fusion of horizons\(^{48}\) | Collective / individual narrative Core and periphery, as discussed by Neal McLeod \(^{49}\) |

**Figure 4.3 Western Theories and Indigenous Paradigms.**\(^{50}\)

I will use this comparison upon which to expand upon the conversation between me and Louise Halfe regarding the narrative of "The Rolling Head."\(^{51}\)

In meeting with Louise Halfe, I was able to learn how she became interested in the narrative of "The Rolling Head." Halfe heard this story, along with many other Cree

---


\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 278.


\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) McLeod "Cree Narrative Memory," 6.

\(^{50}\) This is my own creation better to understand the theories in light of Indigenous paradigms.

\(^{51}\) Louise Halfe, personal communication, 22 February 2006.
narratives, from her parents and grandparents while growing up. The narrative intrigued her, as it did me, when I first heard it. In discussing how we both came to understand and interpret the narrative we talked about where we were from, our families, our experiences and how all of these things shaped our readings of how we saw "The Rolling Head." This can be explained through the term "prosaics," as used by Bakhtin. Prosaics refers to both a person's view of the world and an approach to literature. Under the concept of prosaics, the most important events in life are the small things that happen in everyday life. An example of this can be seen in Halfe's ability to take charge of her fear of snakes by dangling a "baby garter snake on a stick and [running] after a man who made my skin crawl." In overcoming her fear of snakes at an early age, Halfe was able to form a different understanding of the relationship between the woman and the snake in the story.

An individual's interpretations of the narrative stem from his or her worldview, experiences, relationships, and their impact on his or her decisions (horizon). The term horizon, as used by Gadamer, describes the way we see the world. The term horizon "describes and defines our situatedness in the world." Gadamer states:

A horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further. Thus the horizon intentionality which constitutes the unity of the flow of experience is paralleled by an equally comprehensive horizon intentionality on the objective side. For everything that is given as existent is given in terms of a world and hence brings the world horizon with it.

---

53 Ibid.
54 Halfe, "The Rolling Head's 'Grave' Yard," 7.
56 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 245.
According to this view, an individual's position in the world is never absolute. An individual's, or his or her way of understanding his or her world, expands as they come across new ideas, people, or events in his or her live. An individual's changing position is matched with recognition of different ideas, people, or events happening around him or her or in the past. In recognizing ideas, people, or events of past or present, an individual's consciousnesses expand to give thought to things outside his or her own worldviews. This suggests that the interpretation arising from the horizon of experience and of the world, goes beyond the limits of subjectivity (an individual's own experiences and worldview) and relativity (the objective past) because we combine what we know historically with what we have experienced and create a fusion of horizons.

This fusion of horizons is always open to further interpretations. This fusion, however, does not have to coincide with an objective past. The past, in my mind, is not objective. Written accounts of the past are shaped by the author's own prejudices, biases, and views of world. These accounts, in turn, are interpreted by what we know of the past in terms of our present situation, allowing the interpretation to change over time to "clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place." The historical background allows for a condition of understanding to occur which receives its meaning from the language we use to describe the situation.

Language opens the world for an individual to understand, interpret, and project his or her own interpretations and understandings of event, stories, situations, and people. By using language to explain how individuals come to understand and interpret certain situations, events, people, and stories individuals are able to shed light on his or her

---

57 Ibid., 263.
experiences and his or her views of the world. Of course, language and the meanings behind the words individuals use differ between people.

As an individual's experiences, an individual's relationships, and how they see the world change over time, so do an individual's interpretations of these events. The more people grow as individuals, the more we can make sense of people, events, and stories with our experiences (unfinalizability). Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability focuses on humans' abilities to change.\textsuperscript{58} The ability to change and adapt or adjust, rules out any sense of finalization. The same is true for interpretation and narratives. No interpretation of a narrative is truly final. An individual's interpretations may change when he or she hears different versions of the narrative, or as a result of discussion with other narrators, or even his or her own experiences or dreams. Similarly, the more we interact with people and talk about certain events, situations, or narratives (dialogue), the more we are able to gain different perspectives (fusion of horizons), come up with multiple meanings (surplus of vision), as well as question and come to new understandings of the narratives (surplus of meaning).

Dialogue, as a global concept, "refers to a concept of "truth" as a conversation rather than a series of propositions."\textsuperscript{59} As I understand it, dialogue is meant to be open-ended, so that the listeners and readers can participate by sharing their ideas concerning the narrative. This participation may lead to further interpretations and multiple meanings of a word or set of words. The multiple meanings stemming from an open-ended dialogue lead to the unfinalizability of thought and consciousness. By expanding

\textsuperscript{58} Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, "Bakhtin, M.M.," 65.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
an individual's consciousness to absorb and internalize the multiple meanings and ideas related to narratives, new interpretations of the narratives unfold.

The interpretation may change based on the individual's understanding of the culture, the time period, and the language. The interpretation may also change based on where the interpreter is situated in relation to the event, culture, or narrative. Bakhtin suggests that a "vision of outsideness," \textsuperscript{60} is essential in producing new insights or a "surplus of vision"\textsuperscript{61} concerning an event, image, culture, or narrative. Rather than understand "vision of outsideness" as applying to someone from outside the culture or event, I am going to take this concept of "outsideness" as meaning outside one's own consciousness. Discussion about "The Rolling Head" with my mentors, colleagues, and especially with Louise Halfe, has allowed me to think about some of their comments and insights, as well as to question some of my previous beliefs concerning the narrative. The open dialogue, in turn, has created a "surplus of vision" and ideas in terms of my own interpretation. This "surplus of vision" can be related to Ricoeur's "surplus of meaning." He states:

an act of discourse is not merely transitory and vanishing, however. It may be identified and reidentified as the same so that we may say it again or in other words. We may even say it in another language or translate it from one language into another. Through all these transformations it preserves an identity of its own which can be called the propositional content, the "said as such."\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Term in M. M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, ed., Michael Holquist Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 278. Refers to an individual who is outside of the subject's worldview who is able to enter this worldview and then return to their own worldview with the memory of the other to report on or add their own position about what is happening.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 209.

\textsuperscript{62} Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
By telling, retelling, and interpreting the narrative, the message of the story, which is to teach, to question, and to think about our actions, remains the same. The narrative of "The Rolling Head," including all of its interpretations, will continue to challenge our perceptions of ourselves, as well as our interpretations of the situations and people around us.

Even though the message remains the same, the inclusion of multiple versions of "The Rolling Head" will detract from the negative connotations associated with the six versions discussed in the previous chapter. The mere mention of the title "Rolling Head" to people who know or have heard of the narrative as told or read by any of the six narrators referred to in Chapter Three, may trigger emotions such as fear and self doubt. After giving the first draft of this thesis, minus Louise Halfe's interpretation, to my mother to read, she was horrified and thought I was pegging her as "The Rolling Head." While I tried to assure her she was not "The Rolling Head" as portrayed in the previous chapter, the narrative and the way how the woman was portrayed, played to her fear of being judged by her children and the people around her. The fear of being judged, though perhaps not for the same reasons as those described in "The Rolling Head," is something to which we can all relate.

Fear can lead to many other feelings such as abandonment, humiliation, judgement, and uncertainty. These feelings are not necessarily directed at anyone in particular, but may be harboured deep within individual selves. For me, "The Rolling Head" embodies all these potentially self destructive feelings. These feelings are potentially self-destructive because we allow our emotions to control our outlook on life. When faced with feelings such as abandonment, humiliation, judgement, and uncertainty,
we can either face our fears and learn how to overcome them or we can wallow in despair, and allow these emotions to control our actions. The ability to recognize how we interact and deal with certain events, people, and emotions in our lives leads to how we interpret these events, people and emotions.

The narrative of "The Rolling Head" is interesting because it challenges us to think not only about ourselves, but about the situations and the people surrounding us. Louise Halfe's interpretation of the narrative further challenges the way we interpret others actions. When the mother narrates "The Rolling Head," as opposed to a third person narrator, the listener or reader is able to think about the mother's situation. A new awareness is created by giving voice to the "Rolling Head," or the marginalized character in history, a new awareness is created. This awareness of voice, situation, and characterization allows listeners, readers, writers, and researchers to question previous concepts of "truth." By questioning and reworking or interpreting these old perceptions we actively engage in a decolonization process. Individuals engaging in this process, however, must always remember that decolonization is an awareness of different perceptions. We need to ensure that we continue to discuss narratives, history, and everyday events, in order to keep our minds open to new possibilities.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The scope of this thesis analyzes women's roles and responsibilities within traditional and life narratives. The traditional narratives come from the *âtayohkêwin* genre. *âtayohkêwin* presents the listener or reader with the culture's worldview, beliefs, morals, and history. These narratives help explain where we come from and our connection to the rest of creation. By using the traditional narratives to understand the roles of women in light of contemporary situations, the interconnection of women to the rest of creation is made evident.

By focusing on women's narratives I am stressing the importance of women's roles and responsibilities within the cultural narratives and within our own lives. Key elements in "The Bear Woman" and "The Woman who Married a Beaver" may be used in drawing parallels to a contemporary understanding of women's roles and responsibilities. By writing about women, both within the narratives and individual lives, women's actions are highlighted as examples of how to and how not to respond in certain situations. Within my own life I have related traditional narratives such as "The Bear Woman" to my mother's and grandmothers' lives. This understanding of the strength, determination, the and hard work women embody reminds me of my own abilities to carry on in difficult or stressful times.

Similarly, "The Woman who Married a Beaver" narrative in a contemporary understanding is related to reciprocity and change. The woman within the narrative does not run away once she discovers she married a beaver. Rather, the woman embraces the decision she made and tells others of her life and experiences once she emerges from the...
beaver's den. Her knowledge in relation to the treatment of beavers is then used to aid others in hunting and trapping beavers later on. Contemporary women can use this narrative when faced with situations that lie outside of their everyday experiences. When faced with decisions that will change our normal routines – such as moving, change of employment, or change of schools – we generally have two choices. We could regret our decision to change our position in life and be unhappy, or we could embrace this change and learn from the experience in order to apply these teachings to any new situations we may come across.

Narratives that focus on women's strength, determination, and ability positively to manage change are empowering. Women who relate these stories to their own lives and family narratives draw strength from knowing they are not alone. Of course, not all narratives or life situations are positive – for example "The Rolling Head" as outlined in Chapter Three. I was drawn to "The Rolling Head" because of its graphic depiction of the woman. The woman's infidelity leads to her beheading and pursuit of her sons, eventually ending in her reincarnation as a sturgeon. The woman's actions have disastrous consequences that affect her marriage, her children, and the world she lives in. This narrative relates to women's lives today, by showing women that our actions and our words come with potential consequences. This narrative stresses the importance of thinking before we engage in activities to assess how they potentially would hurt us and those around us. The consequential actions of the woman challenge contemporary women to discuss possible fears, or insecurities before destructively acting out.

By anticipating fears, insecurities, or accusations with the person involved, the individual confirms or negates these emotions. Louise Halfe's interpretation of "The
Rolling Head" acts as an example of what happens when we pass judgment based on false information or misrepresentation. Within Halfe's interpretation, the husband reacts to the wife's affection towards the snake by sending the boys running from their mother in fear, killing the snakes, and beheading the wife. While this interpretation differs significantly from the interpretation in the previous chapter, it serves as a reminder to think about narratives and the situations surrounding us in a holistic manner. By thinking about the other person's feeling, thoughts, and actions, as opposed to just our own, we are better equipped in assessing certain situations.

The analysis and interpretation of these narratives provides the first step towards understanding women's roles within the culture. These roles however need to be understood in light of changes that occurred within the culture. By discussing both the traditional narratives and women's contemporary narratives with various story tellers, this thesis is contributing to a broader understanding of oral narratives as methodology. The open discussions with Maria Campbell, Louise Halfe, Joseph Naytowhow, and my committee members demonstrated how essential these traditional narratives are to understanding Cree culture and history. These traditional narratives are a part of Cree history because of the teachings and examples they provide to the listeners and readers.

The scope of this thesis has also contributed to bringing voice to women within the narratives. My recreation of "The Rolling Head" in chapter three, presents the woman as being a kind, compassionate, human being, who makes a series of bad choices that ends in her destruction. By presenting the first half of the narrative in the voice of the mother I wanted to show her humanity. Louise Halfe's interpretation of the narrative further stresses the woman's humanity even after her beheading. By bringing the voice
to women within the narratives, this thesis is further contributing to understanding the effects of colonization on Aboriginal women.

The effects of colonization on the narratives are present within the various images of women as being either virtuous or demonic. This has led to stereotypes and even violence against women. This thesis helps bring forth these images recognizing that these images were imposed on women and are not characteristic of all women. In analyzing these narratives, as well as bringing forth women's contemporary narratives, I am contributing to the growing body of literature on decolonization within the discipline of Indigenous Studies. In addition to adding to the literature, I also recognize that these narratives will add to a growing awareness of women's strength through future research.

The different versions of "The Rolling Head," including Louise Halfe's version, along with "The Bear Woman" provide a contrasting image of women. Engaging in an open dialogue revolving around these contrasting images of women allows researchers and discussants to debunk myths and stereotypes concerning women. Future research involving the different versions of the narrative can include facilitating small group discussions of the narratives with middle and high school students. By engaging both the female and male students an open dialogue is created, allowing the students to share his or her reactions to the narratives, including why the narratives evoked certain reactions. By discussing the teachings from the narratives and how they apply to today, the students will be introduced to understanding narratives in a contemporary context. The teachings and discussions can then be redirected to bring attention to the women within the students' own life. By expanding the discussion on the roles and responsibilities of women from a historical and global context to a personal and community level, young
men and women will recognize the roles and responsibilities of women within their families and communities. Furthermore, the teachings within the narratives and subsequently from the life narratives, will serve as examples of how to act in new or difficult situations.

I have used these narratives discussed throughout this thesis, along with the narratives of my mother, aunts, and grandmothers' within my own life to think about roles and responsibilities women have. The narratives my mother, aunts, and grandmothers told me fill me with strength and courage to undertake new journeys in life. Their ability to survive, carry forward and enjoy life has strengthened my own zest for life in experiencing new situations. Their narratives, along with narratives such as "The Bear Woman," "Woman Who Married a Beaver," and "The Rolling Head" remind me that my decisions and actions in life have potential positive and negative consequences. Knowing of the potential consequences thereby helps me live in a manner that allows me to feel good about myself and my decisions.

The narratives discussed throughout this thesis are important in understanding women's strength, determination, and responsibilities. The themes throughout the narratives - women's duties and responsibilities, household chores, child rearing and relationships - relate to women's contemporary situations. By using the traditional and contemporary life narratives together to empower women and their decisions, a healthier and more confident future generation of women emerges. Instilling confidence through the celebration and recognition of women's narratives, leads to a further investigation of women's roles in traditional, historical, and life narratives. This, in turn, may result in a
reinterpretation of women's roles in the narratives and history by Indigenous women, resulting in decolonization through narratives.
CREE GLOSSARY

ácimisowina literally stories of oneself (autobiographical)
ániskótapan, family histories
asotamâtowin Treaty
átayohkêwina sacred stories
awásis children
câhkapis refers to the elder brother. Term used in summer months as a sign of respect
cihcipiscikwan Rolling Head
iskwéwak women
kakéskihkêmowina counseling narratives
kayás-ácimowin, old stories
kéhté-âyak elders
kihci-ácimowina great stories
kistêsinâw elder brother
mahikan wolf
mamâhtawisîwin extraordinary power/ or “ability to tap into the mystery, tapping into the energy of the land
manitow spiritual power
mîmîkwîsiwak little people, around three feet tall, with no noses
mistasiniy the big rock that resembles a sitting buffalo
mitêwiwin an Ojibwa ceremony given to the Cree
napêwak men
nisîmis younger sibling
nōtōhkwḕw-ātayōhkān Old Grandmother Spirit

okihcitawak worthy young men's society

pawākan dream/ spiritual helpers

pawākanak dream/ spiritual helpers

posākanacihk at [the] Touchwood Hills

tāwaham (translated by Wolvengrey as s/he hits s.t. with a missile; s/he hits s.t. (as a target), s/he hits the mark

wabenokkwe [wāpăn-ihkwē] [Anishinabe word] ruler of the East, sister of the sun

wawiyatācimowina humorous stories, tall tales, or “funny little stories

wimisosiw wisahkēcāhk’s father-in-law

wisahkēcāhk elder brother in Cree / name of the trickster in Cree
Ahenakew, Edward


Ahenakew, Freda and H.C. Wolfart
2000  *áh-áyítaw isi é-ki-kiskéyihtahkik maskihkiy*  They Knew Both sides of Medicine, *Cree Tales of Curing and Cursing* told by Alice Ahenakew.  Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press.


Ahenakew, Lizette

Albers, Patricia

Alfred, Agnes Qwiqwasutinuxw Noble Woman,

Allen, Paula Gunn

Anderson, Benedict R. O’G

Bacchilega, Cristina
Bakhtin, M. M.

Basso, Keith H.

Benton-Banai, Edward

Blackman, Charlie
1974 Interview IH-162 Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library Date of Interview: May 14, 1974. Location of Interview: Cold Lake, Alberta. Source: Office of Specific Claims & Research, Winterburn, Alberta. Interviewer: Louis P. Crier & Cyril Musekgo Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.

Blackned, Harriet

Bloomfield, Leonard

Brightman, Robert


Brodribb, Somer

Campbell, Maria and Winona Wheeler

2005 Personal communication. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 9 December 2005.

Carroll, Michael P.

Castel, Domithilde

Christensen, Deanna

Colomb, Rosie

Congreve, William

Cree Elders Workshop 2.
1973 Workshop. IH-431. Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library. Date of Interview: September 26, 1973. Location of workshop: not listed. Source: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College. Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.

Cruikshank, Julie

DeMallie, Raymond J.

Dion, Toussait
n.d. Interview IH-182. Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library. Date of Interview: Unknown. Location of Interview: Frog Lake Alberta. Source: Office of Specific Claims &

Elders Conference.

Ermine, Willie


Fixico, Donald

Fishing Guides.com

Foster, J.E.

Gadamer, Georg

Goodvoice, Robert

Goody, Jack and Ian Watts
Grant, Agnes  

Groden, Michael and Martin Kreiswirth, eds.,  

Halfe, Louise Bernice  
2006  Personal communication, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 22 February 2006.  

Harper, Francis  
1973  Interview IH-037-039. A part of the Indian Film History Project which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library. Date of Interview: June 20, 1973. Location of Interview: Seekaskootch Reserve, Onion Lake, Saskatchewan. Source: Saskatchewan Archives Board. Interviewer: Mary Mountain and Iris Baker. Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.

Harrington, M.R.  

Haumschild, Audrey  
2005  personal email (27 February 2005).

Historical Trauma  

Indian Act 1876, Excerpts  
Irwin, Lee
American Indian Quarterly 18, no. 2.

Jamieson, Kathleen

Kapoeze, Joe

King, Thomas

Landes, Ruth
1997 The Ojibwa Woman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Leavitt, Robert M.

Lightning, Walter

Linklater, Keno

Lowie, Robert H.

Manataka American Indian Council
Mandelbaum, David

Manitoba's Central Plains.

Maracle, Lee

McLeod, Ida

McLeod, Neal

Metchewais, Alexander

Michelson, Truman, ed.
Minde, Emma

Morris, Gwenth Elsie

Nabokov, Peter

Native American Legends

Naytowhow, Joseph


New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Peers, Laura
1994  *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press.

Pettipas, Katherine

Preston, Richard
Ray, Arthur
1998 Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ricoeur, Paul.

Rigney, Lester-Irabinna

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
1992 Final Report vol. 4. discussion of Women’s Perspectives.

Sapir, Edward

Sarris, Greg

Schulz, Amy Faye Knoki, and Ursula Knoki-Wilson

Sinclair, Margaret

Skinner, Alanson

Smarch, Virginia
Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

Snakeskin, Paul

Stevenson, Winona (Wheeler)


Stewart, Charles

Stonechild, Blair and Bill Waiser

Summary of Elders' Interviews, Treaty Six.
N.D. IH-221 Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library. Source: Office of Specific Claims & Research, Winterburn, Alberta. Summary by: Lynn Hickey, Richard Daniel, and Eric Stamp Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.

Sweet Grass First Nation community profile.

The Great Chain of Being
Tonkin, Elizabeth
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tootoosis, Ernest
1981 Elders' Conference 3 of 4 IH-OM 13/2 Part of Indian History Film Project
which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library. Date of
Source: Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Transcriber:
Joanne Greenwood.

Toren, Christina
1988 Making the Present, Revealing the Past: The Mutability and Continuity of

Van Kirk, Sylvia
1999 Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870. Winnipeg:
Watson & Dwywer.

Vansina, Jan
1985 Oral Tradition as History. Madison, Wisconsin: University of
Wisconsin Press.

Venne, Sharon
1997 Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective, In Aboriginal and

Vizenor, Gerald
1994 Manifest Manners: Post Indian Warriors of Survivance. Hanover:

Weigle, Marta
1982 Spiders and Spinsters: Women and Mythology. Albuquerque:
University of New Mexico Press.

White, Bruce
1999 The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles

Whitehead, Mr. and Mrs.
1978 Interview conducted by Mr. and Mrs. John McLeod. June 24, 1978.

Wilson, Angela Cavender
1998 Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota
Family. In Natives and Academics: Researching a Writing About American

Wolfe, Alexander  

Womack, Craig  

Yelloweyes, Jim  
N.D. Interview IH-217A Part of Indian History Film Project which is deposited in First Nations University of Canada library. Date of Interview: Unknown. Location of Interview: Sunchild Reserve, Alberta. Source: Office of Specific Claims & Research, Winterburn, Alberta. Interviewer: Abraham Burnstick. Interpreter: Rik Yellowbird. Transcriber: Joanne Greenwood.
Once upon a time a man lived all alone and never saw any people, being all alone in that place. When he had slept at night, in the morning he went hunting. Whenever he saw buffalo, he killed them. He would take a tongue and a thigh-bone and go home, and when he reached his dwelling, he would prepare his meal, and when he had eaten, he would gather firewood. So night would come upon him. As he stayed thus by himself, at last he felt lonesome. When daylight came and he as usual went hunting, again he killed a buffalo. He went home; he took a little to eat. When he was near his dwelling-place, he saw a great pile of firewood by his tent. He wondered about it; “It must be that someone has come,” he thought. He was glad. When he entered, he saw nobody, though it was plain that someone had swept the place. He was sorry that he saw no one. He stayed there. “How is it that there is no one here?” he thought. Lo, there where he sat, he found some moccasins. He was very glad, thinking, “A woman perhaps is the one who came here. In the morning I shall hunt; I shall try to come upon her while she is here, if she comes again,” he thought.

At daybreak he quickly went off to hunt. Again he killed a buffalo. He took the tongue, the ribs, the kidneys, and a thigh-bone. Then he went home, thinking, “I shall come in time to find her there.” He kept running. When he got near his dwelling, he saw a little smoke, and a great pile of firewood. When he entered, eagerly he looked about: he saw no one. He was very sorry that no one was there. Then as he went about his cooking, soon he found some moccasins. He picked them up and examined them; they were very pretty.

“Probably it is a woman has been coming here,” he thought; “Now all the harder I shall try to find her here. Early in the morning I shall go,” he thought.

After eating he lay down to sleep. He got up early; without eating he went forth to hunt. In a short time he killed a buffalo, and when he had cut it up, took the ribs and the kidneys and went home. He ran as he went. When he was close to his dwelling, he saw much smoke rising from his tent. He was very glad, thinking, “Perhaps she is there.”
When he got there and entered, lo and behold, there sat a very handsome woman on his settee. He sat down there, and she smiled at him as he looked at her. It appeared that she had already done the cooking. Without delay she took off his moccasins and put others on his feet, and she washed his hands and face. Thereupon she gave him to eat, and they took their meal. Oh, he was very glad.

Thus spoke that woman: "Why do you bring so little meat?"

"Oh," said the man, "I did not think anyone was here; that is why I brought only a little," he said; "But whence do you come?" he asked.

"A long ways from here we dwell," she answered. "Please, when you hunt, bring much meat; they are in want of food," she said, "my father and his people."

"Very well," said he.

So he hunted every day. In time he killed many buffalo. The woman worked a great deal, preparing the food.

When they had a large amount of it, "Suppose we go to my father's place," said the woman; "They are very hungry."

"Very well," said the man.

"Tomorrow," she said.

"But what are we to use to carry things?"

"Oh, there will be some way we can manage," she answered.

Then, when they ate in the morning, "Go on ahead," she told her husband; "Then you will set up some sticks at the place where we are to camp; from that place you will go hunting," she said to her husband.

So, when they had eaten, the man set out. And the woman made ready, laying their belongings and their food supply in a row. Then, when she had got ready, she went along, stepping each time upon their bundles of food; and when in this wise she set out, not a trace was there of their supplies of food. So then she walked on. Toward nightfall she found the sticks that were set up in the ground; there she made camp. When she kicked the ground, there lay their tent. Then she took the tent and set it up. When she had set it up, inside again she stamped the ground; on that spot fell all their belongings and their supplies of food. Then she went inside and cooked their meal.
There, when the man came back and saw their dwelling, "How did she do it?" he thought concerning his wife. When he entered, there she was, smiling at him. He looked about and saw all their belongings and their supplies of food. He wondered greatly at what she had done.

Thus spoke she: "Tomorrow we shall come to where my father's people stay. They are in great want of food," she said. So when day broke, early they arose. When they had eaten, they made ready.

"Help me," said the woman; "Since you have been thinking, 'How does she do it?' you shall now know how I do," she said.

"Yes," answered the man.

Accordingly they made ready by laying in a row their possessions and their stored meats. When he watched his wife, as she went forth and stepped on one after another of their bundles, he saw nothing at all there.

So as they walked on, he marveled greatly at what his wife had done. Then, as they walked on, towards evening they saw smoke rising from a wooded ravine; when they came in sight of that place, the woman's younger sister came forth.

She cried: "Splendid! My elder sister is bringing a great store of meat!" So they went on and came to the house.

The old man called out, "Splendid!"

When the woman opened the door and, as she entered, stamped repeatedly, then into the lodge fell their stored meats and their belongings. Then when the old woman went on to pick them up, she greatly rejoiced, thinking, "So now I shall eat." The old man gave thanks: "Thus I had it in mind, daughter, when "'Go there," I said to you, 'where my son-in-law dwells alone'," said the old man.

There he stayed then. When he had been there a long time, and spring had come, he knew that she, the woman, as it seemed to him, whom he had to wife, was a bear, and that also the old man and the old woman were bears. And he was sorry that he could not always be with them. That is the end of this sacred story.
Appendix B

"The Woman Who Married a Beaver"
As told by J.B. Penesi

Once on a time a certain young woman went into a long fast, blackening (her face). Far off somewhere she wandered about. In course of time she beheld a man that was standing, (and) by him was she addressed, saying: "Will you not come along with me to where I live?"

Whereupon she went along with him who was in the form of a human being. And when they got to where he dwelt, very pretty was the home of the man; every kind of thing he had in clothing and food. Very well provided for was the man. And this she was told: "Will you not become my wife? In this place will we spend our life," she was told.

And the woman said: "Perhaps sad might be my father and my mother."

"They will not be sad," she was told.

Thereupon, in truth, she freely consented to marry him, whereat the woman lost the memory of her parents. Very beautiful was the clothing given her by him to whom she was married. It was where there was a certain lake that they passed their life. A long while did she have the man for her husband. When they beheld their (first) young, four was the number of them. Never of anything was the woman in want. Of every kind of fish that was, did the man kill; besides, some small animal-kind he slew; of great abundance was their food. Outside of where they dwelt (was) also some fire-wood. And the woman herself was continually at work making flag-reed mats and bags; in very neat order was it inside of where they dwelt. Sometimes by a human being were they visited; but only roundabout out of doors would the man pass, no within would the man come. Now, the woman knew that she had married a beaver.

From time to time with the person, that had come to where they were, would the children go back home; frequently, too, would the man return home with the person. And back home would they always return again. All sorts of things would they fetch, - kettles and bowls, knives, tobacco, and all the things that are used when a beaver is eaten; such was what they brought. Continually were they adding to their great wealth. Very numerous were the young they had; and as often as the spring came

---

1 Penesi is derived from pinēsī which means Thunderbird in Anishinabe.
Parts of this version are also used in Bruce White's 1999 "The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles in the Ojibwa Fur Trade" Ethnohistory 46:1 (Winter 1999);109-47.
round, then was when off went their brood two by two, one make and one female. And this they said to them: "Somewhere do you go and put up a shelter. Do you rear a numerous offspring, to the end that greater may be the number of beavers." Save only the smaller of their young would they watch over for still another year; not till the following spring would their young go away.

Now and then a person were they visited; then they would go to where the person lived, whereupon the people would then slay the beavers, yet they really did not kill them; but back home would they come again. Now, the woman never went to where they people lived; she was forbidden by her husband. That was the time when very numerous were the beavers, and the beavers were very fond of the people; in the same way as people are when visiting one another, so were (the beavers) in their mental attitude toward the people. Even though they were slain by (the people), yet they really were not dead. They were very fond of the tobacco that was given them by the people; at times they were also given clothing by the people.

And when they were growing old, the woman was addressed by her husband saying: "Well, it is now time, therefore, for you to go back home. I too am going away to some other land. But do you remain here in my house. Eventually, as time goes on, there will arrive some people, (and) you should speak to them."

And the woman all the while continued at her work, making twine. In very beautiful order was her home. Now, once, sure enough, (she saw) a man arriving there; on top of the beaver dwelling the man sat down.

Thereupon he heard the sound of some creature sawing in the beaver-lodge beneath, the sound of some one pounding. When the woman picked up a piece of wood, she made a tapping-noise, so that her presence might be found out by the man. And he that was seated out on top learned that some creature was down inside of the beaver-lodge. And so up he spoke, saying: "Who (are) you?"

"(It is) I," came the voice of the woman speaking. "Come do you force an opening into this beaver-dwelling? I wish to get out," was the sound of her voice as she spoke.

Now, the man was afraid of her. "It might be manitou," he thought. Then plainly he heard the sound of her voice saying to him: "Long ago was I taken by the beavers. I too was once a human being. Please do break into this beaver-dwelling!"

Thereupon truly then did he break into that beaver-wigwam. And when he was making the hole into it, "Be careful lest you hit me!" (she said). And
when he was breaking an opening, in the man reached his hand; whereupon he found by the feel of her that she was a human being; all over did he try feeling her, -- on her head; and her ears, having on numerous ear-rings, he felt. And when he had forced a wide opening, out came the woman; very white was her head. And beautiful was the whole mystic cloth that she had for a skirt; worked all over with beads was her cloak; and her moccasins too were very pretty; and her ear-rings she also had on; she was very handsomely arrayed.

Thereupon she plainly told the story of what had happened to her while she lived with the beavers. She never ate a beaver. A long while afterwards lived the woman. There still lived after her on of her younger sisters; it was she who used to take care of her. And she was wont to say: "Never speak ill of a beaver! Should you speak ill of (a beaver), you will not (be able to) kill one."

Therefore such was what the people always did; they never spoke ill of the beavers, especially when they intended hunting them. Such was what the people truly know. If any one regards a beaver with too much contempt, speaking ill of it, one simply (will) not (be able to) kill it. Just the same as the feelings of one who is disliked, so is the feelings of the beaver. And he who never speaks ill of a beaver is very much loved by it; in the same way as people often love one another, so is one held in the mind of the beaver; particularly lucky then is one at killing beavers.2

Appendix C

Cree Trickster Tales

E. Ahenakew


Chichipischekwan (Rolling Head)

It happened in the darkness of the primeval world that there existed a being, it is said, who may have been a man. With him was one who was his wife. They had two sons, one being half-grown and the other a small, toddling boy.

They lived in a wigwam, not of hides, but made of many willow wands plastered over with mud to make it warm. Once in a while in later times such lodges were built for winter use; but the impossibility of their being removed from place to place brought them to such discredit among this nomadic people that they were in time entirely replaced by those of skins.

This family lived happily for a time. Every morning the father went out into the woods and seldom came home without bringing with him the choicest

---

pieces of venison. He was happy in his work and in the companionship of his wife and children.

A time came, however, when he noticed that she had changed somehow. Instead of the happy, contented look he used to see on her face, there was now an air of restless preoccupation. A strange light was in her eyes. Every now and again she would get up and go for wood in a nearby bush. This she did repeatedly, even when it seemed altogether unnecessary. The man said nothing, but made up his mind to do some investigation in order to help her, if it were possible.

One day, some time after this, being in the bush, he saw her coming. Something in her eager gait so roused his curiosity that he hid himself behind some willows. She approached a dead tree, a the foot of which there was a large hole. She tapped! A great number of snakes came crawling out. She sat on a log that had blown down; and they crawled all around her, while she fondled them.

He was horrified! In him was born all that human abhorrence of the snake. Not stopping to make his presence known, he went back to the tent and called his two sons. "I am going out to hunt," said he. "Tell your mother so when she returns."

He walked a long time and passed many wild animals before he killed a moose. Without even stopping to take out the insides, he went home. Arriving there, he sighed as if in great weariness and told his wife that he had killed a moose. He explained to her where the carcass lay and asked her to go for some of the meat, as he himself was not feeling well. She showed marked reluctance at having to go; but she could not very well disobey him. "Let me run for some wood first," she cried, "No," replied the man in a firm voice. "Go at once!"

Mumbling to herself, she started off. The man, looking at the fire saw a piece of sinew contracting with the heat. He knew that she had dropped it there while he was not looking and that it was an act of magic performed by her, in order to make shorter the distance she had to go. He scooped it out of the fire with a piece of stick and wetting it, stretched it to its utmost length, thereby counteracting the effect of her act.

Having done this, he armed himself with a hunting knife and walked to where he had seen the snakes. He tapped and as before the snakes began to crawl out one after the other. As fast as they came out, he cut off their heads. He spared only one - and that a very little one. "When the Earth is peopled by men," said he, "you will not have the power to interfere with those who are to be lords of it. You will be small and easily conquered." Having made this pronouncement on the reptiles of the West, he hurried back to the tent and began to make preparations for his wife's return.

He took four things and calling his older son to him he said, "You are to take your little brother on your back and flee for your lives. Here are things which will be useful when danger approaches; this Awl means a hedge of thorns; this Flint gives fire; this Piece of Rock can form a mountain; and this Beaver-Tooth, a great river of water. Farewell, my own sons! Farewell! May your lot be such that good may come to the Earth through this evil that is fallen upon us. In
days to come should you want to see me, look up to the Northern skies; for I shall be up there. People will call me Oochaykatak (The Great Dipper).

The boy took up his brother and fled to the West.

Some little time intervened before the mother arrived, panting and covered with perspiration. Her path had been long and she had run most of the way. Without a word she dropped her load and hurried to the bush. A great suspicion had come over her. Sure enough, there lay her pets in a heap, dead. Only one little snake came out to tell her what had taken place. An insane fury came over her; and she ran to wreak vengeance upon her husband for the death of the reptiles.

In the meantime, the man had been making preparations; he had pulled a net over the door; and he stood, axe in hand, ready for his wife. She approached furiously; but her progress was arrested by her being caught in the net; only her head went through. The man severed it from the rest of her body, and then fled upward through the opening on the top of the wigwam. "Chase him up to the sky," said the Head to the Trunk, "and I will go after his sons." The Body soared after the fleeing man up to the heavens; while the Head sped westward after the boys.

The man may be seen up in the northern skies at night time. He is the Great Dipper; to one side is the Little Dipper, which is the body of his former wife, always chasing him but afraid to go too near the abode of the North Star, who loves her husband and therefore is ready to protect him.

The Flight of Wesakaychak

With wonderful speed the head of the mother rolled after the two boys. This was now Chichipischekwan, the Rolling Head. From afar the boys could hear her say, "Where—where can you flee? I am going to kill you!" Wesakachak, for that we must now call the boy, ran faster, holding his little brother. Ever nearer came the voice of his mother. Something must be done. He remembered the advice of his father; and putting his brother down on the ground, he threw the awl behind him, saying at the same time, "Let it be as my father said."

Immediately, there came to be a seemingly impenetrable hedge of thorns between them and their pursuer. Once more he took up his brother and fled.

Rolling Head could not find an opening anywhere. She went up and down, but the hedge extended from sea to sea; there was no alternative but to force her way through somehow; and this she proceeded to do. Here and there she rolled, screaming with pain and fright as the thorns pricked her. How long she took to make her way through is not told; but in time she was free on the other side, bleeding all over but more furious than she had been before.

It is said that this hedge of thorns disappeared as time went on but that remains of it are still to be seen in the cactus plant in the South.

In the meantime the boy had been making his way as best he could, although he was now very tired having had to carry his little brother on his back for so long a time and having no sleep. Once again he heard the approach of his mother as she spoke the words, "A-a-a-ay-y! Where in the world can you flee to?"

He laid down his brother and throwing the piece of rock behind him, said, "Let
there be a mountain from one end of the earth to the other." Immediately, Rocky
Mountains sprang up and once again Rolling Head found herself thwarted.

Back and forth she rolled, looking for an opening through which she could go;
but she found none. Imbued with unnatural power though she was, a time came
when she was exhausted. She lay down beside a wall of rock and slept. A
strange sound awoke her. It seemingly came from the heart of the mountain. The
sound grew louder and louder till she saw a hole forming. It was a monster worm
which had gnawed its way through the rock. Today this is known as the Golden
Valley trail between Banff and Mt. Assiniboine.

Here was her chance! As soon as the worm was through, she followed
analyzing it, she then rolled into the hole, which was just large enough to let her
through. Bleeding and scratched beyond recognition, she emerged on the other
side, her fury increased a hundredfold. Once again she gave chase to her children
and was close up to them in a short time.

The boy had been making very slow progress, in fact he was beginning to
see the futility of mere flight. When he knew his mother's head to be near again,
he threw down the Flint behind him and said, "Let there be a wall of fire from one
end of the land to the other!" This happened. Once again Rolling Head found
herself confronted by a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. She sought for a safe
way through; there was none. Only one way was possible and that was to go
through. Hesitating only for a sort time, she rolled in to the flames and emerged
on the other side burnt and blackened. A man were dangerous in such a plight;
but no creature exists that can exceed the fierceness of a woman, thwarted in her
vengeance and humiliated at the same time. She gave chase once more!

After throwing the Flint, the boy Wesakaychak was just able to stagger
along, because of his great fatigue. He was hardly able to keep himself from
falling asleep, even as he walked along unsteadily. When he heard his mother's
voice again he took this time the beaver's tooth; and, throwing it ahead of him,
said, "Let a mighty river flow here!" It was only when he found himself
confronted by a great flow of water that he realized his fatal mistake. The river
was in front of them and the Rolling Head behind. He and his little brother were
now at the mercy of their mother; and he knew what that meant. His faculties
cleared; and he ran along the side of the river, seeking some way of escape. The
river seemed uncrossable. When about to despair, he saw two old patriarchs. The
were great bitterns, old men in appearance, sitting, one on either bank of the river,
exactly opposite to each other. These birds are quite large now; but in those days
they were monsters in size. He ran to them and implored them to put him and his
brother across the river. This they refused to do. They were not bad at heart,
however; for in time they took pity on the plight of these boys. They put their
necks side by side; and on the hastily improvised bridge the fugitives crossed
safely to the other side.

In a moment or two Rolling Head came up. "Put me across!" she
commanded. The birds refused. Now Rolling Head was creature well versed in
the wisdom of her kind. She made many flattering remarks to the bitterns.
Seeing that they were pleased, she kept on till they offered to help her.
The Magic Flight

Once a man and his wife and their two little boys lived in the forest. Every day, while the husband was gone, his wife submitted to the embraces of a man who lived in a tree near by. She would comb her hair, paint her face, and knock on the tree, then he would come out. One day her husband returned unexpectedly and caught them. He slew the man, and cut off his wife's head. Then he gave his oldest son four things,—an awl, a needle, a bit of thread, and a knife. He told him, "If that head follows you, throw away these things. Throw the awl first, and say, 'Big mountains with ravines must rise up!' Then throw away the needle, and say, 'There will be thorns!' Then throw away the thread, and say, 'Let there be horned snakes!' Then throw the knife, and say, "Let it be a big river!' If I am killed, the sky will be red at sunset."

Then the father went off, and the boys fled. The body followed the man, but the head chased the boys.

The boys fled, the eldest carrying the other on his back. Presently the head began to draw near; and they heard it cry, "Hold on, hold on! My dear son, I am going to nurse your little brother!"

The boy then threw away the awl, and a great mountain arose; but the head found a cleft, and rolled through. When it caught up again, the boy threw away his needle, saying, "be thou a thornbush!" The hair of the head caught there, and held it back; but it begged a worm to cut its hair, and it escaped. It said to the worm, "If you help me, you may marry me!"—"How?" asked the worm. "Oh, per foramen magnum!"

The worm took its pay; and the head followed, and nearly caught up with the boys. Then the boy threw away his thread, and it became a horned snake.
The head rolled up to it and bounced around, begging the snake to let it by. "If you do, you may marry me." — "How?" asked the horned snake. "Oh, per foramen magnum."

The snake agreed, and raising itself, let it by. Presently the head nearly caught up again with the fugitives. So the eldest boy threw away his knife, and called for a river. The head could not get across; but there was a pelican there. And it begged the pelican to help it. "If you do so, you may marry me." — "How?"— "Oh, per foramen magnum!"— "All right! But there's a seat on the back of my neck; don't touch it as I ferry you over." However, the head disobeyed, so the pelican dumped it in the river. The eldest boy threw a stone and broke it open.

That evening the sky was red, so the children knew their father had been killed.

Rolling Head


Wisahkicāhk had a mother and a dad and a small brother. His dad used to —well, he was always hunting, eh? And whatever time the old man comes in, the old lady wouldn't be cooking.

She'd be out in the bush all the time. Like she make believe she's out cutting wood.

Not time to dry meat or fix up the place, y'know. Always busy in the bush.

Used to go where there's misikinipikwak, big snakes, big snake. Used to go to the snake, that woman. Monkey around with the snake. By the time the old man comes in [to the lodge], the old lady would try to get there. Try and cook. But she caught hell from the old man.

So the guy got fed up with this woman. And he asked his boys, "What does your mother do everytime I leave?" "Well, as soon as you're gone, she takes an axe and tells us she's gonna' cut wood.

And she doesn't come back all day. We heard her making noise, pounding that big trunk of tree." That guy would come out, that big snake.

That was her lover, that old bitch.

So—so the guy wanted to get rid off—kill that snake. So he went—he left two beavers one day's walk away [from the camp]. Like it would take the old lady all day to go and get those two beavers.

So he told the old lady, "I left two beavers. You go and get 'em tomorrow." Oh, the old lady was anxious to leave, she wanted to leave the tent. "Sure, I'll get them back," she said.

So—He had one of those — what you used to call garters. He took one of them and he threw it in the —Well, people used to do things like that, you know—threw it in the fire. Said he's going to shorten up his trail. That's to shorten up his trail. So the old man took off. So he went and killed the snake. So he went and killed the snake. And he brought that snake head back to the tent. And he brought that snake head back to the tent. Then he sends his boys out. Then the old man left the tent, the old man left the wigwam.

When the old lady got back, the kids weren't there and the old man's not there. But she seen that snake head inside that wigwam. And this guy made a dummy to cut wood. So the old lady heard someone cutting wood over there towards where the snake was. So she right away took off. Went to see her lover, that snake. Well, the snake, his head wasn't there. Already she'd seen it. Sure enough, she seen just an axe and a dummy cuttin' wood. And the old man took off already besides.

And so the kids, when he got them out from that wigwam under the poles, he feed all the animals, that old man [to procure their silence]. And the crow—raven is always greedy. He didn't have enough feed.

So first she took off after the old man, that woman. Well, the old man chase her around and finally they took off in the sky.

I think that's where the old lady kill that guy, that man. That's where the Dipper is, that's part of the man. This side's gone [?]. That thing came down except—that's the way she kills him up in the air, that's the Dipper now.

So after he [part of the body] came down, the old lady came down. And then she wants to find out where the little boys were. She ask all the animals. Well, the raven didn't have enough to eat. So he told her, "That's where they took off from." Once she knows from where they took off, from there she knows the road.

And the old man gave them [previously] oskicihk ['awl].

It's something you punch a hole with. We call it oskācihk. It's sticking to a little piece of wood. You punch holes with it. We call it oskācihk. Another thing was that they use to strike fire. Strike sparks. That's one—and he give them that towel [?]. He gave them three things. "So if you notice that your mother's close by," he said, "you throw behind oskācihk. That thing, you throw it behind."

Yeah, the old lady come down with just the head, ostikwân ['her head']. The old man cut the head off the old—the old bitch so there was just her head trailing after her kids. But the old man was killed up in the air. That's that Dipper. But the old lady wouldn't die, she ran after her kids with just a head. She wanted to kill her kids. So they threw those oskācihk behind. They made a fence of thorns. There was lots of them so she couldn't pass it. So the old lady--.

I think she hires two slim things that crawl under the earth. Kind of snake—looking things. Worms that crawl under. So she asked them, "if you can make a hole for me underground, I'll marry you after I get back." So it said, "Okay, I'll make a hole through here, past these things." So away they went and then Ha! She was coming again. Those little kids, they heard her coming. "Oh, I want to kiss my kids for the last time," she keeps saying as she was rolling. They
heard her coming, she was close back. So they threw that sparkler, they threw it behind. Ha! There was a fire across. Ha! The old lady couldn't pass the fire. Somebody got her through again. Anyway, she said she was going to marry the guy again.

There was somebody anyway that got her underground again so she passes that. Oh, she was still coming. So the towel was the last one. "Oh, this is our last—From here on she's going to catch us," Wísakhíčâhk said. And he was going to throw it behind but it so happened he threw it ahead. And there was a river formed across and they couldn't cross it. Son of a gun and she was not far behind. So they seen this swan and he asked the swan if it could take them across. Oh, he said, "Sure." It was a big wide river. So it took them. "As long as you don't touch my neck," the swan said. "If you touch my neck, I'll throw you off." So they landed safely across. Ha! The old lady was just across and she hollered at the swan, "C'mon, you take me across. I'll marry you after I kill my kids." Oh, the swan went back over and told her, "As long as you don't touch my neck I can take you across." Ha! The old lady, she was on top of the swan. Oh, just about when she figured she was going to make it to the shore she rolls into the swan's neck, bumps it. "What's wrong with your neck?" she said. And the swan swings his neck and he threw her off back in the middle of the river. So the old lady couldn't swim across with just the head. Keeps singing. So it came up—this was a sturgeon. She said, 'I'm gonna' turn into a sturgeon. Too bad I couldn't kiss my kids but me, I'm gonna' turn into a sturgeon." So that was the last they saw their mother.

Rolling Head


That woman married a snake. That woman was staying with her husband and she married a snake. I-pawâmít knîpikwâ, she was dreaming of the snake. He husband nîtanîpakâhôw; he's a good hunter and he kills lots of animals. That man went out and he killed a moose. That man went where his wife was in a bunch of trees. So he started hitting the mistik ('tree'). And (as) he was hitting the tree, a misikinîpik ('giant snake') came out of the log (trunk). When it was coming toward him, i-nîpâhât knîpikwâ ('he kills the snake'). And when he kills it, he takes the snake's blood, that knîpikomîhko ('snake blood') home. And that moose he killed, that lady make a stew out of it. And him, he made a stew out of that snake's blood. He told his kids to run away.

"Just leave," he said to his kids. "I'll look after her myself." And then I'll run away too." Îkwâni tâhpwî ('so truly'), so when his wife got there he fed her the snake stew. The woman started eating it. While he was eating it, the man said to his wife, "Do you taste that blood?"

4 Robert Brightman's 1989. p. 59
"It's not moose blood. I went and cut off the head of that big snake, your husband. That's where I got that blood from and that's what you're drinking."
The woman got mad. She went and checked right away in those trees and she saw it laying there. And she got mad and she ran back home. So when she ran back, that man, her husband, cut her head off. So the man run away. His kids had left already. But her head comes alive and starts following him. He ran everywhere but he couldn't escape from her. So he ran to the water and he started running on top of the water. But that tihtipistikwân ('rolling head') kept following him. They got into the middle of the lake and then the head sunk down into the water. So she died there and drowned. That's all I know about the woman. Opawâmiwin ('her dreams/visions') did that to her.

The Rolling Head Narratives

"The Birth of Wisahketchahk and the Origin of Mankind"

Leonard Bloomfield
As told by Louis Moosomin from the Sweet Grass reserve in 1925.5

Once upon a time, long ago—I am now telling a sacred story—once upon a time, of old, a certain man dwelt in a lone lodge with his wife and his two children. Then presently, whenever he went away, his wife put on her finery. He did not know why his wife put o her finery. So then at one time he merely pretended to go away to hunt; he hid himself, thinking of her, "Let me see what she will do." And then he saw her beating a tree, and a serpent came out, and he saw that his wife had it for a lover, at once he was very angry. When his wife struck the tree, she said, "My husband, now I have come!" He was very angry. He was jealous; for the serpent was loved more than he. Thos e whom I mean to tell the sacred story were Wisahketchahk's mother and father. So now that man was very angry; he could not sleep.

He said to his wife; "I am going far away to hunt."
He really went very far away to hunt. He stayed over one night.
"Why did you stay out over night?" his wife asked him.
"I have been far off to hunt," He told her; "But you, you are to fetch the meat," he told his wife.
"Very well," said she.
As soon as his wife had gone, he took her skirt and put it on. He went to where that serpent was inside the tree.
"My husband, I have come!" he said to the serpent.
Really, it came out. He cut through its neck with a knife; he took the serpent home; he made broth. Then he hid his children.

One must keep in mind that before the earth existed they had many kinds of power. He plunged his two children into the ground. And that women, too, had great power for all things, and could talk even to every kind of thing and

\[\text{Bloomfield 1993: p1.}\]
accordingly receive answer from it. And then the man forbade every object that was in their dwelling to tell her anything.

Then his wife arrived. He gave her the serpent to eat which he had cooked into broth.

"Oh, what is this," asked the woman, "which tastes so good?"

"The blood of your husband, the serpent; from it I have made this for you," he told her.

The woman was angry.

"It is not true, is it, that you have done even this?" she asked him.

She went to where she was in the habit of visiting the serpent. Then she struck the tree. The serpent did not come out. She was very angry, as she came back, loudly bewailing it. When she entered the dwelling her husband cut off her head. Then he rose into the air, to flee.

"I shall needs go dwell there in the sky. Let me be a star!" he said as he rose higher and higher.

And that woman, that severed head presently opened its eyes. Then presently that head spoke.

"Come, my dish, where are they?"

Without delay, she asked all her utensils. She spoke to every single one in turn, questioning it. At last a stone told her that her husband had sunk them into the earth. Four things that man had given his children, at the time when he started them off; that they might make a river, fire, a mountain of stone, and a forest; a forest of thom-trees.

Then that head began to call. "My children, wait for me! You are making me wretched by leaving me!" it cried.

That woman called all the time. And that little boy who was fleeing under ground, from afar he saw that severed speaking head, as he was being carried on his elder brother's back.

He said to him, "Big brother, our mother is not there. It is only a talking head," he said.

He took that which his father had given him, that from which his father had given him, that from which the Cree make fire; he threw it behind him.

"Let there be fire here!" he said.

And really that being was entirely brought to a stop, when far and wide the fire blazed. For it was but a severed head which went along. Because he, at any rate, who is called Indian was helped by evil beings, was why that severed head could roll along. Finally it passed the fire. Then it again pursued its children. All its hair was aflame.

Then presently when again that child looked about, who was being borne by the other, "It is not our mother, big brother! Let us flee with all our might!" he told him.

Again he took that which his father had given him that he might make a hill of Thornberry-trees. He threw it behind him. That Rolling Skull was really blocked. Then it bade a Great Serpent to bite through the thorn-trees and make a passage through for it, that it might go unchecked. And so it managed to go on, unchecked.
Then, when again they had fled a long ways, again that child who was being carried saw the Skull come rolling. And again, he threw behind them that which he had been given by his father that he might make a mountain of rock. Vastly that rocky crag extended. That Skull-Being could not manage to go across it. At once it employed a beaver with iron teeth to bite that rock to pieces. Then it was able again to go on. Again it pursued its children.

Again that child who was being borne by his elder brother saw it coming. Then that which his father had given him that he might make a river, he threw it, by mistake, on ahead. The child kept crying its cry. Then they wept in terror that the Rolling Skull would kill them, their mother's skull.

Then, as they wept, "Do not weep! I will take you to safety!" a Great Serpent said to them.

Then he carried them across the water. When he had brought them to the far shore, he crossed back, who had taken those children across.

When the Rolling Skull saw him, it said, "Take me across, too!" it said to him.

"But do not be impatient" he told it.

So he carried it across. It rode on his back.

Just when they were in the middle of the stream, "Great Serpent, you are going altogether too slowly!" said that woman.

Then he threw her into the water.

"'Sturgeon' will be your name!" he told that Rolling Head.

Then those boys wondered about, suffering many hardships. That boy was Wisahketchak in his childhood.

---

Chichipistikwan (cihcipistikwan)

Ida McLeod "Rolling Head" in Ed Stan Cuthand 1977 *Nehiyaw Atayokewina Cree Legends Stories of Wisakecahk* Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

Long ago a young man named Tawaham, his wife White Feather, and their two sons lived in a tipi near a beautiful lake. The elder of the boys was called Wesakechak. They were a happy family; Tawaham was a good hunter and White Feather was a fine wife and mother.

Most of Tawaham's time was spent in hunting. After a successful hunt, it was the custom of those days for the women to butcher, dress and carry the meat home. It was also their duty to prepare the skins of animals and make them into robes and clothing for their families. In all these tasks, White feather excelled.

By and by, it became necessary for Tawaham to hunt farther and farther away from home and he was gone for longer periods of time. Meanwhile, White feather kept the home in order. One of her daily tasks was to go into the forest for firewood. She was a very busy woman. Garments for her family were carefully sewn. Above all, she enjoyed working on a buckskin dress she was making for herself. It was the most beautiful dress she had ever made. It was decorated with
shells and dyed porcupine quills. However, in time, there were no more skins to prepare and make into clothing. White Feather waited for her husband to return. Towards evening, she would put on her beautiful dress and comb her long, black hair until it shone. She wanted her husband to see how beautiful she was in her new dress, but as each evening ended and Tawaham had still not returned. White feather went sadly to bed.

Early in the morning she would go into the forest for firewood. Before long, she was even wearing her buckskin dress to go for firewood. The boys would look at their mother fondly, for she was a kind and beautiful woman. Wesakechak wondered why she wore her best dress while working. Each day she returned later and later and brought home less and less firewood. Her hair became tangled and her lovely dress was untidy and soiled. It became plain to Wesakechak that his mother did not want anyone to know about her mysterious trips into the forest.

All this mystery puzzled Wesakechak. Where did his mother go? She was becoming a different person, no longer kind and thoughtful to her family. Wesakechak was kept busy looking after his brother. More and more of his mother’s daily tasks became his.

Finally, he could wait no longer to find the reason for his mother’s strange behaviour. One day, he followed her at a distance. To his surprise, she followed the path leading to the lake.

Not far off the path stood an old stump. White Feather struck it three times. From a hole in the stump crawled snake after snake. She sat on a log and caressed the snakes as they crawled around her. For a moment, Wesakechak could not move. He was stunned with fear and disbelief when he saw his mother and her pets. He turned on his heels and ran home as fast as he could.

In a daze, Wesakechak went about his daily chores. What he had seen lay heavily on his young heart. He must tell his father, for he was sure that his mother was possessed by a power that would destroy them all. Just as his mother returned home that evening his father arrived. As was usual it was her duty to fetch the kill from the hunt. As soon as White Feather had gone, Wesakechak told his father the whole story of what he had seen.

Sadly, Tawaham said, "My son, this is indeed a great disaster to our family. If you will be brave and do exactly as I say, you and your brother may be saved. Now, listen to me carefully. Your mother will not return until mid-day tomorrow. When I destroy the snakes, I may have no choice but to destroy your mother also. In case I fail, you must get yourself and your brother ready to escape. I will give you four things to protect you. When you are threatened, throw one of these things between you and the danger."

Tawaham handed Wesakechak a medicine bundle. Inside the bundle was a bone awl, piece of fire-flint, a pusacan of birch (which catches the spark from the fire-flint), and an ahpiht (the flat stone which, when struck by the fire-flint, produces a spark).

Early the next morning, Tawaham, disguised in White Feather buckskin dress, stood before the stump and struck it three times. As each snake crawled out of the hole, Tawaham chopped off its head. He drained the blood into a container.
After slaying all the snakes he took their blood home and made it into a soup.
"If your mother takes but one mouthful of this soup," he told Wesakechak, "she will be cured of the evil spell the snakes have cast over her. If she refuses, I must kill her. Should I fail, you must run away with your brother. No matter what she tells you to do, you must not listen."

As Tawaham had said, White Feather arrived promptly at mid-day. As if in a trance, she began at once to prepare herself for her meeting with the snakes. She put on her buckskin dress and braided her shiny, black hair. She hastened to leave, but just as she reached the doorway, Tawaham called, "Wait, you must first drink the blood of your lovers." With a horrible shriek, she dashed out and flew to the stump.

The moment she was out of the lodge, Tawaham sadly bade his sons farewell and warned them that under no circumstances must they allow themselves to be tricked. Holding his brother by the hand, Wesakechak hurried away.

Meanwhile, Tawaham waited behind the flap of the tepee. He stood, the axe poised in mid-air, ready to strike the moment White Feather entered. His aim was accurate and true.

His blow came down the moment the angry woman came in. She fell to the ground, her head severed from her neck. No sooner had it touched the ground, when the body began to fight Tawaham. They struggled long and hard. Tawaham finally caught the body by the ankle and swung it around him. He could not let go of it. Around and around they went until they began to ascend. Up into the sky they went. To this day when you look up on a clear night, you can still see Tawaham as the North Star and White Feather's body as the Big Dipper. No one knows how much longer Tawaham will continue to hurl White Feather's body round and round.

Meanwhile, the head of White Feather began rolling along the ground, pursuing the boys.
"Wesakechak, my son, wait for me!" it shrieked, "Your little brother is hungry and I must nurse him."

Remembering his father's warning, Wesakechak kept right on going. Closer and closer came Chichipistikwan. Wesakechak was beginning to slow down. By now his sobbing little brother was struggling to go to the familiar voice of his mother. Wesakechak, with trembling hands, fumbled through the medicine bundle for one of the gifts his father had given him. The first thing he found was the bone awl, so he threw it behind him. At once, a thick wall of thorn bushes appeared. Tired as he was, Wesakechak realized that he could not stop to rest. Quickly, he gave his brother food and water. They must go on!

In the meantime, Chichipistikwan was furious when the thorny bush suddenly barred her way just when her prize was so close. Angrily, she rolled up and down. Suddenly, she spied a large worm eating its way through the green brambles.
"My dear, handsome worm," she said, "if you will open a path for me I promise you my hand in marriage."
"Your hand! Indeed!" said the worm, "What use will you be to me when all you have is a head?"

The worm continued to open a path. Impatiently, Chichipistikwan rolled back and forth. The worm barely reached the other side, when in crashed the head, squashing the poor worm in the process.

"Ha! Ha!" she said, "Whoever would want to marry a worm?"

Wesakechak had reached the crest of the hill. He stopped to scan the horizon behind him. He felt sick when he saw the head rolling over the hills and down the valleys toward them.

Quickly, he searched through his bundle until he found the pusacan. He held it ready in his hand. Surely these gifts from his father would stop the head from chasing them. He began to run, now carrying his brother. Each time he turned to look, he could see that the head was coming closer and closer. He hurled the pusacan behind him. Twists of flame broke loose.

They roared and flared high to form a scorching wall of fire between them and Chichipistikwan. Wesakechak was sure that no one could go through this fire and live, but he couldn't take a chance so he hurried on. On and on the boys fled. Soon he heard the terrible shrieks of the head. Wesakechak was sure that Chichipistikwan had tricked some innocent victim into carrying her across the fire. She was getting closer again! Wesakechak was now ready to use the third gift. Quickly he threw the ahpiht over his shoulder. A barrier of mountains sprang up.

Although he was worn out and could hardly walk, Wesakechak was determined to continue. He gritted his teeth and forced himself onward. He was sure their survival lay only in his ability to keep going.

"I want my mother. I'm hungry, I want to go to bed!" cried his younger brother.

"Soon we will eat and rest, little brother," encouraged Wesakechak. Finally his brother cried himself to sleep.

Could Wesakechak ever forget the horror of this day? Tired and exhausted, he walked on, carrying his brother. Stumbling and falling, he continued on his way. Only his dogged determination to survive had carried him this far. The never-ending fight to keep going and be watchful had taken its toll. He fell. As he fell, his father's only remaining gift, the fire-flint, flew from his hand.

A swift-flowing river suddenly appeared before him, barring his way from further escape. He had accidentally allowed the fire-flint to tumble ahead of him when he fell! Desperately looking for a way of escape, Wesakechak, with renewed energy, ran up and down the banks of the river. Seeing no other means of escape he jumped into the water.

As he was swimming, Wesakechak saw a swan.

"Where are you going, my brother?" said the swan.

"Please take us across the river or Chichipistikwan will kill us!"

"If you are very careful not to sit too close to my stiff neck, I will be happy to take you across," said the swan.

Once again the boys had escaped. But for how long?
Chichipistikwan rushed up to the bank of the vast river.
"I will make you as white and as graceful as those clouds in the blue sky if you carry me across the river," she called to the swan.
"Gladly!" replied the swan, "but you must be very careful not to sit too close to my stiff neck. Furthermore, you must fulfill your promise to make me white and graceful before I take you across."
"Just as you wish," said Chichipistikwan. Immediately the swan turned into a pure, white bird with a long, graceful neck. From that moment on, all swans have remained that way.

Chichipistikwan jumped onto the back of the swan. In her impatience, she forgot the warning and rolled toward the swan's stiff neck. With a flip of her back, the swan threw Chichipistikwan into the middle of the river.

From the opposite bank, Wesakechak watched what was happening. He began shooting at the head with his bow and arrows. The moment the first arrow hit it, the head turned into a big sturgeon. The flash of its tail in the sun was the last Wesakechak ever saw of Chichipistikwan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Good husband</th>
<th>Good wife</th>
<th>Affair</th>
<th>Who catches the woman</th>
<th>Drinkin g of the blood</th>
<th>Is the father killed</th>
<th>4 elements and order</th>
<th>Animals that aided rolling head</th>
<th>Who named rolling head sturgeon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recorded by Bloomfield</td>
<td>Went away</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Story starts with affair</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fire, thorn berry trees, mountain, river</td>
<td>Thorns-great serpent</td>
<td>Great serpent after it threw her in the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Id told by Edward Ahenake</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe, doesn't concentrate on wife</td>
<td>The affair happens later on in the story</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Awl-hedge of thorns, rock-mountain, flint to make fire, Beaver's tooth-river</td>
<td>Mountains-monster worm gnawed through, River-two patriarchs (birds) Bitterns</td>
<td>Wesakaychak named &quot;&quot;The Rolling Head&quot;&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alanson Skinner, Ojibway</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>Doesn't say</td>
<td>Story starts affair with a man instead of a snake. Woman combs her hair, paints her face before going out</td>
<td>Husband, kills the man and cuts off the woman's head immediately</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Awl - mountains Needle-thorns Thread-horned snake Knife-big river</td>
<td>&quot;&quot;The Rolling Head&quot;&quot; offered to marry all the animals that helped her. Thorns-worm, promised to married the horned snake. Also promised to marry the pelican</td>
<td>No sturgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>version</td>
<td>went out every day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida McLeod, edited by Stan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Gradual build-up to the affair, appears that</td>
<td>Wasesakechak saw and told his father</td>
<td>Made the blood of the North Star</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bone-awl-thick wall of thorn bushes. Pusacan-wall</td>
<td>Offered to marry a worm who aided in the thorn bush. A Swan helped her</td>
<td>Rolling Head changes into a sturgeon after wisahkécahk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cuthand

a spell was put over her.
snakes into a soup.
No she didn't drink it
snakes

and the body of the mother is the Big Dipper of fire
Ahpiht-barrier of mountains
Fire-flint-swift-flowing river

partially across the river.
shoots the head with his bow and arrow after it falls into the river.

Cornelius Colomb in Robert Brightman 1989

Hunting all the time
No, does not cook, clean, or prep the skins, always out
The affair happened in the beginning
Children know what the woman is doing and tell their father
No

Only 3 items
Awl-thorns, sparkler-fire, towel-river

Promised to marry all animals that helped her. Worms in the thorns, unmentioned animal and swan

"The Rolling Head" actually named herself

Jeremiah Michel; Translator: Pierre Merasty in Robert Brightman 1989

Good hunter kills lots of animals
No

Beginning. Woman dreams of the snake
Husband knew and killed snake
Yes

No items were given to the children
The head only chased after the husband, into the water

The head didn’t transform into the sturgeon

---

**Detailed Chart outlining the differences between each narrative**

---

I expanded upon Robert Brightman's 1989 chart.