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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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A healing curve: The poetry of Taqralik Partridge in Inuktitut translation

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RÉSUMÉ

Curved against the hull of a peterhead (PS Guelph 2020), mince volume de dix-neuf poèmes qui « luttent contre le colonialisme et la violence raciale tout en laissant transparaître de riches images sensorielles » (Partridge 2020a), a paru en janvier 2020. Il s'agit du premier livre publié par Taqralik Partridge, autrice de nouvelles, artiste et poétesse reconnue. En mai de la même année, il figurait déjà sur une liste de « six grands titres de la littérature inuit » jugés comme des lectures essentielles. Bien que Partridge ait composé tous ses poèmes en anglais, trois de ceux contenus dans *curved against* s'accompagnent d'une version traduite. Le présent article se concentre sur les deux poèmes s'accompagnant d'une version traduite vers l'inuktitut, réalisée respectivement par Ida Saunders et Looee Arreak. Il s'agira d'en examiner les enjeux pour aborder l'œuvre de Partridge dans la perspective de l'écotraduction. Le langage de la nature – la façon dont il est employé et surtout traduit – s'avère pertinent pour la discussion, tout comme l'acte de traduction, qui dévoile les liens mutuels indispensables à notre survie, littéralement et métaphoriquement, en tant qu'Inuit et non-Inuit.

ABSTRACT

Curved against the hull of a peterhead (PS Guelph 2020), a slender volume of 19 poems that “wrestle with colonialism and racial violence while also reflecting a rich sensory imagery” (Partridge 2020a) was released in January 2020. By May of that year, this first book by prize-winning short-story writer, artist and spoken word poet Taqralik Partridge already figured in a list of “six Inuit literature greats” deemed essential reading. Although Partridge composed all of these poems in English, three translated versions are provided alongside their originals in *curved against*. The present article focuses on the two poems accompanied by Inuktitut versions, translated by Ida Saunders and Looee Arreak respectively, with a view to engaging with Partridge's work from the perspective of eco-translation. The language related to nature – how it is employed and especially how it is translated – proves relevant to the discussion, as does the act of translation, which highlights the inter-relatedness critical to survival, literally and metaphorically speaking, for Inuit and non-Inuit alike.

RESUMEN

Curved against the hull of a peterhead (PS Guelph 2020), publicado en enero de 2020, es un breve poemario que consta de diecinueve textos. Estos poemas “encaran el colonialismo y el racismo a la vez que proyectan una densa imaginaria sensorial” (Partridge 2020a). Este primer libro de Taqralik Partridge, galardonada autora de relatos cortos, artista y poetisa de Spoken Word, ya figuraba en mayo de ese mismo año entre los “seis imprescindibles de la literatura inuit”, cuya lectura es considerada esencial. Si bien

Partridge compuso todos los poemas en inglés, el poemario *curved against* nos ofrece una traducción para tres de ellos. El presente artículo se ha de concentrar en los dos poemas que van acompañados por su versión inuktitut, de la mano, respectivamente, de Ida Saunders y Looee Arreak. El propósito será abordar lo que conlleva una lectura de la obra de Partridge desde la perspectiva de la ecotraducción. El lenguaje de la naturaleza – su empleo y más específicamente cómo se traduce – será de significativa relevancia para el debate; así como lo será también el acto de traducir, que recalca una interrelación esencial para nuestra supervivencia, tanto literal como metafórica, como inuit y no-inuit.

KEYWORDS/MOTS-CLÉS/PALABRAS CLAVE

literary translation, Inuit, Inuktitut, Taqralik Partridge, eco-translation
traduction littéraire, Inuit, inuktitut, Taqralik Partridge, écotraduction
traducción literaria, Inuit, Inuktitut, Taqralik Partridge, ecotraducción

1. Introduction

A great deal has changed since 1994, when Inuit art historian Marion E. Jackson rightly expressed surprise at being able to hear directly from female artists: “rarely are the voices of interpretation those of native Inuit, and even more rarely are they the voices of Inuit women” (Jackson 1994: 37). Today, visual artists such as Kablusiak or Shuvina Ashoona take full advantage of new platforms, filmmaker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril exerts significant influence and writers of fiction and non-fiction have become required reading, including Tanya Tagaq, Sheila Watt-Cloutier and Mini Aodla Freeman.¹ As regards representing the Inuit voice, author Taqralik Partridge once commented:

To me, it's just about being human . . . I mean my roots are from there so it is often grounded in the Inuit experience. But it's about the personal. People tend to think of the Inuit as either these savages or as these great, noble creatures. I like to write about the personal stuff that's universal to everyone. Sometimes Inuits get into deep shit, just like everybody else. (Anonymous 2007)

Many have highlighted the extent to which Inuit art-making is not only important for cultural resilience, but also able to challenge the complex “colonial legacy with grace [and] humor” while addressing various “issues and impacts” (Igloliorte 2011: 115, 116).²

In an article about Partridge from a decade ago, the interviewer commented admiringly that “[t]here is so much silence about her” (Ferrier 2012³), but the presence of a certain reserve does not mean being without a voice, or being in any way passive. Of Inuit heritage on her father's side and Scottish on her mother's, Partridge is a spoken-word and textile artist, throat-singer, actor and curator, who is gaining well-deserved attention across Canada and beyond. She has been rightly described as possessing “a keen ability to carefully hold the heart of a story” (Nunatsiaq News 2019⁴), drawing on a mix of influences from hip-hop to Inuit storytelling. It has elsewhere been noted that, as a poet, Partridge “développe dans ses textes un discours contemporain sur les relations Nord-Sud, sur la perte de la culture et sur le corps de la femme” [develops in her texts a contemporary discourse on North-South relations, on cultural loss and the female body] (Bertrand 2018: 31⁵). Nonetheless, she has long resisted mak-

ing broad generalisations about Inuit and Inuit culture, preferring instead to ground any commentary firmly in her own experience as an individual (Martin and Partridge 2016). Overall, Partridge's work functions as a form of self-expression that, by attending to "the spirit of the north in its journey into urban Canada as if it were a flame" (Ferrier 2012), gestures toward a way to "heal and fortify" (Igloliorte 2011: 122).

Curved against the hull of a peterhead,⁶ a slender volume of 19 poems that "wrestle with colonialism and racial violence while also reflecting a rich sensory imagery" (Partridge 2020a; the book blurb can be found at <<https://www.publication-studio.biz/books/curved-against-the-hull/>>) was released in January 2020. By May, Partridge's first published book – she has expressed ambivalence toward publishing and mainstream literary fame (Martin and Partridge 2016: 213) – figured in a list of "six Inuit literature greats" in *Inuit Art Quarterly*, along with the work of Aodla Freeman, Tagaq, Watt-Cloutier, Mitjarjuk Nappaaluk and Aviaq Johnston (MacDonald 2020b⁷). Although Partridge composed the entire book in English, translated versions are provided for three poems. One – "after an argument" (the book's title is drawn from this poem) – appears alongside an adaptation into French by Quebec poet and musician Richard Desjardins, which raises questions about translation from one colonial language into another that are certainly worth exploring. The present article, however, focuses on the two poems accompanied by Inuktitut versions, translated by Ida Saunders and Looee Arreak respectively, which can be read as a critique of capitalist destruction of the Arctic, as well as of the global environment.

Work in the field of eco-translation (Scott 2015, Cronin 2017, Hu 2020) offers new ways of considering translational acts as part of an ecological whole, implicated in the sustainability of humans and the environment in which we live, alongside a diversity of cultures. Cronin argues for the centrality of translation "as a body of ideas and a set of practices" to any thinking about "interconnectedness and vulnerability in the age of human-induced climate change" (Cronin 2017: 1). He rightly notes that translation offers speakers of minority languages a certain "control over what, when and how texts might be translated into or out of their languages" (Cronin 2017: 2). As we see in Partridge's book, for those Inuit who are not necessarily themselves fluent in Inuktitut, translation can offer a means for starting to take back control and for advancing the healing process. The language related to nature and the natural world – how it is employed and especially how it is translated – proves relevant to the discussion here, as does the activity of translation, which highlights the inter-relatedness critical to survival, literally and metaphorically speaking, for Inuit and non-Inuit alike.

2. Taqralik Partridge: Life and career

Born in Montreal, but residing (at the time this article is being written) in Guovdageaidnu / Kautokeino, a village in Sápmi, northern Norway, Partridge knows much of Canada firsthand:

I've lived everywhere. It's because my parents are Bahá'ís so they ended up moving to Haida Gwai'i for that. We lived there until I was four or five, so I went to kindergarten there with little Haida kids. After that, we went to Rankin [Inlet] and we lived there for about four years. Then we lived in Iqaluit for only six months, and then we went to Kuujuaq. (Martin and Partridge 2016: 195)

After returning to southern Quebec in the early 2000s, Partridge worked as Director of Communications for Avataq, the Nunavik Inuit cultural institute based in Montreal.⁸ In 2008, she co-founded that city's *Tusarniq* festival. Having been guest editor of *Arc Poetry Magazine* in 2014, Partridge recently served as Editor-at-Large for *Inuit Art Quarterly* – the first Indigenous editor in that journal's history – and remains an *IAQ* Advisory Committee member. In May 2020, she was named Director of Nordic Lab, an initiative at Ottawa's Galerie SAW Gallery, in partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts (MacDonald 2020a⁹), and has recently been involved with the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Partridge did not start writing until 2004 (Martin and Partridge 2016: 196), but her work has since been widely appreciated and, more recently, published (in *Inuktitut*, ArtsEverywhere, and CBC Books). In 2010, “Igloolik” won first prize in the Quebec Writers’ Federation’s annual competition and was printed in the magazine *Maisonneuve* (Rogers 2010¹⁰); translations of this short story have appeared in French and in Swedish.¹¹ In September 2012, she appeared at Sweden’s Gothenburg book fair, on a panel titled “The Arctic – the Northern North: the Sami, the Inuit and the promotion of Indigenous languages,” which dealt with Inuit literature and the challenges of teaching minority languages. Her “Fifteen Lakota Visitors” was among four runners-up in the 2018 CBC short story competition,¹² and a story titled “One Old Woman” appeared in *IAQ* the subsequent year.

Partridge's work is rooted in both the urban Inuit experience and traditional culture. Best known for spoken word ("Battery" and "I Picked Berries" are available on YouTube; see Appendix), she has frequently incorporated *katatjaniq* – traditional Inuit throat singing – which she performed for a decade across North America with Nina Segalowitz (born Anne-Marie Thrasher). As a throat singer alongside fellow Nunavimmiuq Evie Mark (acknowledged in *curved against* as having taught Partridge about Inuktitut), she toured with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra to three Nunavik communities (George and Noble 2008¹³).¹⁴ Further, Partridge's throat-singing skills have accompanied silent films as part of performances with Les Productions Troublemakers / Ensemble Gabriel Thibauddau in Belgium and Luxembourg.

In the visual arts, Partridge co-curated an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario titled *Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak and Tim Pitsiulak*, and the Art Gallery of Guelph's exhibit on *Qautamaat / Every day / Everyday*, which showcased images by Nunavimmiut and urban Inuit photographers that had originally circulated on social media, such as the work of Tarralik Duffy, Barry Pottle, Ida Saunders and Laakkuluk Williamson-Bathory.¹⁵ Her own textile art was included in the exhibit ᐱᓕᑦᑦᑦ ᑕᑏᐱᓐᑦ ᓄᓇᑕᐱᓐᑦ / *Among all these Tundras*, which showed at various locales including Concordia University's Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery and as an official selection at the 2020 Sydney Biennale. Partridge has also graced the movie screen, portraying Winnie, the mother of protagonist Elsa, in the 2019 film *Restless River*, adapted from the 1970 novel *La rivière sans repos* by Franco-Manitoban author Gabrielle Roy,¹⁶ and co-directed by Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeline Piujuq Ivalu.

3. Inuit language and / in *curved against*

It has been said that “Inuit writers and performers, by gearing the majority of their work toward Inuit audiences, have largely resisted the generic and linguistic demands of the South” (Martin and Partridge 2016: 192), prioritising the responses of Inuit audiences and insisting on the primacy of Inuktitut. Filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk is the leading proponent of this approach, with his uncompromising focus on and involvement with the community in films such as *Atanarjuat* or *Maliglutit*, which have nonetheless found success with viewers and critics worldwide. Having lived many years outside of the North, Partridge uses English as her medium yet remains very much aware of what it means to write and perform solely in that language:

In a way, because it's in English, it's not really being written for Inuit – especially in Nunavik, because my experience has been that people from Nunavik are not really into it. You know, except for the ones who really speak English well. They're not really into it, and I don't blame them. I mean, English is not the language of choice. If I really want to have an Inuit audience, I need to do things in Inuktitut. (Martin and Partridge 2016: 201)

Although she claims not to “speak Inuktitut well enough to really write well” (Martin and Partridge 2016: 201), Partridge has long made use of occasional words and phrases in Inuktitut, like Tagaq or Norma Dunning do, two other Inuit writers who write in English. Beyond merely signifying the North, such vocabulary is used strategically to reaffirm a properly Inuit identity:

De cette façon, l'auteure s'associe à l'auditoire inuit en créant un espace intime que seuls les initiés peuvent pénétrer, et affirme du même coup son appartenance à la communauté inuite devant le public allochtone et autochtone." (Duvicq 2013)

[In this way, the author associates herself with the Inuit audience by crafting an intimate space accessible to initiates alone, and likewise affirms to the allophone and Indigenous public her membership in the Inuit community.]

In 2017, Partridge gave a presentation at Carleton University about “how to weave Indigenous languages back into the fabric of everyday life,” including the struggle to reclaim Inuktitut within her own family (Abdo and Partridge 2017; see Appendix). More recently, she participated in the naming circle for Winnipeg’s revamped Inuit Art Centre, now known as Qaumajuq (Inuktitut for “It is (day)light, it is bright”) along with various elders and knowledge keepers representing fluent speakers of Anishinnaabemowin, Nêhiyawêwin, Dakota and Michif, as well as all four regions of Inuit Nunangat (IAQ 2020¹⁷).

The prominence accorded to the Inuit language in *curved against* is immediate and powerful. Following a brief foreword by Nehiyaw [Cree] artist and cultural facilitator Jimmy Elwood, the book opens with a full page of Inuktitut syllabics. The text is in fact Ida Saunder's translation into the Ungava Bay dialect of "untitled (we saw the multitudes)": "ᐱᑦᓂᕐᓇᑦ ᐅᑦᓄᑦᓇᑦ" [one that, unusually, has not been given a name] (page 13). In this first collection, Partridge makes the deliberate choice to have two of her poems, both concerning ecological damage resulting from colonialism or the industrialisation that accompanies colonialism, appear in the Inuit language. Her original poem appears on the next page over (page 14) and is followed again by the Inuktitut translation, this time in a Romanised version (page 15).¹⁸ The source text of this first poem is thus to be found not only *after* the target-language version, but

does not have a particular word to indicate “title.” A straightforward solution would be to use **tai-jau-gusiq** [way of being designated / referred to]. Saunders could have written **tai-jau-gusi-qa-ngngi-tuq** [one that doesn’t have a way of being designated / referred to], but opted more creatively for **atsi-jau-mmai-tuq** [one that has not been given a name, contrary to what is usually done]. The verbal base, **atsi-** [to give a name] is followed by the passive **-jau-** and a specific form of the negative, **-mmait-**, which includes the notion of a deviation from the norm.

The body of the poem, which comprises six sentences over a total of twenty lines, speaks about a “we,” and all that surrounds and encompasses this “we.” In Inuktitut, the pronoun **uvagut** [we] does not appear; rather, it is the verbal endings that express the first-person plural (**-vugut**, **-tsuta**), as well as the possessive endings (**-vut**, **-vunnik**). But who is this “we”? The Inuktitut responds with a single ambiguous word: it is the *Inuit*, in either the narrow sense of the Indigenous peoples of the North American Arctic, or the wider sense of human beings. The first five sentences (lines 1-16) essentially say that this “we,” in the face of surrounding multiplicity, used to have a certain belief (**uppi-ri-jaq** [something believed], **-juri-tsugit** [[we] thinking that they]). The choice of the combination **-tu-vini-u-** [be a former *x* that [believe something]] to mark the past tense suggests a rupture: the belief is no more. And what was that belief? “We” thought that the multiplicity of *things* was infinite and that it would be at “our” disposal for all eternity.

The *things* are as follows: **uumaju-it** [animals] (for “creatures,” line 4), **nuna-it** [lands] (for “land,” line 6), **sulli-vi-it** [places to spring from] (for “wells,” line 12), and **tirtuq** [breath, air] (for “air,” line 13). **Tirtuq** is a somewhat refined word, less common than **silu** [air, atmosphere, weather, outside, etc.]. In an unpublished document by the Kativik School Board (Nivaxie 1993), it is defined as follows: “**Taannataga inuup taisigusillaringa anirnimik tirtuq** [this is the real way of designating the air that a human being breathes: *tirtuq*].” The supposed infinity of things is expressed in Inuktitut by various strategies, such as:

amisu-u-tsa-tillugit [them being very numerous] (for “multitudes”)
isu-qa-ngngi-tu-gialla-it [things that, again and again, don’t have an end] (for “hosts of”)
-limaa-t (which appears three times) [all the *x*-s]
-gasa-it [many *x*-s together] (for “schools of”)
nataa-qa-ngngi-tu-it [containers that have no bottom] (for “bottomless”)
kisi-ga-tsa-u-ngi-mmarit-tu-it [things that are really not to be counted] (for “million”)

The idea that the infinity of things exists for “us,” without any limit in time, is rendered by the following forms:

atu-ra-tsa-ri-niar-ta-vut [our things to be used in the future] (for “for our consumption”)
tata-i-guti-tsa-vunnik [our potential means for filling] (for “to fill”)
nugun-nia-rani [not running out in the future]
nungu-laursima-nia-rani-lu [and never running out in the future] (for “never would it run out”)

Sentences two (lines 5-6), three (line 7) and four (lines 8-9) describe a couple of scenes in which the “we” is absent. In the first, the flight of a flock of birds (**timmia-t**) is compared (**suurlu** [as if]) to the movement of a shoulder rising from the land into the air (**tirtuq** again). In Inuktitut, the land this time corresponds to **nuna-rjuaq** ([the

big land]), i.e. Earth. The stylistic figure **nunarjua-p tui-nga** [of Earth, its shoulder], a catachresis, can be interpreted as meaning that Earth is an animate being whose life follows its course independent of “us.” In the second scene, fish (**iqalu-it**) turn in the current (**inirra-niq**, derived from **inirra-** [move forward, travel], and the sun (**siqiniq**) makes their scales (**kavisi-it**) sparkle brightly. The beings in this scene are all independent of any reference to “us.” The specific marker of the past used for the movement of the fish, **-nniq-**, clearly signifies that the speaker was not present, thus cannot situate the moment in time. What both scenes indicate is that the “things” were not made “for us,” and that “we” are ultimately not the centre of the world.

The sixth and final sentence (lines 17-20) poses two questions linked to the fact around which the poem is structured: today (**ullumi**), “we” can see (**taku-**) the limit (**killi-** [edge, border]) of what we previously took to be infinite and eternal. The first question is: how (**qanuq**) can it be thus (**taimait-** [be like that])? The idea of consumption (line 4) is certainly a clue, but the poem leaves it unanswered. The second question is: how can it be that we are today incapable of seeing this (**taku-gunna-ngit-sugu**)? If we assume the “limit” (**killi-**) to be the object of the verb, there might seem to be a contradiction with the previous question, but what we cannot see is actually that we do see the limit – in other words, we cannot see ourselves. As will be shown below, the other poem translated into Inuktitut, “Sea Woman,” states more explicitly that human beings, or at least something within them, are responsible for the fact that today we can see the “limit” and this highlights the blindness of human beings regarding the image that they have of themselves.

5. “ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱ / Sea Woman / Imaup Arnangata Uqallanninga”

While the earlier poem asks how it is possible that today we see the limit of the things around us, which we had believed to be eternally at our disposal, this second one replies that the Western / Southern capitalist ambition runs up against a much greater force: the natural world, which resists and will survive it. “Sea Woman” appears midway through the collection, first as a translation into Inuktitut syllabics (pages 38-39), then the English original (40-41), followed by a Romanised version of the Inuktitut (42-43), as in the aforementioned case. This “translation / adaptation” (page 39) into the South Baffin dialect was done by Looee Arreak.²⁷ The Iqaluit-based Arreak, originally from Pangnirtung / Pangniqtuuq, is an award-winning singer who performs gospel, traditional and contemporary Inuit music in Inuktitut. She is said to be “passionate about Inuit language preservation and creativity,” and focuses in her song-writing on “themes of hope, strength, resilience, playfulness and a love of family and land” (Qaggiavuut n.d., b²⁸). Along with Susan Aglukark, Arreak was a featured singer at the 1999 signing of the amended version of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

“Sea Woman” was commissioned and performed as spoken word for the theatrical production *Kiviuiq Returns: An Inuit Epic*, produced by Iqaluit’s Qaggiavuut,²⁹ a grassroots collaborative in Iqaluit supporting Inuit artists while advocating for better local infrastructure. The poem avoids clichéd references to the sea deity Sanna [the one down there] (known to non-Inuit as Sedna). Partridge, a mother to four daughters, focuses on female empowerment in *curved against*, which opens with the fol-

lowing dedication: “For all my sisters – in memory of our sister Pasha” (5). It is also significant that both of the Inuit translators with whom Partridge works are women, and that the 14-part production of *Kiviuq Returns* is gender-bending in nature, with a main character played by male and female actors.

The production was directed by Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, a well-known performer in her own right of Greenlandic (Kalaallit) and British heritage, born in Saskatoon, but currently based in Iqaluit. Having been a founding member of Qaggiavuut, she now serves as its Artistic Director. As Laakkuluk wrote in the play’s program in January 2019:

Inuktitut is the language of Kiviuq Returns. Let it wash over you. Look for the intent, listen for the emotion, hear the cracks of smiles, the lines of sorrow. Feel the corners and curves of our holophrastic way of speaking. Close your glottis around the sounds “qi-qu-qa,” arch your tongue towards the roof of your mouth for “gi-gu-ga,” and hiss without using your teeth for “lli-llu-lla.” Inuktitut is a river; it flows from a lake that is our histories and dreams, it bends around the land that is our daily lives, hardships and joys and it pours into the ocean that is the working of our minds, our creativity. With this performance we immerse you in our language...Inuktitut. (Qaggiavuut n.d., a³⁰)

Laakkuluk goes on to encourage audience members to read the storyline, provided in English, then to give themselves over to the immersive experience of watching the performance in a language that few of them will understand. She continues:

by being together in this theatre, we have all engaged in an agreement: you agree that it is vitally important to hear and see Inuit theatre professionals working in their own language and we agree to work hard on expanding our use of the language, reclaiming the space it has always taken in this place called Canada. (Qaggiavuut n.d., a)

The poem “Sea Woman” appears to have created more challenges for its translator than was the case for “untitled,” with which it forms an ensemble. First of all, the rendition of the final two lines is rather confusing. In the penultimate line, “you will have your due” becomes **ullu-up isu-anut tiki-tau-jumaaq-putit**, [to/for/until/by (?) the end of the day, you will be reached]. The last line, “and I, I will have mine,” becomes **uvanga-lu pi-nnik pi-jumaaq-punga** [me too, I will get my thing(s)]. Further, there are a couple of notable omissions, as well as various transcription errors. In personal correspondence (June 1, 2020), Partridge notes that “there are a few mistakes in the roman orthography, but it couldn’t be helped for that first round that was already printed.” By contrast, the translation of “untitled” contains no spelling errors in either the syllabics or the Romanised version – the transcription is perfect, which is no mean feat for a text published in Inuktitut. In this second poem, there are almost three dozen typos in both the syllabics and the Romanised version, including:

- *uqallaaninga > uqallanninga [her discussion]
- *qutiniqpaap > quttinniqaap [of the highest one]
- *uvannik > uvannit [from me]
- *qausirnatuq > qausirnaqtuq [that causes to be wet]
- *natirname > natirnaami [in the plain]

Certain errors appear only in the Romanised script, e.g.:

- *kaatillutit > kaattillutit [when you were hungry]
- *nunarjuaq > nunarjuap [of the Earth]
- *kulaaqutikka > kuugalaqutikka [my small rivers]

Such issues aside, there are many translational decisions meriting analysis, beginning with the title. In English, “Sea Woman” suggests that the poem will be about the famous sea deity who, according to Inuit tradition, controls all marine animals. For the Inuit, this deity is known by various names, depending on the region. In the southern part of Baffin Island, she is traditionally called Sanna [the one down there], which Western anthropologists transformed into Sedna. Looee Arreak’s translation avoids using this name, opting for **ima-up arna-nga** [of the water, its woman], which does not correspond to any existing dialectal name. Here, it is the water itself (**imaq**), the ultimate feminine element (the reference is to Bachelard’s work, see Farrell 1999), that runs through the entire poem.

The title as translated into Inuktitut specifies something beyond what the English says: **ima-up arna-ngata uqallan-ni-nga** means “of the water, of its woman, her discussion.” It is thus the Woman of the Water who will herself speak, rather than yet another man going on about Sedna. It is this woman that we hear speaking in the first person throughout the poem. The version in Inuktitut uses the pronouns **uvanga** [I/me], nine times), **uvannut** [to me], **uvannit** [from me], and 33 inflected endings that express the first-person singular: **-vunga** [I], **-punga** [I], **-llunga** [me -ing], **-nanga** [me not -ing], **-pagit** [I you], **-vara** [I it], **-pakka** [I them], **-nnga** [you me!], **-kka** [my x-s], **-nnik** [my, my x-s], **-mma** [of my x-s] and **-nni** [in my x-s]. In line 15 of the English poem, the woman identifies herself: “I am lowly water.” In Inuktitut (line 14, following a line return not present in the English), this becomes **attit-tu-u-llunga ima-u-vunga** [I am water, me being one that is low]. The woman appears to be a personification of the strength of the natural world, represented by water in all its forms: **kuuk** [river] (“river and stream”), **kuuk tariu-mut** [river to the sea] (“estuary”), **katin-niq** [[river] confluence] (“tributary”), **kuugalaq** [small river] (“creek”), **tasiq** [lake] (“lake and pond”), **sirmiq** [ice coating] (“glacier”), **silaluk** [rain], **qiukkanga-niq** [dew], **sikuar-niq** [ice forming] (“sleet,” oddly), **aputi** [snow on the ground] (“snow”), **nataqquna-it** [hailstones], **ingirra-ni-up uli-vijjuar-ni-nga** [of the current, its extreme tide] (“tide and flood”), **siku** [ice], **imiq-ta-vik** [water source] (“well”), **kinna-aluk** [big liquid run off by sweating] (“effluent”), **tariuq** [sea] and **nuvujaq** [cloud]. Water is also present in a great many verbal forms: **imi-ruk-** [want to drink] (“thirst”), **kuvi-** [pour], **kuvi-jau-** [be poured], **tatsiq-** [be foggy] (“mist”), **qausir-naq-** [cause to be wet] (“mist lain heavy”), **irruq-** [rinse out] (“wash through”), **qissa-a-** [sprinkle, or splash, splatter, several times] (“grief”) and **ii-** [swallow] (“suck up”). On the other hand, all reference to liquid is lost in the translation of the verb “to course,” which becomes **aqqusaaq-** [pass by].

The links between water and the rest of the natural world are explicit in the references to **nuna** [land] (“ground”), **nuna-rjuaq** [Earth] (“earth”), **natirnaaq** [plain, flat ground] (“valley,” oddly), **anuri** [wind], **taqqiq** [moon] and, more tangentially, **ullaaq** [morning] (“early morning”). Line 24 references the shore on which the water leaves its mark, but this line is not translated into Inuktitut. Lines 17-20 in English specify one of the links between water and the natural world, when the woman says that she has no voice (**nipi**) other than that of the natural elements that displace her and that she passes through. The translator appears to have misunderstood lines 19-20: “[I have no voice but] what the rush down, down, down / into the earth can tell” becomes **sukat-tu-mik ammut, ammut, ammut / nuna-rjua-p uqa-runnaq-ta-nganut** [quickly down, down, down / into what the Earth can tell].

Whom is the Woman of the Water addressing? The poem's second protagonist is never named and never speaks. In Inuktitut, it appears only in the inflectional endings that express the second-person singular: **-putit** [you], **-tillutit** [you -ing], **-kkit** [you them!], **-nnga** [you me!], **-it** [your], **-tit** [your x-s], **-nnik** [your, your x-s], **-nni** [in your x-s], **-nnut** [to your], and **-vit** [of your]. Nonetheless, this addressee has a face (**kiinaq**), as well as an intentionality expressed in verbal forms: **qini-innaq-pak-** [do nothing but seek all the time] ("[be] always looking to"), **pi-jumatu-** [want very much, want all the time] (in the word for "greed"), **pi-juma-** [want] (in the word for "desire") and **-sugi-** [think that] (in the long word for "[things] you thought you could never live without").

This personification is clearly that of Western / Southern capitalism, with its fixation on unlimited growth and hoarding of goods that can only be accomplished at the expense of the natural world, including human beings. We recognise this ambition by its works: it builds towers, **puqtu-ju-quti-tit sanauga-it** [your manufactured objects of great size], and produces many objects that are both appealing and harmful: **sana-ja-alu-tit pi-jarniq-tu-t** [your damned made things that are pleasant to get] ("the slick of your industry"). It pollutes: **sani-tit** [your rubbish] ("your tailings"). It injures: **tuqu-nnaq-tu-quti-tit** [your ones that cause to die] ("your poisons"). It causes the glaciers to melt: **nungu-liq-tu-t** [depleting] ("disappearing"). The English poem explicitly states that it causes deaths ("your dead") – this becomes **timi-mini-it** [your dead body], in the singular. (Line 36, which contains "your brackish waste" is omitted, along with "discarded" in line 44.)

Capitalist ambitions can also be recognised in the image of being ready to build monuments to a self-determined glory, which becomes **piu-ni-nnut iqqauma-jau-jjuti-ssa-nnik sana-gajaq-putit** [for your good, you would build your means for being remembered]. There is also the question of having forgotten the very essence of what makes such conditions possible: without the natural world, represented by the Woman of the Water, nothing could exist or prosper as it does. This is the basis of the references to amniotic fluid (**anaana-vit illia-ngani tigumia-lauq-pagit** [in your mother's womb I held you]), water found in food (**kaat-tillutit niri-ti-tau-lauq-putit** [when you were hungry, you were fed]) and ever-present water (**arraagu-nnik amisu-nik ajja-lauq-pagit** [throughout your many years, I carried you], to render "through all your years, I carry you."

Movement comes to symbolise capitalist ambitions: going up (**qummut** [upward], which appears six times), always seeking an opportunity to climb (**majurar-vi-ssaq** [future opportunity for climbing]), aiming for the highest tree (**napaaqtu-it quttin-niqpaa-nganut** [to the tallest of the trees]), to the highest of heights (**quttin-niqpaa-p qula-anut** [to the space above the highest one]), above the clouds (**nuvuja-it ungata-anut** [to the space beyond the clouds]), to the heavens (**qilam-mut** [to the dome of the sky], to render "the stratosphere"). With a hint of the phallic, the monument would be a tower stretching all the way to the firmament (**qila-up killi-nganut tikit-tu-mik quttit-tigi-ju-mik** [one that reaches the edge of the sky, one that is as high as [it]]).

An inverse movement symbolises the Woman of the Water's power: always descending (**ammut** [downward], which appears five times). This is clearly stated in two repeated lines (7-8, 43-44): **nuvuja-nik nuna-mut tiki-tit-ti-suu-ngu-vunga** ("I bring the clouds to the ground") and **ammut ingirra-suu-ngu-vunga taimannat**

(“I am always traveling down”). Line 29 indicates this place infiltrated by water from the sky: **iti-niqpaa-ngit imiq-ta-vi-quti-mma nuna-up ilu-ani** [the deepest ones of my water sources, inside the earth] (“my deepest sweetest wells”). No translation is offered for “sweetest,” which has no simple equivalent in Inuktitut.

And what does the Woman of the Water say to her anonymous addressee? In short: my movement is stronger than yours; the power I wield will overcome you (lines 33-42). The sole verb whose ending expresses an action by the addressee upon the Woman is repeated three times in line 47: **kuvi-nnga kuvi-nnga amma kuvi-kkanni-nnga** [pour me and pour me and pour me again] – in other words, keep on exploiting and degrading the natural world, keep on building towers. As indicated in line 13, the natural world will win in the end: **ullu-til-lu aniguq-pata timi-mini-it tigu-kkanni-rumaa-ri-vara** [and when your days are over, your dead body, I will take it back].

6. “Raising questions” (by way of conclusion)

It has been noted that Partridge “isn’t merging two worlds, so much as keeping them in constant conversation” (Leventhal 2007³¹), meaning the different worlds of North and South, although the sentiment could apply to the use of more than one linguistic sphere. Partridge’s choices in working with Inuktitut translators reflect Laakkuluk’s concept of “reclaiming the space” first held by the Inuit language across the northern parts of the land now known as Canada, in deliberate resistance against the loss of Inuit stories, histories and language. In *curved against the hull of a peterhead*, the English-language poems are “wrapped in between” the layers of syllabics and Romanised Inuktitut.³² In personal correspondence (June 1, 2020), Partridge defines this as “intentional.”

It is important that Partridge uses “translation / adaptation” to describe the versions by Saunders and Arreak, as well as Desjardins’s French rendition of “after an argument.” Bastin notes that the second term “may embrace numerous vague notions such as appropriation, domestication, imitation, rewriting, and so on. Strictly speaking, the concept of adaptation requires recognition of translation as non-adaptation, a somehow more constrained mode of transfer” (2011: 3). This suggests the poet’s permission for her translators to embrace a somewhat less constrained transfer of her artistic work into Inuktitut. In effect, it is a case of new poems for new audiences, some of whom may be inspired to learn Inuktitut or to improve their grasp of the language.

In 2019, Partridge stated that her work as a whole “is really just about raising questions about Inuit, and Inuit life, Inuit experience” (Inuit Art Foundation 2019³³), demanding recognition for those long suppressed by settler culture. Her choice to foreground Inuit-language renditions, with the English original buried between the two Inuit versions, is innovative and deeply political. This choice, which upends simplistic hierarchies, underscores that Inuktitut is as valid a literary medium as either of Canada’s official languages. And having the Inuktitut appear first, in a script impenetrable to virtually all non-Inuit, makes the point even more strongly. Including both a syllabic and a Romanised version allows access by a wider range of Inuit readers, a gesture toward the diversity of Inuit experience across Canada that also acknowledges the stated preference of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (September 2019; see <

ter-chart.pdf> and the discussion in articles such as: <<https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/national-inuit-org-approves-standard-roman-orthography-for-all-dialects/>>) for all Inuit in this country to set aside their regional spelling traditions in favour of a single alphabetic writing system, with a view to streamlining language revitalisation efforts.

The diverse body of work produced by Partridge offers a unique vantage point on the vast shifts experienced by Inuit in recent decades. Although some changes have been positive, this journey has “left its scars” (Watt-Cloutier 2015: xviii). As an urban Inuk, raised without fluency in Inuktitut, but nurturing the language in various ways through her craft, Partridge “bridges old and new, north and south” (Watt-Cloutier 2015: 316). In the program notes for *Kiviuk Returns*, Laakkaluk comments:

As a group of Indigenous people who have faced the theft of our lands, culture, spirituality, music, stories, histories and language and who rage against the colonized pull of suicide and loss, we wrap ourselves in the practice of Inuktitut theatre. Our repeated actions on stage are healing. Our connection between our elders and young people is deepened. Humour balances our sadnesses. This play creates safety like the blocks of sod that insulated the houses of our ancestors. (Qaggiavuut n.d., a)

Linguistic action can be as healing on the page as on the stage – an act of resistance against forced assimilation and language / cultural loss via colonisation.³⁴ Through the deliberate and fascinating choices made in *curved against the hull of a peterhead*, Partridge and the translators with whom she collaborates provide a pointed response to Watt-Cloutier’s warning that “our very cultures are now at risk of melting away” (2015: 323). The poet “shows us how to collect ourselves for a more knowing future” (Ruddock 2020³⁵) by underscoring how Inuit culture, knowledge and language remain valuable and empowering.

NOTES

1. Partridge voiced the audiobook of Aodla Freeman’s *Life among the Qallunaat* in 2015.
2. Iglooliorte’s subject here is visual art, but the point is valid for other Inuit cultural practices.
3. FERRIER, Ian (2012): “Taqralik Partridge.” Litlive.ca 5. <<http://www.litlive.ca/story/448>>. Accessed 30 October 2020.
4. NUNATSIAQ NEWS (2019): “Inuit Art Quarterly hires its first Inuk editor.” *Nunatsiaq News*. 22 January. <<https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/inuit-art-quarterly-hires-its-first-inuk-editor/>>. Accessed 8 November 2020.
5. BERTRAND, Katrine (2018): “L’inuktitut et le corps-vocal dans le cinéma inuk: la décolonisation par le poème cinématographique.” *TransculturAl* 10.1: 29-44.
6. Peterheads are fishing boats commonly used in northern Canada.
7. MACDONALD, Jessica (2020b): “6 Inuit book besties: couch content from the IAQ.” *Inuit Art Quarterly*. 15 May. <<https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/iaq-online/6-inuit-book-besties>>. Accessed 8 November 2020.
8. Nunavik ([great land], also known as Northern Quebec), Nunavut, and Nunatsiavut together form Inuit Nunangat or the Inuit homeland across Arctic Canada. Those from Nunavik are called Nunavimmiut (singular: Nunavimmiuq).
9. MACDONALD, Jessica (2020a): “Taqralik Partridge named Director of Nordic Lab.” *Inuit Art Quarterly*. 12 May. <<https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/iaq-online/taqralik-partridge-named-director-of-nordic>>. Accessed 11 November 2020.
10. ROGERS, Sarah (2010): “Nunavik spoken word poet picks up top writing award.” *Nunatsiaq News*. 7 September. <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/101064_nunavik_spoken_word_artist_picks_up_top_writing_award/>. Accessed 11 November 2020.
11. See Pronovost 2014 and Sørensen 2015 in the Appendix. Also, one of her poems has been published in both French and Inuktitut translations; see Gosselin 2010 in the Appendix.

32. "Sea Woman" features in "Magnetic North," an online presentation hosted by the British Museum (see Walling 2020 in the Appendix). Footage of Partridge reading her poem in English is interspersed with otherworldly scenes of the Greenlandic mask dancer Elisabeth Heilmann Blind (13:30-17:17). She then reads "untitled" in Inuktitut rendering (1:09:41-11:27), labelled as a "translation" in the credits (1:24:19), while the English original scrolls on screen. Partridge also gives a reading of "Colonization is a Pyramid Scheme" (45:50-51:00). The accompanying brochure can be found at: BRITISH MUSEUM (2020): "Magnetic North: Voices from the Indigenous Arctic." *Border Crossings*. 3 December. <https://issuu.com/originsfestival/docs/magnetic_north_digital_programme>. Accessed 24 December 2020.
33. INUIT ART FOUNDATION (2019): "Artist spotlight: Taqralik Partridge." 11 December. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBi_ziP7_Aw>. Accessed 8 November 2020.
34. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action 13-17 explicitly address the need to counter the suppression / banning of Indigenous languages and cultures.
35. RUDDOCK, Jesse (2020): "Taqralik Partridge, curved against the hull of a peterhead." *Border Crossings* 155. <<https://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/curved-against-the-hull-of-a-peterhead-by-taqralik-partridge>>. Accessed 11 November 2020.

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- WATT-CLOUTIER, Sheila (2015). *The Right to be Cold: One woman's fight to protect the Arctic and save the planet from climate change*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Appendix: Selected publications and performances by Taqralik Partridge

- ABDO, Nahla, and Taqralik PARTRIDGE (2017): "Language fails me." Carleton University. 17 October. <<https://www2.carleton.ca/socanth/cu-events/language-fails-taqralik-partridge>>. Accessed 24 December 2020.

