

THE PERSISTENCE OF ABORIGINAL ORAL LITERATURE IN THE LADÉROUTE-PERRON-MARION FAMILY GROUP

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The writing of this article took a long and circuitous path, and I offer it today as a reminder that the stories of the Elders can inform the lives of their descendants regardless of where they are in time and space. For it is through the stories, even snatches of stories, like the trail of pebbles through the forests of fairy tales of old, that we can understand and appreciate our cultures, our communities, and the society where we live.

The stories in this article came to light between 1980-1987, first in the context of my research for my Master's degree in Ethnology at Laval University, and afterwards during my personal search for a better understanding of my Métis ancestors¹. The titles of the stories, as well as the names of the characters in them were given by my informants.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. This article is a reflection of the current state of my research and any errors are mine alone.

I have divided the stories into three main groups: myths and legends, animal stories, stories featuring the Transformer Wesakejak, and finally, animal stories where Wesakejak is absent.

Wesakejak (or Ouista-kes-chok as he was identified for me in French), the Trickster/Transformer, is a well-known character in Aboriginal stories and legends everywhere in Canada, including Saskatchewan. In 1984, the Department of Education of that province published a teachers' guide designed to accompany a 13 episode television series of Wesakejak legends.²

¹ « Cachés en pleine vue : les Métis francophones et la clandestinité comme stratégie de résistance et de survivance identitaire : le cas du groupement familial Ladéroute-Perron-Marion » a paper read at the international colloquium « Résistances et convergences : stratégies identitaires des francophones et des Métis de l'Ouest canadien », Centre canadien de recherche sur les francophonies en milieu minoritaire (CRFM de l'Institut français, University of Regina), Regina, Saskatchewan, 2005.

² Saskatchewan Education, *Tales of Wesakechak*.

MYTHS OR LEGENDS

Tête-de-piche-de-kwan: the Rolling Head

The very ancient legend of the *Rolling Head* is well known among the Cree people³, but also among other peoples in North and South America⁴. This legend was told to me by two different generations of the Perron-Ladéroute-Marion family group, first by a son and a grandson of Alexina Marion and subsequently by Joséphine Perron, my father's youngest sister.

According to these informants, the legend was told in shorter or longer form, depending on the amount of time available to the storyteller, or who the listeners were, including children. The long form has three components: the Pursuit, the Appearance of Genosays, and the Wolf-Boy.⁵ The version that follows, as it was told to me in 1981, includes only elements of the first component.

TÊTE-DE-PICHE-DE-KWAN: THE ROLLING HEAD

Once there was a man who married a beautiful woman. She was indeed very beautiful but lazy and capricious, too. The man suspected his wife of being unfaithful to him, but he had no proof, as he never succeeded in catching her in the act, and his two children could not shed any light on the situation either. However, during one hunting expedition, he got lucky. He succeeded in quickly killing some game and got home before his usual time of return.

There, he surprised his wife with her lover – his own brother. Enraged, he killed them both and cut off his wife's head. It immediately became covered with snakes.

Fearing that his wife would cast a spell on him, or that the police would catch him, he fled far away, taking the two children with him. But the Head, still covered with snakes, pursued them everywhere, calling to them and saying, "The Head that tumbles, the Head that Rolls." Thus, they went through forests,

³ Louise Bernice Halfe Skydancer: <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/view/10200/10548>; Carl Ray and James Stevens, pp. 47-59.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, pp. 54-55, p. 92, p. 94, p. 99. The legend is known from the Arctic Circle to the Terra del Fuego, he says. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, Eds., pp. 209-21; pp. 230-237.

⁵ Carl Ray and James Stevens, pp. 47-59.

crossed meadows and sloughs, always fleeing and always pursued by the Rolling Head.

Two informants in two generations of the Marion family told me that this legend was told to the children as a bedtime story! The children were encouraged to escape into sleep to evade the Rolling Head. In spite of the terrifying nature of the elements of this story, one informant said that he asked his grandmother often for this story, and she always complied with his request, taking up the story where she had left off in the previous telling.

WESAKEJAK IN ANIMAL STORIES

The origins of Wesakejak (or Ouista-kes-chok), the Transformer, are obscure. Some researchers identify one of the children of the unhappy couple in the legend of the Rolling Head, as none other than Wesakejak.⁶ Among other more southerly tribes of North America, Coyote has the role played by Wesakejak among more northerly peoples.⁷

Four of the five stories that follow were sent to me between 1985 and 1987, written in English, by Joséphine Perron. In these stories, Wesakejak shows his flawed character: he is solitary, lazy, lascivious, and crafty, as well as a liar and a flatterer. He sometimes uses his magic powers for good, and sometimes the opposite. He is always hungry, which gets him into all sorts of adventures, from which he does not always emerge victorious.

How the Skunks lost their magic powers

This story is part of a worldwide corpus of stories and legends that explain the attributes of birds and animals, as we know them today. The stories take place in the long ago time when animals and men could talk together and understand each other.

⁶ Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman, pp. 129-133. Joséphine Perron, in discussing other animal stories that she had sent me in the mail in 1985, she mentioned the origin of Wesakejak in the story of the Rolling Head, including the fate of the husband killed by the Head, and the transformation of one of the two children into a wolf. She must therefore have heard the legend in its entirety, although she could only remember parts of the other two components.

⁷ Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles, p. iii.

HOW THE SKUNKS LOST THEIR MAGIC POWERS

Wesakejak was hungry and that made him out of sorts because it meant that he would have to make an effort to find something to eat. It was making him depressed when, in the distance, he saw something interesting: a row of skunks in a strange position, their tails in the air, the fur on their hind-quarters all fluffed out creating the impression that the animals were much bigger than they really were.

Wesakejak also saw, arriving in the distance, a herd of caribou and, at their approach, the skunks raised their tails even higher, and a large number of caribou fell dead on the spot. The skunks then had a big feast after which they left for their dens. A dense forest being in their way, the skunks, now lazy with full stomachs, repeated the same manoeuvre they had employed with the caribou, and presto! A path immediately appeared among the trees.

Now extremely intrigued, Wesakejak followed the skunks, and increasing his pace, he soon overtook them. Addressing the skunks with flattering words, Wesakejak tried to extract from them the secret of their power to so easily hunt and cut paths through obstacles in their way. After much discussion, and hearing many fine words, the skunks agreed to tell him their secret, all the while warning him to never, under any circumstances, abuse that power.

His heart light and step nimble, Wesakejak continued on his way, sleeping like a baby every night, sure that he would never again lack for anything to eat, nor come up against any obstacles impossible to surmount.

One day, Wesakejak found himself separated from his lodge by a mountain range that he would have to cross. He said to himself, "Why shouldn't I clear myself a path?" So he took up the skunks' position, his buttocks in the air, and no sooner said than done, a path appeared before him. Once at home, where he found nothing to eat, he again adopted the skunks' position and instantly killed a whole flock of geese flying by.

Against the warnings of the skunks, Wesakejak, went crazy, and engaged in the generalized destruction of whole herds of animals, flocks of birds, and the natural environment in the forests and mountains. And that angered Kitchi-Manitou, the creator of all that exists, who took the skunks' gift away from him.

This of course enraged Wesakejak, who said that if he could not have this power anymore, neither should anyone else. And with that, he took it away from the skunks – without telling them.

The skunks, unaware of what had happened to them, tried as usual to use their power to hunt and surmount obstacles– all in vain! Their magic "position" now yielded nothing more than a nauseous odour. Since that time, skunks hate men– all because of Wesakejak.

Wesakejak, the big birds and the little mudhen

This story is known from East to West in Canada, among others, by the Cree⁸ in the West, and the Ojibway⁹ in Eastern Canada. The version that follows of this story, from the Ladéroute-Perron-Marion family group, is in two parts: the first dealing with the *hunger dance*, and the second, with the origin of the physical appearance of the mudhen.

WESAKEJAK, THE BIG BIRDS AND THE LITTLE MUDHEN

As usual, Wesakejak was hungry. All his efforts to find food had failed. And, since his adventure with the skunks, he no longer had any magic powers to help him. As usual as well, however, his brain was turning over the possibility of some kind of trick or other that would avoid him having to spend a lot of energy on hunting. Suddenly, an idea came to him: he would offer a feast – and invite all sorts of big birds.

Winter was approaching and he would need a big place to gather them all and keep them warm. So he got right into the preparations and sent out lots of invitations. “Big birds only,” stipulated the invitations, “no little birds”. And then Wesakejak waited impatiently for his guests to arrive.

The little mudhen got wind of the invitations that were making the rounds in the community and it intrigued her. She, always dressed to the nines, and known for her elegant walk on land and her lively movements on the water, waited for her invitation. Compared to the ducks, however, she was very small.

When she learned that the invitations to the feast came from Wesakejak, the little mudhen was determined to participate. But how to get into the great tepee? To her questions about the invitations, she was told that she was excluded because she was too small. But, not easily dissuaded, she simply waited for the day of the feast and went anyway.

Wesakejak, as the affable host, was stationed at the entrance to the great tepee to greet the big birds as they arrived, and he evaluated them one by one: big geese (excellent!), turkeys, pelicans (not much to eat on these, but excellent dancers). “Come,” he said, “we will dance – blindfolded. And we will sing, very loud, each in the language of our own species.”

Then, everyone was blindfolded and the dance began. All were having a

⁸ Carl Ray and James Stevens, pp. 38-39.

⁹ Basil H. Johnston, pp. 46-55.

very good time – for a while. However, under the cover of the noise and singing, Wesakejak seized his guests one by one, and wrung their necks so skilfully that they didn't even make a sound. Then he threw the carcasses in a corner.

From the obscurity of the corner where she was hidden, the little mudhen, who had succeeded in sneaking into the great tepee along with the other guests, saw what was happening and began to cry out, "He's killing us! He's killing us!" Then all the birds that were left took the blindfolds from their eyes and, in a single movement; they flew up, taking the top off the tepee in their wake.

Enraged at having been discovered, Wesakejak began to run after the little mudhen in the great tepee. She was fast, but not fast enough, and Wesakejak stepped on her back in chasing her. She succeeded in escaping, but was maimed for the rest of her days.

Ever since that time, mudhens have an awkward way of walking on land and they are mud coloured because of Wesakejak, who had trod the mudhen into the mud in his great tepee.

Wesakejak made several good meals of the guests at his feast, and the big birds who had managed to escape were always grateful to the little mudhen.

Wesakejak, the Birds and the Fox

Like the previous story, the one that follows is also really in two parts, and could easily be split into two separate stories. For the informant who communicated it to me, however, it is a single story which pits two sly adversaries against each other: Wesakejak and Fox. The first part of the story explains how Fox got his red coat, and the second, how the latter avenged the bad joke that had been played on him by Wesakejak. In other versions of this story, the second part is a separate story in itself, and the birds in question are identified as black-capped chickadees, and Coyote replaces Wesakejak.¹⁰

WESAKEJAK, THE BIRDS AND THE FOX

One day, Wesakejak had a full stomach and, as such, he was in good humour, probably as a result of some ruse that he had invented. It was autumn, and he was on his way home on a beautiful sunny day. In crossing a clearing in the woods, he saw Fox stretched out in the sun, sound asleep.

¹⁰ Anthony Mattina and Madeline Desautel, Eds., pp. 158-160; "Okanogan – Coyote Juggles His Eyes." <http://www.ucan-online.org/legend.asp?legend=6091&category=8>.

In an instant, Wesakejak conceived a plan to play a dirty trick on Fox: he would surround him with a ring of fire. "Ha!" he said to himself. "He'll burn to a crisp!" and immediately set fire to the grass around Fox. The smell of the smoke soon made its way to the nostrils of Fox, and he woke with a start. Wesakejak, hidden behind a tree, was enjoying himself very much, and clapped his hands with glee.

But Fox was sly himself. He pretended to be really afraid, ran around here and there, and, when he judged that the fire was approaching too close, at the last minute, he escaped by jumping over the wall of fire, seeing none other than Wesakejak, the perpetrator, in the process. Since that time, the fox has a red coat, he who before was almost white.

The great Wesakejak continued on his way, well satisfied with the joke he had played on Fox.

Soon he came upon a flock of birds who were executing a strange manoeuvre. He watched them for some time before understanding that the little birds were juggling their eyes, singing "Chee-ree-lee, chee-ree-la!" Now that intrigued him, and he approached them saying, "Little Brothers and Sisters, tell me what you are doing. Do tell me!" But the birds, looking embarrassed and rather sheepish, said nothing.

Wesakejak, using a tone designed to charm the little birds, said to them, "Come, come, do tell me!" So one of the birds, more courageous than the others, finally said, "We are doing that to cure our headaches."

"How about that!" said Wesakejak. "How does it work?"

"We take our eyes from their sockets, and we throw them up into the air, singing."

Wesakejak was now very interested in the phenomenon that he had just discovered, and he covered the little birds with praise until they gave him their secret. In taking their leave, the little birds, gave him a strong warning, "Only take out one eye at a time", they said.

"What fools," laughed Wesakejak, and he continued on his way. It was a hot day, and he soon got hungry, which brought on a headache. So he decided to try out the cure he had just learned from the little birds. But, true to his nature, Wesakejak ignored the warning they had given him. "Stupid birds," he said to himself, "I will have an instant cure." And he took both his eyes from their sockets, singing the magic words.

Oh darn! Since he had taken out both eyes at once, Wesakejak could now see absolutely nothing, and his eyeballs fell into the grass at his feet. He fell to his knees and felt about in the grass with his hands, desperately searching for his eyes. Then he felt a sharp pain in his empty eye sockets. "Owww! That hurts," he cried! He at once heard a little chuckle, followed by strangling and vomiting

sounds. "That's all I needed," he said to himself. "There's Fox trying to swallow my eyeballs." (It is said that canines have difficulty in swallowing eyeballs.) And he again felt something sharp and painful in his empty eye sockets.

But Wesakejak remained calm, and in a very soothing tone, he said, "Ah, little Brother Fox. I know you are there. Help me find my eyes – please." Fox laughed in his face. "Help you? You, who tried to burn me alive? Ha!" Wesakejak tried again. "Ah," he said, "That was just a joke! I knew you were perfectly capable of escaping, dear Little Brother." And he continued on in this way with many compliments and flattering words, until Fox found his eyes for him. For this gesture, which saved his vision, Wesakejak gave Fox a beautiful, permanently red coat.

The little birds, however, fared less well. When they tried to cure their headaches by juggling their eyes and singing, it no longer worked. They understood that Wesakejak had defrauded the Creator once again, and since then, they are obliged to endure their headaches, poor things.

Wesakejak and the Prairie Chickens

The literature and the Aboriginal people that I consulted during the course of my research confirmed that the stories of all Aboriginal peoples contain jokes, and scatological or bawdy vocabulary. The stories that follow, like others in the Wesakejak corpus of tales, are of this kind. It took a lot of coaxing before my informants agreed to tell me these stories, which they considered too "strong" to tell in public, where they could come to the ears of people considered to be "decent company".

The informant who told me this story warned me about the "strong" nature of some of its elements. As a prior explanation, she insisted that I remember that Wesakejak was always hungry, that he was a glutton, and that he often had intestinal problems as a result.

WESAKEJAK AND THE PRAIRIE CHICKENS

One day, Wesakejak was walking on the edge of a swamp. As usual, he was contemplating some ruse or other, and at that precise moment, he was not paying attention to his surroundings. All of a sudden, a flock of birds flew up near him, surprising him to the point that he fell head first into the water. These birds were prairie chickens that lived near the swamp.

Wesakejak was very angry and he yelled at the birds and reprimanded them, asking why they flew up suddenly like that, scaring people who happened to be passing. "Well", they replied, "Since we are called 'scary ones', it's in our

nature."

If Wesakejak appeared satisfied with this reply, he was still really angry. But he shook himself to get it out of his mind, lowered his head, and continued on his way, lost in thought, along the edge of the swamp. And so walking along, he almost squashed a nest of baby birds, all with the bills wide open, that he had not seen in front of him on his path. The little birds were very young, almost without plumage, and were of a pale grey colour.

Getting more and more angry, Wesakejak was really tempted to crush the life out of the baby birds, but even worse, he now felt a case of diarrhoea coming on. Feeling himself near a bowel movement, he directed it into the nest, completely splattering the poor little ones with excrement.

When the parent birds returned to the nest, they found their little ones almost suffocated under the excrement. So they took their babies in hand, and tried to clean them up from the excrement that soiled them. All in vain: the little ones were spotted and so they remained.

And that is why prairie chickens are spotted to this day.

Wesakejak and the Stinking Bird

Rosaire Marion told me this story that explains why the stinking bird (the vulture) has no feathers on its head. In fact, he told it to me twice, first in English in 1981, and then in French in 1985. On both occasions, he warned me of the "strong" nature of the story. Told in French, the story was a revelation to me, for I once again heard the accent and the vocabulary of Métis French.

The version that follows here contains elements from both the English and French versions, as they are somewhat different from each other. The transcription of the story translates the spoken style of the informant, who had to be coaxed a lot before he would agree to tell me the story. And before he did so, he asked me pointedly if I wanted to hear all the details, even the most gruesome ones.

WESAKEJAK AND THE STINKING BIRD

Once upon a time, there was a certain man (I don't know what kind of man he was, but you will see later anyway.) who was always casting spells.

One day, this man (who was Wesakejak) got his head stuck in some mud, and he couldn't get out.

And there was a bird, a vulture, flying around high up, and he could see Wesakejak there with his hind end in the air.

The bird had had nothing to eat, and he could see, by the back door,

something moving around there. Well! A bird like that is usually thinking of eating, and so he dove right in after what he could see moving there, the beating heart.

So, plunging in like that, right up to his neck, he got stuck, and pretty good, too. In trying to get his head out of the hole that held him fast, he left all the feathers of his head and neck inside the man.

And ever since that time, vultures have no feathers on their heads.

ANIMAL STORIES WHERE WESAKEJAK IS ABSENT

In the corpus of stories brought together for this article, there is another category of animal tales: those where Wesakejak is absent. The two that follow, about marital misalliances, are of that kind. Wesakejak is not present, but he could be exchanged for Raven in the first one.

The Origin of the Grey Ducks

The story titled the “The Origin of the Grey Ducks” is half way between traditional French tales and those from Aboriginal traditions. It is the only one of its kind that I have found among the total corpus of stories preserved by the Perron-Lad route-Marion family group. I did a detailed analysis of this story in 1987 at the Colloque du CEFCO in Edmonton, and it was subsequently published in the *Actes* of that colloquium¹¹. Therefore, for the purposes of the present paper, I will not undertake a new analysis, but will rather draw the attention of the reader to certain points “The Origin of the Grey Ducks” has in common with “The Rabbit Who Married a Skunk,” the story that immediately follows.

THE ORIGIN OF THE GREY DUCKS

A clan of the most common kind of ducks all lived together quite happily. There was among them, however, one of those families that thought itself better than the others. The reason this family’s opinion of themselves was that, contrary to the neighbourhood children, their only daughter was of a pure white colour. The Old Duck therefore looked for a husband for her daughter who would be worthy of the standing and fine reputation of the family in the community. AND she looked with a jaundiced eye on the young locals who came around courting.

One day, a stranger appeared in the community. All white, very elegant,

¹¹ Marie-Louise Perron, pp. 119-130.

he wore a suit and a coat with long tails, and white gloves that he always kept on, even at table. However, his way of dressing, his hoarse voice, and his indifference to swimming finally got the ducks talking among themselves. The ambitious mother, who hoped to marry her daughter to the handsome stranger said, as far as she was concerned, her neighbours had no class and knew nothing about the wider world. And several parties later, the ambitious mother succeeded in her plans.

The marriage of the pretty little white duck with the handsome stranger was THE event of the season in the world of the ducks. But to the great surprise of the assembled company, with the wedding feast hardly over, the married couple took their leave. They were not going to stay, as was the custom, in the community. The Old Duck was very disappointed. With all she had done for her daughter. The new husband had never really revealed, either, exactly where the couple would be living.

Several months without news of the newlyweds started to cause gossip among the ducks. Her beak held high, the Old Duck said that in fine families, they took no notice of such trivial things. But in private, she often turned over in her mind the fate of her daughter, especially at night when she found herself alone. One stormy evening, she was again thinking of her daughter, when all of a sudden, the door slammed and there stood a little blackish duck, soaked to the skin, and dressed in rags. Grabbing her broom, the Old Duck rushed up to the stranger, who cried, "Mother! Don't you recognize me?"

What an affair it made in the world of the ducks! The little duck then told how her mother had married her to Raven, who had camouflaged his black colour with white lime wash. And the gloves that he never took off were to hide his long claws.

Annoyed and disappointed, the Old Duck really tried to wash her daughter and clean her up. But the little duck kept some black marks, especially on her wings. And that little duck was the first of a line of grey ducks, and her children were grey like her, too. But the other ducks were kind to her, and soon nobody spoke any longer of the events that had caused her to come back home again.

The Rabbit Who Married a Skunk

This story, like "The Origin of the Grey Ducks," is a story of misalliance. It was first communicated to me in a short version in 1985, and then in a longer written version in 1987. The following is a definitive version containing elements of the two earlier ones.

Like “The Origin of the Grey Ducks,” “The Rabbit Who Married a Skunk” contains a description of marriages conducted *à la façon du pays*, or according to the “country tradition.” The description of marriage in these stories is true to the information found in the accounts of explorers, voyageurs, and employees of the different fur trading companies, where stories abound in references to mismatched couples, marital misadventures, and women abandoned following alliances made for business purposes.

THE RABBIT WHO MARRIED A SKUNK

Once upon a time, Rabbit was feeling bored and lonely, so he decided to find himself a wife. Why not among his own people? He was not in his own country, and besides, he found that the women among his own people were not very nice to him, or perhaps he was not very attractive to them.

One day in his wanderings, he saw something strange: a kind of plume waving above the high grasses. This intrigued him, and he decided to go and have a look. And so he followed the plume, hopping along behind it.

Skunk (for it was the tail of a skunk that Rabbit had spied) did not seem upset by the presence of Rabbit. On the contrary, she greeted him warmly, and so they continued on their way together, she walking, and he hopping along at her side.

In fact, Rabbit and Skunk had similar problems: she, too, was discontented with the suitors in her own community. After much walking and hopping and frolicking together, they found that they enjoyed being together, and so decided to marry. An alliance was speedily concluded between the two families, and the wedding feast organised by Skunk’s family. Rabbit was not very happy with the menu: true, there were some roots to eat, but the rest was mainly composed of meat.

Rabbit and little Skunk then left for the long trip to rabbit country. Once there, they found Rabbit’s home, a burrow under some brush. Rabbit went in immediately, but for Skunk, it was impossible: the hole was too small. Mrs Skunk was not very happy about that, but Rabbit came back right away, and happily ran circles around her. He forgot that rabbits and skunks are not normally friends. At nightfall, they snuggled up to each other to sleep.

Now married, however, the new couple started to irritate each other. Rabbit found that the odour of Skunk, his little sweetie, distressed him. Rabbit odour was not like that at all. Besides, she had some strange habits: she wanted to sleep all day and roam around all night. Rabbits also go out at night, it’s true, but more often than not, it is by moonlight.

Even worse, the other rabbits ran away on seeing his wife appear. Why

such fear?

For a while, that situation gave little Skunk a feeling of superiority. But over all, she felt dejected, unhappy. Her diet of roots was not enough, and she missed meat terribly. Little Skunk started to fade away and became the shadow of her former self. Rabbit did his best to provide her with all sorts of savoury roots to eat, but she dreamed of nice pieces of chicken and the pleasure of gnawing the bones. Meat was always on her mind.

Rabbit put great effort into entertaining her: he hopped and tumbled happily around her, trying to mollify her, to convince her to leave the brush and go out with him. Nothing...

Rabbit bragged about little Skunk's dainty walk, her swaying gait, and her beautiful plumed tail.

There was nothing for it; the other rabbits did not accept her. Sometimes, she even laughed at their dances, their hopping around. "What a farce!" she laughed. "Ho! Ho! Ho!" This alarmed her entourage, her strange laugh, not at all like the laughter of rabbits.

Even worse, another rabbit said to the new husband, "You know skunks often eat rabbit..." thereby betraying that the other rabbits did not feel safe with a skunk in their community.

Finally, Rabbit himself started to question his own choice of a wife, and the day came when both accepted that they were rather unhappy, and that their life together was not prospering. They came to understand their differences and the value of their own peoples.

So Rabbit set off to return his wife to her people. At the border of skunk country, Rabbit left his wife: he did not dare go any further. It crossed his mind that rabbit is on the natural menu of skunks...

The friends of Rabbit and Skunk, respectively, were kind enough to them, and did not hold the adventure they had had against them. They wished Rabbit and Skunk happiness and satisfaction among their own kind, and a well-ordered life in their own communities.

Whether little Rabbit and little Skunk were happy afterwards is not known. After the passage of many years, the two probably remembered each other, which made them able to sympathise with young people who are unhappy with their lot.

Perhaps it is all a story for the grandchildren and great grandchildren of rabbits and skunks.

Or maybe nobody understood anything from it at all.

Conclusion

The stories and legends of Aboriginal people are told for different reasons, including to scandalize, to ridicule, to elicit fear or laughter¹², but all transmit the knowledge of the Elders to coming generations. The stories must only be told in winter, so the timing is right for the publication of this article.

People who accept the responsibility of transmitting the knowledge of Elders undertake a heavy task. They must undergo a long apprenticeship in order to know the material in depth, and they must also learn the traditions, the ceremonies, and the instructions related to its transmission, including any required permission to be sought.¹³

There are numerous complexities to the instructions. Some stories are related to specific geographical areas, for example, and telling them outside these areas would deprive them of contextual elements important for them to be understood. Thus, individuals cannot simply declare themselves carriers of stories and their telling.

And then there is the question of writing down the stories and publishing them. Not long ago, it was forbidden to transmit the stories in writing. This issue was vigorously debated among Elders, and for a long time, they refused to allow it. In their eyes, writing them down would be the “death” of the stories, freezing them in their written form, not allowing them to evolve with time and according to the different storytellers, to say nothing of the loss of the original language and the transmission of the traditions that normally accompany the occasions in which stories are told.¹⁴

As the interdiction against writing down the stories is now lifted, I tell the stories of my family in this article. These old stories are from my great-grandmother Marguerite St-Arnaud Ladéroute. She would have heard them from her mother Geneviève Coutrit, and so on, from who knows how many generations back. In receiving the stories, I, in turn, acknowledge my responsibility to continue, in my own way, telling them to future generations. In this, I owe a great debt to my great-grandmother, as well as to my grandmother Céline Ladéroute Perron, Alexina Ladéroute Marion, Rosaire Marion, Joséphine Perron and Raymond Hebb.

You, as reader, have probably noticed that I have offered no explanation as

¹² Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles, p. iii.

¹³ Maria Campbell, *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Maria Campbell, *Achimoona*, p. viii.

to the meaning of the stories I have communicated in this article. In this, I am keeping to the tradition that each person who hears a story, listens, observes, and draws his or her own conclusions on what has been said. Indeed, at the end of the last story, my informant gives a hint of the continuation of this tradition:

Perhaps it is all a story for the grandchildren and great grandchildren of rabbits and skunks.

Or maybe nobody understood anything from it at all.

So, I give the last word to the person who told me the story, Joséphine Perron.

She would be happy about that.

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