Preface

They used to be called Eskimos by Europeans, but now some prefer to be called Inuit, *the people*. Isolated from the rest of the world and from each other, they once believed that they were the only *true* human beings anywhere. Their very presence for century after century in the vast and harsh land that is Canada's north was a marvel of survival.

In recent years modern technology, as well as government interest and activity, has ended their isolation and made survival easier. Almost all of Canada's 28,000 Inuit now live in permanent settlements scattered throughout the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Labrador, and northern Quebec. They share a relatively common culture as well as one basic language, called Inuktitut. Six regional dialects are spoken across the Canadian Arctic in Labrador, Baffin Island, northern Quebec, Keewatin, central Arctic, and western Arctic. There are eight main cultural groupings: the Labrador, Ungava, Baffin Island, the four principal groups of the central Arctic – the Iglulik, the Netsilik, the Caribou, the Copper – and the western Arctic Inuit. Within these broad groups there are also a number of subgroups, identified with a place and named accordingly, for example, the Aivilingmiut or 'people of the walrus,' a branch of the Iglulik.

Their material culture – stone carvings, prints, and weaving – are known all over the world. But Inuit intellectual culture is not as well known despite the fact that for a thousand years and more, in a long history that has no certain beginning, Canada's Inuit have been transmitting the wisdom and truth of their ancestors in stories and songs.

This book presents this literature as it has survived in historical writings and in modern memory. It traces the evolution in Canada of

Inuit writing in English from an oral literature of a non-western culture, through transitional stages of varying degrees of acculturation, to its modern expression.

Traditionally there was no written language. 'We were stupid. We should have thought of writing on sealskins,' said Peter Pitseolak in *Peter Pitseolak's Escape from Death*. Writing systems for Inuktitut were introduced by Christian missionaries after European contact, and literacy began its spread. But the development of literacy throughout Canada's Arctic varied markedly by region in time and orthography.

Although explorers from different countries – Britain, France, Norway, Denmark, Germany, and the United States – kept arriving in different parts of the Arctic at different times, over a period of 400 years, encounters were brief and sporadic and made no substantial impact on Inuit literacy. British and American whalers, who spent winters on their shore-based whaling stations off the east coast of Baffin Island, around Hudson Bay, and the Beaufort Sea, and hired Inuit as pilots, sledge-drivers, harpooners, and seamstresses throughout the latter half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, were responsible for profound change in Inuit lifestyles with their day-to-day contact, but their influence on Inuit literacy was minimal. The Hudson's Bay Company first established posts on the shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay in the later seventeenth century. It did not expand its operations in much of the Arctic until into the twentieth century, and its primary concern was always trade.

Literacy was made possible only by the systematic efforts of the missionaries who provided education for the Inuit until after World War II.

The Moravian missionaries, who established permanent missions among the Inuit of Greenland as early as 1721, in 1771 began setting up stations along the coast of Labrador where they taught the fundamentals of Christianity, as well as how to read and write the Labrador dialect in a Moravian orthography. Literacy in the rest of the Arctic was introduced by the Protestant missionaries sent by the Church of England's Church Missionary Society and Roman Catholic missionaries from the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They began introducing Roman orthographies to write Inuktitut in the Mackenzie region in the second half of the nineteenth century. Almost all early reading material published in Inuktitut was religious in nature.

In the eastern Canadian Arctic (except Labrador) the development

of writing systems was different. The Reverend Edmund James Peck, who in 1894 established the first permanent mission station on Baffin Island, began using a system adapted from James Evans's Cree syllabics mainly to spread the Gospel. The Inuit quickly became skilful in the use of syllabics, learning from missionaries, native lay ministers, parents, or other Inuit, and the syllabic orthography soon spread across the Arctic.

Although the Inuit first began writing their own language in the various orthographies as early as the eighteenth century in Labrador, and as late as the first quarter of the twentieth century elsewhere, writing in English has been a recent development. Soon after World War II, the Canadian government began a new and serious involvement in the north by establishing centralized communities, replacing mission schools with new residential schools, and creating a formal education system. Since the early 1960s the intensity and quality of education have increased with an ever-growing number of young people writing in English. More recently, however, there has been a revival of interest in the preservation and use of Inuktitut as well as attempts to standardize the various regional dialects and orthographies. And in 1988 almost all material is published bilingually (English and Inuktitut) or trilingually (English, Inuktitut, and French).

In this book selections have been arranged to give historical perspective and continuity. The first chapter celebrates the oral tradition of a pre-literate society and is organized according to the eight cultural groupings. The principal source for this literature is the *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921–24* by the celebrated Danish explorer, Knud Rasmussen, who made an unrivalled four-year sledge journey across Arctic North America, studying the Inuit who lived between southern Baffin Island and the Coronation Gulf. He thus documented for the white world the existence of an integrated Inuit culture from Greenland to the Pacific. Other important sources include the German Franz Boas, the first anthropologist to do field work in Canada, who studied the Inuit around Cumberland Sound, Baffin Island, during the winter of 1883–4, and Diamond Jenness, Canada's most distinguished pioneer anthropologist and a member of the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–18.

Chapter 2 presents the comments and observations made by some of the first Inuit to come into contact with the white newcomers, the first Inuit reactions to European and American values and institutions, as documented in official reports, oral interviews, letters,

and diaries. These are the earliest examples of Inuit speaking and writing in English. Chapter 3 enters into the first Inuit attempts at European forms in the world of the autobiography, narrative, memoir, reminiscence, letter, and novel. This transitional literature represents a break with oral tradition and is typical of newly literate people everywhere. Chapter 4 provides diverse samples of contemporary Inuit writing in English from essays and speeches to fiction and poetry and other genres of imaginative literature. The chronological context is not always precise. The line between what can be considered personal narrative and early contact literature, moreover, is at times oblique, and I have had to be arbitrary in my decisions. I have also included four selections by polar Inuit and one by an Alaskan Inuk in the interests of circumpolar unity, since the Inuit used to be a migratory people, moving about freely in the Arctic.

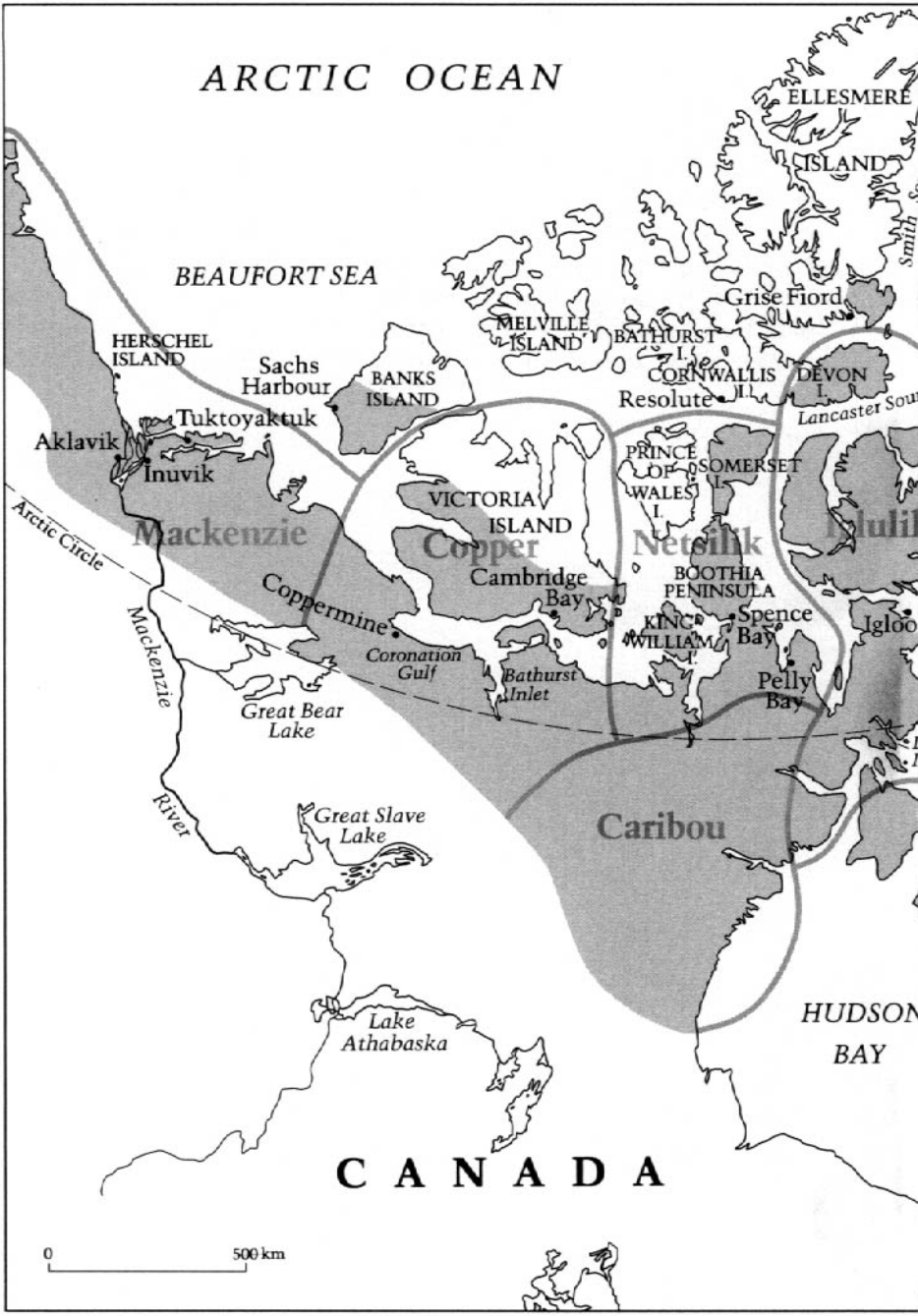
This book includes all types of writing, such as letters, diary entries, speeches, essays, history, autobiography, and reports. Its scope is as wide as possible in content, form, regional coverage, and authorship. Selections have been chosen primarily for their intrinsic literary merit. But because they are unique and universal at the same time, they offer new insights into the way of life and thought of the Inuit people. And because these selections differ in aesthetics, structure, and style, they open new ways of looking at a people's literature.

In the growth of an Inuit literary tradition in English, the intermediate stage between the pre-literate past and literate present – between the oral in Inuktitut and the written in English – is, perforce, one of translation. Hence, many of the selections in this collection are in English translation, either directly from the Inuktitut or indirectly from the Danish and German. Many have been translated by native speakers who speak both Inuktitut and English.

But translation of any language poses difficulties. And the orthographical diversity of Inuit dialects in addition to the archaic expressions make transcription difficult and translation even more difficult. The holophrastic nature of Inuktitut, moreover, as well as the great differences of syntax and sentence structure between a non-western and western language, not to mention the linguistic competence of the translator, add to the problem. One can only guess, therefore, what subtleties of thought and style have been lost through translation. Despite these drawbacks, the selected pieces, most of which have been translated by native speakers, retain their vigour and

effect. They are distinctively the Inuit's own, in their emotions, attitudes, sensitivities and visions, subject matter, idiom, and allusions. They provide the link between the cultural past and its expression in the present.

Except for correcting obvious printing errors, I have not altered any text. Each piece appears with its own stylistic devices and peculiarities of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation, preserved to show development in the use of language. Brief introductions to each item give background and contextual purposes. A glossary of Inuktitut words and their English translations as well as a few pertinent notes are also provided. I have tried to resist critical interpretation or comments to allow the Inuit authors to speak for themselves.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BEAUFORT SEA
ELLESMERE ISLAND
Grise Fiord
MELVILLE ISLAND
BATHURST I.
CORNWALLIS I.
DEVON I.
Resolute
Lancaster Sou
HERSCHEL ISLAND
Sachs Harbour
BANKS ISLAND
Tuktoyaktuk
Aklavik
Inuvik
PRINCE OF WALES I.
SOMERSET I.
VICTORIA ISLAND
Arctic Circle
Mackenzie
Copper
Netsilik
Inuit
Cambridge Bay
BOOTHIA PENINSULA
Coppermine
KING WILLIAM I.
Spence Bay
Igloo
Coronation Gulf
Bathurst Inlet
Pelly Bay
Mackenzie River
Great Bear Lake
Great Slave Lake
Caribou
Lake Athabaska
HUDSON BAY
CANADA
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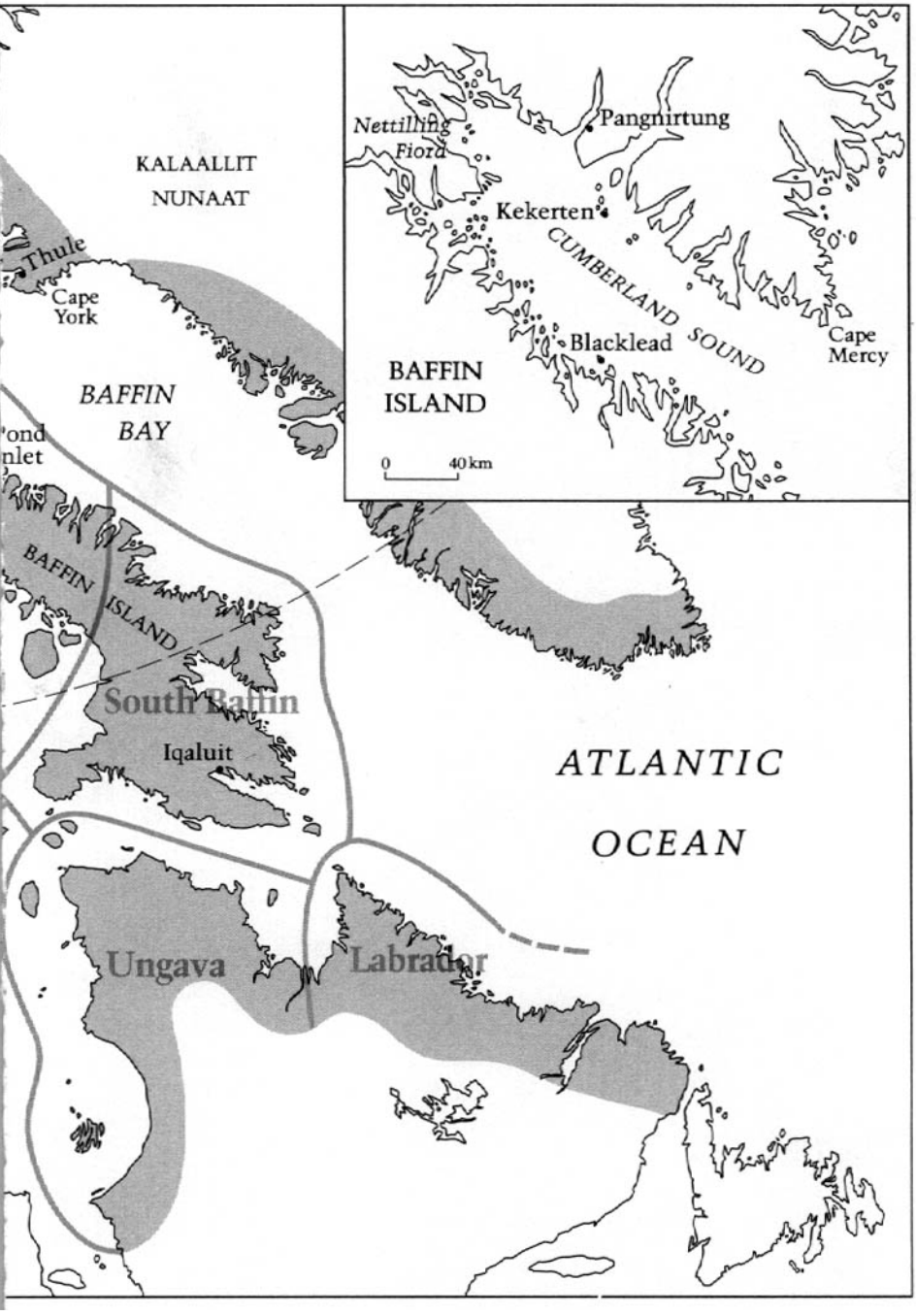
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Blacklead
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Thule
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BAFFIN ISLAND
South Baffin
Iqaluit
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Ungava
Labrador

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