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Myth, Metaphor, and Meaning in “The Boy Who Could Not Understand”: A Study of Seneca Auto-Criticism

JAY HANSFORD C. VEST

Throughout the many years I have taught Native American traditions, I have encountered a plethora of colleagues who have been all too willing to dismiss a Native precontact intellectual tradition. Recently a colleague told me that, in spite of Native luminaries such as Black Elk and Tecumseh, there was no historic tradition of philosophy among American Indians. Qualifying his remarks, he quickly added that there was nothing similar to the philosophical discourse characteristic of the ancient Greeks present among precontact American Indians. Given that this arrogance is beyond reason, I was disposed to restraint in my reply. It is simply wrong to conclude that philosophy, the love of wisdom, is not intrinsic to all human intellectual traditions. So I suggested to my colleague that he was putting the cart before the horse, championing method over substance. The failure of Native elders to cast their wisdom within the genre of Platonic dialogue does not lessen the importance and value of their intelligence. Form is no substitute for value.

This denial of Native American intellectual traditions is nothing new among Westerners and their repeated failure to acknowledge alternative, non-Western epistemologies and wisdom-centered traditions. What is disturbing, however, is the presence of this mentality among American intellectuals after thirty-plus years of embracing American Indian Studies within the academy.¹ Although Native American philosophies are not ensconced in dialogues characteristic of Plato and his intellectual associates from ancient Greece, wisdom is highly evident and manifest in American Indian oral narrative traditions. In part, this disregard of Native wisdom is centered at the origin of Western

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philosophy and Plato's response to the spoken word.² Eric Havelock has brilliantly shown that in Plato's *Republic* the entire epistemology is a programmed rejection of the oral tradition.³ Together Walter Ong and Havelock have independently shown that primary orality that is oralcy, in which cultures "totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print," are significantly different and distinct in worldview from those of a literate paradigm.⁴ In his path-breaking work of language, ecology, and phenomenology, David Abram has supplied a new and unique look at the impact of literacy upon primary orality in the development of the alphabet. His investigation warns of a divorce from the natural world through literacy. It is a thorny problem in which we have become lost in our literate-based abstractions and fail in our misplaced reason removed from a sustained ecological wisdom.⁵ With the advent of literacy, we have become prisoners of our abstractions, lost in an impoverished reality.⁶

Westerners have had and continue to have great difficulty in approaching, understanding, and interpreting Native oral traditions. The problem is born of a literal interpretation of narrative based upon the methods of a literate mind. The tendency is to create a simple location or positivistic reading of narrative as facts of time rather than as metaphorical references to nature. The result is the generation of misplaced concreteness whereby these simple locations take on a historical life of their own when, in fact, they are abstract concretions born of a modern misreading. As a result, the ensuing literary criticism takes the character of hyperreality ensconced within a world of literate abstractions that have no organic referent. The result is what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead called the "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness," in which simulacra and simulation replace nature, and there is an absolute loss of organic referent. This worldview is not even close to any traditional Native American ethos. The failure is twofold, according to Barbara Mann in her excellent essay, "A Lynx in Time." There is an innocence of context or antecedence and a failure to identify foreign interpolations that are characteristic of much Western-based scholarship devoted to Native American traditions.⁷ For the most part, this problem has emerged through the post-contact cultural clashes in the intellectual disparagement of Native Americans by conquering Europeans, specifically the Spanish, French, and English in their colonial and religious institutions.⁸

In a problem very much reminiscent of that identified by Mann's "Lynx in Time," there is the impact of intellectual transformation and acculturation born of Western learning and cultural institutions among Native Americans. As American Indian children were taken and given to the care of missionaries and installed in boarding schools, their intellectual heritage was violently transformed and displaced by Western traditions of narrative literalism and positivistic education. By way of example at the Treaty of Lancaster (Pennsylvania) in 1744, an Iroquois chief addressed the council suggesting "when you take our children away from us to educate them at your schools, they return to us unfit to make a living within our way of life." The Iroquois elders are responding to the heightened sense of abstraction that transformed their children's understanding of the world around them. It is a Native reaction to the Cartesian divorce of thought and nature characteristic of Western

philosophy. Native children as educated in the Western literary paradigm evidenced a divorce from the mimetic and mnemonic oral paradigm characteristic of Native American worldviews. In turn, these children evidenced an inability to understand the significant organic and metaphorical properties characteristic of Native speech. As a result, they were seen as unfit to engage in the gathering, hunting, and farming characteristic of the Iroquois way of life.

Following traditional narrative discourse, the Iroquois appear to have responded to this problem with their ageless wisdom crafted in oral tradition. In 1906, the Seneca elder, Edward Cornplanter, recounted the narrative "The Boy Who Could Not Understand" to his fellow tribesman and scholar Arthur C. Parker. Although Parker locates the narrative somewhere in the middle of his monograph, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, the text is central in confirming some of the contextual and interpolative difficulties, as well as in challenging the creeping literalism and ideological positivism imposed by Western intellectual discourse.⁹ Parker, however, made no use of the narrative despite its critical affirmation of organic metaphor in the Iroquois oral narrative tradition. In a thoughtful and lengthy introduction to his collection of Seneca myths, Parker sought to address some of the many problems derived from a secondary reading of Native oral traditions. Clearly, he recognized that many of the approaches to reading these narratives produced results that no Native would understand or even claim. Yet he seems to have missed the value of this text as it challenges selected Western methodologies.

Historically, when responding to colonial inquiries Native people have answered with oral traditions replete with mythological traditions grounded in time immemorial. These myths, legends, stories, and tales are the foundation of orality and the oral tradition. By the term *myth*, I mean the Greek term *mythos* that conveys the meaning of "sacred word." As such, it must not be confused with the more vulgar social usage that connotes a lie, falsehood, or fiction. Acknowledging the deeper meaning of myth, Joseph Campbell remarked: "Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the penultimate truth—penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words."¹⁰ Åke Hulkrantz contends that myth is essentially a religious concept, and he puts forth a threefold classification of oral narratives in Native America.¹¹ First, there are sacred narratives comprised of traditional myths or formalized stories that have been ritualized through seasonal restrictions and the passage of time. Second, there are legends that take place in historical or recent times and account for human interaction with the spiritual powers residing in the natural world. Last, there are ordinary narrative tales that account for "news or tidings" manifesting anecdotes of experience within daily life and the cycles of the seasons.¹² There are also songs or chants and prayers that are traditionally passed along through the generations as oral traditions.¹³

The impact of Western intellectual and cultural teachings imposed upon Native Americans has been devastating for the survival of traditional Native culture. Faced with ideological and religious syncretism, the wisdom bearers suffer the grief and despair that come with the obligation of transferring an oral heritage to future generations. As a child in the care of my grandparents,

it was my good fortune to learn much of the oral narrative heritage that had been passed down through the generations among my people, the Saponi-Monacan-Tutelo.¹⁴

Although these narratives came to me largely in English, the Native storytellers sought to retain the intrinsic worldview as the stories were transformed into the English language, and they had made the translations across many years. As a student of this oral tradition since age three, it was at seven when I entered the outside world by attending public school. In so doing, I abruptly learned that my grandparents used a manner of reasoning that was very different from that of my elementary school teachers. From ages seven to ten, I attended school one-half day, and when I returned home to my grandparents they frequently inquired of the school day's events and teachings. Following my explanations to their inquiries, Grandma and Granddaddy would invariably respond by telling me a story. Although it was often the case that I had heard these stories many times, I had learned to listen to these narratives and attend to the details, as if they were new in each telling, without interrupting. In the narration, as a response to my school-day anecdotes, these traditional tales were sometimes given a new configuration suggesting a critical response to my accounts.

After all these intervening years, it has occurred to me that my grandparents were utilizing an intrinsic auto-criticism or discourse analysis designed to impart meaning and wisdom upon my school days and those outside world experiences. The result is an acknowledgment of an oral discourse that I believe is characteristic of this traditional Native American worldview. I propose to offer the narrative "The Boy Who Could Not Understand" for review and criticism as a manifestation of Native philosophical organicism. It is my contention that the tale represents a form of Native auto-criticism resulting from experiential encounters with youth who had returned from white boarding schools. In this tale, the mythmakers, if you will, recognize the literal positivism characteristic of Western education, and they react to it with an infusion of obvious nature-based metaphors designed to generate an organic understanding of word, language, and tradition characteristic of their oral heritage. When articulating this assessment, I offer a review of Parker's history, study, and critique of Western folklore methodologies used in the study of Native American oral narratives. Parker's critique supplies an intrinsic, in other words Native-derived, criticism of the folklore methodology of his day, and it is an invaluable beginning in considering the problem of modern criticisms of Native orality.

Parker appears to have missed the idea of auto-criticism that is, in my opinion, the central tenet of the originator of the story. With this oversight, Parker seems to have taken little notice of the problem of literary positivism as the vehicle of "simple location" imposed upon Native narratives by modern scholarship. Of course, Parker cannot be faulted for these oversights, but I can offer a brief review of the positivistic problem, through postmodern literary considerations, while attending both early historical and recent examples of a traditional Native-based organicism. In this organic-based context, nature-based metaphors and organic figures of speech referring to

natural phenomena are the dominant modes of expression. In focusing on this approach, I am guided by the philosophies of organicism characteristic of Whitehead and those of the deep ecology movement. It is my intent to suggest an organic postmodern approach to American Indian mythology, using the following story as an example.

The Boy Who Could Not Understand¹⁵

There was a boy who had been reared in the woods by an old woman who never thought it worth while to teach him oratory or rhetoric.¹⁶ He had never attended a council or listened to a sachem's speech and so he never learned the use of words. When the old woman died the boy's grandfather came and took him home with him hoping to make him useful. The boy was very obedient and obeyed every word commanded. His grandfather began to have confidence in him and one day sent him out to locate a bear tree. "Now when you discover the tree wade'ode', (leave your nails on it)," said the grandfather.

Now the boy thought this strange advice but hastened to obey his old protector. After some wandering he found a bear tree and then remembering that he must leave his nails upon it tore off his finger nails and stuck them in the bark of the tree. This caused him the most excruciating pain and he was hardly able to get home. However, he thought that this was to make him brave and he was confident that his grandfather knew best how to educate a warrior. He went to his grandfather and proudly displayed his bleeding fingers. "See, grandfather," he said, "I have found a bear tree and have left my finger nails upon it."

The old man looked at the boy in wonder. "What have you done?" he asked.

"Left my nails upon the tree," answered the boy.

"Oh, you poor ignoramus," laughed the old warrior; "I did not mean that you should tear out your nails by the roots and stick them in the bark. I meant that you should put your eyes on the tree when you saw one. When I said 'put your nails on it' I meant that you should remember the tree so that you could take it at any time you wished. Go now and put your eyes on the tree (en'se'ganeionden')."

"Oh, grandfather," moaned the boy, "why did you not say what you meant!" and ran out to put his eyes on the tree. He found the tree again, and began pulling at his eyelids and eyes. Having no nails he could not get a good hold and the operation was most painful. Finally he gouged out one eye with a stick and hung it on the bear tree. Going back to his grandfather's lodge he greeted him.

"I have left one eye on the tree, grandfather," he said. "I kept the other so that I could find my way home."

The old man looked at his grandson and was very angry. "You are most foolish!" he said. "When I say, 'leave your eyes on a thing' I mean that you must be able to recognize it instantly when you see it again."

"Oh, grandfather," wailed the boy, "why do you never say what you mean?"

"I do," said the grandfather, "but you do not easily understand my meaning."

Now when the boy was recovered from his bruises the old man asked that the boy take him to the bear tree that he might kill a bear. Each had a bow and quiver of arrows. When they reached the tree the old hunter climbed up the trunk and lighted a torch and threw smoke wood down the hollow to smoke out the bear. "Now, grandson," he said, "shoot him here when he comes out," and the old man patted his heart.

The bear came out on a run and as he did the boy lifted up his bow and aimed at the old man's heart. It was the place that he had been instructed to shoot, so he thought.

The old man was exceedingly angry and yelled out, "You shoot the bear, not me." The boy shot the bear and the old man slid down the tree. "You fool," he yelled, "so you were going to shoot me!"

"You told me to shoot right there, grandfather," pleaded the boy, "and I wanted to obey for I thought you knew best."

"No, I meant the bear," retorted the old hunter. "Now we will cut him up." So they dressed the bear.

Now it is customary to call the pancreas, the oskwi'sont (tomahawk); the diaphragm the o'kaa (skirt); the fat around the kidneys the face (ogon'sa'), and the ventral portion (oho'a), door. So the old man said, "I have placed the door, the tomahawk, the false face and the skirt aside. Go home and cook them for me and I will return. Split a stick and put the tomahawk in it and put it in the fire. When it snaps yell 'Hai-ie' and I will come."

Now the grandfather busied himself cutting up the bear and cutting its meat into strips and chunks. He also prepared its skin. Then he was ready to go home. He glanced at the log where he had laid the organs and found them still there. "I wonder what blunder the boy has made now," he mused and took them with him to the lodge. When he arrived there he found that the stupid orphan had torn the door from its fastenings and had split it into pieces. Moreover the boy was running around the lodge yelling, "Hai-ie!" Inside the old man saw his best stone tomahawk in the fire. It was red hot and when a draft of air struck it it would snap and every time it did the boy would whoop, "Hai-ie!" In a cauldron a false face, a breech skirt and the splinters of the door were boiling.

"It is too hot within!" explained the boy. "Hai-ie!" he paused to say as the tomahawk snapped. "It's too hot, so I am watching outside and—hai-ie!"

The patience of the long suffering grandfather was exhausted and he said some things that the boy thought himself much aggrieved for he said, "Why did you not tell me what you meant?"

The grandfather took matters in his own hand and cooked the meal. The time was at hand also when he must notify his charge that by right of birth he was a chief and that on the morrow he must commence his duties as a runner. The next day the old man with due solemnity told the boy that he was a secondary chief. "We will have a great feast," he said. "I want you to run and notify all the tall trees (Gai'esons), all the rough places (Ain'djatgi), all the swamps (Gai'n'dagon), and all in high hills (Gai'nomde). When you return do not fail to 'jounce your uncle on your knee' (esen'sent'o')."

Now the young chief thought this peculiar but he found tall trees in plenty and invited them all to the feast, likewise he invited the mountains and swamps and returning gave his uncle a kick that knocked him down. The uncle immediately did the same thing to the impudent boy who ran rather lamely back to his grandfather. The old man listened to the tale with impatience and then explained that the 'tall trees' were the sachems, the 'mountains' the war chiefs, and the 'swamps' the common warriors. By 'uncle' he meant the relatives of the family and by 'jouncing with his knee' simply to notify them. "Oh," gasped the boy, "why do you never say what you mean!" Of course he had the work to do all over and the feast came in due season. When it was over the boy said, "Grandfather, there is meat left and soup also."

"Well," said the grandfather, "give each one half a spoon."¹⁷

The lad did not see what good that would do but he instantly obeyed, going to the shed and chopping twenty wooden spoons in halves and then giving each guest a piece.

"Here you," some one objected, "What are these things for?"

The boy was about to say that he had but obeyed his grandfather when the old man himself looked up and saw that the stock of finely carved spoons had been destroyed by his stupid ward. "Shawen 'noiwis!" roared the old fellow. (Sha-wen-noi-wis means incurable fool.) "Why have you ruined my good spoons?"

"I did just as you said," was the meek answer. Then he answered, "There is yet meat left, Haksot!"

"De sa di wa o gwut, tie it on your head and let it hang," commanded the grandfather, meaning that it should be distributed to the particular friends of the family.

The boy took an elm bark rope and tied the juicy meat on his forehead.

"It is disagreeable, grandfather," he complained, "for the juice and oil drip into my eyes."

The old man explained, and the boy feeling much abused answered, "Oh why can you never say what you mean?"

The time came when the boy chief must marry. The grandfather told the boy where a family of lovely girls lived. "Go shove your legs in the door," (Satci'nondat—show your leg), said he, meaning that the boy should go visiting.

The young chief stuck his legs under the door and sat there all night. The next morning the old woman within gave him a blow with a corn pounder and he ran limping to his advisor to discover the trouble. "Oh you fool," said the old man, "I meant that you should 'shake the old lady's skirt'," meaning that he should seek a daughter. When he did this however he was kicked and pounded until he could hardly crawl. Now he had a very difficult time courting for it is hard to describe in direct words how to court and to marry, so when he followed his grandfather's words he found much trouble. Now when he married his wife made him understand and he learned many new things. Now this is all that I can tell.

Before turning to an assessment of the organic character of this narrative, I will consider several factors in its presentation and discuss the problem of oral traditions as framed within Western discourse analysis.

A man of two worlds, Arthur Caswell Parker (1881–1955) had a Seneca father and grandfather who had both married New England missionaries and teachers of English descent. However, in appearance and photographs, he looked as much Indian as his Seneca contemporaries. Although he wore well-tailored clothes, his English speech resonated with an Iroquoian accent. Early in life, Parker readily identified with the Iroquois culture and its values; however, with the Iroquois rule of matrilineal descent, he was politically an "outsider" and a nonenrolled Seneca. As an ethnologist, folklorist, archaeologist, and museologist (a term he coined), Parker, by his sheer achievement, rose through the ranks of American intellectual society.¹⁸

Committed to his Native heritage, Parker was adopted into the Bear Clan and known therein as Gawasowaneh or "Big Snowsnake," implicating the game that he described as an anthropologist.¹⁹ Achieving his Native birthright through ceremonial adoption, Parker became a socially acceptable Seneca.²⁰

Minding his intrinsic Seneca heritage, Parker mused that “his earliest recollections are of having the wise old men relate these tales of the mysterious past.”²¹ He was, in consequence, raised with an oral tradition despite his schooling as the child of a missionary. As a result, Parker intellectually occupied the liminal zone between cultures.

The Iroquois “tales of the mysterious past” were called Ka’kaa, or Ga’kaa, and, according to Parker, when this word was uttered it was “a signal that the marvels of old were about to be unfolded,” whereupon “all the children grew silent,—and listened.” He continued, “In those days, back on the Cattaraugus reservation, it was a part of a child’s initial training to learn why the bear lost its tail, why the chipmunk has a striped back and why meteors flash in the sky.”²² Later as a folklorist collecting these texts, Parker noted that he was greeted by many Indian friends “with stories of the false-faces, of the whirlwinds, of the creation of man, of the death panther, and of the legends of the great bear.” And in particular, he concluded, he was “blessed with an ample store of tales of vampire skeletons, of witches and of folk-beasts, all of whom had a special appetite for young men who dug in the ground for the burial relics of the ‘old-time folks.’”²³

Troubled by the literary romances that were fashionably passed off as authentic Iroquois folklore, Parker noted that these writers had “so glossed the native themes with poetic and literary interpretations that the material has shrunken in value and can scarcely be considered without many reservations.”²⁴ Bearing out this contention, William Canfield’s legends as told by “The Cornplanter” exhibit the characteristics of literary modernism while having little semblance to traditional Native mythology.²⁵ For example, in Canfield’s legend of “The Healing Waters” the narrative reads as a romancive drama between noble savages and ossified personal gods.²⁶ With reference to an Algonquian “manito,” the text is so convoluted that the author has called upon another Native language stock and its “gods.”²⁷

Manifesting his concern with such interpolations of traditional Iroquois mythology and worldview, Parker set forward a folklore discourse analysis by way of introduction to his monograph. Regarding the importance of folklore, Parker declared, “We can never understand a race until we know its literature, written or unwritten.”²⁸ Casting his assessment within the considerations of the poet, fiction writer, amateur, sectarian, philologist, or folklorist, Parker assessed these methodological approaches to Native oral traditions.

Considering the poet, he declared that only the story’s inherent beauty is valued; when failing to find such beauty, the poet “will invent it and produce a tale that no Indian would ever recognize. Plot and detail will be changed, fine flowery language will be used, and perhaps the whole given the swing and meter of blank verse.” As a result, he concluded, the personality of the folktale is buried, “albeit in petals of roses,” but lacking the appearance of “the living thing it is.”²⁹ For example, Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha” reflects this kind of poetic meddling with traditional Native folklore as it bears no semblance to the original Iroquois narrative.³⁰ Derived from traditions collected by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Longfellow cast his poem within the framework of a traditional Ojibwa narrative, only the name Hiawatha is of Iroquois origin.

Using a professional literary prerogative, Parker asserted, the fiction writer will disassemble the Indian tale and recast the plot while expanding, explaining, and pruning. "He will invent names and new situations to make the story 'go,' then, as a rule, he sells it to a magazine or makes a collection of tales for 'a supplementary reader for children.'" But, challenges Parker, "are these Indian tales?"³¹ Canfield's *Legends of the Iroquois* bears out Parker's assessment of the romantic fictionalization of traditional Iroquois narrative.

"The amateur," noted Parker, "finding good material in the Indian story will do as the fiction writer does, but he will work in foreign allusions and inconsistent elements and in other ways betray his unfamiliarity with the material."³² The intent, similar to that of the fiction writer, is to find a good story and dress it as one pleases.

In their lust for the conversion of souls, sectarians, according to Parker, "will frequently seek to show the absurdity of the Indian tale, and point out the foolishness of peoples who are unacquainted with biblical teachings."³³ It may be added that among sectarians, many tales were disdained and "cleaned up" to suit their ideas of appropriate social mores and morals and synchronized with biblical accounts in order to serve their Christian metanarrative.³⁴ For example, the Iroquois "How the World Began" is vicariously infused with allusions to original sin and a watery world that introduces and affirms the Judeo-Christian account of creation.³⁵ As a result, the sectarians favoring religious proselytization and Native conversion at the expense of the traditional ethos exploit a naive semblance in narrative events.

Recognizing an anthropology attending tribally specific worldviews, Parker acknowledged the philological approach as one grounded in literal transcripts of traditional texts. In recording every Indian word with painstaking attention to phonetic spelling, the philologist produces, according to Parker, "an analytical interlinear translation" of these texts. Noting the tedious and laborious impositions upon those who solely speak English, Parker conceded that although this method may be useful, it is an awkward way of securing a tale. "The philological approach," concluded Parker, "tends to deprive the texts of all literary life."³⁶

In these considerations of folklore methodology, Parker considered the motive and purpose of recording these oral traditions. According to Parker, the folklorist must seek to present the legend so "that it will awaken in the mind of his reader sensations similar to those aroused in the mind of the native raconteur."³⁷ In assimilating the narrative characteristics, the folklorist is charged with retaining the spirit of the narrative in its original sequence. As Parker declared, he "strives only to be the medium by which a native tale is transformed from its original language to that of another tongue. The thought, the form and the sequence of the story . . . must remain exactly as it was, though the verbal dress is European and not Indian."³⁸

When concluding the narrative, Parker noted that "The Boy Who Could Not Understand" was "related as a humorous commentary on the literal meanings of certain idioms of the Seneca that are so well understood that they never cause confusion."³⁹ Suggesting that the author of the tale deliberately analyzed each term and provocatively provided a literal application,

Parker implies the narrative was born as a kind of oral discourse analysis. He declared that “The Boy Who Could Not Understand” is the only tale of its kind secured by the writer among the Seneca.⁴⁰ Following this perspective Parker speculated “that a captive Algonkin invented” the tale “to explain his own plight in learning the Seneca tongue.”⁴¹ Even the narrator, Cornplanter, was puzzled by this tale. At Cornplanter’s confusion, Parker noted that “his own literal translations of American slang into Seneca made him wax merry, and he concluded by saying, ‘So you see it don’t make any sense at all.’”⁴²

Although I am sure that many scholars and laymen will accept these conclusions as a convincing explanation, I cannot be counted among them. Alternately, I suggest that the narrative is an example of a traditional auto-critical discourse. Before addressing this theme in an organic context, however, we must consider some of the alternative perspectives characterized by those scholars who would impose a modernist/postmodernist ideological discourse upon Native oral traditions.

With his remarks concerning folklore methodology, Parker has given a caution for those who would assess Native American mythology, yet there remains a powerful question for the reader. What is the nature of “the mind of the native raconteur?” With this question, Parker opened the door to a contemporary debate concerning a “Native ethos” and the considerations of a traditional versus modern mind-set among Native Americans. Following closely behind this question of a “Native worldview” are additional issues surrounding the ongoing arguments of modern versus postmodern discourse. Further intertwined within this complex series of questions is the structuralist versus poststructuralist debate. Many on both sides of this debate will insist that there is no such thing as an all-inclusive Native worldview outside of specific tribal traditions. In the radical forefront of these arguments are many postmodernists who will dismiss all scholarship of interpretation that occurs outside of Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge*. In this view, all preceding and/or external scholarship is suspect due to the limitations imposed in its epochal periodicity. By epochal periodicity, there is reference to patterns of thought that undergo paradigmatic shifts necessary to reject preexisting ways of thought. Notwithstanding this model, Foucault challenged this concept of discourse as a tool of hegemonic power.

Michel Foucault wrote that the great problem presented by recurrent redistribution and architectonic unities of systems, both elements of modernity and structuralism, is

how a single pattern is formed and preserved, how for so many different, successive minds there is a single horizon, what mode of action and what substructure is implied by the interplay of transmissions, resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions, how the origin may extend its sway well beyond itself to that conclusion that is never given—the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of the lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations.⁴³

In 1926, Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead anticipated this epochal criticism of a given period and explained,

there will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them. With these assumptions a certain limited number of types of philosophic systems are possible, and this group of systems constitutes the philosophy of an epoch.⁴⁴

Although this last observation concerning “the philosophy of an epoch” would be anathema to Foucault’s postmodern discourse, Whitehead’s observation is an important one in the consideration of a paradigm shift.

The difficulty of transcending an epochal ethos is one of serious epistemological consideration, and its actualization is essential to the decolonialization of orality and the traditional discourse assessed herein. Thomas Kuhn found that change was often the product of shifting the discourse through ironic exogenous factors, such as the result of an amateur becoming involved with the analysis.⁴⁵ As with Foucault, Whitehead also anticipated this conclusion. By illustration, Whitehead commented on “the danger of refusing to entertain an idea because of its failure to explain one of the most obvious facts in the subject-matter in question. If you have had your attention directed to novelties in thought in your own lifetimes, you will have observed that almost all really new ideas have a certain aspect of foolishness when they are first produced.”⁴⁶ The irony of epistemological transformation is oddly found in the hegemonic perception of “foolishness” that serves to overturn the standing discourse.

In the West, the notion of Modernity has the standing of an epistemological transformation characteristic of epochal periodicity. As such, it is an historical or political period that begins in the late sixteenth century and continues at least through the mid-twentieth century. Thus, Modernity has been couched in the theoretical discourses born of Descartes, the Enlightenment, and its progeny. These Modernist discourses champion reason as the privileged locus of truth in advancing systematic knowledge.⁴⁷ By the term *Modernist*, as used herein, I am reflecting this notion of Modernity as an epistemological transformation evident in a movement from orality to literacy. As such it should not be confused with the aesthetic term *modernist* reflected in the epochal literary, theater, and arts criticism of the early twentieth century. As a movement, Modernity suggests a heightened sense of abstraction such as the Cartesian cognate with its notions of mind over matter. Given this conclusion, Modernity reflects the observed impacts of literacy in favoring the abstract over the concrete.

Attending the criticisms of Modernity, Foucault, like Horkheimer and Adorno, determined that modern rationality is a coercive force.⁴⁸ Unlike the other critics, Foucault concentrated his critique “on the domination of the individual through social institutions, discourses, and practices.”⁴⁹ In contrast,

Horkheimer and Adorno had “focused on the colonization of nature.”⁵⁰ With the emphasis upon human intellectual discourse, apart and separate from the affirmation of nature, the discourse becomes all too easily prey to the Cartesian fallacy, which subsumes experiential association to mental imagination.⁵¹ Postmodernism has generated significant and formidable challenges to modernity on three fronts: contesting the problem of grand narratives and their right to universal absolute truth claims; challenging the static illusions of simple location in time and process; and exposing the dementia of simulacrum and hyperreality. It has failed in two substantial ways: first, in its extreme claims to the creation of a new and viable discourse, which have not been substantiated, and second, in its collapse into the metatheoretical grand narrative arguments characteristic of Modern theories.⁵² As a result, postmodern discourse theory has a rather limited application, and ultimately it fails to offer authentic insight into a traditional Native ethos.

Mann’s “A Lynx in Time” identifies the need for a methodological shift of mind-set from linear logic and toward an embrace of “a matrix of interlocking cycles” when examining Haudenosaunee narratives. The metaphoric measure of Haudenosaunee discourse is metonymic and “not compressible into flat lines of intellectual abstraction.”⁵³ Mann explains:

Haudenosaunee metaphors do not operate in isolation but in complex association. Any attempt to “straighten them out” by transposing them into the logical, linear terms more comfortable to Westerners destroys their content. There is no way to take them but on their own terms. Moreover, metaphors regularly forge palpable, direct links between the concrete and the spiritual realms, for there is no “mind/body” separation in Haudenosaunee thought.⁵⁴

It is from this perspective that Mann has hinted at the organic union of mind and matter characteristic of traditional Native thought.

Although postmodern and poststructural critics will contend that there is no singular Native ethos or worldview, they seem to ignore the commonality of precontact Native discourse. Certainly, among Natives, narratives were transmitted across language barriers and applied in very similar configurations of time and process. From early times, linguistic studies of American Indian languages have noted an “inner form” that is strikingly universal.⁵⁵ Structurally, Native languages are incorporative and show an overwhelming preference for concepts of action or verbs, rather than concepts of existence or nouns.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in 1636, Paul Le Jeune S. J. declared that “metaphor is largely in use among these Peoples; unless you accustom yourself to it, you will understand nothing.”⁵⁷ Likewise, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft declared that the philosophy of the Indian mind is disposed to “pure allegory, under which truths are hidden.”⁵⁸ Affirming this highly metaphorical character of Native worldview, Ruth Underhill has suggested that these traditions constitute a “magic language” that is fluid with striking natural metaphors.⁵⁹ Such narratives carry both a metaphoric and a mnemonic value in association with local idiom.⁶⁰ Largely these metaphorical expressions are concrete and attached to

the natural forms and forces or “nature persons” characteristic of American Indian religious cosmologies.⁶¹ In such accounts, the recurring theme is one of connection to people and nature. These connections are explored through kinship in association with a sense of place. This kinship ethos is much more than a mere structure; it actually frames and shapes the narrative.⁶² In Western Apache geopiety, for example, the moral values are encoded in narratives that are ascribed to place, and these stories “stalk” the listeners with an essential normative wisdom.⁶³

Native worldview is filled with signifiers that strike an accord with the natural environment as a means to insure power. Two epistemological sources are manifest in making this point. First, there is the recognized metaphorical character of myth that reflects a Native metaphysic of nature wherein the natural forms and forces are expressive of the Ultimate Power, or essence, of the Great Spirit.⁶⁴ Second, there is a mystical dimension born of dream in association with nature.⁶⁵ As mystical knowledge, myth is the narrative of the soul, and it occupies the same zone as the dream.⁶⁶ Originating in dream and vision, myths are thusly metaphorical of the spiritual potentiality in the human body, a potentiality that originates in nature. As such, we observe that the same powers that animate human life also animate the life of the natural world about us.⁶⁷ The poststructural diversity acclaimed for multiple Native worldviews is a function of environmental and ecological diversity as reflected in traditional associations of place. In this manner, Native traditions are diverse according to long-standing ecological associations; however, they share an overarching metaphysic of nature, which ought not be confused with a monolithic ideology.

Many Native traditions are about putting oneself in accord with the natural world in which the goal is harmony with nature and ethical reciprocity.⁶⁸ Among the Haudenosaunee or League of the Iroquois, for example, there is identification of the five nations given through striking metaphorical references derived from descriptive geographical features. The specific examples are connotated as “elder brothers” regarding the Seneca, Onondaga, and Mohawk in the respective phrases “people of the high hills or mountains,” “people of the hill,” and “people of the flint.” While the League’s “younger brothers” featuring the Oneida and Cayuga are referenced respectively as “people of the standing stone” and “people of the mucky land.”⁶⁹ Underhill referred to this practice as “sympathetic magic” whereby the natural referent in its organic properties exhibits the desired power when presented in an empathetic manner through song, dance, and ritual.⁷⁰ Power is thus organically revealed from natural process through sympathetic ritual association. Scholars have referred to such practices as mimetic sympathy. As such, it is a theme that I associate with simile and experience. Herein, the spiritual and ecological processes of an organic referent, such as a ritual fetish, are spiritually referred to by its ecological properties. These are affected in sympathetic association, and the power that is evoked manifests itself in the organic. By organic, it is referenced in the natural processes, forms and forces, or nature persons surrounding us in our experience. Combining the notions of simile and nature-based experience, I refer to this concept as “simile of association” and offer it as a tool for deriving

the metaphysical values ensconced in traditional mythology. In these traditional oral narratives, the simile of association is an experience evidencing the ritual sympathetic magic and revealing the organic referent metaphorically. The process is an organicism in which value rests in the natural form, force, or element as referent. As a result, the nature persons are taken seriously and respected for their ecological evocations and organic associations.⁷¹

Minding these insights, we may note several affirming examples in other studies of Native oral traditions. In the Yukon, for example, Cruikshank notes that the narrators used stories as an explanation. She further remarks, "With practice I learned to follow the complex plots and to understand that when women told me stories they were actually using them to explain some aspect of their lives to me."⁷² In using oral tradition, Cruikshank found these Native women spoke of their lives grounded in local idiom.⁷³ In a telling manner, Cruikshank notes, "Oral testimonies are very different from archival documents and were never easily accessible to outsiders. They are cultural documents in which much is implicit, in which metaphor and symbol play a role in how ideas are presented."⁷⁴

Given this consideration, it seems to me that the authors of "The Boy Who Could Not Understand," similar to my grandparents, noted the creeping literalism and characteristic simple location that accompanies Western education and its concomitant reading of myth.

Reared in the woods by an Old Woman, the "boy" was never taught oratory and rhetoric. Functionally in Iroquois society, it is not the place of women to address the council, although they appoint and direct the sachems from their respective clan-mother houses. Although the clan mothers in their nurturing role know best the will of the people, oratory and rhetoric are the tools of the chiefs in public display. As noted, "the boy had never attended a council or listened to a sachem's speech," so then "he had never learned the use of words." Here the account exhibits a gender trope wherein the "boy's" instruction was deficient in masculine culture. Although the "boy" is obedient, "he" has no comprehension of figurative expression, a deficiency that exposes his positivistic education. The "boy," as a result, acts literally on his grandfather's requests, even when it causes "him" severe bodily harm.

The communications barrier is evident in the wailed refrain, "Oh, grandfather why do you never say what you mean?" and the grandfather's response, "I do, but you do not easily understand my meaning." It is a refrain of cultural alienation in which the "boy" has clearly fallen into a literal or ideational understanding of language. Although the fallacy of literalism is the central criticism within the narrative, there remains a functional and symbolic discourse that merits analysis. First, in the functional discourse, the "boy" fails to meet the demands of the society. For example, in the bear episodes, "he" demonstrates an inability to hunt. The loss of nails figuratively suggests the loss of hunting prowess, the loss of an eye implies a near blindness in the woods, and the literal aiming at his grandfather's heart indicates that the "boy" has no sense in hunting, and therefore "he" is a danger to his people. Herein the "boy" approaches the organic world as if it were a literary problem characteristic of a work of fiction.

When dressing out the bear, the “boy” again reveals “his” unsuitability for the Native way of life. Each of the four organs of the bear (pancreas, diaphragm, fat around the kidneys and face, and the ventral portion) has a simile of association (tomahawk, skirt, false face, and door) that further expresses the second point manifesting symbolic values, which the “boy” must know in order to function effectively in Iroquois society. Symbolically these values are war, manhood, mores, morals, norms, and heart or courage.⁷⁵ The “boy,” however, fails to understand each of these symbolic characteristics, which are intrinsic to the bear.⁷⁶ Virtue is not spoken of in the abstract, but as a property inherent to the bear’s organic character. As such, it is a manifestation of the mimetic characteristic of an oral worldview.

In the course of life, one is expected to assume and fulfill the requisite social roles that make a society whole. In the case of the chief, “he” must comprehend the integral relationship between the land and the people in which each ecological factor is mnemonically equated with a societal role. As “tall trees,” the sachems reflect the virtue of the Great Peace that is symbolically manifest in the Iroquois tradition of the Great Tree of Peace. “Rough places,” “high hills” or mountains, and swamps, characterized here as warriors, are likewise encoded in the Iroquois League structure. As noted earlier, each nation is given to a specific geographical connotation.⁷⁷ In total, this relationship with the landscape reflects the Longhouse metaphor, or Haudenosaunee, as applied to the peoples’ Aboriginal homelands in the context of the Great League. Of course, the further theme of kinship is manifest in the notion of “uncles” and the process of “jouncing” or notifying one’s relations. All of these mimetic associations reveal a traditional organicism characteristic of primary orality in Native traditions.

In the episodes of the feast and courting, the “boy” again fails his normative social responsibilities. “He” shows no understanding of social etiquette characteristic of ceremonial feasting and defaults to the positivistic ideology of halving the spoons. When “showing a leg” and “shaking the old lady’s skirt,” “he” visits the personal abode of the women; “his” proper place for courting is at the ceremonial dances. In “his” failure to follow customary courting practices, “he” illustrates that he is unfit for marriage. With the wife’s teaching, reference is given to the characteristic wisdom with which women and clan mothers are accorded among the Haudenosaunee.⁷⁸

In recounting these failures of understanding through ironic juxtapositions, “The Boy Who Could Not Understand” illustrates an intrinsic Native auto-criticism that was created as a response to compulsive alienation of Iroquois youth from their traditional way of life or civilization. Given the Iroquois charge at the Treaty of Lancaster concerning the education of their children and the unfit character of their learning upon returning among their people, “The Boy Who Could Not Understand” is the functional referent of these remarks. As such, the narrative supplies a critical discourse analysis exemplifying Haudenosaunee intellectual traditions. In perhaps an affirmative precursor of this question regarding oral tradition and the impact of literacy, Barre Toelken cites an account of his experience with the Navajo elder Little Wagon.⁷⁹ Following the telling of a traditional accounting of the

origin of snow in Montezuma Canyon, a young traveler asks a positivistic question of Little Wagon prompting the old man to remark “it is too bad the boy did not understand stories.”⁸⁰ Westerners are taught to look for positivistic evidences of etioloical values; the story, if anything, was “about” moral values in teaching reciprocal relations between men and nature. Assessing this lesson Toelken notes that “by seeing the story in terms of any categories I had been taught to recognize, I had missed the point, and so had our young visitor—a fact that Little Wagon at once attributed to the deadly influences of white schooling.”⁸¹ Born in an oral paradigm, the narrative categories are distinctively mimetic in nature and not positivistic like those of modern Western literature.

“The Boy Who Could Not Understand” is an example of the Native philosophical discourse suggested by Schoolcraft. It was formulated within the confines of orality free of literate-based logic. Grounded in the mimetic sympathy of an organic worldview free of secondary abstractions, this wisdom champions a primary association with the natural world that has long since been lost in the Western rationalizations that transpired with literacy. Given this retro-examination of the text within our contemporary literate milieu, we are obliged to respect the metaphorical quality of these oral narratives within the confines of natural organic referents. In doing so, we approach oral narratives with an empathy characteristic of what Parker called “the mind of the native raconteur.” The result is the wisdom of organicism that we are surely obliged to respect in our contemporary existence and amid the ecological crisis that has ensued with the modern way of life. Ensclosed in Native oral traditions, this wisdom is surely worthy of the intellectual tradition that is philosophy.

NOTES

1. In placing the emergence of American Indian studies within the academy beginning about 1970, I am omitting the “Science of Man” discourse that is anthropology, which, heretofore, had dominated the intellectual consideration of Native American traditions. In 1970, Joseph Epes Brown broke the anthropological mold when he became the first professor of American Indian religious traditions within a religion department in the United States. In this matter, Brown had found it necessary to leave the United States while earning his doctorate in comparative religion in Stockholm, Sweden with professor Åke Hultkrantz. Upon his return, Brown began his duties within a religious studies department at Indiana University. Brown, who had previously recorded *The Sacred Pipe* derived from his association with Oglala Sioux elder Black Elk, published a revision of his dissertation in 1992. See Joseph Epes Brown, *Animals of the Soul: Sacred Animals of the Oglala Sioux* (Rockport, MA: Element Inc., 1992); also in rev. ed., *ibid.*, 1997. For his earlier work, see *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk’s Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* [1953], recorded and edited by Joseph Epes Brown (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); Joseph Epes Brown, *Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1982); and in a posthumous volume, see Joseph Epes Brown with Emily Cousins, *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). For Black Elk’s most noted work, see John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being*

the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux [1932] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); and in an alternate treatment see Raymond J. DeMaille, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985). Among the many prominent works on Native American religious traditions authored by Hultkrantz, see Åke Hultkrantz, *The Religions of American Indians*, trans. Monica Setterwall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) and Åke Hultkrantz, *Belief and Worship in Native North America*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

2. See Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), 3–19.

3. *Ibid.*, 3–19; see also Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 80–81.

4. *Ibid.*, 13–15; Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 24–29, 63–97.

5. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1996).

6. For another treatment of this problem, see Jay Hansford C. Vest, “Organicism and Pikuni-Blackfeet Mythology: Paradigms of Mythological Discourse Analysis,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2006): 1955–69.

7. Barbara A. Mann, “The Lynx in Time: Haudenosaunee Women’s Traditions and History,” *American Indian Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 423–49.

8. A referee of this article suggested that the term *European* was too broad and inclusive when referencing colonialism, suggesting that at least in Native America the Germans and Beligae were never a part of such activities. However, one must certainly acknowledge that both these cultures were involved with colonialism in Africa. There was a de facto German colony in Anglo-America under the leadership of William Penn, and his heirs were significantly implicated in colonialism with the infamous “Walking Treaty” that disenfranchised the Delaware peoples. See Anthony F. C. Wallace, *King of the Delawares: Teedyuscung, 1700–1763* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

9. Arthur C. Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales* [1923] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 3–5.

10. Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 163.

11. Hultkrantz, *Belief and Worship*, 117–35.

12. *Ibid.*, 3–19.

13. See also Brown, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*, 83–100; and Paula Gunn Allen, “The Mythopoeic Vision in Native American Literature: The Problem of Myth,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (1974): 3–13.

14. For these narratives see Jay Hansford C. Vest, *The Bobtail Stories: Saponi-Monacan-Tutelo Narratives from the Buzzard Rock—Hico, Virginia and Beyond* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming). Also see the following publications from Vest: “The Buzzard Rock: Saponi-Monacan Traditions from Hico, Virginia,” *Lynch’s Ferry: A Local History Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1992): 26–31; “My Mother’s Brother’: Monacan Narratives of the Wolf from the Virginia Blue Ridge,” *Weber Studies* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 117–22; “From Bobtail to Brer Rabbit: Native American Influences upon Uncle Remus,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2000):

19–43; “From Nansemond to Monacan: The Legacy of the Pochick-Nansemond among the Bear Mountain Monacan,” *American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 781–806; “Native, Aboriginal, Indigenous: Who Counts as Indian in Virginia?” in *Mid-Atlantic Conference on the Scholarship of Diversity, Conference Proceedings*, ed. Janet Sawyer (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech University, 2004), <http://www.multicultural.vt.edu/conference> (accessed 6 October 2006); “The Origins of the Johns Surname: A Monacan Ethnogenesis,” *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia* 60, no. 1 (March 2005): 1–14; “The Lynchburg Tobacco Trade and the 19th Century Monacan Economy: Oral Traditions from the Blue Ridge at Hico—the Buzzard Rock,” *Lynch’s Ferry: A Local History Journal* (Spring 2005): 34–35; “An Odyssey among the Iroquois: A History of Tutelo Relations in New York,” *American Indian Quarterly* 29, nos. 1 and 2 (July 2005): 124–55; “Further Considerations in the Ethnogenesis of the Monacan Indian Nation: The Saponi Origins of Selected Families,” *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia* 60, no. 3 (September 2005): 133–49; “Opechancanough and the Monacan: The Legend of Trader Hughes and Princess Nicketti Reconsidered,” *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia* 60, no. 4 (December 2005): 198–215; “Monacans and Huguenots: Manakin Town and the Ethnogenesis of the Monacan Indian Nation,” *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia* 61, no. 1 (March 2006): 7–21; “A Tutelo Inquiry: The Ethnohistory of Chief Samuel Johns’s Correspondence with Dr. Frank G. Specki,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (2006), 63–84; “Weeds from the Underworld: The English Conquest of Tsenacomoco and Monascane,” in *Eating Fire, Tasting Blood: Breaking the Great Silence of the American Indian Holocaust*, ed. Marijo Moore (New York: Avalon, Thunder’s Mouth Press 2006), 146–69; and “A Tutelo Heritage: An Ethnoliterary Assessment of Chief Samuel Johns’ Correspondence with Dr. Frank G. Speck,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006).

15. “The Boy Who Could Not Understand. A Study of Seneca Idioms. Related by Edward Cornplanter, 1906,” in Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, 142–46.

16. Oratory—hai’wanota’; Rhetoric—haya’dushālendi.

17. This may be a modern interpolation.

18. William N. Fenton, “Introduction to the Bison Book Edition,” in Parker, *Seneca Myth and Folk Tales*, xi.

19. Arthur C. Parker, “Snow Snake as Played by the Senecas,” *American Anthropologist* 11, no. 2 (1909): 250–56.

20. Fenton, “Introduction,” *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, xv.

21. Parker, “Foreword,” *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, xix.

22. *Ibid.*, xix.

23. *Ibid.*, xix–xx.

24. *Ibid.*, xxiii.

25. William W. Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois: Told by “The Cornplanter”* (New York: A. Wessels Co., 1902), 89–98.

26. *Ibid.*

27. In coining the term *romancive*, I am taking issue with the notion of using the term *romantic* as a means to convey an important intellectual movement that merits serious consideration and that of *romanticizing* as a means of dismissing this movement, as well as *romantic* as in a romance novel. See, e.g., Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* [1925] (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 75–94, wherein he champions the Romantic Movement in its reaction to the so-called Enlightenment

period. Canfield mistakenly casts the spirit of the “Healing Waters” in the Algonquian term *Manito*, a Native language family separate and distinct from the Iroquoian of whom he writes.

28. Parker, “Introduction,” *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, xxiv. It is worth noting that the suggestion of an “oral literature” is something of a problematic oxymoron in characterizing primary oral traditions. In this matter, see Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 11–14, who, concerned with the ideological consequences of literacy upon primary orality, calls oral literature “a monstrous concept that confines orality to pre-textual formulation of literacy.” He explains in the “pre-emptiveness of literacy, it appears quite impossible to use the term ‘literature’ to include oral tradition and performance without subtly but irremediably reducing these somehow to variants of writing.” Furthermore, Ong contends that “you cannot without serious and disabling distortion describe a primary phenomenon by starting with a subsequent phenomenon and paring away the differences.” On the ideological consequences of literacy as it displaces orality, see Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 27–68; Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write* in which orality is acknowledged as a distinct worldview and not a prelude to literacy.

29. Parker, “Introduction,” *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, xxv.

30. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*. Minnehaha ed. (Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1898).

31. Parker, “Introduction,” *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, xxv.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., xxiv.

34. Daniel G. Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1890), 304, explains the mythological as a class of poems were “the productions of the primitive bards” and they are few “chiefly owing to the prejudices of the early missionaries.”

Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist*, 21, citing F. Michel, *Dix-huit Ans chez les Sauvages. Voyages et Mission de Mgr. Henry Faraud* (Paris, 1866). Emile Petitot, *Monographie des Déne-Dindjé?* (Paris, 1876) noted that “the missionaries, Bishop Henry Faraud and the Abbeé Emile Petitot, both entirely familiar with the Cree and the Athapaskan languages and lore, insist that the myths and legends of these tribes bear such strong resemblances to the Semitic traditions that both must have had a common origin.” The extraordinary hostility of the Christian sectarians toward Native American religious traditions is evidenced in Bishop Landa, *Relacion de las Casas de Yucatan*, 316, who commented upon the destruction of the Mayan and Aztec sacred literary texts by stating that “we burned all we could find of them, which pained the natives to an extraordinary degree.” Furthermore, in this respect, see Daniel G. Brinton, *Aboriginal American Authors and Their Productions Especially Those in the Native Languages. A Chapter in the History of Literature* (Philadelphia, 1883), 24, in which he noted that “the ruthless hostility of the Church to the ancient civilization, an hostility founded on religious intolerance, could be proved by hundreds of extracts from the early writers.”

35. Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, 59–73; see also Mann, “Lynx in Time,” 425–28.

36. Parker, "Introduction," *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, xxvi.

37. *Ibid.*, xxvi–xxvii.

38. *Ibid.*, xxvii. In a note, Parker adds that "this is important in order to preserve every folk-motive and element by which the tale may be compared in detail with those of other tribes and stocks." In his use of a "European verbal address," one must suspect that Parker is concerned with the impact of literacy upon oral narratives akin to the notion of a "Western" intellectual tradition rather than an ethnic qualifier.

39. Parker, *Seneca Myths and Folktales*, 146.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 146.

43. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969], trans. A. M. Sherridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 5.

44. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 63–64.

45. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

46. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 62–63.

47. *Ibid.*, 53–92; also Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Investigations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 2.

48. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1972).

49. Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 37–38.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 31–67.

52. Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 261.

53. Mann, "Lynx in Time," 428.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Daniel G. Brinton, *The American Race: A Linguistic Classification and Ethnographic Description of the Native Tribes of North and South America* (Philadelphia: David McKay Publishers, 1901), 56 citing Wilhelm van Humbolt.

56. *Ibid.* See also Ruth Murray Underhill, *Singing for Power: The Song Magic of the Papago Indians of Southern Arizona* [1930] (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1993), 17.

57. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. VI, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (New York: Pagent Book Company, 1959), 1–318.

58. Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Notes on the Iroquois: or Contributions to the Statistics, Aboriginal History, Antiquity and General Ethnology of Western New York* [1846] (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1975), 37.

59. Underhill, *Singing for Power*, 16; also Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist*, 299–300.

60. Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 2.

61. Brinton, *Aboriginal American Authors*, 10.

62. See, e.g., Gladys Reichard, *Dezba: Woman of the Desert* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1939); Alice Marriott, *Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948); Nancy Oestrich Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder:*

Autobiography of a Winnebago Woman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961); Lalla Scott, *Karne: A Paiute Narrative, the Story of Annie Lowry* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1966); and accounts recorded by Truman Michelson, "The Autobiography of a Fox Indian Woman," in the *Fortieth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1918-19* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, US Government Printing Office, 1925), 291-349; Michelson, "The Narrative of a Southern Cheyenne Woman," in *Smithsonian Misc. Collections*, vol. 87 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, US Government Printing Office, 1932), 5; Michelson, "Narratives of an Apache Woman," *American Anthropologist* 35: 595-610; Ruth M. Underhill, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman*. *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, no. 46 (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1936); and Jane Holden Kelly, *Yaqui Women: Contemporary Life Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978) as cited in Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story*, 3, 358.

63. Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Place: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

Geopiety is a geographical term meaning "love of land" that was first coined during the late 1970s and early 1980s in the work of distinguished geographer Yi Fu Tuan. See *Topophilia* and other works from the University of Minnesota Press.

64. Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist*, 291-92; Joseph Campbell, *Transformations of Myth through Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 96; Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 31, 131; and Brown, *Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*, 37, 60, 70.

65. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, 126.

66. Campbell, *Transformations of Myth*, 94.

67. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, 22.

68. Christopher Vecsey, "Environmental Religions," in *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History*, eds. Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 1-37. See also Hultkrantz, *Belief and Worship in Native America*, 117-35; and Campbell, *Power of Myth*, 23-24.

69. Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Iroquois* [1851] (New York: Citadel Press, 1962), 51-53; see also Mann, "Lynx in Time," 433-34.

70. Ruth M. Underhill, *Red Man's Religion: Belief and Practices of the Indians North of Mexico* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 24, 181; and Underhill, *Singing for Power*, 6, 12, 22.

71. See A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Contributions to Anthropology* [1960] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 364-65, as a means for explaining this ontology of nature persons exemplifying this Native organicism.

72. Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story*, 15.

73. *Ibid.*, 2.

74. *Ibid.*, 3.

75. Among the Iroquois, the False Face Society is associated with social mores, morals, and norms. See, e.g., Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* [1969] (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 78-84.

76. A bear society was an intrinsic feature of the midwinter ceremonial rites of the Iroquois, see Frank G. Speck in collaboration with Alexander General (*Deskáheh*), *Midwinter Rites of the Cayuga Long House* [1949] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska

Press, 1995), 64–65; Elisabeth Tooker, *The Iroquois Ceremonial of Midwinter* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 57–58; and, particularly as the Iroquois society expanded to include other Native peoples such as the Delaware, see, e.g., Frank G. Speck in collaboration with Jesse Moses, *The Celestial Bear Comes Down to Earth: The Bear Sacrifice Ceremony of the Munsee-Mahican in Canada as Related by Nekatcit* (Reading, PA: Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Scientific Publications, no. 7, 1945).

77. Morgan, *League of the Iroquois*, 51–53; see also, Mann, “Lynx in Time,” 433–34.

78. *Ibid.*, 437–40.

79. Barre Toelken and Tacheeni Scott, “Poetic Retranslation and the ‘Pretty Languages’ of Yellowman,” in *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian: Texts and Interpretations*, 2nd ed., comp. and ed. Karl Kroeber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 88–134.

80. Toelken and Scott, “Pretty Languages,” 94–95.

81. *Ibid.*, 95.