8. Cf. Sun-Dance Ceremonies, especially Sioux self-torture, or mourning rites like the self-mutilation of Blackfeet women.

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Mythological Tales And The Allegany Seneca: A Study of the Socio-Religious Context of Traditional Oral Phenomena in an Iroquois Community. By Thomas McElwain. Almqvists and Wiksell International; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Inc., 1978. 118 pp. $17.00.

The Iroquois have long enjoyed renown for their oratorical skill, and their reputation continues to be well deserved. Verbal art, from monumental ceremonial speeches lasting for days, to the everpresent humor drawn from intricate plays on words, has traditionally been appreciated and cultivated among the Seneca in particular. For this reason, Seneca oratory is an especially fertile and important area for study. In his *Mythological Tales and the Allegany Seneca,* Thomas McElwain examines a set of traditional tales in their cultural context, analyzing their composition, performance, and function, then draws conclusions concerning various social and religious aspects of Allegany community life.

Part I of the book situates the Allegany community historically, geographically, and culturally. Criteria for group membership and concepts of ethnic and religious identity are discussed. The primary religious dichotomy in the community is examined, that between the traditional Longhouse religion, whose prophet is Handsome Lake, and Christianity. The author proposes that the dichotomy is superficial, resting solely on congregational affiliation and terminology for the Creator. Both share a common foundation of native Iroquois traditions, which include a harmonious world view, personal independence beside community obligation, and active, pragmatic religious practices rather than pious but passive observation. Formal parallels are drawn between the traditional Thanksgiving address and Christian prayer.

Field techniques and questions of ethics involved in working with individuals and in observing Longhouse ceremonies are considered at length. A statistical approach is taken to the investigation of the effects

of sex, age, religious affiliation, and proficiency in the Seneca language, on the recall of traditional narrative. Since the data for the last three categories consist of subjective estimates by the author, it is unclear how precise the statistical conclusions can be expected to be. Not surprisingly, he discovers correlations between age and linguistic proficiency (few Senecas under age 35 speak the language), and between age and recall. He dismisses the correlation between proficiency in Seneca and recall of traditional narrative, however, simply saying that "stories can be and are told in English" (p. 31). The analysis seems to ignore a crucial factor: the intimate relationship between verbal art and the language which is its medium.

Part II provides an examination of the storytelling event. The question of genre is raised, and previous classifications of narrative based on content are surveyed. J.N.B. Hewitt's categories of myth, fiction, and legend are taken as a point of departure for the present study. Hewitt differs from his predecessors in considering not only content, but function and time frame as well. Myth "glorifies a sorcerer" (p. 45) and takes place in "primordial, proto-human, cosmic time" (p. 46). Fiction is a "poetic judgment about the phenomena of life and the outside world" (p. 45) and takes place in "imaginary, iterative, but human" time (p. 46). Legend purports to be historically true (p. 46). McElwain examines tales of the last two genres, the mythological tale, which roughly corresponds to Hewitt's fiction, and legend. He differs from Hewitt in attributing a religious function to the mythological tale. Although it does not function as a formal part of religious ritual, it does function on the level of individual religious action. The mythological tale is exemplified by an explanation of how to make a corn necklace, and the legend by a ghost story. McElwain's transcription follows the conventions established by Wallace Chafe in his *Seneca Morphology and Dictionary*, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, vol. 4, (Washington, 1967) and is carefully and accurately done. The function of craft explanation is seen as the preservation of a memory of former material culture, and the consequent reinforcement of traditional values. The role of the ghost story as an instrument of socialization in the modern community is emphasized, with its traditional values and its elements of fear.

A typology of performance situation is set up with six examples involving various performers, audiences, and settings. In each of these situations, the function of the narrative as a socializing agent in the family and religious community is prominent. In each case, by defining the roles and responsibilities of group members, the tale is seen to facilitate co-operation and bring about group cohesion. The effect of the storytelling situation on the composition of a tale is illustrated by a

comparison of three different versions of *Hatho:tha:s*, The Obedient One. Differences are linked to the sex of the performer, the identity of the audience (Indian or White), and the date of the performance. The author notes that television has now taken over some of the previous functions performed by storytelling within the family, however, particularly as entertainment for children and as a focus of evening get-togethers. Modern children are correspondingly deprived of the systematic inculcation of specifically Iroquoian values.

A fundamental aspect of verbal art is its medium. The investigation of the special linguistic characteristics associated with different verbal functions is a crucial but demanding task. McElwain notes the use of distinctive intonation patterns, the increased rhythmic and lexical monotony, and formulaic adverbial and demonstrative particles in traditional narrative. His preliminary analysis points out the need for further extensive, careful research in this rich area.

Finally, the changing function of storytelling in instilling values is examined. First the possibility of reconstructing earlier values from tales is raised. A method of reconstruction is demonstrated by an analysis of two stories collected by Hewitt in 1896. Unfortunately, since the stories under discussion are neither included in the present work nor summarized, it is difficult to follow the analysis with conviction. To illustrate the changing values and corresponding functions of storytelling in the Longhouse community, the author compares two versions of the Pleiades myth. He shows that the primary function of the first version, told by a woman who married into a Christian family but has recently returned to Longhouse activities, is the preservation of cultural heritage. The second version, told by an older member of the Longhouse, transmits cultural traditions as well, but it also encourages young people to return to the Longhouse and traditional ways.

McElwain concludes that certain features of the traditional narrative have changed along with subsistence patterns. Where the agricultural lifestyle of earlier generations left room for lengthy recounting of tales, both during co-operative activities and during leisure, the modern pace of daily life has led to "hurried anecdotal telling." Where tales used to function in developing the capacity for individual independence, they now tend to reinforce dependence on elders. The traditional functions of "maintaining kinship responsibility, community integrity, passage through life crises, and shamanistic powers" (p. 113) remain a central aspect of mythological tales today.

This examination of Seneca narrative, with its scrupulous attention to cultural context, should prove highly interesting to all concerned with oral literature, with Amerindian culture in general, and, of course, with

the Iroquois. It treats a rich subject which has been only too sparsely documented, but which is in danger of disappearance, since children are no longer learning the Seneca language and television is replacing the story-teller. The functionalist approach to the texts, along with the informative background material and careful recording of the tales, will also provide a source for comparative work beside such studies as Chafe's *Seneca Thanksgiving Rituals* BAE Bulletin 183 (Washington, 1961) and Michael Foster's *From the Earth to Beyond the Sky: An Ethnographic Approach to Four Longhouse Iroquois Speech Events*, National Museum of Man, Mercury Series No. 20 (Ottawa, 1974).

The book does raise a serious issue of concern to all involved in research on Amerindian topics. In a section on method, the author discusses at embarassing length the need for secrecy concerning the exact motives of research. This is justified by the statement that "objectivity requires that the informant not be included in the mechanics of data analysis" (p. 16). Particularly at this point in history, it seems crucial that both the goals and the results of such community studies be submitted to the group in question. The researcher in such a situation generally benefits considerably from the skill and generosity of those he works with, a generosity which deserves nothing less than a straightforward approach. McElwain's lengthy discussion of ethics indicates that he must have struggled with a serious question: that of crediting his sources. Although he notes that "the individuals were selected for their reputation as good storytellers and for their willingness to tell them" (p. 47), the names of those who provided the stories and translations are never mentioned. Credit should be due those who share their expertise. In a community the size of Allegany, it is well known who tells which stories and who works with a researcher. Failure to identify sources does not provide them with anonymity within the community; it only deprives them of public recognition of their talents and efforts. It is hoped that such serious oversights can be remedied in future work.

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