

## REPRESENTING NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL NARRATIVE: THE TEXTUAL PRACTICES OF HENRY ROWE SCHOOLCRAFT<sup>1</sup>

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The burgeoning philological researches of the nineteenth century established the foundations not only for the scholarly production of languages, but also for the production of a significant class of texts, specifically, texts gathered from oral tradition under the aegis of the developing field of folklore. In Europe, the twin linguistic and folkloristic labors of the Brothers Grimm exerted a formative influence on conceptions of both language and folktales, but while the revolutionary significance of Jakob Grimm's *Deutsche Grammatik* is well known to linguists, the Grimms' textual practices figure not at all in standard histories of linguistics. Nevertheless, the increasing centrality of narrative textuality to a number of contemporary lines of linguistic inquiry, including discourse analysis, conversational analysis, pragmatics, ethnopoetics, and performance-centered study of verbal art, suggests that conceptions of narrative textuality and the metadiscursive practices that have been employed in identifying, recording, extracting, and interpreting oral narrative texts are worthy of linguists' attention as well. Charles Briggs has recently offered an illuminating analysis of the Grimms' textual practices and the rhetorics they employed in support of those practices (1993). Briggs's investigation is part of a joint project in which he and I are engaged, centering on poetics and performance in linguistics, linguistic anthropology, folklore, and adjacent disciplines (see Bauman and Briggs 1990; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Briggs 1993). The present paper is intended as a complement to Briggs's investigation of the Brothers Grimm, examining a similarly formative moment in the Americanist tradition, namely, the work of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793-1864), whose career was roughly contemporaneous with that of the Grimms.<sup>2</sup>

Schoolcraft is accorded by intellectual historians a status similar to that of the Grimms as founding ancestor of folklore and anthropology. A.I. Hallowell has observed that "Historically viewed, Schoolcraft was a pioneer in the collection of the

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<sup>2</sup> Concerning Schoolcraft's life and career, see Bieder (1986), Bremer (1987), Freeman (1959), Marsdan (1976).

folklore of any non-literate people anywhere in the world" (1946: 137); Rosemary Zumwalt has called him "the first scholar of American Indian culture to collect and analyze a large body of Indian folklore" (1978: 44); and W.K. McNeil credits him with being "the man generally recognized as the father of American folklore and anthropology" (1992: 1). As with the Grimms, critics are divided or ambivalent concerning the scholarly validity of Schoolcraft's work. Some, like Stith Thompson, are strongly negative: "Ultimately, the scientific value of his work is marred by the manner in which he reshaped the stories to suit his own literary taste. Several of his tales, indeed, are distorted almost beyond recognition" (1929: xv). The vocabulary and rhetoric here are strikingly similar to some of the assessments of the Grimms cited in Briggs's article. Others, like Zumwalt and William Clements, credit many of Schoolcraft's pronounced methodological principles, but fault him for his lack of adherence to those principles in practice (Zumwalt 1978: 49; Clements 1990: 181). Finally, like the Grimms, Schoolcraft's statements concerning textual practice are framed centrally in terms of a rhetoric of authenticity and the the problematics of intertextual relations.

Schoolcraft's first encounter with Ojibwa oral narrative occurred within weeks of his arrival at Sault Ste. Marie in early July of 1822 as newly appointed Indian agent for the Michigan Territory. Eager from the beginning to learn about his charges, he was initially frustrated by having to rely on traders and interpreters who were disappointingly ignorant concerning the fine points of the native languages and incapable of managing his more subtle inquiries into the "secret beliefs and superstitions" of the Indians (Schoolcraft 1851a: 106). When he moved into the home of John Johnston and his family, however, a week and a half after arriving at his post, a new world was opened to him. Johnston was a highly successful and respected Indian trader, Irish-born but of long experience on the frontier, and married to an Ojibwa woman of high status and political influence. Their children, bridging both cultures, were accomplished individuals, one of whom became Schoolcraft's wife. I will deal with the Johnston family further below, but suffice it to say here that they provided a privileged vantage point for Schoolcraft on Ojibwa language and culture.

Two weeks after entering the Johnston household, Schoolcraft recorded his exciting and energizing discovery of the existence of oral narratives among the Indians, revealed to him by his hosts:

Nothing has surprised me more in the conversations which I have had with persons acquainted with the Indian customs and character, than to find that the Chippewas amuse themselves with oral tales of a mythological or allegorical character....The fact, indeed, of such a fund of fictitious legendary matter is quite a discovery, and speaks more for the intellect of the race than any trait I have heard. Who would have imagined that these wandering foresters should have possessed such a resource? (1851a: 109)

The sense of importance surrounding this discovery never left Schoolcraft; he saw it as being at the same time the basis of a major contribution to knowledge that would enhance his scholarly reputation, a matter of interest to his patron, Governor Cass, who encouraged his further inquiries as a basis for the formulation of a national Indian policy, and a point of entry into Ojibwa culture more broadly (Schoolcraft 1839: 17). Especially significantly, the existence of oral storytelling among the Indians was for Schoolcraft the key to their essential humanity; it

transformed his vision of who they were:

That the Indians should possess this mental trait of indulging in lodge stories, impressed me as a novel characteristic, which nothing I had ever heard of the race had prepared me for. I had always heard the Indian spoken of as a revengeful, bloodthirsty man, who was steeled to endurance and delighted in deeds of cruelty. To find him a man capable of feelings and affections, with a heart open to the wants, and responsive to the ties of social life, was amazing. But the surprise reached its acme, when I found him whiling away a part of the tedium of his long winter evenings in relating tales and legends for the lodge circle. (1851a: 196)

One of the significant implications of this sense of discovery was that Schoolcraft felt a lack of models and precedents to guide his collection, understanding, and rendering of these materials for dissemination to a wider audience. He was eager to get the word out concerning his discovery, but how? What were these tales? What was their significance? Who would be interested? In effect, Schoolcraft felt that he had to start from scratch in gathering the narratives, understanding their nature, meaning, and significance, identifying and engaging a public, and making his discovery available and comprehensible to this audience. All of these factors had a formative effect on his textual practice.

As regards Schoolcraft's understanding of the nature of Indian narratives, he conceived of them simultaneously and in varying degrees and combinations as literary forms and ethnological data. Schoolcraft himself employed the term "literary" repeatedly in his writings in referring to his narrative materials (e.g. 1839: iii; 1851a: 254, 631), but it is necessary in developing this point to specify what "literary" implied for Schoolcraft and his readers.<sup>3</sup> First of all, "literary" meant, in its most general sense, "to be read." Insofar as literacy and access to books were tied to particular social strata, serving as a touchstone of bourgeois attainment, "literary" also carried a dimension of moral meaning, as implying *polite* learning, marked by standards of taste, decorum, and refinement that needed to be cultivated in the process of literary production. This element will figure significantly at a later point in my consideration of Schoolcraft's textual practice. At the same time, in the period comprehended by Schoolcraft's career, "literary" was connected as well with a heightening awareness of authorship, of literary works as intellectual property, commodities oriented to a growing bookselling market. This too will receive further attention later in the paper.

Finally, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the term "literary" came increasingly to designate creative, imaginative, aesthetically shaped works, and this sense of the term also marks Schoolcraft's usage. For example, he remarks on the "poetic" quality of the Indian narratives (e.g. 1825: 409; 1839: iii), not a matter of verse, but of aesthetic properties, as the narratives are rendered as prose and distinguished from "measured songs or poetry" (1825: 427). That he conceived of them more particularly as *narrative* literature is amply attested by his pervasive - if loose - employment of such generic labels as "tale," "legend," and "story," and his

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Michael Silverstein for pointing out to me the need to elucidate the meanings that "literary" carried in Schoolcraft's writings. My discussion draws centrally from Williams (1983: 183-188).

references to "narration" (1839: 17), "narrators" (1839: 17; 1851a: 216), and "narrated" (1848: 130) in describing their provenience. In addition to their poetic qualities, a further dimension of Schoolcraft's conception of the Indian narratives as literature in this more marked sense of the term is revealed by his repeated reference to their "imaginative" and "fanciful" qualities (1825: 403, 409; 1839: 15, 17; 1848: 68; 1851a: 109, 678; 1853: 314), which is to say that they were, for the most part, "fictitious" (1839: iii; 1851a: 109, 196; 1851b: 216; 1853: 313). It is this last cluster of meanings that warrants Schoolcraft's use of the compound term, "oral literature." Schoolcraft was to my knowledge, one of the earliest scholars to employ the designation "oral literature" in relation to these forms of verbal art; he may, in fact, have coined the term. An early entry in his journal, dated September 27, 1822, bears the heading "Oral Literature of the Indians" (1851a: 120). Whether this heading appeared in the original journal or was added for publication in 1851 we cannot know, but the term is also employed in his 1848 volume, *The Indian in His Wigwam, or Characteristics of the Red Race of America*. It is worth remarking that from the vantage point of the first sense of "literary" offered above, that is, "to be read," "oral literature" is an oxymoron; it becomes intelligible to the extent that "literary" designates primarily poetic, imaginative, creative works. Indeed, the tension encapsulated in the term "oral literature" highlights some of the most salient problems Schoolcraft had to confront in formulating and implementing his textual practices.

At the same time that Schoolcraft conceived of the Indian tales as literature, he recognized them from the beginning of his inquiries as privileged sources of insight into the Indians' culture. In his first publication of Indian narratives, the subject matter of the final chapter of his *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley* (1825, hereafter *Travels*), Schoolcraft prefaces a narrative entitled "The Funeral Fire" with a statement that makes clear the close interrelationship between narrative and custom (or tradition):

For several nights after the interment of a person, a fire is placed upon the grave....The following tale is related as showing the origin of this custom. It will at once be perceived that their traditions and fictions are intimately blended. It would be impossible to decide whether the custom existed prior to the tale, or the tale has been invented to suit the custom. We may suppose that their customs and imaginative tales have alternately acted as cause and effect. (1825: 404)

The realization that Indian belief and custom were accessible through their narratives was for Schoolcraft an exciting and significant breakthrough.<sup>4</sup> His early attempts to obtain such ethnological information by more direct inquiry were notably unsuccessful, a problem he attributed variously to misapprehension, evasion, and "restlessness, suspicion, and mistrust of motive" on the part of the Indians and the inadequacies of his early interpreters (1851a: 106; 1856: xv). But when he turned

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting here the correspondence between Schoolcraft's discovery and the Herderian program, rooted in mid-seventeenth-century classical and biblical philology, of looking to folklore forms as sources of insight into culture. The centrality of this strategy to Americanist anthropology in the tradition established by Powell and Boas underscores the importance of Schoolcraft as intellectual precursor.

his attention to the narratives, the veil of secrecy was lifted. Indeed, this rhetoric of revelation, of bringing secrets to light, pervades Schoolcraft's framing of his Indian tales throughout his career. "Hitherto," he writes, "Indian opinion, on abstract subjects, has been a sealed book" (1856: xv). In the tales, however, "the Indian mind unbends itself and reveals some of its less obvious traits" (1851b: 216). The narratives

furnish illustrations of Indian character and opinion on subjects which the ever-cautious and suspicious minds of the people have, heretofore, concealed. They reflect him as he is. The show us what he believes, hopes, fears, wishes, expects, worships, lives for, dies for. They are always true to the Indian manners and customs, opinions and theories. They never rise above them; they never sink below them. ...Other sources of information depict his exterior habits and outer garb and deportment; but in these legends and myths, we perceive the interior man, and are made cognizant of the secret workings of his mind, and heart, and soul. (1856: vii; see also 1848: 68; 1851a: 196)

Ultimately, Schoolcraft believed that the "chief value" of the tales lies in "the insight they give into the dark cave of the Indian mind - its beliefs, dogmas, and opinions--its secret modes of turning over thought - its real philosophy," and he considered that his revelation of these aspects of Indian life constituted the basis for the lasting importance of his work (1851a: 655; see also 1851a: 585).

Schoolcraft's dual conception of Ojibwa narratives as simultaneously literary forms and ethnological data ramifies throughout his statements concerning his textual practices. The first of these is a revealing footnote from Schoolcraft's first major publication of Indian narratives, in the concluding chapter of his *Travels* (1825: 409):

These tales have been taken from the oral relation of the Chippewas, at the Sault of St. Mary, the ancient seat of that nation. Written down at the moment, and consequently in haste, no opportunity for literary refinement was presented; and after the lapse of some time, we have not judged it expedient to make any material alterations in the language adopted, while our impressions were fresh. A literal adherence to the sense of the original, to the simplicity of the narration, and, in many instances, to the peculiar mode of expression of the Indians, is thus preserved, while the order of the incidents is throughout strictly the same. Our collections on this subject are extensive. We do not feel assured that the selections here given present a just specimen of their merits - particularly in relation to the poetical machinery or invention of the Indians.

In this passage, we may observe clearly the play of meanings that shaped Schoolcraft's understanding of the Indian tales as literary. Note, for example, the coupling of "literary" with "refinement," suggesting that taking down the tales in writing was not sufficient to render them fully literary, for which further refining work was necessary. Writing down the tales makes them available for reading, but literary refinement distances them from their original oral qualities of expression. Even unrefined, however, they remain literary insofar as they are the products of "the poetical machinery" and "invention" of the Indians. The passage testifies to the difficulty Schoolcraft experienced in reconciling these various dimensions of the tales' literariness. We are immediately struck in this passage by Schoolcraft's effort to minimize the intertextual gap between the texts he has presented and "the oral relation of the Chippewas." What is emphasized here is freshness, immediacy,

directness, preservation, adherence to an original, while the potential distancing effect of textual "alterations" is explicitly disclaimed.

Now, while it is clear that Schoolcraft had ample opportunity to experience storytelling directly, it is equally clear that his narrative materials did not come to him in as unmediated a fashion as this passage might suggest. Certainly, Schoolcraft's own observations of Indian storytelling constitute one of the chief bases for the rhetoric of revelation and authenticity that marks his presentation of the Indian tales. For example, in contrasting the public and formal demeanor of Indians "before a mixed assemblage of white men" with their more relaxed manner in their own villages, "away from all public gaze," Schoolcraft writes, "Let us follow the man to this retreat, and see what are his domestic manners, habits, and opinions." He continues, "I have myself visited an Indian camp, in the far-off area of the NORTHWEST, in the dead of winter, under circumstances suited to allay his suspicions," and then goes on to describe a sociable occasion of storytelling (1851b: 184; see also 1851a: 109). It is such direct experiences that allow Schoolcraft to discover and reveal the secrets of Indian life, including the grand discovery of their storytelling. "It requires observation on real life," he insists, "to be able to set a true estimate on things" (1851a: 138), an early appeal to the authority of fieldwork, with all its rigors and remoteness and claims to privileged access to the real stuff. And, of course, the magnification of his own role in the gathering of these significant materials was quite consistent with his lifelong concern for his scholarly reputation (see, e.g., 1851a: 639, 655, 672, 703).

While we do not have direct information concerning the circumstances under which three of the four tales presented in *Travels* were collected, we do know the source of one of the narratives, "Gitshee Gauzinee" (1825: 410-412). This tale, recounting a dream-vision of an Ojibwa chief relating to burial practices, was part of the repertoire of John Johnston, Schoolcraft's father-in-law, to whom it was earlier told by Gitshee Gauzinee himself (McKenney 1827: 370; for fuller discussion, see Bauman 1993). While Johnston was fluent in Ojibwa, he would undoubtedly have recounted the narrative to Schoolcraft in English. Nevertheless, the mediation of the story through Johnston to Schoolcraft is elided in Schoolcraft's methodological statement, which implies that he himself recorded the tale directly from "the oral relation of the Chippewas." I shall have more to say about dimensions of mediation in Schoolcraft's textual practices below.

To be sure, Schoolcraft does suggest the intertextual gaps that are opened by the twin processes of intersemiotic and interlingual translation, that is, the taking down of the oral narratives in writing and their translation from Ojibwa into English, in his references to the haste with which the texts were recorded and to his lack of assurance that they adequately represent "the poetical machinery or invention of the Indians." These problems are minimized, however, by the claim that "A literal adherence to the sense of the original, to the simplicity of the narration, and, in many instances, to the peculiar mode of expression of the Indians, is...preserved, while the order of the incidents is throughout strictly the same." There is an implication here, as well, of a form-content differentiation, insofar as Schoolcraft's statement suggests that "poetical machinery" fares less well in the translation process than "the sense of the original" and "the order of the incidents," that is, the meaning and the plot. This distinction assumed a still greater place in Schoolcraft's subsequent discussions of his textual practices, correlated with the dual nature of the

narrative materials as literature and ethnological data.

The issues of intersemiotic and interlingual translation figure in a somewhat more problematic way in Schoolcraft's next major collection of Indian narratives, *Algic Researches* (1839), the work on which his reputation as a student of folklore principally rests and for which he is best known beyond folklore and anthropology because of its role as the central source of Indian lore for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his composition of *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). In an introductory section entitled "Preliminary Observations on the Tales," the reader encounters Schoolcraft's claim that his investigations of Ojibwa culture led him to the discovery "that they possessed a story-telling faculty, and I wrote down from their narration a number of these fictitious tales" (1839: 17-18). As with the statement in *Travels*, this assertion suggests a lack of mediation, a directness of recording, that is belied by the historical record, for we know that Schoolcraft's Johnston kinsmen, including prominently his wife Jane as well as his sister-in-law Charlotte and his brothers-in-law George and William, collected a significant number of the narratives included in Schoolcraft's collection and conveyed them to him already in writing and in English.

Later in the volume, in a note immediately preceding the texts themselves, Schoolcraft acknowledges these and other individuals for their assistance as interpreters and translators of the narratives, though not for the actual recording of the tales. The terms of the acknowledgment are significant: "These persons are well versed in the respective tongues from which they have given translations; and being residents of the places indicated, a reference to them for the authenticity of the materials is thus brought within the means of all who desire it" (1839: 26). Here, then, for the first time, is an explicit indication of mediation in the text-making process, but the recognition of the intertextual gap opened by the need for translation of the tales into English is framed in terms designed to minimize its distancing effects. The linguistic competence of the translators and their residence in Indian country is a warrant both for the accuracy of their translations and for the authenticity of the materials, a claim akin to the fieldworker's appeal to the authority of direct contact with the source.

The matter is rendered more complex, however, by a pair of entries in Schoolcraft's journal (published in 1851) concerning his textual practices in the preparation of *Algic Researches* for publication. These entries are worthy of quotation at length. The first is dated January 26, 1838:

Completed the revision of a body of Indian oral legends, collected during many years with labor. These oral tales show up the Indian in a new light. Their chief value consists in their exhibition of aboriginal opinions. But, if published, incredulity will start up critics to call their authenticity in question. ...If there be any literary labor which has cost me more than usual pains, it is this. I have weeded out many vulgarisms. I have endeavored to restore the simplicity of the original style. In this I have not always fully succeeded, and it has been sometimes found necessary, to avoid incongruity, to break a legend in two, or cut it short off. (1851a: 585)

The second entry dates from June 21, 1839, after the publication of *Algic Researches*:

...it is difficult for an editor to judge, from the mere face of the volumes, what an amount

of auxiliary labor it has required to collect these legends fr the Indian wigwams. They had to be gleaned and translated from time to time. ...They required pruning and dressing, like wild vines in a garden. But they are, exclusively...wild vines, and not pumpings up of my own fancy. The attempts to lop off excrescences are not, perhaps, always happy. There might, perhaps, have been a fuller adherence to the original language and expressions; but if so, what a world of verbiage must have been retained. The Indians are prolix, and attach value to many minutiae in the relation which not only does not help forward the denouement, but is tedious and witless to the last degree. The gems of the legends - the essential points - the invention and thought-work are all preserved. Their chief value I have ever thought to consist in the insight they give into the the dark cave of the Indian mind - its beliefs, dogmas, and opinions - its secret modes of turning over thought - its real philosophy; and it is for this trait that I believe posterity will sustain the book. (1851a.655)

Both of these entries, especially the first, reveal clearly the depth of Schoolcraft's concern that his narratives be recognized as authentic, that they not be taken as "pumpings up of my own fancy." Tellingly, however, his anxiety on the matter is acknowledged as the principal motivation for the intensity of the editorial labors he has invested in the revision of the texts. These labors are enumerated in some detail: The weeding out of vulgarisms, the restoration of the simplicity of the style, the breaking of compound tales into two, the abbreviation of texts, the lopping off of excrescences.

These operations open ever more widely the gap between form and content. While literary refinement remains a salient concern, Schoolcraft clearly and explicitly assigns primary importance to the cultural content of the tales as he views them, the "beliefs, dogmas, and opinions" which are given expression in the narratives - these are what must be preserved. By the standards of Schoolcraft's literary aesthetic, the tales are flawed, and any effort to achieve "a fuller adherence to the original language and expressions" or to other formal features of native expression would only detract from their literary appeal for his readers. Their chief flaw, in Schoolcraft's view, lay in verbal excess - prolixity, excessive verbiage, proliferation of minutiae, excrescences - that renders them "tedious and witless to the last degree" and offers nothing to the realization of the essential plot, the denouement.

To a degree, Schoolcraft saw the stylistic deficiencies of the Indian narratives as inherent in their language itself. He noted his apprehension, for example, "that the language generally has a strong tendency to repetition and redundancy of forms, and to clutter up, as it were, general ideas with particular meanings" (1851a: 141). In a further indictment of Ojibwa morphology, he observed that "The Indian certainly has a very pompous way of expressing a common thought. He sets about it with an array of prefix and suffix, and polysyllabic strength, as if he were about to crush a cob-house with a crowbar" (1851a: 151). (This is certainly in striking contrast with Sapir's aesthetically appreciative suggestion that "Single Algonkin words are like tiny imagist poems" (1921: 228)). And again, in a sweeping dismissal of the communicative capacities of Indian languages, "One of the principal objections to be urged against the Indian languages, considered as media of communication, is their cumbrousness. There is certainly a great deal of verbiage and tautology about them" (1851a: 171). Small wonder, then, that he considered the style of the narratives to be in need of repair by the standards of polite literary taste.

In light of these considerations, Schoolcraft's statement that he has

"endeavored to restore the simplicity of the original style" might appear contradictory. It is not entirely clear what he means by the notion of "original style," but the sentence that follows, about breaking a legend in two or cutting it off, would suggest that Schoolcraft had in mind a conception of tales as properly consisting of unitary plots which were compromised by storytellers' occasional tendency in certain contexts to chain or blend multiple narratives into a single extended narration. This too had to be fixed for an "original" quality to be restored.

Ultimately, while there is some sense of loss attendant upon the stylistic repairs he has carried out, an admission that they "are not, perhaps, always happy," literary taste requires such intervention, and the repairs to do not detract from the preservation of "the essential points." Indeed, they enhance their accessibility and appeal to his readers.

Finally, in 1856, Schoolcraft published a collection of tales, derived largely from *Algic Researches*, but entitled *The Myth of Hiawatha*, in the hope of capitalizing on the popularity of Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, published in the preceding year and inspired in significant part by Schoolcraft's publications of Indian lore. In the Preface to *The Myth of Hiawatha*, Schoolcraft offered the following:

There is but one consideration of much moment necessary to be premised respecting these legends and myths. It is this: They are versions of oral relations from the lips of the Indians, and are transcripts of the thought and invention of the aboriginal mind. ...To make these collections, of which the portions now submitted are but a part, the leisure hours of many seasons, passed in an official capacity in the solitude of the wilderness far away from society, have been employed, with the study of the languages, and with the very best interpreters. They have been carefully translated, written, and rewritten, to obtain their true spirit and meaning, expunging passages, where it was necessary to avoid tediousness of narration, triviality of circumstances, tautologies, gross incongruities, and vulgarities; but adding no incident and drawing no conclusion, which the verbal narration did not imperatively require or sanction. (1856: vii-viii)

In this final statement of textual practice, the intertextual gaps I have noted in earlier passages are widened still further. Here, for example, the texts are claimed as "versions of oral relations from the lips of the Indians," the term "version" conveying a degree of lack of full identity with an original. Likewise, this passage acknowledges a still greater degree of editorial intervention, in the writing and re-writing of the texts and in the addition of incidents and conclusions, albeit ones that are required or sanctioned by the verbal narration. Significantly, the "true spirit and meaning" of the tales, "the thought and invention of the aboriginal mind," are not "preserved," as before, but *obtained*, brought out and in part created by Schoolcraft's own editorial work in repairing the literary deficiencies of "tediousness of narration, triviality of circumstances, tautologies, gross incongruities, and vulgarities." Accuracy and clarity of content must be won back from literarily flawed narration.

My emphasis thus far on Schoolcraft's negative assessment of Indian tales as literature and his judgment that their chief value lay in their content as a key to the native mind must not be taken to imply that he considered the beliefs, values, opinions, or "thought-work" that he was at such pains to preserve to be of positive worth, for such was decidedly not the case. Indeed, his assessment of native thought was fully as negative, notwithstanding occasional sympathetic gestures toward the

Indian as a feeling human being. His common evaluation of both style and thought are clear in the following passage from *Alcic Researches*:

The style of narration, the cast of invention, and the theory of thinking, are imminently peculiar to a people who wander about in woods and plains, who encounter wild beasts, believe in demons, and are subject to the vicissitudes of the seasons. The tales refer themselves to a people who are polytheists; not believers in one God or Great spirit, but of thousands of spirits; a people who live in fear, who wander in want, and who die in misery. The machinery of spirits and necromancy, one of the most ancient and prevalent errors of the human race, supplies the framework of these fictitious creations. Language to carry out the conceptions might seem to be wanting, but here the narrator finds a ready resource in the use of metaphor, the doctrine of metamorphosis, and the personification of inanimate objects; for the latter of which, the grammar of the language has a peculiar adaptation. Deficiencies of the vocabulary are thus supplied, life and action are imparted to the whole material creation, and every purpose of description is answered. The belief of the narrators and listeners in every wild and improbably thing told, helps wonderfully, in the original, in joining the sequence of parts together. (1839: 18-19; see also 1851a: 196; 1856: xix-xx)

Style, plot, and error are all of a piece. There is an important point to be made here concerning the interrelationship between form and content. This passage makes clear that Schoolcraft did in fact perceive certain dimensions of connection between the two, especially in regard to the relation between personification, agency, and the grammatical marking of animacy. In Lisa Valentine's description of Ojibwa gender,

The two genders are animate and inanimate, classifications that are roughly logical, i.e., people, animals, and many plants are categorized as animate, whereas things such as moccasins, blankets, and sticks are considered inanimate. There are many systematic exceptions to this generalization, e.g., heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars), traditional religious articles (tobacco, pipes, drums, etc.), close personal possessions (mitts, spoons, snowshoes, etc.) and an odd assortment of unrelated items including among many other items certain berries, stones, and tires are all reckoned as animate. (1992: 27)

Animate, personified stars or berries would have struck Schoolcraft as "wild" and "improbable," signs of "error." From Schoolcraft's vantage point, then, grammatical form, narrative function, and cultural meaning are mutually implicated, at least to this extent.

Schoolcraft's negative judgment of Indian thought did not extend to a belief in innate mental inferiority (1848: 67). Rather, he held that "It was not want of mental capacity, so much as the non-existence of moral power, and of the doctrines of truth and virtue, that kept them back" (1848: 68). For "moral power" and "the doctrines of truth and virtue" here, read "Christian moral power" and "the Christian doctrines of truth and virtue," for Schoolcraft was a devout Christian, an energetic champion of missionary efforts, and a strong believer in the need for the Indians to accept Christianity in order to secure their future in this world and save their souls in the next. Here, then, is the key to Schoolcraft's preoccupation with offering texts that foreground cultural content at the expense, if necessary, of fidelity to native style. Opening up "the dark cave of the Indian mind" is a critical prerequisite to bringing the Indian to the light of Christian belief, an essential basis for the formulation of a national policy toward these inevitable losers in "the contest for

supremacy" on the North American continent. The relationship between tales and policy is explicit: "By obtaining - what these legends give - a sight of the inner man, we are better able to set a just estimate on his character, and to tell what means of treatment are best suited for his reclamation" (1856: xxii). The treatment must be humane, for the narratives establish the Indians' essential humanity, but it must be a policy of reclamation nevertheless. The crucial point for my argument is the mutual consistency in Schoolcraft of textual practices and political ideology. The intertextual gaps between the oral form of native storytelling and Schoolcraft's published texts are intended to serve the minimization of intertextual gaps in content, all in the greater service of cultural and political dominance.

But of course, Schoolcraft had other agendas and motivations beyond political ideology and policy. He was profoundly concerned with the commercial viability and success of his published work, and indeed, he made his living by writing after his dismissal from his government position in 1841. If he was to reach an audience - which is to say, a market - with his work, he needed to shape his writings to appeal to publishers, booksellers, and readers. Still further, Schoolcraft was motivated by a lifelong desire to build a scientific reputation, which demanded a proper display of scholarly knowledge and rigor in his writings as well. We must recall, in this connection, that the second quarter of the nineteenth century in America was a period in which the professionalization of scholarship was in its most nascent stages, especially in regard to philology and ethnology, and if we recall as well the novelty of Schoolcraft's findings concerning American Indian oral narrative, we can recognize the scope of his task in devising a mode of presentation for his Indian tales. To a considerable degree, he was compelled to exploration and experimentation in his textual practice. The concern to unveil the secrets of the Indian mind was paramount, but the practical considerations of commercial viability and scholarly respectability weighed strongly as well, and the achievement of a proper balance among these forces required real effort.<sup>5</sup>

The practical effects of this dilemma may be perceived in Schoolcraft's actual textual practices as revealed by an examination of his texts (see the Appendix for two contrasting renderings of the "same" tale), and here, once again, we turn to Schoolcraft's dual conception of Indian narratives as literature and ethnological data. Notwithstanding Schoolcraft's conviction that the native tales were literarily flawed, they remained a species of literature with a potential appeal to a literary audience. Moreover, they had a dual potential of their own in this regard, standing as literature in their own right while also representing a resource for the

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<sup>5</sup> In light of the dual focus of the papers in this special issue on languages and publics, it may be appropriate to say a word concerning Schoolcraft's orientation to a public, as well as to an audience and a market, though this is not a central concern of my paper. I take a public to be an audience (in the general sense of receivers and consumers of communicative forms) that is held to share some commonality of attitude and interest and that may be mobilized to collective social action (cf. Crow 1985). In this sense, then, insofar as Schoolcraft intended his publication of Indian tales to influence people's attitudes toward Indians in support of particular national Indian policies, he was attempting to shape a public as well as an audience and a market.

development of a distinctively American national literature.<sup>6</sup>

As I have established, Schoolcraft considered that to render the tales acceptable in a literary garb required editorial intervention and repair. Schoolcraft employed a number of means and devices in order to enhance the literary quality of his tales, some of which are suggested by his statements concerning textual practice. For example, polite literary taste required the weeding out of vulgarisms, sexual and scatological references in the tales. Likewise, the felt need to avoid tedious prolixity and repetition manifested itself in the abridgement or elimination of form-content parallelism in the sequencing of narrative episodes. A further means of enhancing literary appeal was the adoption of a flowery and elevated register, full of high emotion, sentimental observations of nature, archaic pronominal usage ("thou," "thee," "ye"), and heavily sentimental rhymed poetry to index the inclusion of songs in native narrative performance. A still further device was the advancement of the narrative by means of direct discourse. All of these marked the texts as literature in regard to standards of polite taste, and were available to enhance their appeal to a literary audience.

On the other hand, Schoolcraft had a corresponding set of textual means for highlighting the ethnological "authenticity" and scholarly validity of his texts. Some of these involved the manipulation of the same sets of elements that could be utilized to foreground literary refinement, tempering, reducing, or eliminating them to foreground ethnological content and expository clarity. Thus, Schoolcraft might employ a less ornate, more expository register, reduce direct discourse, or eliminate the poems from the texts. At the extreme, this would yield a brief, informationally focused précis of what might elsewhere be a more extended "literary" narrative. Also related to the language of the texts, one device favored by Schoolcraft to enhance ethnological verisimilitude was the employment of native-language words, idioms, or phrases, frequently with an accompanying English gloss in the text or a footnote. For still more scholarly effect, these Ojibwa forms might be further accompanied by linguistic commentary explicating their morphology or etymology. To cite one further device in the service of rendering cultural content accessible, Schoolcraft resorted frequently to metanarrational commentary, noting a particular action, behavior, or other feature as customary, or explaining its function. Some such comments might be interpolated into the texts or presented as framing matter before or after a given narrative for all audiences, but for more scholarly tone, they might be rendered as expository footnotes. Being especially concerned with moral issues, Schoolcraft used a special set of metanarrational devices to key a moral

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<sup>6</sup> Schoolcraft emphasizes this potential in his dedication of *Algié Researches* to Lt. Col. Henry Whiting (1839: v):

SIR

The position taken by you in favour of the literary susceptibilities of the Indian character, and your tasteful and meritorious attempts in embodying their manners and customs, in the shape of poetic fiction, has directed my thoughts to you in submitting my collection of their oral fictions to the press.

Likewise, the dedication of *The Myth of Hyawatha* to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow lauds Longfellow's work as demonstrating "that the theme of the native lore reveals one of the true sources of our literary independence" (1856: v). See also Dippie (1982: 16-17).

interpretation, including genre designations in subtitles, such as "allegory" or "fable," and explicit moral exegeses appended to the text.

Schoolcraft employed all of these devices in varying degrees, combinations, and mixtures to calibrate the framing of particular texts and collections as relatively more literary or ethnological, popular or scholarly. Thus a given tale might be rendered in a more literary guise for publication in a literary magazine but in a more expository register for inclusion in *Algic Researches*. *Algic Researches*, for its part, is marked by a proliferation of ethnological and linguistic metacommentary; *The Myth of Hiawatha* draws some of these more scholarly "ethnological" texts from *Algic Researches*, but includes also an admixture of more "literary" texts previously published in other venues. One would not want to say that Schoolcraft was fully and rigorously systematic in his calibration of textual practice, for there is a certain *ad hoc* quality about some of his compilations, but the general patterns and tendencies can be adduced from an examination of the published texts. Nor, ultimately, were Schoolcraft's efforts fully successful, at least in his own estimation, for he repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction with the degree of recognition and commercial success he achieved - or, by his lights, failed to achieve (see, e.g., 1851a: 585, 631, 634, 655, 672, 697, 703).

Successful or not, however, Schoolcraft's career-long struggle to devise a viable set of methods for the representation of Indian narratives and a productive rhetoric for the effective framing of those methods for his readers (and for himself) illuminates a formative moment in the history of textual representation, of significance to the subsequent development of linguistic anthropology, folklore, and adjacent disciplines. I have attempted to elucidate in this brief examination of Schoolcraft's metadiscursive practices a range of factors that defined the field of tensions that shaped his efforts. One set of relevant factors had to do with personal, biographical circumstances, such as his position as Indian agent, his relationship with the Johnston family, and his personal ambition. A second set related to broader historical factors: The lack of precedents for the representation of oral narratives in print, the related need to identify - even to create - an audience and a market for his work, the desire to influence national Indian policy. I have given most prominence to the tension between Schoolcraft's dual conception of the Indian tales as literary forms and ethnological data, with special attention to contemporary conceptions of literariness. To be sure, all of us who are engaged in the study of oral discourse are susceptible to just the same sorts of tensions in our work, though we may differ in the degrees to which we are able and willing to acknowledge them openly and confront them directly in our own practices. Unlike Schoolcraft, however, we do not lack for precedents - again, whether we acknowledge them or not - among which are the pioneering and vexed efforts of Schoolcraft himself.

## Appendix

1. From Schoolcraft (1962 [1826]: 7-8):

### TRANCE

Suspended respiration, or apparent death, is not common among the Chippewa Indians. Some cases have however happened.

Wauwaunishkum or Gitshee Gausinee of Montreal river, after being sick a short time, died, or it turned out, fell into a trance. He was a good hunter, & among other things left a gun. His widow still flattered herself he was not dead, & thought by feeling his head she felt some signs of life. After four days had elapsed he came to life, & lived many years afterwards - He related the following story to his companions - That after his death he traveled on towards the pleasant country, which is the Indian heaven, but having no gun could get nothing to eat, & he at last determined to go back for his gun - On his way back, he met many Indians, men & women, who were heavy laden with skins & meat, one of these men gave him a gun, a squaw gave him a small kettle, still he kept on, determined to go back for his own gun which had not been buried with him. When he came to the place, where he had died he could see nothing but a great fire, which spread in every direction. He knew not what to do, but at last determined to jump through it, thinking big forests were on the other side. And in this effort he awoke, & found himself alive. - Formerly it had been customary to bury many articles with the dead including all his effects, clothing etc & even presents of food etc from friends wishing them well. After this the practice was discontinued.

2. From Schoolcraft (1839: 180):

GIT-CHEE-GAU-ZINEE  
OR  
THE TRANCE

(The following story is related by the Odjibwas, as semi-traditionary. Without attaching importance to it, in that light, it may be regarded as indicating Indian opinion on the temporary suspension of nervous action in trance, and on the (to them) great unknown void of a future state. The individual, whose name it bears, is vouched to have been an actual personage living on the shores of Lake Superior, where he exercised the authority of a village chief.

In former times, it is averred, the Chippewas followed the custom of interring many articles with the dead, including, if the deceased was a male, his gun, trap, pipe, kettle, war club, clothes, wampum, ornaments, and even a portion of food. This practice has been gradually falling into disuse until at present, it is rare to see the Indians deposit any articles of value with adults. What effect tales like the following may have had, in bringing this ancient pagan custom into discredit, we will not undertake to decide. Much of the change of opinion which has supervened, within the last century, may be fairly attributable to the intercourse of the Indians with white men, and in some situations, to the gradual and almost imperceptible influence of Christianity on their external manners and customs. Still, more is probably due to the keen observation of a people, who have very little property, and may naturally be judged to have ascertained the folly of burying any valuable portion of it with the dead.)

Git-Chee-Gau-Zinec, after a few days' illness, suddenly expired in the presence of his friends, by whom he was beloved and lamented. He had been an expert hunter, and left, among other things, a fine gun, which he had requested might be buried with his body. There were some who thought his death a suspension and not an extinction of the animal functions, and that he would again be restored. His widow was among the number, and she carefully watched the body for the space of four days. She thought that by laying her hand upon his breast she could discover remaining indications of vitality. Twenty-four hours had elapsed, and nearly every vestige of hope had departed, when the man came to life. He gave the following narration to his friends:

"After my death, my Jeebi\* traveled in the broad road of the dead toward the happy land, which is the Indian paradise. I passed on many days without meeting with anything of an extraordinary nature. Plains of large extent, and luxuriant herbage, began to pass before my eyes. I saw many beautiful groves, and heard the songs of innumerable birds. At length I began to suffer for the want of food. I reached the summit of an elevation. My eyes caught the glimpse of the city of the dead. But it appeared to be distant, and the intervening space, partly veiled in silvery mists, was spangled with glittering lakes and streams. At this spot I came in sight of numerous herds of stately deer, moose, and other animals, which walked near my path, and appeared to have lost their natural

timidity. But having no gun I was unable to kill them. I thought of the request I had made to my friends, to put my gun in my grave, and resolved to go back and seek for it.

"I found I had the free use of my limbs and faculties, and I had no sooner made this resolution, than I turned back. But I now beheld an immense number of men, women, and children, traveling toward the city of the dead, every one of whom I had to face in going back. I saw, in this throng, persons of every age, from the little infant - the sweet and lovely *Penaisee*,\*\* to the feeble gray-headed man, stooping with the weight of years. All whom I met, however, were heavily laden with implements, guns, pipes, kettles, meats, and other articles. One man stopped me and complained of the great burdens he had to carry. He offered me his gun, which I however refused, having made up my mind to procure my own. Another offered me a kettle. I saw women who were carrying their basket work and painted paddles, and little boys, with their ornamented war clubs and bows and arrows - the presents of their friends.

"After encountering this throng for two days and nights, I came to the place where I had died. But I could see nothing but a great fire, the flames of which rose up before men, and spread around me. Whichever way I turned to avoid them, the flames still barred my advance. I was in the utmost perplexity, and knew not what to do. At length I determined to make a desperate leap, thinking my friends were on the other side, and in this effort, I awoke from my trance." Here the chief paused, and after a few moments concluded his story with the following admonitory remarks:

"My chiefs and friends," said he, "I will tell you of one practice, in which our forefathers have been wrong. They have been accustomed to deposit too many things with the dead. These implements are burthensome to them. It requires a longer time for them to reach the peace of repose, and almost every one I have conversed with, complained bitterly to me of the evil. It would be wiser to put such things only, in the grave, as the deceased was particularly attached to, or made a formal request to have deposited with him. If he has been successful in the chase, and has abundance of things in his lodge, it would be better that they should remain for his family, or for division among his friends and relatives."

Advice which comes in this pleasing form of story and allegory, can give offense to no one. And it is probably the mode which the northern Indians have employed, from the earliest times, to rebuke faults and instill instruction. The old men, upon whom the duty of giving advice uniformly falls, may have found this the most efficacious means of molding opinion and forming character.

\*[*jii*bay 'spirit' (Rhodes 1985: 580) - R.B.].

\*\*The term of endearment for a young son. [H.R.S.]. [Probably *bneshiinh* 'bird' (Rhodes 1985: 425) - R.B.].

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