



PROJECT MUSE®

The Hum of Routine: Issues for the Study of Early American Indian Print Culture: A Response to Phillip H. Round

Robert Dale Parker

American Literary History, Volume 19, Number 2, Summer 2007, pp. 290-296 (Article)

Published by Oxford University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/alh/summary/v019/19.2parker.html>

The Hum of Routine: Issues for the Study of Early American Indian Print Culture: A Response to Phillip H. Round

Robert Dale Parker

It was good to hear that Phillip Round is writing a history of the book in Indian country, and I am delighted to see this early installment of his project.

Sequoyah's syllabary led to the *Cherokee Phoenix* in 1828, as Round notes, but the *Cherokee Phoenix* (in its first version) did not last long, amid the pressure for removal. Indeed, the trajectory of Indian print culture has a good deal to do with land, and the European invasion and the history of treaties intensified the role of land in Indian self-consciousness. Hendrick Aupaumut, for example, a Mahican sachem who served as a captain in the American revolutionary army, led a delegation of Mahicans to the Indiana Territory in 1803 to persuade their Delaware relatives to take up alphabetic literacy and sign a treaty. Through "what our white brothers call A B C," he told the Delawares, "I and my nation have found many advantages; among other things our white brothers cannot so easily cheat us now with regard to our land affairs" (469). Just as many non-Indians used writing and print culture in treaties, legislatures, and courts to swindle Indian people out of their land, so Indians sometimes turned to the same technologies and venues to save their land and, through land, to help sustain their cultures.

In short, to think about early Indian print culture it may help to think about how print culture worked both to colonize and to resist colonization. Still, that is not enough, for life and land are not

Robert Dale Parker is a Professor of English and American Indian Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His most recent books are *The Invention of Native American Literature* and *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft*.

all about agency and resistance. If we are to study early Indian print culture, we can also draw on a sense of what Round calls “the everyday” and what I will call the ordinariness of print culture in Indian life, the ways that print culture absorbs and expresses not the exotic or the hybrid but instead the hum of routine.

In this context, I would like to build on the story that Round tells to pose a series of issues for the study of early Indian print culture. To start, we need to think about language. For example, a considerable body of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Indian writing survives in the Massachusetts language, mostly about land ownership.¹ Farther west, a century or more before Sequoyah, central Algonquin peoples picked up on French writing and developed their own writing systems.² But without print, their script, like the Massachusetts writings, remained exceptional. By 1849, however, there were enough printed works in Indian languages, not counting newspapers, for Henry Schoolcraft, who was sometimes called—with patriarchal exaggeration—the father of American ethnography, to catalog them in a bibliography. No doubt far from complete, his list nevertheless ran to 139 items.³

To study early Indian print culture thus means to consider a good number of issues: Indians’ and non-Indians’ use of Indian languages; Indians’ use of English and other previously non-Indian languages; whether people printed the languages they used; how print addressed linguistic variation; how well writers, whatever their race, knew the languages they used (an intriguing question for translators and for David Cusick); Indian dialects of English, including their relation to class; and what power relations Indians’ use of language expressed or encouraged. These issues get complicated. For example, when Schoolcraft’s brother-in-law George Johnston published a book of Episcopal prayers in 1844, he “calculated to suit both the Chippeway and Ottawa dialects” (26), which could help hold related peoples together through print. To take just one more example, the first known, printed literary writing by an American Indian is a 1679 elegy by a Harvard student known only as Eleazar and written in Latin and Greek.⁴

Through the mid-nineteenth century, many transcriptions and translations of Indian songs were printed, but rarely with scores and of course never with recorded music. Nor were they accompanied by dance, ritual, or other features of performance that often surround songs. Stories were printed, especially under Schoolcraft’s name, with little or no acknowledgement or naming of the Indian storytellers, the translators, and the transcribers; with minimal explanation of how the stories were edited; and again with little attention to the roles that many stories play in ritual, attention that some Indian people would not want anyway. While

Indian people were sometimes pressured into cooperating with such ventures, other times, as in the case of Schoolcraft's Ojibwe relatives, they eagerly cooperated or took charge. Remarkable materials await us if we consider the manuscripts that Indian writers left and that scholars have usually ignored in favor of white-attributed printed editions. To take an example from my current research, the Johnstons—a fur-trade family that included Henry Schoolcraft's wife Jane Johnston Schoolcraft—left Indian-produced manuscripts of the stories that Henry Schoolcraft then edited and published, manuscripts that scholars assume, without doing the research, are not available.⁵ Henry Schoolcraft's editions of stories, a landmark in American ethnography, form the first large-scale body of traditional Indian stories translated, written down, and published, and they are the major source for *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), so that to unearth these buried manuscripts is to uncover the actual Indian writing that transmogrified into Longfellow's sensational international print bestseller.

Moving (if not removing) words from orality to print, what Round calls—in loaded language—“collecting” stories, carries cultural, economic, and land-related consequences that often engage with fetishism, exoticism, and salvage operations potentially complicit with “Indian removal” and the myth of the vanishing Indian (the last of the Mohicans), as well as consequences that engage with Native agency, esthetics, or routine. As Round notes, James the printer, or James Printer, helped print John Eliot's famous seventeenth-century Christian texts in the Massachusetts language. James later used his skills in ways that Eliot probably had not anticipated, for, as Round notes, he fought against the English in the so-called King Philip's War. Similarly, Eliot's first major Indian assistant, Cockenoe, used his English and literacy to write out a deed selling Indian land.⁶ His legal work in this and perhaps other sales sold out Indian ownership, but it might also have helped preserve ownership over some lands by selling other lands.

With these questions about the relation between print culture as a node in power relations and print culture as also, potentially, part of esthetic routine, let us return to David Cusick's woodcut of Atotarho. Atotarho was known for his evil powers, the tangle of snakes in his hair, and his contorted body. Given that Thomas McKenney, who met Cusick on the same trip that took him to the Schoolcrafts and Johnstons,⁷ described Cusick in 1826 as “a cripple . . . bedridden . . . with his legs doubled under him” (McKenney 355), we can suppose that Cusick might identify with Atotarho. In a dramatic moment in Iroquois history, Degonawida and Hiawatha famously confronted Atotarho and persuaded him to

change his evil ways. When Hiawatha then combed the snakes from Atotarho's hair, Atotarho's body lost its contortions, and the three leaders founded the Iroquois Confederacy, which is sometimes seen as a model for the American constitution. (Incidentally, this is not the Hiawatha in Longfellow's epic; Longfellow confused two Iroquois figures named Hiawatha with the Ojibwe figure named Manabozho, whom he read about in Henry Schoolcraft's collections of tales.) This history invites us to see the two figures to the left of Atotarho in Cusick's woodcut as Degonawida and Hiawatha. Degonawida, who had a speech disability, chose Hiawatha to speak for him, and here one figure stands in front of the other, as if to speak for him.⁸ None of this explains the dog, which Round, in the earlier version of his paper, reads as whimsical. The dog balances the larger scene, with its four legs and its tail pointing out like the bow and arrows and the spear on the left. It echoes the writhing snakes, the feather headdresses, Atotarho's pipe and its plume of smoke, and his chair's sprawling legs. Whimsicality might seem out of place in this woodcut, which otherwise has a somberness like that other representation of a founding moment, John Trumbull's famous painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Thus, I hesitate before Round's suggestion of whimsicality in the dog (anticipated mildly by Sherry Brydon's description of the dog as "playful" [64]). Yet if Round is right, then the dog's ordinariness balances the extraordinariness of Atotarho's evil and its snaky confrontation with a kinder future represented by Degonawida and Hiawatha. Perhaps Cusick complements the transcendent founding moment with a moment of ordinary routine.

Routine, of course, was under siege for American Indians east of the Mississippi in 1827, the dawn of the age of "Indian removal." Cusick recounts a prophet who foretold in a dream that "the whites would . . . bring some liquors, and buy up the red people's lands," and who advises the Iroquois "not to comply with the wishes of the whites, lest they should ruin themselves and displease their Maker," thus losing "their national sovereignty" (*sic*, 34). In other words, Cusick's pamphlet marshals print against a concrete colonialist threat while also claiming print for a new routine of Iroquois publication and reading.

That takes us to the 1828 second edition of Cusick's *Sketches*, which identifies itself as an edition of 7000 copies and names its place of publication as Lewiston, at the Tuscarora village. Round even supposed (in the earlier version of his paper) that the "type was set and its editions pressed by the Tuscarora people themselves." The print run for a locally published book, Round suggested, "was usually below 10,000" copies, and in that

context he read 7000 as an impressively large number. Indeed it is. I suspect the typical print run was below 1000 copies. For example, in 1826 a huge seller like *The Last of the Mohicans* sold 5750 copies,⁹ and if there were a press at the Tuscarora village, would we not have a record of other things it printed? None shows up in WorldCat. Perhaps it turned out only ephemeral items, such as handbills, but if Tuscarora people had a press and the technical experience to run it, there surely would not have been the capital or infrastructure to print, market, distribute, and sell 7000 copies of Cusick's pamphlet, many more than a major publisher would produce or the local population would absorb, especially for a second edition. There was a press publishing the *Niagara Sentinel* nearby at Lewiston until 1827, and in that year it probably printed Cusick's first edition, which says it comes from Lewiston without mentioning the Tuscarora village.¹⁰ Perhaps the *Sentinel*, which I have not seen, carried news of the Tuscaroras, their connection to print culture, Cusick, or Cusick's *Sketches*, but no copies survive from 1827. In the meantime, I will hazard the deflating guess that the claim about 7000 copies printed at the Tuscarora village is about marketing, not accounting. If there were 7000 copies, then WorldCat would probably register more than eight libraries that own them. In 1839, someone advertised in the Lockport newspaper in search of a copy,¹¹ suggesting that copies were rare. Similarly, in 1845, Cusick's brother James wrote Henry Schoolcraft that at a certain house "you will find a copy of my late brother David's book on the Indians" (H. R. Schoolcraft, *Notes* 475). These signs of rarity seem unlikely if over 7000 copies were printed.

It appears that the 1828 edition's claim of 7000 copies printed at the Tuscarora village registers not so much a material fact as it stakes a polemical claim. Printing gets cast as a metonymy of land and sovereignty. For Cusick, and for many other participants in early Indian print culture, this raises the problem of how to move into a medium associated with the colonizers and decolonize it. That is the now standard critical problem of resistance and agency that contemporary criticism fetishizes so predictably that it sometimes threatens to reduce the discovery of resistance and agency to a reflex of our critical desire. To make those categories more meaningful, we need other critical goals to complement them, such as attending to the indigenous world apart from its colonization. Henry Schoolcraft's bibliography, for example, suggests that, outside newspapers, early Indian print culture in Indian languages typically consisted of Christian materials, which in turn suggests that early Indian print culture often registered a submission to conquest. Yet it can also suggest an Indian expansion into (I will not say conquest of) previously

non-Indian territory. Of course, such expansions did not always work. Aupaumut and the Mahican people lost their land over and over again. The treaty that Aupaumut persuaded the Delawares to sign cost the Delawares land. The Iroquois too have a long history of struggle to retain their land and sovereignty, but as I hope that the examples in this response and in Round's broader survey will show, while print could colonize, could resist colonization, and could fail in its resistance, it also emerged as part of Indian esthetic life and—in the profoundest sense—as part of ordinary Indian routine.

[W]hile print could colonize, could resist colonization, and could fail in its resistance, it also emerged as part of Indian aesthetic life and—in the profoundest sense—as part of ordinary Indian routine.

Notes

1. See *Native Writings in Massachusetts* (1988), Ives Goddard and Kathleen Bragdon, eds.
2. See Robert Dale Parker, *The Invention of Native American Literature* (2003), 112–13.
3. A later version from 1854 includes 150 items.
4. See Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* 3 (1702): 153.
5. See *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft* (2007), Robert Dale Parker, ed.
6. See Walter T. Meserve, "English Works of Seventeenth-Century Indians," *American Quarterly* 8.3 (1956): 267.
7. For an interpretation of Schoolcraft's later writings on Cusick, see Scott Michaelsen, *The Limits of Multiculturalism: Interrogating the Origins of American Anthropology* (1999), 45–54, though it seems to me that Michaelsen's reading of Schoolcraft as responding hysterically to Cusick is itself excited, and perhaps shaky in its information about Schoolcraft, Cusick, and Iroquois history (for example, conflating the Five Nations with the Six Nations), all tricky topics to be sure.
8. For readings of these figures as Degonawida and Hiawatha, see Horatio Hale, who says that they "cannot be mistaken" (26–27), and Neal B. Keating, who calls such a reading "likely" (239).
9. See William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America: 1800–1870* (1968), Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., 75.
10. The earliest surviving edition is from 1827, suggesting that it is the first edition, though its preface is dated 1825 and its copyright is 1826. Here I follow the usual practice of referring to the 1827 edition as the first and the 1828 edition as the second. Early references to the first edition as being from 1825 seem to derive from the date of the preface.

11. See L. L. Pechuman's "Introduction" to David Cusick's *Ancient History of the Six Nations* (1961), 4

Works Cited

- Aupapumut, Hendrick. "Extract from the Indian Journal, being the sixth Speech that was delivered to the Delaware Nation residing at Waupekum mekut, or White River, on the 15th day of April, 1803." *The Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* (April 1804): 467–71.
- Brydon, Sherry. "Ingenuity in Art: The Early 19th Century Works of David and Dennis Cusick." *American Indian Art* 20.2 (1995): 60–69, 85.
- Cusick, David. *David Cusick's Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations*. 1827? Rpt. Lockport: Turner & McCollum, 1848.
- Hale, Horatio, ed. *The Iroquois Book of Rites*. 1883. Rpt. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1963.
- Johnston, George, trans. *The Morning and Evening Prayer, Translated from the Book of Common Prayer of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Together with a Selection of Hymns*. Detroit: Geiger & Christian, 1844.
- Keating, Neal B. "Pictures and Power: The Historical Anthropology of Iroquois Painting, A.D. 1600–2000." Dissertation, University at Albany, State University of New York, 2002.
- McKenney, Thomas L. *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippewa Indians, and of Incidents Connected with the Treaty of Fond du Lac*. 1827. Rpt. Barre: Imprint Society, 1972.
- Schoolcraft, Henry R. "A Bibliographical Catalogue." *Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*. Vol. 4. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1854. 525–51.
- . *A Bibliographical Catalogue of Books, Translations of the Scriptures, and Other Publications in the Indian Tongues of the United States, with Brief Critical Notices*. Washington, DC: C. Alexander, 1849.
- . *Notes on the Iroquois; or Contributions to American History, Antiquities, and General Ethnology*. 1847. Rpt. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2002.