

# ORALITY & LITERACY

## REFLECTIONS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

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EDITED BY KEITH THOR CARLSON, KRISTINA FAGAN,  
& NATALIA KHANENKO-FRIESEN



# Orality and Literacy

Reflections across Disciplines

*Edited by Keith Thor Carlson, Kristina Fagan,  
and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen*

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## *Introduction*

# Reading and Listening at Batoche

KEITH THOR CARLSON, KRISTINA FAGAN,  
AND NATALIA KHANENKO-FRIESEN

The wind was constant and cold on that October day in 2004 as we walked across the open Canadian prairie toward the little graveyard on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. The Batoche cemetery still sits where it did when the conflict between the Métis, a people of mixed Aboriginal and European descent, and the Canadian military forces raged over its grounds in 1885. As we made our way into the burial ground, bending our heads against the stinging gale, we paused to examine a tall monument listing the names of those Cree and Métis who fell in the battles of Batoche, Fish Creek, and Duck Lake. We studied the names carved in stone and we thought about their meaning.

Each of us in the group was, in a sense, a professional thinker about meaning. Twelve scholars from different disciplines – anthropology, folklore, history, literature, and sociology – with diverse ethnic backgrounds and from different parts of the world, we had gathered for an invitational three-day symposium to talk about how we interpret the different ways that meaning is communicated through, and across, the spoken and written word. None of us specialized in prairie Métis history or culture. Our excursion to Batoche was primarily a social one. We had not come with the intention of formally examining the historical conflicts and tensions between Aboriginal people and the Canadian state, although as organizers, we did hope that we might see and experience some of the theoretical issues we were engaging at the conference being played out in a real world setting – and in that desire we were not disappointed.

Though the Battle of Batoche looms large in Canadian history, it does not necessarily resonate in Canadian popular consciousness – let alone in the minds of people living elsewhere. What is known about it – or at

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least what is communicated through history texts – describes a conflict that was ostensibly over land, governance, and identity. What we observed that day suggested that it was also, in a fundamental sense, a conflict between literacy and orality. The Canadian military came armed not only with Gatling guns and artillery but with documents and maps asserting title, proclaiming law, and declaring legislative authority. The Métis responded with bullets, and, when those ran out, they reloaded their rifles with rocks, nails, and brass buttons from their coats. But behind their powder and shot were oral traditions that spoke a counter-narrative, in which title emerged from relations with the land itself and the spoken words of God resonated in the ears of Louis Riel and those who followed him.

As we stood with our faces to the wind, studying that seemingly simple text carved on the Batoche monument, we were reminded just how complex communication is. Those inscribed names were mnemonic devices that triggered a symphony of layered stories, stories of individuals, families, and nations. All these stories pushed in different directions, highlighting the slippery middle ground in the contact zone between orality and literacy.

Immediately prior to visiting the gravesite we had shared steaming bowls of soup, plates of bannock, and saskatoon berry tarts at Maria Campbell's home. Maria, perhaps best known as the author of the 1973 autobiography *Halfbreed*, is a descendant of Gabriel Dumont, the Métis military commander in 1885. Her house is on the riverbank on the site of Dumont's old home. Over that wonderful meal, Sherry Farrell-Racette, a Métis scholar, shared with us what she knew to have happened at Batoche and what has happened to the Métis people since. Some of her accounts came from her family, part of a living oral tradition. Others came from digging up written archival records. She blended these, weighed evidence, contrasted accounts and motivations, and created a story that was both hers and a community's. She passed quickly over the battle, which for her was but a moment (admittedly an important and tragic one) in the Métis story. The battle did not define the Métis people. Sherry spoke more about what they did after it. Hers were principally stories of survival.

As we departed Maria's house on our way to the Batoche National Historic Site, we were warned to be sceptical of the 'government version' of the story. We arrived at the federal interpretive centre and were ushered into a theatre to view a multimedia show about the history of Batoche. The presentation began with a quotation from a song titled 'Maria [Campbell]'s Place' by Canadian folk singer Connie Calder:

On the South Saskatchewan River  
 There's a crossing and a bend  
 That they call Batoche  
 And on the banks of that river  
 A battle was won  
 And a people were lost.

'A people were lost.' It was clear that we were going to hear a very different version of Batoche from that told in Maria's kitchen. Indeed, what we watched was a detailed story of the battle – a story that stopped when the battle was over. It left us wondering what happened next: what did it all mean? Then the lights came on and we met our tour guides, a young Métis man and a woman from the local French-speaking community. As they spoke enthusiastically about the land that we stood on, it was clear that for them, the story did not end in 1885. We were told, for instance, about the bell from the Batoche Catholic church that had been taken 3,000 kilometres back to Ontario as a war trophy by the victorious Canadian soldiers. After sitting behind glass in a central Canadian veterans' Legion Hall for more than a century, the bell had recently disappeared. With a twinkle in their eyes, the guides explained that witnesses had reported seeing an old pick-up truck bearing a Saskatchewan licence plate speeding into the night the evening before the 'theft' was discovered. And yet, while our guides provided glimpses into the ongoing oral traditions surrounding Batoche, they also referred to a government-composed interpreters' manual that gave them the 'official meaning' of Batoche, a meaning that did not include things such as stolen bells. Clearly, once again, both written and oral traditions were at work in dynamic tension.

So we stood in the graveyard with a variety of stories pushing against one another in our minds. And, of course, we also brought our own stories with us. Those of us born in Canada reflected on what we had earlier learned, or not learned, in school, as we contemplated the meaning of a government heritage site that commemorated that same government's military alienation of Métis lands and the supposed destruction of Métis governance. And language made a difference. Some of the names were Cree and few of us could penetrate their meaning. One of the symposium participants, however, was looking at the name of his Cree grandfather on that monument. His story was surely a complex one. Others in our group were not from Canada, or had never been to the prairies before. For some of these visitors, the English names were



just as foreign. Surely they were sorting out a different set of stories (perhaps having to do with Canadian winter weather).

The graveyard at Batoche is layered with stories: some written, some oral. Some have the authority of government manuals, others of archival documents, still others of family connection and intergenerational memories. They make different and sometimes conflicting claims about Batoche and they require different kinds of interpretation; some provided space for counter-interpretations, and others were polemical. And it was not simply the messages that were in tension but also the media. Oral and literate sources competed for legitimacy, each citing different criteria for authority and each received differently. Some listeners/readers were predisposed to privilege one over another, but as we said, we were all, in a sense, professional thinkers about meaning, and so we paused to reflect on what we brought to the stories and what we were going to take away.

In trying to figure out these kinds of tensions and differences, early and influential theorists of orality and literacy – such as the ‘Toronto school’ of Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong – tended to assume that oral cultures and written cultures were essentially, inherently, and universally different, both psychologically and culturally.<sup>1</sup> The culmination of the Toronto school is found in the seminal writings of Walter Ong, who claimed that ‘fully literate persons can only with great difficulty imagine what a primary oral culture is like.’<sup>2</sup> The oral–literate epistemological chasm was nearly impossible to bridge, Ong argued, because writing was ‘a technology’ that literally ‘restructured thought.’ So profound was this transformation that within oral societies thought functioned in a manner that to the literate mind appeared ‘strange and at times bizarre.’<sup>3</sup> Once transformed, literate people’s minds worked in a new and distinct way, as reflected in Ong’s list of binary divisions: oral peoples tend to aggregate knowledge, speak repetitively or redundantly, think conservatively and empathetically, and reason situationally. Such characteristics contribute to the saliency of words and thereby enhance the memorability of utterances. Among literate peoples, in contrast, knowledge tends to be analysed, thought is innovative, ideas are objectively distanced, and reason is approached abstractly. Within literate societies words are not necessarily spoken so they will be remembered (written texts can always be pulled from the shelf and referred to when needed), nor are they necessarily meant for an audience that can respond immediately. While text relieves the need to memorize, it simultaneously creates a distance between

writer and reader. This distance in turn facilitates the interiorization of thought, and when thought is interiorized people are able to situate themselves abstractly within time.

Considered in this light, the relationship between orality and literacy inevitably becomes characterized by a unidirectional displacement; literacy, once introduced into a society, becomes an unstoppable force, impelling orality to recede into darkness. Thus for Ong, just as a child exposed to literacy in the Western tradition ultimately and inevitably became a literate-thinking adult, so too civilizations and cultures transform, mature, and develop once literacy is introduced. For Ong and Havelock, literate thinking necessarily supplants oral thinking. As such, these theorists highlight that orality and literacy are not simply two ways of expressing the same messages; rather, as Marshall McLuhan famously declared, the media themselves define and ultimately become the messages.

Running parallel to the Toronto school was the work of anthropologist Jack Goody.<sup>4</sup> Ethnographic evidence Goody collected among African tribal communities seemed to confirm the theoretical musings emerging from the Toronto school. Oral societies were 'pre-logical,' Goody argued, by which he meant that they lacked syllogistic reasoning (i.e., 'If A, then B; but not B, so therefore not A').<sup>5</sup> In addition Goody found that his study group lacked complex hierarchical systems for organizing information and therefore had trouble using visual representations to arrange conceptual data. Oral societies, he argued, might have arithmetic, but they inevitably lacked multiplication tables and as such the ability to develop organizing systems such as algebra, calculus, or trigonometry. In such societies, Goody concluded, knowledge could never be cumulative and therefore one person's reasoning could not be recorded and built upon by someone from the next generation – as occurred in classical Greece, for instance.

Though Ong concluded *Orality and Literacy* by asserting that neither orality nor literacy was superior to the other (p. 175), and Goody attempted to be cautious in assessing the broader implications of his case studies, the thrust of their overall arguments fit snugly into a stream of popular and political discourse that regarded western European society as not only unique but superior and exceptional. Critics latched onto Ong's assertion that 'both orality, and the growth of literacy out of orality, are necessary for evolution of consciousness' (p. 175) and Goody's contention that 'Cognitively, as well as sociologically, writing underpins "civilization," the culture of cities.'<sup>6</sup> The Eurocentric and

evolutionary normativism informing such assumptions were plain to see, and if not explicit, the belief was that all societies would (perhaps should?) go through identical evolutionary changes as had Europe. Thus, whatever the merits of their analysis, those who followed Goody and Ong sought correctives that showed, for example, how orality had not always bowed to literacy, and how orality continued to inform literacy long after earlier scholars had dismissed its influence.<sup>7</sup>

Revisionist works that emerged over the past two decades have generally either sought historical examples of oralist achievements to challenge the supposed evolutionary rule (the Inca, for example, were oral and had yet built a nation state), or pointed to the veracity of oral forms within supposedly literate societies (the English written epics were largely products of oral thinking and representation;<sup>8</sup> oral communication persisted as the dominant vehicle despite the introduction and adoption of literacy in Malaysia<sup>9</sup>). One of the earliest, and most compelling, of these critiques came from Ruth Finnegan, who questioned the technological determinism that informed Ong's and Goody's work. Although literacy and its associated technologies could be credited with creating certain of the conditions that precipitated the rise of modern democratic institutions, scientific thought, and rationalism, they were not, she argued, their causes. Nor, in her opinion, did the introduction of literacy mean that an oral culture would necessarily abandon its traditions and embark down the path of Western rationalism and modernity.<sup>10</sup> Certain African tribal communities, for example, had oral traditions that matched the complexity of European literature. Among Maori orators she found clear evidence of oral-literate hybridity, and among Fijian oral historians she observed people who cared deeply about keeping narratives fixed and unchanged as they were transmitted across generations. Perhaps more important, however, Finnegan intimated that literacy's supposedly inevitable benefits were not so inevitable. Biblical authority, for example, could stifle intellectual enquiry, and divisions between literates and non-literates within a society could lead to deeper and reified social stratification. There existed no genuine 'great divide' between orality and literacy; rather what mattered was how the technology of literacy was controlled and mobilized within a society.<sup>11</sup>

The debates and discussions surrounding the orality-literacy divide continue. Rather than viewing orality and literacy as separate and opposite, the authors of the various essays in this collection take for granted that whatever meaning literacy and orality have are a product

of their relationship to one another. Put another way, it is impossible to understand literacy outside the context of its relationship to orality, and exceedingly difficult to understand orality in isolation from literacy. Furthermore, most scholars today have become attentive to the sometimes subtle ways in which power shapes this relationship. It is unfortunate that the first scholars to explore the dynamics between these two forms of communication did so primarily through an evolutionary lens derived either from their understanding of the process by which western Europe collectively adopted literacy, or from observations of the equally culturally specific experience of a single child's transition from an oral to a literate state as he or she passes through the process of Western education. This legacy has been difficult to shake, as is apparent from the common and popular conflation of the term *non-literate* with both *preliterate* and *illiterate*.

Considering the history of Batoche quickly makes it clear that the relationship between orality and literacy has been shaped as much by power relations as by inherent differences in the media of communication. At its most simple level, the Battle of Batoche can be seen as a fight between an oral people (the Métis) and a literate people (the Canadians). The Métis wanted to create a community that conformed to the natural landscape of the river and prairies, in which each family's land would include a portion of the riverbank. The Canadian government sought to impose a written orderliness on the landscape. They wanted to discard the natural features in favour of a grid system consisting of quarter-section farms. The surveyed grid was based on, and in turn justified by, literate, paper-based mapping, land tenure, and ultimately governance. The Battle of Batoche was, then, the orality-literacy conflict writ large and in real, human terms. But it also took place in a world where Métis leader Louis Riel wrote proclamations and decrees and where many of the Canadian soldiers were themselves illiterate.

We can see the story of Batoche as a 'micronarrative' that complicates some of the 'metanarratives' which have dominated scholarly discussions of orality and literacy. Similarly, most of the essays in this collection investigate the intersections of the oral and the literate through close study of particular cultures at particular historical moments. This focus on culturally specific micronarratives reveals the powerful ways in which cultural assumptions, such as those about truth, disclosure, performance, privacy, and ethics, affect how particular cultures approach and make use of the written and the oral. Our efforts to ascribe value and meaning to written or oral texts is inevitably culturally determined. And

as J.E. Chamberlin points out in his contribution to this collection, because of these cultural assumptions, 'the trouble is that one community's currency is often merely another's curiosity' (p. 21). The power imbalances that arise out of this trouble have often served to marginalize oral-based cultures in the face of societies for which literacy is the currency of power. Across the colonial world, for instance, oral forms of knowledge and interaction have been devalued by literate invading nations. A reading of the essays in this collection reveals connections and commonalities between societies around the world that have been disempowered in this way, from post-Soviet women in Ukraine to the First Nations of North America and to peasants in the Philippines. However, the essays also remind us that we must be careful not to overgeneralize the oral-marginal/written-powerful binary. Overall, this collection highlights the need for scholars to be attentive to the social and cultural contexts of written or oral texts rather than relying on universal generalizations about how literacy and orality function.

Diversity appears on many levels. It is unusual to find a volume in which Canadian Aboriginal communities and authors are discussed alongside Soviet women, ancient Chinese autocrats, medieval magic, Plato, Ukrainian immigrants, Filipino peasant romantic verse, and South African Khoikhoi tribesmen. We did not select these topics for inclusion because they reflect a suitable range of people, cultures, and times to reveal the workings of the dynamics between orality and literacy. Rather, as editors from three separate disciplines but working on the same university campus, we invited scholars whose ideas about orality and literacy we found stimulating, provocative, and insightful. The purpose of this collection, therefore, is not to focus on any particular cultural group but rather to raise theoretical issues about the interaction of orality and literacy through the exploration of specific cultural contexts. The collection is also cross-disciplinary, bringing together scholars who are pushing the boundaries of their home disciplines (while recognizing the value of a firm disciplinary grounding). Individually and collectively, these authors move beyond disciplinary boundaries and in so doing are seeking to redefine their disciplines as much as they are striving to reassess the topics of their research enquiry. We invite readers to engage these essays not as an introductory survey of orality and literacy, nor as a scholastic appetizer providing a taste of a particular methodology or approach to the study of orality and literacy, but as a sampler of the innovative research occurring at the intersection of orality and literacy across several disciplines, on several continents, and relating to different periods.

We begin with two challenging essays that we group together under the heading 'Questioning Truths.' These chapters set the parameters and establish the tone, tenor, and trajectory of the chapters that follow. J.E. Chamberlin's 'Boasting, Toasting, and Truth-telling' is a wise and wide-ranging essay and the only one in the book that does not undertake a close reading of a particular cultural moment. But it reminds us of the fundamental reason why such close study is essential. He points out that each of us essentially lives inside our own minds, gaining access to the outside world only through the lens of our own interpretation. Thus when we take in a work of verbal art – whether spoken, written, or sung – we look to our own learned methods of interpretation to understand it. But we may not know how to access and interpret another culture's messages and furthermore, intermediaries such as translation, transcription, electronic recording, and so forth may stand between us and the original message. We look to these works for truth, but our sense of what is true is largely determined by the form and style they take and the kind of pleasure we get from them. To understand the truth of a work we must learn to experience the kind of pleasure it can give. It is an assumption that understanding sophisticated oral traditions comes naturally to the sympathetic ear. It does not. Just as we learn how to read, so we learn how to listen. This kind of learning is the purpose of this collection.

Chamberlin's broad examination of truth within oral and literate media is followed by Keith Carlson's deeply focused essay, 'Orality about Literacy: The "Black and White" of Salish History.' Carlson's epistemologically sensitive study exemplifies the way that learning about specific interactions between orality and literacy can challenge many of our assumptions about them. By engaging Salish historical consciousness, Carlson turns the table on the postulation that literacy was a new arrival in North America, imposed upon indigenous orality. He reveals that Salish people claim the power of literacy as an indigenous practice that once belonged to them. Within legendary Salish stories of community origins and transformation and nineteenth-century prophetic narratives, and as revealed through ethnolinguistic analysis of the Salish words for writing, inscription, and ancient transformation, literacy is portrayed not as an outside imposition but as a tradition that can be repatriated. While historians have traditionally dismissed such claims about literacy as untrue, Carlson, as Chamberlin suggests, shows a way of listening to the kinds of truth that these stories of literacy can tell. In turning the usual idea that orality precedes literacy on its head,

he disrupts standard Western notions of the evolutionary relationship between orality and literacy, and in so doing challenges us to rethink the our approach to the history of Native–newcomer relations.

Other essays in the collection find more subtle but equally nuanced ways to contest the idea that literacy necessarily supplanted orality. The next two, by Twyla Gibson and Susan Gingell, do this in a way we characterize under the heading 'Writing It Down.' Early communication theorists McLuhan, Havelock, and Ong argued that we could see Plato's writings as evidence of the 'great divide' in human history, when Greek society's primarily oral perspective (seen in Homer and Socrates) was replaced by a gaze that was fundamentally literate. This perceived rift between oral and written cultures has acted as a model for how theorists have understood other, more recent, meetings of the oral and the literate. Twyla Gibson invites us to revisit this long-held belief about 'the great divide.' In 'The Philosopher's Art: Ring Composition and Classification in Plato's *Sophist* and *Hipparchus*,' she provides a close reading of two of Plato's dialogues to reveal the degree to which they are structured around 'ring composition,' a traditionally oral technique characteristic of ancient Greek poetry. The dialogues, she argues, represent a blending of oral and literate traditions in which oral modes persist alongside and into written texts, and this has implications not only for the way we interpret ancient, orally derived works of history and philosophy but also for the study of current oral cultures.

Returning to Aboriginal content, Susan Gingell's 'The Social Lives of Sedna and Sky Woman: Print Textualization from Inuit and Mohawk Oral Traditions,' provides a thoughtful engagement with contemporary Aboriginal writers that makes a similar point to Gibson's about the blending of oral and literate traditions. Much like, and indeed perhaps because of, the Greek 'great divide' theory, the academic view of writing down Aboriginal oral traditions is that the writing process will help to salvage oral traditions as they die away, since 'the written supplants the oral in a linear development from the primitive to the more sophisticated' (p. 113). However, drawing on Julie Cruikshank's insight that Aboriginal people use oral traditions in a way that is suited to contemporary circumstances – that stories have a 'social life' – Gingell explores the ways in which two Aboriginal writers have drawn on ancient oral stories to express ideas about contemporary Aboriginal lives. Moreover, she illustrates that they have mobilized distinguishing characteristics and features of oral style in their writing. The stories continue to live and to change, moving into writing and, Gingell points out, back into the oral.

Like Gibson's reading of Plato, Gingell's engagement with the narratives reveals a complex intermingling of the oral and the written.

Along with their assumptions about the 'evolution' of literacy, the Toronto school of orality theory emphasized that individuals had little control over the ways in which literacy entered their lives and minds. Literacy was regarded as a societal phenomenon: broad, unstoppable, and all encompassing. The essays by Kristina Fagan and Natalia Khanenko-Friesen, grouped together under the heading 'Going Public,' show how this is simply not the case. Using diverse examples (Ukrainian immigrants to Canada in the former and indigenous writers in the latter), they show how communities have deliberately and strategically harnessed certain oral tales for written tellings.

Keeping with the Aboriginal focus of earlier chapters, in "'Private Stories" in Aboriginal Literature,' Fagan explores the process through which indigenous writers negotiate the move from oral, public communication to seemingly private reading and writing. This carefully argued piece shows how Aboriginal writers have engaged with the published and thus public written word while remaining conscious of the oral value placed on privacy and reticence in communication. This does not, however, mean that they are disinclined to disclose in print. Indeed, as Fagan shows, Aboriginal authors have frequently used the printed page as a place to share information not deemed culturally appropriate for oral transmission. Exploring a variety of works by Aboriginal writers over the past century, Fagan shows how the writing is both shaped by, and sometimes deliberately against, cultural protocols.

Similarly, Khanenko-Friesen's folkloric study shows how Ukrainian-Canadian narratives of migration have been shaped by oral traditions and forms. In 'From Family Lore to a People's History: Ukrainian Claims to the Canadian Prairies,' she shows how individual narratives of migration have, over generations, been appropriated by entire communities to create synthesized, generic stories that are themselves heavily influenced by even more ancient Ukrainian folk tales. She traces the oral roots of current Ukrainian-Canadian community self-representations to show that the resulting mediated master narrative of Ukrainian history in Canada is intricately connected to oral traditions. But she also shows how writing down these community stories in order to legitimize them and make them more publicly accessible has changed their form, eliminating some of their folkloric qualities. Like Fagan, she emphasizes the ways in which the community has moved to write down previously oral stories for strategic purposes, changing them



while remaining aware of cultural values and forms.

While Gingell, Fagan, and Khanenko-Friesen all find people from traditionally oral cultures moving to take advantage of the power and legitimization offered by writing, such is not always the case. As in the essay by Carlson, who shows how the Salish claim literacy as their own precolonial possession, the power relations between orality and literacy play out in very different, and from a contemporary Western perspective, non-intuitive ways in other contexts. Gary Arbuckle's and Frank Klaassen's contributions to this volume, collectively identified under the heading 'Subverting Authority,' remind us not to rest in the easy assumption that literacy is always a stable institutionalizing force while orality is marginal or subversive. In reopening the debate over the Daoist sage Laozi, Arbuckle's 'Literacy, Orality, Authority, and Hypocrisy in the *Laozi*' argues that a kind of 'fabricated orality' was promoted within ancient China in order to give legitimacy to Laozi's oppressive political program. Alongside this 'faux spoken style' (p. 210) Laozi wished to see a literary vacuum in which political analysis and protest could not take root and grow. Within Laozi's ideal non-literate world, a village would be 'a frozen dream, not a real place, and its imaginary population ... little more than a collection of waxworks' (p. 211).

Klaassen's sweeping engagement with medieval European manuscripts in 'Unstable Texts and Modal Approaches to the Written Word in Medieval European Ritual Magic' likewise reveals that literacy sometimes functioned within a theatre of ritual and discourse that ran counter to common assumptions about the relationship between literacy and orality. Previous scholars examining the medieval transition toward literacy have usually understood this move to be illustrative of literacy's reification as a static and standardized medium – a development reflective of society's increasingly rational and objective outlook. Within the dynamic realm of magical manuscripts, however, Klaassen finds that 'the intellectual culture surrounding the production of texts revels in, and self-consciously employs, the ambiguous or unstable features of the written word' (p. 219). Ironically from our present-day perspective, it was the oral utterances associated with the text that provided a level of stability and community to their readers.

If cumulatively the essays presented here hint at the depth and breadth of the complex power relations between orality and literacy, certain contributions remind us forcefully that scholars cannot exempt themselves from the dynamic. Academics and poets alike are often engaged in the process of 'textualizing orality' – recording, or encoding, oral creations

on the page. Indeed, much of the work on orality is conceived of as an inclusive project to legitimize voices from the margin within officially construed Western – literacy-based – histories. Within this school of thought, writing the oral message down is meant to legitimize it. The final two essays in the collection, grouped under the heading 'Uncovering Voices,' deal with, among other things, the possibilities and limits of oral historical methods. Reynaldo Ileto's essay 'A Tagalog Awit of the "Holy War" against the United States, 1899–1902' looks at a handwritten version of a Filipino oral romance (an *awit*) composed by a member of the resistance army, in order to reveal the shortcomings of conventional oral historical methods. Building on the theory and approach pioneered in his seminal study, *Pasyon and Revolution*,<sup>12</sup> Ileto demonstrates the extent to which classic methods of engaging oral history are inadequate to the task of retrieving the 'language of popular mobilisation' from the distant past. Through this *awit*, Ileto derives an understanding of the history of resistance to imperial rule from below, a story that is not part of institutionalized literate Filipino history and yet is only available through literate sources.

Oksana Kis deals with the challenges of collecting oral histories in the present. Kis, a feminist oral historian from Ukraine, offers her critical assessment of post-Soviet Ukraine's first women's oral history project in her essay 'Telling the Untold: Representations of Ethnic and Regional Identities in Ukrainian Women's Autobiographies' and reminds us that even such supposedly neutral terminologies as 'cultural setting' and 'cultural context' can never truly be void of politics – especially in times of totalitarianism. In the Soviet Union, the official discourses, whether in politics or entertainment – were empowered by the written word. As such they became associated with the domain of literacy: a predominantly male and urban preserve. At the other end of this process of marginalization, unofficial counter-discourses, with their often rebellious testimonies, were routinely confined to the domain of oral circulation among trusted family and friends. As a result, Ukrainian women's oral autobiographies and testimonies rarely exited the intimate circulation of which they were a part. Once liberated from this context, Kis demonstrates, such testimonies illustrate the contested nature of privacy while providing historical insights that challenge both the old official Soviet line and the more recent revisionist interpretations of Western political historians.

While there are often inequities and tensions between modes of communication, taken both individually and as a whole these essays show

that past generations of scholars were misguided to conceive of orality and literacy primarily as set in opposition to one another. However, our intellectual forebears did initiate the discussion, and without their work to build upon we could not have launched the symposium that led to this collection and that brought together voices from many cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. Our goal was to explore the ways that orality and literacy make meaning in complicated and intertwined ways. Insights inevitably emerge not from a study of one form of communication but from the cracks and fissures where orality and literacy give meaning to one another. It is appropriate perhaps that the Métis history we engaged at Batoche, the history of a blended people, introduces us to how oral and written traditions blend as well as how they contest one another. We invite readers to bring their own voices to the topics, themes, and theories raised here and to engage in a conversation that will help to move the discussion beyond where it stands today.

## NOTES

- 1 See especially Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); Marshall McLuhan, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).
- 2 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 4 Jack R. Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jack R. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jack R. Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 200).
- 5 Goody, *Interface between the Written and the Oral*, 205.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 7 Myron C. Tuman, "Words, Tools, and Technology" (review of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technology of the Word* [New York: Methuen, 1982]), *College English* 45, no. 8 (1983): 769–79.
- 8 Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (New York and Oxford: Clarendon Press/Oxford Press, 2000).

- 9 Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
- 10 Ruth H. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).
- 11 Among the most prominent scholars to challenge Ong, Havelock, and Goody were Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Among those who tended to support the literacy-orality divide were David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance, eds., *Literacy and Orality* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 12 Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution; Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo University, 1979).

## Chapter 2

# Orality about Literacy: The 'Black and White' of Salish History

KEITH THOR CARLSON

The Great Spirit travelled the land, sort of like Jesus, and he taught these three *siyá:m*, these three chiefs, how to write their language. And they were supposed to teach everyone how to write their language, but they didn't. So they were heaped into a pile and turned to stone. Because they were supposed to teach the language to everyone and because they didn't, people from all different lands will come and take all the knowledge from the people – because they wouldn't learn to write they lost that knowledge.

Bertha Peters, Stó:lō Salish elder, 1995

Some indigenous histories not only challenge Western chronologies but dispute Western ways of knowing. Indeed, a number of indigenous stories circulating among the Salish people of south coastal and plateau British Columbia challenge us to reconsider both the history of Native-newcomer relations and our understanding of such core concepts as the relationship between orality and literacy, and ultimately, our definitions of indigeneity.

If communication theory and ethnography have interpreted literacy as a force capable of facilitating profound cognitive (and thereby assimilative) change in non-literate people,<sup>1</sup> as a colonial 'weapon capable of inflicting damage' by relocating the sacred from local control and into the public domain,<sup>2</sup> and more recently as a Western tool sometimes employed by Aboriginal people to preserve their cultural and traditions against colonial assimilation,<sup>3</sup> certain Salish stories reveal that other Aboriginal truths regard literacy as something indigenous that was itself once taken away. In addition to Bertha Peters' story of the

transformed chiefs, quoted above, is the 'beginning of time' narrative shared by Harry Robinson, which describes Coyote's 'loss' of literacy, and also the thematically related oral tradition of a contact-era Salish prophet's use of sacred texts (and subsequent alienation by Catholic Church authorities) described by a second, unrelated, Bertha Peters. Considered together, as well as in relation to a countervailing Salish discourse that regards the process of 'keeping writing out' of sacred and ritualized ceremonies as an 'act of integrity,'<sup>4</sup> these indigenous historical narratives reveal the enigmatic role and place of literacy within Salish epistemology.

Within the oral traditions, literacy sits alternately at the centre of the Salish world and outside of it. It is simultaneously foreign and indigenous, threatening and protective; it is from the past as well as the present, and it looms large in the future. Literacy challenges orality, and therefore Salish notions of self, while at the same time these narratives reveal that literacy is implicitly regarded as something in need of repatriation: a repatriation that, once accomplished, will restore a balance that was earlier disrupted.

No matter how Salish oral histories situate literacy, it is always within a context of power relationships and a discourse that emphasizes the value of innovation and flexibility.<sup>5</sup> Presented here is a discussion of several Salish oral traditions that strives to situate literacy within an indigenous cosmology and thereby to begin the process of filling a void that Peter Wogan has identified as a serious impediment to our understanding of Aboriginal responses to European contact.<sup>6</sup> To accomplish this, I attempt to invert the now standard scholarly exercise of trying to determine the effect of literacy on orality, as well as the more recent efforts to assess the degree of 'orality in literature' or the extent of 'literature in orality.'<sup>7</sup> Instead, I turn my gaze to the indigenous orality *about* literacy.

A stream of scholarship led by Ruth Finnegan suggests that what Walter Ong and others identified as a qualitative cognitive difference between literates and non-literates is better understood as merely a social construct: a product of ethnocentric assumptions concerning evolutionary progress and development.<sup>8</sup> Support for this position has also recently emerged from historical studies of European literacy. Adam Fox, for example, has argued that pre-modern British ballads such as *The Ballad of Chevy Chase* were much more heavily influenced by literacy than was previously thought, just as early modern British literacy was in fact permeated with orality.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, while communication theorists no longer necessarily interpret the relationship between orality and literacy within a strictly evolutionary developmental paradigm, suggesting a transition from primitive to civilized, nonetheless it is still a working assumption that orality antedates literacy, and that all historical movements between the two states (whether within cultures or across cultures) is unidirectional, with literacy following orality. Exceptions to this rule, if they existed, would signal a civilization's decay or a culture's decline. Within this context, literacy has been considered as either a gift of enlightenment bestowed upon North American Aboriginal people or as a colonial tool of assimilation imposed upon those same people.

Presented here is an effort to take indigenous historical understanding seriously, not necessarily because it helps to explain aspects of non-Native history but because it destabilizes mainstream understanding of and assumptions about history and therefore creates new starting points for cross-cultural dialogue. All of the indigenous storytellers discussed in this chapter firmly believed that there was a time in Salish history, no matter how fleeting, when at least a few of their ancestors had working knowledge of literacy that preceded, and was therefore independent of, newcomer initiatives and influences. They were literate because powerful forces from the spirit world had wanted them to be literate, and they would become literate again for the same reason. Literacy is not, according to this version of history, something imposed on or introduced to Aboriginal people as part of the colonial process. It is therefore not necessarily assimilative and presumably, therefore, it is not inherently a threat or a challenge to Salish people's sense of self vis-à-vis non-Native outsiders. The non-conformity of these beliefs in relation to Western historical understanding, as well as some contemporary Aboriginal political discourse, suggests a disjuncture between Salish and newcomer ways of knowing, which in turn collectively offer insights into the causes of the misunderstandings that have characterized so much of Native-newcomer relations.

### **Situating Literacy within a Salish world**

It would be misleading to suggest that there was, or is, a 'Salish world' in which political and philosophical ideas were universally shared. The Salish people have never been politically united, and great diversity exists among the speakers of the twenty-two mutually unintelligible Salish languages. Culturally, the greatest division is between the seven

Interior Salish language groups, which occupy the Columbia plateau in British Columbia and Washington (and small portions of Alberta, Idaho, and Montana), and the fifteen Coast Salish language groups whose territories stretch, with interruptions, from the shores of northern Oregon to the mid-coast of British Columbia. Nonetheless, their shared linguistic roots suggest a commonality that is reflected in certain metaphysical beliefs. These are in turn accentuated in those regions where social relations were historically maintained.

The Coast and Interior Salish people of what is now British Columbia (my focus here) have long had significant social interactions. A series of communication corridors linked people east to west across the Coast Mountain range. Marriages aimed at cementing economic benefits and facilitating diplomatic relations were common, and the children of such relations appear to have been anything but systemically disadvantaged.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, even if scholars have failed to make it a focus of research, Aboriginal people identify a Coastal and Interior Salish metaphysical continuum premised on the shifting identity of the 'beginning of time' Transformer figures.

Among the lower Fraser River Coast Salish people (the Stó:lō) the central Transformer character is Xá:ls – the 'Great Spirit' of Bertha Peters' narrative, whom she describes as having travelled Stó:lō territory 'sort of like Jesus.' In other Stó:lō discussions, such as those related to Franz Boas by George Chehalis in 1884, we are told that Xá:ls was the youngest of the four children of Red Headed Woodpecker and Black Bear, who were collectively known as Xe:xá:ls.<sup>11</sup> Their home was in the mountains near the north end of Harrison Lake (on the border of a principal travel route between the Stó:lō and the Lillooet Interior Salish people). Red Headed Woodpecker also had a second wife, Grizzly Bear, who was envious of Black Bear. In a jealous rage Grizzly Bear killed both her husband and her co-wife, Black Bear. Fearing for their lives, Black Bear's children set off from their home, and in the process became Xe:xál:s, the Transformers.

In the Stó:lō histories, Xe:xá:ls are sometimes described in human terms and sometimes in relation to their bear-like characteristics. Together they travelled Stó:lō territory 'making the world right,' that is to say, they transformed people and things into their permanent forms, thereby creating the world we recognize today.

According to widely circulating stories, Xe:xá:ls travelled down Harrison Lake to the Fraser River. There they turned eastward and eventually passed beyond the limits of Stó:lō territory through the Fraser Canyon.



The Stó:lō explain that they know little of the Transformers' activities immediately after they left the coastal region except that they eventually reached the sunrise. Once there, they travelled through the sky with the sun to the sunset, and in the process acquired additional miraculous transformative powers. From the sunset they travelled by canoe eastward, eventually reaching the mouth of the Fraser River, and from there they resumed their journey back upstream. As they travelled east to west across Stó:lō territory and back up the Fraser River they performed ever greater transformative feats, including punishing the three chiefs who refused, or failed, to share their knowledge of literacy. Eventually the Xe:xá:ls passed through the Fraser Canyon and beyond Stó:lō territory, 'never to be seen again.'<sup>12</sup>

According to some of the Nlakapamux people, who reside in what might be considered the transition zone between coast and plateau, however, Xe:xá:ls, and in particular the youngest brother, Xá:ls, did not necessarily disappear. Rather, they transformed from bear-like humans into coyote-like humans and became the Interior Salish Trickster/Transformer figures known as Qoa'qLaqal and Coyote.<sup>13</sup>

References to literacy, and in particular the loss of literacy, also feature prominently in the Interior Salish historical transformation narratives, thereby reinforcing the linkages between these two regions and peoples. In speaking with ethnohistorian Wendy Wickwire in the early 1980s, Okanagan elder Harry Robinson explained that near the beginning of time, as God was busy setting the world in order, He revealed literacy to Coyote and Coyote's twin brother. Then began Coyote's problems:

He put the paper on the ground, well, just because he's God. And he find a stone. And he take stone and put the stone on the paper so it wouldn't fly away ... Went up to Heaven ... But these two [twins] still around ... And this younger one, he look at this paper lying there with stone on 'em. He thought, 'I take this paper and I hide 'em ...' And he thinks, 'This paper, He's going to give 'em to my friend because he's the older one. He's going to get this paper not me. And he's going to be the boss. And not me. But I take this paper and I hide 'em ... Tell 'em that the wind blowed.

... And that younger one, now today, that's the white man. And the other one, that's me. That's the Indian. And that's why the white man, they can tell a lie more than the Indian. But the white man, they got that law ... And [God] told him, 'That paper, it'll tell you what to do. But you have to tell the Indians.'<sup>14</sup>

As with Bertha Peters' narrative of the transformed chiefs, Harry Robinson explains that it was God's original intention that Salish people be literate. In both accounts, future generations of Salish people are denied literacy; through the failings of their own leaders in the former case, and through the conniving and selfishness of the white brother in the latter. The consequences are profound. Immediately after sharing her transformation narrative with me, Bertha Peters made explicit the ongoing historical significance of the loss of literacy:

When the first white people came, a white man raped this Indian woman. And she got syphilis. Then, when her husband *went* with her, he caught syphilis too. But they didn't know about these sicknesses, and so the man went up the mountain to die. He was laying there naked and a snake came up to him and ate all the sickness off his penis, then wiggled away. Then it ate three types of plants and got well. So the man went and ate the three plants and got well. So they knew a cure for this sickness, but they couldn't write it down, so they lost it.<sup>15</sup>

For Bertha Peters, literacy was not necessarily a source of knowledge or power in itself. Rather, it was principally a tool for preserving certain kinds of knowledge that could have assisted Salish people during times of great distress, such as those associated with the arrival of Europeans. White people's mastery of literacy gave them an advantage not only in terms of preserving their own European knowledge but in terms of their ability and propensity to steal and profit from indigenous wisdom. For as Bertha went on to explain, 'This [white] man came to see me and he told me the Indians have a lot to be proud of because there are twenty-eight different types of medicine they use in the hospital which came from the Indians. That knowledge of medicine was taken away from the Indians by the white people because they didn't write it down.'

In a similar fashion, in a follow-up conversation with Wickwire, Harry Robinson outlined the consequences of Coyote's loss of literacy on Salish people in terms of alienated lands and governing authority. Long after Coyote's white twin brother had stolen literacy and moved to Britain, troubles began emerging as a result of the imbalance in the world between the literate white brother's children and Coyote's non-literate children. An 'Angel of God' then appeared to Coyote, bestowed additional powers upon him, and directed him to embark on a mission to England, where 'you and King are going to make a law for the white people and the Indians.'<sup>16</sup>

In Robinson's description of Coyote's adventures in London, the king of England is reminded that Coyote too is a king, and that as monarchs they together have the authority to make lasting laws for their two people, and in particular, to regulate relations between the two races. Such laws are necessary, Coyote explains, because the English king's children have started arriving in Coyote's country 'and they don't do good with my children ... They just don't care for them. They just go and claim the land and they just do as they like.' It was a serious matter, Coyote clarified, for when his own children tried to explain to the English immigrants, 'This here is mine,' the English settlers responded with violence and some of Coyote's children were killed.<sup>17</sup> Only a written law could ensure that the two groups of children would 'be good; not be in trouble, not be bad to one another.' Coyote insisted that the two sides would not have to fight if he and the English king 'marked down on paper a law, so it can be that way for the rest of time, to the end of the world. Because that's God's thought, you know.' Coyote wanted the Indian Law, which he referred to as the 'Black and White,' or 'the Indian Law,' to clarify the criteria by which Indian reserves would be defined, to set restrictions on the degree to which white settlement could 'crowd' the Indian reserves, and to entrench guarantees concerning the future inalienability of Indian lands. It was intended, in other words, to codify and regulate Native-newcomer relations.

In Robinson's narrative Coyote is continually stymied by the English king, who seeks ways to escape having to properly fulfil 'God's thought.' In the end, it is only Coyote's mystical ability to reveal to the English king a vision of an impending attack by an indigenous army that convinces the British monarch to agree to put pen to paper and create the document Coyote desires. Indeed, 'Coyote just forced him to do something he don't really like - and that idea is still the same right now ... [and that's why] they always try to beat the Indians, because the king is not really satisfied.'

So difficult is the task of composing the 'Indian law' (and so reluctant, it seems, is the king to work speedily) that the task cannot be completed during Coyote's visit. And so Coyote has to be satisfied with a point-form list and a commitment that 'when I leave you, then you can do the rest. Take your time and do the rest. When you finish, all the paper, that'll be the Indian Law; you give 'em to my children. Not right away, but long time from now ... You gonna give 'em to my children. By this time, my children, they can read. That's *their* law.'

Robinson explains that ultimately, 'the King, he didn't make that stuff.' Coyote and his people had to wait many generations before the English king's promise was finally fulfilled by one of the his successors – a queen. She was a good woman, according to Robinson, who took the promise of her ancestor seriously. She wrote the Indian Law and made copies, so there were four in all. One the queen kept in her London office; the other three she sent to Canada. Letters were attached to the books requiring that they be deposited in Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Victoria, 'til the Indians get to be educated so they can read.' A Salish man named TOM-mah was hired to guide the government official who carried the BC copy of the 'Black and White' through the mountains from Kelowna to Hope. Robinson explained that one night while camping the government official opened the Black and White and showed it to TOM-mah. Because TOM-mah couldn't read the government agent explained to the Salish man the book's contents. He also showed TOM-mah an illustration in the book – a photograph that showed the king of England in Buckingham Palace meeting with Coyote. TOM-mah told his people what he had been shown, and Robinson had met TOM-mah in 1917, when the guide was more than eighty years old. This, Robinson reasoned, meant that the Black and White was delivered about 1860.

Wickwire's published version of Robinson's narrative ends with Robinson explaining that he had himself seen the padlocked book of the Indian Law when he visited Victoria in the company of Aboriginal activists Andrew Paul and Tom Gregoire in 1947. The actual interview, however, goes on to describe how literacy came to the Salish people and how they used literacy to mobilize the power of the Black and White. According to Robinson, as Coyote's children became literate, they 'open[ed] the Black and White and read it and ... [thought] for themselves.' One of the first to do so was a Salish man named Edward Brett. Robinson remembered meeting Brett circa 1947. Brett's parents had died, according to Robinson, while their son was quite young, and so Brett had been raised at the Roman Catholic residential school in Kamloops. As a young literate man, Brett learned that the Black and White was locked in Victoria. After much difficulty, frustration, and personal financial sacrifice, Brett was eventually able to acquire a 700 page copy of the Black and White from a government agent, and 'he read that and he knew exactly what it said from the Queen and the King.'<sup>18</sup>

Upon returning to his community with his copy of the text, Brett is remembered to have organized study sessions every month or so to allow Salish people from a wide region to congregate to hear him read

and translate a few pages at a time of the Indian Law. In this way, over the course of many months, the people from all around became familiar with the great book and its laws – with the Black and White. They came to know, in other words, what regulations had been established for Native-newcomer relations and were thus able to assess non-Native behaviour in relation to codified criteria. The conclusion was clear: non-Natives could not be trusted. Just as Coyote's white twin brother had stolen literacy, white settlers and the Canadian government were stealing land and Aboriginal people's dignity. For Coyote and his descendants, literacy was the key to accountability and the means of restoring interracial balance.

Throughout Robinson's narrative, literacy is shown to be a powerful force, capable of precipitating transformations in people's lives not unlike the transformative power associated with Coyote. After initially having literacy stolen from them, it is the absence of literacy that sets Native people apart from their English brothers. Coyote's desire to encode, standardize, and make predictable Native-newcomer relations through the repatriation of literacy and the Black and White should not necessarily be regarded as a sign of assimilation or weakness on the part of Salish people. Rather, it speaks principally of the extent to which Salish people perceived differences between themselves and the strangers who came to their lands from afar, while also illustrating that they anticipated a means of peaceful and prosperous relations. Indeed, it illustrates that Robinson considered Salish people and non-Natives to have a shared history of creation. As he explained,

Now, they had them all finished ... that's the Indian Law. That's where the Indian's Law is, in that book. Nothing but the Indian Law and that's what they call the 'Black and White,' because whoever made that law, one he was black and the other was white. See that's the key ... that he was white. And Coyote was black: that was Indian. Black and white. He made that law. That the reason why they called that book 'Black and White.'

### **Prophetic Salish Literacy**

Until relatively recently, it was an academic commonplace to assume that non-literates across time and cultures reacted to literacy in identical ways, in what former US president George W. Bush might describe as 'shock and awe.'<sup>19</sup> A counter-current of scholarship has posited that

what was regarded as universal indigenous amazement was more likely a reflection of Western assumptions and arrogance on the part of literate observers and recorders. So pervasive is literacy's importance as a symbol of Western superiority that, as cultural theorist Michael Harbsmeier has observed, 'only modern European civilization came to make its own ... proper literacy, into the very definition of its own identity against the rest of the world.'<sup>20</sup> Along similar lines, Patricia Seed raises the possibility that 'the geographic diversity of reports of native "marveling" over several centuries of encounters with non-Europeans suggests not an implausible similarity among the Ibo, Tupi, Nambikwara, and Raratonga, but rather a historical continuity in Western expectations of the conduct of non-European peoples.'<sup>21</sup> The narratives of Bertha Peters and Harry Robinson challenge the notions underlying each of these observations in ways with which the existing scholarship on orality and literacy are ill equipped to deal. Their narratives of 'beginning of time literacy' (and in the case of Robinson, literacy's indigenous repatriation) suggest that at least some Salish people believe not only that their ancestors were not necessarily awestruck by the arrival of Western literacy but that they embraced it as part of their own historical identity.

To sift through newcomer biases it is useful, and revealing, to situate the accounts of ancient Salish literacy alongside what on the surface might appear to be rather distinct narratives of nineteenth-century Salish prophesy. For from the perspective of several Salish carriers of historical narratives, Salish literacy before the residential school era was not restricted to the ephemeral encounters of the three transformed chiefs or betrayed Coyote. These Salish histories also tell of pre-contact prophets who, within the context of Bertha's and Harry's accounts, might be thought of as having reacquired literacy directly from the spirit world, and who used this medium to prepare Salish people for the profound changes associated with European colonization.

Tucked away in the British Museum in London, England, are the restricted fieldnotes of the anthropologist Marian Smith, of Columbia University, and those her graduate students, compiled during their summer of ethnographic research among the Stó:lō in 1945.<sup>22</sup> A number of the entries were made during conversations with a Mrs Bertha Peters (whom I will refer to simply as 'Mrs Peters,' to distinguish her from the other Bertha Peters referred to above). Mrs Peters described the profound role that prophetic literacy played in nineteenth-century Salish-British relations.

She explained that her 'great-grandfather's great-grandfather' St'a'saluk had been a prophet. In and of itself, being a prophet was not necessarily considered remarkable among Salish people. As the anthropologist Wilson Duff, among others, has documented, Salish individuals with the power to see what was transpiring in other settlements, and who could foresee future events, have a long history that pre-dates European contact.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, among other things they played an important role in advising people about the potentially hostile intentions of those in other settlements. What apparently set St'a'saluk and at least one other nineteenth-century Salish prophet apart from others was less their ability to predict the future than their use of literacy to accomplish this feat. According to Mrs Peters, St'a'saluk acquired from God himself a piece of paper that foretold the future, including the impending arrival of white people. As a result, this paper was so valued that it was passed from 'son to son' and in that way continued to provide a valuable service to Salish people across generations.

Within Salish traditions, not unlike the practice of medieval European magic described by Frank Klaassen (chapter 8, this volume), rituals and incantations were carefully guarded and their secrets passed from mentoring ritualist to novice. Moreover, as in medieval magic, in which utterances in Latin were regarded as especially sacred and invested with power, Salish incantations also tended to be in an esoteric language (often described as 'the old language,' and sometimes as 'the high language'), which only the practitioner and his or her acolytes could understand.

According to Mrs Peters, on the sacred paper that her great-great-great-great-grandfather received from God were 'the fanciest capital letters' that 'only the old man could read.' In addition to foretelling the coming of white people and the imminent arrival of various Western technologies (including light bulbs, cross-cut saws, nuclear family housing, and glass windows), European stock animals, and domesticated fruit and vegetables, St'a'saluk's text taught a special creed to facilitate positive relations between Salish people and the European newcomers. According to Mrs Peters, he told them,

'They will be different. They will be white and they will give you anything you can get from them.' He begged his people, when these people come to be kind to them and treat them like their brother. He even mentioned the stock (animals). This was first time they ever knew how pigs looked like. (He grunted to show them). 'That will be your meat.' He got a sheet of paper.

No one ever saw such paper and it has writing on it. He told them that he got it from God. That is why they had to pray and fast for 40 days. He told them about vegetables. 'And the fruit will be growing outside your places.' On this paper it said you are not supposed to steal or kill anybody.<sup>24</sup>

The prophet read the special words on the paper and told the people that they should not fear the changes that were coming. Indeed, contrary to most other nineteenth-century North American Native prophecy movements (such as those associated with the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee or even the neighbouring and historically associated Interior Salish 'Plateau Prophet phenomenon'), in which people were encouraged to reject whites and their new ways, the Coast Salish prophet of Mrs Peters' story encouraged Salish people to join in certain rituals designed to hasten the newcomers' arrival. 'One part of ceremony they danced with their hands over their heads and looking up begging God and the strange people to come,' she explained, and 'this is why he was making them pray, because they wanted these times to come.'

The point behind Mrs Peters' recounting of the prophecy narratives was not simply to show that one of her ancestors was a remarkable man whose prophecies had come true – although this was no doubt one of her motivations. Rather, the significance of the story lay in its power to link indigenous literacy with the alienation of Salish lands by European settlers. As she repeatedly stated to her Columbia University interviewer, the prophet's paper was 'the reason these people here didn't fight for their country when the white people came.'

To the Salish people's chagrin, the prophet's printed word revealed certain truths that ultimately led to their marginalization by the very people the sacred texts had encouraged them to welcome and make room for. Contrary to scholarly orthodoxy, the Native people did not lose their land in large part because they were non-literates who could be easily duped and manipulated by nefarious literate settlers and mendacious colonial government officials, but, ironically, precisely because they were literate! Within Salish historical consciousness the prophet is remembered as having prepared Salish people for the arrival of newcomers who he expected would bring positive change to a chaotic world in the aftermath of a smallpox epidemic. In a manner similar to what Elizabeth Vibert has documented in the context of the Columbia plateau prophecy phenomenon, the Coast Salish prophet was operating in a world devastated by recent smallpox epidemics, when people were desperate for new solutions to new problems.<sup>25</sup> Introduced epidemic diseases, which



pre-dated European settlement and the imposition of colonial rule, had resulted in the Salish world being disordered, and (without sufficient context to link the diseases directly to Europeans) the Salish people interpreted smallpox as the product of a disruption in the spirit world: a disruption that needed to be corrected by new transformations not unlike those associated with the corrective transformative work of *Xá:ls*, or Coyote.

While St'a'saluk's prophecies eventually proved correct – white people and their technologies did come – the newcomers themselves ultimately proved a disappointment. As in the Coyote story related by Harry Robinson, the whites who eventually arrived and confirmed the prophecies were not necessarily good people. They were, as one account of the prophet's teachings predicted 'half good and half bad.'<sup>26</sup> Unlike St'a'saluk, who was 'good and innocent enough for God to give him that paper,' the white people presumably possessed literacy because they had always had it. As a result virtue was not associated with their use of paper. Mrs Peters explains that St'a'saluk was pleased when white people started to arrive and thus fulfil his prophecy – until some of the newcomers began to challenge the authority and sanctity of his texts:

When Catholic priests came they heard and told Bishop Durieu and he went against it. It was (the paper) handed down from son to son. The paper was put in a little house (miniature) and was put up a cedar tree ... The Bishop took the paper and burned it at Sk'welq. He was telling [St'a'saluk] it was the devil's work. As soon as he saw it, little house and all, he threw it in the fire. [My] mother saw him do it. She was 15 at the time.

So whereas the Salish who listened to St'a'saluk are remembered as not having fought the newcomers for their land because of the will of God as revealed through the prophet's paper, the white settlers ultimately used paper to dispossess Salish people of their land and resources. Where through these narratives Salish literacy is portrayed as legitimate and proper, newcomer literacy is described as illegitimate and corrupt. Just as the white brother stole Coyote's paper, so the prophet St'a'saluk's white counterpart within the Christian faith stole his paper.

### **The Question of 'Authenticity' in Historical Salish Literacy**

Bertha Peters' story of the three chiefs who were turned to stone and Harry Robinson's account of literacy being stolen from Coyote by his

white twin conform to all the standard criteria associated with a genre of Salish narratives commonly referred to by outsiders as 'legend' or 'mythology' with one exception – they appear to contain post-contact content.<sup>27</sup> While non-Natives have generally not been overly concerned with the historical legitimacy of Aboriginal legends and myths (if only because they assume them to be fiction),<sup>28</sup> they have been greatly concerned with their 'authenticity.' Stories that appear to have been unduly influenced or informed by post-contact European events and issues have long been discarded to the dustbin of scholarly interest. This prejudice applies equally to prophecy stories such as those shared by Mrs Peters in which the assertions of prophetic power are perceived by outsiders as being built upon information acquired in the post-contact era. That is to say, we have grown so accustomed to associating authentic Aboriginal culture with pre-contact temporal dimensions that we have dismissed or ignored Native stories that do not meet our criteria for historical purity. We might proceed, blindly oblivious to what we are missing by applying such ethnocentric, historically deterministic models, were it not that Aboriginal people themselves flatly reject both our model and our criteria. In failing to listen we not only close a door on another way of knowing, we potentially insult the people who share the stories and thereby reduce the likelihood of their generosity continuing.

Like Western scholars, Salish people distinguish between at least two genres of historical narratives, but authenticity is not a criterion used in making that distinction.<sup>29</sup> Stories set in the distant past describing both the work of the Transformers or Coyote as they set about 'making the world right' by transforming it into its present stable and recognizable form and their efforts to introduce special technical or ritual power to heroic ancestors are referred to in Bertha Peters' Stó:lō Salish language as *sxwōxwiyám*, and in Harry Robinson's Okanagan Salish language as *shmee-ma-ee*. In the world of both Bertha Peterses, the other form of historical discourse is called *sqwélqwel*, whereas for Harry Robinson this category of story was known as *teek-whl*. Stories of the second type tend to describe more recent happenings associated with events in the lives of living people or people from recent generations, such as those relating to the prophet St'a'saluk. Both *sxwōxwiyám/shmee-ma-ee* and *sqwélqwel/teek-whl* are considered equally true and real.<sup>30</sup> Whatever differences and similarities exist between the two narrative forms – sometimes the lines between the two blur, making categorization difficult – neither *reality* (in the Western meaning of the term) nor *authenticity* is part of the indigenous criteria

for assessing them. There are no authentic or inauthentic *swoxwiyam*, only better remembered/conveyed or less well remembered/conveyed *swoxwiyam*. There are no authentic or inauthentic *sqwélqwel*, only more or less reliable sources of historical information.

Historical accuracy in the Salish world is a matter of great concern – no less so than among Western academics. What is different is the way accuracy is assessed. Among literate Westerners, historical accuracy is measured in relation to verifiable evidence. Footnotes provide the reading audience with a means of assessing the relationship between evidence and interpretation. If a scholarly historical interpretation can be shown to run counter to historical evidence it is regarded as poor history: poor scholarship. The conveyors of poor history in the Western model place themselves in a dangerous situation. If exposed they will be branded either as sloppy academics, or worse, as dishonest ones. Such designations have serious consequences in the sense that they will affect historians' ability to have their work published, and their reputation within academia will suffer. They will be marginalized and ostracized within their profession.

Within the Salish world, by way of contrast, historical accuracy is largely assessed in relation to people's memories of previous renditions or versions of a narrative and in relation to the teller's status and reputation as an authority. In cases of conflicting narratives, discrepancies are as often as not dismissed according to familial alliances and associations, or what Wayne Suttles has informally described as the process of asserting 'My family's history is better than your family's history because it is *my* family's history.'<sup>31</sup> However, what Wendy Wickwire has described as oral footnotes – the verbal citing of one's sources and authorities – provides the Salish audience with the principal means of assessing a storyteller's legitimacy, and by extension, the legitimacy of the narrative when such matters are being adjudicated among families. That is to say, if the conveyor of a historical narrative is considered to have failed to establish such credentials, the narrative is likely to be regarded as poor history by third party listeners not allied with the teller's family. The Salish conveyors of poor history, like their Western counterparts, face various sanctions for sloppiness and transgression. It is unlikely, for example, that they will be called in the future to share their stories in a public forum, and moreover they will acquire reputations as poor historians: their status will diminish.

Given the common concern over the accuracy of historical narratives, it is not surprising that people in both the Salish and Western worlds

also expressed concern over the consequences of sharing inaccurate or wrong history. In each society, for example, it is understood that poorly conveyed or inaccurate historical narratives pose dangers, not only to the reputation of the speaker but to the listening (or reading) audience. Among Western scholars, this recognition is a relatively recent epiphany, and one related to the recognition of the power that interpretations of the past have to shape the present. This is most apparent among histories written about relatively recent occurrences, and in particular those that discuss violence or exploitation. Nazi history that depicted the German people as not only a betrayed people but a superior race created the context and justification for the brutal conquest of Slavic lands, the occupation of western Europe, and the sadistic execution of six million Jews. In a not dissimilar way, Brian Dippie has shown how a false understanding of Native history allowed American policy makers to embrace a teleological and self-serving notion of the future that in turn justified the physical, social, and economic marginalization of Aboriginal people. Indians were deemed to be a 'vanishing race,' Dippie explains, because history ostensibly revealed their pre-contact civilizations to be inferior and incapable of advancement. Once they had been classified as a historically vanishing people, policies were enacted that actually promoted their political, economic, and cultural disappearance. Unfortunately, it is not only ideologues and self-serving politicians who create dangerous histories. Jeffery Gould has argued that scholars contributed to a perception of Nicaraguan history in which indigenous people were portrayed as having been replaced through the miscegenational process of 'mestizaje' wherein people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry eclipsed Nicaraguan Aboriginal people. With 'real Indians' deemed to have been a casualty of history, contemporary political leaders absolved themselves of responsibility for indigenous people – with tragic consequences.<sup>32</sup>

If Western historians are increasingly aware of the dangers of inaccurate or ideologically driven history, Salish historians have long been sensitive to the need to 'get the story right' – even if the consequences of bad history are conceived differently. For the Salish historian, bad history is considered to have potentially tragic consequences for both the teller and the listening audience. Stories about the distant past, and indeed any story that involves deceased people, is regarded as of interest to ancestors in the spirit world. To retell a story is to convene the spirits of the historical actors described. Ancestral spirits, it is believed, are extremely concerned with honour, integrity, and accur-

acy – so concerned, in fact, that they can cause ‘bad things’ to happen when their story is altered or abused. So sensitive are the spirits that many Salish people today are careful not to mention the names of deceased people at night (when spirits are especially active) for fear that either a malevolent, or even an excessively kind, spirit might carry away their soul.

Indicative of the obligation that Salish historians have to maintain the integrity of sacred historical narratives are the protocols and sanctions anthropologist Sally Snyder observed in 1963 among even her supposedly ‘acculturated’ informants – people she described as being ‘compulsive about telling stories “right.”’ As she discovered, ‘If a story was imperfectly recalled it was wrong for [Salish historians] to “guess” meaning, to pad, improvise, paraphrase or omit. It was better not to tell it at all for it was dangerous to omit scenes and to shorten myths. Nubile women in the audience might give birth to deformed children, incomplete or malformed like the abbreviated or truncated story. And shortening myths would shorten the lives of all listeners.’<sup>33</sup>

Regarded in this light it is difficult to imagine a context in which a Salish person could, or would, intentionally modify a historical narrative pertaining to the ancient transformations, and even more difficult to imagine a context in which the community would allow such an individual to get away with it even if they tried. More to the point, in placing the history of literacy within the context of a sacred narrative – one that from a Salish perspective cannot be easily challenged by either indigenous people or non-Native newcomers and their competing chronologies and interpretations – it becomes sacrosanct. To raise the question of ‘authenticity’ is to challenge not only the narrative but also the ‘truth’ behind Salish ways of knowing. This is not to suggest that outsiders should not ask about authenticity, just that they should be alert to the significance and implications of their questions to Aboriginal people.

### **Context for Situating Salish Orality and Literacy**

Culture binds Salish stories together and provides them with an internal coherence that is not always apparent to outsiders. Salish prophecy narratives, for example, have been examined from a number of perspectives, most notably with an eye to determining whether they were of genuinely indigenous origin or a borrowed reaction to colonial pressures (that is, whether they were ‘authentic’), or, most recently, in relation to

what they say about indigenous beliefs and practices in the face of catastrophic challenges to society such as those posed by smallpox epidemics.<sup>34</sup> No one has yet attempted to place the historical actors within a Salish historiography or historical consciousness. Such an approach offers a means of escaping the quagmire of assessing authenticity, while simultaneously elevating the analysis beyond an evaluation of semiotics.

For example, studies of Salish prophecy have avoided the question of the historical reality of the actions and words attributed to prophets. An underlying assumption of these studies is that the prophets were not really prophets; that they could not have known what they claimed to have known in the way they claim to have known it. That is to say, post-Enlightenment Western epistemology does not account for prophetic knowledge, and therefore either the prophets are considered to have acquired their knowledge of Europeans and European ways (including 'mock literacy') from other sources, or the more recent twentieth-century stories about nineteenth-century prophets are not genuinely historical but instead historical fiction designed to serve contemporary purposes. Thus conceived, Mrs Peters' great-great-great-great-grandfather St'a'saluk could not have had a paper with written text because such things could not have been known to Salish people prior to either direct or indirect contact with Europeans.

But what if the Salish understanding of the historical St'a'saluk departs from the Western understandings an individual? Mrs Peters tells us that the name St'a'saluk was also the name of her grandfather and father, and we know that in Salish society when names are passed on so are essential components of the spirit or soul of the person or persons who previously 'carried' the name. Moreover, as mentioned, Mrs Peters tells us that the prophetic paper was passed from son to son. Thus, it is possible that the prophecies actually emanated from what outsiders might consider to have been a series of people over many years. That is to say, there may not have been one St'a'saluk who uttered one set of prophecies, but a series of St'a'saluks who uttered many cumulative prophecies. I am not suggesting that this was necessarily the case, simply that it might have been, and that questions of authenticity, should we feel the need to continue asking them, might need to be recast to account for different measures of historical accuracy and different definitions of what constitutes an historical actor.

Given such context, perhaps the more interesting question is what these stories collectively or individually say about Aboriginal perceptions

of literacy. For if the above synoptic accounts of 'beginning of time' literacy tell us that literacy is part of a broader genre of transformation stories, they only indirectly reveal how Salish people understand the process or act of transformation in relation to literacy itself.

For Salish people, transformation stories are as much, if not more, about creating permanency or stability as they are about documenting the change from one state to another. In the two Bertha Peterses' language, the verb that has been translated into English to describe the work of the Transformers is *xá:ytem*. This term first entered the popular English lexicon in 1995, when the elders of the Stó:lō Shxweli (Spirit) Language Revival Programme were asked to select a name for the new interpretive centre that was being established at the recently protected site of the transformer rock referred to in Bertha's literacy narrative. The elders balked at the request, however, explaining that they 'could not make up a name' for something that had been made by *Xá:ls*. Instead they suggested that the site simply be referred to as *Xá:ytem*, which meant 'suddenly and miraculously transformed by *Xá:ls*.'

Both the name of the Transformers and the verb describing the act of transforming are derived from the same proto-Salish root *xá:l*. Interestingly, however, as at least one insightful scholar of Salish hermeneutics has observed, perhaps a better way of thinking of the meaning behind *xá:l* is not to emphasize the act of transformation but the process of 'marking.' The Transformers leave their mark on the world through transformations that in turn are then understood and known through the stories describing that act. Considered in this light, the 'root word *Xá:l* refers to inscription in the widest sense.'<sup>35</sup>

In terms of helping us understand the meanings embedded in the narratives of both Bertha Peterses, one important context can be derived from the indigenous term Stó:lō people use to refer to literacy itself. During the course of interviews, Stó:lō elders explained to me that the verb *to write* in their language was *xéla:ls*. This is significant for two reasons. First, it reveals that the Stó:lō did not choose to borrow the English or French word for literacy as they did for certain other concepts about which they had no prior knowledge. The Stó:lō word for cow, for example is *músmes*, which is derived from the mooing sound cattle make. Similarly, the word for pig, *kweshú*, comes from the French *cochon*, and *miyúl* from the English *mule*. It is relatively easy, of course, to imagine a world in which knowledge of certain concrete objects does not exist and for which people therefore borrow the word to correspond with the introduced object. It is more taxing to imagine people

not having knowledge of abstract concepts, and so the response to such introductions becomes more creative. While the adoption of an English word should not necessarily be taken as evidence that a given concept did not exist in pre-contact times, the use of an Aboriginal word for an activity or thing that is generally associated with post-contact developments should cause us to reflect on why that word was selected. It should, in other words, provide hints about what pre-existing ideas were used to interpret the introduced phenomenon or idea.<sup>36</sup>

The choice of the word *xéla:ls* to describe writing is also significant for another reason, for it is derived from the same proto-Salish root for 'marking' as *xá:ls* and *xá:ytem*. To write, in other words, is to engage in an activity of marking that Stó:lō people associate with the actions of the Transformer. Thus the central 'Great Spirit' or *Xá:ls* character in Bertha Peters' narrative was presumably not only punishing the three chiefs for failing to share the knowledge of literacy but was engaged in the act of writing himself. The very act of transforming them to stone was an act of literacy.

### A Salish Orality about Literacy

If someone were to create a timeline of literacy for the Salish people living along the lower Fraser River watershed based solely on evidence gleaned from archival records, chances are it would contain very different information, names, and dates from the Salish literacy narratives discussed above. It would probably begin with the establishment of St Mary's residential school in 1862, for it was there, under the watchful eye of Oblate Catholic priests, that Salish students first attended classes to learn their ABCs. By the time Canadian government officials started keeping systematic files on Aboriginal literacy in the region in the 1870s, Indian Agent James Lenihan was able to report that of the 32 girls and 22 boys attending St Mary's, all had 'passed a very credible examination in reading writing [and] grammar.'<sup>37</sup> Two years after St Mary's was built a young alumna of that school established, in the village of Cheam in the central Fraser Valley, what is possibly the first Aboriginal-run Western-style school in Canada's Pacific province. There she taught other Salish youths and adults the rudiments of English literacy. Throughout the late nineteenth century the number of literate Aboriginal graduates was augmented by the work of Protestant teachers at the Methodist and Anglican Indian schools built in Chilliwack, Lytton, and Yale and the Catholic school at Kamloops.



Yet against this mid-to-late-nineteenth-century colonial backdrop Stó:lō prophets, possibly including a namesake descendant of Mrs Peters' original St'a'saluk, continued to use a separate, esoteric literature to preach about the future in relation to the past. According to ethnographer James Teit, as late as 1880 a Salish prophet was travelling among Coast and Interior Salish villages preaching from a divinely inspired manuscript that only he could read. This text, an accountant's ledger book containing a series of pencil drawings and repetitive symbols, is now a part of the ethnographic collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa and has been catalogued under the title 'Dream Book of a Stalo Prophet.'<sup>38</sup> It does not reflect literacy in a sense immediately recognizable to non-Native outsiders, but a child who glimpsed some of the pages might be forgiven for interpreting the images and symbols as the 'fanciest capital letters.' Moreover, the prophet's literacy was as real and meaningful to his Salish audience as either Bertha Peters' story about the three chiefs was to her or Harry Robinson's account of Coyote's misadventures was to him.

For many, orality is considered the defining characteristic of indigeneity, but these Salish narratives remind us that such a definition perhaps says more about the fact that literacy has for even longer been regarded by elite Europeans as the defining characteristic of Western civilization. All other popular definitions of what it means to be indigenous (to be non-industrial, to have a deep and meaningful relationship with one's local environs, to value collective decision-making processes over hierarchal social and political structures, to be intensely spiritual, and so forth) are products of the same assumption that informed Walter Ong's interpretation of the role of literacy in Western society. Salish oral histories about literacy reveal that to be indigenous is not necessarily to think of oneself and one's history as non-literate.

It was a long-standing assumption of Westerners that to be without literacy was to be without history. The stories told by the two Bertha Peterses and Harry Robinson inject literacy (and therefore history) into the Aboriginal past in a way that they probably believed non-Native listeners would understand. But more important, their stories reveal that literacy was not always interpreted by oral indigenous people in the same way. Their ways of understanding the works of the legendary 'beginning of time' Transformers and influential contact-era prophets indicates that literacy was regarded within the context of earlier understanding of what it meant to inscribe, make permanent, preserve, transform, and reveal.

Salish orality about literacy therefore offers glimpses into Salish historical consciousness. Reflecting on 'the history of active oppression imposed on Native languages and cultural practices,' as well as on the manner in which legal and even ethnographic documents were used to restrict and diminish Native rights, Crisca Bierwert recently observed that 'it would not be a surprise to find "writing" understood as a signifier of domination in a Native American oral tradition.' She notes that among contemporary Salish people on Canada's Pacific Coast, textual and literary representations are largely regarded in terms Walter Ong would have recognized – that is, as 'a weapon capable of inflicting damage.' And indeed, as is revealed through the stories of 'beginning of time' literacy and prophetic literacy, text was regarded as a powerful tool that could be used to undermine, steal, and in other ways diminish not only the sacredness of oration but also the rights of Aboriginal people and their relationship with land and resources. The desire Bierwert observed among many contemporary Salish people to 'keep writing out' of sacred and ritualized ceremonies should indeed be regarded as an 'act of integrity,'<sup>39</sup> but so too should the desire to repatriate literacy (as reflected in the Peterses and Robinson narratives) be appreciated as reflecting a countervailing act of historical integrity.

The task now before us is to better understand the tensions between these two positions within Salish society. That is to say, we must begin shifting our focus away from a binary study of Native–newcomer relations (which inevitably assumes that non-Natives are the most important thing in Aboriginal people's lives and history) to one that recognizes the plurality of indigenous voices within Aboriginal communities and the historical consciousness that informs those voices and beliefs.

## NOTES

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Lutz, and Jim Miller provided helpful and encouraging comments on an earlier draft.

- 1 For example, Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Jack Goody and Ian Watt, 'The Consequence of Literacy,' in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 1968); Aleksandr Romanovich Luria, ed., *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, Michael Cole, trans., Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Jack R. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1977); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982); 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).
- 2 Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 112.
- 3 See David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); also Marie Battiste, 'Micmac Literacy and Cognitive Assimilation,' in *Indian Education in Canada*, vol. 1, *The Legacy*, ed. Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert, and Don McCaskill (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 23–44.
- 4 Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 112–13.
- 5 Even the scholarship emphasizing Salish opposition to literary depictions and representations of their culture contain powerful countervailing stories in which 'literary' options become rationalized as if they are not the only solution, but the best solution, to various orality/literacy tensions. See Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 112–35.
- 6 Peter Wogan, 'Perceptions of European Literacy in Early Contact Situations,' *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 3 (1994): 422.
- 7 Internationally, the best example of enquiry along this path is Adam Fox's *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). In the North American Aboriginal context see J.W. Berry and J.A. Bennett, *Cree Syllabic Literacy: Cultural Context and Psychological Consequences* (Tilburg, Netherlands: Tilburg University Press, 1991); David L. Schmidt and Murdena Marshall, eds., *Mi'kmaq Hieroglyphic Prayers: Readings in North America's First Indigenous Script* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Press, 1995); Jarold Ramsey, *Reading the Fire: The Traditional Indian Literatures of America*, rev. ed.

- (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Germaine Warkentin. 'In Search of "the Word of the Other": Aboriginal Sign Systems and the History of the Book in Canada,' *Book History* 2, no. 1 (1999): 1–27; Bruce Greenfield, 'The Mi'kmaq Hieroglyphic Prayer Book: Writing and Christianity in Maritime Canada, 1675–1921,' in *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492–1800*, ed. Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 189–211; Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Margaret Bender, *Signs of Cherokee Culture: Sequoyah's Syllabary in Eastern Cherokee Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For a New Zealand perspective consult D.F. McKenzie, 'The Sociology of a Text: Orality, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand' [1984] in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2002), 189–215.
- 8 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies on the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); R.W. Niezen, 'Hot Literacy in Cold Societies: A Comparative Study of the Sacred Value of Writing,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, no. 2 (1991): 225–45; Kenneth George, 'Felling a Story with a New Ax: Writing and Reshaping of Ritual Song Performance in Upland Sulawesi,' *Journal of American Folklore* 103, 407 (1990): 3–24; Brian Street, *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 9 Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England*.
- 10 For example, Billy Sepass, one of the most prominent lower Fraser River Stó:lō leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, traced his ancestry through his father back two generations to the Colville region of the Columbia plateau.
- 11 These journeys and transformations are summarized and contextualized in Sonny McHalsie, David Schaepe, and Keith Carlson, 'Making the World Right through Transformation,' in Keith Thor Carlson with David Shaege, Albert McHalsie, David Smith, Leanna Rhodes, and Collin Duffield, eds., *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Vancouver, Seattle, Chilliwack: Douglas and McIntyre Press, University of Washington Press, and The Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), 1–2. See also discussions of transformer movements as recorded by Franz Boas in *Indianische Sagen von der nordpazifischen Küste Americas* (1985), recently translated into English and edited by Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, in *Indian Myths and Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2002). See also the narratives translated by Charles Hill-Tout in the collection edited by Ralph Maud as *Mainland Halkomelem* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1977).

- 12 See McHalsie et al., 'Making the World Right through Transformation.'
- 13 Sonny McHalsie, personal communication, May 1999. See also James Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians of BC*, Memoir no. 6 (Boston and New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1900).
- 14 Harry Robinson, *Write It on Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller*, comp. and ed. Wendy Wickwire (Vancouver: Talonbooks/Theytus, 1989), 43–6.
- 15 Bertha Peters in conversation with the author, 20 September 1995.
- 16 Harry Robinson, *Living by Stories: A Journey of Landscape and Memory*, comp. and ed. Wendy Wickwire (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005). All of the following quotations come from a chapter titled 'Coyote Makes a Deal with the King of England,' 64–85.
- 17 The first documented killing of Okanagan Interior Salish by non-Native newcomers occurred in the early months of the 1858 gold rush, although tensions between Okanagan and HBC employees at Fort Kamloops and Fort Shushwap had periodically grown violent in the years preceding the influx of miners.
- 18 Harry Robinson in conversation with Wendy Wickwire, audio interview, 20 June 1980, copy in author's possession. Edward Brett is described as humble: 'Not a chief, not a councillor; just a band member,' who quietly made the sojourn to Victoria, and ultimately paid more than \$250 of his own money to acquire a copy of the 'Black and White.'
- 19 Jack R. Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jack R. Goody, *Interface between the Written and the Oral*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jack R. Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000).
- 20 Michael Harbsmeier, 'Early Travels to Europe: Some Remarks on the Magic of Writing,' in *Europe and Its Other: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen, and Diana Loxley (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), 72.
- 21 Patricia Seed, "'Failing to Marvel": Atahualpa's Encounter with the Word,' *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 19.
- 22 Until 2004 Marian Smith's fieldnotes were housed in the archival division of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London, MS 268, unpaginated.
- 23 Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia*. (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1952); Wayne Suttles, 'The Plateau Prophet Dance among the Coast Salish,' *Coast Salish Essays* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 152–98.
- 24 Marian Smith, field notes, box 3:4, no. 2, Royal Anthropological Institute, London.

- 25 Elizabeth Vibert, "'The Natives Were Strong to Live': Reinterpreting Early-Nineteenth-Century Prophetic Movements in the Columbia Plateau,' *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 2 (1995): 197–229.
- 26 Stó:lō elder Robert Joe, recorded in Duff, *Upper Stalo*, 122. Also, personal communication with Welsey Sam (Robert Joe's grandson), aged seventy-four in 1993.
- 27 The anthropologist Wayne Suttles describes Salish myths or legends as being set in 'an age when the world was different, its people were like both humans and animals of the present age, and it was full of dangerous monsters ... [This] age ended when xé'ls [Xá:ls] the Transformer came through the world, transforming monsters and other myth-age beings into rocks and animals, and setting things in order for the people of the present age.' Suttles explains that these stories 'usually told how [a community's] founder [came to find his] winter village or summer camp, where the Transformer gave him technical or ritual knowledge, and where he established special relations with local resources.' Wayne Suttles, 'Central Coast Salish,' *Handbook of the North American Indians*, vol. 7, *The Northwest Coast*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 466.
- 28 By generally I mean historically. A string of recent scholarly studies of Native legends have afforded them due credit as historical sources, even as they recognize the inherent problems of trying to use indigenous histories the way we use Western historical evidence. See, for example, Jonathan Hill, ed., *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Wendy Wickwire, 'To See Ourselves as the Other's Other: Nlaka'pamux Contact Narratives,' *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (1994): 1–20.
- 29 In my most recent discussions with fluent Halkomelem speakers, a third category of historical narrative has been discussed called *xelth'it*. This too is translated as 'true history.' The context in which this expression is used suggests that it is probably the word applied to a version of historical narrative that has proven more true than another after a council of historical experts has assessed the merits of two or more competing historical discourses.
- 30 Wayne Suttles, 'On the Cultural Track of the Sasquatch,' *Coast Salish Essays*, 73–99. Also Wayne Suttles, 'Sasquatch: The Testimony of Tradition,' in *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence of Bigfoot, Abominable, Snowman, Sasquatch, and Grendel*, ed. Marjorie M. Halpin and Michael M. Ames, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1980), 245–54.
- 31 Personal communication with Wayne Suttles, May 2004.
- 32 Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes & U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1982); Jeffery Gould, *To Die in This*

- Way: Nicaraguan Indian Communities and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880–1965* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). I am grateful to Jonathan Clapperton for our conversations about the consequences of historical inaccuracies, and for drawing my attention to Jeffery Gould's scholarship.
- 33 Sally Snyder, 'Skagit Society and Its Existential Basis: An Ethnofolkloristic Reconstruction' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1964), 21–2.
- 34 Leslie Spier, *The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and Its Derivatives: The Source of the Ghost Dance, Menasha* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing, 1935); Christopher Miller, *Prophetic Worlds: Indians and Whites on the Columbia Plateau* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); Vibert, 'The Natives Were Strong to Live.'
- 35 Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 74.
- 36 Elsewhere I have developed this thesis more thoroughly with regard to Stó:lō verbs associated with various expressions of trade and exchange and their relationship to indigenous concepts of spatial distance. Keith Thor Carlson, 'Stó:lō Exchange Dynamics,' *Native Studies Review* 11 (1997): 30–5.
- 37 James Lenihan to the Hon. Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 7 November 1875, DIA Annual Reports, Sessional papers 1876, Library and Archives Canada.
- 38 James A. Teit, 'Dream Book of a Stalo Prophet,' Canadian Museum of Civilization, MS VII-G-19M, c. 1882.
- 39 Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 112–13.