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‘IROQUOIS WOMEN, EUROPEAN WOMEN’

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In the opening years of the seventeenth century in the Montagnais country, Pierre Pastedechouan’s grandmother loved to tell him how astonished she had been at the first sight of a French ship. With its large sails and many people gathered on the deck, she had thought the wooden boat a floating island. She and the other women in her band immediately set up cabins to welcome the guests.[1] The people on a floating island appeared also to a young Micmac woman of the Saint Lawrence Gulf in a dream which she recounted to the shaman and elders of her community and which came true a few days later when a European ship arrived.[2]

Across the Atlantic, Mother Marie Guyart de l’Incarnation also first saw the Amerindian lands in a dream-vision, a vast space of mountains, valleys and fog to which the Virgin Mary and Jesus beckoned her and which her spiritual director then identified as Canada. By the time she had boarded the boat in 1639, she hoped to ‘taste the delights of Paradise in the beautiful and large crosses of New France’. Once at Québec, she and her sister Ursulines kissed the soil, Marie finding the landscape just like her dream except not so foggy. The Christianized Algonquin, Montagnais and Huron girls, ‘freshly washed in the blood of the lamb, seem[ed] to carry Paradise with them’.[3]

The similarities and differences in the situation and views of these women in the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries is my subject in this essay. I want to look at the Amerindian women of the eastern woodlands in terms of historical change – and not just change generated by contact with Europeans, but by processes central to their own societies. I want to insist on the absolute simultaneity of the Amerindian and European worlds, rather than viewing the former as an earlier version of the latter, and make comparisons less polarized than the differences between ‘simple’ and ‘complex’ societies. I want to suggest interactions to look for in the colonial encounter other than the necessary but overpolarized twosome of ‘domination’ and ‘resistance’, and attribute the capacity for choice to Indians as to Europeans. The Amerindian case may also be a source of alternative examples and metaphors to illumine the European case. Indeed, an ideal sequel to this essay would be an inquiry about the history of European women that made use of Iroquois tropes and frames.

The term ‘Iroquois women’ in my title is a shorthand for both the Hurons and the Iroquois among the nations speaking the Iroquoian languages, from whom many of my examples will be drawn, and in some instances for women of the groups speaking Algonquian languages, peoples from primarily hunting, fishing and gathering communities such as

the Montagnais, Algonquins, Abenakis and Micmacs. On the whole, I will stay within the region penetrated by the French, though the woodlands Indians themselves ranged well beyond its reach. My sources are the classic travel accounts and the Jesuit and other religious relations from the eastern woodlands (including the writings of Marie de l' Incarnation and the women Hospitalers of Québec); ethnographic studies, including those based on archeological research and material culture; and collections of Amerindian tales and legends and customs made over the last 150 years and more.[4]

The Hurons and Iroquois alike lived from a digging-stick agriculture gathering, fishing and hunting.[5] The men opened the fields for cultivation, but the women were the farmers, growing maize, beans, squash and, in some places, tobacco. The women also were the gatherers, picking fruits and other edible food and bringing in all the firewood. When villages changed their base, as they did every several years, it was sometimes in fear of their enemies, but ordinarily because the women declared the fields infertile and the suitable wood exhausted for miles around. The men were in charge of hunting, fishing, and intertribal trading, but the active women might well accompany their husbands or fathers on these expeditions when not held back by farming or cabin tasks. Along the way the women were expected to do much of the carrying, although, if there were male prisoners with the band, their masters would have them help the women.[6] Warfare was in the hands of the men.

Responsibility for the crafts and arts was similarly divided. Men made weapons and tools of stone, wood and sometimes bits of copper, carved the pipes, built the cabins and constructed frames for canoes and snowshoes. Women were in charge of anything that had to do with sewing, stringing and weaving, preparing thread and laces by hand-spinning and winding, stringing snowshoes and making baskets, birchbark kettles, nets, and rush mats. Once the men had made a kill at the hunt, the animal was the women's domain, from skinning and preparing the hide, softening and greasing the furs, to making garments and moccasins. The women were the potters and also made all the decorative objects of porcupine quills, shells (including wampum necklaces and belts), beads and birchbark. They painted the faces and bodies of their husbands and sons so that they would look impressive when they went visiting and decorated each other for dances and feasts. As for the meals, the women took care of them all, pounding the corn into flour and cooking much of the food in a single kettle. (Similar work patterns were found among the Algonquian-speaking peoples, where horticulture was only occasionally practiced and where the women were thus on the move much of the time with the men.)

This division of labor looked very lopsided to the French men who first reported it, presumably contrasting it with European agriculture, where men did the ploughing, where women did the weeding and gardening and where both did woodcutting and carrying, and with European crafts like leather and pottery, where men had a predominant role. 'The women work without comparison more than the men,' said Jacques Cartier of the Iroquois whom he had met along the Saint Lawrence in 1536; 'the women do all the servile tasks, work[ing] ordinarily harder than the men, though they are neither forced or constrained to do it,' said the Recollet Gabriel Sagard of the Huron women in 1623. 'Real pack-mules,' a Jesuit echoed a few years later.[7] Marie de ITncarnation, in contrast, took the women's heavy work for granted, perhaps because she heard about it from the Huron and Algonquin women in a matter-of-fact way in the convent yard rather than seeing it, perhaps because she herself had spent her young womanhood in a wagoner's household, doing everything from grooming horses and cleaning slops to keeping the accounts.[8] In any case, Sagard noted that the Huron women still had time for gaming, dancing and feasts, and 'to chat and pass the time together'.[9]

The differences that even Marie de l'Incarnation could not fail to recognize between her life in France and that of Huron and Iroquois women concerned property, kinship structures, marriage and sexual practice. Whereas in France

private or at least family property was increasingly freeing itself from the competing claims of distant kin and feudal lords, among both the Iroquois and the Hurons collective property arrangements – village, clan, band or tribal – prevailed in regard to hunting and gathering areas and to farming plots. Matrilineality and matrilocality seem to have been more consistently practiced among the Iroquois than among the Hurons,[10] but for both societies the living unit was a long-house of several related families, in which the senior women had a major say about what went on. (The Algonquian-speaking peoples counted descent patrilineally and dwelt in smaller wigwams and summer lodges.)

Parents often suggested potential marriage partners to their children (among the Iroquois, it was the mothers who took the initiative), but then the younger generation had to act. A Huron youth would ask the permission of the parents of a young woman and give her a substantial present of a wampum collar or beaver robe; if, after a sexual encounter for a few nights, she gave her consent, the wedding feast took place.[11] As there was no dowry and dower but only a bride gift, so there was no property in the way of inheritance: the deceased took some of his or her mats and furs and other goods away to the other world, while the bereaved kin were given extensive gifts ‘to dry their tears’ by the other members of their village and clan.[12]

Without property inheritance and without firm notions about the father’s qualities being carried through sexual intercourse or the blood,[13] sexual relations between men and women were conducted without concern about ‘illegitimate’ offspring. There could be several trial encounters and temporary unions before a marriage was decided on, and openly acknowledged intercourse with other partners was possible for both husband and wife. When a Huron father was questioned one day by a Jesuit about how, with such practices, a man could know who his son was, the man answered, ‘You French love only your own children; we love all the children of our people.’ When Hurons and Algonquins first saw the Québec Hospital nuns in 1639 – three women all in their twenties – they were astonished (so one of the sisters reported) ‘when they were told that we had no men at all and that we were virgins’.[14]

Clearly there was room in the Iroquoian long-house and Algonquian wigwam for many quarrels: among wives at their different long-house fires, among daughters and parents about consent to a suitor,[15] among husbands and wives about competing lovers.[16] One Jesuit even claimed in 1657 that some married women revenged themselves on their husbands for ‘bad treatment’ by eating a poisonous root and leaving the men with ‘the reproach of their death’.[17] Much more often, an unsatisfactory marriage simply ended in divorce, with both man and woman free to remarry and the woman usually having custody of the children.[18]

In such a situation the debate about authority had a different content from that in Renaissance and early seventeenth-century Europe, where a hierarchical model of the father-dominated family was at best moderated by the image of companionate marriage or reversed by the husband-beating virago. Among the Amerindians, physical coercion was not supposed to be used against anyone within the family, and decisions about crops, food consumption and many of the crafts were rightfully the women’s. If a man wanted a courteous excuse not to do something he could say without fear of embarrassment ‘that his wife did not wish it’.[19]

When we leave the long-house fire and kettle for the religious feast or dance and council meeting, we have a different picture again. Religious belief among both the Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples was diverse and wide-ranging, their high divinities, sacred manitous and omnipresent lesser spirits remembered, pondered over and argued about through decentralized storytelling. Recollets and Jesuits, hearing such accounts, would challenge the speakers: ‘How can the creator Yoscaha have a grandmother Aataentsic if Yoscaha is the first god?’ they would ask a Huron, ‘And how could Aataentsic’s daughter get pregnant with Yoscaha and his evil twin Tawiscaron if men had not yet been

created?' 'Was Atahocan definitely the first creator?' they would ask a Montagnais. Huron or Montagnais would then reply that he did not know for sure: 'Perhaps it was Atahocan; one speaks of Atahocan as one speaks of a thing so far distant that nothing sure can be known about it.' Or that he had the account from someone who had visited Yoscaha and Aataentsic or had seen it in a dream. Or, politely, that the French beliefs about 'God' were fine for Europe but not for the woodlands. Or, defiantly, that he would believe in the Jesuits' God when he saw him with his own eyes.[20]

The Recollets and Jesuits reported such exchanges only with men, Father Lejeune even adding, 'there are among them mysteries so hidden that only the old men, who can speak with credit and authority about them, are believed'.[21] Marie de l'Incarnation, always attentive to women's roles and pleased that Abenaki belief included the virgin birth of the world-saver Messou, said only that traditional accounts of the 'Sauvages' were passed on 'from fathers to children, from the old to the young'.[22] Women were certainly among the listeners to Amerindian creation accounts, for the 'ancient tales' were told, for instance, at gatherings after funerals,[23] but were they among the tellers of sacred narratives? Speculation from the existing evidence suggests the following picture: during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, men, especially older men, were the tellers of creation stories at male assemblies (as for the election of a chief) [24] and at mixed gatherings, but women recounted Aataentsic's doings along with many other kinds of narrative to each other and to their children.[25] If this be the case, then the situation of women in the eastern woodlands was rather like that of their Catholic contemporaries in Europe. There, for the most part, Catholic belief systems were formally taught by doctors of theology and male preachers and catechizers, and women reflected on such doctrine among themselves in convents and told Christian stories to their children.

To the all-important realm of dreams, however, Amerindian women and men had equal access. Huron and Iroquois notions of 'the soul' and 'the self' were more inflected, articulated or pluralistic than Christian notions of the living person, where a single soul animated the body and where reason, will and appetite were functions warring or collaborating within. Huron and Iroquois saw 'the soul' as 'divisible' (to use Father Brébeuf's term about the Huron), giving different names and some independence to different soul-actions: animation, reason, deliberation, and desire. The desiring soul especially spoke to one in dreams – 'this is what my heart tells me, this is what my appetite desires' (*ondayee ikaton onennoncwat*); sometimes the desiring soul was counseled by a familiar *oki* or spirit who appeared in a dream in some form and told it what it needed or wanted, its *ondinoc*, its secret desire.[26] In France, dreams and the time between sleeping and waking were the occasion for extraordinary visits from Christ, the saints, the devil, or the ghosts of one's dead kin. In the American woodlands, dreams were a visit from part of oneself and one's *oki*, and their prescriptions had wider effect, forestalling or curing illness and predicting, sanctioning or warning against future events of all kinds.

Amerindian women and men thus took their dreams very seriously, describing, evaluating and interpreting them to each other and then acting on them with intensity and determination. For a person of some standing, the village council might decide to mobilize every cabin to help fulfill a dream. So a woman of Angoutenc in the Huron country went outside one night with her little daughter and was greeted by the Moon deity, swooping down from the sky as a beautiful tall woman with a little daughter of her own. The Moon ordered that the woman be given many presents of garments and tobacco from surrounding peoples and that henceforth she dress herself in red, like the fiery moon. Back in her long-house, the woman immediately fell ill with dizziness and weak muscles and learned from her dreams that only a curing feast and certain presents would restore her. The council of her birth-village of Ossassané agreed to provide all she needed. Three days of ritual action followed, with the many prescribed gifts assembled, the woman in her red garments walking through fires that did not burn her limbs and everyone discussing their dream desires through riddles.[27] She was

cured in an episode that illustrates to us how an individual woman could set in motion a whole sequence of collective religious action.[28]

Women also had important roles in dances intended to placate the *oki* spirits or to drive out evil spirits from the sick. Among the Hurons, a few women who had received a dream sign might be initiated along with men into a society whose curative dance was considered 'very powerful against the demons'; among the Iroquois, women were received in several healing and propitiary societies.[29] To be sure, women were accused of witchcraft – that is, of causing someone's death by poisoning or charms – but no more than Huron and Iroquois men, and *okis* or *manitous* in mischievous action were not gendered female more than male.[30]

The major asymmetry in religious life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries concerned the shamans. The Arendiwane, as the Hurons called them ('sorcerers' or 'jugglers' in the language of the Jesuits), comprised the master shamans, who diagnosed and cured illness by dealing with the spirit world, and the lesser religious leaders, who commanded winds and rains, predicted the future or found lost objects. The Jesuits scarcely ever described women in these roles among either the Algonquian-speaking or Iroquoian-speaking peoples, and Marie de l'Incarnation mentioned none at all. An Algonquin woman was known 'to be involved in sorcery, succeeding at it better than the men'; a woman 'famous' among the Hurons for her 'sorcery' sought messages from the *Manitou* about what kinds of feasts or gifts would cure an illness; a Montagnais woman entered the cabin where the male shamans consulted the spirits of the air and through shaking the tent-posts and loud singing was able to diagnose an illness and foresee an Iroquois attack.[31] Indeed, soothsaying seems to have been the one shamanic function in which women were welcome, as with the old woman of Teanaostaiae village in the Huron country, who saw events in distant battles with the Iroquois by looking into fires, and the Abenaki 'Pythonesses' who could see absent things and foretell the future,[32]

Most of the time, however, a woman was simply an aide, marking on a 'triangular stick' the songs for the dead being sung by a Montagnais medicine man so their order would be remembered; walking around the shaman and his male performers at a prescribed moment in a ritual to kill a far-away witch.[33] Surely the herbal remedies known to be used by later Amerindian women must have had their antecedents in the female lore of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,[34] and it is hard to imagine that there were no religious specialists associated with the menstrual cabins of the Iroquian communities and the Montagnais. It may have been precisely the beliefs about defilement that barred women from handling the sacred shamanic objects and rattle used in spirit cures. Across the Atlantic, the powers and dangers of menstruation kept European *religieuses* from touching altars and chalices too directly and kept Catholic laywomen away from the mass during their periods. Among the Hurons, the presence of a pregnant woman made a sick person worse, but was required for the extraction of an arrow; among the French Catholics, the glance of a post-partum woman brought trouble to people in streets and roadways. Among the Amerindians, medicine men were to abstain from sexual intercourse before their ceremonies; among the Europeans, Catholic priests were to abstain from sexual intercourse all the time.[35]

The most important asymmetry among Indian men and women was political. In the female world of crops, cooking and crafts, women made the decisions; in lodge and long-house, their voice often carried the day. Village and tribal governance, however, was in the hands of male chiefs and councils, and, apart from the Iroquois, women's influence on it was informal. (Only among the Algonquian peoples of southern New England and the mid-Atlantic coast do we hear of women sometimes holding authority as sunksquaws along with the more numerous male sachems.)[36] Huron villages and Algonquin and Montagnais settlements often had two or more chiefs, their access to this honor partly hereditary but even more based on assessments of their eloquence, wisdom, generosity or past prowess. The chiefs presided over

frequent local council meetings, where women and young warriors were rarely present and where pipe-smoking men gave their views, the eldest among them being accorded particular respect. At larger assemblies of several clans and villages, the young men were invited as well, and sometimes the women.[37] When council or assembly decisions required embassies to other villages or nations – to seek support in war or to resolve disputes – the envoys were chiefs and other men.

In Iroquois communities, women had more formal roles in political decisions than elsewhere. Here, to women's advantage, succession to chieftancies was more strictly hereditary, passing matrilineally to a sister's son or another male relative named by the woman. Here among the Onondagas – so we learn from the pen of Marie de l'Incarnation – there were 'women of quality' or 'Capitainesses' who could affect decisions at local council meetings and select ambassadors for peace initiatives.[38] At least by the eighteenth century important women could attend treaty councils of the Iroquois nations, and perhaps they did so earlier.[39]

Now it is precisely in regard to this political life that major historical changes had occurred in the American/Canadian woodlands and villages from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. The evidence for these changes comes in part from archeologists: tobacco-pipes become more elaborate, pottery and sea shells are found further from their place of origin and human bones in ossuaries show signs of being 'cut, cooked and split open to extract the marrow'.[40] The evidence comes also from the collective memory of Hurons and Iroquois after European contact and from Indian stories and legends.

A double picture emerges. First, warfare became more prevalent and intense, with the seizure of women as wives[41] and the adoption of some male captives and the torture and cannibalization of others. European contact then added to the complicated history of enmity and exchange between Iroquois and Hurons. As a Huron chief recalled to some Onondagas in 1652:

> Have you forgotten the mutual promises our Ancestors made when they first took up arms against each other, that if a simple woman should take it on herself to uncover the Sweat-house and pull up the stakes that support it, that the victors would put down their arms and show mercy to the vanquished?[42]

The two roles assigned to women by intensified warfare – the woman-adoptor of an enemy and the woman-enemy incorporated as wife – must have had important consequences for consciousness. Let us consider here only the enemy wife, a position in which women living in Europe rarely found themselves (even though the foreign queens of Spain and France might have felt divided loyalties when their husbands went to war in 1635, the marriages had been made as peaceful alliance).[43] In the eastern American woodlands, Algonquin and Huron captives became Iroquois wives; Iroquois captives became Huron wives. Nor was their origin forgotten: Pierre Esprit Radisson among the Mohawks in 1652 discovered that his adoptive mother had been taken from the Huron country in her youth; Father Le Moyne among the Onondagas the next year was approached by a Huron wife who 'wanted to pour out her heart to him'.[44] This suggests that to the Amerindian habit of self-discovery through dream analysis was added for the enemy wife another source for self-definition: the experience of being forcibly transplanted, alone or with only a few of her kin, to a people who had a different language and burial ground from her ancestors. When the enemy wife was also a Christian in a non-Christian village, the impulse toward self-definition might be all the stronger, but the process predated conversion.

This setting for self-consciousness is rather different from those in which Renaissance historians usually locate the discovery of 'the individual' or of a renewed sense of self among European Christians. There we stress how persons set

themselves off against those whom they resembled, against their own kind and kin: some of Montaigne's best self-discovery occurred when he played himself off against his friend La Boétie and against his own father. The Amerindian enemy wife (and the adopted male enemy as well) represent a contrasting historical trajectory. Still, they should make us more attentive to European situations where the experience of 'foreignness' and 'strangeness' could prompt consciousness of self as well as of group. The emergence of Jewish autobiography by the early seventeenth century is a case in point.[45]

Along with intensified warfare, a second associated change took place in the eastern American woodlands in the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: intertribal political federations appeared along with a new peacemaking diplomacy. The Huron League, or League of the Ouendats as they called themselves, was made up of four nations or tribes, two of them establishing themselves as 'brother' and 'sister' with a grand council in the fifteenth century, the other two being adopted, one in the last decades of the sixteenth century and the other in the early seventeenth century.[46] The Iroquois League of the Five Nations, the Houdénosaunee – three Elder Brothers and two Younger Brothers – was probably founded around 1500.[47] Its origin was memorialized in the Deganawidah Epic about a divine Iroquois seer, Deganawidah, who preached peace, converted a Mohawk chief Hiawatha away from cannibalism, and then together with him transformed the wicked and obstructive Onondaga chief Thadodaho into a willing collaborator. (Women enter the epic through Deganawidah's grandmother, who foresaw his peace-bringing role in a dream; his mother, who received divine guidance in hidden seclusion and then gave birth to Deganawidah as a virgin; and the daughter of Hiawatha, who died sacrificially in the encounter with Thadodaho.)[48]

Among the many fruits of the League formation was the development of a language of politics and diplomacy: a set of rules and styles of communication that operated around the local council fire, on embassies to rouse for war or make amends for a murder, at large assemblies and at general councils of the federation. At council meetings, where many opinions were given, matters opened with the leader's appreciative words about the men's safe arrival, no one lost in the woods or fallen in the stream or slain by an enemy. A special tone of voice was used for all the comments and opinions – the Hurons called it *acouentonch* – 'a raising and lowering of the voice like the tone of a Predicant a l'antique, an old style Preacher', said a Jesuit in 1636.[49] Always the men spoke slowly, calmly and distinctly, each person reviewing the issues before giving his opinion. No one ever interrupted anyone else, the rhythm of taking turns aided by the smoking of pipes. No matter how bitter the disagreement – as when some Huron villages wanted to rebury their ancestors' bones in a separate grave – courteous and gentle language was sought. The Hurons said of a good council, *Endionraondaoné*, 'even and easy, like level and reaped fields'.[50]

In more elaborate public speeches, for example, as an envoy or at a large assembly or to make a treaty, still another tone of voice was used – 'a Captain's tone', said a Jesuit, who tried to imitate it among the Iroquois in 1654. Mnemonic devices were used 'to prop up the mind', such as marked sticks and, for a major event, the ordered shells on a wampum necklace or belt. Arm gestures and dramatic movements accompanied the argument, and the speaker walked back and forth, seeming 'marvelous' to Jacques Cartier in 1535 and, to the later Jesuits, 'like an actor on a stage'.[51] At the 1645 treaty between the Iroquois, the French, the Algonquins, and the Montagnais, the tall Mohawk chief Kiotseaeton arose, looked at the sun and then at all the company and said (as taken from a rough French translation):

> 'Onotonio [the French governor], lend me ear. I am the whole of my country; thou listenest to all the Iroquois in hearing my words. There is no evil in my heart; I have only good songs in my mouth. We have a multitude of war songs in our country; we have cast them all on the ground; we have no longer anything but songs of rejoicing'.

> Thereupon he began to sing; his countrymen responded; he walked about that great space as if on the stage of a theatre; he made a thousand gestures; he looked up to Heaven; he gazed at the Sun; he rubbed his arms as if he wished to draw from them the strength that moved them in war.[52]

Throughout, in all political speech, many metaphors and circumlocutions were used, which made it difficult to follow for anyone who had not learned the system. 'Kettle' could denote hospitality ('to hang the kettle') hostility or killing ('to break the kettle', 'to put into the kettle') and ritual reburial of ancestors ('Master of the Kettle', the officer for the Feast of the Dead).[53]

Meanwhile, the persons who were literally in charge of the kettle and who literally reaped the cornfields so that they were easy and even were not deliverers of this oratory. Women strung the shells for the wampum necklaces and belts used in all diplomacy, but they did not provide the public interpretations of their meaning. (Even the Algonquian sunksquaws of the central Atlantic coast are not known for their speeches, and it is significant that Mary Rowlandson, captive of the sunksquaw Weetamoo in 1676, said of her mistress only that 'when she had dressed herself, her work was to make Girdles of Wampom and Beads'.)[54] To be sure, councils had to accede to the request of any woman to adopt a prisoner who would replace her slain or dead male relative, but this desire could be discovered by a word or gesture. Only one occasion has come down to us where a Huron woman gave a speech at an assembly: during the smallpox epidemic of 1640 at a large and tumultuous gathering of Ataronchronons, an older woman denounced the Jesuit Black Robes as devils spreading disease.[55] Even in the most favored case of the Iroquois, where the chiefs had been enjoined by Hiawatha to seek the advice of their wisest women about resolving disputes and where captains' wives might accompany an embassy, women never orated as ambassadors – the Five Nations never 'spoke through their mouths' – and their opinion at treaty councils was given by a male Speaker for the Women.[56]

Indian men trained their sons in oratory: 'I know enough to instruct my son,' said an Algonquin captain in refusing to give his son to the Jesuits. 'I'll teach him to give speeches.' Huron men teased each other if they made a slip of the tongue or mistake, and accorded the eloquent speaker praise and honor. When the Mohawk chief Kiotseaeton wanted to persuade the Hurons to take part in a peace treaty with the Iroquois, he presented a wampum necklace 'to urge the Hurons to hasten forth to speak. Let them not be bashful [*honteux*] like women.' The Hurons 'call us Frenchmen women,' said the Recollet Sagard, 'because too impulsive and carried away [*trop précipités et bouillants*] in our actions, [we] talk all at the same time and interrupt each other.'[57]

It seems to me that connections between political change, eloquence and gender can be similarly constructed in the North American villages and woodlands and in Western Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Renaissance political oratory, emerging in both republics and monarchies, and the art of formal diplomacy were part of a masculine political culture. As Leonardo Bruni said, 'Rhetoric in all its forms – public discussion, forensic argument, logical fencing and the like – lies absolutely outside the province of women.' The privileged few with a right to public pronouncement – the queens or queen regents and a rare learned woman – required exceptional strategies if their voice were to have an authoritative ring.[58]

Some European women sought the chance to speak publicly (or semi-publicly) in religion instead: members of radical and prophetic sects from the first Anabaptists to the Quakers; Protestants in the early days of the new religion, before Paul's dictum that women should not speak in church, was strictly enforced; Catholics in the new religious orders, like Marie de l'Incarnation's Ursulines and the Visitation of Jeanne de Chantal, where women preached to and taught each other.[59]

Can we find evidence for a similar process in the eastern American woodlands, that is, did Amerindian women try to expand their voice in religious culture while Amerindian men were expanding political oratory? Conceivably, the role of women in dream analysis (which, as we have seen, involved describing one's dreams publicly and playing riddle games about them at festive fires) may have increased in the course of the sixteenth century. In 1656 an Onondaga woman used her dream-swoon to unmask the Christian Paradise to her fellow Iroquois: she had visited 'Heaven', she announced to them, and had seen the French burning Iroquois.[60] Conceivably, the women soothsayers whom the Jesuits met were not simply filling a timeless function open to women, but were recent shamanic innovators. Conceivably, the Iroquois Ogiweoano society of Chanters for the Dead, described in nineteenth-century sources as composed of all or predominantly women, was not a timeless institution, but a development of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[61]

The evidence we do have concerns Amerindian women who converted to Christianity. Some of them used the new religion to find a voice beyond that of a shaman's silent assistant, even while Jesuits were teaching them that wives were supposed to obey their husbands. Khionrea the Huron was one such woman, her portrait drawn for seventeenth-century readers by Marie de Plncarnation. Brought to the Ursuline convent by her parents in 1640, when she was about twelve, Khionrea had been given the name Thérèse, Marie de l'Incarnation's *favorite* saint, and had learned to speak both French and Algonquin and to read and write. Two Huron men from her village came to the convent two years later and she preached to them through the grill:

> They listened to this young woman with unrivalled attention, and one day, when they were on the point of being baptized, one of them pretended no longer to believe in God and so she need no longer speak to him of faith or baptism. Our fervent Thérèse … became disturbed and said, 'What are you talking about? I see the Devil has overturned all your thoughts so that you will be lost. Know you well that if you died today, you would go to Hell where you would burn with Devils, who would make you suffer terrible torments!' The good man laughed at everything she said, which made her think that he spoke with a spirit of contempt. She redoubled her exhortations to combat him, but failing, she came to us in tears. 'Ah,' she said, 'he is lost; he's left the faith; he will not be baptized. It hurt me so to see him speak against God that if there had not been a grill between us, I would have thrown myself on him to beat him.' We went to find out the truth … and the man affirmed that he had done this only to test her faith and zeal.[62]

Several months afterward Khionrea's parents came to take her back to her village to marry, expecting her to be 'the example of their Nation and the Teacher (Maîtresse) of the Huron girls and women'. Instead her party was captured by Iroquois, a number were slain and Thérèse was married to a Mohawk. A decade later, in 1653, she was the mistress of the several families of her Iroquois long-house, still praying to her Christian God and leading others publicly in prayer.[63] Khionrea may have been placating *oki* spirits as well – though Marie de Plncarnation would have hated to think so – and inspired non-Christian women in her village to experimental religious action. One thinks especially of how Christian forms and phrases could have been appropriated to elaborate and lengthen Indian propitiary prayer.

Cécile Gannendaris is another example of a Huron woman who found an authoritative voice through a new religious mix. Her biography was left by the Sisters of the Québec Hospital where she died at an advanced age in 1669, her Christian 'virtue' being demonstrated not only by her fighting off 'seducers' in her youth with smoldering logs and spanking her children 'when they deserved it', but by giving spiritual guidance to her first and second husbands. Especially she taught and preached, 'converting numerous Savages and encouraging them to live more perfectly'.

> She was so solidly instructed in our mysteries and so eloquent in explaining them that she was sent new arrivals among the Savages who were asking to embrace the faith. In a few days she had them ready for baptism, and had reduced the opinionated ones beyond defense by her good reasoning.

The French were impressed with her as well, the Jesuits learning the Huron language from her lips, the newly established Bishop of Québec coming to visit her in her cabin, and the Frenchwomen sending her gifts of food. The Hospital Sisters thought that Gannendaris's clarity of expression and discernment were a break with her Huron past, or, as they put it, 'had nothing of the savage [*rien de sauvage*] about them'. We would interpret these talents differently, as drawing on a Huron tradition of lucid male discussion around the council fire and on a long-house practice of women's teaching, here transformed by Christian learning and opportunity into a new realm of speech.[64]

When Iroquois women became interested in Christianity, the oratorical force of young converts struck them right away. In the fall of 1655, an Onondaga embassy came to Québec to confirm peace with the Hurons and their French allies and to invite the Black Robes to their villages. A chief's wife (*'une Capitainesse'* in the words of Marie de l' Incarnation) visited the Ursulines with other Onondagas several times and listened to the Huron, Marie Aouentohons, not yet fifteen and able to read and write in French, Latin and Huron. Aouentohons catechized her sister seminarians before the company and made a speech (*une harangue*) both to the chief and his wife:

> Send me as many of my Iroquois sisters as you can. I will be their older sister. I will teach them. I will show them how to pray and to worship the Supreme Parent of All. I will pass on to them what my teachers have taught me.

She then sang hymns in Huron, French and Latin. The Capitainesse asked the Ursulines how long it would take their daughters to acquire such accomplishments.[65]

Religious eloquence was not, of course, the only kind of expressiveness that attracted some Indian women to Christianity.[66] The spirituality of the 'Servant of God' Katherine Tekakwitha, daughter of a Mohawk chief and an enemy-wife Algonquin, was marked by heroic asceticism, intense female companionship and absorption in mental prayer. Her holy death in 1680 at age twenty-four was followed by shining apparitions of her and by miracles at her tomb near Caughnawaga. But even Tekakwitha's life involved teaching, as she spoke to the women while they did their cabin tasks of the lives of the saints and other sacred themes and as, toward the end of her life, she instructed those drawn by her reputation on the virtues of virginity and chastity. As her confessor reported it, 'At these times her tongue spoke from the depths of her heart.'[67]

In one striking way, then, Iroquois and Huron women faced what European historians could call a 'Renaissance' challenge in regard to voice and some of them made use of religious tools and the 'Catholic Reformation' to meet it. But neither rebirth nor a return to a privileged past would be an image of change that came readily to them. In the thought of the Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples of Marie de l'Incarnation's day, sacred time turned around on itself, but there was no historical golden age from which humankind had declined and to which it might hope to return. When people died, their souls divided into two, one part gradually moving toward the setting sun to the Village of the Dead, the other part remaining with the body 'unless someone bears it again as a child'.[68] There was no fully developed theory of reincarnation among the Hurons, however. Gaps were filled not so much by rebirth as by adoption: the adoption of the dead person's name, which otherwise could not be mentioned; the adoption of a captured enemy to replace a slain son. Things could be created anew, like wampum, which came from the feathers of a fierce and huge wampum bird, slain to win the hand of an Iroquois chief's daughter and then put to the new uses of peacemaking.[69] Institutions could

be created anew by joint divine and human enterprise, as with Deganawidah and Hiawatha and the confederating of the Five Iroquois Nations.

Models for abrupt change were also available. One was metamorphosis, the sudden and repeatable change from bear to man to bear, from trickster to benefactor to trickster – changes emerging from the double possibilities in life, the ever-present destabilizing potentiality for twinning[70] (a potentiality that makes interesting comparison with the sixteenth-century fascination with Ovidian metamorphosis). A second model was the sudden fall to a totally different world. The first fall was at creation, when the pregnant woman Aataentsic plunged from the sky through the hole under the roots of a great tree (according to one version recounted to the Jesuit Brébeuf), landed on the back of a great turtle in the waters of this world and, after dry land had been created, gave birth to the deity Yoscaha and his twin brother. Falls through holes, especially holes under trees, are the birth canals to experiences in alternative worlds in many an Indian narrative.[71] A seventeenth-century Huron woman, describing Marie de l'Incarnation's life, might say that she tried to fulfill the promptings of a dream, as a person must always do, but what she thought would only be a boat trip turned out to be a fall down a hole. What that alternative world would become remained to be seen.

I hope that one of the Amerindian women in Marie's convent yard told her a seventeenth-century version of the Seneca tale of the origin of stories. We know it from the version told by the Seneca Henry Jacob to Jeremiah Curtin in 1883, where a hunting boy is its protagonist;[72] perhaps a woman's version 230 years before would have used a wooding girl instead. Set in the forest, the tale called to my mind Marguerite de Navarre's rather different storytelling field in the Pyrenees – a conjoining of alternative worlds. An Orphan Boy was sent each day into the woods by his adoptive mother to hunt for birds. One day he came upon a flat round stone in the midst of a clearing. When he sat upon it he heard a voice asking, 'Shall I tell you stories?' 'What does it mean – to tell stories?' the boy asked. 'It is telling what happened a long time ago. If you will give me your birds, I'll tell you stories.'

So each day the Orphan sat on the stone, heard stories and left birds, bringing home to his mother only what he could catch on the way back. His mother sent other boys from the long-house and even men to follow him to find out why his catch had diminished, but they too were captivated by the stories and would say 'haa, haa' with approval now and again. Finally, the stone told the Orphan Boy that he should clear a larger space and bring everyone in the village to it, each of them with something to eat. The boy told the chief and, for two days at sunrise, all the men and women of the village came, put food on the stone and listened to stories till the sun was almost down. At the end of the second day the stone said:

> I have finished! You must keep these stories as long as the world lasts. Tell them to your children and your grandchildren. One person will remember them better than another. When you go to a man or a woman to ask for one of these stories, bring a gift of game or fish or whatever you have. I know all that happened in the world before this; I have told it to you. When you visit one another, you must tell these things. You must remember them always. I have finished.

Notes

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