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The Sacred Role of Animal Beings in Iroquois Lore

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The Sacred Role of Animal Beings in Iroquois Lore

by

Melissa J. Martinelli

An Abstract of a Thesis
in
English

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2012

State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of English

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Sacred Role of Animal Beings in Iroquois Lore

The act of storytelling provides a connection between the spiritual and physical spheres, and the Haudenosaunee people (more commonly recognized as Iroquois) utilize the oral narrative to convey the most sacred truths of their culture. In focusing primarily upon animals and animal beings, one can recognize the deep reverence traditional tribal members feel toward animals as certain legends seek to unite individuals with the spirits, personalities, and bodies of such creatures in narrative form. Too often animals are overlooked as “lesser” beings, yet in legends of the Iroquois they possess potent orenda (great power) that can help one achieve success through their specialized abilities. It is only through the exploration of such tales that one can understand the transcendental link with the animal world which elicits great feelings of affection, wonder, awe, and even fear for the People of the Longhouse. It is the combination of these sentiments that inspires great animal beings which manifest themselves as constructive and good, or unearths monstrosities which use otgont or destructive power that endangers humans within the sacred stories that bring them to life.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis has been a journey, one which has left me with a memorable experience in writing that I will carry for the duration of my life. This project would not have been possible without the helpful correspondence of my thesis committee and those who believed in me from the beginning of this undertaking.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Bachman, for his unwavering support and thought provoking critiques which greatly helped to improve my ideas. Our communication throughout the year has been extremely rewarding, as he holds great knowledge of the Iroquois people while also possessing a great spiritual understanding which I hope to emulate. I would also like to thank Dr. Ryan for her great interest in my topic; her revisions and suggestions have been invaluable to me and she has helped perfect this thesis to the best of my abilities. I truly could not have asked for a better committee, I feel very fortunate in this aspect.

My family also deserves praise, as they never questioned my decision to become a writer. Thank you mom and dad, for instilling the importance of an education from an early age and raising a woman who never has to depend upon anyone but herself. My brother Mark also deserves a thank you, for always making me smile. Last but certainly not least, Sharon Hill Martinelli – you were the kindest of souls and your love of animals and pride in Haudenosaunee culture inspired me to write this for you. I miss you very much, and I know that your guiding spirit is always with me.

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INTRODUCTION

The story is always more important than the storyteller,
because there is a whole intangible internal quality to it.

The story goes beyond us. It existed before us.

--Joseph Bruchac ("Studies in Indian Literatures" interview, 2002)

The act of storytelling provides a spiritual link between the ethereal and physical planes, and the Haudenosaunee or "People of the Longhouse," utilize the oral narrative to convey their most sacred truths. More widely recognized today by the adopted name of Iroquois, their traditional stories continue to live on through those who recite and seek to understand the tales of a past age when a deep respect for nature took precedence over selfish human impulse, and where people and animals walked within the same liminal space and could communicate accordingly: "My people lived more or less with nature's own way . . . they were able to converse with animals . . . strange things happened" (Cornplanter 66). This profound relationship with the natural world was directly reflected in the sacred stories of the Haudenosaunee people, as traditional tribal members experienced a deep connection with the personalities of animals in both bodily and spiritual form. The earth was not simply a piece of land to be conquered, since it held a divine presence that housed creatures which were looked upon with great love as well as overwhelming awe and fear. This combination of conflicting sentiments manifested itself into animal and animal beings in Haudenosaunee lore that carried constructive traits to the benefit of the people, as well as destructive or otgont beings whose presence brought

detrimental effects upon humanity.

As Arthur C. Parker explains in *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, “animals have souls that are alike in their nature to the souls of human beings. The hunter, therefore, propitiates the soul of the animal he kills and explains why he killed it. The souls of friendly animals help man, if man has been courteous, and has properly propitiated them” (Parker 4). The concept of reciprocity, a system based on mutual interchange, is able to transcend the death of a given animal in the Iroquoian belief. Those who take the lives of animals for the benefit of meat and other byproducts are not seen as malevolent, since there are several tales that refer to a “good hunter,” most notably versions of “The Grateful Animals, A Legend of the Little Water Society” and “The Boy Who Lived with the Bears,” which will be explored thoroughly in later chapters. Though agriculture and gathering were vital to the survival of the tribe, hunting was seen as a masculine duty to be carried out by those who wished to provide proper nourishment for their people. Stories related to those who hunted provided a sense of peace and comfort to those who took the lives of a revered animal, for “Man lives by killing, and there is a sense of guilt connected with that. Burials suggest that my friend has died, and he survives . . . The animals that I have killed must also survive” (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 90). Haudenosaunee myth brings the souls of animals to light, since they contain a life force sensitive to the good or bad emanations generated by those who seek to end their bodily presence and release their spirits into another realm of existence.

Propitiation of the animal’s soul does not end in verbalizing the reason for the killings aloud, for the use of charms and dance are rituals diffused across American Indian tribes throughout North America: “For where there is magic there is no death. And

where animal rites are properly celebrated by the people, there is a magical, wonderful accord between the beasts and those who have to hunt them. The buffalo dance, properly performed, insures that the creatures slaughtered shall be giving only their bodies, not their essence, not their lives . . . so they will live again, or rather, live on; and will be there to return the following season” (Campbell, *Primitive Mythology* 293). Though Campbell uses the word magic to describe the transcendent power of life over death through dance, *orenda* is the appropriate term used to convey this type of sacred understanding. Magic is not used to describe miracles in Judeo-Christian belief, nor should it be used to designate supernatural occurrences found in Haudenosaunee myth and legends. Orenda may be possessed by an individual, or infused within a charm for a specific purpose. Dance is one medium from which the benefits of orenda can be experienced, for the spirits of the animals which have departed will be reborn again with each season as long as the dances are carried out in proper fashion.

Cornplanter states in reference to his own tribe’s Dark Dance (Appendix A): “It seems that this and other rituals were inherited, as it seems to follow down to the present day . . .we still carry on these strange unbelievable rituals, not knowing the exact cause” (Cornplanter 42). While the exact origin for certain dances may not be known to the participants, they are necessary in bridging one season to the next and honoring those who have departed into the spiritual realm – whether animal or human in body. They also hold a specific agency within the community, bringing the people together to feast and celebrate their culture. There are several legends which feature an animal or other supernatural being instructing the protagonist to start a certain dance or song in remembrance of a great task performed for the human beneficiary. Most notably, in “The

Orphan Girl,” the Horned Serpent, known to carry both otgont and beneficial traits, instructs the young girl he rescues to dance and hold a feast in his memory. She also “discovers in her pocket a strange article, she found out it was a scale, possibly from her friend” (Cornplanter 64). Charms, such as the one found in the girl’s pocket, can protect the recipient as well as infuse him or her with residual orenda. Groups of charms, usually referred to as bundles, were used in certain rituals including those which involved the hunt.

Though the use of dance and charms as described above may be used to thank helpful animals who have sacrificed their bodies for us, there are also beings found in certain myths and legends who do not reflect the friendly animal sentimentality. As Parker stated previously, animals have souls that have similar traits to human beings – and some people choose to gravitate towards anger, vengeance, and general negativity. These emotions manifest themselves into beings of otgont nature. Some animal beings, such as the Monster Bear, have little to no redeeming qualities while the Horned Serpent is seen as paradoxical in nature, for it both rescues young girls in some legends and seduces them for the sake of manipulation in others. His dual nature is most obviously experienced in *Seneca Fiction, Legends, and Myths* through the version of the creation story – Sky Woman is falling, and he is one of the animals willing to catch her. However, Loon quickly rejects his offer, for he states “You cannot take care of her, you are endowed with too much evil orenda which would kill her” (Curtin 411). The Horned or Water Serpent, which will be further explored in Chapter Four, proves to be one of the most fascinating animal beings – for he is the true embodiment of the conflicting impulses that humans are forced to confront daily.

Otgont beings can also hold the essence of humans in animal form. Some widely known examples in modern folklore are black cats - known as witches' familiars in popular belief, with the same thought of bats taking the form of bloodthirsty vampires in transit from one location to the next. In Haudenosaunee legends, the owl and sometimes the rabbit are used in particular to illustrate this motif: "Owing to the peculiar habits of the owl, the turtle-dove, and the manifestation of extraordinary traits by other animals, some of these creatures were regarded as the oiairon' of sorcerers and witches, whose chief occupation was the destruction of human life by means of their occult arts. Hence it is that these birds and animals came to be regarded as uncanny and of evil portent. A sorcerer when hard-pressed could transform himself into his oiairon', or its representative, i. e. the soul of the sorcerer is not human but that of the ill-omened owl, or other object" (Hewitt 115). An example of this can be found in Parker's "The Boy Who Overcame all Magic by Laughter," where a boy must overcome great trials as he interacts with charmed animals in order to be reunited with his parents. When the servants of lizard tried to trick him, he cast them into a fire and "when the heads were consumed they burst with a loud explosion and out flew a great flock of screech owls" (Parker 164). A similar theme is echoed in *Seneca Fiction, Legends, and Myth* with the story of Hodadenon and Yenyent'hwus when the evil uncle is cast into flames, "he fell off the stump, and, his head bursting, an owl came out of it and flew away" (Curtin 205). Cornplanter's "The Vampire Skeleton" depicts a living corpse being burned and a jack rabbit escaping from the flames (Cornplanter 149). These legends prove to be most unsettling, for the malicious being lives in another form which is familiar to anyone observing owls in tree tops or rabbits enjoying the green grass of spring. Otgont beings can live on in harmless

forms, just as evil can mask itself in what is perceived as good.

Now that the concepts of friendly animals, otgont beings, dances, and orenda have been examined briefly – the myths, legends, and folktales which house them must be distinguished from one another. One may use the term “sacred stories” to signify the tales as a whole, but each chapter will examine and feature elements of the three genres with some allusions to larger archetypal patterns. As surmised by Anthony Wonderley:

Oral narratives . . . myths, folktales, and legends . . . all are regarded as true, but myths, a people’s most sacred stories, are the truest of all . . . usually they explain how the world came to be ordered, how something significant came about, or where a people came from. They feature supernaturals and cultural heroes.

Legends describe human action locally bound and historically rooted. They claim special usually explicit credibility by alluding to what is regarded as historically true. Folktales are less historically minded than legends and more secular than myths. Many seem more clearly designed to amuse and entertain. (Wonderley XV)

Wonderley most accurately describes the differences found in stories within the confines of Iroquoian tradition. Elements of myths, legends, and folktales may overlap each other – however, the differences between each cannot be ignored. Bears may be seen as protectors of children or feared predators depending upon the particular legend, but when examining an American Indian folktale they are usually perceived as blundering fools who are easily outwitted by other members of the animal kingdom dwelling within the forest. Also, interactions between animals and humans are less likely to occur in folklore

since the featured animals tend to interact with each other in a light-hearted way. They do not make decisions which affect the human race, such as the council of animals that gather during Sky Woman's descent onto earth in the creation myths. Though such stories are considered to be fiction in a time of modernity, one must consider the deep reverence that traditional members hold for their sacred stories – the narratives which link one back to generations past. Certain spiritual truths will be extracted in the myths, legends, and folktales featured in the following chapters:

Chapter One will explore the critical role that animal beings played in the creation of the cosmos, and how their influence within these creation myths helped to shape the ideology of the Haudenosaunee people in their relationship with animal beings. The ducks which cushion Ata-ensic's or Sky Woman's fall, the Fire Dragon which provides her with gifts of mortar and pestle, the divers who seek the proper dirt for her fall, as well as the great turtle who offers his back to her and generations to follow are all examples of animal beings which were willing to sacrifice their own lives and share sacred knowledge for the benefit of humanity.

Chapter Two will focus upon the "Animal Helpers" found in legends of the Iroquois, creatures infused with powerful orenda to be used for constructive purposes. The grateful animals found in the hunter and medicine legends, as well as the great feats accomplished by those considered "weakest" of the animal kingdom such as spiders, toads, and moles will also be examined in depth. The central role of dogs and bears as protectors of respectful hunters and children will

also be included.

Chapter Three will seek to contrast the helpful animals previously analyzed, for the ruthless Monster Bear (Nia'Gwahe) will be unearthed from Haudenosaunee legend and brought to life through contrasting lore. Though this being sometimes is manifested in natural form, a witch can take on the appearance of a Nia'Gwahe and seek the lives of innocent children. A young man usually emerges victorious and regains respect from the community after the Monster Bear is defeated.

Chapter Four will seek to expose the true nature of the Horned or Water Serpent. Is this being truly otgont if it possesses goodness? It is both the rescuer of stranded maidens and the seducer of strong willed women who refuse to settle for an ordinary husband. The Horned Serpent is a being truly dual in nature, and thrives in tales that feature women who seem unfit or mismatched in the society they live in.

CHAPTER ONE

Sky Woman and the Gifts of Creation

You think you own whatever land you land on,
The earth is just a dead thing you can claim,
But I know every rock and tree and creature,
Has a life, has a spirit, has a name.

--Vanessa Williams, "Colors of the Wind." (1995)

The question of how life came to be upon earth has been addressed in creation myths throughout the world, accepted as truth by those who trace the origins of their people to the narratives which vividly illustrate the moments leading to the beginning of the universe. The Haudenosaunee carry on their myths of creation as the sacred stories continue to perpetuate the role of human beings within the cosmological sense. The descent of Sky Woman, known as *Ata-ensic* in the Seneca tradition, from the precipice above has captured the imagination of artists throughout North America (Appendix B), and her constructive role as a woman in the creation of earth sets her story apart from patriarchal stories known from Biblical accounts of creation. Though she was seen as flawed in some versions by her jealous husband, she is worthy of redemption since life on earth begins when the compassionate animals decide to cradle her fall.

The basic outline of this particular myth, with some variants based on different versions, occurs with a description of a great chief or Skyholder who becomes jealous of his wife when she is found to be pregnant with a child that is not his. The tree of life is

uprooted for the sake of divining a dream that Skyholder or his wife has, or because she demands to see what is beneath the roots. Her husband becomes overwhelmed with anger and casts her down the hole that the uprooted tree has left, and Ata-ensic free-falls in the sky. On her way, she encounters the invisible Death Panther who gives her essential gifts of survival – mortar and pestle. Other animals notice her in the sky above, and they hold council. They decide that the Great Turtle should house her upon his back, and several animals dive down under the vast expanse of water to provide essential soil so that earth can grow on Great Turtle's back. A given animal carries this out, and a group of water fowl comes to cradle Ata-ensic comfortably down to her new home upon the Great Turtle's shell.

There are many distinguishing elements in this myth which have profound thematic influence within the oral narrative, one being the divination of dreams. Though the topic of dreams diverges from the exploration of animal beings, Sky Woman's fall would not have taken place if not for her visions in slumber. One can say that the origin of the universe began with a dream that could only be fulfilled by uprooting the sacred Tree of Life, an act seen as forbidden by the man-beings which inhabited Skyworld. This is a direct testament to the power of dreams within Iroquoian belief, for they "must be interpreted by a chosen person or by volunteer guessers, and the desire must be satisfied, or calamity will befall the dreamer" (Parker 5). In this instance, the act of satisfying a longing latent in a dream takes significance over the law itself – for it is understood that the tree should never be disturbed. What is forbidden becomes permissible, but it comes with a cost. The act of uprooting the tree unknowingly causes cosmic chaos, for an entrance to another world presents itself: "The most widely distributed variant of the

symbolism of the Centre is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the Universe . . . the bridge or ladder between Heaven and Earth were possible because they were Centre of the World” (Eliade, *Images and Symbols* 44-45). As Ata-ensic kneels at the edge of the great expanse where the Tree of Life stands, her husband’s jealousy disrupts his reason just as Ata-ensic’s dream clouds the commonly understood rules of their society. She is thrown into the unknown, but her free-fall is only temporary as the water fowl cradle her safely down to Turtle – it was the birds that effectively link the woman of Skyworld onto the earth. They were the symbolic bridge, or ladder to the Centre which Eliade speaks of.

Animals take on a poignant role within this myth – as helpful caretakers who hold constructive qualities imperative in the creation of this world:

Stories like these teach several important lessons regarding the position of animals relative to humans. First, animals are more powerful than humans. They lived in the world before we did, and therefore have more practical and spiritual knowledge than humans do. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that it is animals working together who create the lands—a feat that humans could not achieve. In other words, while some interpretations of the Genesis 1 creation story describe humans as more important than any other animal because we were created last, [American Indian] creation stories suggest the opposite—that humans are weaker than any other animal because we appeared last. (Aftandilian 195)

Aftandilian’s contentions prove valid in the sacred myth of Sky Woman, for the animals observing her plight did not question Ata-ensic’s presence in their world – they simply seek to save her from certain death. While humans are plagued with indecisiveness,

animals hold a certain spiritual understanding and act upon the instincts that nature provides. They are content in that they do not have ulterior motives or wish to deceive – and the Haudenosaunee recognize that innocence as greatly powerful. The animals within this myth work together to create a harmonious world fit for a human being; a task that they were not bound to or could benefit from. This is a true display of selflessness, for the gifts they provide lay the foundation for creation itself. The animal which dives deep into the abyss of the water, usually a muskrat or duck, ends up sacrificing its life so that Ata-ensic can live comfortably upon the new land upon the Great Turtle. While the animals in this sacred story constantly give of themselves, Sky Woman is the recipient and must accept the sacrifices made for her so that she can give life through the daughter which she will soon bear in her new surroundings. It is the gifts of animals which ultimately save, and in time sustain Ata-ensic.

One animal being which is not present in all versions of this myth is the Death Panther. He is first of the beings to appear to Sky Woman after she is thrown from her former home, and gives her gifts of corn mortar and pestle which is imperative if one wishes to create meal. After he presents the objects to her, Death Panther states: “Because thou has thus done, thou shalt eat by these things, for there is nothing below, and all who eat shall see me once and it will be the last” (Parker 61). This statement signifies the beginning of Ata-ensic’s mortality, a corporal state of being which she did not embody in Skyworld. The Death Panther, also known by his Seneca name Gahashondietoh, aids in Ata-ensic’s demise in some versions of the creation myth as well – for the chief of Skyworld suspects that Gahashondietoh is responsible for his wife’s pregnancy. The possible union of Ata-ensic and Gahashondietoh suggests that the child created is subject

to great tragedy, for a being which brings death cannot father a child who can properly sustain life. The daughter which Ata-ensic mothers does survive into adulthood, but later dies in childbirth after one of her twins leaves her body in an unnatural way. While none of the tales researched exactly clarify the paternity of Ata-ensic's daughter, the presence of Gahashondietoh at the very beginning of her descent is curious. The Death Panther is present in other myths as well, most notably in a tale where two boys compete in a lake over who could hold their breath the longest. He presents himself in disguise, and tells the boy to burn tobacco for "it is the sign that disaster is not wanted . . . when he has breathed it he will go away satisfied with the offering and turn aside the impending evil" (Parker 80). Interestingly enough, Ata-ensic grasps at tobacco leaves before she is cast down to earth in some versions of her story. Perhaps this was an attempt to ward off an unwelcome visit from her former lover as she falls to her certain death, though this action likely stresses the importance of tobacco within Iroquois ceremony. The smoke rises to the sky, carrying the pleas and praises to the Creator who dwells above. The Death Panther is also present in Hewitt's variant of the myth, where he is known as the Fire Dragon:

Now Fire-dragon took out an ear of corn, and verily he gave it to her. As soon as she received it she placed it in her bosom. Now, another thing, the next in order, a small mortar and also the upper mortar [pestle] he gave to her. So now, again, another thing he took out of his bosom, which was a small pot. Now, again, another thing, he gave her in the next place, a bone. Now, he said: "This, verily is what thou wilt continue to eat." (Hewitt 50)

Though called by a different name, the being still offers gifts which will assist Ata-ensic

in her new life and addresses her mortality as well. After their brief meeting, Gahashondietoh departs from Ata-ensic leaving the other animal beings to rescue her.

Joseph Campbell addresses the phenomenon of gift giving by what is considered a sacred animal in one of many interviews: “It is a fact that the religious attitude towards the principal animal is one of reverence and respect, and not only that – submission to the inspiration of that animal. . . . The animal is the one that brings the gifts – tobacco, the mystical pipe, and so on” (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 93). This cannot be explained within the sphere of western rationalism, because humans are conditioned to believe that they are above other creatures which inhabit the earth, and their position dictates that there is nothing an animal can give them which would be to their benefit aside from what can be obtained from hunting. Campbell cites that animals can offer gifts - a concept which cannot be understood if one’s mindset dwells only within the physical plane. Ata-ensic had to be literally thrown from the only world she knew in order to receive her gifts from the Death Panther, and perhaps one who seeks the gift of spiritual gratification from animals must fall away from their own selfish impulses in order to gain a new perspective. Though Gahashondietoh holds negative connotations, it is he who offers the tools for Sky Woman to function and provide for herself, since her hunger could never be satisfied properly without the gifts of a being that dwells between the earth and sky.

The Great Turtle’s significance cannot be underestimated within this myth, as it is believed by some that North America continues to rest upon his sturdy back in the modern age. Patyal states, “In the Iroquois myth the world was at first covered with water, and when Aataetsic fell from heaven, the animals in a conference decided to bring the earth, the turtle brought the soil on his back, and then the miraculous growth of the

earth took place. The turtle is an important Iroquois totem; the clan traces its descent from a turtle that threw off its shell” (Patyal 101). Turtles act as an important symbol of longevity, for their lengthy lifespans can exceed the average human and their association with fertility is culturally diffused throughout the world. They are seen as slow yet dependable, and are able to verily outwit other animals in Iroquois folk tales. The turtle travels between the spheres of earth and sea, a mutable nature which embodies mythic significance. A common motif found in versions of the creation story is the ability to travel from one mode of existence to another, and the turtle is able to cross the threshold that separates both land and water and can actively function within both environments:

The break-through from plane to plane has become possible and repeatable . . .the sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence *it founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world. (Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane* 30)

As Ata-ensic leans over the hole left behind by the uprooted Tree of Life, what exactly is she searching for? Eliade suggests here that what is sacred is real to the individual, and even though Ata-ensic lives in a world which is unknowable to those who live on earth, she is not fulfilled. She is seeking something which is sacred to her, and has to travel between what is known to her and what she could not understand in order to reach it. Turtle helped to establish order in the chaos of her world, giving her life and the physical experience from which she could pursue her desires and perhaps satisfy a dream which caused the tree to be uprooted in the first place. The Great Turtle may not sacrifice his life in the same fashion as the failed divers, yet he selflessly offers a part of himself in order for a human life to thrive and discover her own purpose within the universe.

The turtle does not only appear as a resting place for Sky Woman, but is also featured as a lover who deceives Ata-ensic's daughter into believing that he is truly human. He has the power to shed his human form and return to his true turtle nature at whim, an occurrence quite common in Haudenosaunee lore: "Tales abound in references to courtship and marriage between humans and other 'people' who are often sources of food, with the right to kill and eat these species derived from a mythic charter setting up reciprocities as a result of the original marriage. . . . These marriages can be consummated and produce viable off-spring because under the robe of each species the males and females are really humanoid" (Miller 275). Miller's phrasing here can be interpreted as somewhat condescending in nature, for the "humanoid" designation does not account for the fact that man-beings and humans share an essence that is of equal significance. Though it is never explicitly stated that the twins that Ata-ensic's daughter bore were part turtle, the prevalence of "man-beings" upon the island was accounted for. After all, Ata-ensic and her daughter are the only human beings to take residence upon Great Turtle's back – and since the boundary between earth and sky is broken, mythological tradition dictates that other boundaries could be crossed as well. Guimarães also makes reference to this, "if we asked an Amerindian what is a myth, the answer probably would be that it is '[A] story of a moment when humans and animals were not distinguished yet' " (Guimarães 149).

Animals in this myth serve not only as protectors, providers, and deliverers – but as lovers as well. The role of man-beings as lovers is perpetuated in later myths and legends as well, but the turtle is the man-being specifically used in these narratives (with the exceptional variant being the West Wind). Perhaps early storytellers intended to

continue Turtle's influence beyond a mere resting place, since certain versions were favored by each clan. When turtle is specified as a husband or lover in this version, he plays an important role in the continuation of humanity beyond cushioning Ata-ensic's fall. The turtle effectively becomes the predecessor of a world before there was good or evil as embodied by the twins which Sky Woman's daughter gives birth to. Thus, the animal becomes a symbol of a mystery which cannot be rationalized – the world before binaries. For in Ata-ensic's mindset - nothing was known as inherently good or bad, positive or negative. Human beings brought on these associations by thought, which in turn created the boundaries from which animals were separated from people and heavens from the earth. In returning to the story of Ata-ensic, we are attempting to remember a time in the past when true communication with an animal was possible, and not all inhabitants of earth were true human in form: "For instance, shamans' experiences, as dreams and inebriation, allow them to access the original kind of experience characterized by the undistinguished nature of animals and humans. This means that concomitant with the apparent discontinuity of animals and humans, the mythical flow conceives a possibility of non-differentiation among types of beings. Hence, a myth is a narrative that talks about *a moment that is neither past nor future*, but expresses a relational configuration among beings in the cosmos" (Guimarães 149).

Myths represent a sacred vision that is shared collectively through stories, an experience that is not confined by connotations of time. Rather, it relates experiences which we all seek to revive in a phase before memory – because it is through this that we can satisfy our need to understand the unique role we play in the universe in relation to other forms of life that surround us. Animals occupy the highest sphere of dominance in

traditional American Indian belief, since they were able to survive on earth long before the appearance of human beings in the mythic tradition. The origins of our world may rest within Ata-ensic's vision, but it is the helpful animals that create a realm suitable for her and all of humanity to dwell within long after her descent.

CHAPTER TWO

Animal Helpers and Redemption

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons.

They were not made for humans any more than

black people were made for white, or women created for men.

--Alice Walker

Humanity dwells within a sphere that houses a myriad of creatures - some which tread upon earth, while others soar to the highest precipices of the mountain laden sky. Our dialogue with such beings must be experienced on a transcendent level, for the language of human beings can hardly verbalize the universal truths of the world that animals internalize at birth. There are several Iroquoian tales that call upon an animal helper when a human being is in the greatest of distress, since great orenda is held by creatures infused with deep instinct and clever ingenuity.

In the article "Bear Imagery and Ritual in Northeast North America", Thomas E. Berres states, "Native Americans felt a special kinship with bears because of many shared morphological and behavioral characteristics, which lent the bears more readily to anthropomorphism than other animals . . . they often stand on their hind legs . . . they are omnivorous with a diet similar to that of humans" (Berres et al. 9). Bears are one animal which will be explored primarily for their tendency to nurse lost children, protecting the child from certain death after his neglectful parent throws him away. They are divine helpers of youth, and thus safeguard the future of humanity in this symbolic way. Dogs are also found to accompany children in other Haudenosaunee myths, though their crucial role rests with warning their masters of impending danger. Loyalty and

sacrifice are embedded notions which these animal helpers hold, and they are more than willing to give up their lives for the sake of their beloved owner. Each tale offers its own unique approach regarding the animal and human relationship, though it must be noted that powerful orenda can be found within what is perceived as the weakest of the animal kingdom. Toads, mice, and moles are three examples of figures which assist their human counterparts whenever they are called upon – since animal assistants are not limited to beings which are traditionally understood as powerful. The concept of the hunt is a motif which deserves to be examined as well, since the central figure of the hunter evokes sentiments rooted in both fear and gratitude – a dichotomy which is directly reflected in the Hunter and Medicine legends as well as tales of the bear.

Cornplanter in his collection of letters found in *Legends of the Longhouse* relates the oral legend of “The Grateful Animals, A Legend of the Water Society” with great reverence, since this particular Hunter and Medicine narrative is a legend believed to have occurred in a time before memory. This story directly shows the intimate relationship a hunter shares with the animals he pursues, and introduces an exceptional man who would “always remember his animal and bird brothers who eat meat . . . whenever he dresses his game, he always leaves a portion of the carcass for them . . . then he would call at the top of his voice inviting all meat-eaters to the feast” (Cornplanter 22). This excerpt alone addresses the cycle of life, for some animals are hunters themselves who acquire meat in the same manner as a human being – sans ritualistic offers which follow in Haudenosaunee tradition. Animals obtain meat for the sake of survival, while the motives of some humans who hunt are not as clearly defined. However, this person is not a hunter who seeks the flesh of animals for the sake of sport.

A sense of selflessness is evident within him, since he invites all carnivorous creatures to participate in the bounty of the hunt. He uses his voice to communicate the desire to share with the many creatures that dwell within nature, for they provide the generous gift of their flesh. Complanter clearly expresses his respect for animals, since he never consumes more than his hunger commands and leaves enough game to account for tomorrow.

A similar character is depicted within the Tuscarora sacred story related by Johnson, as the hunter shares the result of his conquest with his other members of his tribe and “receive[s] the appellation of Protector of Birds and Animals” (Johnson 221). A hunter that is given the designation as a defender of animals can be seen as a contradictory idea in every aspect, for it is a concept which one can only understand in the light of Iroquoian tradition:

First and foremost, native theologies of animals are based on observation and experience with real animals. On the one hand, this focus on close observation of real animals stems from a deep curiosity about and concern for the animal peoples with whom we share the world. . . . Native peoples have also watched animals closely and tried to understand them because they were deeply dependent upon the animals for both physical sustenance and spiritual knowledge and power.

(Aftandilian 192)

If one wishes to obtain physical nourishment from an animal’s flesh, a hunter needs to carefully discern the habits and various behaviors a particular creature has in its natural environment. He must learn to blend with nature, and effectively merge as one within the soul of the forest. Aftandilian’s ideas perpetuate throughout the Hunter and Medicine

legends, for a capable hunter knows the animals surrounding him hold great orenda that one cannot dismiss in ignorance. The Good Hunter resonates as a protector within these legends, because in approaching his kill with a deep respect and perhaps even tender kindness, the animal is only taken for the body and is not stripped of the soul. He is protecting the wildlife from needless slaughter, slow death by disease, and even from starving as a result of a cruel winter. When these elements diffuse into storytelling, a narrative emerges in which animals can reciprocate for the reverence held deeply by the hunter who believes in the power of their spirits.

As the legend continues, a War Party descends upon the hunter. He is scalped by the offending tribe, and left lifeless upon the forest floor. In both tales, a council is held and the bear is appointed chief since “he of all animals stands next to mankind in their relation, habits, and knowledge” (Cornplanter 23). Parker also conveys a version of this tale, which greatly accounts for the comforting nature of the bear: “The Bear feeling over the body found a warm spot over [the hunter’s] heart. . . then the Bear hugged him in his hairy arms and kept him warm” (Parker 388). The gathering decides if the man were to breathe again, his scalp must be retrieved from the opposing party.

The animals devise a plan, and they decide to cut a piece of their own flesh to “make a medicine which must be the strongest in all the world” (Cornplanter 24). It is also said that the dew of the Great Eagle’s wings helped to moisten the scalp (Johnson 223), while the bark of trees and rare leaves combined with the brain of birds helped to form the miraculous elixir which bound the scalp back to its rightful place. The procedure complete, the hunter opens his eyes and to his astonishment sees the animals which he had provided for during his life, and they relate “how great was the lamentation of those

who had so long experienced his kindness, and the efforts made to restore him to life” (Johnson 224). The hunter rejoices and tells his people of the marvelous power of his animal helpers, and the medicine is still used in dire cases to this day. Parker relates that the animals instruct the hunter to remember a song in ceremony, (Parker 389-390) which would preserve the active components of the medicine and keep the animals that created it satisfied.

This legend relates several important concepts to the reader, one being the reciprocal nature of actions as well as the spirit of the hunt: "The hunting and killing of beasts is carried out in accordance with the numerous important rituals and myths. In the tribe where there may be a master or mistress of animals, who possesses the authority to withhold captured game if the relevant ritual is observed incorrectly by the hunters. Animals are regarded as an important source of spirit power and Native American shamans often rely on animal helpers" (Willis 233). Because the hunter conducted himself in a way which adhered to proper ritual and reverence for the animals he sought, he was able to attain game and was generous enough to share his abundance with other animals of the forest. When grave misfortune fell upon the cherished hunter, the animals collectively worked together to restore him to his original state. These parallel legends stress the power of animals, for they have the ability to restore an individual's very breath. While a variety of creatures are mentioned, the role of the bear is stressed since he is designated leader of the council in a matter of life and death. In both Cornplanter and Parker's versions, the bear rubs the dead man's chest in an attempt to restore life – and warmth is a direct result. Bears are the protector of human existence, a creature so similar to us that they understand the complexities of our bodies and hold the power to heal

them. Tehanetorens conveys the association of bears with medicine in “The Gift of the Great Spirit,” a legend of Mohawk origin. Here, the Great Creator disguises himself as an old man and travels from lodge to lodge seeking food and shelter where he observes that: “over the doors of the bark houses were the emblems of the clans of those who [occupy] the lodges” (Tehanetorens 34). Each clan (Appendix C) denies the man access to their home, until he comes across the lodge of the Bear Clan. A very old woman answers, and allows the man to stay with her. Each day the old man falls ill with a different ailment, and instructs the old woman what herbs to gather in the forest to cure his condition. One day she comes home to see the Great Creator in his true form. He tells her that because she, of the Bear Clan, was the only person who was willing to shelter and feed him, the herbal remedies he taught her will cure real sickness in others, and that “the Bear Clan Members will be the Keepers of Medicine for all time to come” (Tehanetorens 40). The association of the bear with physical restoration is prevalent within these particular legends, but they can also safely support children emotionally within a den of motherly love in other tales.

Though the characteristics of the bear found in Haudenosaunee lore vary, one cannot ignore her role as an advocate which seeks to preserve abandoned sons and daughters. She is not the bumbling fool found in other American Indian folklore, but rather a wise instructor who successfully infuses the knowledge of the hunt within her human foster child. Legends of Cornplanter, Parker, and Bruchac depict a boy not yet of age who experiences the loss of his mother, and his father remarries a new woman. Though the boy has great affection for his new maternal figure, she wishes to dispose of a son who is not her own. She leads him to a cave in the woods, and leaves him there. His

plight is noticed by the animals, and a council is called from which the bear is appointed guardian to the child.

The motif of abandonment often presents itself in animal helper narratives, for it plays on the cultural fear of the Haudenosaunee who rely upon each other for the survival of the community. To be left in the forest without proper resources equates with certain death, an unfortunate predicament which this boy of legend is thrown into. The act of being left specifically within a cave by the stepmother or wicked uncle holds symbolic significance, for it is the resting place of bears in the winter months as they hibernate. They are brought from a death-like state in sleep to life again as spring emerges, a cyclical concept which has captured the attention of American Indian storytellers: “It is the bear's apparent power of dying and coming to life again which has impressed the imagination of the [American] Indians, just as, for an identical reason, they have been impressed by the serpent's habit of shedding its skin. Hence, and because of its general resemblance to man, especially when walking erect on its hind paws, the bear was regarded by the natives of this continent as a highly mystical animal, endowed with extraordinary powers” (Hagar 95). The bear is an animal which can figuratively die and be brought to life again, for they are seemingly transformed within their winter dwelling space. The cave forever alters the mindset of the young boy as well, since he enters as a result of abandonment and leaves with a new awareness of the love that his new bear family provides. The mother bear teaches her adopted son the ways of the hunt, an act which is detrimental to her and other animals yet essential for a young man to gain in Haudenosaunee tradition. She shares her knowledge in an altruistic way so that her adopted son could properly function within a society which emphasizes the male within a

hunting role. Though fathers traditionally teach their sons the ways of the hunt, the bear is able to take on the paternal gender role despite her dominating motherly characterization. A young boy, once cast away, grows into a resourceful young man who embodies profound mythical knowledge a helpful bear chose to reveal in love.

This legend clearly illustrates how nature comes to the rescue of the weakest, since the malicious elements of the wilderness can be overcome by animal beings that are conversant with all things sacred. Bears are not always painted in a terrifying and unknown light, for they were a common sight of the Iroquoian people who often tread upon the forest grounds to gather food in the same manner of this particular creature. Their familiarity cast off fear, which may have served to construct the mother-son relationship found within such narratives. The nurturing bear does not restore the boy back from death in a literal sense, but she bestows great knowledge upon him which would help him survive well into adulthood. The fact that she sacrifices herself as well as her cubs' lives for the sake of her foster son is not to be taken lightly, for what individual can honestly say he or she would do the same for an outsider? Bears found in these stories lack the selfish traits common to the human race, but their nature may be confusing to those who have never encountered their legends: "Friendly white scientists might think that the mythologies are works in wildlife biology or, let us say, in ecological wisdom. But they are not. The characters with those names have fused human and animal natures do not look or act like the recent bears and coyotes, which are the subject of wildlife biology" (Bahr 606). In an ancient time when people found themselves intimately connected with wildlife, animals did not appear as they are conventionally represented. "Man-beings" are often used to describe animals that may be a wolf or bear

in true form, yet resemble humans - for the boundary which separates people from animals was indistinct and easily crossed. This is why the boy sees his adopted families in human form, for these are not the animals that disturb campsites and pace sadly at the zoo. Too many of us have become blinded by a false sense of superiority, and now simply see the bears as frightening fragments of nature which are seldom encountered.

One creature which has continued to endure as an animal helper is the dog, a being which has co-existed with humans for centuries. They literally assist the visually impaired and can even detect oncoming seizures for those suffering from epilepsy and their presence is proven to help relieve ailments of depression for those who face the world alone. American Indians knew dogs held the capacity for inordinate abilities, for “It is true that whenever a person loves a dog he derives great power from it. Dogs still know all we say; only they are not at liberty to speak. If you do not love a dog, he has power to injure you by his orenda” (Curtin 236). A particular narrative found in *Seneca Fiction, Legends, and Myths* embodies the notion of potent orenda which has the ability to transform an ordinary human being into a monstrous creature that craves human flesh. The story begins with a “man who had three dogs, who were his brothers, and of whom he was fond . . . When he left them at home he always told his wife to feed them well and to take good care of them, but in spite of this she abused the dogs; no matter how long he was away, she would give them nothing to eat” (Curtin 231). The dogs (who had the ability to speak in human tongue) told of their mistreatment at the hands of the wife, for the woman was only kind to the animals when her husband was around. The pack resolved to punish the woman for her misdeeds, and one night as she cut meat to satisfy her hunger the dogs watched. Every small movement was carefully observed by the

hunter's companions, and the woman eventually cut her finger. Wishing to stop the blood flow, she put the injured finger to her mouth and began to suck the blood. She enjoyed it so much, she soon drank all the blood from her body, ate the skin of her arms and legs, and went as far as to consume her infant daughter (Curtin 232). The dogs went to warn their master that his wife had become a man-eater, and helped to aid in his escape.

A similar tale is found in Curtin, "The Man-Eating Wife, Little Old Woman, and the Morning Star," though it is not stated that the power of a dog caused the woman to desire human flesh, only that the dog is able to speak and flees with his master upon her approach: "The man and the dog started off. The dog's legs were short, he couldn't run fast, so the man put him in a hollow tree and commanded him to [stay there]. The dog was willing, for he wanted his master to save himself" (Curtin 83). The men in these tales differ greatly, for Curtin's character seems to disregard the well-being of his dog though its warning preserved his own life. Though dogs would never abandon their masters in a time of crises, humans are not subject to the same unwavering loyalty. Bruchac also relates a story of dogs that save their master from a cannibalistic creature, though it is not a family member who develops a taste for human flesh but rather a "terrible creature" who could be a Monster Bear. The orenda-filled dog in this myth is called "Four-Eyes," and she licks the bottom of her master's moccasins so that he could "travel as we dogs do, with the speed of the wind through the trees" (Bruchac 87). The owner escapes with the help of his friends, and returns to properly bury the bones left behind by the hideous creature. Unlike the selfish man found in Curtin's tale, he genuinely laments the loss of his companions as "tears fill his eyes" (Bruchac 89) when he hears the brave and unrelenting Four-Eyes being attacked by the creature.

Dogs seem to sacrifice themselves more than any other animal helper, and modern narratives portray similar ideas of canines laying down their lives for a human companion, as tales such as *Old Yeller* depict a farm dog succumbing to rabies, an unfortunate result of protecting its owner against a fatal attack by a wild animal. The tragic loss of dogs seems to be a common motif in Haudenosaunee legends, perhaps because these stories may help us to prepare us for a certain reality - we will endure long after our beloved companions since we do not share the same life expectancy. The monster that pursues us may not only be an unknown creature in the woods, but time itself which eventually consumes all.

Though bears and dogs are the most common animal helpers in Haudenosaunee legend, other creatures serve to assist humans in times of difficulty. Though their appearance may be brief, the animal helper embodies “the protective power always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent, within, or just behind the unfamiliar features of the world. One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear” (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 72). Campbell goes so far as to speculate that “ageless guardians” found in Iroquois legends personify the power of the unconscious, though the will to persevere when all other options are exhausted is primarily experienced in a conscious state. Animal beings are one of many manifestations of such guardians for they bear gifts in a time of great need, a motif echoed in the myth of Sky Woman and Creation. They need not to be large in form, nor terrifying in appearance, since even the smallest creatures retain orenda rivaling the strongest of animal beings found in other narratives.

In Bruchac’s tale, a boy named Hodadenon or “the last one left” must retrieve

the remaining chestnuts as it is the only food that his starving uncle is able to eat. In order to avoid the sight of Skin Woman (a being that hangs from a tree which keeps watch over the chestnuts), he evokes the help of a mole. After the animal helper appears, “he grew smaller and smaller until he was small enough to travel with the mole under the earth . . . coming up beneath the very tree where the Skin Woman was swaying back and forth” (Bruchac 179). Parker also has a version of this tale, which depicts a young boy and his grandmother as the last surviving members of their people. A cannibalistic wizard preys upon their tribe, and he calls upon the mole to help conceal him from the seven sisters which guard the “monster sorcerer’s heart” (Parker 204). Turkey Boy destroys the heart of the wizard, and peace is brought back to their land. Though the mole may be blind and lives a life underground, there is great power within its small body for it is able to escort the protagonist of the tale to safety. Another instance of such aid in a time of need occurs in Sanborn’s myth, “Why Indians and Toads are Friendly.” A chief comes to a neighboring enemy village when he witnesses festivities at a distance, and seeing his chance to kill some unsuspecting members of the enemy tribe he decides to attend the dance ceremonies. In the process of “blending in”, he stabs members of the gathering with his scalping-knife (Sanborn 75), and in retaliation the party killed his entire tribe except for the offender for “it was not rutable to kill a chief” (Sanborn 75). They decide to punish him for his actions, however, and so they blister his feet with hot coal and force him to run a great distance. After he had reached an area far beyond the enemy camp, the chief retreats into a hollow log where he encounters a toad who applies medicine to his wounded feet: "I am he whom your people call the toad. You have often heard me crying in distress when the hungry snake has tried to swallow me, and you have beaten him off

and now for this reason I have come and cured you . . .help us and we will help you" (Sanborn 76). Again we encounter the reciprocal nature of animals within these legends, for they remember thoughtful deeds that were done for them and seek to repay such actions in their own exceptional ways.

A variety of animal helpers are also conjured in the journey of Okwencha, or Red Paint, a young man who wishes to rescue his departed uncles from death: "I wish the bat were here; the mouse; the night-hawk; and all came. He told the bat to amuse the people by flying about, while the mouse climbed the pole and gnawed off the cords supporting his uncle's skin. The night-hawk was to report to him" (Beauchamp 136). The animals found in Beauchamp's tale can perform tasks beyond what Red Paint was capable of at the time, acting as extensions of the self in another form. Animal helpers seem to suddenly appear in a time of need, though they can also be called upon if one possesses enough orenda to call upon them from their natural dwellings - a power which Okwencha clearly displays.

Animal guides come to our heroes of the American Indian myth cloaked in various forms, but one central concept unites them. The Iroquois, and all tribes of North America, held on to the belief that any presence found in the natural world has the ability to communicate if one is willing to listen - for we are all spiritual beings who share life on earth, and some animals are able to instinctually decipher what humans cannot. These myths and legends not only serve to entertain, but to educate individuals, for the sense of community the Iroquois advocate is lost to history. Haudenosaunee belief perpetuates respect for all animals; since they are the protectors of secrets one cannot comprehend, possessing powers which one can only explore through legends of a past time.

CHAPTER THREE

Unveiling Otgont Power through the Nia’Gwahe

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
 Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
 Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
 That I will speak to thee

--William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1.4.44-48)

Legends of the Haudenosaunee unearth a multitude of animal beings – some possessing characters considered benign in temperament. However, others carry evil orenda so powerful that atrocities result from their very presence. The sacred stories surrounding such otgont creatures depict a monstrosity that seeks to destroy members of a given tribe, or they can also challenge an underdog’s ability to complete a mental, spiritual, or physical task. Defeating the otgont being is imperative, for failure to conquer the entity equates with death itself. However, a “monster” is named so because it is an amalgamation of many forms – a being housing more than one nature within. Tales of the Iroquois are not in binaries, for otgont beings embody aspects that are both constructive and detrimental to humanity. The Nia’Gwahe (variants in stories include Nia-‘Gwahe-gowa or Nia-Gwahe-hi-gowa) or Monster Bear, destroys all in its path yet also redeems since legends depict it surrendering its life to what is perceived as the lowest members of society who seek to free their people from the terror of its presence.

Parker cites the Nia’Gwahe as being “the most feared of magic beasts and one of the most frequent among them to enter in the fortunes of men” (Parker 17). Unlike the gentle bear that protects lost children in previous legends, the Monster Bear consumes human flesh and does not hesitate to make its presence known to victims. In the article “Bear Imagery and Ritual in Northeast North America,” Thomas E. Berres explores the psychological associations of the animal with the mindset of American Indians who faced frequent encounters in close proximity to their homes:

Bears have attacked people, therefore eliciting human fears of being mauled, maimed, and even killed. Fear of this powerful animal, which both competed and sometimes preyed upon humans, was partially responsible for various rituals, legends, and tales. . . . The bear's prominence may thus be attributed to two opposite sets of meanings, signifying a dangerous, intelligent predatory animal opposed to people, while also seen as looking and behaving like a human. The union of these two opposed yet related beings provides an apt vehicle for religious themes. (Berres et al. 8-9)

Berres’ contentions prove valid since great trepidation surrounds the bear within the legends that house them, for their resemblance to humans does not end with their omnivorous diet. Individuals see a reflection of their own unpredictable tendencies within the animal, for they are capable of acting upon the same instinctual anger that drives a bear to harm an individual when threatened. The Haudenosaunee worldview dictates that “animals have souls that are alike in their nature to the souls of human beings” (Parker 4), which further perpetuates the fact that they are driven to either help or hurt others based solely upon their unique experiences and convictions. The Nia’Gwahe is an animal being

gone awry, fixated upon its own hunger and taste for destruction – a mirror image of a selfish person consumed with his or her own desires despite the needs of the family or community as a whole.

In order to truly understand the nature of the Monster Bear, one must return to the sacred stories that house it. Author Jesse J. Cornplanter relates a legend of the Nia’Gwahe within his collection of lore, titled “The Naked Bear: A Seneca Legend of Peace.” While this account certainly has elements of Christianized belief, as the chief in this legend laments the fact that his people “did not know the difference of good and evil . . .” (Cornplanter 90) and makes it his personal mission to “study the sins of his fellowmen” (Cornplanter 91), this source is imperative in understanding this powerful creature of legend. The writer unknowingly faced an internal conflict with his cultural beliefs with immersion in white America – a society that ignorantly viewed his ancestry as barbaric and savage. However, despite references to the Judeo-Christian faith, Cornplanter masterfully preserves the image of the Nia’Gwahe through his depiction.

“The Naked Bear” begins with a chief who seeks to rectify the violence which plagues his people, and institutes a “new thought belief” (Cornplanter 91) of peace which carries over to the next village by two runners who take on animal forms as they travel between locations. Both parties agree to bury their war weapons, and the villages experience peace for an extended period of time. The original runners decide to pay their neighbors a visit some time later, but they do not return on the designated day. Other members begin to disappear when visiting the adjacent village and the chief believes that his friends may be deceiving him but if not “there must be something causing the

disappearance of our people” (Cornplanter 111). A young man considered lowly in appearance volunteers to discover the cause of the vanishings; he goes home to tell his grandmother of the task. She informs him of her “great power . . . I can do wonders, no one knows that. Your old Grandfather was a great man, but he never boasted or bragged about it . . .” (Cornplanter 113). She then presents him with old headgear, and a long bow that belongs to his deceased Grandfather – tokens of great orenda which will assist the young man on his journey. It is not only the objects that hold powerful orenda, but the boy himself – for he passes the test of drawing his Grandfather’s bow though he has no experience with such a weapon: “If you can string this bow, then you are good enough to use it . . . so he took it and what seem no effort he strung it ready for use” (Cornplanter 114). This motif is echoed in other stories throughout the world, comparable to the legend of King Arthur drawing the sword from stone. Successfully completing an impossible task marks the young man as an epic being of great power himself, for he is able to transform himself into a warrior without traditional training. Cloaked in his Grandfather’s war garb and weaponry, he waits for his journey to begin at sunrise.

The beginning of Cornplanter’s legend has a respectable backstory, which sets the peaceful tone of the tale before the Nia’Gwahe is introduced as the culprit of the disappearances. An unnamed young man accepts a great task for the purpose of preserving peace that the chief so desperately sought for his people, and he is able to cross the threshold into the unknown because he cast away his fear of death with the hope that redemption would be bestowed upon him: “I am of no account. Should I die, no one would miss me. If I were successful . . . I may regain some respect from my own people” (Cornplanter 113). He does not view himself as an asset to the community, and thus

wishes to rectify his position. The young man must resurrect war weapons symbolically buried, and fight an unknown harbinger of destruction for the purpose of restoring a newly-acquired peaceful lifestyle for his people.

The Monster Bear waits for the lowly warrior between the villages, a disparaging barrier which prevents messages of hope from ever reaching the boy's community. This motif is echoed in stories previously explored, from Ata-ensic's fall from the sky onto earth to the cave which temporarily houses the abandoned boy in the helpful bear stories. As the young man approaches the ravine where the Nia'Gwahe takes residence, he sees the fresh bones in its lair, yet does not feel fear. Killing the animal guarantees redemption – and the promise of respect within the village drives the boy forward. Just as the Fire Dragon gives Ata-ensic the tools to survive in a new world, so too does the Nia'Gwahe act constructively to help a young man thwart his reputation of weakness and thrive in a society that values bravery and strength.

After the young man proclaims his intentions to kill the Mammoth Bear, he suddenly sees the being materialize in the distance: “Its back was seen above the timber of the country as it ran in its flight. Then again he gave the cry of challenge for the thing to stop and then fight it out like a good warrior would . . . he was slowly gaining on this race – for speed, on foot. Man against beast” (Cornplanter 118). The young man does not exactly know what the animal is, but he does not hesitate to speak to it despite its fearsome size and evident ability to tear human flesh. This is his attempt to gain power over the Nia'Gwahe, for in addressing the being it becomes palpable and can no longer dwell within obscurity. Its attempt to flee is futile, and the only power it has over the boy is to spoil his food by transforming it into insect larvae – effectively weakening the

pursuer's physical state. When the boy decides to sleep, the voice of the Monster Bear comes to him and offers its orenda-laden teeth in exchange for its life: "I will promise to leave the country and go out west where there are no people . . . I will give you my teeth as a token of our friendship . . . it will always bring you luck" (Cornplanter 119).

The motif of a monster being bartering for its life is not uncommon in other cultures across the world, for Joseph Campbell cites a similar being who is willing to bequeath sacred knowledge in exchange for escape: "The folk mythologies populate with deceitful and dangerous presences every desert place outside the normal traffic of the village." The author continues to describe a hideous monster found in legends across Central Africa, a "hunter of men, whom it tears to shreds with cruel teeth as long as fingers . . . if thrown, he will plead 'do not kill me, I will show you lots of medicines' . . ." (Campbell 78). Those who seek to destroy the monster must reconcile themselves with death long before they encounter it, but the being does not understand the notion of its own mortality and thus renders itself untouchable until it faces defeat. It cannot fathom its own death, so its solution is for the monster to give a part of itself for the sake of its own life, a form of sacred collateral which solidifies a pact between the monster and the individual that defeats it. The power of the Nia'Gwahe rests within its teeth, a gift which the young man accepts after some reservation. The boy states "you did not show any mercy to my people when you went and ate all that came in your way . . . you were about to bring another uprising" (Cornplanter 120). Despite his misgivings, the boy does not commit to vengeance. He simply wishes for the restoration of tranquility, and accepts the offer of the Nia'Gwahe. His life thereafter entirely changes, for the disgrace of his past status is forgotten and he goes on to rule as high chief.

What is the symbolic significance of an encounter with a Nia’Gwahe? In Cornplanter’s account, the Monster Bear is a representation of the unknown, a mysterious being which threatens the welfare of neighboring villages. It is the young man’s task to travel into an unfamiliar land, conquer the beast with his Grandfather’s bow, and redeem himself all for the sake of the people. Though the hero’s journey is not the main focus in exploring constructive and otgont animal beings, sacred stories of the Iroquois often linger within the “forgotten dimension” (Campbell 217) , for the boundaries that divide the spiritual and physical spheres are far from absolute. It must be noted how the two volunteers early on in Cornplanter’s legend were able to assume the appearance of their animal familiars when traveling between villages, only returning to their human bodies when their journey through the ravine was complete. They could take on their supernatural forms only on the liminal pathway, the same space where the Monster Bear takes residence. The Nia’Gwahe leaves behind its tooth (in other variants, its entire set of teeth) as a poignant reminder of how uncanny beings are not just fragments of imagination, but presences that manifest themselves on the physical plane. They can evoke emotions never anticipated, for a boy is marked a hero in conquering such a beast with his own orenda.

“The Naked Bear: A Seneca Legend of Peace” is one of many stories which define the nature of the Monster Bear – it is also the most detailed account of others researched. Arthur C. Parker tells of three other versions in *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, stories which reveal the function of the being in other contexts. “Niahawahe, The Monster Bear” describes the legend of a young man whose excessive pride and insistent bragging cause the animals to take action against him. His father constantly warns: “the

animals will hear you – will hear you [boast] and out of revenge will slay you” (Parker 350). Here, the Monster Bear is designated as the chosen animal to challenge the boy in a race where the consequence of losing is death. Nia’Gwahe is represented here simply as a powerful animal who takes offence to hubris in humanity, and seeks to rectify it. The threat of his presence is a warning to the boastful, a constructive aspect of its character.

In other versions, a witch takes on the body of a Monster Bear which is evident in “Boy Outwits a Nia’Gwahe.” Her goal is to eat the children she is in pursuit of, all while uttering the magical chant of “You cannot escape me!” (Parker 347). Animal helpers are ever present within this legend, as the desperate young siblings address a spider as “uncle” and ask him to weave a web that would bind the Nia’Gwahe Witch. Pigeons also thwart the being, as the boy holds a basket of feathers which “transformed into myriads of pigeons who flying into clouds, sent down a kind of rain that covered the ground for miles so deep and slippery that no creatures could wade through it” (Parker 347). The pigeons’ attempt to save the children demonstrates that humor is not entirely absent in Haudenosaunee lore and even the simplest efforts of animal helpers produce great results. Ironically, the Witch Bear finally perishes when boiling bear oil is thrown upon her, and the siblings reunite with their lost parents.

The last Nia’Gwahe legend found in Parker’s collection is very similar to Cornplanter’s legend where “The Five Nations has waged war with the Snake People who lived in Caves (The Cherokee). Both began to see that the cause was not worth such a loss of life, and so a treaty of peace was made” (Parker 358). The parties came to an agreement, but soon people began to disappear between villages. The Monster Bear is the culprit, and the only one to accept the challenge of destroying it is a boy with a “foolish

mind” (Parker 359). Once again, the young man finds power through manipulating words. Like the phrase uttered by the Witch Bear in “Boy Outwits a Nia’Gwahe,” the charmed words of “you cannot escape me” are used by the Nia’Gwahe in this tale to drain life from its victim. The boy turns this phrase onto the Monster Bear, and shouts it consistently while chasing the being to the edge of the forest. The young man’s food transforms into worms and maggots, and after relentless pursuit the Monster Bear gives the boy all of his teeth for they contain great orenda which “medicine men [have] to this day and use for magic” (Parker 362).

Great Bears likewise play a significant role in matters of the sky, present in sacred tales that involve the act of hunting and are categorized as star lore. This legend usually involves four to seven brothers, one being particularly fat and lazy in nature. They wish to overtake the Great Bear for the sake of game itself or because their village is disturbed by the beast (Bruchac 189). As the brothers discover the trail of the Great Bear, the slothful brother suddenly becomes incapacitated, forcing the group to cater to his needs (Parker 81; Bruchac 193; Curtin 503). In Parker’s version, the lazy brother is abandoned but finds redemption when he leaps and kills the Giant Bear with the powers he absorbs from the rest of his brothers. Bruchac also provides tribute to the lazy brother, since he succeeds in killing the bear before he bites their companion dog. Despite these minute differences, the legend continues as the men rise into the sky after consuming the bear meat where they “remain to this day and can be seen any starlit night” (Curtin 503) as the Big Dipper constellation. As the blood and oil from the bear drips down the carcass, they stain the leaves which form the characteristics of an autumn landscape (Bruchac 195; Curtin 504; Parker 82). The brothers watch this occur from the land above, and the bear

begins to mysteriously reassemble itself, rising from the earth (Bruchac 195; Parker 82). They continue to pursue the Great Bear in the night sky every fall – the seasonal bloodshed of the bear forever evident with the changing trees. While this legend does not depict the traditional Monster Bear found in other legends, the Great Bear holds similar characteristics as it turns the lazy brother's food to worms and chases individuals with intent to kill. These legends of the creature seek to emphasize the bond of brothers, redeem the weak, as well as provide explanation for natural occurrences. The Great Bear is directly tied into the landscape, its blood producing orange and red leaves that decorate the communal scenery.

An integrated representation of the Monster Bear can be formed from the legends gathered. The Nia'Gwahe shows no preference when choosing victims, and will only attack when individuals wander upon its territory. This does not apply if a witch takes on the Monster Bear form, for she is known to destroy the home where her intended target resides. It is associated with racing, since it relentlessly pursues its victims until they are caught. It does not take physical force to destroy the animal being, but the power of words greatly affects its psyche – especially when its own charmed phrases are used against it. Like the good bears found in the abandoned boy tales, it is cognizant of human presence and is capable of communicating with people whether telepathically through dreams or literally through the spoken word. It is able to turn the pursuer's food into larvae, which prevents the individual from replenishing lost strength after a chase. Its teeth and bones “are medicine . . . just the powder in a potion makes a human unbeatable as a runner . . . such a heavy totem is the Monster Bear that [it's] the focus on a whole dance society, one of the few mythic animals so used” (Bastine and Winfield 231). The

Nia'Gwahe will barter for its life when it faces defeat, for the being is unwilling to accept death as a consequence for its actions. It is capable of annihilating entire tribes, though it only takes a lone warrior of courageous spirit to rid the land of the being for eternity. It is an animal being whose presence in lore makes one wary to travel too deep into the forest, and continues to endure as one of the most feared creatures in Haudenosaunee legend.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Dual Nature of the Horned Serpent

Sometimes when I'm alone

I wonder . . . is there a spell that I am under

Keeping me from seeing the real thing?

--Incubus, "Love Hurts." (2008)

The Horned Serpent is another animal being preserved through sacred stories of the Haudenosaunee – though not inherently otgont, his relationship with human beings can be described as curious. He often takes on the role as a savior figure for the abandoned: “The Great Horned Snake of Lake Ontario is a figure of Iroquoian legend. Sometimes his horns are the shape and spread of the antlers of massive buck deer. Sometimes they’re like those of the buffalo, though many times larger. This being is not by nature evil . . . he helps outcast human beings in many a tale” (Bastine and Winfield 227). The outcast Bastine and Winfield describe in their collection *Iroquois Supernatural: Talking Animals and Medicine People* is usually a young girl rejected by her peers, left on an island to waste away. The Horned Serpent’s interest in women does not end with rescue efforts, for they are known to lure young maidens from their homes in human form. Though he does not intend to harm his love interest, the serpent’s motive is to lead the individual away so that she can transform into a sea serpent herself – an attempt to eternally strip her of all humanity.

The otgont nature of the Horned Serpent resonates within the legends that depict him transporting a young woman into a world she does not recognize, a strange domain where she must compromise her very identity for the sake of her relationship:

That is to say, that with her marriage she had moved out of the rational, conscious sphere into the field of compulsions and of the unconscious. That's always what's represented in such adventures underwater. The character has slipped out of the realm of controlled actions and events . . . the adventure is its own reward – but it's necessarily dangerous, having both positive and negative possibilities, all of them beyond control. (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 196-197)

While the serpent lover in disguise certainly manipulates his potential mate into abandoning the life she knows, the choice to leave her family for the promise of a fulfilling life with a beautiful stranger ultimately remains her own. She flees from her father's home and dives into the deep waters, a world where she lives by her masked desires and gains knowledge of her own sexuality with her serpent lover. Still, she refuses to completely conform to her new husband's ideals since the only sense of control which remains is her ability to reject her lover's wishes. She recognizes the danger of her predicament – for she is a young heroine isolated from the outside realm. Her lone objective is to find a way to reunite with her family – a goal shared with the forgotten woman left on an unforgiving island as depicted in other tales of the Horned Serpent. Their deep desperation to reunite with their respective communities is the linking element of the heroines, a motif which deeply resonates in a society where the preservation of the matrilineal line is imperative.

The Horned Serpent is a master of charm, capable of using his power of persuasion to lure his unsuspecting target into a supernatural union. Bastine and Winfield posit that “sometimes they come to us as lovers . . . seductive, on-the-edge beings, what about them entrances us so? They’re a lot like the Lamia of European folklore . . . figures of dangerous sexuality. They are sublime – psychologically threatening. They look too cool for us. Then they show an interest” (Bastine and Winfield 226). His otgont nature lies in the power to disguise himself and manipulate others for the purpose of conforming to a reality his love interest is familiar with.

Parker and Bruchac relate similar legends that directly perpetuate the Horned Serpent as a mysterious figure of questionable intent. Parker’s legend, “The Horned Serpent Runs Away with a Girl who is Rescued by the Thunderer” introduces the audience to Hi’no, a thunder being who wishes to obtain the affections of a young woman who lives on earth. He is the only true enemy of the Horned Serpent, a relationship considered “one of the most fundamental myths of all – conflict between Thunders or Thunderbirds in the air above and horned creatures, especially snakes, in the water below . . . themes [that are] deeply rooted in regional cosmology of a former time” (Wonderley 52). One cannot accurately give reasons for this destructive relationship, since it is a deeply imbedded primal conflict within the Iroquois worldview. Hi’no visits the girl nightly, but she consistently refuses his advances, leaving him in a state of bewilderment: “He told the girl’s father that he suspected that some witch had cast a spell on her or that some wizard was secretly visiting her . . . so they both watched . . .” (Parker 218). A man with small beady eyes and a long neck comes to the lodge wearing porcupine quills, and simply asks the girl “if she is willing to become his wife and come to his house” (Parker

218). Three days later, the lovers are at the edge of a cliff, with Hi'no and the girl's father in close pursuit. The disguised serpent takes the girl by the waist, and they plunge into the depths of darkness (Parker 219). Free from the impending grasp of her pursuers, the girl swims until she find a lodge which serves as her new home. Her husband instructs her to find a dress she likes, but she fears the garments since she instinctually feels otgont power within the seams.

The lure of material possessions is an important motif in the disguised serpent stories, for it is a mechanism designed to entice the woman who is under a spell of infatuation. In the collection of *Seneca Fiction, Legends, and Myths*, Hewitt conveys a similar phenomenon in "The Horned Snake and the Young Woman:" "As they entered the hole in the rocks, which led into what seemed to be a lodge, she saw many fine things which she thought would be a comfort to her. In one corner was a beautiful skin couch, her husband said to her, 'this is your couch.' She was well pleased with her new home" (Hewitt 269). Though a handsome husband and material gain can satisfy temporarily, the women in these legends are subject to the voice of their cautioning intuitions. As Parker relates, "it dawned upon her that the garments were the clothing of great serpents. She was horrified at the discovery and resolved to escape" (Parker 220). In Hewitt's version, Hi'no is not the rival lover but rather her grandfather who descends down into the water lodge and directs her way to the surface. Curtin also echoes the rescuing grandfather pattern in his collection of *Seneca Indian Myths*, though the notably fine couch in this depiction conceals seven hearts of the serpent brothers which the captive girl must collect before her departure to ensure that the brothers would not come to life again after the fatal encounter with Hi'no (Curtin 459). Parker's tale depicts the girl swimming for shore

without guidance, though the three versions conclude with the death of the serpent lover by thunder bolt. Some follow with a purifying ritual via sweat lodge or the burning of sacred tobacco, though Curtin's heroine is endowed with incredible physical strength and a purging ritual is not referred to.

Bruchac's relation of the narrative echoes elements of Hewitt's, as Hi'no is not the competing lover but rather the benevolent grandfather who rescues his granddaughter in the same fashion as Parker's Thunderer. The rival lover motif is entirely absent as well, for "The Girl who was Not Satisfied with Simple Things" depicts a young woman who found fault with every potential husband that presents himself to her – never favoring one in particular. When a stranger of a foreign tribe visits the girl, his handsome features entrance her and she resolves to become his wife despite her parents' disapproval. Joseph Campbell describes the alluring mystique of the intangible other, a figure of immense attraction and otherworldly appeal:

The regions of the unknown are free fields for the projection of unconscious content. Incestuous libido and patricidal destrudo are thence reflected back against the individual and [his or her] society in forms suggesting threats of violence and fancied dangerous delight – not only as ogres but as sirens of mysteriously seductive, nostalgic beauty. (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 79)

Campbell's sentiments resonate strongly within the girl of legend, for she chooses to follow her personal desires despite her mother's strong warnings. She in essence rejects the laws instilled in her by her family and runs away with a stranger who could be an

enemy of the tribe – for he associates himself with a clan unheard of by the girl’s people. In the end, her desire turns to fear, and it is violence itself which destroys the union – for it is a fatal strike of lightning from Hi’no which ultimately severs the girl’s ties with the lover who wishes to dispose of her humanity by cloaking her in a fine dress (Bruchac 124).

While the previously explored Nia’Gwahe or Monster Bear is considered purely otgont in character, the Horned Serpent holds a double nature which enables him to intervene in the affairs of people in a positive manner: “This legend shows that the things people looked with fear, in those days, were also the benefactors in many cases” (Cornplanter 58). Parker and Cornplanter convey similar legends of the Seneca “Djo-nih-gwa-donh” as a divine rescuer who intercedes for the forgotten. The story opens with a description of an orphan girl, who is industrious and helpful within her community yet is looked upon with great abhorrence for reasons unknown (Cornplanter 59). In Parker’s version, the young woman has three sisters-in-law, all jealous of her beauty and the attention she receives from their brother (Parker 223). Both tales depict an innocent individual who is a victim of unwarranted hatred, a person who is seen as nothing more than a disposable nuisance. Those who oppose the young woman leave her on the island, with no hope of rescue.

As the dejected girl stares into the darkness, she hears a council of animals engage in a great debate over who could best assist her in this desperate time – a common occurrence in Haudenosaunee legend as surveyed within the Seneca Creation Myth as well as the Bear Adoption legends. Perhaps used to illustrate the collective thoughts of the natural world to best assist humanity in times of need, it conveys the belief that

animals are able to communicate with each other and take active roles in the affairs of human beings. A decision is made after “a very tall slender being arose and in a clear ringing voice said he would use his utmost power to save the unfortunate young wife if only permitted” (Parker 225). After the Great Horned Serpent establishes his role, the abandoned girl sleeps as her rescue is to take place at dawn.

With twelve willow whips in hand, (Cornplanter 61; Parker 225), the young woman climbs the space between her savior’s horns at sunrise and lashes his back as they race to shore, since the Thunder Spirit sees his enemy in open water. As the threat of lightning bolts looms overhead, the Horned Serpent commands the girl to jump. The young woman eventually makes her way back to shore, and is greeted in celebration. It is not clear if the Horned Serpent survives, but she remembers her rescuer’s name in the dark dance for life after she discovers a charmed scale from her friend within her pocket – a token that would always bring her luck.

This narrative is not the typical animal helper legend, for an unfamiliar being associated with otgont power acts as the rescuer in the face of hardship. While the majority of oral narratives feature a male protagonist, this specific legend depicts a courageous young woman who is bold enough to place her trust in a fearsome supernatural being. This portrayal is unusual, for most females of Iroquois lore have some sort of flaw that must be rectified, or they simply play the supportive role as a wise maternal figure whose function is to give assistance to a male relative. Rarely are they the focus of the sacred story in itself, but perhaps she is used to further elucidate how nature assists all people in times of great need in accordance with Haudenosaunee belief. As

Anthony Wonderley writes in *At the Font of the Marvelous*, the neighboring Ojibwa Nation links this “Crossing Water” legend with “the myth chartering women’s participation in the great Midewiwin medicine society and ritual cycle” (Wonderley 51). This would account for the young woman’s action of lashing her rescuer with willow whips, for she is an active contributor in her rescue mission just as women were within certain medicine societies. Figures such as the Great Serpent may receive the same type of notoriety as male protagonists within Iroquois narratives, but it is the women who sit at the head of the clan and drive their society forward.

Sanborn’s legend of “Niagara’s Horseshoe Fall” depicts a young maiden fleeing from a marriage prospect, though this tale differs from previous stories since she holds her own independence in the highest regard. She does not run into the arms of another lover, but holds enough confidence to take charge in her own destiny even if the final result is certain death. She travels down the Niagara River in her canoe, knowing that the Falls are approaching. As she rapidly descends, her grandfather, Hi’no “who dwelt in the cave behind the falls saw the maiden falling, and flew out - for he had massive wings - and caught her ere she struck the rocks below” (Sanborn 20). She lives with her grandfather for an undisclosed amount of time, where she gains great knowledge of her tribe. He informs the girl of the reason her people suffer and die every spring from a terrible pestilence – beneath the settlement inhabits a serpent that poisons the water every year. Hi’no instructs the girl to carry his message, and when the tribe moves north he sends a thunderbolt to destroy the being that had plagued the people. The serpent succumbs to the fatal strike, and "rolling down the rapids, the serpent's body lodged upon a rock, and piled the waters mountain-high, and the shelving rock gave way, behind the

coiling mass which stretched from bank to bank, and thus was formed the horse-shoe bending of the falls" (Sanborn 21). This particular legend accounts for natural occurrences, since it has some elements of myth. It is also one of the few tales researched in which a woman is given sacred knowledge which she must carry out to benefit her community. Most importantly, it conveys how the evil orenda of an animal being can bring grave misfortune upon an entire society and brings a complex image of the serpent to life. Like the serpent lover who hides beneath a beautiful human form, this serpent dwells beneath seemingly beautiful landscape and operates in the same cunning fashion in destroying innocent lives for the sake of its own selfish appetite. However, it takes a resourceful woman to break the binds of the cunning serpent – lightning bolts may destroy the body, but her actions ultimately lead to his demise.

The Horned Serpent is a being that both fascinates and repels, a perplexing figure of Haudenosaunee legend whose orenda is used to help individuals left behind as well as to lure the unsuspecting away into a realm that can only be reached by diving into the deepest of waters. The snake itself is present in mythologies across the world, a figure which holds evil connotations in Judeo-Christian thought, yet represents the circular movement of life in others: "The serpent represents immortal energy and consciousness engaged in the field of time, constantly throwing off death and being born again. There is something tremendously terrifying about life when you look at it that way. And so the serpent carries in itself the sense of both the fascination and terror of life" (Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 53). These elements directly echo the composite nature of the Horned Serpent. He holds the power to restore life when hope is lost, a presence that speaks to the abandoned when the threat of death is wholly present. Between his horns lies a

liminal space that human beings are able to temporarily occupy, but we must heed to his words and jump into the unknown when he commands us to. He may try to lure us into obscurity, but it is only what we perceive as dark and unforgiving – perhaps he just wants to give humans the ability to shed their past in the same way in which he can shed his own form. He hears us when we cry, gives us gifts of love and protection, and ultimately leaves a presence in our lives which remains with us forever. His dwelling place today may only lie between the lines of legend, but in resurrecting the tales he comes to life and awaits the moment when he can carry us safely back to shore.

CONCLUSION

The power of a thing or an act is in the meaning and the understanding.

--Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe* (1989)

The oral narrative breathes life into presences of legend from a time before memory, and sacred animal beings in Haudenosaunee lore are conceptualized through the art of storytelling. The tale itself possesses power of its own accord, for it connects individuals with profound notions that would otherwise remain unexplored. These esoteric ideas are diffused throughout Iroquois legend and are personified through certain animal beings previously surveyed; however “[American Indian] spiritual beliefs vary by tribe and by individual, so one cannot develop a single overarching ‘[American Indian] theology,’ of animals or anything else” (Aftandilian 191). The intent of this thesis is not to develop an absolute Haudenosaunee worldview on animals or the animal beings, but to reveal the deep connection traditional tribal members share with the animal world so that one can understand the otherworldly purpose of such creatures within their sacred stories.

Reciprocity is a strong unifying motif which cycles throughout Haudenosaunee lore, a notion exemplified through both constructive and otgont animal beings. This interchange serves to link humans with the natural world: “Of all the laws, reciprocity is both the most important and the most difficult to express succinctly. Showing respect to animals and thanking them for the gifts of their lives are both forms of reciprocity” (Aftandilian 200). One reciprocal action common in Iroquois legend is animals saving human beings – whether from death, disease, or lowly social status – as a result of their

kind treatment or benevolent nature. The Horned Serpent comes to the rescue of a lost girl because of her caring disposition and unrecognized industriousness, the grateful animals bring a hunter back to life because of his compassion, and the Nia'Gwahe surrenders to a young man as a result of his bravery in the face of a monstrosity which redeems him in the eyes of his people. The animals or animal beings may also bestow sacred knowledge upon a person, such as the boy in the Bear Adoption legends, who innocently accepts a bear as his mother and in exchange learns to become a great hunter. Animal beings also strive to humble individuals, as otgont beings can present themselves in an attempt to rid human beings of hubris. This can result in a race to the death, as evident in certain Monster Bear legends, or a life of isolation as portrayed in legends of the Water Serpent. When a person begins to consider himself or herself above the laws of nature or society, animal beings return the individual to a modest state.

It is through the notion of reciprocity that other spiritual concepts can be properly understood within the context of Haudenosaunee belief. It is an idea which transcends selfishness, and in contemplating it a person unites with all that thrives within the natural world. In this way, animal and animal beings within myths and legends of the Iroquois hold powerful orenda all their own for they have the capacity to link humanity with transcendent thought, enabling individuals to seek truth beyond what is known within the physical sphere.

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APPENDIX A

The Origin of the Dark Dance

According to Jesse J. Cornplanter in *Legends of the Longhouse*, the origin of the Dark Dance begins with a young boy chasing a squirrel he wounds with a small bow and arrow. He suddenly hears voices and looks down to see “two tiny little beings down at the foot of the tree” (33). The boy feels pity for the little people, and gives them the squirrel. The little people inform the boy that black squirrel is the most prized of all meat for their kind, and rejoice. They invite the boy to their dwelling, where he learns the “Djonh-geh-onh” or the “Great Little People” serve several purposes. They have three classes, one being the hunters which chase the Great White Buffalo that travels beneath the surface. This being would bring great suffering if it found its way above the earth. The second are the stone-throwers, and the third are those who paint the fruits and vegetables – most notably the strawberries. The old man, the chief of the Great Little People, informs the boy that they wished to make their presence known to his tribe for some time. Now that their relationship is known, it must be rejoiced in ceremony. This ceremony, known as the “Dark Dance” once belonged to the Great Little People but now belongs to the Seneca. Corn soup is made with black squirrel, and then night time descends. They pass around berry-juice and smoke sacred tobacco. A drum begins to beat, and all sing and dance. The old man instructs the boy to perform this ceremony with his people three days after his return, as it will forever connect the little and earth-people together. (Cornplanter 32-43).



(Cornplanter, Jesse J. *Legends of the Longhouse*. Ohsweken, Ont.: Irocrafts, 1986. Print.)

APPENDIX B

Illustration: Sky Woman's Descent

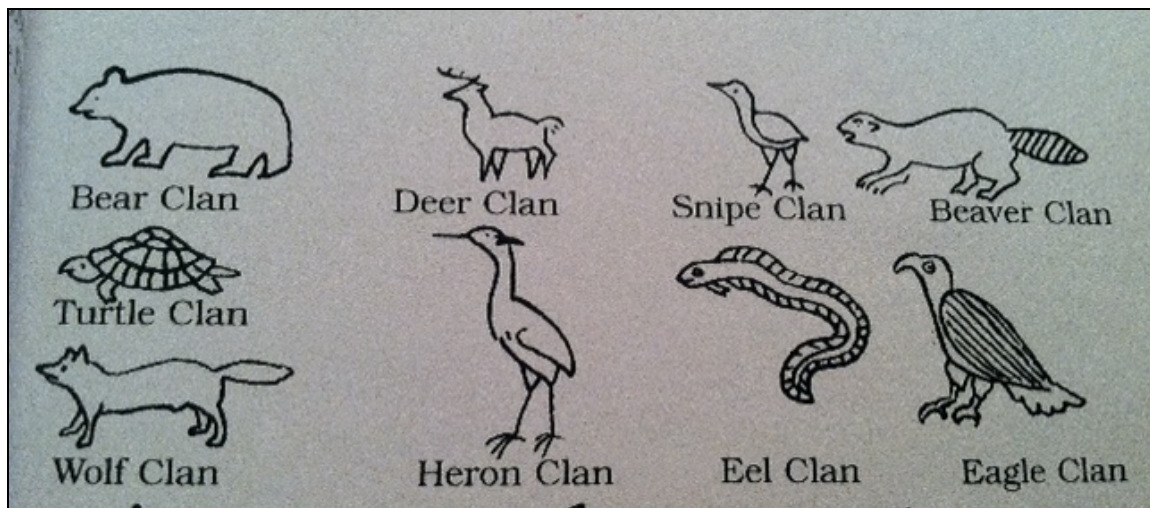


(Source: Mass Archaeology.org)

APPENDIX C

Clans of the Iroquois

“Below are the clans of the Iroquois. Every warrior and woman of the Iroquois belonged to one of these clans. Clan members considered each other brothers and sisters. No one could marry into his or her own clan. The children belonged to the clan of their mother. Clan members of one tribe were given welcome, food, and shelter by clan members of another tribe. The clan system united the Iroquois into a strong brotherhood” (Tehanetorens 25).



(Source: Tehanetorens. *Legends of the Iroquois*. Sumertown, TN: Book Pub., 1998. Print)