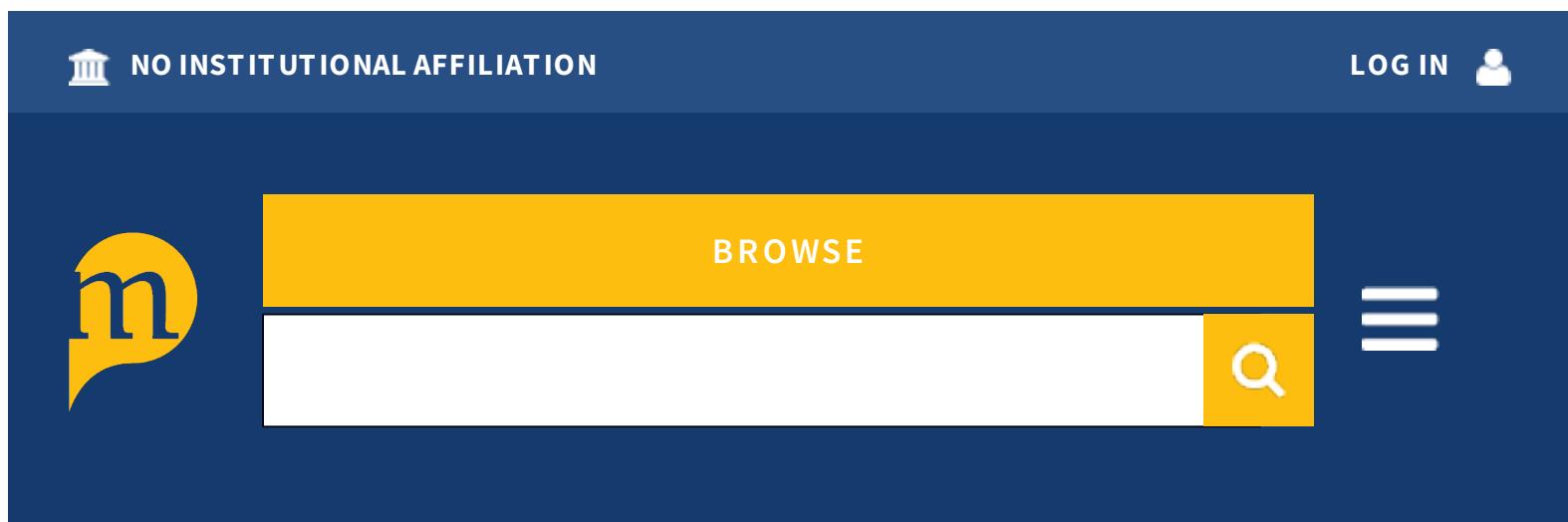


# The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft.

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## ***The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (review)***

James Cox

Legacy

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

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*James Cox*

*The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft*. Edited by Robert Dale Parker. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 292 pp. \$34.95.

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The last fifteen years in American Indian literary studies have been an age of recovery. During this time, scholars have found previously unpublished works, such as John Milton Oskison's novel *The Singing Bird*; reintroduced works such as Todd Downing's *The Mexican Earth*, S. Alice Callahan's novel *Wynema*, Dallas Chief Eagle's novel *Winter Count*, and Joseph Nicolar's *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man*; and edited the collected writings of William Apess, Joseph Johnson, and Samson Occom. We now welcome Robert Dale Parker's edition of the writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, "the first known American Indian literary writer, the first known Indian woman writer, by some measures the first known Indian poet, the first known poet to write poems in a Native American language, and the first known American Indian to write out traditional Indian stories" (2). With this edition, Parker moves Schoolcraft's writing from the margins of American Indian literary studies to a much more prominent position.

During approximately the same period of time, scholars such as Lisa Brooks, Daniel Heath Justice, and Robert Allen Warrior have been recovering and foregrounding Native intellectual traditions and tribal nation contexts in their literary critical practice. Parker's introduction, which he describes as a "cultural history, a literary and cultural biography, and a literary-critical introduction," contributes to these efforts by guiding readers through the many complex and overlapping contexts that informed Schoolcraft's literary production: Ojibwe, Métis, French Canadian, British Canadian, Scotch-Irish, and American. Schoolcraft produced a collection of poems, stories, and songs that in fascinating, often poignant ways speaks of this world of shifting cultural and national allegiances and American colonial aggression.

Writing was also a refuge for Schoolcraft. The loneliness, melancholy, and grief so frequently expressed in the poems document a home life made turbulent, for example, by her husband Henry's long and frequent

absences, the death of their son, and her possible addiction to laudanum prescribed by her doctors. The stories focus on relationships within families—between parents [End Page 168] and their children or between siblings—and the devastating consequences of the failure to fulfill kinship obligations, while several of the songs explore the impact on those people at home of the absence of lovers or family members. Precise attribution of stories and songs was a daunting task for Parker, who had to follow, often through many manuscripts in different hands, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's role in the transcription, translation, and revision of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft's work. Jane Johnston Schoolcraft "may have played a central or a shared role in the transcription and translation of all or some of these songs," Parker indicates, but with two exceptions "there is no evidence that she did" (211).

Many scholars will find particularly exciting the path that Parker traces from Schoolcraft's writing through Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Wilhelm Grimm, one of the famous brothers of German folklore, and perhaps to Mary E. Howard Schoolcraft, to whom Henry was married after Jane died in 1842. Mary Schoolcraft wrote *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina*, in which, Parker suggests, there is a character with an opium addiction modeled on Jane (42). The path that Jane Johnston Schoolcraft's work follows, through multiple appropriations and silencings, places her in a web of national and international literary production. Her work traveled the globe, while her home in Sault Ste. Marie was an influential literary salon in which she hosted visitors such as Anna Brownell Jameson.

Parker's editing and readings of the texts demonstrate an abiding intellectual respect for the writing and the world in which Schoolcraft produced them. His lists of substantive and "less substantive" variants allow for a careful consideration of Schoolcraft's process of revision (260, 261), and the appendices include two examples of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's readings of Jane's work as well as a discussion of misattributions. Parker identifies "The Otagamiad..."

of how to resist the still powerful urge to believe in the fiction of gender segregated genres, "which hold that the author's sex determines," or should determine, "the contours and content of lyric expression" (6).

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Reviewed by James Cox, *University of Texas at Austin*

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