

CHAPTER I

*Lewis Henry Morgan &  
Victorian Secret Societies*



IT IS NOT COMMONLY KNOWN THAT, as a young man, Lewis Henry Morgan enjoyed the intimacy of male secrecy at a time when the ground between public and private cultural spaces was unstable and secret societies produced trust and mistrust between the men who occupied their reality. Morgan—the nineteenth-century lawyer whose investigation of Iroquois social organization in upstate New York is critical to the development of anthropology in the United States—created, occupied, and subsequently abandoned men's secret societies. Secrecy was a condition of Morgan's masculinity, sexuality, and sociality, as it was for other men of his time; however, unlike his peers, he was instrumental in founding a number of secret societies, in addition to participating in several within Native American culture. Morgan's story, recounted here, provides insight in understanding ritual secrecy and the role of anthropology in the more exotic New Guinea men's clubhouse societies.

In detailing this little-known theme in the life of Morgan, it is not my intention to suggest that he "caused" anthropology to handle the subject of secrecy in a particular way. Nor am I interested in tracing the impact of Morgan's work upon ensuing theories of secrecy; that is the subject of an entirely different book. Morgan's life and work—so ordinary, yet so remarkable—shows that ritual secrecy was an uncommonly popular solution to collective problems of nineteenth-century society, especially in men's lives.

Examining the role of clandestine men's clubs and secret fraternities in Morgan's time not only disproves the historically dubious idea that secrecy

is a sham, it also clarifies how secrecy was once at the forefront of public concern in regard to changing gender roles and religious beliefs, rather than being caught up in the domain of individual rights and confessions, as it is in the tabloid culture of today. The men of Victorian-era America lived with their own personal and political concerns about secret societies, which share almost nothing in common with our late-modern prejudices, as we shall see. A study of Morgan's participation in men's secret clubs reveals the basis of how anthropology and the social sciences have viewed ritual secrecy in non-Western societies. Moreover, it deepens our understanding of the complexity of the subject, since Morgan and his contemporaries were themselves skeptical toward and uncomfortable with these pervasive men's secret societies, even as they became fashionable among Victorian men. Secrecy in the Victorian age was not purely concerned with political activities, as it was during the cold war. In the latter case, outcry against secrecy was based on the fear of infiltration by "communists" and their agents in international espionage networks. At the same time, secrecy was not restricted to the realm of the purely personal, as in present-day tabloid scandals, Twelve Step programs and encounter groups, or television talk shows where the narrative of self-revelation identifies stories of secrecy, personal growth, and individual failure or success. Instead, the Victorians were preoccupied by social anxieties that were as much political as personal when it came to secrecy. In this respect, Morgan was not unique in his cultural experience of ritual secrecy; rather, his life experience embodied the principles of ritual secrecy and reflected the problems of his historical era.

This revisionist view necessitates an experience-near theory of how secrecy is formulated and reflected back into sociocultural theory and methodology in the present day. Rarely, if ever, have social scientists—those who have had the most to say about secrecy in cultural studies—either experienced secrecy as a profound (not trivial) way of being or lived with the presence of institutional secrecy pervading their adult lives, unless it has been in the context of fieldwork or some other kind of research study. In historical context, secrecy and passing were problems related to out-group stigma and impression management, as famously outlined by Erving Goffman (1963), and tended to be limited to institutionalized populations—both criminal and medical—and, of course, closeted homosexuals, whose sexual desires were silenced and punished by their society. However, these experiences were largely ignored or dismissed by academics and

never brought into the process of theory formation, at least not openly. Today, a number of lesbian and gay anthropologists who grew up concealing their desires and living under a veil of silence and secrecy—many of whom passed as heteronormal in their university careers (Lewin and Leap 1996; Weston 1993)—directly employ their resistance to heteronormativity as a means of theoretical insight into cultural dynamics (Herdt 1997a).

Early ethnographers' experiences with secrecy—whether personal or political, at home or in the field—would be treated as shameful and brushed aside as something of an embarrassment, much as other men treat the subject of locker-room jokes or late-night drinking party conversations. This dislocation of subjectivity, a system of secrecy in itself, resulted in social scientists coming to disown their own experiences so that they could never be compared to the quaint and exotic forms of Otherness they had discovered in the men's houses of non-Western societies. In short, what had once seemed strange about ritual secrecy to previous generations of anthropologists in the twentieth century was both familiar and indispensable to the cultural reality experienced by nineteenth-century Victorians such as Lewis Henry Morgan.

#### *Morgan and Victorian Male Cultural Reality*

Particularly in the first half of his life, Morgan was deeply involved in idealistic male secret orders and fraternal lodges, beginning with his early initiation into Greek-admiring societies and culminating with the purchase of ritual initiation among the Iroquois of New York. His admiration for the Greeks and the American Indian was the basis of his creative effort to build bonds of ritual and secret friendship with other men. Morgan's romantic belief in the unity of the human species and his belief in progress, though seemingly at odds with one another, were ultimately reconciled by his view that "the rise of civilization had, in fact, destroyed something valuable" (Patterson 2001: 30): "Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges" (Morgan 1877: 562). As the years passed, the meaning and role of secrecy in social life changed for Morgan as he became cynical. Only later, following his unexplained disillusionment and abandonment of the last of his involvements with secrecy, did Morgan remove himself from the company of the Iroquois and withdraw into scholarly circles, thereafter consistently refusing to join his former colleagues.

Lewis Henry Morgan's romantic yearning for an alternative social real-

ity of homosocial secrecy locates his life and work squarely in the tradition of American expressive individualism. Among this new generation of democratic voices—following after Washington, Jefferson, and other founders of the United States of America—many notable figures come to mind: Emerson and Thoreau, already celebrated in Morgan's day, as well as Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman—a contemporary of Morgan throughout his long life, who, like Morgan, honored freedom, learning, and justice, favoring less the search for material ends than a “deeper cultivation of the self” (Bellah et al. 1985: 33). Unlike Morgan, Whitman never married, but instead became a lover of men. As his literary fame increased, these passionate affairs were treated with increasing openness and detailed in his most significant work, *Leaves of Grass*, remarkable for its time. Far more common in the lives of other men, however, is male homosociality—an intimate, exclusionary, bumping-elbows kind of masculinity—distinct from sex with men and the construct of homosexuality. We now understand the tension between these forms of sociality to be the product of a moment in middle-class gender role formation and the crisis of masculinity (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Kimmel 1996; Lane 1999; Sedgwick 1990).

Whatever their basis in Eros, the desires at the center of these secret homosocial fraternities were neither pure nor simple. Power and hierarchy coexisted with ideals of innocence and equality. As is often characteristic of periods that frame rapid social changes, anxiety—mostly reflected in the fear of losing one's social position, reputation, and ability to provide for one's family—was prevalent in the Victorian era. The most significant problem faced by the middle class and aspiring workers was managing the conflict between the capitalist ideal of competition in the marketplace and the implicit need for shared intimacy, including sexual intimacy, which, of course, existed before the creation of “homosexuality” in modernity (Bech 1997). The expression of these desires among working-class men found its way into the pubs and dance-halls, taking a different form than traditional heterosexual interaction given that these spaces were host to members of both sexes and featured performances of conspicuous consumption and production. By contrast, secret brotherhoods brought aspiring middle-class and professional men into sympathetic fraternity with others of their own social status. While homosexuality was not a part of Morgan's life (as far as is known), homosocial male cloisters in premodern societies, such as those to which he belonged, struck a balance in the relationship between the desire by men to subscribe to these homosocial male disciplines and the

erotic energy created within the participants at the liminal border of their public and private lives.

To understand men's secret societies during this period of history is to open a Pandora's box of contentious political and social movements that competed for the interests and attentions of the American people, particularly progressive and enlightened men and women, who were burdened by the demands of countervailing desires and contradictory gender relations. The social order of the time was beset with challenges posed by the early women's suffrage movement, which itself developed in a parallel fashion out of the objectives put forth by vocal abolitionist and antislavery organizations and, in turn, contributed to the formation of the staunch temperance movement. The demand for women's rights inspired other groups to advocate for social reform in an environment that was becoming increasingly hostile and repressive toward sexuality—despite the reactions to this trend in relations between the genders in the Victorian age (Foucault 1980; Gay 1986; Smith-Rosenberg 1975). “It was an age of golden hypocrisies, a great time for masks and secrets, public lies and private truths. But a private truth can be quite fragile when neither part can name it in public, and you are both too shy to name it even when you're alone” (Bram 2000: 81).

This period of American postrevolutionary society is informed by three cultural concerns: “forging a national identity, territorial expansion, and justifying a slave-based economy in southern states” (Patterson 2001: 32). As a “frontier” (at least from the perspective of the early nineteenth century) positioned at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution that was spreading through the New England area at the time, western and upstate New York played host to many of these secret or semisecret movements. Simultaneously, as the historians have shown, a series of metaphysical “attacks” and spiritualist happenings also emerged in that particular location and continued for a number of years (Braude 1989). Reports and testimonies of the period might remind the anthropologist of ecstatic religions, characterized by the struggle between orthodoxy or patriarchy and symbolic rebellions of the oppressed and disenfranchised projected to the cosmic level (Lewis 1971).

Upstate New York and the Finger Lake communities had, for years, been renowned as the birthplace of esoteric and millenarian sects. The region was an epicenter of the late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century millenarianism ideology endorsed by a Native American prophet named Handsome Lake, whose religion is presently centered on

the Seneca Reservation that Morgan first visited in 1845 (Wallace 1972). Otherwise unaccountable religious happenings were common; the whole area was described as “a section of the country ‘burned over’ by repeated outpourings of the spirit and auspicious millennial tidings during the evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening” (Braude 1989: 10). Coincident with the rise of feminism in the national consciousness, spiritualism and séances became popular throughout the local towns and villages. The role of women was highly conflictual and was probably a matter of personal and philosophical discord for Morgan, too. Theosophy championed the use of occultism, “the belief that secret or hidden knowledge can give access to magical powers” (Braude 1989: 178). The birth of Mormonism and Millerism in 1827, which paved the way for the Jehovah’s Witnesses in the 1840s, demonstrates the degree to which prophecy and other metaphysical activities were at work in producing new religions and populist zealots. It was a time in which social networks among individuals were created from similarity of beliefs. Indeed, the city of Rochester itself—in which Morgan himself was to reside—gained renown as a hotbed of feminism, abolitionism, and psychic and religious cultism from the 1840s (Braude 1989: 10ff.) until well after the mid-century.

When Morgan set up a law practice in Rochester in the 1840s, inexplicable religious and spiritual visitations were a significant part of the folklore of upstate New York (Resek 1960: 11–15). To take but one example from the town, unnamable spirits and visitations from the dead seemingly haunted the house of Quaker abolitionists Amy and Isaak Post. In this form of materialization, the mediums could raise the spirits and make the ghosts appear. Notice, moreover, that the same house served as Rochester headquarters for reform activities of many kinds, including lectures by visitors from far and wide, not to mention fugitive slaves (Braude 1989: 10–11). The Underground Railroad was active here, and no less a dignitary than Frederick Douglass hailed from Rochester. In time, the religious formations gave refuge to the female voice, as “spiritualism and woman’s rights spread simultaneously through the network of Quaker abolitionists who produced the first supporters for both movements” (Braude 1989: 59). Susan B. Anthony was herself the daughter of a Rochester Quaker family. A few years later, Amy Post, whose house was haunted by mysterious powers, went on to found the Rochester Equal Suffrage Association, and so on. In other words, this mid-nineteenth-century cultural scene was home to a society of dualities that presaged a revolutionary period of changing reali-

ties and social movements, especially feminism. Certainly these “spiritual attacks” reflected gender transformations in a society that had hitherto typified women either as objects of Victorian motherhood, domesticity, and spiritual grace, or, on the other side of the tracks, “fallen women” to be shunned and vilified (Smith-Rosenberg 1975).

The rising position of women in the middle class was beginning to break through these dualities and thus impinge upon masculinity. Intimacy between women was a new arena; creative bonds of friendship and camaraderie among both married and single women were taking hold (Smith-Rosenberg 1975). A deeper kind of ritual and friendship became evident in the intimate relations of unrelated women, sometimes involving erotic feelings (Faderman 1981). Through the construction of new ways of being and forms of discourse about democratic social involvement—including reformist politics, moral purity, and spiritual cleansing—women’s influence upon men was greater than ever before in the premodern era (Trumbach 1994). Indeed, Victorian women could be described as “proto-lesbians”—a new and “modern” class of social women (Faderman 1999).

The enlargement of women’s lives created unprecedented and sometimes unwanted challenges to men, especially to young middle-class males in search of social achievement and domestic security (Carnes 1990). How were they to get ahead in society? How were they to combine successful jobs and careers with social climbing and “traditional” marriages, or with “untraditional” women? Some individuals no doubt stumbled over the problem of competing with peers, of finding women competing with them in the domestic sphere. How were these men to dominate their kin, boys with whom they grew up, and school chums, when this meant establishing themselves as superior to the others and sacrificing camaraderie? After the Civil War, men were increasingly challenged by the early feminist movement and took refuge in ideas of progress that drew from Lamarck and Spencer, such as notions of “survival of the fittest” supporting traditional male social bonds (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988; Lane 1999). Morgan’s generation was to recognize the “increasing importance of the monogamous patrilineal family and the diminished status of women” (Patterson 2001: 30). Aspiring males faced the prospect of migration—of giving up their patriarchal communities and social intimacies without the clear prospect of successful marriage and financial security. In short, during a period in which the rights of women were growing, the perception (not reality) of greater solidarity among women at the expense of male control

was also increasing, and men's anxiety with each other was precipitating a crisis in the previously accepted forms of male homosociality.

The gendered differences so evident in the social economy of the prior age, which traditionally divided women between family hearth and the public marketplace, were being disrupted. The notion of "gendered traits" gains currency as a result of the emerging political economy of work and home in the middle class. Whereas premodern society did not clearly differentiate gender role from self or sexual identity, the Victorian age gave rise to the increasingly popular representation of an autonomous social self (Giddens 1990). It is no wonder that spiritual attacks and séances brought a new texture and creative narratives for the emerging "social self" in such an age, especially the subaltern Woman. Overlapping or contradictory moral expectations of men and women were carried over into all manner of domestic and social relations. A social structure of shifting and uncertain moralities complicated personhood, not unlike the situational morality of precolonial New Guinea (Read 1955). The creation of sexual relations, of intimate citizenship (Weeks 1985) across these domains became tense and contested. Men's attitudes about women's sexual nature were changing, and women's expectations about marriage and demands for a voice in public life were controversial. Such changes also exposed women to new definitions of religious virtue and moral purity. In time, these cultural ideals associated maleness with sexual aggression and economic competition, and they divided the image of woman between motherhood and grace, on the one hand, and prostitution and fallen grace, on the other. The latter became a cultural fetish; to borrow the phrase of Emily Apter (1991), the "cabinet secrets" of the prostitute became one of the obsessions of medicine and the modernization of moral genders.

However, already in the mid-nineteenth century, the claims for emancipation and women's rights were coming under fire. The cultural spaces of gender uncertainty exerted new pressures, and sometimes contradictions, about who could do what—both in public affairs and in the confines of domestic family life. Men had to do something, we might say, because women were doing something new. The activist and intellectual woman, particularly in the upper middle class and upper class, were likely to have been involved in social activism in the urban centers, or in the towns and vicinities of places such as Rochester, New York. What seems likely is that the loss of male rule—or rather the perception of declining male authority—generated increasing anxiety in individual men, and hence new social



formations of collective male secrecy as a diffuse technology of power (Foucault 1980). The crisis in masculinity, much touted by historians, seems to have precipitated a slew of male reactions, panic formations, and “masculine protest,” at the level of personal meaning (Carnes 1989). However, we must be cautious about the source of this reaction, resisting the temptation to reduce the change to individual psyches or their unconscious defenses as denoted by the construct of “protest masculinity” (Herdt 1989c), since all of these changes were predictive of much that was to follow—the modernization of men’s and women’s roles and the transformation of male intimacy. This is the forgotten chapter of the male secret society.

Beginning around the time of Morgan, a whole new set of secret societies began to take shape, notably in the homosociality of upwardly mobile middle-class men. The regime of male secret organizations and fraternal orders, such as the Grand Order of the Red Man, formed around new and widening cliques of such men. The older secret orders, especially the Freemasons, were regarded as threatening, even politically dangerous (Robinson 1989). However, these secret societies had long claimed some of the most illustrious figures in Western liberal democratic history among their followers, including the Revolutionary heroes Washington and Jefferson, and they were strongholds of voluntary male social and political association. As a social movement, these groups reflected the changing features of masculinity and male social mobility, particularly the challenges of feminism. The female rights movement and spiritualist cults were to arise at the center of public/private dualities, mediating male/female relations and certain gendered traits (nurturing for women, aggression among men) and relationships (especially middle-class marriage), while exaggerating others (e.g., homosociality). The men who sought this new secretive homosociality in gender-segregated secret associations were at sea in the social change, as their desire for secrecy negotiated “the conflict between ardent individualism and the longing for fellowship” (Braude 1989: 164). The women’s increasing social activism and the men’s increasing secret associations form complementary parts of a common social field across historical time.

In the nineteenth century, aspiring workers or middle-class men (including lower-status professionals—the merchant, lawyer, doctor, educator, and cleric) were more likely than not to have joined a secret male society (Carnes 1989, 1990). The increasing number of male fraternal orders and the swelling of their ranks during this period are impressive,

even by the standards of contemporary society. Millions of American men had undergone at least one initiation into a secret order of this kind during the last third of the nineteenth century—which seems remarkable today, and not simply because secrecy has gotten a bad name.

Ritual secrecy was popular but controversial, even feared, in Victorian society: hidden homosocial networks that depended upon ritual practices of initiation and secret ceremonies of status began to flourish, much as they were common to contemporary Melanesia and other areas of the non-Western world at the time. As Carnes (1989) has shown in his thoughtful book *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*,<sup>1</sup> the scope and range of these nascent organizations is astounding. Dozens of them flourished, sometimes self-consciously and romantically created in imitation of Oriental and American Indian images of ceremonial secret societies or, more likely, the imaginal of exoticism in Victorian popular culture. With mysterious and arcane names such as the Odd Fellows, Red Men, Knights of Pythias, Grand Army of the Republic, and later, after Morgan, the Grand Order of the Red Men, they were indeed all the rage among men. The Freemasons in particular were widely associated with subversive practices that extolled the values of expressive individualism, mythically identified with George Washington and other Revolutionary war figures up through the time of Morgan, whose own father was a prominent Mason. Indeed, the quasi-secret cult Masons, once created as a counterhegemonic formation in reaction to the control of religious worship by the feudal Church, provides a link between Renaissance and contemporary forms of ritual secrecy (Robinson 1989). Though implicitly antisocial in their day, the meanings of such organizations are long gone. They largely petered out in the first decades of the twentieth century, as the Great War mobilized men and hastened new waves of feminism and sexual reform movements (D'Emilio 1983). Surely it is no coincidence that as homosexuality became increasingly visible, between 1870 and 1900, homosocial male groups of heterosexuals, including secret societies, declined.

A new idea of male “human nature” was growing popular among the aspiring middle class—that it was “normal and natural” to join segregated secret clubs and to be initiated through special or esoteric rites. A new cultural reality was created—albeit hidden from the public, and particularly those public or domestic spaces trafficked by women. How can we imagine a reality created collectively in culture that is not public? This is the enigma that we face in the case of Lewis Henry Morgan—and, in general,

with respect to the problem of ritual secrecy at large. The emerging secret reality commandeered social relations, requiring that a man pledge loyalty through “Adoption Degrees” to newfound socially fictive brothers and fathers. Their loyalties and fictive kinship supported male-admiring practices in a space entirely apart from women. These new secret orders solidified the political and economic interests of aspiring middle-class men as much as they kept the women at a safe distance. “As young men, they were drawn to the male secret orders, where they repeatedly practiced rituals that effaced the religious values and emotional ties associated with women” (Carnes 1990: 48).

Victorian ideals among men such as Morgan did not encourage expressive emotional confessions or sexual stories of the self, as known to us from the age of television (Plummer 1995). Men did not join these groups in a self-reflexive manner to discover or express deep feelings; that was neither their social purpose nor their psychological intention. But apparently a good many of these men were troubled enough to seek a separate shared reality in which to build confidence and trust in their social and personal strivings. Rituals of solidarity hidden from women were a key to this end. Aspiring middle-class actors who had the resources to join secret associations thus sought a homosocial atmosphere of male camaraderie amid the romantic idealism of mythic rites and nature worship. In short, the popular men’s secret societies provided a safe refuge that gave men a divergent cultural reality removed from the domestic hearth and immune to the claims for new rights by women and other vocal dissenters who contested men’s traditional authority, moral and sexual superiority.

But this brings up the great puzzle of ritual secrecy—indeed, it is the same puzzle that has long perplexed the anthropological literature on small societies. For anthropology it begins with Morgan (1901) and Parker (1909); for sociology it began with the work of the great Georg Simmel (reviewed in chap. 2). “If the rituals reaffirmed the values of Victorian America, why did the orders take pains to keep them secret?” (Carnes 1989: 3). Writers such as Lionel Tiger (1970) and, before him, Freud (1923) once appealed to a biologically innatist position that men are attached to each other libidinally; that is, males have an intrinsic desire to form circles or havens of same-gender attachment and intimate security to shelter their masculinity (Tuzin 1997: 178ff.). Such an ultimate cause, however, is insufficient to explain the historical variations and cross-cultural conditions observed in ritual secrecy in such places as Victorian

America or New Guinea. Moreover, it obscures whether such an intrinsic drive includes homoeroticism, an important question to which we must return in the study of secret social groups in Melanesia.

We are dealing here, in the remarkable arena of male ritual secrecy, with the mixture of rule and power. To be socially superior, to rule in public relations, does not provide power in all domains. Public and domestic tensions abound. Obviously, power plays an important role in the mixture, which may destabilize all social relations in a particular society. The particular idea of "power" to which we appeal is significant, whether formal or informal. For Foucault's (1973) model of power as discursive and omnipresent, a part of the very norms internalized by the individual, the link between rule and power typically occurs through technologies of power and formations of the State, such as the public health apparatus and bureaucracies. Such an approach may well apply to Victorian America, but it encounters many difficulties when transplanted into precolonial communities such as those of Melanesia (Herdt 1992).

In Morgan's day it seems likely that the rise of the women's movement and other social upheavals introduced by opposition to slavery, alcohol abuse, and heterosexism opened new and deeper fears and schisms than previously existed between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters. Perhaps this void motivated men's participation in a club of misogyny and the splitting of Woman's image into Mother and Whore (Chodorow 1978). This posed an unprecedented challenge to the received meanings and privileges of masculinity, prompting the creation of secret men's groups like those founded by Morgan.

### *Morgan, Secret-Maker*

Born in 1818 in Aurora, New York, Lewis Henry Morgan was the son of a wealthy farmer, Jedidiah, who was prominent in local politics and community affairs. Jedidiah was morally upright, a staunch Presbyterian who paid for the erection of the local Masonic Lodge. His father's official title in the temple must have seemed grand to a small boy: Worshipful Master of the Scipio Masonic Lodge and High Priest of the Aurora Chapter of the Royal Arch Masons (Carnes 1989: 96). Jedidiah held the post until his premature death in 1826. However, he was also a practical man with worldly ambitions, who got himself elected to the state senate and became a friend of Governor DeWitt Clinton. The governor, New York's best-known

Mason, laid the cornerstone of the elder Morgan's Masonic temple, an important show of local political theater. This religious secret and political nexus is significant, for it shows the interface between secret Masonic activities and the production of public power and wealth. Indeed, its political connection would haunt the family in the years to come. Long afterward, rumors of political patronage shadowed the governor and tainted the Masons. Secrecy, in this connection, was a source of suspicion and corruption. For decades after, the name of the Masons was mired in scandal, tainted by the "expose of Masonic secrets" throughout western New York (Carnes 1989: 97).

Lewis Henry was eight years old at the time of his father's death. The death was a great blow to the boy, and as so often happens in childhood loss, the grief exerted a lifelong influence on Morgan, a theme ignored in the better-known biographies of Morgan (see White 1959). Carnes's account of these events relies upon the overdetermined notion of unconscious compensation for the early and traumatic loss of Morgan's father through the search for and investment in secret ritual bonding with other men. Carnes remarks that as a boy, Morgan was "shaken by the loss" and was reared by his mother after his father's death.

Some readers may be skeptical of such a Freudian reading. However, paternal loss appears as a definite symbolic theme at critical junctures throughout Morgan's life, as is stressed in Carnes's historical biography. For example, the context in which Morgan initiated his first secret association was the moment of his return home from the study of law. He had been living at college and immersed in a homosocial academic atmosphere. His return was to an all-female household, ruled by a powerful woman:

When he returned home after graduating from Utica (now Union) College in 1840 as a twenty-two year old attorney without prospects of a practice, secret societies became his regular escape from domestic duties and from the affectionate vigilance of the women in the family. (Carnes 1989: 96)

Moreover, shortly before his marriage in 1850–51, Morgan curiously drew up a will stipulating that after death he was to be buried near his father. The timing suggests the sudden desire to conjure the presence of his father on the eve of matrimony.

In fact, the loss of a parent was common during these times, and the

issue of “paternal neglect” on the frontier was of such widespread social interest that one observer complained in 1842 that it “had become epidemic” (Carnes 1990: 47). Concomitantly, historical documents of the era, such as autobiographies and diaries, revealed how the “symbolic importance of motherhood” exerted a feminine pressure on Victorian men (38). As if to echo the theme of the age, Morgan was to remark years later that the loss of a parent could never be overcome, in an apparent reference to his own loss. The language and practices created by the organizations with which Morgan was involved reflect a symbolic focus on fathering, which supports Carnes’s general claim about the compensatory psyche of these clubs.

Growing up on the frontier after the Revolution and during the time of America’s “invasion” of Indian lands, Morgan’s development must have been riddled by many of the conflicting influences reviewed previously. Certainly he was exposed to populist ideas and movements, whose politics must have involved not only his natal family but later his own position as an aspiring attorney, too. The encroachment of white settlers and land-grabbers upon Indian lands, abolitionism and militant antislavery activism, the budding women’s movement, the conflict between science and religion, and vehement temperance activities were all heatedly debated. We can be reasonably sure that Morgan interacted with some of the key players in Rochester surrounding these debates, since he supported antislavery activities and Native American revivalism. Clearly Morgan was committed to the emancipation of the slaves and the unity of North and South. Morgan’s support of Native American land reform was particularly critical later in his life (Resek 1960), for as White (1959) has noted, Morgan later devoted much of his time and political effort to the protection of Native American rights and their empowerment through congressional legislation. However, his attitudes about women and feminism, spiritualism and the occult, are obscure. Morgan’s character suggests that if he felt antipathy toward early feminism, it would have been intellectualized, and perhaps subordinated to his liberal views that all people should be equal in rights and privileges. Whether he flirted with spiritualism, a popular form of romantic entertainment, remains unknown.

Morgan attended Cayuga Academy in Aurora. Through his socialization and formal education, he was introduced to classical ideas and texts, and took to reading Plato and Socrates in Greek and Latin. The student lawyer at this point was uninterested in ethnology or the American Indians; he was immersed in the great philosophers and no doubt in the male idealization of Greek culture common to the period (Halperin 1990: 56ff.).

Like other American and British middle-class men, Morgan's imagination was captivated by classical romanticism, signified by his first involvement in a secret society. By contrast, his second secret organization not only provided his introduction to anthropology (Stern 1931: 16ff.) but also inspired him to be initiated into the secret society of the Indians. These intellectual, social, and political activities, coupled with his activism as a self-righteous partisan lawyer, suggest an enlightened thinker and social idealist working to improve himself and society—the historical principles of middle-class American expressive individualism (Bellah et al. 1985). Whatever the unconscious sources of Morgan's attraction to secret fraternities, they rapidly gained a foothold in the larger cultural imagination of the times.

The first of the men's societies in Morgan's development was a social and classical literary club for young men known as the Order of the Gordian Knot, or simply the Gordian Knot, a Greek-admiring semisecret fraternity in Aurora, New York.<sup>2</sup> This emerged during the hard years of Morgan's early law practice when work was scarce. He had a lot of time on his hands, and much of it went into the secret club. The order convened in the local Masonic Temple near Rochester, New York, and eventually grew to 500 members. From what little is known, it had the characteristics of a voluntary association of upwardly mobile men, bound by common interests of social class, locale, and perhaps the need for mutual support in their commercial dealings with one another. After the Gordian Knot was disbanded, Morgan's idealization of the Greeks carried over into later life. In his famous *League of the Iroquois*, for example, he openly admires Greek ethics for "the acumen and inspiration of their marvelous intellect" (1901: 142). He waxes poetic in his discussion of the virtues of their religion, stating that "they perfected and beautified that stupendous production of genius and credulity, the polytheism of the ancient world" (143).

The second secret order was modeled on the Indians, closer to home, and was perhaps influenced by the romanticism of Washington Irving's far-flung literary ideas about Indians (and romantic writings on Moorish Alhambra in Spain) and an emerging image of "primitive society" in human evolution. This club also marked his transition into revivalist traditions of Native Americans in the Finger Lakes area of New York. Morgan began his study of the Iroquois in 1841 (Fenton 1941: 148), with a variety of meetings that resembled fieldwork. In 1843 he decided to change the Order of the Gordian Knot into an Iroquois-admiring society (later known as the Order of the Iroquois).

Early on, Morgan met Ely Parker, the son of a Seneca chief, at the New

York State archives in Albany (Carnes 1989: 95). This fortuitous meeting began a long and fruitful collaboration, one of the most profound partnerships in the history of American anthropology. Parker's association was critical to Morgan's eventual introduction, not only to Iroquois culture, but also to their controversial secret formations (the False Face Society). The two men also "became fast friends" and comrades, as testified by Morgan's dedication of *The League of the Iroquois* to Parker in the same year that Morgan married (White 1959: 4-5).

About the same time, but independent of Morgan, a group of former Masons in 1843 formed a wholly new society called the Improved Order of Red Men. This other group employed certain rites similar to those of Morgan's secret order, but the ceremonies more closely resembled those of the Odd Fellows, both in their socially esoteric and political functions. This society would eventually number in the hundreds of thousands throughout the United States and outlive Morgan. However, the budding popularity of these movements failed to inspire Morgan's praise; indeed it seemed to repel him. This negative reaction was the start of an emotional and then physical withdrawal from the secret groups. Morgan's increasing attitude of cynicism was a harbinger of later cultural sentiment.

Even before his first visit to the Seneca at the Tonawanda Reservation, on October 1, 1845, Morgan was already fascinated by Iroquois initiation rites and secret societies, having journeyed with George Ripley of Rochester to attend the Six Nations Council to see the installation of a new chieftain or Sachem. Shortly thereafter, "Jimmy Johnson, successor to Handsome Lake, recited the prophet's message on October 12 and 13, and Ely Parker sent Morgan an English Synopsis" (Fenton 1941: 148, n. 1). This made a deep impression on Morgan.

What Morgan was to create had a strong undercurrent of spiritualism and relativism in its understanding of the Indians and ideals of secrecy. The role of Parker was important in fostering this spiritual dimension. Parker's work on the False Face Society of the Iroquois was highly "respected" and valued, even over Morgan's. According to one authority, though, it was "deeply involved with the Masonic mysteries" (Fenton 1987: 140). In other words, Parker was not only an intellectual partner in secrecy, but also a cocreator of the Order of the Iroquois.<sup>3</sup> When Morgan convened the first meeting of this new Order, "it was composed of members of the local Freemasons and a few New York Indian scholars" (Fenton 1987: 140). We can assume that Parker was among them, since he was



known to admire and support Native American customs. Certainly Morgan strongly believed in the role of spiritual beliefs as a source of human understanding; Book II of *The League* starts, "The mind is, by nature, full of religious tendencies" (1851: 141).

Morgan called his local secret chapter The Grand Order of the Cayuaga Tribe. In time other secret chapters dispersed across New York and were given other "tribal" names. His fellows voted Morgan their Grand Sachem or Chief, bestowing upon him the proper name Skenandoak (apparently in commemoration of the famous Iroquois friend of the American Revolutionaries). Morgan led his fellows into the new order by imitating all kinds of Iroquois customs, manners, dress, history, and, especially, initiation ceremonies. The change in Morgan's identity suggested at least a partial desire to "go native" in certain idyllic interludes with local Iroquois. Morgan's writings make it clear that he saw in Indian society the hallmarks of a higher civilization—prior to the "distortions" of private property and profit motives (1877: 561–62). His behavior at times was odd enough that the Iroquois were mystified and a bit frightened by him (Carnes 1989: 98).

Morgan reasoned that the best way to share in the romantic meaning of Indian life was to experience Indian rituals. Even before he had set foot on a reservation, he superintended the creation of the order's first induction ceremony, which he called an "indianation." The ceremony bore no relation to any Seneca ritual (Carnes 1989: 95). Nonetheless, Morgan's ingenious use of Iroquois symbolism anchors Victorian "identity work" in his remarkable anthropology. It also links what is distinctive of Victorian manhood to ritual secrecy—that it depends upon embodiment for its physical, and subjective, dimensions. Embodiment is a basis of ritual secrecy; while knowledge is involved in the creation of its totality, neither rational teaching nor abstract knowledge is sufficient to produce cultural reality (identity). For that, separation and submersion of the person in ritual praxis is required.

What role did such a secret "religious formation" play in an area renowned for the emergence of protest religions? An initiation ceremony dreamed up by Morgan provides clues. As written in the "Constitution of the Grand Order of the Iroquois Organized at Aurora, New York, by Morgan," we find this preamble:

Believing that the institution of an Indian Order—having for its object a literary social confederation of the young men of our State,

for the purpose of making such Order the repository of all that remains to us of the Indian,—their manners, customs, and history; their mythology, government and literature; and for the further purpose of creating and encouraging a kinder feeling toward the Red Man, founded upon a true knowledge of the Virtues and blemishes of the Indian character; and finally to make up an institution that shall mutually cast the broad shield of its protection and the mantle of its benevolence over these declining races; and lastly our own intellectual and moral improvement. (Morgan 1917: 17)

Within Morgan's own secret group, itself reminiscent of the famous medicine societies of the Iroquois (Parker 1909), some spiritualism and revivalist connection seem certain. Though directed by Morgan, other noted scholars such as Henry Schoolcraft and of course Ely Parker later joined the Order, attracting the attention of local reformers and neighboring Iroquois tribesmen. It is no doubt true that the spirit of the times was individualistic, even antiauthoritarian. Morgan promoted social change in the spirit of the era and thereby tested the very limits of the expansionist white society's tolerance of his expressive ideal that glorified Indian life. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder if his activism created a site of cultural resistance to white hegemony, within the secret fraternity, in alliance with the Indians. In these and other matters, including his own bodily experiences, I have the impression that Morgan was engaged in personal, as well as political, development.

As its prestige grew, and Morgan's "head was filled with notions about primitive society" (Resek 1960: 23), he changed the name of the secret society to the Grand Order of the Iroquois. The rituals constructed by Morgan and his colleagues are a fascinating amalgam of the romantics' search for a Garden of Eden and the naive trumpeting of a boy's club, with a striking number of references to the "Great Spirit" (translated as "Father"). The key seems to have been that the men being initiated into the Grand Order had "lost their fathers" and needed a Great Spirit to protect them. Astonishingly, Morgan "advised initiates to rediscover their lost fathers" in his personal counsel to them:

When Sachem Lewis Henry Morgan pleaded with the Great Spirit to "receive us as your children," and to "save from the grave" the memory of departed fathers, he was "regenerating" the paternal

bonds of which he had been deprived as a boy. (Carnes 1989: 96–97)

The appeal and invocation of the name of the Father was the signature of the times. It became iconic of these Victorian movements and masculine secret formations throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. For that matter, its appeal to Christian iconography and homosocial haven imagery is not so far distant from the Iron John mythology alive today (Kimmel 1996). The implied purity of male work, identity, and secret commitment, emotions of collective grief, the renewal of spiritual purity, and the intense intimacy briefly shared by Morgan and his comrades are all akin to what anthropologists have long known as a rite de passage (Van Gennep 1960). In such a masculine movement, we might guess, the sign of the Father is being substituted for conscious homoerotic attachment; their ritual rebirth need not displace the heterosocial domestic order with a homosexual one (Herdt 1989c, 1990). This particular contrast, as we shall later see, is informative of what is distinctively Melanesian about ritual secrecy, since it is the male and not the female body that is desired among New Guinea peoples such as the Baruya and Sambia (Godelier 1986).

Ever restless, Lewis Henry Morgan's long romance with Native American culture was to shift, and then recede. He soon tired of imitations of the Iroquois rites: he wanted to experience the realness of the thing. While his fellow initiates were content with what he had created, "Morgan came to doubt whether they could vicariously share in the deeper impulse of Indian life through experiencing spurious rituals" (Carnes 1989: 95). This yearning led to Morgan's petition in 1846 to undergo the ceremony of adoption into the Iroquois tribe. One can imagine the curious response of the Iroquois to this unparalleled request. They consented, but only if Morgan would pay for the necessary feast (to which he agreed). The "Adoption Degree" was made through the Hawk clan and the ritual consummated in due order. Jimmy Johnson, by then over seventy years old and among the famous dignitaries living in that area of the country, became Morgan's new "father." It is not clear how much of a mark the initiation left upon Morgan, but it certainly made a queer impression on the Iroquois. (Some of the texts and rites are set down in Morgan's work and writings: see Fenton 1987; Parker 1909.) Morgan's "adoption" into the Iroquois tribe through the Corn Harvest Festival signaled a desire for a deeper immersion into their culture, including its mysteries and medicinal powers. This is where

he had parted company with his contemporaries, who were content to taste the imitation, not the original; but the original was ultimately to disappoint Morgan too.

The flavor of Morgan's interests in the esoteric and the secret rites emerges to some extent in his later writings on the False Face and Wooden Face Societies, their medicine lodges, and other exclusive or secretive associations. Though facilitated by Ely Parker and other native consultants, these ethnographic accounts are written as if Morgan were an insider, and some of them reveal the fresh sensitivity of a member of the elect, especially in volume I of the *League of the Iroquois* (Morgan 1851). A variety of arguments have questioned whether Morgan's account was consistent with secret practice.<sup>4</sup> For example, Morgan claimed that the False Face Societies helped to continue the practice of witchcraft: "Belief in witches is to this day, and always has been, one of the most deeply-seated notions in the minds of the Iroquois" (156–57). Because of the "terror" with which the Iroquois regarded their witches, the accused was put to death. This helps explain the cultural sources of the secrecy of witchcraft and membership in the secret societies. These practices were nearly unbelievable to Morgan's mind, given the charitable attitude he attributed to the Indians. Anyone could be possessed of an "evil spirit" and assume for "nefarious" purposes animal or spirit form, he noted. "When one became a witch, one ceased to be himself." To subvert and to further their aims, the witches collected in "a secret and systematic organization, which has subsisted for ages" (157). "These meetings were held at night, and the fee of the neophyte was the life of his nearest and dearest friend, to be taken with poison, on the eve of his admission." To combat these malevolent forces, a special Falseface Band was created whose chief purpose was to "propitiate those demons called False-faces, and among other good results to arrest pestilence and disease" (159). The Band reportedly wore "hideous masks," could appear in dreams, and had flutes and other sacred instruments that accompanied their rituals and through which they could "propitiate those demons" (Morgan 1901: 158–59; Parker 1909). One suspects that these descriptions coming into Morgan's hands must have deeply disturbed his idealism about the Indians, especially in the light of his own Christian beliefs, and may perhaps have permanently damaged his identification with their culture. The real no longer lived up to the ideal.

Iroquois specialists later challenged some of these interpretations of the secret societies, and I leave those debates to them. Nevertheless, we see

now how Morgan had tried to puzzle out the inner workings and meanings of secret societies among the Iroquois and how his work forms and informs the genealogy of all the anthropology of secrecy that followed. Certainly these beliefs and practices are the stuff from which secret societies are made in many places, including Papua New Guinea. In fact, there are remarkable resemblances between the Iroquois False Face Society and the famed Tambaran societies of the Sepik River, especially the Ilahita Arapesh (Tuzin 1980; see chap. 5).

In any case, all this was to end. The events of his adoption marked a developmental watershed in Morgan's life. He appeared to tire of his engagements with the Iroquois, with the Hawk clan, and with his ties to the Iroquois people. Concurrently he lost interest in the social functions of the second secret society he had founded, just as it was reaching its zenith. His initial enchantment with the rites—with their ability to generate the deeper spiritual feeling he had once admired and longed for among the Iroquois—seemed to go sour on him, as Morgan seems to have turned cynical. "Within a year he lost interest in the Order of the Iroquois and its 'boyish' rituals; it disbanded shortly thereafter" (Carnes 1989: 98). By 1847, then, after four years' involvement with the secret societies and a fairly long stretch of "fieldwork," Morgan's desire for all these associations dissipated. What had precipitated such a dramatic change?

Although we can never be certain of the actual chain of events, it seems likely that Morgan's growing domesticity, his social and financial success, culminating in his marriage, are at the heart of this radical change. Morgan was—to capture the proverbial sense of things in the American idiom—about to "settle down." And to "settle down" meant to leave the adventuresome forays into Indian country behind, just as the evenings would be taken up with domestic activities, rather than secret fraternities. The identity crisis indicates a transformation of sociality and selfhood, a dissociation of the subject from the once desired object: the rituals and secret societies, as embodied in the Iroquois. The evidence suggests that just as his interest in ritual secrecy was flagging, Morgan's interest in Christianity was on the rise. It will not surprise the reader, much less the anthropologist, to know that it was precisely this moment when Morgan began to write his great work, *The League of the Iroquois*. He had removed himself from direct experience of intimate homosocial spaces in the field; the secret societies had given way to domestic places next to his study.

Morgan's early political activism seems at odds with his later philoso-

phy of social evolution, but only in part. Intellectually, his later life was spent in elucidating the principles of social progress and of the development of civilization, which increasingly preoccupied his search for the unity of human kind and universals of social structure (Stocking 1987). This is but a developmental difference: between the younger Morgan, engaged in romantic idealizations of the Indians through the molding of the admiring secret society, versus the older, more skeptical, scholar, who quit the secret fraternities, removed himself from all intimate contact with the Iroquois, and finally refused to join anything at all. The tension in Morgan's development in the middle decades of the nineteenth century aptly mirrors the Janus of anthropology in the twentieth: the relativistic field-worker who lives with the locals and is actively pro-nativist; versus the philosophical and skeptical academic don, who has ceased fieldwork and conceptualizes the Human Condition, a necessary tribute to modernity.

Morgan's admiration for Iroquois culture was not to decline but to grow over the years, as if his emotional distance permitted him to create, in the private experience of his library, the famous Iroquois texts—a utopian objectification thwarted by the actual encounter. Still, there can be no doubt that Morgan believed that Iroquois religion surpassed our own cultural ancestors. He thought that the Iroquois were “more wise” than the Greeks and Romans, and more “confiding in the People” than the Egyptians. Morgan thus concluded of the Indians, “The fruits of their religious sentiments, among themselves, were peace, brotherly kindness, charity, hospitality, integrity, truth, and friendship; and towards the Great Spirit, reverence, thankfulness, and faith” (1901: 224). Such a Garden of Eden emerged in his later portrayal of the Iroquois.

As a younger man, however, Morgan and other men of his time wanted something more inclusive of their identities: a closeness and camaraderie, homosocially trusting in and being trusted by their fellows, with the blessings of a paternal spirit, pursued through ritual secrecy.<sup>5</sup> The secret fraternities were a means to this utopian end, albeit a failed one.

### *Morgan After Secrecy*

As Morgan ended his active field study among the Iroquois he began to write his treatise, *The League of the Iroquois* (1847). By about 1850, Morgan had married his cousin Mary Elizabeth Steele, of Albany, New York. He was thirty-two. By the time of his marriage, he had ceased his field activities

with the Indians; the divergent cultural reality of the secret societies was replaced by matrimonial life. Why did he marry his cousin? What was involved in the decision to marry inside a family already very close-knit, and heavily dominated by strong women? At the very least, we can infer a desire on Morgan's part to confine his trust, as well as his romantic and sexual life, to the restricted security circle of his extended family, who had helped to arrange the marriage. It was as if the outside world posed anxieties, which the eligible bachelor chose not to take on. In this way, through the creation of a restricted circle, Morgan was a perfect Victorian, and his domestic life illustrates the tendency to cloying domesticity that was to usher in a subsequent historical crisis of masculinity at the end of the century.

Morgan entered the bourgeois conventions of Rochester life. In 1851 the newlyweds "moved into a house on South Fitzhugh Street in Rochester, and Morgan devoted himself wholly to his professional and domestic life" (White 1959: 5). Indeed, in his account of Morgan's work, Leslie White states that "from the close of 1850 until the summer of 1857, Indian affairs were laid entirely aside" (262). While his law practice was not so successful, Morgan became a highly successful capitalist and entrepreneur in financial ventures, especially in railroad companies. In fact, Morgan ran one of these railroads during the time in which he was writing his treatises on the evolution of society. During this time his active collaboration with Ely Parker continued, from which were written a series of significant scholarly papers. Increasingly, Morgan dedicated himself to the legal and political reform of Indian land rights in New York state.

Morgan was certainly not alone in his desire to join secret fraternities that would take him away, however temporarily, from the tense or disconcerting or drab conventionality of domestic life to seek idyllic or romantic homosociality. What is common to Morgan's and his fellows' involvement in secret societies is the escape into another, parallel, or utopian cultural world. The cultural reality of the Victorian age is reflected in, but also refracted by, the curious creation of these men's secret clubs. Both the social and political links between the men, as much as their personal friendships and needs, are captured in the story of Morgan. These practices were so widespread in later nineteenth century society that upward of 40 percent of all American men may have participated in them, including the majority of middle-class men (Carnes 1989: 2). Some groups numbered in the hundreds of thousands. By 1896, we are told, out of "a total adult male population of nineteen million," secret societies made up "five

and a half million members” within the United States (Carnes 1989: 1). The Grand Lodge of the Red Men was particularly successful: “By 1900 hundreds of thousands of Red Men were finding their way into wigwams of the order each week. Annual receipts exceeded a million dollars” (Carnes 1990: 40). These circles of hygiene and masculine or Christian purity are evident throughout American history, up to the present (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988; Kimmel 1996; Moran 2000). Unique to Morgan’s story, however, is the romantic joining of American Indian cultural renditions with male desires and contradictions in Victorian America.

The many strands of these secret societies suggest a problematic for anthropology’s treatment of men’s secret clubs as exotic and alien from daily life in the twentieth century. The history of secrecy is far closer to home in anthropology than we would have imagined; and the story of Morgan is mirrored in other quarters in the history of our civilization, if only we care to look. This idea objectifies a long-standing ambivalence in Western thought, and hence in its social science, regarding the good and bad sides of secrecy. Just as Morgan’s life illuminates Victorian masculinity and its conditional character, so too secrecy impacted upon the public and domestic domains, sexuality and marriage, so that profession and friendship—once so separate—were reconstructed. These arenas of male agency were fragmented and not of a piece (nor were they *at peace*) within Morgan. Like other men of his time he sought alternative realities through which to create greater trust, or fraternity, with others, the mystical, and the Indians.

Religion was one of the prime sources of pressure in Morgan’s life, as for many other Victorians of his era. The Reverend Joshua Hall McIlvaine, D.D. (1815–97), “pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Rochester for many years and a close friend of Morgan” (White 1959: 202), was especially important. In Adam Kuper’s account of Morgan, much is made of the influence of McIlvaine, who was “intimately associated with Morgan’s research,” being a philologist and Sanskritist (1991: 43). “He did his best—with the support of Morgan’s wife—to ignite Morgan’s Christian faith, but with only partial success, though he claimed that Morgan’s heart lay in the end with the Christian religion” (43). The pastoral connection is also important to Morgan’s domestic life, since the two men were close; the Reverend was both his senior and the keeper of his father, Jedidiah’s, faith. The intellectual influence of McIlvaine was repressive as well, for he apparently deleted from Morgan’s manuscripts prior to publication key



passages that endorsed evolutionary thought, or that went against the Scriptures. Once more, a fascinating mixture of both conservative (i.e., religious) and progressive (i.e., women's emancipation) attitudes is apparent in one of Morgan's close friends.<sup>6</sup> That this man was of immense import to Morgan can be shown by that fact that Morgan dedicated his general treatise, *Ancient Society*, to McIlvaine.

It is interesting that Morgan created one last fraternal organization during his later years of domesticity. The Pundit Club, or simply "The Club," as it came to be known, "was organized on the evening of July 13, 1854, at Morgan's home" (White 1959: 202). The Reverend McIlvaine was also a prominent member. But Morgan was its "prime mover" and was voted "secretary." Between 1854 and 1880, Morgan read thirty-two papers before the Club. (In 1856, Morgan was elected to a far more elite scientific establishment, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which motivated him to prepare his celebrated paper on the "Laws of Descent of the Iroquois.") The Club was a scholarly, intellectual, and scientific circle, and while we cannot be certain of it, we may surmise that women were excluded. Perhaps in this sonorous little utopia we see not a secret society—though it could have become that in another time and place—but rather the cozy gentleman's club of Victorian scholars, linked by their common privilege and modernist regard for letters and science that set them apart from the domestic family—and excluded women as colleagues. Nevertheless, the presence of their women was as close as the next sitting room in Morgan's house. Indeed, the scholars depended upon the existence of that parallel parlor for the meaning of their own existence, as well as for the food and service supplied by their wives. The conventions of the day justified their separation and allowed for this special scholastic intimacy, precisely because of the beliefs and roles that relegated men and women to different homosocial spaces. Some of these developments, including the secret history, may have been typical of middle-class men in Morgan's era. But it was less typical to found secret clubs, and perhaps even more unusual to found and then leave them, as Morgan did.

What truly set Morgan apart, however, was his other desire—the one we have come to think of as prototypical of the anthropological experience in this century: to enter another culture, and even ideally to be initiated into its secret circle. Nothing could be more symbolic of the dawning of anthropology's romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment project of science and rationality (Shweder 1984). What was the source of this inter-

est in Morgan's life? The answer may lie in the same sources that motivated his secrecy. During the peak of his involvement in the secret rites around 1845–46, Morgan may have experienced a kind of delayed grief reaction and symbolic mourning. We do not have to be Freud to reconstruct the challenges before him. He lacked a father, brothers, and apparently close male friends after returning from college. Perhaps he sought male friendship and confidence in the earlier literary society; but like most literary groups, its ability to address emotional challenges, as well as mortality, was no doubt limited. Was this the source of the motivation driving his secret associations? "Morgan's fascination with initiatory ritual may have reflected an unconscious wish to follow in his father's steps" (Carnes 1989: 96). Morgan's appeal that men be received by the Great Father Spirit as "children" and to have them save the memory of their fathers "from the grave" is nationalistic, nostalgic, and notational of an unconscious wish. I would draw attention, moreover, to the anxieties facing Morgan, and to the shared anxieties—real and imagined—which he dealt with by the construction of secret societies. Suffice it to say that when relationships are badly fettered by anxiety and mistrust, men who value social and political cohesion with like-minded others erect utopias, either to gain control or to create a better society than the one in which they live. That is the Janus of secrecy.

Iroquois tradition has changed since Morgan's time. Though the followers of Handsome Lake attempted to eliminate the medicine societies, Parker's (1909) later account suggests that the effort failed. The groups lived on in secret, though the medicine societies are no longer a relaxed subject of discussion; the kind of cynical scrutiny characteristic of Western social science, and even anthropology, is no longer welcome. As with other "tribal" groups in the United States and abroad, social rights to reclamation and cultural preservation are being asserted: "Today, secrecy and sacredness are watchwords of the militants who spurn ethnologists and insist that museums remove all masks from exhibit and return them" (Fenton 1987: 140).

While Morgan's romanticism ended in cynicism, it gave birth to Iroquois cultural analysis—perhaps the hallmark of anthropology's invention of the other, the creation of the object of culture through the subject that studies it. Today, it is commonly argued, and not without reason (Lévi-Strauss 1974; Stocking 1997), that we should date anthropological epistemology from the time of Malinowski's *Diary* (1967). But the narrative of

Morgan's odyssey suggests that we may historically move back the date of this intellectual transformation by two generations and spatially move it across the Atlantic. Hence with Morgan was born what we might call the role of the anthropologist as cryptographer of secrecy and the hidden codes in social life (see chap. 5). To recall the opinion of Stocking: "The true founder of British social anthropology was the American Lewis Henry Morgan" (1987: 301)—whose rediscovery by Rivers was the beginning of a method and a theory of fieldwork. Now let us add that Morgan founded the anthropology of secrecy.

During the period of the nineteenth-century transition to modernity, anthropology has pioneered the description of what we might call ritual secrecy as a particular and privileged mode of practice in small-scale societies. Lewis Henry Morgan's romantic Iroquois studies, revolutionary and clever as they were, ended in his intellectual remove from the Other through the construction of universal frameworks, which did not challenge in any respect Western cultural stereotypes of secrecy in the last century. Is it not supremely ironic that Morgan—a mystic, romantic, and religious Christian—produced an authoritative text on social evolutionism that became a mythic charter for Marxist theory? Anthropological science, born in the discovery by Morgan of classificatory kinship terminology among the Iroquois (1877), as lauded by Fortes (1969), formed the basis of Engels's work on the political economy of gift exchange in small societies (Gregory 1982: 15–18). Engels was fascinated by the claim that the earliest stage of human society was the "matriarchal gens" that preceded patriarchal forms, as he misconstrued Iroquois society. Even more, Engels thought that he had found, within the domestic sphere itself, the very hotbed of competing claims negotiated by secret clubs and spiritual séances in Morgan's time—a class war, with the husband as bourgeois ruler, and the wife as the proletariat that would rise up against him (Engels 1972: 128; see also Kuper 1991: 73). The image hardly fits the social reality of the Iroquois; but it certainly comes closer to the hidden reality not far from the smoky den of cigars in Morgan's Club. When we reflect upon the secrets of sex hidden by the now failed Soviet regime (Kon 1995), including the fact that the Soviets outlawed homosexuality and made abortion the means of birth control, we come even closer to Engels's oppression perpetuated not only against women, but against homosexuals and minorities as well.

Morgan's submersion in Iroquois culture suggests the kind of dialectic

between extreme idealization and romantic anticipation of “going native” that is sometimes followed by cynical detachment; the “reverse culture shock” and removal of the self from the field into the text, a not uncommon pattern (Herdt and Stoller 1990)—especially in the Victorian era, when the colonies were believed to hold the secret to a deep and darker side of the human condition. Because these male fraternities were largely unknown to later generations and Morgan was silent on the experience, especially the secretive aspects—much as late Victorian anthropology was largely silent on the legacy of religion and spiritualism, no less than the discussion of sexuality (Herdt and Stoller 1990; Tuzin 1994)—the field experiences of Morgan were never informative or “transformative” (to use Kuper’s [1991] sense of the legacy of Morgan’s syncretic) for the field. Indeed, Morgan’s writings on the False Face Society of the Iroquois seem only to have reinforced preconceptions regarding the structure, function, and meanings of the culture-bound category of “secrecy” in Native American groups.

### *Studying Secrecy*

Secrecy as a collective force in human societies typically emerges in historical situations in which humans suffer deeply unstable relationships. Faith is insufficient in such a world; trust is required to create alliances against an uncertain world. But what is the means of creating this trust? Personal coherence is increasingly problematic, as the failure to achieve trust becomes intolerable. Perhaps it might be objected that all societies are unstable, blemished by incoherence and the difficulty of achieving trust; I will not deny the general assertion. But I will answer that men and women—and especially men—attempt to make themselves “strong” through hierarchies that promote this trust within a disorderly social world. Their way is to make their masculinity invincible; to stake claims for their immortality; they want to believe that the empire will last a thousand years, defeat its enemies, raise the gods, and create an eternal utopia. All the while their masculinity is conditioned on the existence of this utopian world. Perhaps one of the essential characteristics of modernity and the middle class is the yearning for a safe and stable private space that promises to last forever and eschews special conditions for the creation of gender. Men in particular, but women as well, promote this audacity through ritual secrecy in all of its hidden ways of embodiment: being, knowing, and doing that ensure their perpetuation. In their utopia they must not fear that they

will fail—that is the condition of their masculinity. Boys are initiated with the promise of agency based upon condition. What they desire and believe are built up through body rituals and dietetics of a kind that differs fundamentally from rational knowledge and cannot be tested against the canons of language or Cartesian epistemology (Whitehouse 1995). Ritual secrecy is thus its own means to its own end.

Practicing this kind of ritual secrecy is tumultuous and historically shaky. Where actors require an additional social leverage or political advantage, they can turn to secrecy: not, as often imagined, to grab for power, but rather to hold on to the tenuous power they already claim. Of course, secret practice is a “weapon” and “resource,” depending upon one’s perspective within the local system of power relations; a kind of omnibus means of promoting social affairs—mysterious, diffuse, a matter less of faith than of initiation into secret practice, often esoteric or sacred in character, but also fragile in its hold upon the cultural imagination of a people. Make no mistake: ritual secrecy is about (among other things) the *male imagination*, and without that imagination, and the messy prerequisites of masculinity in a particular land, there can be no secrecy. The cynic might like to think that material-historical conditions or the subversion of power are sufficient to explain the existence of this archaic and peculiar form of embodied ritual, secrecy. But that is not so, and one purpose of this book is to demonstrate why.

Of all the ingenuous solutions to the problem of agency and dependency in human life, this kind of secrecy reigns supreme in the human imagination. Morgan’s creation in his own Victorian society and his discovery among the Iroquois of something he thought to be kindred were to presage what anthropologists were to discover in the most surprising places in the century that followed. It is true that anthropologists have sometimes made these secret groups appear quaint or silly; even more sadly we have sometimes contributed to the demise of these extraordinary systems of the imagination. However, anthropology has also preserved these hidden realities and strained to make them a part of the human variation—and this surely has furthered understanding of the human condition, which is, after all, one of the aims of anthropology.

By the early part of the twentieth century and the establishment of modern anthropology, this history of Morgan’s secret societies would be forgotten, and an awareness of Victorian men’s secrecy would also be lost to coming generations of anthropologists. Anthropology’s love affair with

postmodernism would kindle a fire of self-absorption that would have been unimaginable to Morgan, and certainly vulgar and objectionable to Malinowski. The work of Geertz (1988: 78) is a source of this ennui but not the source of its excess, as his objection to the postmodern ethnographer's confessional makes clear: "When the subject so expands does not the object shrink?" Secrecy is virtually gone, or erased, from these burgeoning confessional accounts. Even today, I think, to admit of participation in secret associations, especially for males, goes too far. Anthropologists are not so far removed from the conditional masculinity of the last century in that respect. If agency requires secrecy, as I suggest for the men's house in New Guinea, then perhaps the mystique of fieldwork has secured the same effect. Ritual secrecy waits to be rediscovered as if it were another country awaiting colonization.

Some colleagues fear that exoticism is the new sin of anthropology. Indeed, it is easy to sensationalize the strange and ignore the familiar, leading to further bouts of attack against and defense of relativism (Geertz 1984a; Spiro 1986), a matter to which we must return at the end of this book. Nevertheless, one must search long and hard to find a body of cultural traditions as strange and variegated as those of American culture today. Is not this warning against exoticism enigmatic in view of how little anthropology has been dedicated to the interpretation of secret forms of our own sociality? Indeed, the forms of secrecy known to us—from James Bond to monster movies, the Oprah Show, and the ever-popular Twelve Step programs that transform self-help problems from alcoholism to sexual compulsions into a new religion of healing—let alone the ones our imaginations imagine but have not yet located—beg for cultural analysis in this New Age of fundamentalism. In this popular view still, "We are only as sick as our secrets." Anthropology has just begun to look closer to home to investigate secrecy. Be forewarned, then, that what is hidden in other times and places is susceptible to exoticization, and nowhere more so than in New Guinea. In fact, the familiar looks very strange upon examination at home (Herdt 1999a).

This prelude on nineteenth-century origins of anthropology and secrecy opens a general lesson about a particular secrecy, one that Lewis Henry Morgan may have glimpsed but never voiced—indeed, could never be fully conscious of—in his work. And this we must think on: In these traditions ritual secrecy is received as "natural," as elementary as the body, more virtuous than the gift. It accommodates the desires of the actor to the

conventions of power and meaning; the ritual knowing gradually becomes a part and parcel of being, protecting the self from the anxieties and doubts of a messy, even polluted, public world; and this secret reality satisfies in one stroke the historical yearning of an era with the self-interest purveyed by performance of a common rite. Hence in secret praxis, social behavior and hidden reality merge; the ritual secret *becomes* personal subjectivity; culture and ontology are one.