

# Introduction

## Whence These Legends and Traditions?

The Ojibwa have received a vicarious distinction, unique among aboriginal American tribal groups. They have achieved an enduring fame, not through wars or conquests . . . but through the projection of an artistic image of them that has become an integral part of American literary tradition.

—Alfred Irving Hallowell

The Ojibwe language has given English the words “moccasin,” “toboggan,” “wigwam,” “moose,” “totem,” and “muskeg.” We’ve even met on the middle ground. We provided “musk” from “mashkiig,” or swamp, English provided “rat” and together we built a word for a swamp dwelling rodent that looks an awful lot like a rat—muskrat. If that’s not a fine example of cultural exchange I don’t know what is.

—David Treuer

ON A SUMMER DAY IN 1900 a large crowd assembled on the shore of Lake Huron, just a few miles downriver from the rapids at Baawitig. They sat in rapt attention of a man standing near the water as he prepared to address them. He cut a striking figure, dressed in a decorated buckskin tunic, fringed leggings, and the large war bonnet of a western chief—its many eagle feathers draping nearly to the ground. Speaking in loud and steady Anishinaabemowin, the man told the crowd that he was about to travel back to his home, located somewhere in the far distant west. As those gathered around him shouted their farewells, he launched a small birch bark canoe into the open waters of Lake Huron. Standing, in the traditional fashion, on the frail cedar ribs of the canoe, with his eyes fixed on the horizon, the man uttered a single word: “Ningaabii’an.” As

if by magic, the canoe began to move across the water, gradually picking up speed on a steady westward course. As the canoe and its noble passenger receded into the distance, the audience left behind on the shore burst into waves of rapturous applause.

The hidden mechanical winch pulling the canoe was just one part of the elaborate staging put together for *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, which also included choreographed stage combat, a full-sized re-creation of an Anishinaabe village, and a gutsy high dive into Lake Huron in the play's climactic third act. First performed near the village of Desbarats, Ontario, in 1900, *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* was an adaptation of Longfellow's epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, performed by an all-Anishinaabeg cast from the Garden River community. The play was comprised of thirteen short scenes depicting several of the more memorable episodes from Longfellow's poem, including Hiawatha's miraculous birth, his wooing of the Dakota maid Minnehaha, and his eventual defeat of the evil trickster Pau-Puk-Keewis. The dialogue was performed exclusively in Anishinaabemowin language, with an English-speaking narrator reciting corresponding passages from Longfellow's poem through a bullhorn. A true spectacle of singing, dancing, and romance, the highlight of the play was its carefully timed finale, in which the actor playing Hiawatha departed for "the portals of the sunset" on his pulley-driven canoe into the light of the real setting sun.

*Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* was the brainchild of two very different men. The first, George Kabaosa, was a member of the Anishinaabe community located on the Canadian side of the Sault, at the Garden River reserve. Educated in a missionary school in Michigan, Kabaosa was part of a new class of political elite among Anishinaabeg, who blended their knowledge of Anishinaabe tradition with a savviness for the workings of the Euro-American culture. At the time of the play's first performance, Kabaosa was in the employ of Louis Olivier Armstrong, an adman from Montreal hired by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to help colonize the Canadian interior. Having achieved a degree of success in enticing Anglo-Canadians to settle in Manitoba in the aftermath of the Riel Rebellions, Armstrong now had the unenviable task of making the remote forests of northern Ontario seem like a good place to take a vacation. Part of the large-scale effort to restructure the economy of the Great Lakes region after the collapse of the timber industry, Armstrong hoped to market Desbarats as a sportsman's paradise, rife with opportunities to hunt, fish, and—of course—meet real Indians.

As a means of drawing urban tourists to an otherwise unremarkable stretch of Lake Huron coastline, staging *Hiawatha* at Desbarats was, as

we would say today, good branding. At the time, *Hiawatha* was one of the most widely read works of poetry in North America, and for many a beloved childhood classic. Seeing *Hiawatha* performed by Indians in rural Ontario presented an opportunity for the fans of the poem to feel like they were not just witnessing their favorite book, but embedded in its romantic setting. In actuality, Longfellow's poem was set more than a hundred miles to the west (on the American side), at the pictured rocks of Lake Superior, but for geographically challenged *Hiawatha* fans, any stretch of the Great Lakes' shoreline could reasonably stand in for the poem's iconic "shores of Gitche Gumee." Staging the play at Desbarats ensured that fans of the poem took CPR trains—the only rail line to service the village.

By 1901, *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* was being performed twice a day, drawing in crowds as large as five hundred.<sup>1</sup> Part of this success, no doubt, was due to the fact that it was one of the few things tourists could actually *do* once they got to Desbarats. Besides fishing, the sparsely populated region had little to offer by way of entertainment—especially for those used to creature comforts of large eastern cities. Armstrong and Kabaosa took advantage of this captive audience, supplementing the play with woodcraft demonstrations, staged canoe races, and Anishinaabe vendors who sold pieces of beadwork and makakoon—handmade birch bark baskets—filled with fresh berries. In 1904, *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, along with its original Native cast, made an off-season tour of Chicago, Boston, and New York. The next year, the play was performed in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Britain—spending five months in residence at Earl's Court in London.<sup>2</sup> The play would be taken up and performed by Anishinaabe communities across the region, with productions taking place as far away as the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. In 1905, the Odawa of Little Traverse Bay began to put on regular performances of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* near Petoskey, Michigan, that would continue in various forms for the next five decades. The Garden River Anishinaabeg, meanwhile, continued to produce *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* in various forms well into the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

I begin with *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, in part, because it represents something of a historical nexus for this book as a whole—a point of convergence from which we may trace connections between a surprising set of writers, translators, and critics. The text of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* reflects the contributions of several prior generations of Anishinaabe writers, including Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, John Tanner, and George Copway, on whose works Longfellow based his poem, and whose descendants would eventually sit in attendance at performances

of the play. Another regular attendee was a young Ernest Hemingway, who would later launch his career as a writer with a tragic story about an Anishinaabe logging camp. Hemingway's classmate, Janet Lewis, also attended the show, several years before writing a novel about the troubling family history that lay behind *The Song of Hiawatha*. At White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, a performance of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* was organized by an Anishinaabe schoolteacher named Mary English, whose translations of Anishinaabe song would spark heated debate among the foremost minds of American Modernism. English's production was almost certainly taken in by Theo Beaulieu, whose own adaptation of the Nanabozho mythos would provide a spark of inspiration for a young Gerald Vizenor.

These connections show an important aspect of Anishinaabe cultural identity essential to the argument of this book: the way in which writing allows cultural material to move independently between indigenous and settler contexts, taking on new meanings and different political valences as it goes. When traced back to its sources, *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* is revealed to be staggeringly intertextual. It is a play produced by a Canadian and an Anishinaabe, performed in Anishinaabemowin, based on an English-language poem (with a meter cribbed from a German translation of a Finnish epic) written by an American poet, which was, in turn, based on an ethnographic text that reprinted English translations of Anishinaabe stories made by the Anishinaabemowin-speaking children of a Scots-Irish aristocrat. This complicated history of production and reception (to be more fully unpacked over the coming pages) makes *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* a particularly difficult object of analysis. Sitting on the borders of Euro-American and Anishinaabe culture, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the literal border of the United States and Canada (with the memory of Anishinaabewaki's continued presence beneath it all), *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* doesn't seem to comfortably fit into the received categories by which we tend to think about literature.

It should come as no surprise that scholarly responses to *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* have been markedly ambivalent. The sociologist Margot Francis, for instance, argues that the Anishinaabeg used *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* "to symbolically enter the culture of modernity, at least partially, on their own terms," by encoding Longfellow's poem with meanings that "would *only* have been available to other Ojibwe speakers in the audience."<sup>4</sup> On the other side of the coin, the cultural critic Alan Trachtenberg takes a particularly jaundiced view of what he calls the "Indian minstrelsy" of the play, in which the Anishinaabeg "perform[ed] their loss in someone else's version for the pleasure of white audi-

ences.”<sup>5</sup> The historian Michael McNally is more measured, suggesting that, despite the compromised nature of the play itself, “what happened onstage might have been less of a concession than it might seem at first glance to a modern-day observer,”<sup>6</sup> arguing that *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* “kept alive a repertoire” of cultural knowledge “on which, decades later, the resurgence of traditional culture, and related assertions of sovereign peoplehood, could build.”<sup>7</sup>

The range of opinions regarding *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* speaks to the difficulty the play presents to our understandings about identity, agency, and culture. The idea that the Garden River Anishinaabeg were willing (perhaps even eager) to be associated with Longfellow’s famously kitschy poem does not seem to jibe with our current understanding of the cultural politics of indigeneity, in which the power and coherence of “the people” comes from a reverence for, and the desire to protect, the sanctity of traditional culture. *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*’s explicit commodification of Anishinaabe culture, its willingness to sacrifice dignity for the sake of spectacle, its imbrication in the economics of settlement, makes the participation of the Anishinaabeg in the play deeply uncomfortable to consider. To make sense of it, we imagine the Anishinaabeg variously as being strategic, coerced, or merely assimilated—in every case, their ability to make meaningful decisions about their own destiny severely limited by the circumstance of history.

But should it be so? Can we imagine the Anishinaabeg’s participation in *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* differently? Can we read the obvious pride of the performers as anything other than complicity? Can we not celebrate *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* as an act of Anishinaabe persistence and survival even as we acknowledge its complications? Can we find value as a significant work of Anishinaabe literature—as one of the first dramas written by a Native?

It is worth noting that Francis, Trachtenberg, and McNally all examine *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* in terms of performance, but largely dismiss its existence as a *text*.<sup>8</sup> Part of the reason may be because the earliest printed version of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*’s script seems hopelessly compromised.<sup>9</sup> More of a tourist brochure than a working script, the short booklet is full of paratextual elements meant for the benefit of the play’s audience, rather than its performers. Scattered throughout the play’s dialogue are photographs of the cast posing in full costume, as well as several of the scenic landscapes around Desbarats. The text is also regularly accompanied by small engravings depicting an assortment of unmistakably “Indian” artifacts, including a parfleche bag, a buffalo-horn headdress, and a large number of war clubs. The last page of the booklet

is the most explicitly commercial, comprised of detailed instructions on how the “countless virgin lakes and rivers” of northern Ontario could be reached “by the Canadian Pacific Railway from Boston, New York, and the East generally” (32).

Yet, the most interesting aspect of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* is the script itself, presented in both English and Anishinaabemowin in facing-page translation. The inclusion of a complete Anishinaabemowin translation of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*'s script seems particularly odd, given the obvious degree to which the published version of the play seems meant for tourist consumption. For the play's average audience member, seeing written Anishinaabemowin would have had little meaning outside of lending the script an air of authenticity. The same effect, however, could have been achieved far more easily—perhaps with the inclusion of a few lines of Anishinaabemowin dialogue given for exotic flavor. Instead, the translation seems to dominate the script, taking up thirteen pages of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*'s thirty-two pages (the English version, for comparison, is only eleven). Moreover, the Anishinaabemowin pages are largely bare, featuring almost none of the decorative elements present in the rest of the booklet. Rather, the reader is confronted with large blocks of unbroken text, a mass of hyphenated polysyllables filling the page from the top margin to the bottom.

The commercial presentation of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*'s script reflects the interests of the play's ostensible librettist, L. O. Armstrong. The idea that Armstrong wrote the play is testified to by the play's title page, which reads: “*Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, Ewh Ojibway Ahnishenahba, E nuh Kuh me ge ze win (oduhmenowin) owh Waubungay or L.O. Armstrong”<sup>10</sup> (An Ojibwe Indian Performance [Play] by Waubungay or L.O. Armstrong). Armstrong's claim to sole authorship is troubled, however, by the inclusion of the Anishinaabemowin translation—the only part of the script that isn't merely a reproduction of Longfellow's poem. As an Anglophone Canadian living in Montreal, the idea that Armstrong knew enough of the (notoriously difficult) Anishinaabe language to produce his own translation seems unlikely. As one contemporary reviewer acknowledged, Armstrong's involvement in the play's script was limited to “realizing the wonderful possibilities of the poem as a drama” and “ha[ving] it translated into the Ojibway language, and dramatized.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is tempting to read evidence of Armstrong's lack of participation on title page of the script itself, which bestows on him the dubious honorific “Waubungay” (Waabange), meaning “He watches,” or more appropriately, “He is a spectator.”

Although there is no direct evidence linking George Kabaosa to the text of *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, a very strong circumstantial case can be

made that it was he, not Armstrong, who was the translator and editor responsible for dramatizing Longfellow's poem. Kabaosa had developed an interest in Longfellow's poem as a child, after hearing it recited in missionary school and recognizing the stories it contained as those of his own people. In 1901 Alice Longfellow, who had met Kabaosa and kept a correspondence with him, wrote that he was "engaged in writing out all [the Hiawatha] legends to preserve them for posterity."<sup>12</sup> In July 1903, the Fox ethnologist William Jones wrote that he stayed up until two in the morning listening to Kabaosa relate "the Indian versions of the things used in the poem."<sup>13</sup> A 1929 obituary reports that Kabaosa "was sought after by Canadian writers because of his ability as a linguist."<sup>14</sup> Reviewers who saw the earliest performances of the play also note that the Anishinaabe cast (led by Kabaosa, who played Hiawatha) had final say over its content—adamantly refusing, for example, to stage any scenes depicting the death of Minnehaha.<sup>15</sup> Whatever his role, Kabaosa certainly expressed considerable pride in *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, saying of his fellow Anishinaabeg collaborators: "We don't act; we live the legends of our people."<sup>16</sup>

Kabaosa's emotional investment in *The Song of Hiawatha* was not without reason. Longfellow's poem was based, in part, on stories originally told by his grandfather, Shingwaukonse, and his uncle, Buhkwujjini in the early nineteenth century. The fact that his family had played a role in the creation of what was, at the time, one of the most famous works of literature in North America must have been a source of considerable pride for Kabaosa. Although the poem took many liberties with its source material, and cast Indians in a grossly stereotypical light, Kabaosa seems to have recognized how *The Song of Hiawatha* was, in some small way, a testament to perseverance of his people's culture. By translating the poem into Anishinaabemowin, Kabaosa showed how Longfellow's poem was capable of speaking to that culture, making it visible in a way that hadn't been done before—creating a new form of Anishinaabe written expression that may not have been traditional, but was nonetheless true. But doing so would mean having to grapple with *The Song of Hiawatha's* dark assumptions about writing's role in Native life.

## Wild and Wayward Stories

Broad critical consensus has it that the ideological core of *The Song of Hiawatha* is the poem's fourteenth canto, titled "Picture-Writing." In it Hiawatha invents a system of pictographs meant to preserve "the great traditions" of his people for "the generations / That, as yet unborn, are

waiting / In the great, mysterious darkness / Of the speechless days that shall be!"<sup>17</sup> Coming nearly two-thirds of the way through *The Song of Hiawatha*, the picture-writing canto represents a significant shift in the poem's tone, beginning with Hiawatha's sorrowful lamentation: "Lo! how all things fade and perish!"<sup>18</sup> The mournful tenor of the canto's opening line marks, as Joshua Bellin notes, "the poem's first step toward decline,"<sup>19</sup> foreshadowing the deaths of Chibiabos, Kwasind, and Minnehaha, the betrayal of Pau-Pau-Keewis, and Hiawatha's own bittersweet journey to the West.

The picture-writing canto, unlike almost every other episode in *The Song of Hiawatha*, has no apparent antecedent in the Anishinaabe oral tradition. Instead, it is likely a product of Longfellow's own imagination—one with disconcerting implications. In Hiawatha's words, writing allows the Anishinaabe to "speak when absent,"<sup>20</sup> ensuring that knowledge of Anishinaabe traditions can survive the disappearance of actual Anishinaabe people—prefigured in his own disappearance at the end of the poem. Having established a way of preserving his teachings for "the generations . . . as yet unborn," Hiawatha disconnects Anishinaabe culture from its communal context, allowing it to be transmitted perfectly across time and space without relying on the fallible memories of Anishinaabe people, who "May pervert it, may betray it."<sup>21</sup> For Bellin, Hiawatha's invention of pictograph writing is "an act of pure translation, translating literally nothing, or translating nothing into literature" that both reflects and enacts "Longfellow's effacement of his source[s]."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, much of the narrative material *The Song of Hiawatha* was based on was taken from stories originally translated and edited by Jane Johnston (Obabaamwewe-giizhigokwe) and her siblings in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Educated in the literary arts by their Irish father, the Johnstons were avid writers, composing multiple poems, memoirs, and stories in Anishinaabemowin, French, and English. Importantly, they also recorded and translated dozens of Anishinaabe stories from around the Sault—many from their mother, Ozhaawashkodewekwe. It was this "fund of fictitious legendary matter"<sup>23</sup> that Henry Rowe Schoolcraft claimed to have discovered after being installed as the head of the Indian Agency at the Sault in 1822. Marrying Jane in 1823, Schoolcraft set out to publish the Johnstons' stories as a work of ethnography, thinking that they would reveal insights into what he called "the dark cave of the Indian mind."<sup>24</sup> The resulting work, *Algonic Researches* (1839), reprinted forty-six stories originally collected and translated by the Johnstons, lightly edited by Schoolcraft, along with a brief consideration of the "mental characteristics" of the Anishinaabeg. It was from this text that



Longfellow drew the bulk of the narrative material that comprises the plot of *The Song of Hiawatha*.

The Johnstons, moreover, were hardly Longfellow's only Anishinaabe sources. Several years before he began work on the poem, Longfellow was introduced to a young Anishinaabe lecturer and writer named George Copway (Gaagigegaabaw) who had stopped in Boston to give a lecture on the manners and customs of his people. Longfellow would maintain a correspondence with Copway that would last through the composition and publication of *Hiawatha* and use his writings on Anishinaabe history to supplement Johnston Schoolcraft's stories.<sup>25</sup> After publishing the first edition of *Hiawatha*, Longfellow was also visited in Cambridge by James Tanner, the son of John Tanner (Zhaazhaawanibiisens), the former captive whose memoirs Longfellow had plumbed for details about Anishinaabe language and hunting practices. The younger Tanner helped to correct several mistakes Longfellow had made in his use of Anishinaabemowin words, so that they could be rendered accurately in subsequent editions of *The Song of Hiawatha*.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, by the time the reading public encountered the first lines of Longfellow's poem—"Should you ask me, whence these stories? / Whence these legends and traditions?"<sup>27</sup>—the existence of these Anishinaabe interlocutors had been completely obscured. Instead, *The Song of Hiawatha* claims that these "wild and wayward" stories were discovered "In the bird's-nests of the forest, / In the lodges of the beaver, / In the hoof-prints of the bison, / In the eyry of the eagle" by Nawadaha, "the sweet singer," a pseudonym for Henry Rowe Schoolcraft.<sup>28</sup> In a short postscript to *The Song of Hiawatha*, Schoolcraft is briefly credited with "rescuing from oblivion so much of the legendary lore of the Indians,"<sup>29</sup> but there is absolutely no mention of the literary contributions of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, George Copway, or John Tanner. As Birgit Rasmussen argues, "the differences in Longfellow's intertextual relationship to his sources mirror and enable his construction of a national epic based on the simultaneous appropriation and erasure of indigenous culture."<sup>30</sup>

The effacement of Anishinaabe sources performed by *The Song of Hiawatha* speaks to an underlying monologism that structures the poem as a whole. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, monological texts work to obscure their relationship to previously written texts by "join[ing] and personif[y]ing others' words, others' voices" into anonymizing rhetorical figures such as "'the voice of life itself,' 'the voice of nature,' 'the voice of the people,' 'the voice of God.'"<sup>31</sup> Presenting itself as having a relatively unmediated relationship with what we would now call "the oral tradition," Longfellow's poem could claim to speak with the cultural

and historical authority of an “Indian consciousness” untouched by the corrupting influences of modernity. The ponderous trochaic tetrameter of *The Song of Hiawatha* further serves to give the poem a sense of monological cohesion, smoothing over its awkward welds and gaps with a steady, driving rhythm.

The inclusion of the picture-writing canto in *The Song of Hiawatha* is meant to legitimize Longfellow’s project of speaking for (and, in many ways, as) an Anishinaabeg. Hiawatha’s invention of pictographic writing posits the existence of a “pure” record of Anishinaabe culture untarnished by contact or colonialism—heavily implying that such a text is the basis for *The Song of Hiawatha*. For Alan Trachtenberg, the picture-writing canto offers “a meta-action, a reflection on the reading of the poem itself,”<sup>32</sup> explaining:

The illusion of the translation, the illusion that Longfellow’s verse is as transparent as pictures, is the poem’s ultimate act against the native and for the nation. . . . It makes Hiawatha or “the Indian” disappear in the act of seeming to give him voice; its own metrical and figurative system disarticulates aboriginal culture from its own systems of thought and speech by subsuming the aboriginal into the Anglo-Saxon nationality of the narrative verse form. The poem thus constructs a “white man’s Indian” by suggesting that we can hear the picture speech of natives only by the means of the mediating voice of the poet.<sup>33</sup>

According to Trachtenberg, *Hiawatha* leverages the authority of text to speak as the Indian, ventriloquizing an indigenous voice in order to speak back to Euro-Americans, reassuring them that their destruction of Native peoples was not just necessary, but preordained by fate itself. As Roy Harvey Pearce argues, this aspect of *The Song of Hiawatha* was critical to its success, as it offered a way to receive absolution for an act that “was still heavy on American consciences,” by making Indians part of “a dim and satisfying past about which readers could have dim and satisfying feelings.”<sup>34</sup>

### Gakina Banaadad

Despite removing from *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* a great many of the episodes depicted in Longfellow’s poem, Kabaosa chose to retain the

picture-writing canto in his translation, albeit in a very condensed form. In the script for *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho*, the entire scene is reduced to a single piece of dialogue—Hiawatha’s lament—adding another layer of significance to an already overdetermined moment.

**English Script:**

Lo! how all things fade and perish!  
From the memory of the old men  
Fade away the great traditions (16)

**Anishinaabemowin Script:**

Enuh Gah ken uh ga goo-ahnoot kah  
Kahya gah keen uh bah nah dud  
Emah ode nan dah mowine waung  
Egewh uhke-wan-ze-yang  
Kahya ah-nooj-kah ah-dis-oka-win (19)

**Modern Orthography:**

Inaa gakina gegoo anoshka  
Gaye gakina banaadad  
Imaa od-inendamowiniwang  
Ingiw akiwenziyyag  
Gaye anoshka aadizookewin

**English (Re)Translation:**

Oh! Everything fades  
And all is destroyed  
In the thoughts  
Of those old men  
And sacred storytelling is fading<sup>35</sup>

A reader familiar with ideological implications of Longfellow’s poem may find the faithfulness of this translation troubling. The speech is a tacit admission that responsibility for the inevitable decline and disappearance of tribal cultures lies at the feet of the people who abandon them to the passage of time and the frailty of memory—seeing it rendered in an indigenous language makes it all the more disturbing. Some critics may want to read this passage as evidence of Kabaosa’s assimilationist mind-set, molded by the efforts of missionaries and boarding school-teachers to weaken the strength of the Anishinaabe nation. A critic of settler-colonialism may point to this moment as evidence that Kabaosa

translated *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* under duress, constrained by imperial forces beyond his control or ken. We may want to read it as evidence of mental illness, material greed, or simply a lack of respect for tradition. We may want to minimize and disregard this moment, ignoring it as many already have—reducing the existence of an Anishinaabemowin translation of *The Song of Hiawatha* to a mere historical curiosity, an embarrassing relic of an imperfect past.

But to do so, I think, would be to make a grave mistake. If we are to dismiss Kabaosa's translation as too culturally compromised, too inauthentic, too liminal to count as a work of independent Anishinaabe expression, we deny Kabaosa the same kind of agency to interpret and translate texts that we freely accept in Longfellow. More importantly, to read Kabaosa's translation as a mere stand-in for Longfellow's poem is to invest in *The Song of Hiawatha* a kind of transhistorical immanence that we do *not* invest in the Anishinaabe stories from which it was adapted. That is to say, if we allow a Eurocentric interpretation of *The Song of Hiawatha* to be the *only* possible interpretation, we deny the idea that the Anishinaabe stories embedded within it may retain significances for an Anishinaabeg reader to which a Euro-American reader may not have access. The artificial monologism carefully constructed throughout *The Song of Hiawatha* is allowed to remain intact, its definitional authority unthreatened by the heterogeneous mass of stories, histories, and languages it seeks to obscure.

If we instead read Kabaosa's translation as a text that both departs from, and reflects on, *The Song of Hiawatha*, we may see how it destabilizes the monologism of Longfellow's poem while drawing out beneficial cultural and political significances latent within it. The most immediate difference one notices between Longfellow's poem and Kabaosa's translation is, of course, linguistic. Anishinaabemowin is a polysynthetic language that uses conjugation, affixes, and compounding to express complex ideas in a single word—usually much longer than those found in English. Breaking up complex Anishinaabe words into simpler mono- or disyllabic units,<sup>36</sup> Kabaosa's translation makes it easy for a nonspeaker of Anishinaabemowin to read each line aloud. Doing so, the reader would not only be confronted by deep unfamiliarity of Anishinaabemowin's elongated vowels and tricky consonant clusters, but also discover that the language has no underlying metrical or rhythmic resemblance to *Hiawatha's* iconic trochaic tetrameter. In Kabaosa's translation, the familiar lines of *Hiawatha* stretch and contort to accommodate unfamiliar Anishinaabemowin words, as the three lines of English become five lines of Anishinaabemowin. The fundamental

incompatibility of Anishinaabemowin with *Hiawatha*'s meter casts a layer of opacity over the original poem's claim to translational transparency, revealing the poem's most defining characteristic as an artificial construction imposed on the Anishinaabe language, rather than some sort of racial rhythm endemic to it.

Kabaosa's translation of the picture-writing canto does much more, however, than simply challenge Longfellow's understanding of Anishinaabemowin. To borrow Alan Trachtenberg's terms, Kabaosa's translation rearticulates the "aboriginal culture" presented in the picture-writing canto with "its own systems of thought and speech," revealing an alternative interpretation of the scene's relevancy for the Anishinaabeg of the time. The original salience of the picture-writing canto relies on an imagined future in which non-Natives could be the only possible readers of *Hiawatha*'s texts. While such a future may have seemed imminent to Longfellow's nineteenth-century readers, the mere existence of Kabaosa's translation offers direct evidence that it never came to be. Kabaosa's translation radically reframes the temporal assumptions of Longfellow's poem, transforming *Hiawatha* from a narrative of Indian disappearance into a story about Anishinaabeg's use of writing as a tool of adaptation and survival. The continued presence of the Anishinaabeg as both readers and writers of texts forces us to reconsider the prophetic implication of the picture-writing canto, transforming it from an augur of the Anishinaabeg's inevitable decline and disappearance to the mythic origin of written Anishinaabe literature. If, as Trachtenberg argues, the picture-writing canto offers a metacommentary on *The Song of Hiawatha*'s effacement of Anishinaabe writing practices, Kabaosa's translation of the scene provides an equally compelling metacommentary on their persistence.

Moreover, *Hiawatha*'s anxiety over the potential disappearance of Anishinaabe storytelling practices expressed in the picture-writing canto takes on a different kind of urgency in the historical context of Kabaosa's translation. While the action of Longfellow's poem is self-contained in the prepolitical time of the epic form,<sup>37</sup> the facing translations of *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* act as a constant reminder of the play's colonial context. The overlapping of English and Anishinaabemowin on the page reflects the overlapping (and conflicting) political claims of Euro-American settlers and the Anishinaabeg themselves—including a claim to language. As Margot Francis points out, "The significance of Ojibwe as the language of performance is particularly important when one realizes that the local idiom was discouraged by the Canadian state and usually forbidden in the local residential school."<sup>38</sup> The compulsory use of English was just part of a systematic assault on indigenous cultural traditions being carried

out at the time by the U.S. and Canadian governments, which also forbade certain forms of singing, dancing, and religious practice. In such a context, the desire to preserve “aadizookewin” (“sacred storytelling”) before “gakina gegoo anoshka / gaye gakina banaaad” (“everything fades / and all is destroyed”) takes on a distinctly political edge.

In Longfellow’s poem the invention of pictographic writing is meant to create the possibility of cultural continuity between the Anishinaabeg and Euro-American settlers, but in *Hiawatha, or Nanabozho* this causality is flipped on its head, as colonization becomes a motivating precondition for the Anishinaabeg’s adoption of graphematic writing. Presenting Hiawatha’s invention of pictographic writing in graphematic Anishinaabemowin, Kabaosa’s translation imagines a continuity between the two practices, offering a potential way to keep aadizookewin alive in a time of duress. At the same time, the translation calls attention to the fact that this mode of preservation depends on a set of technologies (alphabetic script, the printing press, etc.) adopted from nonindigenous sources. Unlike *The Song of Hiawatha*, however, the political significance of writing is never truly resolved in Kabaosa’s translation, but remains weighted with ambivalence—acting as both an expression of traditional Anishinaabe cultural practices *and* as evidence of their disruption by Euro-Americans.

Crucially, we must recognize that this alternative meaning only makes sense embedded *within* the context of *The Song of Hiawatha*, not despite it. Kabaosa’s translation makes no attempt to tell the true story of Nanabozho, neither does it depart from the meaning of Longfellow’s original language. Kabaosa’s translation does not append overtly critical language into Longfellow’s poem, or attempt to present a more “authentic” understanding of traditional Anishinaabe culture. Instead, the anticolonial implications of Kabaosa’s translation lie in the way it uses *writing* to reveal and activate the ambiguities already present in the pastiche-like nature of Longfellow’s poem, showing how its monological claims to define Indian identity as primitive, illiterate, and vanished are contradicted by the very conditions of its production. Kabaosa’s translation asks us to read Longfellow’s poem as a single utterance in an ongoing conversation between Anishinaabe and Euro-American *writers* that encompasses the work of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, George Copway, John Tanner, and many others—a conversation that had been already going on for centuries. By translating *The Song of Hiawatha* into Anishinaabemowin, Kabaosa made his own contribution to the conversation, one that challenged Longfellow’s vision of the future as a time without Indians while reclaiming the stories that belonged to his family and people.

Like the Anishinaabeg themselves, *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* bears the marks of Euro-American contact in its graphemetic script, its dramatic form, and the deeply compromised nature of Longfellow's original poem, but at the same time it insists that it is "iw Anishinaabe . . . inakamigiz-iwin" (5),—literally, an Anishinaabe *act*. Instead of a record of decline or assimilation, *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* should be read as an expression of agency that finds power in crossing the boundaries that separate Anishinaabe and Euro-American, authentic and appropriative, past and present. Rather than passively assert identity, *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* lays claim to nonindigenous ideas, technologies, and languages, subjecting them to a process of translation (what we might call indigenization) that fundamentally alters their meaning, and makes them into something the Anishinaabeg can use to their own ends. This expression of agency is, to my mind, what makes *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* a significant text, as it replicates, in miniature, a larger dynamic that has largely defined literary writing both by and about the Anishinaabeg.

### Translation, Transmotion, and Transnationalism

While the history of U.S.-Anishinaabe relations has been relatively free of armed violence, it is littered with literary confrontations of the kind seen between Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* and Kabaosa's *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho*. Focusing on such moments, this book presents literature as a representational battlefield on which the Anishinaabeg and Euro-Americans have met to contest the future of their respective nations. Where most (but not all) texts by Euro-Americans examined in this work use the conventions of literary writing to set imaginative limits on Anishinaabe identity, those written by Anishinaabeg (and their allies) are all engaged in the project of troubling the boundaries—appropriating and tweaking literary forms, questioning narrative convention, and refusing categorization. *Our War Paint* argues that Anishinaabe literature works to support the project of Anishinaabe sovereignty and nationhood not by asserting its cultural separatism, but by resituating monological narratives of Indianness as part of an ongoing discourse comprised of multiple—even conflicting—understandings of Anishinaabe nationhood. Reading across the contested boundaries of indigenous nation and settler state, I argue, allows us to reassess the ways literary writing gives definition to otherwise vague ideas about identity, authenticity, and temporality within a political context where such abstractions are expected to carry the force of law.

According to the political theorist Kevin Bruyneel, the history of U.S. settler-colonialism since the nineteenth century has been defined by attempts to “create and perpetuate monological identities” for Native people, which are meant to “deny the multiplicity and contingency of [their] political identity, agency, and autonomy.”<sup>39</sup> As Bruyneel argues, U.S. colonial policy during this period has sought “to narrowly bound indigenous political status in space and time” in order to “limit the ability of indigenous people to define their own identity and develop economically and politically on their own terms.”<sup>40</sup> By establishing and policing the boundaries between what is “Indian” and “non-Indian,” the United States maintains the exclusive right to define “the people, the power, the space, and the time of legitimate sovereignty.”<sup>41</sup> According to Bruyneel, the most important of these boundaries are temporal ones, which create a division between “an ‘advancing people’ and a ‘static’ people, placing the latter out of time . . . where they are unable to be modern, autonomous agents.”<sup>42</sup>

In simpler terms, U.S. colonial policy depends on the ability to define modernity as coterminous with Euro-American culture, and that for indigenous peoples to participate in either is for them to implicitly accede to Euro-American political dominance. Indigenous communities, therefore, can only experience social, political, or cultural change at the cost of their political rights as indigenous peoples. The result is a political situation in which non-Natives retain complete authority to define the limits of Native political subjectivity according to their own needs and desires. Although the temporal boundaries that separate Indians from modernity are ultimately codified through legislation, according to Bruyneel, they originate in “economic, cultural, and political narratives that place limitations on the capacity of certain peoples to express meaningful agency and autonomy, especially in the modern context.”<sup>43</sup>

Given the significance of narrative in this process, it should come as no surprise that literature has been a particularly privileged site for examining settler-colonial ideology. Starting with the inestimable work of Roy Harvey Pearce in the 1950s, there has been a long tradition of examining the role of literature in defining the boundaries separating the “savage” Indian from the “civilized” American. In works such as James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Disney’s *Pocahontas*, and many, many others, Euro-Americans have created an image of the Indian that is, in Pearce’s words, “bound inextricably in a primitive past, a primitive society, and a primitive environment.”<sup>44</sup> More recent works such as Joshua Bellin’s *Demon of the Continent* (2001), James Cox’s *Muting White Noise* (2006), and Mark Rifkin’s *Settler Common Sense*



(2014) have done much to investigate and elaborate Pearce's idea of the "savage" as an ideological construction, showing how literary representations of Indianness have served to legitimize artificial boundaries set on indigenous people by the American state. By examining such narratives, we can gain incredible insight into what Raymond Williams describes as the "structures of feeling"<sup>45</sup> that underlie and give rise to specific colonial policies.

Of equal importance has been the scholarly work that shows, in Craig Womack's words, how "Indian people exercis[ing] the right to present images of themselves and to discuss those images" constitutes a "part of sovereignty."<sup>46</sup> Works such as Louis Owen's *Other Destinies* (1992), Robert Warrior's *Tribal Secrets* (1995), Jace Weaver's *That the People Might Live* (1997), Daniel Heath Justice's *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (2006), Womack, Weaver, and Warrior's *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006), among many others, have shown how Native literature works to transgress the temporal boundaries meant to contain it by offering an alternative narrative of continuity and survival in the face of colonization. According to Jace Weaver, critical attention should be focused on Native literature that presents itself as "separate and distinct from other national literatures," and "sees itself as attempting to serve the interests of indigenes and their communities, in particular the support of Native nations and their own separate sovereignties."<sup>47</sup>

These critical approaches, while important and sound, also have an inadvertent tendency to reproduce existing assumptions that limit our understanding of the texts with which they engage. Nationalist criticism, as Scott Richard Lyons has ably argued, has a tendency to overlook the historical development, within indigenous communities, of the idea of nationhood as a specific kind of social organization with broad economic and ideological implications for tribal peoples.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, work that examines the settler-colonial assumptions of Euro-American literature has a tendency to produce symptomatic readings that serve to reaffirm Euro-American literature's complicity in structures of power, but do little to show how that power expresses itself differently in relation to particular tribal nations.

More importantly, in treating the literary output of indigenous peoples and Euro-Americans separately, these two lines of criticism run the risk of reifying many of the same temporal and cultural boundaries Bruyneel identifies as intrinsic to U.S. colonial power. By emphasizing the ways in which Native literature displays its "cultural separatism" or "intellectual sovereignty," nationalist criticism inadvertently participates in the highly suspect politics of recognition, in which indigenous political rights

are tied to the continuity of specific historical practices. Settler-colonialist criticism, for its part, has a tendency to reify U.S. colonial authority even as it critiques—setting severe limits on Native peoples' ability to act as meaningful agents in the face of the supposedly totalizing force of U.S. imperialism. Both approaches, I would argue, have a tendency to present the idea of the nation—both settler or indigenous—as a transhistorically stable concept, far more immutable (in terms of politics) and far more impermeable (in terms of cultural influence) than the observation of history would seem to suggest. Both approaches, importantly, also have a tendency to privilege texts that reaffirm the ideological and political assumptions of their critical approach and tend to overlook those, like *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho*, that trouble the boundaries between indigenous and settler in potentially productive ways.

It is the ability to trouble such boundaries, according to Kevin Bruyneel, that forms that basis of indigenous sovereignty. As he argues, “U.S.-indigenous politics, at its core, is a battle between an American effort to solidify inherently contingent boundaries and an indigenous effort to work on and across these boundaries, drawing on and exposing their contingency to gain the fullest possible expression of political identity, agency, and autonomy.”<sup>49</sup> Where the United States asserts its power by setting limits and defining terms, “the expression of political power by indigenous tribes and citizens is more often than not a supplementary strategy,”<sup>50</sup> in which indigenous peoples work to destabilize the United States’ “monological narratives” of Indianness. Rejecting the rhetoric of “assimilation or secession, inside or outside, modern and traditional”<sup>51</sup> as false binaries explicitly meant to put limits on their agency, indigenous peoples have consistently articulated their own understanding of sovereignty “that resides neither simply inside nor outside the American political system but exists on their very boundaries, exposing both the practices and the contingencies of American colonial rule.”<sup>52</sup> By “demanding rights and resources from the liberal democratic settler-state” while simultaneously questioning “the imposition of colonial rule on their lives,” Bruyneel argues that indigenous peoples “work across American spatial and temporal boundaries” in a way that draws attention to their fundamental instability—calling into question the legitimacy of the United States’ settler-colonial authority.<sup>53</sup>

In simplest terms, *Our War Paint* argues that U.S. colonial rule over the Anishinaabeg has been upheld through the perpetuation of monological narratives of Indianness, articulated and disseminated through literary writing. Such narratives serve to lend an appearance of solidity to what are, in reality, arbitrary distinctions between past and present,

genuine and inauthentic, presence and absence. Anishinaabe writers, in turn, have resisted U.S. colonial rule not by offering their own monological counternarratives, but by translating, critiquing, and co-opting dominant narratives of Indianness, imbuing them with divergent and supplementary meanings that challenge the definitional authority of the colonial narrative altogether. The resulting works of poetry, prose, and drama work to tease out the ambivalences and ambiguities of the colonial situation, redefining important terms in ways that best suit the expedient political demands of Anishinaabe communities, and exposing the fundamental instability of U.S. colonial authority. In response, Euro-American writers articulate new monological narratives that, in turn, co-opt elements of the Anishinaabe response, recasting their pragmatic and expedient formulations of Anishinaabe identity as the new definition of Indianness to which Anishinaabe writers must respond. The result is a network of texts linked to one another by allusion, reference, and theme—with the addition of each new text complicating and inflecting how we understand every other text.

Critical to this argument is Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation of the "dialogic" as a process by which literary texts produce, and are produced by, social processes. According to Bakhtin, the discursive nature of language means that literary works should not be understood as autonomous expressions with stable meanings, but as assemblages of previously articulated meanings that take on recognizable shapes (an idea we implicitly recognize in discussions of genre and literary influence). As new texts are produced and old texts are forgotten, the meaning of a particular literary expression can change, as it is read in the context of a new set of significations. As Bakhtin argues,

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue.<sup>54</sup>

Thinking about Anishinaabe and Euro-American writers as engaged in a dialogical process of exchange and negotiation allows us to think about literature's relationship to indigenous/settler politics differently. Instead of reading a text like *Hiawatha* solely through the colonialist politics and patronizing cultural assumptions of its Euro-American author, we

can see how it can become indigenized through an act of Anishinaabe interpretive agency.

Of course, such an approach is not without drawbacks—especially for those who wish to understand indigenous literature as principally engaged in the work of cultural expression. My approach reads Anishinaabe literary production in fairly instrumental terms as an act of resistance to U.S. colonialism, reflective of the pressing need to respond to its constant existential threat. This political context determines the way Anishinaabe authors present cultural information, sometimes causing them to distort and misrepresent cultural tradition for political purposes. That is to say, I do not see Anishinaabe literature as primarily a project of expressing cultural identity, but rather the attempt to *use* culture in expedient ways.<sup>55</sup> For Anishinaabe writers, giving readers an authentic account of their culture is often less important than getting them to support efforts to dismantle the colonial policies and economic structures that put Anishinaabe culture in jeopardy. As such, works of Native literature must continually define themselves relationally to dominant narratives of Indianness if they are to be made at all intelligible to a non-Native readership—those who, for better or worse, hold a disproportionate amount of power over their lives.<sup>56</sup>

This inherent dialogism should not be seen as a relinquishing of cultural or political authority to non-Natives, but the assertion of it. By speaking directly to non-Indians, books by Native writers are doing the important work of disrupting the colonial narratives of Indianness for a population most likely to embrace such narratives as truth. What was once a colonial monologue becomes a transnational dialogue in which once stable understandings of identity, temporality, and governance become open to reinterpretation and negotiation, allowing for Natives to shift, if only in small ways, dominant structures of feeling regarding Indianness. I should say here that this is decidedly not an argument about canon-formation—I am neither trying to suggest that we read a text like *The Song of Hiawatha* “as” Anishinaabe literature, nor the *Hiawatha*, or *Nanabozho* “as” American literature. I *am* saying that however we choose to classify these works, they are related to one another in ways that are worth thinking about. Regardless of their origin, every text discussed in this book articulates an understanding of the relationship of the Anishinaabeg and the United States—an understanding subject to reinterpretation and renegotiation as these texts circulate between Anishinaabe and U.S. national contexts.

While already seeming like a dated concept to most scholars of American Studies, transnationalism is an approach that is still treated