

Carleton College

Carleton Digital Commons

Faculty Work

Religion

2006

The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in Song of Hiawatha Pageants, 1901-1965

Michael D. McNally
Carleton College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.carleton.edu/relg_faculty



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McNally, Michael D.. "The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in Song of Hiawatha Pageants, 1901-1965." *American Quarterly* 58, 1 (2006): 105-136. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2006.0031>. Accessed via Faculty Work. Religion. *Carleton Digital Commons*. https://digitalcommons.carleton.edu/relg_faculty/3
The definitive version is available at <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2006.0031>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Carleton Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Work by an authorized administrator of Carleton Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons.group@carleton.edu.



Project
MUSE[®]

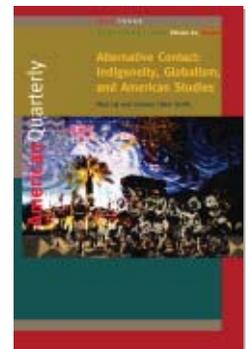
Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in Song of Hiawatha Pageants, 1901-1965

McNally, Michael David.

American Quarterly, Volume 58, Number 1, March 2006, pp. 105-136 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: [10.1353/aq.2006.0031](https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2006.0031)



For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/aq/summary/v058/58.1mcnally.html>

The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in *Song of Hiawatha* Pageants, 1901–1965

Michael D. McNally

Each summer from 1901 to 1918, and intermittently thereafter through the 1960s, summer tourists eagerly took their seats on harbor shores of Lake Huron at Desbarats, Ontario, or near the shores of Lake Michigan's Little Traverse Bay, while a group of Ojibwe and Odawa people (*Anishinaabe* [pl. *Anishinaabeg*], as they refer to themselves collectively) changed out of flannel shirts and calico house dresses into buckskin loincloths and feather headdresses to perform an operatic adaptation of *The Song of Hiawatha*.¹ First published in 1855, Longfellow's poem was billed as "a prediction in verse of the conquest of America by the white race," and it ended with the noble hero Hiawatha singing a poignant "Death Song" for the Indian past that bid welcome to European missionaries. In his parting words, Longfellow's hero tells his people: "Listen to their words of wisdom/Listen to the truth they tell you/For the Master of Life has sent them/From the land of light and morning."

Longfellow's poem has long been recognized as among the more influential representations of "the vanishing Indian" and "noble savage" in American culture, and scholars have long shown how much such representations of Indianness have mattered in American culture.² More recently, Philip Deloria has identified in the long cultural history of "playing Indian" a decidedly American way of working out (or not) the contradictions of American identity.³ Less clear are the cultural politics involved when Native people have played Indian. Precisely because Native language *Song of Hiawatha* pageants placed in high relief the differing expectations about the relationship between Longfellow's prominent representations and "real Indians," performances of the poem offer an excellent vantage on this complex terrain.⁴

The railroads that financed the pageant dramatizing Longfellow's poem spoke of it as nothing less than the "Indian Passion Play." That it should be likened to the well-known modern German dramas of Jesus' crucifixion at Oberammergau and elsewhere was no doubt a rhetoric of promotion to attract tourists, generate train fares, and sell lands claimed by the railroads only

seven decades after they had been ceded to the United States in the first place by the Odawa and Ojibwe.⁵ But the rhetoric was more than promotion; it reflected an effort to spiritualize the representation of the real Indian in marked contrast to the materiality of the Native people still in the region, and the reiteration of staged Hiawatha pageants after the close of the Indian wars carried a peculiar force, what Alan Trachtenberg calls a “perennial ritual of violence sublimated as art.”⁶ “Longfellow’s fairy tale became flesh,” Trachtenberg writes of the pageants, “as a lost ritual recovered, and the Indian performers had a chance to perform their loss in someone else’s version for the pleasure of white audiences and perhaps their own fun: Sacrifice was sublimated as entertainment.”⁷ Thus ritualized and spiritualized, Hiawatha pageants can be distinguished from the Wild West shows proliferating in the same era.⁸ As one pageant review put it, “Hiawatha retains its popularity because no poet has shown a better insight into the spiritual nature and life of the Indian than Longfellow.”⁹ Performances were praised for having wrested the pure beauty from the raw material of Anishinaabe story, song, and dance. Yet in making the “pure” Indian of yore the real one, pageants consigned to degradation the contemporary Native people whose very continued survival called the American project into question. What might seem at first glance then to have been a mere amusement, and a fairly schmaltzy one at that, was caught up in deeper American anxieties and desires concerning Indianness.¹⁰ Its popularity carried the pageant to Madison Square Garden, Philadelphia, Boston, Toronto, and beyond to London and Amsterdam, and onto the silver screen in a version captured on silent film.¹¹

On another more curious trajectory, years after the railroads quit promoting them, performances by Native actors enthused audiences of Natives and non-Natives alike in Indian boarding schools and in productions sponsored by reservation communities.¹² If it seems jarring that Native people would gravitate toward performances of a script that rendered them absent, it suggests the intriguing possibility that some considered the pageants a field wherein they could assert their presence in consequential, if subtle, ways. Interpreters of culture and society in the tradition of Gramsci have noted that music, dance, and drama are more than the mere trappings of deeper tectonics of economic and political power. Because it is often through cultural forms that we come to articulate what is to be taken as real, meaningful, and of value, the spaces in which these forms are staged are often charged with presumptions to power by the strong and nimble gestures of resistance by the weak.¹³ Theorists of body knowledge and memory alert us further to how performances of such cultural forms can elicit repertoires of knowledge and embody communal

memory in their very performance. Writing of ritual, Paul Connerton argues that societies “entrust to bodily automatisms the values and categories which they are most anxious to conserve. They will know how well the past can be kept in mind by a habitual memory sedimented in the body.”¹⁴

Informed here by both interpretative traditions, I will argue that even as these Native actors performed a romanticized Indianness for pay in lean times, they were not determined by that script or rendered wholly absent by its insistence that the real Indian had vanished with the arrival of American civilization. If they were playing Indian, they were Anishinaabeg playing Indian, and doing so for Anishinaabe reasons. In significant, if subtle, assertions of indigenous language, song, drum, and humor, Native people claimed the stage at least in part as a space of their own shaping, a place of conspicuous Native presence rather than absence. If they were ultimately unsuccessful in determining the subsequent cultural history of “Indianness,” they were engaged in an effort to gain some measure of control of the means of its cultural production at a watershed moment in their history.¹⁵ Formal governmental policies of assimilation from the 1880s to the 1930s effectively outlawed most public displays of indigenous ceremonies, drumming, and dancing.¹⁶ Native children were torn from family and familiar landscapes and sent off to English-only boarding schools, where authorities tried to break them of indigenous ways of valuing kin and land and to shame them for speaking their own languages. And although the stated aim of assimilation policy was the integration of Native people as citizens into American legal protection and economic opportunity, it occasioned along the way the fleecing of two-thirds of their lands set aside by treaties and the gutting of political sovereignty. In 1903, as a costumed Hiawatha bade his daily farewell from a magic canoe, the Supreme Court in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* affirmed that the government’s “plenary power” over Native people was one that could trump treaties.¹⁷

Conventional wisdom would view what happened on Hiawatha stages as evidence of the discontinuity between intact “precontact” indigenous cultures and the resurgence of those cultures in the 1970s. I want to call attention to some crucial threads of continuity in that cultural history, by showing how indigenous language, music, dance, and humor in the pageants became stealthy media for Native agency between the lines of the Longfellow script, and more enduringly, how authorized stage performances of those repertoires enabled a generation of Anishinaabe people to sustain the assault of assimilation and carry forward vital body knowledge with which a subsequent generation could fashion a renaissance of tradition.¹⁸ On warm July evenings, lakeside stages may have seemed serene places charmed with costumes and songs of a noble

Indian past, but they were in truth fields claimed by non-Native audiences and Native performers alike in a tussle for the definition of the real.

For their part, tourists fled bureaucratized lives in steamy hot cities for the northern edges of civilization, where they hoped to brush up against something refreshing and authentic. To these paying customers, the stage represented a boundary over which they gazed at a nowhere and nowhen of the primitive, a vacation from the ordinary, a spectacle that by definition had to be breathtakingly other, really real. What most captured their fancy, then, was the verisimilitude of the productions. Newspaper accounts hastened to note that “real Indians” were performing in their own language the spiritual truths of Longfellow’s *Song* in the very waters of “Hiawatha’s Playground.” Critics reached different conclusions about the artistic quality of the outcome, but they consistently remarked on the play’s lack of artifice. Writing of the Desbarats pageant, one critic found that “a conscientious fidelity to the Indian’s own conception of the various parts distinguishes the acting, which is obviously untutored and genuine.”¹⁹ A review of a 1913 silent film version of the pageant found it had captured Longfellow’s “insight into the spiritual nature and life of the Indian,” because “the red men and women act in a play so characteristic of them and so dear and sacred to their hearts.”²⁰ Another reviewer found the “main charm” to be “that the Indian players are true to themselves; they live—they do not act their characters, and they bring home forcibly the beauty and pathos of the Red Man’s Passion Play.”²¹

If it seems odd to find critics enthusiastic about what they considered bad acting, such enthusiasm makes more sense in light of a kind of circular logic whereby Anishinaabe men and women on stage validated the truth of the “real Indian” as imagined by Longfellow and where the “real Indians” of Anglo-American imagination validated, at least on stage, the presence of Anishinaabe men and women in the audience’s midst. But in effect the staged version of the “real Indian” rendered invisible the real Anishinaabe people who offstage were trying to raise families, get school clothes for their children, and pass on traditions. For once the show was over and the buckskin put away, there were again no more “real Indians.”

Tourists thought they were privy to a diorama of real Indians doing their thing, but Native actors took the stage as artists concerned about the aesthetics of their performance. Proud of their tradition and eager to publicly claim their continuity with it, these were also future-oriented people, wizened survivors of reservation and boarding school life. Because they knew that sacred songs and sacred steps continued to happen well out of view, what happened onstage might have been considered less of a concession than it might seem at

first glance to a modern-day observer.²² To glimpse the subtle but highly ramified dynamics in action, I will examine the scenes that audiences consistently remembered: the wooing/wedding of Minnehaha, and Hiawatha's departure upon the arrival of the missionaries. But first, we may more fully appreciate what was at stake for Indians on stage by examining the making of Longfellow's original poem, one with Anishinaabe origins.

The Text: Schoolcraft and Longfellow

When Longfellow first published the *Song of Hiawatha* in 1855, he cleared arguably the most familiar path for Americans to follow their fancy into Indianness. Recited by generations of American schoolchildren, especially on Columbus Day, the poem's first lines became so familiar that even my spell-checker allows me to type "wigwam" and "Nokomis" without incident. The story of the poem actually began in the 1820s at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, where Henry Rowe Schoolcraft served as Indian agent. After marrying into a prominent Ojibwe family, Schoolcraft was deeply interested in documenting Anishinaabe stories, language, and culture.²³ Based on a steady stream of Native guests calling upon his mother-in-law as they passed through this crossroads of the fur trade, Schoolcraft wrote a prolific chain of literary products that helped fashion a disciplined attention to Native cultures. "My method," Schoolcraft wrote, "is to interrogate all persons visiting this office, white and red, who promise to be useful subjects of information during the day, and to test my inquiries in the evenings by reference to [my wife's family], who being educated, and speaking at once both the English and Odjibwa correctly, offer a higher and more reliable standard than usual."²⁴ It would ultimately contribute to the spectacular nature of the Ontario Hiawatha pageants that the poem was performed just downriver from the Sault, where Schoolcraft garnered the material in the first place. It was even reported that a number of players in the 1901 pageant were grandchildren of his informants.

Schoolcraft published the stories in 1839 as *Algic Researches*, chief among them the story cycle of the Anishinaabe trickster and culture hero, Nanabozho. Schoolcraft sought in the two-volume work to save from oblivion the literary traditions of Indians he thought were vanishing. Schoolcraft wanted it also to "infuse new energy into the cause of benevolence, and awaken fresh ardour in the heart of piety" toward Indians.²⁵ But the efforts of Schoolcraft the philologist and son-in-law to preserve Ojibwe language and traditions were curiously conjoined with his efforts as Indian agent to promote English language education, market agriculture, and assimilation.

In Odawa and Ojibwe circles, Schoolcraft is notorious for having orchestrated the dispossession of their Michigan lands. He helped negotiate the Treaty of Washington in 1836, which ceded most of the northern half of lower Michigan in exchange for fourteen reservations for permanent homes, annuity payments, education, farming equipment, and relief of debt to traders. But in ratifying the treaty, the Senate unilaterally limited the protection of the reservations to five years. Convinced that removal of Indians from Michigan would be best for Native people and settlers alike, Schoolcraft tried to persuade Anishinaabe leaders that they had no viable alternative to signing the revised treaty.²⁶ If Schoolcraft's role in the dispossession frames a proper understanding of his literary output, his documentation of Ojibwe traditions remains prodigious. He wrote voluminously, but in serial fashion, a style not ill-fitting the trickster cycle in the oral tradition. A biographer referred to Schoolcraft's output as a "mass of unsorted, unsmelted ore of ethnology, language, and grammar."²⁷

The smelting of that ore would be up to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, an aspiring poet who had become enamored of the "vast value in both poetic and dramatic sense," "delicacy," and "genuine quaintness" of the Indian tales. Longfellow said he "pored over" Schoolcraft's corpus for almost three years before resolving to "appropriate something of them to my own use."²⁸ While he opened his Cambridge, Massachusetts, home to George Copway and perhaps other Ojibwes on the lecture circuit, Longfellow reportedly never set foot himself in Anishinaabe country. From June of 1854 to March of the following year, he undertook to set Schoolcraft's serial accounts of the Nanabozho cycle (along with Haudenosaunee/Iroquois material from Schoolcraft's other writings) into a unified narrative.

At the time of his poem's submission, Longfellow fittingly titled it *Manabozho*. But his publishers retitled it *The Song of Hiawatha*, after the Iroquois prophet with "better credentials."²⁹ If the title change seemed nominal enough on the surface, it signaled far deeper transformations, for Longfellow's poem had denatured the Anishinaabe trickster.³⁰ Like other personifications of the sacred powers that give, sustain, and take life, Nanabozho is a fickle figure, holding both good and bad, sacred and profane, mischief and honor, in tension. By contrast, the poet's Hiawatha was decidedly a tragic hero in the Western mode. Ojibwe novelist and critic Gerald Vizenor has characterized Anishinaabe culture in terms of its comic vision of life, embodied in the beloved trickster. Unlike "an isolated and sentimental tragic hero in conflict with nature," Vizenor writes, the trickster "survives as a part of the natural world; he represents a spiritual balance in a comic drama rather than the

romantic elimination of human contradictions and evil.”³¹ The Ojibwe trickster brings culture to the people that they might live well, but he is no Prometheus at odds with nature or necessity. Indeed in many stories, he plays the ultimate buffoon, a captive to the natural and illogical desires that drive the circle of life.

The significance of Longfellow’s artifice in this regard was not lost on pageant audiences. One critic praised the poet for having “spiritualized the abounding materialism” of Indians:

With the instinct of an artist he ignores the flimsy, silly, and in some cases disgusting ceremonies and indecent orgies of the primitive tribes. . . . The wigwams of Longfellow’s poem may have ghosts and famine and fevers, but they do not suffocate with their smoke, and dirt and fleas are absent. The genius of the poet has given us the pure gold of Indian life with all the dross and impurities eliminated.³²

To render his epic a tragedy, Longfellow made two notable additions to the Nanabozho stories as Schoolcraft recorded them. Tellingly, these two scenes became the more celebrated ones in the pageants, and thus draw our attention as foci of the struggle to define the real. First, the poet added a romance between the culture hero and Minnehaha, a maiden of the onetime “enemies” of the Ojibwe, the Dakota Sioux. This includes a prominent wedding scene, the merriment of which heightens the ultimately tragic nature of the affair, for Minnehaha dies in a winter’s famine, the last of a series of deaths that haunt the hero. In the next and final scene, Longfellow introduced a second major episode found neither in Schoolcraft’s corpus nor in the Anishinaabe trickster cycle: the symbolic death of the culture hero, a departure of a despondent Hiawatha that coincides with the arrival of the Jesuits. Hiawatha foresees their coming, but counsels his people that the “Black Robes,” their religion, and their future countrymen, are ultimately part of the Great Spirit’s benevolent scheme: “Let us welcome, then, the strangers,/Hail them as our friends and brothers.”

It is hard to overstate the significance of Longfellow’s license here. The concluding absence of Hiawatha contrasts markedly with the recurring presence of Nanabozho, immortal occupier of story time who keeps popping into Anishinaabe life as an ever-relevant source of power, courage, compassion, and wit. What is more, this absence of Hiawatha, and thus the end of the days of yore, is anchored in the historical moment of the coming of Jesuit missionaries, the cycle of stories disfigured into a linear epic. When the show is over, Hiawatha’s absence becomes the Anishinaabeg’s absence, the effectual sacrifice of the real Indian.

The Script: L. O. Armstrong and Frederick Burton

If Longfellow offered the idea of Hiawatha's sacrifice to mid-nineteenth-century Americans, a "Hiawatha Revival" captured American imaginations in the decades around 1900 with a more prolific, graphic, and ritualized iteration of that sacrifice in pageants and films.³³ By 1900, the poem had been translated for immigrants into twenty different European languages, among them French, Russian, Polish, German, and Yiddish.³⁴ Perhaps its most freighted translation, however, was the one made back into the Ojibwe language at the turn of the twentieth century.

The idea man behind the Hiawatha production, also its librettist, was an amateur ethnologist and land agent for the Canadian Pacific railroad. But Louis Olivier Armstrong maintained that the pageant began not with him, but with George Kabaosa, an Anishinaabe man from the Garden River Reserve who had heard Armstrong recite portions of the poem around a campfire in 1893, and reportedly recognized the trickster cycle in the story line.³⁵ He joined Armstrong the next year on a trip to Boston to invite Longfellow's daughters and their families to visit the region. When the Longfellows came in the summer of 1900, they camped together with Ojibwes on an island off of Kensington Point near Desbarats, Ontario. To entertain the company, Armstrong came up with the idea of "an impromptu presentation of a play based on the poem," which he prepared with Garden River Anishinaabeg as actors. By the following summer, Armstrong had regularized the performance as part of his promotion of the region.³⁶

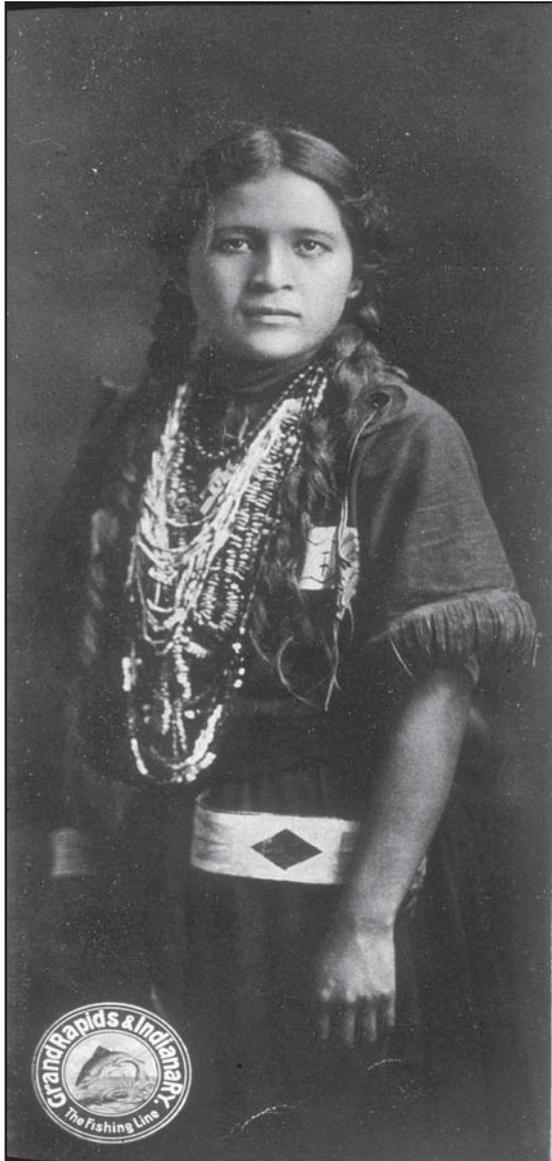
His 1901 libretto, written in English and Ojibwe, consisted of thirteen scenes "taking in the whole scope of the poem," but Armstrong subsequently pared down the performances to seven, including, of course, the wooing and wedding of Minnehaha and Hiawatha's departure.³⁷ Reviewers' accounts suggest that Armstrong's libretto did less to direct disciplined performances than to provide a key to enigmatic Ojibwe language speeches and actions onstage, for the production took no pains to concentrate the audience's attention on a clearly developing plot, character development, or meaningful dialogue between characters. More spectacle than narrative, the pageants presented audiences with a series of tableaux that depicted key scenes but that assumed familiarity with Longfellow's poem in order to fill in the development.³⁸ If disciplined character acting and the specifics of Ojibwe dialogue were of little account, the tableaux provided the occasions for ample servings of drumming, singing, and dancing introduced by Garden River performers to the applause of audiences and, it follows, to Armstrong's hearty approval. In 1905, at the

behest of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railway, Armstrong exported his scheme to Petoskey on Michigan's Little Traverse Bay.

Performances under Armstrong's direction were regarded as overly rustic, but they soon received further refinement under the baton of Frederick Russell Burton, an ambitious composer from Yonkers whose interest in the "art value of Indian songs" and his own desire to write a counterpart to Dvorák's "New World Symphony" based on Indian themes had brought him to Anishinaabe country.³⁹ Commissioned by the American Museum of Natural History and Chicago's Field Museum to gather field recordings near the Sault as early as the summer of 1902, Burton became closely associated with the actors of the pageant at Desbarats and eventually undertook to orchestrate the music for the pageant when it went on tour in 1903. His compositions and descriptions of the performances and its actors were published that same year under the title *American Primitive Music: With Special Attention to the Music of the Ojibways*.

Burton stands out among contemporary dilettantes of Native music by virtue of his willingness to consider hybrid music that reflected contact with Europeans, such as indigenized hymns, as genuinely "Indian" music. Indeed, he valued changes in aboriginal music as evidence that "the Indian will tend to refine his utterance and do away with whatever is grotesque, inartistic, and useless."⁴⁰ He considered Ojibwe songs to be "useful to civilization," as Longfellow had with Ojibwe narratives, and dedicated himself to the task of recording and transcribing the music to place his own compositions on an indigenous footing. Thus it was Burton the artist rather than Burton the collector or ethnologist who most appreciated the potential of the Hiawatha pageant and its Native actors. It was also Burton the artist who considered his harmonizations of several of the key songs in the pageant to improve upon the aboriginal genius of the songs, since no traditional Ojibwe music involved harmony. He scored an overture, finale, several interludes, a funeral march, and musical accompaniment to the production.⁴¹ On its tour in 1904, he took up the baton of the "Hiawatha Orchestra" for performances at Madison Square Garden and beyond.

With the help of the Anglican missionary at Garden River, Burton tried to set English translations of the song texts to the tunes. But these translations took considerable advantage of the fact that Ojibwe songs involve the repetition of spare phrases, relying less on narrative than on understatement and haiku-like allusion. For one example of an outrageous liberty, compare the Ojibwe text of the song chosen for the wooing scene:



THE
INDIAN PLAY
"HIAWATHA"



IN THE
LAND OF THE
OJIBWAYS

WAYA-GA-MUG

Grand Rapids & Indiana
The Fishing Line

*Chekabbay tebik ondandayan,
Chekabbay tebik ondandayan,
Ahgahmah-sibi ondandayan*

Throughout the night I keep awake,
Throughout the night I keep awake,
Upon a river, I keep awake.

with Burton's florid translation in his harmonized version.

In the still night, the long hours through,
I guide my bark canoe,
My bark canoe, my love, to you.
While the stars shine and falls the dew
I seek my love in bark canoe,
In bark canoe I seek for you.
It is I, love, your lover true,
Who glides the stream in bark canoe;
It glides to you, my love, to you.⁴²

Burton's notation, regularization, and harmonization of the music seemed to him his more significant contribution to the play. Publicly regarding the "Ojibway tribe as the composer," he apparently arranged that all royalties from

Figure 1.
"Minnehaha," cover of C.L. Lockwood's *Libretto for the Petoskey*, Michigan production, "Hiawatha in the Land of the Ojibways" (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grand Rapids and Indiana Railway, 1912).

the published music "be divided among the "Hiawatha Band," as the troupe was called.⁴³ Burton said he was adopted by the Garden River community and given the name *Negaunneekahbob*,

"man in front," which he earnestly explained was because "the first time this group of Indians saw me I was conducting an orchestra."⁴⁴ Feeling thus ennobled, Burton apparently missed the Indian humor in the name.

The Performance: Pageants at Desbarats and Petoskey and Beyond

Such aspirations to "culture" distinguished *Song of Hiawatha* pageants from the better known Wild West shows that toured the country and Europe in the early twentieth century, most notably under the management of "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Cody brought large entourages of "show Indians" to perform sham battles on horseback. Indeed the whole show Indian business drew the ire of missionaries and Indian Office bureaucrats who thought it an obstacle to their aims of assimilation that Native people should get paid to leave reservations in

order to give war cries and ambush mock wagon trains. But it brought cash income into Indian communities and enabled some Native people to see more of the world than average Americans could ever hope to see.⁴⁵

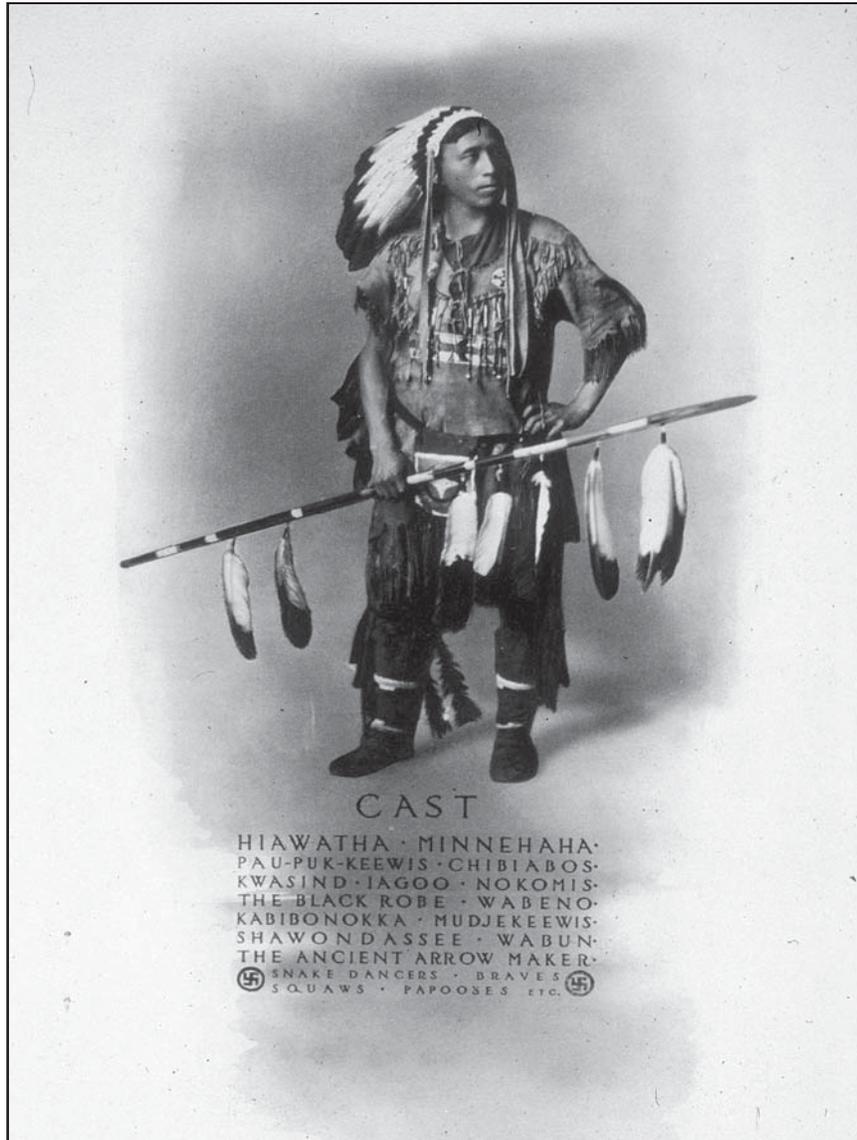
By contrast, *Song of Hiawatha* pageants drew few such criticisms when they went on tour, because the Indians they staged were considered “ennobled” by the poet, and the music they performed on the tours elevated to “art” by virtue of Burton’s arrangements and under his baton. These Indians were diplomats, not fighters; lovesick, not bloodthirsty. If the wild Indian stirred just below the surface of the pageants in compelling ways—in the figure of the mischief maker Pau-Puk-Keewis, for example, or in the loud drumming and dancing of the wedding scene—pageants depicted the triumph of the wholesome over the wild, culture over nature.

At Desbarats, the stage itself was set on an island in the calm channels between lakes Superior and Huron. Performances began daily at 2:15, with audiences taking excursion trains from Sault Ste. Marie or staying overnight at either the Hiawatha Camp or Nokomis Lodge hotels on Kensington Point. Tourists did not just observe Indianness from the grandstand; they were invited to play Indian themselves by participating in the great feast of “bear meat and venison,” fishing with “Indian guides,” and engaging in canoe races and portage contests.

During an intermission, as Hiawatha was paddling west to woo Minnehaha, “an exhibition was given of the various arts practiced by the ancient Ojibway and which have in a great measure been restored chiefly owing to the impulse given by the reproduction of the drama.”⁴⁶

That pageants were performed in the Ojibwe tongue also mattered to audiences as linguistic seals of approval that Longfellow’s fancies were in fact depictions of real Indians. A Toronto critic acknowledged such audience desires even as he remained incredulous of the text’s authenticity. “It is too bad,” he wrote, “that the Misses Longfellow in common with most other avowedly cautious people, should have been allowed to fall into the belief that a choice variety of whoops, accompanied by fluent but unknown linguistic sounds, represented a translation into Ojibway of the poet’s verse,” especially since “those in charge of the production, being ignorant of Ojibway, are not in a position to vouch that the meager dialog in any degree expresses the spirit of Longfellow.” The critic hastened to add that, in that particular 1904 performance (an exception to the rule), “the two chief characters are Mohawks and speak in that tongue lines which for anything known to the contrary may be a repetition of the multiplication table.”⁴⁷ No matter, evidently, for the bulk of

Figure 2. “Hiawatha,” frontispiece of C.L. Lockwood, “Hiawatha in the Land of the Ojibways.”



CAST

HIAWATHA · MINNEHAHA ·
PAU-PUK-KEEWIS · CHIBIABOS ·
KVASIND · IAGOO · NOKOMIS ·
THE BLACK ROBE · WABENO ·
KABIBONOKKA · MUDJEKEEWIS ·
SHAWONDASSEE · WABUN ·
THE ANCIENT ARROW MAKER ·
Ⓜ SNAKE DANCERS · BRAVES Ⓜ
SQUAWS · PAPOOSES ETC. Ⓜ

enthusiasts in the audience, for whom Ojibwe dialogue was merely an empty indicator of authenticity.

The cast took the pageant to the Sportsmen's Show in Boston in the winter of 1902, the next year to Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. It played in 1904 at Earls Court, London, for nearly six months, then two weeks at Portsmouth, and on in 1905 to Antwerp and Amsterdam, where the "skill of the Indians in handling their birchbark canoes on the city's canals greatly interested the citizens."⁴⁸ At the Michigan State Fair in 1925, a production appeared in connection with the African American composer Samuel Taylor Coleridge's opera, *The Song of Hiawatha*. Even on location in northern Ontario, the pageant came to exert a broader cultural influence. Among its repeat customers was Ernest Thompson Seton, the cofounder of the Boy Scouts who brought to that organization an insistence that "tribes" of boys playing Indian could offer an antidote to the vagaries of modern life.⁴⁹

In 1905, Armstrong took the production, along with several cast members, to Petoskey, Michigan, a town that was being groomed by the Grand Rapids and Indiana railway as a summer resort for people from Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati. Although actors were recruited from the nearby Odawa community of Harbor Springs, Petoskey performances did not highlight dialogue in the Native language, perhaps because reviewers had begun to frown on the unintelligibility of the dialogue at Desbarats and because the spectacle could enthrall audiences already familiar with its story line with or without dialogue. Instead, the Petoskey performances included longer verbatim passages of Longfellow's verse to accompany the action. A young Ernest Hemingway, whose family summered on nearby Lake Walloon, reportedly enjoyed the Petoskey performances so much that he resolved to memorize Longfellow's poem.⁵⁰

The stage was set on an isthmus of land between Round Lake and a lagoon, which the grandstand overlooked. The set included a twenty-foot cliff fashioned from a wooden tower covered by burlap sacks, as well as the characteristic frame of an Ojibwe ceremonial longhouse. Summer performances ran daily in the afternoon, excepting Sunday, with occasional evening performances. As at Desbarats, the Round Lake promoters seasoned the pageant with a host of other amusements, and encouraged Anishinaabe neighbors to set up booths for selling birch bark baskets, moccasins, and items embroidered with beads and dyed porcupine quills. Here again, the shows offered a rare opportunity to earn the coins and bills that were increasingly necessary to making a living in a cash economy.⁵¹

Native Communities Extend the Performances

The unambiguous contours of a colonizing economy of cultural production emerge here. Indigenous traditions were mined by Schoolcraft, smelted by Longfellow, refined into Armstrong's libretto, orchestrated by Burton, and marketed by the railroads, which were trying to sell parcels of "Hiawatha's Playground," land that had been appropriated from the Odawa and Ojibwe in a treaty promoted by Schoolcraft himself. Without sufficient land base for a fuller subsistence and lacking access to other employment, Native people were paid to perform Indianness and, in effect, forced to complete the circuit as the ultimate consumers of the colonial product. Longfellow's staged Indians became the real ones; the actors themselves and the world they lived in became invisible, unreal. If the onstage wigwams of the poet's Indians did not "suffocate with their smoke, and dirt and fleas [were] absent," neither did they bear witness onstage to the deadly consequences of American injustice at the turn of the twentieth century: malnutrition, tuberculosis, alcoholism, domestic abuse, and other insidious forms of violence that accompanied the tight grip of dispossession, assimilation policy, and racism.

Why then, should such pageants outlive their sponsorship by the railways to receive continued performances at the behest of the very Native communities they ostensibly rendered invisible? The Garden River Anishinaabe sponsored performances regularly on the banks where that river enters the flowage between Lakes Superior and Huron. In 1923 and again in 1932, Garden River people performed at historic festivals in Sault Ste. Marie. In 1937, they took the performance to the Canadian National Exhibition at Toronto.⁵² Held as late as 1965, these pageants, consistently in the Ojibwe language and controlled by members of the community, were apparently a source of pride for the performers at Garden River as well as a source of income. By 1965, even the Jesuit "Black Robe" was played by an Anishinaabe person.⁵³

In northern Michigan, the pageant proper closed in 1917, but elements of it remained associated by midcentury with "Naming Ceremonials," in which singing, dancing, and pageantry were linked with the more ceremonialized giving of Odawa names to young people.⁵⁴ On some occasions, the namings were extended to honor non-Natives, including wartime luminaries Eisenhower and Nimitz. At first, these "ceremonials" were only nominally directed by the Odawa community, instead financed and promoted by a circle of wealthy Detroit summer people with a hobbyist penchant for things Indian. By the mid-1950s, however, the events had returned to the control of the Native people.

More curious still is how such pageants apparently became among the better memories of many Native boarding school students, or became celebrated features of the annual powwow on the White Earth reservation in northern Minnesota.⁵⁵ If this is not merely evidence of colonized minds and the need for cash, if it is also evidence of the agency of Anishinaabe men and women, then what ends were they trying to accomplish in and through the pageants? I will leave to others the task of exploring in further detail the later career of the pageants, especially those performed in powwows and boarding schools, but I want to mention these trajectories too because they urge a closer look at the Desbarats and Petoskey pageants not simply from the vantage of promoters, conductors, and newspaper reviewers but from the perspective of Anishinaabe actors themselves.

Native Actors Carry on Cultural Repertoire

Fortunately the stories of two Native actors in Michigan were documented with some detail in the early 1950s by Gertrude Kurath, a student of music and dance, anthropologist Jane Willets Ettawageshik, and Fred Ettawageshik, an Odawa community leader who married Jane. The three produced a portrait of the cultural life of Anishinaabe story, song, and dance at midcentury through recordings, musical and choreographic notation, and in-depth interviews with some of lower Michigan's more accomplished traditional people. What is perhaps most striking in their work is the prominent role that such hybrid events as *Song of Hiawatha* pageants came to play in the sustaining of those traditions.⁵⁶

Born in a log house near Petoskey, Joe Chingwa attended the boarding school at Mount Pleasant, where after three years "he forgot what his mother looked like." He returned to Petoskey and worked there as a city laborer for years, "locally famous as a great fisherman and story-teller." When Armstrong brought the pageant to Petoskey in 1905, Chingwa took the role of Chibiabos, the sweet-singing tenor, and doubled as the Great Spirit in the opening scene, a role that doubtless brought a touch of mirth to the celebrated tales he told as an old man.⁵⁷

By all accounts, Chingwa took the pageant seriously, regarding it fondly as an occasion for the regular performance of dance and song repertoires important to Odawa peoplehood. One of the songs in the pageant was found to be "a really old Odawa song, perhaps not known to the Ojibwe" that Chingwa told Jane Ettawageshik had been taught him by his mother. Its performance in the pageant was not inimical to its performance in less folkloric contexts. Kurath noted the song "could be sung at ceremonials when the pipe is being smoked,

perhaps by a welcoming delegation, at court trials, when asking for rain, at social meetings, etc.” But even onstage, in front of tourists, she observed, “solemnity pervades” the song’s performance.⁵⁸

Offstage, Chingwa was a player of sorts too. In 1930, he was elected the first “chief” of the Michigan Indian Defense Association, an organization formed by Odawa leaders to unite Michigan’s Anishinaabeg as they sought to protect community interests without incorporation under the tribal government plan administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs through the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act.⁵⁹ When the railroads got out of the pageant business, the association took over sponsorship of summer “ceremonials,” which continued the trajectory of the pageants as part of this larger agenda. Chingwa and other Odawa realists knew that the support of influential non-native Michiganders would be necessary, and thus the summer people were assuaged, national heroes honored, and Native names given in showy pageants in a Harbor Springs amphitheater. It was all as real as necessity required.

While Whitney Albert never appeared in the *Song of Hiawatha*, he told Kurath that he learned a number of songs from watching the pageant, in addition to ones he learned more directly through the oral tradition from his grandfather. His repertoire of “tradition,” then, relied considerably on the pageants without being derivative of them. Kurath regarded him as having had “the largest and most varied repertoire of Indian songs in the state.” Albert worked in the 1940s on the interstate that linked northern Michigan with Detroit, but he came to life in powwows held at Mount Pleasant and Hastings in central Michigan. He took the show business name “Chief Blue Cloud,” although he freely admitted he was neither a chief nor Blue Cloud. Among Odawa speakers, he went by the name Zhagezhin, and appears to have been quite rooted in his Odawa identity. “He knows both Catholic and Protestant hymns,” Kurath wrote, “yet he is a pagan at heart. He is, however, little worried about his individual position and is poised, content, and affable.”⁶⁰

Albert and Chingwa shared with Kurath a far broader repertoire than that which they learned in and from the pageants, but their repertoire was in no small part shaped by the show business.⁶¹ Moreover, these figures were regarded in their day as authoritative elders, possessors of cultural knowledge that could not be dismissed as “damaged goods” even if it had been, for so many years, staged.⁶² For them, the pageant was not simply a job, nor perhaps primarily a performance for the non-Native audiences; it was also a rare occasion for the public performance of a cultural repertoire.

It is easy to underestimate the potential loss that a whole generation of disuse could bring to a primarily oral tradition. It is equally easy to underesti-

mate the amount of cultural work effected in and through such embodied forms as dance and song as they recollect memory and peoplehood. Anishinaabe dances and songs and drumming were far more than matters of expressive “art” or entertainment. Typically regarded as “gifts” from the spirits through dreams and visions of individuals, songs, texts, rhythms, and dance gestures had power to transform the world. Because they didn’t just mean things, but did things, songs and dance steps were treated accordingly with uncommon care. Many were regarded as among the more important resources an individual or community “owned,” exchanged only in well-controlled, ritualized ways. Proper performances often began with an account of their origin and required adherence to elaborate codes of conduct, in particular toward the drum.⁶³ Although it would be scarcely visible from the grandstand, Anishinaabe actors in the Hiawatha pageants undoubtedly brought such codes and convictions to their stage performances.

Crucially, the waning of interest on the part of Little Traverse Bay Odawas in the 1950s and on the part of Garden River actors in the mid-1960s coincided with a broader awakening of pride in the public exercise of tradition. One could justly infer that when alternative means for public expression of Native identity became available and viable, Odawa and Ojibwe people wasted little time in availing themselves of them. Longfellow’s poem and Armstrong’s libretto, no matter how many insertions of Native music and dance, simply could not compare to more autonomous expressions of culture. But as Deloria’s work on their contemporaries suggests, room for such autonomy was cleared in no small part through the agency and savvy of such folks as Chingwa and Albert in a contest over cultural production.⁶⁴

At Harbor Springs, the Hiawatha pageants yielded to “ceremonials” that increasingly came to reflect the control asserted over them by the Odawa community. The events still drew large crowds of non-Native people, but they drew them away from the tourist center of Petoskey to an amphitheater across the bay in the heart of the Native community of Harbor Springs. With time, they also changed the content, incorporating a “large number of genuine Odawa songs and dances still in their repertoire . . . into a coherent and entirely indigenous program.”⁶⁵ In Michigan, there appears to have been a trajectory that led from these festivals to the contemporary powwow tradition.⁶⁶

Like the Hiawatha pageants before them, the “ceremonials” brought needed income—about ten dollars per participant per day. But, according to Gertrude Kurath, they also made leaders “more conscious of the value inherent in their non-Christian heritage. In this they have been encouraged by realization of increased white interest and appreciation. With better pay they have given

more time to research and to improvements. Thus any permanent rejuvenation is a project for the White audiences as well as their Indian protégés.⁶⁷ It is also clear that the exercise of control over the ceremonials brought its own reward, as “the effort of cohesion drew the Indians together” in such a way that Kurath thought would “grow into a permanent organization truly for the revival of their arts and lore.”⁶⁸

But as to the sixty years leading up to such a moment, the question remains, why should Native people wish to continue performing these traditions in the context of a script that could be construed to confine the “real Indian” to the never-never land of the stage, and to a time that, like Hiawatha’s own life, had run its course by the time the Black Robe came? A consideration of the script alone is insufficient to understanding the full cultural dynamics at play through the performance of those scripts in the Native language. No doubt performing Longfellow’s *Indians* and thereby their own absence was to the actors problematic, but as we learn from an increasing body of scholarship on indigenous peoples in colonial contexts, the consumers are never just passive consumers of other peoples’ ideas about them. They are demonstrably also part of what Michel de Certeau has called the production of consumption, improvising on themes of other people’s imaginations in ways that become laden with possibilities that one would not appreciate were one to consider that history only from the vantage points of bureaucrats overseeing Indian affairs.⁶⁹ In the cultural politics of defining the real, the stages of the Hiawatha pageant represented both the limits of the script and the possibility of a captive audience for the public performance of Anishinaabe drums, songs, language, and humor that could engender other realities within those limits. To focus on these stage politics in action, we turn to the two key scenes introduced as part of Longfellow’s spiritualizing agenda: the wooing/wedding of Minnehaha and Hiawatha’s farewell.

Wooing and Wedding Minnehaha

That audiences were so consistently thrilled with Hiawatha’s wooing and wedding of Minnehaha is ultimately unsurprising, given how charged the affair was with an intriguing if uneasy melding of noble and savage. Indigenous sexual norms had long been decried by missionaries and Indian Office bureaucrats for a perceived lack of emphasis on marital discipline. Anishinaabe families at this time were more often based on common-law marriages than on church weddings and marriage licenses. Anishinaabe conventions were complex in their own right, but marriages could form and dissolve in such a

way that defied the finality of a wedding or a divorce. It follows that weddings as such did not command Anishinaabe attention as rites of passage marking a singular transition in life. It was certainly the case that Nanabozho, always on the move as he was, conformed to no such conventions.

But Hiawatha did. His wooing of Minnehaha ostensibly transgressed boundaries of tribe, for his grandmother had warned him against marrying an enemy Dakota, and resulted in a dramatic onstage release in the scene of their wedding feast, which, with the loud beat of the drum and a series of dances in full regalia, caught the imaginations of Anglo audiences even while it gratified them to know that the affair was safely contained in recognizable conventions of courtship and marriage. Critics spoke freely of their pleasure at viewing the Native bodies onstage. Assessments of Hiawatha often referred to his erect posture, physical strength, handsome face, and “overall fitness as a specimen of his race.” A *Toronto News* reviewer who panned the production in general remained no less taken with “the girl of 18 who impersonates Minnehaha. Her natural modesty of demeanor and rather pretty features, coupled with a certain Native refinement, attract more attention to her than anything she does, in the way of acting, her role making no demands upon her.”⁷⁰

The same reviewer also found florid praise for the songs from these scenes, especially “My Bark Canoe.” Burton, whose four part arrangement had presented audiences with a recognizable art song, boasted that the Ojibwe actors, too, “seem to be very appreciative of the harmonized versions of their songs.”⁷¹ Onstage, he wrote, “My Bark Canoe” was rendered not “only with feeling but even with Schmaltz,” “at one third the speed of the average . . . song.”⁷²

The song had a rich life offstage as well, indicating the important role pageant performances had for traditional repertoire and the power it could bring to bear. Burton recounted how an Ojibwe friend “fell fatally ill in a foreign city far away from home.” “Death lingered for hours at the threshold” and “the old man knew the signs. ‘I should like to hear a song,’ he whispered. They understood, those who stood around, and asked him if there were some particular song he would like to hear. ‘Gayget [Indeed]: *Chekahbay tebik ondandayan*,’ he replied, lapsing into his Native tongue.” Subsequently, an Ojibwe resident in the city was called. “He came, knew the song and sang it, and while yet the sweet strains were throbbing, the old man died.”⁷³ Fifty years later, Jane Ettawageshik found the song to be of currency still at Harbor Springs. She identified it as “a traditional chant” that “perhaps originated in the neighborhood of Garden River,” but which was “disseminated by means of the pageant.”⁷⁴ Over the years, the “traditional chant” evidently outlived Burton’s harmonizations of it, even if his compositions conferred new vitality and significance.

Consistent with Longfellow's attempt to spiritualize the Nanabozho cycle, Burton took pains to avoid carnality in the music of the scene. "Hopelessly incongruous are those love songs that give utterance only to carnal passion," Burton wrote of his artistic challenge. "The Indian is frank where the white man is reserved; he does not mask brute desire under vague euphemisms; he is primitive and honest, and speaks according to his lights."⁷⁵

A "courtship dance" ramped up the tensions of the wooing scene. According to Chingwa, it was adapted from a social dance local to Lake Superior's Keweenaw Peninsula:

This was sung by Hiawatha and Minnehaha, he on one side of the fire, she on the other, very brief and fast . . . Maiden dances, makes one circle, chooses partner. Then both dance. Another maiden steps in, does same, then another. Girl dances inside circle, man outside. They both turn and look at each other, they meet inside circle afterwards. They both circle as they dance, give yell at same time: "Don't flirt with your friend."⁷⁶

In the subsequent wedding feast, the tensions of the wooing scene erupt into activity, dance, and spectacle. The incessant beat of drums and a barrage of rhythmic dances performed in revealing costumes were themselves sexually charged matters in this larger context.⁷⁷

Longfellow's wedding scene presented a challenge to the performers and promoters, because Anishinaabe people simply had no songs or dances specific to such affairs as weddings. When the cast was asked to introduce a festal song for the scene in 1902, Burton remembered, "pains were taken to impress the Indians with the fact that what was wanted was such a song as they would sing on a jolly occasion. They were asked if they had any song of that character and replied that they knew many. After three days of thinking it over . . . they decided on a very ancient song." When Burton "heard it roared forth by forty powerful voices at a solemn adagio," he thought "there must have been some mistake, but when I understood the words I knew that, from the Indian point of view, nothing could have been more appropriate." Burton's later translation suggests something of the subterfuge going on:

Ambay ge way do che wah de wa bun gee gah gee kay ne me go minka hen ahkon e gayaung.
Let's go home before daybreak or people will find out what we have been doing.

To those who knew Ojibwe, and this did not include the audience, the scene made room for some good old-fashioned Anishinaabe humor, for these introduced songs were bawdy songs of carousal. Picture, for example, an audience transported by Joe Chingwa's beautiful tenor as he sang the role of Chibiabos

at the wedding of chaste Minnehaha and noble Hiawatha. Then consider the ribald song Chingwa had slipped in under cover of his own language:

:kaninda-nibasi: nin :	<i>kidagobane</i>	<i>geinojinibasina</i>
I would not sleep	if there was anything	for which I could not sleep.

Apparently, the inference was “I wouldn’t sleep if I had something to drink,” but Whitney Albert sang a version that was more direct, adding *waminikwaeya* (“that I could drink”) in the first three repetitions, and then in the fourth, *gawiya nibane owisaena* (“if I had someone to sleep with”).⁷⁸

In a pageant that otherwise took itself far too seriously, such unauthorized humor stood out. Tongue-in-cheek improvisation enabled Native actors to insert their presence on a stage that otherwise elided them into tropes of vanished Indianness. For Gerald Vizenor, it is the last laugh of such trickstering that poses the most unrelenting resistance to the “pathetic seriousness” and “tragic victimry” that such narratives as *The Song of Hiawatha* represent.⁷⁹ To this view, of course, an objection could be raised: under cover, no such Native presence would be visible to the audience, and thus no effective resistance generated. But well-timed assertions of Indian humor could make all the difference in Native actors’ efforts to claim the public presence of their drums, their songs, and their traditions authorized by the *Song of Hiawatha* pageants without themselves becoming the representations. Equipped with this good-natured subterfuge, a Joe Chingwa could embrace what he found valuable in his years onstage and move on to become an esteemed elder and steward of Odawa culture and a powerful advocate for Native interests through the Michigan Indian Defense Association.

Hiawatha’s Departure and Death Song

One scene alone outdid the wedding in the estimation of audiences: Hiawatha’s Farewell. After Minnehaha’s tragic death, he had apparently little more to live for, and, upon the subsequent arrival of the Black Robe, little more to offer. After publicly entrusting his people to the care of the missionary (played at Desbarats by Frederick Frost, the Anglican priest at Garden River mission) and urging them to heed the wisdom of the Europeans, Hiawatha waves goodbye to his people on shore, delivered by magic canoe to the western “Land of the Hereafter.”

As with the wooing and wedding, Hiawatha’s departure was a conspicuous invention of Longfellow’s, for the Nanabozho of Anishinaabe oral tradition

lived and moved not in historic times, bounded by the arrival of Jesuit missionaries, but in “the long ago” that was no time in particular and consequently retained a kind of eternal relevance to the present.⁸⁰ Frederick Burton described the details of the scene as follows:

Hiawatha bade them farewell, prayed to the four winds, and stepped into his canoe. Raising his paddle in air he said; “*Kabeyaynung!*” (Westward!) and immediately the canoe started in a westerly direction. Without visible means of propulsion, the canoe glided along the gleaming path of the setting sun, for the play was given in the afternoon so that this scene came when the water glowed as with fire. . . . When he had finished the song, the people on the island repeated it in resonant unison. Then *Hiawatha* sang it again, and by this time he was so far away that his voice was perceptibly fainter. The antiphonal finale was continued until the prophet disappeared in the shadow of the two small islands half a mile distant. It was a wonderfully poetic, impressive scene, realizing Longfellow’s glorious description of the prophet’s departure; and the emotional force of the episode was strongly enhanced by the noble, dignified strains of this song.⁸¹

As it happens, the song conscripted for Hiawatha’s Death Song was “not, strictly speaking a death song,” and this seems to have occasioned even more Anishinaabe humor to buffer performers from the gravity of the representations they made onstage. Burton said he had named it as such when he “offered it for publication among the six songs from the play,” but the song that had so “deeply stirred” him upon hearing it was a traveling song “always used for the journey from Sault Ste. Marie rapids to the place where Detroit now stands.”⁸²

Mah noo ne nah ningamahjah
Mah noo ne nah ningamahjah
Wahweyabtenung ningadejah
Mah noo ne nah ningamahjah
Neen Wahweyabtenung ningadejah.

Don’t be anxious; I am going very far away
 Don’t be anxious; I am going very far away
 To Detroit I am going
 Don’t be anxious; I am going very far away
 To Detroit I am going.

“The Indian actors . . . left out *Wahweyabtenung* and inserted Hiawatha” to “adapt the song to the purposes of the play,” Burton reported, though he added that “the Indian who did the adapting incorporated more new words than Hiawatha in the text, and I should be surprised if such were not the case,



for the words as sung today are not, grammatically speaking, good Ojibway. Some carelessness crept in with the numerous repetitions of the song called for in the performances of the play until the present version seems to be fixed unalterably.” Revealing again the pragmatic humor that helped actors distance themselves from their roles, Burton observed that “the actors are conscious of the false syntax, but, as one of them said to me, ‘What does it matter? The white people do not know one word from another.’”⁸³

The critic from Toronto found numerous technical problems with the scene, especially because “the windlass containing the coil of rope by which Hiawatha’s canoe is pulled over the water is visible all day upon the stage” and “because everybody knows why two men in a boat carry the coil to a point on the other

Figure 3.
Depiction of the celebrated “Hiawatha’s Farewell” scene in the 1912 Petoskey, Michigan, production, from C. L. Lockwood, “Hiawatha in the Land of the Ojibways.”

side of the bay just before each performance, having first attached one end to Hiawatha’s canoe.” But even this critic found “Hiawatha’s Death Song” to be a “distinctive piece of melody having a rich vein of poetry not unmingled with that pathos for which all national

airs are remarkable.”⁸⁴ Reminded of “Lohengrin’s departure,” by its “mournful sentiments,” the critic pronounced it “an impressive and highly poetic finale.”⁸⁵

Rites of Passage On- and Offstage

If good-natured humor enabled Native people onstage to subvert the finality of the finale, it went unnoticed on the grandstand. To audiences, the actors had become the representations they performed, and this was made plain in a celebrated incident in Ontario in 1902, when the man who played Hiawatha, Tekumegzhik (Tom) Shawano, married Margaret Waubunosa, who played Minnehaha. In the music director’s telling of the story, ironies abound that bespeak conspicuous distance between the real lives of Anishinaabe actors and the staged lives of their characters:

It was not suspected that a real courtship was in progress every day when Hiawatha laid a deer at the feet of Minnehaha, but the revelation came when Shawano asked for a day off in order to get married. He was persuaded to continue playing his part even on the day of the wedding, and the Garden River missionary journeyed to the playground and officiated at the marriage ceremony immediately after the performance. Hundreds of persons, paleface and red, came from great distances to witness the event, and it was suggested to the bride and groom that it would add to the general interest if they would keep on the picturesque

costumes worn in the play. This they politely but firmly refused to do on the ground that it would profane the new faith if they should wear the ancient costumes of their race in one of its most sacred ceremonies. And all the other members of the Hiawatha “band,” coinciding in this view, hurried to their teepees when the play was over to don the habiliments of civilization before presuming to assist at the ceremony in the humble guise of spectators. In the evening, too, the Indians preferred to go to the white man’s supper in white-man clothing.⁸⁶

In truth, the story tells far less about Native desires for civilization than about how deeply ran Anglo-American desires for authenticity, as audiences could not suffer the spectacle to end at the boundary of the stage, not even on someone’s wedding day.⁸⁷ Consider the treatment given Shawano upon his death in 1945. “Easy enough it is to feel that it was Hiawatha himself who set out only last week,” the newspaper’s lead read. Recounting the list of other cast members still living in 1945, the obituary read, “Friday they said farewell to Tom, constable, councillor, secretary of their agricultural society. But in their hearts they might have said, ‘Farewell, O Hiawatha,’ as in their own folk drama, wherein: Thus departed Hiawatha,/Hiawatha the beloved,/ . . . To the Land of the Hereafter.”⁸⁸ To the public eye, the boundary between the real and the stage Indian had become more than blurred; it had dissolved entirely.

Indians Playing Indian

In his book *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria probes changing constructions of American identity as they have been articulated and performed when non-Natives have played Indian—from the Boston Tea Party to the Boy Scouts to Grateful Dead concerts. But what about the dynamics at play when *Indians play Indian*? Deloria begins to explore this question in the stories of a number of Native American individuals who had been “present at the margins” of the “history of Indian play, insinuating their way into Euro-American discourse, often attempting to nudge notions of Indianness in directions they found useful.”⁸⁹ In each case, according to Deloria, Native people were “miming Indianness back at Americans in order to redefine it,” an assertion of autonomy within the confines of colonialism that “indicates how little cultural capital Indian people possessed at the time.”⁹⁰ “If being a survivor of the pure, primitive old days meant authenticity,” Deloria avers, “and if that in turn meant cultural power that might be translated to social ends, it made sense for a Seneca man to put on a Plains headdress, white America’s marker of that archaic brand of authority.”⁹¹ In the case of Hiawatha pageants, Anishinaabe actors of that same generation were claiming the authority of an Anishinaabe

past, transforming it, to use Frederick Hoxie's words, "from a source of shame to a badge of distinction."⁹²

If their claiming of that authority was powerful because done in the presence of the paying audience, it was more elementally performance for performance's sake, a function of bodies enacting embodied knowledge and cultural memory. As Amy Stillman found in the case of hula exhibitions that drew on tourists' appetite for the primitive to engage larger numbers of Native Hawaiians in the enactment of their cultural repertoire, "performances are moments in which remembrances are sounded and gestured," "archivings" of knowledge of the past that become, because they are so deeply embedded in bodies, "central to discourses about identity."⁹³ Embodied performances of Anishinaabe music, dance, and language thus kept alive a repertoire on which, decades later, the resurgence of traditional culture, and related assertions of sovereign peoplehood, could build.

Whether it consisted of a makeshift rock island on the shores of Lake Huron, or the gym of a boarding school, the stage of the *Song of Hiawatha* pageant represented both a possibility and a limit for the Native people who played *Indian* on it. Disintegrated into constituent parts of music and dance, the culture performed on these stages was hardly a working culture; it was folklorized on and confined to the stage. But performed it was, and in the end, this was the more abiding ramification of the pageants for people whose offstage lives were so circumscribed in an era of forced assimilation. For those of us whose languages, ceremonies, and cultures have not been so under siege, it is perhaps easy to underestimate the urgency here.

The memoirs of Esther Horne, a Shoshone elder who weathered an education at the Haskell Institute, are instructive on this point. As a young student at the Kansas boarding school in the 1930s, Horne had played with pride her role in a production of a Hiawatha pageant that enabled the Native students to claim their traditions before non-Native audiences. Attending a boarding school in an era that otherwise regarded Native traditions as a retarding factor in assimilation, this was particularly important. "During my senior year," Horne remembered, "I accompanied Ruth Muskrat Bronson and other students to participate in programs that we presented to schools, to church groups and to service organizations. Instrumental and vocal music and talks relating to our Indian heritage were a part of the programs we presented. . . . Both Ruth and Ella [Deloria] wanted us to learn to survive in a variety of environments. They wanted us to be proud of who we were as Indian people and as boarding school students but also to be comfortable in explaining our identity to the non-Indian world. I suppose one could say that this was a safe way of being

Indian, that is, according to the expectations of white society. But for us it was not this way. With Ruth and Ella as our Indian mentors, these excursions became an expression of our Indianness that may not otherwise have been possible, given the poverty and discrimination so prevalent on most reservations.”⁹⁴

While staged productions of the *Song of Hiawatha* have been part of the story of Native people like Esther Horne, fortunately such stages have not come to define the horizon of their identity and culture. Neither the trickster nor his Anishinaabe people could be so easily captured in the “fugitive poses” that attempted to define their absence.⁹⁵ When the show was over, it may have seemed that the real Indians had disappeared to the Land of the Hereafter with Hiawatha. But Nanabozho, master of transformation, has managed to have the last laugh.

Notes

- For their aid in gathering materials, I am indebted to Judy Avery of the University of Michigan’s Hatcher Library, as well as Jamie Myler, Stephen Young, and the staffs of the Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario) Library and the Little Traverse Historical Society. For comments and criticisms, I am grateful to Amy Stillman, Laura Donaldson, Michelene Pesantubbee, Will Elison, Lisa Perez, Joy Young, Don LaCoss, Sally Southwick, Matt Hooley, American studies colleagues at Carleton, and especially Phil Deloria. Above all, I’m grateful to my wife, Devon Anderson, for her encouragement all along the way.
1. As an ethnonym, Anishinaabe refers to the people of the “three fires”: the Ojibwe (variously Ojibwa, Ojibway, Chippewa), the Odawa (variously Ottawa), and the Potawatomi, who have lived traditionally in the western Great Lakes region of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ontario, and Manitoba.
 2. See, for example, Robert Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man’s Indian* (New York: Vintage, 1978), and Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
 3. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).
 4. Two books appeared as this article was in the copyediting stage that begin to move in this direction. Philip Deloria’s *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004) develops a rich discussion of how several prominent Native figures tweaked notions of Indianness and Americanness in the early twentieth century, and touches on the role of playing Indian in that effort. In *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880–1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), Alan Trachtenberg draws important correspondences between the staging of Hiawathan Indianness and American anxieties about modernity, masculinity, art, commerce, and nationhood. For his discussion of the pageants, he draws on newspaper accounts from the eastern tours and can thus only begin to reckon with what brought and kept certain Native people themselves onstage.
 5. On the passion plays at Oberammergau, see James S. Shapiro, *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World’s Most Famous Passion Play* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000).
 6. Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 88.
 7. *Ibid.*, 93–94.
 8. See L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883–1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
 9. W. Stephen Bush, “*Hiawatha*: Longfellow’s Immortal Poem Portrayed in a Four Part Production by F. E. Moore,” *Moving Picture World*, March 8, 1913, 980.

10. The performances emerged a few short years after the frontier had been declared closed. And while Native communities were by this time deemed to be contained, their land absorbed, anxieties about Indian hostilities would not leave America's system overnight, nor would the deep contradictions of American prosperity built atop stolen land. Indeed, as recently as 1898, federal troops had been summoned to suppress an armed Ojibwe stand at Bear Island on Minnesota's Leech Lake Reservation.
11. "Hiawatha" was shot in upstate New York and northern Michigan by an Ohio filmmaker, F. E. Moore. Moore's film improvises on the pageant libretto, and evidently involves some of the pageant's original cast. A twenty-eight-minute cut is housed in the American Film Institute's collection in the Library of Congress, but lacks the final scene.
12. Hiawatha pageants also had an enormous, if unrelated, following on stages where non-Native people performed the roles. An excellent discussion appears in Sally Southwick, *Building on a Borrowed Past: Place and Identity in Pipestone, Minn.* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).
13. See, for example, Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," in Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995).
14. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 102. See also Deborah Battaglia, *On the Bones of the Serpent: Person, Memory, and Mortality in Sabarl Island Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
15. I am grateful to Phil Deloria for inspiration and concrete suggestions in thus reframing my material in terms of a struggle to control the means of cultural production that would have these broader historical implications. I had the good fortune of hearing Deloria present preliminary findings from *Indians in Unexpected Places* at the 2003 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.
16. See Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).
17. 187 U.S. 553, 23 S. Ct. 216, 47 L. Ed. 299. Allotment policy had reduced native landholdings from 138 million acres in 1887 to 48 million by 1934. Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 10.
18. I am indebted here to Amy Stillman for reminding me of the significance of embodied performances in pageants or elsewhere for the sustenance of cultural repertoires.
19. Hale, "Hiawatha Played by Real Indians," 45; unidentified fragment in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Public Library.
20. Bush, "Hiawatha," 980.
21. Harvey Harris Gates, "Unspoiled Indians in True Portrayals: F. E. Moore Talks of Experiences with Players in Hiawatha Picture," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, April 9, 1913, 31.
22. See chapter 4, "Native Songs by Modern Singers," by Gertrude Kurath, Jane Ettawageshik, and Frank Ettawageshik, in *The Art of Tradition: Sacred Music, Dance, and Myth of Michigan's Anishinaabe, 1946–1955*, ed. Michael McNally (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming).
23. In 1823, he married Jane Johnston, the daughter of a prominent trader at the Sault and his wife, Susan Ozhaw-Guscoday-Way-Quay Johnston, matriarch of a powerful Ojibwe family in the western Great Lakes, daughter of Waabojiig and granddaughter of Maangozid, two prominent *ogimaag*, or "chiefs."
24. As cited in Chase Osborn and Stellanova Osborn, *Schoolcraft—Longfellow—Hiawatha* (Lancaster, Pa.: Jacques Cattell Press, 1943), 403.
25. Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Algic Researches*, vol. 1 (New York: Harpers, 1839), 26–27. In 1832, he formed the Algic Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Native Race in the U.S., along with its literary organ, the *Muzzeneigan*, a miscellany of things Indian. The Algic Society's mission included "to aid and encourage missionary schools and agricultural effort" and "the cause of the reclamation of the Indians." It also set out to "collect scientific and statistical information" for Indian agents and missionary boards, and as such discloses the proximity that proto-anthropological interest in Native peoples came to colonialist aims. After leaving the Great Lakes, Schoolcraft took up a kind of scholarship-in-residence at the Indian Office in Washington, D.C., from 1847 to 1857.
26. Charles Cleland, *Rites of Conquest* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 227–29.
27. Osborn, *Schoolcraft*, 402.
28. As cited in Osborn, *Schoolcraft*, 10.
29. Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 81. Analysis of early drafts of the poem enable Trachtenberg to track the "stripping" of "low trickster traits" and their transfer to the character of Pau-Puk-Keewis.
30. The very process of fixing Nanabozho stories in the printed word denatures them, for the Anishinaabeg consider such stories powerful stories, stories with the capacity to transform. The very term used for

- this class of stories, *aadizookanag*, as distinct from *dibaadjimowin* (news, legend) is gendered animate in Ojibwe grammar, a “he/she” rather than an “it.” The telling of such stories has a seasonality to it, for they are to be heard only when snow is on the ground.
31. Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 4. See also Vizenor’s *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). On tricksters generally, see Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).
 32. “Hiawatha as played by the Ojibway Indians before Longfellow’s Family,” *The Ledger Monthly*, August, 1901, 1.
 33. In *Shades of Hiawatha*, Trachtenberg understands the breadth and depth of this “revival” in terms of anxieties about immigration and Americanness.
 34. On the story of translations, see Joe Lockard, “The Universal Hiawatha,” *American Indian Quarterly* 24 (January 2000): 110–25, and Trachtenberg’s chapter, “Yiddish Hiawatha,” in *Shades of Hiawatha*, 140–68. The poem also inspired the musical imagination of nineteenth-century composers Antonin Dvorák, Robert Stoepel (1821–1887), and Samuel Coleridge Taylor. See Michael Pisani, “Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Robert Stoepel, and an Early Musical Setting of Hiawatha—1859,” *American Music* (Spring 1988).
 35. Kabaosa had attended government school in Marquette, and “there got an idea of singing.” William Brigham, “The Music of the Ojibway Indians: Aboriginal Tunes on the Scene of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*,” *The Evening Post* (New York), July 26, 1902.
 36. “Garden River Ojibways First Presented Hiawatha Play More than Thirty Years Ago,” *Sault Star*, March 16, 1937, 7.
 37. L. O. Armstrong, *The Song of Hiawatha*, 1901. The scenes were as follows:
 - I. Warriors of many nations assemble for war dance, upon Gitche Manito’s bidding, bury their hatchets, wash off war-paint, and smoke the peace-pipe.
 - II. Hiawatha’s childhood and training by Nokomis and Iagoo, including archery and dancing.
 - III. Hiawatha’s wooing of Minnehaha, “Laughing Water,” a Sioux Maiden.
 - IV. The Wedding Feast, featuring several dances including a gambling scene that results in a thrilling chase of Pau-Puk-Keewis, the braggart and mischief maker.
 - V. Hiawatha instructs the people in Picture-Writing and other cultural lessons.
 - VI. The coming of the “black robe,” the white man’s missionary, with crucifix.
 - VII. Hiawatha’s departure.
 38. This was particularly the case with the 1913 film version of the pageant, which pares down the action even further to focus attention on the wooing, wedding, and death of Minnehaha. Given the constraints of silent film, perhaps the tableau effect was even more pronounced than it might have been at lakeside encounters with resonant Anishinaabe drums, songs, and language. Nonetheless, the film offers an opportunity to imagine what the spectacles looked like from the grandstand.
 39. Even before his first summer in northern Ontario, Burton had written “Hiawatha: A Cantata,” based on Alice Fletcher’s field recordings of Omaha songs.
 40. Frederick R. Burton, *American Primitive Music: With Special Attention to the Music of the Ojibways* (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Co., 1909), 71.
 41. *Ibid.*, 191.
 42. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 149–53.
 43. Brigham, “The Music of the Ojibway Indians.”
 44. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 119.
 45. See Moses, *Wild West Shows*. In 1905, Ishi was captured and subsequently displayed at the Museum of the University of California. In 1911, the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company performed more than a hundred shows with Kikapu people “as proof that the medicines being hawked were derived from genuine Indian medicine.” Fusco, *English Is Broken Here*, 43.
 46. *Sault Star*, August 1, 1901, 3.
 47. Review by T. C. G., *Toronto News*, reprinted in the *Sault Star*, September 1, 1904.
 48. *Sault Star*, August 25, 1937, 1.
 49. On Seton’s Indian leanings and antimodernism, see Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 95–127.
 50. Candace Eaton, comments in “Hiawatha,” undistributed videotape produced by Petoskey Antiques Club, Little Traverse Historical Society (Petoskey, Michigan).

51. On railroads and the promotion of Indian arts and crafts in the Southwest, see *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway*, ed. Marta Weigle and Barbara A. Babcock (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).
52. *Sault Star*, Dec. 24, 1985; Aug. 25, 1937, 1.
53. *Sault Star*, Mar. 11, 1965.
54. James McClurken, *Gab-Baeb-Jhagwah-Buk/The Way It Happened: A Visual Culture History of the Little Traverse Band Bay Bands of Odawa* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991), 93.
55. Josephine DeGroat, interview with author. See also issues of the White Earth reservation newspaper *The Tomahawk*, beginning March 24, 1904 (Minnesota Historical Society).
56. Together, they collected hours of interviews, stories, and songs in Ojibwe and Odawa, and produced in 1959 an unpublished manuscript titled *Religious Customs of Michigan's Modern Algonquians*, deposited in the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia. Their work is to be published as *The Art of Tradition: Sacred Music, Dance, and Myth of Michigan's Anishinaabe, 1946–1955* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming).
57. Michigan Indian Foundation, *Annual Review*, 1948 (Bentley Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.).
58. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *Art of Tradition*, chap. 4.
59. McClurken, *Gab-Baeb-Jhagwah-Buk*, 83–84.
60. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *Art of Tradition*, chap. 1.
61. *Ibid.*, chap. 5.
62. Frank Ettawageshik, interview with author, 1999.
63. On Ojibwe music, see Thomas Vennum Jr., *The Ojibwe Dance Drum* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), and Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, 2 vols., Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletins 45, 53 (1910, 1913).
64. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.
65. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *The Art of Tradition*, chap. 3.
66. On the cultural history of powwows, see Tara Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Powwow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), and William K. Powers, *War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).
67. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *The Art of Tradition*, chap. 3.
68. *Ibid.* Perhaps the answer is not unrelated to the conclusion of one promoter of the Petoskey pageants. “The Indians themselves are most enthusiastic,” he declared:
because the actor’s self respect is immeasurably increased—increased commensurately with the respect shown by the white man for the Indian whom he sees transformed into a beautifully attired being—an old Lord of the North—doing things skillfully presenting and perpetuating for us a most picturesque period in the history of America; suggesting to us some of the possibilities of an American national music; telling us of hygienic practices and exercises to which we must return if we would not become physically degenerate. In addition to all this there is in us the recognition of the dominant fact that we have been doing rank injustice for nearly three centuries to a race that had many noble qualities; that we are now endeavoring, here a little and there a little, to undo this injustice.
C. L. Lockwood, *The Indian Play “Hiawatha” in the Land of the Ojibways* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids and Indiana Railway, 1905).
69. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
70. Review by T. C. G., *Toronto News*, reprinted in *Sault Star*, Sept. 8, 1904.
71. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 119–20.
72. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *The Art of Tradition*, chap. 5.
73. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 138–39.
74. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *The Art of Tradition*, chap. 5.
75. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 168.
76. As cited in Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *The Art of Tradition*, chap. 4.
77. Review by T. C. G. of the *Toronto News*, reprinted in *Sault Star*, Sept. 8, 1904.
78. Kurath, Ettawageshik, and Ettawageshik, *The Art of Tradition*, chap. 5.
79. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 54–55.
80. See Michel de Certeau, “Story Time,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
81. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 267–68.

82. Ibid., 268.
83. Ibid., 269.
84. Review by T. C. G., *Toronto News*, reprinted in the *Sault Star*, Sept. 1, 1904.
85. Ibid., Sept. 8, 1904.
86. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, 140–41.
87. Upon Margaret Waubunosa Shawano's tragic death two short years later, the cruel ironies only intensified as audiences drank in the spectacle of Hiawatha's onstage grief at the death of Minnehaha, now played by Margaret's younger sister. "The mimic representation of Hiawatha's life," one critic wrote, "has realized in this sorrowful incident a very near approach to the story as Longfellow has told it. The modern Hiawatha mourns sincerely for the lost Minnehaha, and his grief has given to his acting a melancholy and pathetic quality which is very touching." Hale, "Hiawatha Played by Real Indians," 45.
88. "Tom Thibault Follows Hiawatha He Recreated," *Sault Star*, December 24, 1945, 12.
89. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 8.
90. Ibid., 125.
91. Ibid., 189.
92. Frederick Hoxie, "Exploring a Cultural Borderland," *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992): 976.
93. Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman, "Re-membering the History of Hawaiian Hula," in *Cultural Memory: Reconfiguring History and Identity in the Postcolonial Pacific*, ed. Jeannette Marie Mageo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 188.
94. Esther Burnett Horne and Sally McBeth, *Essie's Story: The Life and Legacy of a Shoshone Teacher* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 49.
95. Gerald Vizenor titles his reflections on such struggles *Fugitive Poses*.