

# Obiquadj: Instruction and Delight for Children in White Versions of Indian Stories.

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The available versions of Indian stories written primarily by white authors for white children vary widely not only in their details and substance but also in their tone, intention and quality. It is difficult, as a result, to perceive behind the stories a genuine, vital culture. It is also difficult to evaluate these versions because of the large number of variables and white assumptions they express. We always see another culture through the frame of our own times, interests and values. A fundamental question in considering the white retelling of native stories is "How much does the author's frame serve as a means of seeing the originals, and how much does it draw attention to itself and therefore distort or ignore the originals?" Does the author "use" the Native material to create acceptable white stories, or is she/he interested in revealing to white children a culture other than their own?

If children's literature were simply for children it would be easy to evaluate; we could ask them. But it is largely for adults, who after all write it, produce it, buy it and write about it. Adults decide what the stories teach and how they should move children towards and into adult norms; they decide what is amusing or entertaining for children (with varying success). The white "frame" they use for Native stories can be described in terms of the familiar elements of instruction and delight. It is worthwhile to be clear about the tradition of white versions and the range of possible responses to the originals so that we can at least be conscious of our grounds for preferring one version to another. We may also become more aware of what our intentions are for the stories we tell children, or read to them, or let them read.

The relative weighting of instruction and delight has shifted over the last hundred years. At one time the entertaining dimension of a story was considered a sugar coating for the pill of the message, as if instruction were necessarily unpalatable by itself, as if the two were mutually exclusive. More recently there has been some attempt to discover what does delight children and to give this some prominence in the stories over whatever lesson they might be learning, as if (in an extreme form) instruction of any kind were suspect.

There is a parallel shift in the lessons of the stories, in the values imparted by them. Of course, values are always imparted even when the stories are not pointedly didactic. The fashionable values these days seem to be individuality, self-expression, the reduction or elimination of stress and tension, and the

expression of the anarchic, non-rational, imaginative dimension of children. (The brilliant and complex model for the child hero of anarchy is of course Peter Pan; he may be said to preside over the changing white attitude to the trickster figures of Indian legends.)

So the white use of Indian legends will indicate the direction and stages of development in attitudes to children's stories. What distortions or alterations take place in the originals (if we have access to the originals)? What tone do the stories have? (How sententious, poetical are they? What degree and kinds of comedy are allowed?) And what values do the stories express? Are the native stories "used" to convey white values? Is there any interest in native values or lore? If the lore is "authentic" is it distorted through the switching of values?

Longfellow is the central example of the problem of white retelling of native stories. Although *The song of Hiawatha* was intended originally for white adults it has been co-opted as a children's classic,<sup>1</sup> is the model for a prevailing mode of retelling Indian legends, and is of course the first popular version of Nanabush. Moreover Longfellow's intention was also the noble one of preserving Ojibwa culture, and yet he distorts the originals in revealing ways. So he provides the model for both the fairy tale and the ethnologists' versions of Indian legends. Finally, the case of Nanabush/Hiawatha is a useful one because we still have access to the folklore Longfellow used as his base, and because there have been since his poem different versions of the same material through the years showing the changes in approach, including most recently, and fortunately, versions of the Ojibwa legends told by Ojibwa people.

Longfellow's intentions — to delight and instruct, and also to uplift and inspire by presenting noble actions in his domestic epic and by giving a spiritual or poetic patina to nature — are in some ways surprisingly similar to the intentions of the stories in the original oral culture. The elders, the storytellers, wanted to entertain the children, to demonstrate to them the spiritual forces operating in the world around them, and to advise, direct, and teach them values and behaviour. The instruction was moral, cultural and practical and presented a communal view of the world, of history, of social behaviour and of survival methods. All of this is recognizable in *Hiawatha*. The differences of course are extensive between a written literary work and oral tales: the told tales were immediate, constructed out of the breath of the storyteller, in the context of those seated around her or him, coming out of a communal sense of values; the telling of them was an occasion, in winter; the teller used inflection; the present surroundings were included as part of the story. The written story has no occasion, can be read any time, depends on the imagination and verbal skill of the teller, constructs tone purely by verbal means. And of course *Hiawatha* is radically different from the original tales in that it dramatizes white values. To be fair to Longfellow, he does have some interest in Indian history, lore and language (surely giving most North Americans their only Ojibwa words), but the Indian elements are primarily colourful costume for

a very conventional (in white terms) hero. This blend is characteristic of much children's literature — attracting their attention with the exotic, wild and colourful, promising them the anarchic, free and alternative, and then delivering them the conventional. It is one notion of what we mean by delight.

The methods of delighting are different in the two cultures and have changed in white culture during the last hundred years. For a long time the way of making Indian legends delightful to white children (or adults) was to make them conform to white narrative norms. To the first collectors of the stories they seemed repetitive, crude, obscure, shapeless, pointless. And so when they were presented to white audiences they were refined, smoothed, edited, made coherent; their foreign, incomprehensible, vulgar, violent, erotic elements were softened, altered or removed. The stories were attached (explicitly or not) to familiar myths and legends. That is, the presumption was that the legends might be entertaining inasmuch as they were like classical myths. This use of analogy relates directly, of course, to the teaching function of the white versions. The force of a tale was presumed to come from its degree of familiarity — its connectin to Greek tales or Biblical stories. And so the desire of the white writers was to move the original tale towards a Greek or Hebraic analogue, rather than acknowledge or preserve its unique quality, its distinctive differences. An example of this enforced migration of a story is that of Mondamin in *Hiawatha*. The original story very quickly starts to be affected by Longfellow's version so it is difficult to see, but we are aware of how in Longfellow it drifts towards the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32. The notion of a quest vision in Ojibwa culture would seem too superstitious by itself unless it is attached to a biblical parallel by which it can acquire force, and present an image of God's beneficence allied to human strength and courage. (If not restrained by the analogue, the Indian's "strength and courage" are in danger of tipping into "savagery and violence" in the white mind.) The story is also important to Longfellow because it moves the Ojibwa people towards an agrarian and hence a whiter culture.

This is part of a large, complex issue. Can we see at all without the "frame" of the culture in which we are raised? Can we see without the filters of the dominant culture? Specifically, in the case of the Nanabush legends, how do those filters affect the collecting by whites of the stories in the first place? Whether they can be collected at all without being distorted depends on how much the ethnologist is able to drop her expectations and values, and so transcribe without interfering with or ignoring what is incomprehensible or distasteful to her.

So we may distinguish the variations in white adaptations and transmissions of Ojibwa tales: (1) the radical, and often not acknowledged transformations towards white methods and lessons; (2) the more objective ethnological versions attempting to interfere less with the original; and (3) the versions told more recently by Natives themselves (including whatever biases and changes they

make), for example, Basil Johnston's version of Papeekawiss.<sup>2</sup>

The desire to preserve Native culture and to present a story acceptably white, as I have said, is found from the beginning in Longfellow. He succeeded better at the second than the first, because he believed he needed to make the Native tradition familiar and acceptable in white poetic terms in order to preserve it. But he radically distorts the originals in a number of ways. In his fusion of Nanabush (Manabozho) and Hiawatha he obscures the complexity of the original figure, ascribes to a mythic figure a historical dimension (leading to the very unstable blend of history and myth at the conclusion of the poem). His intention is to make the figure of Hiawatha consistently noble, and so he represses the dominant trickster element in Nanabush; more correctly he transfers it to Paupakeewis and so creates a simplistic moral distinction (good guy, bad guy) all too familiar in the white presentation of Indians, starting with Cooper's Uncas and Magua and running through the movies to the present. This moral simplification is a crucial aspect not only of white versions of Indians but also of children's stories; in the case of Indian characters, whites have projected on to them their noblest aspirations and longings, and their deepest fears. What the white writers cannot allow is human complexity. So Osborn can applaud Longfellow's editing out of Hiawatha/Manabozho's "inconsistent mischievousness"<sup>3</sup> because both he and Longfellow are not interested in, or not able to tolerate, what Leekley objects to as well:<sup>4</sup> the distinctive volatile blending of high and low behaviour in Nanabush. (And if I claim that we do have in English children's literature a soul-mate of Nanabush in the irresponsible, egotistic but nevertheless attractive Peter Pan, I too must resist the temptation simply to move the Ojibwa figure towards a different white analogue.) Longfellow believed that in the style of his poem he was in part preserving the narrative methods of the original, in its "melody" and "repetition" and colourful similes. But his intention was to smooth and refine (cf: bowdlerized Grimm making things less grim, about which I do not know enough to comment), and in larger (missionary) terms to move the Ojibwa towards white Christian culture. Hiawatha then is purposely seen as a proto-Christian preparing his people for the appearance of the missionaries, revising their primitive rites in the direction of Christian ritual, and teaching them the arts of an agricultural society. Moreover, in the poem Hiawatha treats his people as children, and takes on a number of adult roles — protecting, feeding, healing, and instructing them. The image of Indians as children (of nature, of God, of great white father or mother) is a common one, and is the primary reason why their legends are deemed appropriate for white children. Children are regarded as naive, primitive, unsophisticated, incapable of understanding complex issues or explanations, (e.g. "the stork," or thunder as God moving furniture, or bowling), and so the legends of "nature's children" provide for them answers which they can understand to questions about the world around them. Also children are regarded (more positively) as more imaginative and so more responsive to the

“poetic” explanations of Indian tradition. The tradition of “pourquoi” stories (explanations of natural phenomena) is a genuine one, but the presumption that they are merely pre-scientific and hence suitable for children needs to be examined. Again, we are on the edge of a complex issue. Stories about how the woodpecker got its crest are not merely pre-scientific in these terms but non-evolutionary, and hence a part of the debate in education between religious and scientific explanations of creation. The Indian legends provide “imaginative-poetic” accounts of the creatures of this world, and I wonder if for some people one of the implications is “There now, isn’t that better than nasty old natural selection?” And, to extend the complexity of the appeal of these stories, they also point us towards the simple, pure, non-civilized world that part of us always longs for. In American terms it is the drawing power of the wilderness, the frontier (Hawkeye and Huck Finn); in Canadian terms it is less prominent, and appears perhaps in Seton’s woodcraft Indians. But we all know versions of the release from the confinement of school each summer to the relative freedom and joy of the beach, the park, the summer camp, the cottage.

So the reasons for telling these stories to white children are as mixed and complicated as the reasons for transforming them.

Sometimes the transformations are difficult to judge; there may be variations in the original stories themselves, between tribal versions of the same story, or through time. And then there are any number of possible changes that may occur in the transmission between native storytellers and white ethnologists and between them and white storytellers or writers. The intended audience (adult, child, general) will also affect the transmission; here, we confine ourselves to versions for children or, as too many editors say, “children of all ages.” And to judge the nature of the transformations we should be aware of the points of view of the white tellers. How much do they acknowledge their teaching function? Do they see it in moral, cultural, practical terms? What ordering principle do they use? Is chronology significant in it? Do they make use of the comic dimension of the originals, and of the violent and bawdy aspects? Do we recognize the white (Greek, Biblical) analogues they use as validations of the stories — if they feel the stories need it?

A comparative study of different versions of Ojibwa legends concerning the great trickster Nanabush (Manabozho, Nanabozho, Nanabijou, *etc.*) may reveal the various values and approaches of the white authors, which may often be mixed together or balanced in the same story. These authors/collectors/translators sometimes clarify their points of view in their introductions, not always intentionally. They are all more or less aware of the difficulties of translation and comprehension. Katharine B. Judson (*Myths and legends of the Mississippi Valley and the Great Lakes*, A.C. McClung and Co., Chicago, 1914) is deep in the Longfellow tradition and assumes that “charm” is the same in both cultures: “Longfellow’s work shows the wonderful beauty of these northern legends, nor has he done violence to any of them in making them poetical” (p. viii). She

is unaware how thoroughly altered the stories are in her versions, because her intention was not to change them: "No effect has been made to ornament or amplify these legends in the effort to make them "literary" or give them "literary charm". They must speak for themselves. What editing has been done has been in simplifying them and freeing them from the verbose setting in which many were found" (p. ix). Schoolcraft himself, to whom everyone is indebted for the original collecting of the material, when he rewrote the tales for children (*The Indian fairy book*, Mason Brothers, New York, 1865), felt free to smooth out the stories and change them around. Ella Elizabeth Clark is more scholarly and careful in her collection of stories (*Indian legends of Canada*, McClelland and Stewart, 1960) and clearly tries to balance entertainment and instruction. She is collecting for "readers of all ages" (p. xi) and chooses stories therefore on the basis of variety and their presentation of everyday life. But because she wants the book to be read in families and in schools, she excludes "tales with brutal and erotic themes." (It is, as she points out, a common principle of screening for children, but the reasons for it are not examined.) Her ethnological interests seem to prevail, and so the style of her versions is a little dry and dull. There seems to be an attempt to have no style rather than give a false impression about one. Thomas B. Leekley (*The world of Manabozho*, Vanguard, 1965) is aware of adaptation of legends as a moral problem (p. 120) and takes care to point out the kind of changes he makes. Primarily he finds it necessary to show a "development" in Manabozho's character (p. 121) because he wants to present him as a culture hero with a mission to humanity (this may be a carry-over from Longfellow in a collection largely free of his influence), and so wants to show Manabozho changing from "buffoon" to "benefactor" in the course of the stories. He regrets (again like Longfellow) that in Indian culture the good, the bad, and the trivial existed side by side. We seem to want them (especially in stories for children) to be in a hierarchy or a progression; he sees the Indian view as a limitation, even though (as far as I can see) the three *are* always mixed together. He also admits to having "linked [the stories] in an arranged order to provide a unity that was merely suggested by the originals" (p. 128). The desire for chronology and causal ordering is another strong aspect of the white "frame" for children's stories, perhaps because we want the children to be aware of the consequences of actions. Dorothy M. Reid (*Tales of Nanabozho*, Oxford, Toronto, 1963) points out that she has synthesized and ordered diverse material, "But I have tried to make my own versions true to the spirit of the original material, and above all to the qualities of humour, adventure, and fantasy in which it is so rich" (p.10). But she sees Nanabozho primarily as a "teacher" and so edits out the ruder jokes (it was, for example, his bum and not his back he told to keep watch (p. 32); a large part of the joke disappears in this transposition). Reid also gives away her fondness for "pour-quoi" stories: "Wherever you look in the woods and lakes, there is something to remind you of Nanabozho" (p. 16). Her style as a result is sometimes sen-

timental or cute, but her interest in the relation between the stories and a physical location is very important. The sense that this land, this place has been imagined richly in narratives (that there are other stories than those told across the Atlantic) is to my mind the main reason for telling Indian stories to white children. Norval Morrisseau's reasons for collecting stories of his people (*Windigo and other tales of the Ojibwa*, McClelland and Stewart, 1969) are to preserve them for his people and to be understood and respected by the whites. The style seems to have been affected by his collaboration with Herbert Schwarz, and is quite neutral; we are aware of having lost the excitement of the oral teller, but are compensated by the powerful drawings. The same things are true of Carl Ray's collaboration with James R. Stevens (*Sacred legends of the Sandy Lake Cree*, McClelland and Stewart, 1971). The intentions and accomplishments of the last-named two books are mixed and complex: Morrisseau's is simpler, more personal, more consistent in tone (more literary); Ray's is more ambitious (and varied), wider ranging (more ethnological). They both have the distinct advantage of their co-authors' Ojibwa or Cree language and experience, and represent the most accessible means of testing, for oneself, the "whiteness" of other versions.

The vocabulary of white tellers, as I have said, will often reveal much about their point of view and intentions. For example, the accounts of the birth of Nanabush (or Hiawatha in Longfellow) vary a great deal. Birth stories, it is necessary to point out, are not prominent in the oral tradition as it has been preserved. They do not as a rule come at the beginning of native collections or stories about Nanabozho — because, of course, there is *no* beginning to the circle of legends. In the oral tradition one is always in the middle. It is the white rational tradition devoted to coherence, cause and effect, which wants to present origins first. The epic traditionally begins, of course, *in medias res*, and then circles back to show how we got there, but Longfellow is following not the Greek epics but the New Testament. The birth of culture heroes is regarded as a mysterious or holy or magical event and so one does not want naturalistic details which might reduce the hero to the human level. One wants his genealogy to be clear and impressive; depending on one's attitude to sexuality one may want his mother to be a virgin. One wants signs of the significance of his birth.

So we can judge the nature of the transformations of white storytellers by looking at the placing and tone of the birth narrative. The question behind this is "How much of the original story sense do we want our children to have?" How much do we feel it must be changed to be acceptable to them (or at least to us) or accessible to them? Can we only understand and accept the familiar? What *is* familiar to children? Do we want to give them only versions of Christian or western orthodoxy? Or a variety, multiplicity of cultural traditions? The issue of a kind of orthodoxy of myth is crucial, since children are after all not orthodox, and are (at least more than adults) open to various possibilities, and could

possibly acquire a tolerance for alternate views of reality and a range of response by not being tied down to a single world view.

The closest we can get to the original version of the birth of Nanabozho known to Longfellow is Henry Schoolcraft's account in *Algonic researches*. Even Schoolcraft, sympathetic to the teller and his race, alters the tone of the story he heard:

Having a daughter, the fruit of her lunar marriage, [Nokomis] was very careful in instructing her, from early infancy, to beware of the west wind, and never in stooping, to expose herself to its influence. In some unguarded moment this precaution was neglected. In an instant, the gale, invading her robes, scattered them upon its wings, and accomplishing its Tarquinic purpose, at the same moment annihilated her. At the scene of this catastrophe her mother found a foetus-like mass, which she carefully and tenderly nursed till it assumed the beautiful and striking lineaments of the infant Manabozho.<sup>5</sup>

Schoolcraft, through the Latinate and Hellenic-derived English words, moves the story towards classical models. The erotic dimension of the story is still quite violent but is mediated by the language which is abstract ("lunar marriage"), clinical ("foetus-like mass") and primarily literary ("catastrophe" and of course "Tarquinic purpose" — a classical euphemism for rape). Through the Latin screen it is still possible to detect the power of the original which seems to me to have been in part comic, even if it is also violent. We may also be aware of a deep, ancient mythic dimension to the event, if we are reminded of the widespread belief that bear cubs are born as shapeless masses and licked into the shape of bears by their mothers.

Longfellow of course regarded the Greek tabloid-horror dimension of the story as inappropriate to his hero, and clearly shifted the story towards the nativity of the New Testament, with an overlay of nineteenth-century gentility and melodrama:

[Mudjekeewis] Wooed her with his words of sweetness  
Wooed her with his soft caresses  
Till she bore a son in sorrow,  
Bore a son of love and sorrow.<sup>6</sup>

The conception itself of the child disappears from the account. The divine father takes the form of the wind or a spirit; the human mother who "In her anguish died deserted" is a melodramatic, betrayed maiden fused to the Virgin Mary. The intentions behind his changes — to smooth out, to remove the coarse, vulgar, violent, unfamiliar, to sentimentalize, to see the Indian story as a "less worthy" or "materialist" or "primitive" version or forerunner of "genuine" culture — are important to us inasmuch as they dominate for a hundred years

the intentions of white retellers of Indian stories for white children.

When Schoolcraft (after the success of *Hiawatha*) retold the Ojibwa stories for children he too altered the tone of the birth narrative. In all editions of *The Indian fairy book* (1865, 1867, 1869, 1916) he began with generalized description of Manabozho, then had Nokomis "begin at the beginning" by telling her grandson the story of his birth:

Your mother is dead. She was taken for a wife by your father, the west wind, without the consent of her parents . . . Your mother, owing to the ill-treatment of your father, died when you were born.<sup>7</sup>

By this means Schoolcraft simplifies, generalizes the story. His reason for having Nokomis shorten the story is that she fears Manabozho's vengeful nature, and so holds back on details. So Schoolcraft in part justifies his editing as a means of providing motivations for the characters. Schoolcraft characteristically synthesizes and simplifies the stories but attempts in so doing to preserve much of their original nature. Longfellow by contrast alters the stories to create an acceptable image of Manabozho as a Christian prototype, and (he might claim, with some reason) to assure the reception and survival of the legends. Schoolcraft and Longfellow represent two strains or tendencies in the white retellings. Longfellow edits out the "inconsistent," "unfamiliar" elements; Schoolcraft attempts to preserve them.

We may follow this division of types through later versions. Many reveal an uneasiness about the trickster figure, finding it impossible that a culture hero could be mischievous. (It is likely they will in general be suspicious of anarchic freedom for children and will regard a trickster as an unacceptable model for them.) These writers may also have a fear of appearing racist; that is, it is possible their desire was to smooth out the savage roughness of the originals in order to correct or avoid the other prevailing cliché about Indians: that of the savage beast. That is, in order to balance out the whole strain of Cooper's Magua and the murderous "varmints," they repressed the violent, playful, erratic side of Manabozho. But children know and love anarchic figures (and it might be better for them to see mixed characters than simply to split Indian characters into good and bad, noble and savage). I know one seven year old who loves Peter Pan best when he pretends to be Captain Hook, and tells Hook in Hook's voice that he (Hook) is a codshead. It is an act worthy of Manabozho, and when Peter is tricked into revealing who he really is, that too is a Nanabozho-like story.

The two strains of white versions of native legends — (1) attempting to preserve original qualities, but synthesizing, ordering, and (2) transforming towards white analogues — lead to two extremes: the first to dull ethnology, and the second to prettified "tales"; but they need not do so. (By the way, these two attitudes to the stories also correspond to the two white means of "preserving" Indians themselves — (1) imposing order on them by means of social

programmes, welfare and so on, and (2) assimilating them into white culture.)

Later versions of the birth story show the complexity of attitudes. Judson (*Myths and legends of the Mississippi Valley*) uncritically accepts Longfellow as gospel, and makes no distinction between Nanabush and Hiawatha; yet she includes (p. 62) an alternative account of his birth (Menomimi in origin) without comment. It is the version in which he appears first as a rabbit under a bowl. Ella Clark (*Indian legends of Canada*) tends towards ethnological dullness, giving a generalized descriptive view of Nanabozho's nature and history. Her ordering of the legends is categorical; hence this story appears early in the first section, "Tales of long ago." Dorothy Reid (*Tales of Nanabozho*) relates the birth in an italicized first section as a kind of Preface to the rest. "Know then . . ." she says (p. 13) and tells us necessary background information. This is a blend of ethnologist and storyteller. She picks up some of Longfellow's sense of the figure in her sense that the Great Spirit sends him as a teacher, and in details of the wooing of Wenonah. When Wenonah returns to Nokomis from her husband she is worn out and dies giving birth to twins, along with one of the twins. The surviving twin is discovered by the grandmother under a wooden bowl, in the form of a small white rabbit. Again this story synthesizes an alternate tradition (and tries to account for the etymology of Nanabozho's name). But we see the material through a screen; we recognize Demeter and Persephone, and Naomi and Ruth, as the analogues. Reid's sense of Nanabozho's life (p. 16) as a constant warfare against evil spirits is a moral simplification like Longfellow's, familiar as the good Indian/bad Indian division in Cooper and elsewhere. Her moral simplification is the same as Longfellow's when he ascribes the evil selfishness to Paupakeewis. The Longfellow influence is strong here; it can always be detected in these stories by the presence of Minnehaha, Hiawatha's wife, since she is Longfellow's invention. The original stories mention a wife for Nanabozho and many erotic adventures, but the "princess" Laughing Water is nowhere to be found. So Reid's version is a revision of Longfellow's, attempting to include more original material but picking up some of his attitudes; it is a complex blend of synthesis, editing, transformation and simplification.

Thomas B. Leekley does not give sources for his tales (*The world of Manabozho*); mostly they represent an alternate strain to Longfellow's although there are signs of Schoolcraft. The birth is not recounted at the beginning of the collection, but instead is turned into a structural device, and provides coherence (in white terms) to the collection as a whole. Throughout the stories Manabozho attempts to learn more about his origins from Nokomis, from his recovered brother Nahpootee, and from his father. He never does learn everything, because finally his father won't tell him (and so the "revenge" plot is avoided). Thus Leekley gives Manabozho a motive and an object for his quest; the birth narrative is fragmented, but not as it would be in oral versions. It is carefully timed and is built into the characterization and motivation of

Manabozho. This explanation is something the oral tellers would not have presented or felt the need to present in a coherent, methodical way.

Unexpectedly, Carl Ray and James R. Stevens (in *Sacred legends of the Sandy Lake Cree*) begin at the beginning, perhaps due to their intentions to preserve the tales and to suggest a coherence to white readers. They explain the genealogy of Wee-sa-kay-jac (in Cree culture, many of the same stories are told about him as the Ojibwa tell of Nanabush), but do not give a narrative of his birth. Morrisseau and Schwarz in *Windigo* include no origin stories at all. These more recent co-operative collections still show the “white” effects of transformation and synthesis, and are difficult and unnerving in some ways. Some parents and teachers might decide they are too strong or rough for children. My guess is that Wee-sa-kay-jac’s troubles with his rear end would appeal very strongly to children, whether their parents approved or not. Perhaps as a general rule we should be suspicious of versions which are easy and familiar, and should look instead for the surprising, the revealing, and even the difficult. Surely this is what entertainment and instruction mean.

One example by way of conclusion: the story of the death by drowning of Manabozho’s brother. In its general form, Manabozho has a pre-vision of danger to his brother, who is usually a wolf, but in spite of a warning the brother is drowned by water serpents. Manabozho is informed of this, usually by a kingfisher, and must come to terms with the death by learning to mourn. If he goes on to revenge the death, a new set of stories begins.

In Longfellow we are given a romantic, passionate, elegant tale of devotion, jealousy and loss. Chibiabos, the “brother,” is the sweet singing friend of Hiawatha.<sup>8</sup> He represents allegorically the cultural vitality of the people, and so his death is a part of the familiar stories of the “vanishing race” and perhaps the loss of the homoerotic ideal described by Leslie Fiedler.<sup>9</sup> Hiawatha laments instantaneously and excessively and is cured by the medicine men (an example of Longfellow’s including “lore”) who sing an operatic chorus. Chibiabos is turned into the ruler of the dead and Hiawatha becomes the teacher of his people.

Judson’s version is very close in emphasis to Longfellow’s, but is pared down to a simpler form.<sup>10</sup> The brother Mokquai is told not to cross the ice, but does; is mourned for four days, then is seen by Manabush; becomes Naqqote and takes charge of the dead. Judson includes lore and the revision of rites; she synthesizes material by accounting for the two names of the brother.

Curiously when Schoolcraft retells the story for children<sup>11</sup> he reverses it so that Manabozho the prankster tells his brother *always* to cross the ice. After the death Manabozho goes “thirsting for revenge” and eventually is “deprived of the greater part of his magical powers.” So Schoolcraft, in an attempt to preserve the original nature of Manabozho and explain his loss of powers, radically alters the story.

Leekley in his version<sup>12</sup> changes the timing of the story in order to include suspense (we don't know for some time if the brother dies), lore, and lively entertaining dialogue between the kingfisher and Manabush. There is no mourning in this version; instead Manabush restores his "nephew" to life by magic.

Reid's version<sup>13</sup> synthesizes much material from different sources (as in the Nahpootie material she includes) and sentimentalizes it by extending the "pour-quoi" elements not only with the kingfisher but also with an otter. Ray gives a very simplified account of the death, leading quickly to the story of revenge against the water spirit.<sup>14</sup>

The point in recounting these variations is to compare them to the clearest sense we have of "original" material and that is the story as told in Schoolcraft's *Algonic researches*.<sup>15</sup> There the brother (in this case, a foster grandson) ignores the warning and is drowned, and Manabozho finally believes he is dead:

But he was much perplexed as to the right mode. "I wonder," said he, "how I must do it? I will cry 'oh! my grandson! oh! my grandson!' " He burst out a laughing. "No! no! that won't do. I will try so — 'oh! my heart! oh! my heart! ha! ha! ha!' That won't do either. I will cry, 'Oh my grandson *obiquadj!*' " *This satisfied him . . .*

Is this the kind of story we want to tell our children? Do we feel the need to change it in any way? It moves towards what may strike us as an odd Ojibwa word, "obiquadj," which means the part of the intestines of a fish which, by its expansion from air in the first stage of decomposition, causes the body to rise and float. Perhaps this is more Indian lore than we want for our children. In fact, the word turns out to be essential for the rest of the story, although the importance is never explained explicitly, and so it cannot be edited out.

Perhaps, alternatively, we are offended or upset by Manabozho's laughter; his behaviour may seem heartless or trivial. We don't want our children to think that all Indians are "like that"; we don't want a culture hero to act that way. But we must not be too quick to edit; it is possible to screen out too much from children. There is in Manabozho's reaction a startlingly accurate perception about mourning and grief: that we can in the midst of them be struck by the foolishness of words, or the inadequacy of them.

And we, as humans, are able to find, are obliged to find the right words. Strange as it may sound, "obiquadj" is the right word, since when Nanabush goes looking and mourning in the word that satisfied him, the body of his grandson rises to the top of the lake. That is, the word turns out to be accurate *and* efficacious. It names an aspect of reality, *and* it summons it into our field of vision. The story is in part about the relation between words and reality.

The story and the word are as convincing as they are surprising; they express equally and precisely a physical (natural), an emotional, and a linguistic reality. They represent just what we should have the courage to look for in white versions of Indian stories.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>e.g. H.W. Longfellow, *The song of Hiawatha*, Children's Classics (New York: Dent), 1959. First published 1856.
- <sup>2</sup>Basil Johnston, *How the birds got their colours*, (Toronto: Kids Can Press), 1978. (A wonderfully told and illustrated story of Papekawiss, including a transcription of the Ojibwa text.)
- <sup>3</sup>Charles Osborn, *Schoolcraft, Longfellow, Hiawatha*, (Lancaster, Pa.: Jacques Cattell Press), 1942, p. 124.
- <sup>4</sup>Thomas B. Leekley, *The world of Manabozho*, (New York: Vanguard), 1965, p. 121.
- <sup>5</sup>Henry Schoolcraft, *Algic researches*, Vol. 1, 1848, pp. 135-6.
- <sup>6</sup>*The song of Hiawatha*, Section III.
- <sup>7</sup>Henry Schoolcraft, in *The Indian fairy book* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes), 1916, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>8</sup>*The song of Hiawatha*, Section XV.
- <sup>9</sup>Leslie Fiedler, *Love and death in the American novel*, New York: Stein and Day, 1960.
- <sup>10</sup>Judson, pp. 62-64.
- <sup>11</sup>Schoolcraft, in *The Indian fairy book*, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>12</sup>Leekley, pp. 27-34.
- <sup>13</sup>Reid, pp. 51-54.
- <sup>14</sup>Carl Ray, *Sacred legends of the Sandy Lake Cree*, pp. 21-23.
- <sup>15</sup>Schoolcraft, *Algic researches*, Vol. 1, pp. 162-64.

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