

A detailed painting of a forest interior. Tall, slender trees with dark trunks rise from a dense undergrowth. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow in the upper right. In the foreground, large, lush green ferns are prominent. The overall atmosphere is one of a wild, untamed natural space.

7. The Myth of Wilderness

Longfellow, Johnston Schoolcraft, and the Legacy of Hiawatha

ENGL133 Imagining Nature

Course Stuff

- Writing Assignment due Friday 3/14 uploaded to Canvas by 5 pm
- On that Friday 3/14: No meeting of Friday discussion sections
 - TAs will instead have more office hours should you wish to discuss your papers
 - these office hours were posted as an announcement on Canvas last week
- Since we won't be having discussion sections this Friday, your midterm exams will be returned and discussed in section on Friday 3/28
- Reading for Week 9: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*-I've cut out one of the critical articles
- optional extra credit (counted toward your Engagement grade): short response to Zoom lecture 3/26 from 4-5 pm by Professor Shannon Gayk on "After Apocalyptic Ecologies"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

-in his own time, he was the most popular 19th c. poet

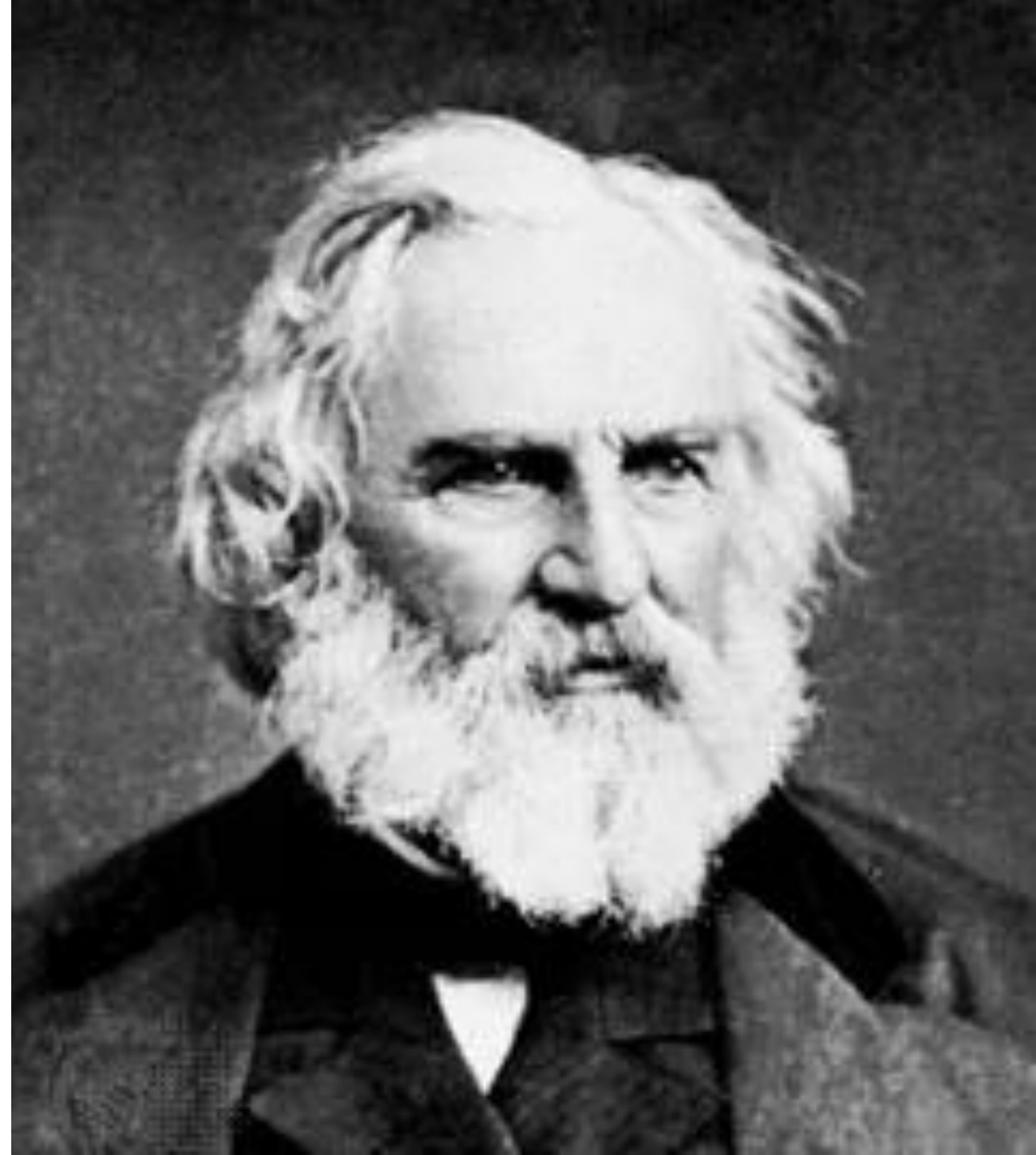
-a friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson and was influenced by the Transcendentalists

***The Song of Hiawatha* (1855)**

-*Hiawatha* was an immediate bestseller, selling around 50,000 copies in its first six months in print

-Longfellow thought America needed a great epic because Europe claimed its descent from the epics of the Greeks (Homer) and the Romans (Vergil)

-he thought ancient Native American stories could provide this same sense of historical tradition





Albert Bierstadt, "The Departure of Hiawatha," presented to Longfellow by the artist in 1868

Archive: Where did Longfellow's *Hiawatha* come from?

- Longfellow's primary source was a collection of myths and stories edited by the geographer and ethnographer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft entitled *Algonic Researches, Comprising Inquiries Respecting the Mental Characteristics of the North American Indians* (1839)
- by "Algonic," Schoolcraft referred to a group of Native American peoples originally from east of the Allegheny mountains, though the Algonquin peoples had largely been forced to relocate to the Western plains by the time he was writing
- Schoolcraft began his interest in Native American culture when he was appointed as an "Indian agent," or American government delegate to Native American tribes
- the unacknowledged source of many of these stories was his Ojibwe wife, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, and her mother, from whom Henry had heard these stories and learned the Ojibwe language



What vision of nature emerges from Longfellow's Hiawatha?

Should you ask me, whence these stories?

Whence these legends and traditions,

With the odors of the forest

With the dew and damp of meadows,

With the curling smoke of wigwams,

With the rushing of great rivers,

With their frequent repetitions,

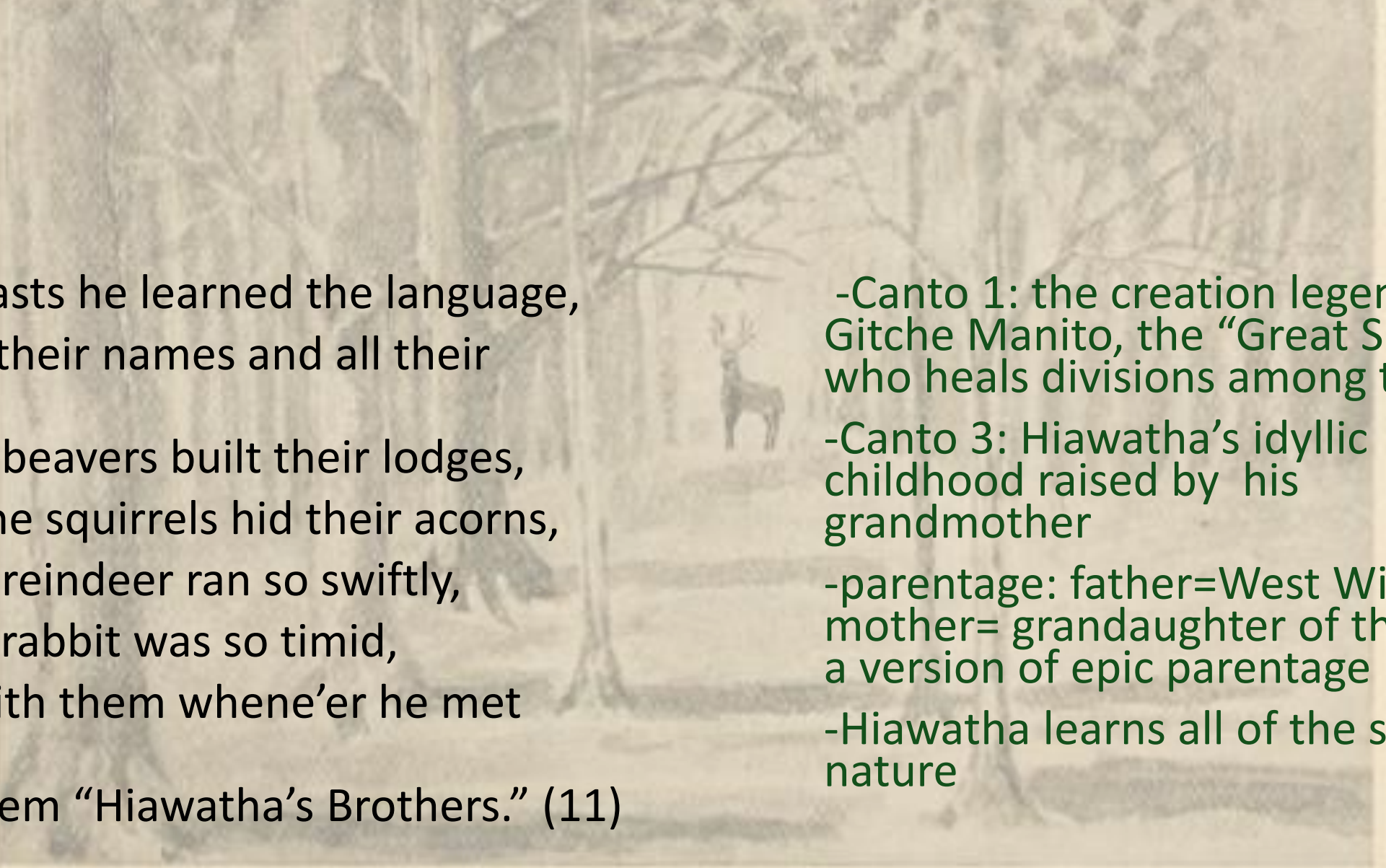
And their wild reverberations

As of thunder in the mountains? (1)

-the Introduction establishes the necessary connection between nature and nation

-songs come from the land directly and from a Native American bard who learned them from birds

-audience is imagined as "ye who love the haunts of Nature" and "ye who love a nation's legends" (2-3)



Of all beasts he learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How the beavers built their lodges,
Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Brothers." (11)

-Canto 1: the creation legend of Gitche Manito, the "Great Spirit" who heals divisions among tribes

-Canto 3: Hiawatha's idyllic childhood raised by his grandmother

-parentage: father=West Wind;
mother= granddaughter of the moon;
a version of epic parentage (9)

-Hiawatha learns all of the secrets of nature



With both hands his face he covered,

What is Longfellow's Hiawatha like? How does Longfellow transform his Ojibwe subject matter?

- Hiawatha's courtship and marriage of Minnehaha was Longfellow's addition to his sources
- contrary to Anishinaabe family life that was based on commonly recognized relationships (something like modern common-law marriages) rather than formal, licensed marriages
- the powerful trickster Nanabozho becomes the sentimental Hiawatha
- cf. the Ojibwe stories that we read earlier in the term with Nanabozho
- Hiawatha confirms the stereotype of the 'noble savage'
- turns Hiawatha into a national folk hero

What options are there for reading Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* today?

- 'redface' and settler colonialism
- should we read it today? (cf. Shakespeare's *Othello*)
- if so, how do we read it?
- a model of decolonial reading:
 - a critical approach to interpreting texts, where the reader actively challenges and deconstructs colonial narratives embedded within the material, by questioning the assumed universality of Western knowledge and centering marginalized perspectives, (such as that of the critic Sylvia Wynter)
 - this is to contextualize an artwork
- how to read a settler colonial narrative such as *Hiawatha* from a decolonial perspective?
 - analyze how it portrays Indigenous peoples
 - examine how it reinforces the concept of "terra nullius" (empty land)
 - address the text's assumptions about a settler narrative of progress and civilization
 - explore the author's (and audience's) positionality
 - seek out counter-narratives from Indigenous voices to understand the full picture of historical events and experiences

Historical 19th c. Models of Nature and Native Americans: Manifest Destiny

- what are the most important details of the painting?
- the figure of Columbia?
- how is nature envisioned?
- how is this a rationale for settler colonialism?



John Gast, *American Progress* (1872)

The Ending of Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*



"Let us welcome, then, the strangers,
Hail them as our friends and brothers,
And the heart's right hand of friendship
Give them when they come to see us.
Gitche Manito, the Mighty,
Said this to me in my vision.

"I beheld, too, in that vision
All the secrets of the future,
Of the distant days that shall be.
I beheld the westward marches
Of the unknown, crowded nations.
All the land was full of people,
Restless, struggling, toiling, striving,
Speaking many tongues, yet feeling
But one heart-beat in their bosoms.
In the woodlands rang their axes,
Smoked their towns in all the valleys,
Over all the lakes and rivers
Rushed their great canoes of thunder." (15-16)

- The civilizing and development of 'terra nullius' (empty land)
- assumptions about progress?

Historical 19th c. Models of Nature and Native Americans: Indian Removals

Removal Act of 1830

- President Andrew Jackson passed an act that granted land west of the Mississippi River to Indian tribes that agreed to give up their homelands. He then passed more than 70 mostly coerced treaties that displaced Native American peoples to this land, including the forced displacement of the Cherokee in the Southwest known as the “Trail of Tears”
- the land opened up by these displacements was then settled by Euroamericans

Treaty of Washington (1836)

- Among Jackson’s treaties was one in the Northern Plains that saw the Ojibwe cede to the United States a huge territory of more than 13 million acres
- a small amount of land was set aside for the Ojibwe to live and to replace their traditional hunting lifestyle with farming but the government subsidies that were to fund the transition were often late and underfunded
- the agent who negotiated this treaty for the US government was Henry Rowe Schoolcraft

Treaty of 1855

- same year that *Song of Hiawatha* is published, the Ojibwe under duress gave up land and rights for money and US citizenship, a treaty that weakened the Ojibwe nation
- replaced larger tracts of communally held land with individual farm ownership on small plots

Song of Hiawatha's legacy: the Vanishing Indian Stereotype

- the 'Vanishing Indian' stereotype
(cf. The Crying Indian of Make America Beautiful ad campaign)
- The legacy of Longfellow: *Hiawatha* Pageants
 - large outdoor performances from ca 1900 to the 1950s in the NY and Great Lakes region
 - the plays romanticized Native American life even as it provided income for Native actors

What are the effects of the “vanishing Indian” stereotype?

- used to justify the eradication of Indigenous culture
- Indian boarding schools run by religious and government orgs throughout the West from 1869 to the 1960s
- “Kill the Indian, Save the Man”
- in these schools young Native Americans would often put on plays of “Hiawatha,” a story that that demonstrated Indigenous people support assimilation into Angloamerican culture



Theatrical portrayal of Hiawatha proposing to Minnehaha. NPS Photo, Longfellow Family Photograph Collection, LONG Collections

