

The Song of Hiawatha

Henry W. Longfellow

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The Song of Hiawatha is an 1855 epic poem, in trochaic tetrameter, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, featuring an Indian hero and loosely based on legends and ethnography of the Ojibwe (Chippewa, Anishinaabeg) and other Native American people contained in Algic Researches (1839) and additional writings of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. In sentiment, scope, overall conception, and many particulars, Longfellow's poem is very much a work of American Romantic literature, not a representation of Native American oral tradition, despite Longfellow's insistence that "I can give chapter and verse for these legends. Their chief value is that they are Indian legends." Longfellow had originally planned on following Schoolcraft in calling his hero Manabozho, the name in use at the time among the Ojibwe of the south shore of Lake Superior for a figure of their folklore, a trickster-transformer. But in his journal entry for June 28, 1854, he wrote, "Work at 'Manabozho;' or, as I think I shall call it, 'Hiawatha'—that being another name for the same personage." Hiawatha was not, in fact, "another name for the same personage" (the mistaken identification was actually made by Schoolcraft then compounded by Longfellow), but a probable historical figure associated with the founding of the League of the Iroquois. Because of the poem, however, "Hiawatha" came into use as a name for everything from towns to a telephone company in the western Great Lakes region where no Iroquois reside



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