THE EPIC ELEMENT IN HIAMATHA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If one traced the life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow backward from his peak of fame, the publication and popularity of Hiawatha, he would unconsciously try to interpret the beginning of his life and career in the knowledge of all that has been gathered in returning to it, and possibly attach importance to minor details. Yet, early in his life, Longfellow could have served as the "perfect symbol of a young ambitious country that hardly knew as yet where it was going but felt sure it was on the way."  

Longfellow was considered fortunate in respect to "stock and environment." He was born into an aristocracy which was definitely not middle-class. His ancestry was both Puritan and Pilgrim. From his mother he must have inherited "the imaginative and romantic" side of his nature,

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1 Albert Keiser, The Indian in American Literature, p.189.

2 R. Spiller and others, Literary History of United States, I, 592.


for she encouraged his pursuit of knowledge and stimulated his interest in the refinements of society. His father, too, contributed his share by directing him along the lines toward economic success. The New England which he represented was the "highest and most homogeneous culture this country has yet produced."

Longfellow attended Bowdoin College, but before he graduated in 1825 he had written verse "rather copiously," and this early success and popularity had strengthened his desire to enter the literary field as a poet. In a letter to his father, written April 30, 1824, we see his first approach to the subject, for his father had planned for him to be a lawyer. The letter contained:

But in thinking to make a lawyer of me, I fear you thought more 'partially than justly.' I hardly think Nature designed me for the bar, or the pulpit, or the dissecting-room.

It was at this time that Longfellow first became interested in writing about the Indians. The three short poems, on the theme of Indians, composed at this time are "Lover's Rock," "Jeckoyva," and "The Indian Hunter." They

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7. Longfellow, op. cit., p. 4.
8. The Complete Writings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, I 298-303. (Hereafter referred to as Longfellow, Works.)
were insignificant, but showed his marked interest in the aborigines. Later that year, 1825, he wrote the poem, "Burial of the Minnisink," which was included in the contents of his first collection of poems, "Voices of the Night."

Apparently his reading of Heckewelder's *Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations of Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*, which he mentioned in a letter to his mother, November 9, 1823, and his role as King Philip in a "Dialogue between a North American Indian and a European" in the Junior Exhibition in December, 1823, had heightened his interest in the subject.

That interest was soon interrupted by Bowdoin's offering him six hundred dollars a year for three years to study abroad in preparation to teach modern languages. Late in 1829 he joined the faculty of Bowdoin, and the next few years his writing took the form of translations, grammars, and linguistic studies.

In 1835 Harvard offered him the Smith professorship of modern languages, and after another year spent in Europe, he began his duties at Harvard and his long residence in Cambridge. Established in Craigie House, which was a wedding gift from the father of his second wife, he soon became the

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9 *Longfellow, op. cit.,* p. 32.
central figure in a congenial group of friends. These surroundings were conducive to literary endeavors of a different kind for in succession appeared Outre Mer in 1835, Hyperion and Voices of Night in 1839.

Longfellow's interest in Indians had not waned during this period. He wrote to his father in 1827 about "the grand display of Indians in Boston." His next poem with an Indian theme was "To a Driving Cloud," written in 1845 just before Evangeline appeared in 1847, and The Golden Legend in 1851.

"Long before the poet had reached the zenith of his reputation, the professor had grown weary of his chair." His eighteen years of service had dulled his enthusiasm for a scholarly, academic career, so he resigned in 1854.

Longfellow's acquaintance with Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, the Ojibway chief, and the pleas of a former student to make

11 Longfellow, Works, I, 44.
13 Schuster, op. cit., p. 36.
14 Ibid., p. 36.
some Indian legends into a poem, apparently set him on a
diligent search for materials to carry out such a plan for
writing a poem with a true American theme and background.

In June of 1854 he recorded in his journal the suc-
cess of that search:

22d. I have at length hit upon a plan for a poem
on the American Indians, which seems the right one,
and only one. It is to weave their beautiful tradi-
tions into a whole.

25th. I could not help this evening making a begin-
ning of 'Manabozho,' or whatever the poem is to be
called. His adventures will form the theme at all
events.

28th. Worked at 'Manabozho;' or, as I think I shall
call it, 'Hiawatha,'—that being another name for the
same personage.

Algonquian Researches and History of the Indian Tribes of
the United States, both by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, formed
the "mine" from which Longfellow dredged "his preliminary
information and situations."

The first result of Longfellow's freedom in the purely
literary realm of writing, free from teaching duties, was
The Song of Hiawatha, published in 1855. The idea of writing

15
G. L. Austin, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, p. 322.

16
Samuel Longfellow, Life of Henry Wadsworth Long-
fellow, II, 248.

17
H. S. Gorman, A Victorian American, p. 274.
about the American Indians had been taking shape in his mind for many years although not in a definite form. The work on the poem progressed slowly through 1854, for he was determined to create a letter-perfect poem, so far as scholarship was concerned. The first draft was completed by February, 1855, and during April and May he rewrote it for the press.

When the inspiration came, he covered a large space with verses; but he had the power to go back, and to forge anew or retouch before the fire had cooled. His methods were careful to the last degree; poems were kept and considered a long time, line by line; and he sometimes had them set up in type for better scrutiny. They were left so perhaps for months, and when they appeared it was after rigorous criticism had been exhausted. 18

He received proof-sheets early in June, and on November 10 the first edition of five thousand copies was published by Ticknor and Fields. *Hiawatha* created an instant upheaval in the literary world of that day, and by December 11 eleven thousand copies had been sold. According to Griswold, writing in 1856,

*His last work, *The Song of Hiawatha*, has surpassed all the rest in popularity, and has probably been more widely read than any other poem of its length within so short a period from its publication.*


In three months twenty thousand copies were sold in the United States alone. 20

Its publication caused newspapers and periodicals to make bold and sometimes bitter charges.

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CHAPTER II

CRITICAL EVALUATIONS OF HIWATHA

The foundation for a critical reception of Hiawatha had begun as early as 1839. Longfellow's Voices of the Night, published December 10, 1839, was a small book, but included the poem, "The Beleagured City," which was the opening wedge that gave Edgar Allan Poe an opportunity to vent his fury at Longfellow with his first charges of plagiarism. Next, in 1843, after the publication of the poem entitled "The Good George Campbell" he furthered his campaign with the charge of imitation, and, again, with his review of "The Spanish Student." However, it was in his criticism of "The Waif" for the Evening Mirror, January 14, 1846, that he stated: "it is infected with a moral taint," and "These men Mr. Longfellow can continuously imitate (is that the word?) and yet never even incidentally commend" that actually aroused indignation among some of Longfellow's literary friends. They attempted to defend Longfellow from

1 Gorman, A Victorian American, p. 225.
2 Edgar Allan Poe, Works, VI, 326.
3 Ibid., p. 258.
the charges, and the whole action resulted in what has been termed the "Longfellow War." 4

In 1845 William Gilmore Simms blasted Longfellow in "a very abusive article" in a magazine review. Also, in a letter to Evert Duycknick, an influential littérature, he wrote: "I think Longfellow's 'Waif' a poor compilation. I had almost said a dishonest one," but his true estimate of Longfellow and his influence is clearly given in a letter, dated July 15, 1845, in which he writes of the New England group in general and Longfellow in particular. He says "They have, curiously enough, fastened our faith to the very writers who, least of all others, possess a native character. Such is Longfellow, a man of nice taste, a clever imitator--simply an adroit artist." 5

According to Longfellow's entry in his diary on December 11, 1845--two days after his notation of Simms's articles--we find that Margaret Fuller had made "a furious onslaught" upon him in The New York Tribune, which he termed "a bilious attack." 6 Upon examination of her article we find that Longfellow might have benefited by accepting her strictures,

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5 Ibid., p. 90.

6 Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, II, 249.
for they were soundly reasoned and sharp in censure, if not courteously phrased. She rather regretted, not jealously as with Poe, that "exaggerated praises" had been given to "a person of moderate powers instead of reserving those honors for the highest." She recognized the "sweet and tender passages descriptive of his personal feelings," but, also, knew that he had "no style of his own growing out of his own experiences and observations of nature. Nature with him, whether human or external, is always seen through the windows of literature." She did try to defend him from the harsh charges of plagiarisms which Poe was promoting by saying that she could not conceive of anyone's being anxious to accuse him of such charges, "when we had supposed it so obvious that the greater part of his mental stories were derived from the work of others."

These three, Edgar Allan Poe, William Gilmore Simms, and Margaret Fuller, sounded discordant notes in the voices of contemporary criticism that interrupted the theme-song of praise in his lifetime. Certain strong principles of criticism had prompted Poe's abusive and personal attacks--"He hated secondary genius in poetry. He despised sentimentality. He detested and feared the monstrous log-rolling of the New

7 G. R. Carpenter, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, p. 91.
8 T. Higginson, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 294.
England group. The didactic element in letters nauseated him. He maintained that the literary artist's function was to build a completely new thing of beauty, to the extent that human genius permitted. Longfellow held a different belief for he thought the poet's function was "not creation, but insight." He considered himself in the position of the middle man, "who collected beautiful thoughts and tales wherever he could, and then reshaped and resung them in the way most natural to him."

Cradled in this critical background created by Poe, *Hiawatha* was attacked severely, and Longfellow found himself entangled with criticisms and defense for almost a year and a half after the publication. A most flagrant charge of plagiarism was directed at Longfellow by a reviewer of the *Washington Intelligencer* who signed the initials "T. C. P." He asserted that Longfellow had borrowed not only the meter, but also "many of the most striking incidents of the Finnish Epic and transferred them to the American Indians" without proper acknowledgment.

11 Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
Longfellow did not publicly deny the charges of plagiarism, but in a letter to his friend, Charles Sumner, December 3, 1855, he clearly admitted his debt to Schoolcraft and to the *Kalevala*, and eliminated those charges of borrowing from either. He wrote:

> This is truly one of the greatest literary outrages I ever heard of. You see what the charge of imitation amounts to by the extracts given.... I can give chapter and verse for these legends. Their chief value is that they are Indian legends. I know the *Kalevala* very well; and that some of its legends resemble the Indian stories preserved by Schoolcraft is very true. But the idea of making me responsible for that is too ludicrous. 13

Soon afterwards, in England, the meter of *Hiawatha* was discussed in the newspapers. Some reviewers claimed the meter was taken from the Spaniards rather than the Finns. That matter, though, was corrected by Ferdinand Freilgarth, a friend of Longfellow's, and a reviewer of the *Athenaeum*. He wrote Longfellow from London, December 7, 1855, and gave his solution to the controversy, which he thought should settle the question at once. He explained that: "The characteristic feature, which shows that you have fetched the metre from the Finns, is the parallelism adopted so skillfully and so gracefully in *Hiawatha*." 14 Longfellow did not take issue with Freilgarth

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over this solution, but still contended "that the parallelism, or repetition, is as much the characteristic of Indian as of Finnish song."

The rising volume of hearty praise from his literary circle of friends and admirers soon drowned out this quick flurry of criticism. Bayard Taylor, a historian, was impressed with the skill used in "representing the purely poetical aspects of Indian life and tradition." He predicted that it would be "parodied," yet "live after the Indian race has vanished from our Continent." Bancroft, an editor and critic, at Prescott's insistence, added his commendation that "you have made everything of your subject which it permitted." Longfellow spoke of Hiawatha as an "Indian Edda," or "the saga of a legendary hero sent as a benefactor to the American Indians," but from a remark he made in a letter to Freilgarth that Hiawatha is "the hero, a kind of American Prometheus" we may assume that the so-called epic element was the goal of his attainment. Ralph Waldo Emerson assured Longfellow that he was right in calling it an "Indian Edda"

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and declared it to be "sweet and wholesome as maize" with the "costume and machinery" which was in harmony with its American landscape. 21

In 1856 H. R. Schoolcraft dedicated his book, The Myth of Hiawatha and other Oral Legends, Mythologic and Allegoric of the North American Indians, to Longfellow, thereby setting the pattern of felicitous criticism that was destined to continue throughout Longfellow's life and extend as a dim afterglow until 1907. The dedication smoothed the accusations to commonplace. It goes:

Permit me to dedicate to you this volume of Indian myths and legends, derived from the story-telling circle of the native wigwams. They indicate the possession, by the Vesperic tribes, of mental resources of a very characteristic kind,—furnishing, in fact, a new point from which to judge the race and to excite intellectual sympathies,—you have most felicitously shown in your poem of Hiawatha. Not only so, but you have demonstrated, by this pleasing series of pictures of Indian life, sentiment, and invention that the theme of the native lore reveals one of the true sources of our literary independence. Greece and Rome, England and Italy, have so long furnished, if they have not exhausted, the field of poetic culture, that it is, at least, refreshing to find both in theme and metre something new. 22

In 1874, J. Scherr, writing in A History of English Literature, pointed out that Hiawatha was "a truly

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21 Ibid., p. 266.

indigenous American epic," and in 1896 Charles F. Johnson, an American biographer, supported that idea in claiming that "Longfellow went much further back into primitive nature-worship, and recalled for us the cultus of infantile, half-articulate man." Thus, Hiawatha may be considered the poem which "vindicates Longfellow's claim to the name of poet in the sense of a creator of original and characteristic works of art." It interpreted "an unfamiliar type of life, and as such possesses an ideal beauty and truth." Andrew Lang in Letters on Literature, published in 1889, developed the theme along the same lines. It seemed to him that "Everything lives with a human breath, as everything should live in a poem concerned with these wild folk, to whom all the world, and all in it, is as personal as themselves." In 1899 in the History of American Verse, Onderdonk refers to Hiawatha "as the nearest approach to an American epic." J. W. Abernethy in 1902 considered it, "a forest epic, a poem more redolent of the primitive soil of America

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25
Ibid., p. 7149.

26
Moulton, op. cit., p. 396.

27
Ibid.
than anything else in our literature." 28

In 1905 Page suggested that possibly it was the simplicity in Longfellow's own nature which "enabled him to reproduce the effect of primitive poetry and legend," and stated that Hiawatha appeared to be "superior to all other attempts at epic treatment of Indian legends," for "by some wondrous alchemy" Longfellow "did catch the true local color, even in detail as well as in mood, of a life he had never seen." 29 Carpenter showed interest only in the source materials. In his review of Longfellow he said that "he had at his hand the very sort of epic the Indians might have had, could they have woven together their scattered and imperfect traditions—an epic crude and semi-monstrous." 30

William Dean Howells in his article, "The Art of Longfellow," published in the North American Review in 1907, confidently assured the public that "an epic of our Indian life" would have been impossible if Longfellow had not approached his theme in such a manner as to free the episodes of savagery for greater effect on the main incidents which are

28 American Literature, p. 264.


30 Carpenter, op. cit., p. 115.
"originally and ultimately of epic solemnity."  

Following in the immediate shadow of the elaborate praises during Longfellow's lifetime, Oliphant Smeaton, in his biography, *Longfellow and His Poetry*, published in 1913, tells us that "Hiawatha is the only attempt worthy of the name to portray the red man amidst his native surroundings," for "Hiawatha is a semi-divine personage like Buddha in Hindu mythology and Prometheus in Grecian, who came to earth to benefit certain races and to teach them the arts of peace."  

The changing trends of critical thought diverted the attention of the critics into other channels until approximately 1933. Longfellow's contemporaries were in accord with Emerson about Longfellow when in writing of Hiawatha, he said that "I have one foremost satisfaction in reading your books, --that I am safe." But safety, in those terms, creates a hazard to succeeding generations, and Hiawatha had already paid the penalty for Longfellow's "overwhelming immediate success."  

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33 Longfellow, *op. cit.*, p. 266.  

The criticisms grew fewer in number but sharper and more diagnostic in pointing out weaknesses in Hiawatha. Helen Clark in The Poets' New England, published in 1911, complained that Longfellow was not a true observer of nature, for he preferred idealized pictures of nature drawn from imagination. 35

W. P. Trent as editor of The Cambridge History of American Literature, 1917, did not deny the popularity of Hiawatha, but accounted for its local appeal by setting the "novelty and quaintness" of style in contrast to its "facility and factitiousness." 36

Rush Powell, a biographer, in 1919, reasoned that Longfellow's detractors, especially in the fields of science and history, objected to Hiawatha because it was "poetry, sentiment, idealization, and not a contribution to the literature that helps to explain the American Indian, or to reflect his life or thought." 37

Stith Thompson in his article, "The Indian Legend of Hiawatha," published in 1922, discredited Longfellow's use of the Manabozho myth. He felt that Longfellow had done

35 Helen Clark, The Poets' New England, p. 56.


violence to the original myth and the spirit of the race by "all but humanizing the demigod" then weaving around him typical experiences of Indian life. Alfred Kreymborg considered Hiawatha as "a careless fusion and confusion of the Ojibway and Algonquin, Manabozho demigod, "but his fault-finding centered in Longfellow's creating his heroes in purity, and in allowing his descriptions to supersede plot, characters, and action.

Gorman in his endeavor to prove that Longfellow was a Victorian American admitted that Hiawatha "as a conceived work" ranked a little higher than Longfellow's other poems, but he justified that admission by blaming it on the Time-Spirit which had thrust this "epic based on the only autochthonous American myths" upon American readers at the same time that Tennyson, in England, was busy with a comparable theme.

A. B. Demille in his Explanatory Notes for The Song of Hiawatha, published in 1923, grudgingly refers to it as "an epic poem which paints a romantic picture of the Indian." Van Wyck

38 Stith Thompson, "The Indian Legend of Hiawatha," Publication of the Modern Language Association of America, XXXVII (1922), 140.


40 Gorman, op. cit., p. 276.

41 A. B. Demille, American Poetry, p. 274.
Brooks in his biographical sketch contended that Longfellow's Indians in *Hiawatha* were not "warrior-stoics" of actual life, but that they conformed to the legends which he had reshaped to omit all savage traits. In other words, Longfellow had "simplified and humanized them."

The literary boom from the early years of the twentieth century to 1933 had failed to produce a poet to counteract the self-assertive materialist in this age governed by the high-pressure of industry. So it was not surprising to find the leading critics in their search for true poetic values returning to the poets whose poetic philosophy was fundamentally sound and honest. Albert Keiser in *The Indian in American Literature*, published in 1933, voiced that trend of thought when he suggested that if *Hiawatha* was not as realistic as desired, it was because Longfellow wished to reflect his own kind and delicate nature through traits of savage life.

G. R. Elliott in "Gentle Shades of Longfellow" recognized that Longfellow had done what he could for poetry within his own limits, and while "worshipping the epic gods afar off, he created near at hand the limpid shadowy eagerness of


43 Keiser, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
Similarly, Howard Mumford Jones gave credit where it was due. In *American Writers on American Literature*, published in 1931, he wrote concerning *Hiawatha*:

It seems to me that Longfellow, given the materials and the age, has done wonderfully well; he has created something unique and *sui generis*, he has displayed the greatest literary tact, and a really superb artistic élan in carrying this small epic to a satisfactory close. 45

In 1947, Mr. Walter Fuller Taylor summarized his findings thus:

Over *Hiawatha* Longfellow cast the spell of the romantic return to the simple life; his scenes are invested with glamour of that imaginary state where a virtuous folk live in intimate touch with wind and rain and the warm earth. His Indians are not Indians, but human beings in general, poetically idealized, and placed in the midst of an equally ideal setting. *Hiawatha* lives not because it is true to life, but because it is beautiful with a beauty beyond life, a beauty of an imaginary childhood of the race, fresh and joyous as morning sunshine. 46

The *Literary History of the United States*, published in 1948, placed *Hiawatha* in its proper niche in the structure of American literature in concluding that it "did something to stay if not to satisfy America's hunger for a past, a legendary,

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a body of myth, of her own." The author considered that Longfellow had successfully fulfilled his function as poetic craftsman in delving below the surface of popular demand to hold fast to the elementary fact that "a poet must make poems," and to remind us "of deep-drawn traits in the American Character" which helps us to understand ourselves.

Even in 1950 John Mason Brown in an article in the Saturday Review of Literature took a firm stand when he took issue with the Monogram Studios. He declared that the literary merits or demerits of Hiawatha did not matter, but that Hiawatha, the hero was "plainly meant to be the most noble of all Noble Savages, a man of celestial ancestry and divine power, a prophet and deliverer of the nation, a godlike figure, an Indian Christus." Clearly Mr. Brown is describing an epic figure.

From the foregoing comments it is apparent that Longfellow's work was praised, except for a small minority of critics, until just a few years before his death. There was a gradual breaking-away until 1907; then there was a general stampede away from his work until approximately 1925. This dimming of his fame during the early twentieth century


involved many factors, such as change in taste, different moral concepts, stress of individualism, and the quality of contemporary imagination. For a few years, 1925-1933, the criticism seemed to smolder. Some critics praised certain poetic principles while others picked his poetry to pieces and denounced every phase of it for not conforming to the enlightened standards of their literary thinking. From 1933 to the present the more astute critics seem to be more liberal in their criticism by sorting out his good poetic practices and holding them up to public view while, at the same time, lessening the emphasis on controversial points of difference and forcing them into the background.

Saintsbury urged that slight importance be attached to the American criticism of *Hiawatha*. For him it was enough that Longfellow produced the desired effect—"the presentation of an entirely strange civilization, or half-civilization, with imagery, diction, meter and all, adapted in strangeness." Yet, according to Canby, *Hiawatha* was the poet's recognition of the spirit of nationalism which was springing up in the United States. *Hiawatha* was Longfellow's

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attempt "to give the land of the dollar a romantic past." His choice seemed an appropriate medium for creating an American epic.

CHAPTER III

DEFINITION OF THE EPIC

The epic belongs to that dim region of beginnings, when true religion had not yet enlightened man, nor had science explained to him causes and effects. It is the source of literature beyond which man has not explored, for "the epic carries the imagination into the past, into the land of dreams and ideals." It is the expression, comparatively speaking, of the earliest experience in living.

These primitive dwellers of the earth must have become curious about their environmental surroundings; for we find that, in order to solve the disturbing questions, men devised myths which accounted for the innumerable phenomena of nature. These myths were diffused within the race until they became a body of legend and stored-up experience centered around one hero, which, in turn, was recognized as the epic, or representative expression of elemental moods and ideals of the primitive race.

Since the epic depicts the life and living conditions of the early peoples of the prehistoric era, and since the

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1 C. M. Gayley and B. P. Kurtz, Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism, p. 424.
living conditions differed with the races in various sections of the globe—although the early people were of one generic race, they were divided into a considerable number of stocks, and again into a far greater number of tribes which were recognized as individual races—we have not one epic, but many. Each race created its own epic by its own peculiar account of home life, habits and customs, big, heart-swelling movements, passions, conquests, sufferings, and spiritual beliefs and achievements.

The essence of the epic is that attitude toward life which sees in the moment a destined future. The hero, although symbolic, around which the epic is usually centered is a victorious culmination of all beliefs and ideals of the race as a whole. He may be solely historical or may be a creation based on historical facts but endowed with superhuman abilities for the recurrent inspiration of the content of race narrative.

Since the epic gives a sense of destiny and a feeling of guidance to an end, the great action is usually slow, the tone majestic and inevitable in its elemental simplicity, and the content portrayed by means of episodes, which are but opportunities for the display of destiny, every moment promising a new beginning. The success of the epic,

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however, depends upon the resultant light created by its mass of human experience in content, and upon the extent to which the past is restored.

Scholars generally agree that "the epic is the first-fruits of the earliest experience of nature and life on the part of imaginative races," 3 but it had its origin in myths and legends which were conveyed by word of mouth from one generation to the next, and in songs which passed from singer to singer. Often they were greatly altered by those that received them; and a clever story-teller, or a poet with a fine imagination, added touches here and there, but when they finally came to be recorded on the pages of literature, they were the truest of folk-epics.

The true folk-epics, however, were not merely recited poems. The epic songs accumulated from critical sittings and compilings of a previous time in which the actual epos were only remembered.

But before these epic songs became the object of such literary care, they had flourished mid the folk, eked out by voice and gesture, as a bodily enacted art; as it were, a fixed and crystallized blend of lyric song and dance, with predominant

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3 H. A. Guerber, The Book of the Epic, p. 15.

lingering on portrayal of the action and reproduction of the heroic dialogue. 5

In general it may be said that the folk-epic deals with traditions which command the credence of the people by and for whom it is composed, and that the individual epic chooses its subject with a view to inculcating an ideal, historical or spiritual. 6

Gradually, after a long lapse of ages, men came consciously and broadly to write, and they naturally turned to that which was written as a model. Some writers aspired to the grandeur of style exhibited in the folk-epic. The result was "the individual, or art-epic." As distinguished from the folk-epic, the art-epic depends for the main part of its content upon the extent to which the past is blended with the present in making a fresh advance into realms of sentiment and imagination, thus losing the characteristics—the learned ideals and manners in the written records of a people—of the original epic.

Within the literary field, designated as the epic, critics have attempted to classify as "authentic," epic poems which suggest the pure, inspired song of the poet, unspoiled by


7 Ibid., p. 428.
culture; and as "literary," those which suggest the pre-
meditated song derived from study and invention. The two
classes differ because of their technique and method of com-
position. This distinction lies chiefly between the oral and
written epic, or that which is to be heard and that which is
to be read. Again, the epic which involves a natural growth
and a natural spirit is referred to as "natural," while that
which takes its form from the author's idea of what consti-
tutes an epic with its artistic subject and literary con-
struction is termed "artistic."

Those models of the written epic as a literary form have
varied with the individual poet throughout the ages, each
attempting to justify his poems in relation to a previous
theory, thus enlarging the definition until critics are not
sure just what does constitute an epic. By tracing the de-
velopment of the theory of the epic, one may better under-
stand the methods used by critics in formulating a defini-
tion which can be used as standard criteria in classifying
poems as epic.

Aristotle was "the first, and only Greek," to attempt
defining and limiting an epic by establishing an "ordered


group of opinions." For that reason, most critical analysis begins with the diffused theory of the epic in his Poetics. Since the theory was primarily derived from the "ethical problems" arising from the Iliad of Homer, an epic "might well have been defined as 'a poem written in imitation of the Iliad.'"

Aristotle, thinking that tragedy and epic are similar in many respects, clearly differentiated between them. He said that they are both "modes of imitation"; that the epic, in the same manner as tragedy, must be divided into four types; and that it must contain "Reversals of Situation, Recognition, and Scenes of Suffering." He believed that poetic imitation, in "narrative form," using a "single metre," should have a plot constructed on "dramatic principles," and have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Unity of action Aristotle applied to epic poetry. Tragedy was supposed to limit itself "to a single revolution of the sun, whereas the Epic action has no limits of time."

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13 Ibid., p. 91. 14 Ibid., p. 89. 15 Ibid., p. 23.
The epic, even though it deals with historical materials, is not history because no attempt is made to depict all events that occur at any one period. Furthermore, the poet must restrict his plot by artistic selection. Homer exemplified such selection by choosing Achilles's anger as the theme of the Iliad. It is obvious that the plot was properly unified.

He never attempts to make the whole war of Troy the subject of his poem, though that war had a beginning and an end. It would have been too vast a theme, and not easily embraced in a single view. If, again, he had kept it within moderate limits, it must have been over-complicated by the variety of incidents. As it is, he detaches a single portion, and admits as episodes many events from the general story of the war--such as the Catalogue of the ships and others--thus diversifying the poem.

Aristotle felt that epic poetry had a "great--special--capacity for enlarging its dimensions." Because of its narrative form, the epic provided for the inclusion of many episodes--"episodes simultaneously transacted"--which "if relevant to the subject, add mass and dignity to the poem" and are conducive to "grandeur of effect, to diverting the mind of the hearer, and relieving the story."

Aristotle, in discussing character in connection with plot, does not assign specific qualities to epic characters; but the qualities listed for tragic characters--"they must be

\[16\text{ Ibid., p. 89.}\]  \[17\text{ Ibid., p. 93.}\]
good, they must be appropriate, they must have reality, and 18 they must be consistent" --may be applied to epic characters for he said that "Epic poetry agrees with Tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type." Although epic and tragedy agree in characters of a "higher type," they differ in language, for "Epic poetry admits but one kind of metre," the heroic measure or hexameter.

Aristotle said that tragedy must contain the element of the wonderful but that the epic has the advantage over tragedy in that it can achieve the wonderful more rapidly by making use of the irrational. "The irrational, on which the wonderful depends for its chief effects, has wider scope in Epic poetry, because there the person acting is not seen." He explained that the difference lay in the method of presentation, for an event which would appear absurd performed before an audience, does not appear so in narration. Consequently, he concluded that "the poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities."

Horace ranked next, in importance, after Aristotle as a critic of the epic in antiquity. His work of major importance, *Ars Poetica*, contained a few remarks on the epic, but its

value lies in the fact that it has been repeatedly quoted and referred to by subsequent critics. The remarks in *Ars Poetica* important to the study of the epic are those concerning subject matter, meter, and plot. First, Horace warned the poet to choose a simple subject commensurate with his ability.  

Next, concerning meter, he said, "In what measure the exploits of kings and captains and the sorrow of war may be written, Homer has shown." Third, Horace led the way in developing the epic plot *in medias res*.

The Middle Ages produced no important epic theory in the field of literary criticism. However, during the Renaissance in Italy, three important critics, Trissino, Tasso, and Castelvetro, emerged.

Trissino, in an entire section of his *Poetica* devoted to epic theory, introduced the Aristotelian theory of the epic to modern literary criticism. Trissino stressed Aristotle's theory by pointing out that the epic, like tragedy, deals with illustrious men and illustrious actions; that the epic was similar to tragedy because of its having a single action, but differed because the action was not limited to a certain interval of time. Trissino, like other critics of his age,

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thought the vastness of design and largeness of detail were requisite to create the grandeur of the epic. He also pointed out to the romantic poets that the marvelous should not be confused with the miraculous, which violates verisimilitude. He preferred Aristotle's concept of the element of the wonderful.

Tasso wrote of verisimilitude and attempted to reconcile the epic and romance. He felt that the subject matter of the epic should be based on history, preferably the history of Christianity. He was careful in pointing to the danger of using themes connected with the unchangeable articles of Christian faith for he did not want to limit the free play of the poet's imagination. He felt that the epic should be set in history, neither too ancient nor too modern, and that the events themselves must be grand and noble.

Castelvetro did not agree with the Aristotelian theory in regard to the unity of the epic. He considered poetry to be imaginative history, and since history dealt with the whole life of an individual or with many actions of many people, he could see no reason for setting the epic apart. He did admit, however, that a person writing a successful epic, dealing with

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one action of one person, showed signs of ingenuity and excellence.

The epic theory in France did not develop to its highest until the seventeenth century. Ronsard, the most important of the sixteenth century critics, recorded his remarks in the two prefaces of his Franciade. He thought the epic poet should have a wide span of knowledge in history, medicine, anatomy, law, and all related fields in order to create verisimilitude, the greatest concern of the poet. Too, he was liberal in his attitude regarding the action of the plot, for he considered it permissible to start in the middle or at the end. Such devices as dreams, prophecies, and visions, he recommended for use to aid the poet with his plot. He believed, like Tasso, that the action should not be in a period too recent. He felt that one year should be the limit of the action.

Ronsard wrote his own epic in decasyllables, but he considered the Alexandrine as the proper meter for the epic. He was convinced that the language of the epic should possess dignity and be elevated in tone. The poet, then, was obligated to ornament and embellish his language. He and Du Bellay

25 Ibid., pp. 119-120.
agreed that the function of the poet was to enrich the language even if it involved coining new words or reviving old ones.

Le Bossu was the representative critic of the seventeenth century. He wrote the most expansive and authoritative treatise on the epic. He stressed the didactic purpose and believed that the subject should be a fable, like those of Aesop, around which the poet could teach a moral lesson in "disguised allegories."

Edmund Spenser of England in his *Faerie Queene* carried the elements of allegory and didactism to a greater height. Nevertheless, he referred to the artificial order of epic construction as advocated by Horace and others when he apologized for the abrupt beginning of his poem. He explained that the method of the poet differs from the historian. According to him the "Poet thrusteth into the middest even where it most concerneth him and there recursing to the things forepaste, and divining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all."

27 Vernon Hall, Jr., *Renaissance Literary Criticism*, pp. 115-117.

28 Swedenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

Milton was undecided as to what form to use in *Paradise Lost* to show the harmony of form and subject matter. He first considered the form of a Greek tragedy. However, he decided that even if his subject were not that of the orthodox epic, it was more worthy of being considered epic than some of the commonplace ones. He favored the use of blank verse as the medium of language.

Sir William Davenant's preface to *Gondibert*, published in 1650, is considered a "definite landmark" in the theory of the epic. He set forth "a platform definitely classical" of the theory of epic that was to flourish in England for the next one hundred and fifty years; and he brought together "ideas that had appeared on the Continent and in England prior to his time."

Davenant's preface was a mixture of established theory and freedom of thought. He deviated from the accepted construction of the epic, modeled after Homer, and used dramatic principles which divided the epic into five acts. This new epic form included many of the features proposed by Tasso; his epic was to have a Christian theme which was conducive to virtue, and the subject should be far enough removed from the poet's time to be credible, yet allow the poet freedom which

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31 Swedenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
was not given the historian. Love and ambition were the emotions that he considered proper to the epic since they were often the consuming forces of great minds.

John Dryden, the most representative critic of the seventeenth century, contended that the epic poem should rank higher in greatness than the tragedy, in opposition to the position taken by Aristotle. He considered the epic poem, "undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform." He accepted the classical idea of unity of action, but rejected the unity of time. Unity of action was essential because it showed relationship of episodes to the main plot. He said, "The action of it is always one, entire, and great. The least and most trivial episodes, or under-actions, which are interwoven in it, are parts either necessary or convenient to carry on the main design." He favored the moral and didactic value of the epic, and declared the hero should be noble and virtuous--yet not altogether virtuous as exemplified in Aeneas. He also believed that machines were necessary for creating the element of the marvelous.

34 Ibid., p. 426. 
Dryden was not original in his ideas, but he championed that which seemed logical and acceptable because of nature and right reason. He is considered the authority in neoclassical criticism of the epic from 1650 to 1700.

From Dryden to 1750 there was little difference in opinion in the definition of the epic. The critics generally agreed that it should be unified, solemn in tone, about a great event taken from fable, didactic in purpose, and allegorically designed to include the element of the sublime. After 1750 this "crystallized definition" of specialized form broke down to include romances and novels under the term of epic.

In tracing the development of epic theory to formulate a definition, it is evident that epic theory is an important aspect of literary criticism. Although the critics are not always in agreement, there are certain general qualities which have become permanently recognized as belonging to the epic. From these general characteristics and the study of the great epics of the past, modern critics compose their definitions.

Clayton Hamilton gives this broad summary of the epic:

The great epics of the world, whether, as in the case of the Norse sagas and possibly of the Homeric poems, they have been a gradual and undeliberate aggregation of traditional ballads, or else, as in the case of the Aeneid and Paradise Lost, they have been

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36 Swedenberg, op. cit., p. 156.
the deliberate production of a single conscious artist, have attained their chief significance from the fact that they have summed up within themselves the entire contribution to human progress of a certain race, a certain nation, a certain organized religion. . . . The great epics have attained this resumptive and historical significance only by exhibiting as subject-matter a vast and communal struggle, in which an entire race, an entire organized religion has been concerned,—a struggle imagined as so vast that it has shaken heaven as well as earth and called to conflict not only men but also gods. The epic has dealt always with a struggle, at once human and divine, to establish a great communal cause. This cause in the Aeneid, is the founding of Rome; in the Jerusalem Liberated it is the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre; in the Faerie Queene it is the triumph of virtues over vices; in the Lusiada it is the discovery and conquest of the Indies; in the Divine Comedy it is the salvation of the human soul.

. . . . As a result of this, the characters in the great epics are memorable mainly because of the part they play in advancing or retarding the victory of the vast and social cause which is the subject of the story. Their virtue and their faults are communal and representative; they are not adjudged as individuals, apart from the conflict in which they figure: and, as a consequence, they are rarely interesting in their individual traits . . . . Because the epic authors have been interested always in communal conflict rather than in individual personality, they have seldom made any use of the element of love,—the most intimate and personal of all emotions. 37

W. Macneile Dixon, another modern critic, defines the epic as "a narrative poem, organic in structure, dealing with great actions and great characters, in a style commensurate with the lordliness of its theme, which tends to idealise these characters and actions, and to sustain and embellish its subject by means of episodes and amplification." 38

Since the epic "reveals the impulses and promptings of the human spirit in perhaps their intensest forms," and also records "one of man's early efforts in moral and spiritual progress," the definition of C. M. Gayley lists qualities of the epic which should be considered before setting criteria for classifying Hiawatha as an epic. His definition is as follows:

The epic in general, ancient and modern, may be described as a dispassionate recital in dignified rhythmic narrative of a momentous theme or action fulfilled by heroic characters and supernatural agencies under the control of a sovereign destiny. The theme involves the political or religious interests of a people or of mankind; it commands the respect due to popular tradition or to popular ideals. The poem awakens the sense of the mysterious, the awful, and the sublime; through perilous crises it uplifts and calms the strife of frail humanity.

The devices--statement of purpose, invocation of the muse, beginning in medias res--developed by the authors of classical epics have been appropriated for use by subsequent poets. Other usages, not considered as requisite to the general qualities in defining the epic, have been adopted and associated with epic structure; namely, epic catalogues and descriptions, formal speeches by characters, descriptions of warfare and battles, and use of the extended or Homeric

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39 H. V. Routh, God, Man and Epic Poetry, I, 14.
40 Ibid., II, 1.
simile, metaphor, and the element of melancholy.

Thus the epic may be defined as a long, rhythmic narrative in majestic tone, the theme of which is so mighty in its scope that it extends beyond the affairs of individuals to encompass a whole race, nation, or even the whole world. Its subject matter is taken from history, religion, legend, or mythology. Supernatural agencies are prominent in creating the element of the marvelous. The action is unified and on a huge scale which allows for episodes that embellish and amplify the theme. The characters are mighty heroes, demi-gods, demons, or celestial beings. The great communal struggle is centered in the subject matter to give the reason for carrying out some great and just purpose against opposing forces, which are destined to be overthrown in the end. Elemental passions of hate, revenge, jealousy, ambition, and love—sometimes personal and intimate—are set forth.

Chapter IV is an application of this definition of the epic to Hiawatha.

CHAPTER IV

THE EPIC QUALITIES IN HIAWATHA

In *Hiawatha* Longfellow fulfilled the first requirement of the definition of an epic as a "long, rhythmic narrative." From the very character of the legends, --"verbal narrations" --which he wove into the tradition that served as a basis for his story, the narrative element is evident. The "rhythmic" adjective which describes "narrative" is defined in the peculiar trochaic octasyllabic rhythm that Longfellow used to give the desired effect. Oliver Wendell Holmes stated that "the poet showed a subtle sense of the requirements of his simple story of a primitive race in choosing the most fluid of measures that lets the thought run through it in easy sing-song, such as oral tradition would be sure to find on the lips of the story-tellers of a wigwam." Aristotle differentiated between tragedy and epic by identifying "epic" as a poetic imitation in "narrative form" that used a "single metre." He advocated

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the use of the heroic measure because of its proven fitness by the test of experience, but succeeding poets have used the meter they considered best suited for adding dignity and "majestic tone" to their stories. The early poets used the heroic meter, or hexameter; Ronsard wrote in decasyllables, but favored the Alexandrine as the proper meter for the epic; Milton used blank verse. Parallelism, or repetition, was considered by Longfellow to belong to the Indian song, and with "his rare gift of rhythm; his lines sing themselves inevitably," and there is no feeling at any time that the "cadence does not fit the thought." His parallelism is confined mainly to two consecutive lines,—sometimes three,—as shown in the following lines taken from "Hiawatha's Wooing."

Then uprose the Laughing Water,
From the ground fair Minnehaha,
Laid aside her mat unfinished,
Brought forth food and set before them,
Water brought them from the brooklet,
Gave them food in earthen vessels,
Gave them drink in bowls of bass-wood,


Listened while the guest was speaking,
Listened while her father answered,
But not once her lips she opened,
Not a single word she uttered. 8

Longfellow, also had the power of catching and holding
his reader's interest. That power depended mainly upon his
use of similes and metaphors. The following are examples of
that power. In the lines taken from "Hiawatha and Mudjekeewis"
is a metaphor of the night.

Where into the empty spaces
Sinks the sun, as the flamingo
Drops into her nest at nightfall
In the melancholy marshes. 9

The opening lines of "Hiawatha's Wooing" show parallel
structure of metaphors and similes with one half of the line
balancing against the other half.

As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman,
Though she bend him, she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows,
Useless each without' the other! 10

Longfellow's use of the simile is comparable to the Homeric
simile in its "precision, simplicity, and familiarity of images,"
but the "vivacity of its impressions" and the "lyrical spirit" 11
denotes an epic quality of the more modern poets. Longfellow,

8  Longfellow, Works. II, 201.
9 Ibid., p. 148. 10 Ibid., p. 196.
11 Keiser, op. cit., p. 205.
like Homer, did not use the simile as an ornament, but to point out some sight of beauty and wonder, or to intensify some action. In other words, Longfellow described something similar, only more familiar, to make the reader feel at once that the ideas and language are his own. On the whole, Longfellow's similes in Hiawatha are shorter, more compact than the extended, elaborate similes of Homer and the traditional epic. The use of similes served to arrest the attention of the reader, but the metaphors in their "copiousness," "variety," and "ingenuity" provided the "continuance and ease" of the reader's interest. The poets of classical epics used the metaphor sparingly. The tendency of the metaphor is to "substitute the diversion of fancy for the more tenacious vision of the imagination; they distract the mind ordinarily from its intense preoccupation and so lessen, while diversifying, our intellectual emotion." Milton, in Paradise Lost, used the metaphor in the blank verse form, but that usage was overshadowed by the use of the elaborate simile.

Alliteration, the figure of speech more expressive of elemental moods and ideals of the primitive race than the Homeric

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13 More, op. cit., p. 143.
simile, was used profusely throughout Hiawatha. Longfellow, while "meditating a poem, a long narrative poem, on an Indian theme," re-read the Finnish epic, The Kalevala. Soon afterwards, an entry in his diary recorded his having "hit upon a plan" and "a measure" for the poem. The similarity between Hiawatha and The Kalevala was quite marked, but Longfellow explained that both were concerned with primitive races and required the same type of meter and language which by nature is indigenous to all primitive people. Since the epic deals with a whole race or nation, it is natural to expect the poet to collect those qualities of the race, such as words, idioms, songs, legends, and traditions, which add historical breadth and epic flavor to the whole. Thus, the alliteration was justified.

Both Horace and Longfellow pursued the study of language, and their attitude toward its use was almost identical. Both used new words when necessary, but preferred old words that appeared new by being place in a skillful setting. Diffuseness of expression and over-adornment in language was disapproved by both.

15 Longfellow, op. cit., p. 247.
17 Horace, Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica, pp. 46-72.
Many of the words used by Longfellow seem strange, but he took them from the vocabularies of the Indians and with his artistic skill and "sense of the music of words," re-shaped and resung them to add dignity and put "a living, beating human heart" into the poem. In so doing he was following the example of Virgil who favored the use of old words and the revival of certain usages for the purpose of adding dignity.

The theme of the epic is so mighty in its scope that it extends beyond the affairs of individuals to encompass a whole race, nation, or even the whole world. This definition follows closely the conception of seriousness and magnitude which Aristotle set as a standard in his definition of a tragedy. Seriousness indicated the extent to which the whole of humanity was affected, and by magnitude, Aristotle referred to that action which extended beyond the circumstances around one individual to include consequences that touched a whole race, or nation. Superficially, Hiawatha was founded "on a tradition, prevalent among the North American Indians, of a personage of miraculous birth, who was sent among them


19 Longfellow, op. cit., p. 259.

20 Hall, op. cit., p. 115.
to clear their rivers, forests, and fishing-grounds, and to teach them the arts of peace." Symboically, it traces the imaginary history of the aborigines through the various stages of development, from hunting and fishing to the introduction of agriculture and the development of art, medicine, religion, and literature. "The subdued tragic element becomes stronger with the passing of time, the inexplicable departure of the Messiah, when his presence and guidance are needed most, foreshadowing the decline and fall of the red man." Longfellow intended Hiawatha to encompass the development and decline of the Indian race, thus giving his theme the necessary scope to satisfy the epic-element.

The subject matter of the epic is taken from history, religion, legend, or mythology. Longfellow's source materials consisted mainly in the two books written by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Algon Researches, Comprising Inquiries Respecting the Mental Characteristics of the North American Indians with its collection of tales, legends, and myths, and History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States, in three huge quartos. The third quarto contained the Iroquois form of the Hiawatha tradition. Schoolcraft had served for many

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21 Keiser, op. cit., p. 20y.

22 Ibid., p. 196.
years as a government agent in his study of the life and
habits of the Indians, and was considered an authority on that
subject. Longfellow, also, knew the Indian first-hand from
early childhood experiences in his native state of Maine, and
his continued interest had caused him to steep himself in
factual material that was available. He wrote in his diary
of working away with Tanner and Heckewelder in his collection
of factual material concerning the Indian race.

Longfellow gave the hero of his poem the name of Hiawatha,
which he mistakenly took to be another name of Manabozho, the
Algonquin hero. Schoolcraft had found the legendary matter
concerning the Algonquin hero misapplied to Hiawatha, and Long-
fellow in following Schoolcraft made the same error. Hiawatha
was the name of a famous Mohawk reformer, statesman, legis-
lator, magician, and according to tradition, also a prophet,
prominent in the sixteenth century. He was one of the founders
of the League of the Iroquois, the Confederation of Five Nations.
He attempted to abolish bloodshed among the tribes and instigated
reforms among the Onondagas. Atotarho, their warlike chief,
opposed Hiawatha, but when most of the tribes had been per-
suaded to join the confederacy, he thought it wise to accept


an organization that promoted the common welfare. Hiawatha, however, had received the acclaim of the people, and to him were attributed the feats of the chief gods of the Iroquois, especially Terahonhiwagon, an anthropomorphic deity. 25 Manabozho, on the other hand, was the Algonquin hero endowed with the qualities of a god, an ordinary mortal, a trickster and dupe, and in transformation, a great rabbit. Although the Iroquois and Algonquins were enemies, they were, also, close neighbors, and it seems possible that similar traditions of the tribes might have passed from one family to the other. However, only a small proportion of Hiawatha is concerned with the actual Manabozho myth, for Longfellow with his usual artistic selection eliminated the trickster element, and around his hero wove the simple and entertaining legends of the typical experiences of Indian life. His selection of material to produce unity follows the Aristotelian theory of "unities" for he had both unity of action with its "beginning, middle, and end," and unity of time with the time limit extending through the life of his hero. Not only did Longfellow have unity of action, but also allowed for "episodes which embellish and amplify the theme."


In the first canto of *Hiawatha* the Red Pipestone Quarry tradition furnished the background for the prophecy of the birth of a great deliverer of the people. According to legend, Gitche Manito, or the Great Spirit, descended upon the mountains, made the peace-pipe and called the nations together in the following manner:

> From the red stone of the quarry,  
> With his hand he broke a fragment,  
> Moulded it into a pipe-head,  
> Shaped and fashioned it with figures;  
> From the margin of the river  
> Took a long reed for a pipe-stem,  
> With its dark green leaves upon it;  
> Filled the pipe with bark of willow,  
> With the bark of the red willow;  
> Breathed upon the neighboring forest,  
> Made its great boughs chafe together,  
> Till in flame they burst and kindled;  
> And erect upon the mountains,  
> Gitche Manito, the mighty,  
> Smoked the calumet, the Peace-Pipe,  
> As a signal to the nations. 27

The hostile warriors saw the smoke from the peace-pipe and congregated on the meadows. The Great Spirit told them that he was weary of their wars and explained that strength lay in their union and danger in their discord. This advice was given in connection with the announcement of the deliverer. He promised:

> I will send a Prophet to you,  
> A Deliverer of the nations,  
> Who shall guide you and shall teach you,  
> Who shall toil and suffer with you.

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If you listen to his counsels,
You will multiply and prosper;
If his warnings pass unheeded,
You will fade away and perish.

This appeal for unity and the introduction of the hero through legendary material had no connection with the Manabozho legend. Albert Meiser thought Longfellow had used a masterly stroke in placing this appeal for unity—possibly suggested by Hiawatha's appeal for unity to the Iroquois tribes on the eve of his departure in Schoolcraft's account of the legend—-at the beginning of the story instead of at the last.

Having accomplished his purpose,

The Master of Life, ascending
Through the opening of cloud curtains
Through the doorways of heaven,
Vanished from before their faces,
In the smoke that rolled around him,
The pukwana of the Peace-Pipe!

The original legend regarding the departure of the Great Spirit gives a more detailed account. It states that at the last whiff of his pipe, the Great Spirit's head went into a great cloud and the surface of the rock for several miles was melted and glazed. Two great ovens beneath the rocks opened and two women, the guardian spirits of the place, entered them in a blaze of fire. The peace-pipe then became the

28 Ibid., p. 130.  
29 Keiser, op. cit., p. 200.  
30 Longfellow, Works, II, 132.  
31 Catlin, North American Indians, II, 186.
symbol of peace. Supernatural appearances, the announcement of a messiah, or national hero, prophecies from supernatural sources are all characteristic elements of epics.

Longfellow projects the incident of Mudjekeewis into the main action at this point in order to amplify the theme. Mudjekeewis, the father of the hero, was victor in his struggle with Mishe-Mokwa, the Great Bear, the terror of the nations. Mudjekeewis stole upon him while he was sleeping, and after obtaining the Belt of Wampum, smote him in the middle of the forehead. The first blow only stunned him and started him to whimpering, but the second blow was fatal. His conquest caused the people to exclaim:

Honor be to Mudjekeewis!  
Henceforth he shall be the West-Wind,  
And hereafter and forever  
Shall he hold supreme dominion  
Over all the winds of heaven. 32

Holding supreme dominion over the winds of the heaven, Mudjekeewis kept the West Wind for himself and gave the others to his children. Wabun was given the East Wind; Shawondase, the South; Kabibonokka, the North-Wind. Ojibway mythology furnished the basis for this incident. Longfellow reshaped the legend of Mudjekeewis and his nine brothers who conquered the Mammoth Bear to obtain the Belt of Wampum, a symbol of great happiness to man. In the legend, Mudjekeewis, the

32 Longfellow, Works, II, 134.
youngest of the sons, received the chief award in receiving
the government of the West-Wind. The other winds were divided
among his sons. Mudjekeewis, in the poem, is given heroic
height by conquering the Great Bear single-handed. Conquest
of supernatural monsters by human heroes is an action character-
istic of epics; a great bear is possibly less traditional than
a dragon, but better suited to the American Indian background.

Hiawatha's miraculous birth was accounted for by legend.
Schoolcraft recorded the Ojibway account of Manabozho's
grandmother, the daughter of the moon, who having been married
only a short time, was enticed by her rival to a grapevine
swing on the banks of a lake. The rival, then, pitched her
into the center of the lake, but she fell through the lake
and landed on earth. The earth became the birthplace of her
daughter, the offspring of her lunar marriage. Correspond-
ingly, Hiawatha's grandmother, Nokomis, came to earth by
falling from the full moon. She was swinging in a grapevine
swing when her rival, full of jealousy and hatred, cut the
swing in two. She fell to a meadow, where she bore the
daughter, Wenonah. Wenonah grew to young maidenhood and fell
in love with Mudjekeewis, the West-Wind, regardless of her

33
H. R. Schoolcraft, Algic Researches, II, 214.

34
H. R. Schoolcraft, Algic Researches, I, 135.
mother's warnings. One evening the West-Wind, finding her lying among the lilies, wooed her with sweet words and soft caresses. As a result she bore a son in love and sorrow. Hiawatha was that son, but his mother, deserted by the false Mudjekeewis, died in anguish.

It seems obvious that Longfellow followed the legend of Manabozho's birth:

In some unguarded moment the 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. 35

Homer suggested that the miraculous births of his heroes was the result of the mating of gods, or goddesses, and mortals. Beowulf opens with the legend of an ancient king, sprung from the race of gods. This divine one, a good king, ruled mightily, and when his time came, as decreed by fate, he departed and left a son. Hrothgar, a descendant of the divinely sprung monarch, was harassed by a demon, Grendel. Likewise, Wainamoinen, the principal hero of the Kalevala,--Son of the Wind, and of the Virgin of the Air--was born upon the ocean after


his mother, Ilmatar, daughter of the illimitable Ether, had floated upon its surface for more than seven hundred years.  

Anything that the Indian could not understand he explained by the presence of Manitous, or spirits, which existed in great numbers and took many shapes. They functioned in either capacity, as an evil force or as a useful agent. It was considered a great feat among the Indians to conjure a personage powerful enough to defeat the most wicked, overcome the strongest, and confuse the cleverest. Longfellow illustrated this idea in Hiawatha's conquest of his father, West-Wind.

After Hiawatha had grown to manhood and had acquired skill in hunting, he sought revenge for his mother's death. He had learned of the betrayal and desertion of his father by questioning his grandmother. He prepared for the journey, in spite of his grandmother's warnings. He wore enchanted moccasins that enabled him to make strides a mile wide. He also took his magic mittens with which to crush mighty rocks and grind them into powder.

Hiawatha journeyed westward until he reached the kingdom of the West Wind in the Rocky Mountains. Mudjekeewis, his father, was sitting on a summit, and when he saw Hiawatha, he

38 W. F. Kirby, Kalevala, p. viii (Introduction).

39 Schoolcraft, Algon Researches, I, 137.
was joyful and welcomed him to his kingdom. They spent many days talking, but Hiawatha soon grew weary of his boasting (Modesty is not characteristic of epic characters; the concept of modesty as a virtue seems to have developed in a later stage of civilization than that which is suited to epics.) and began searching to find his weaknesses. He asked his father of what he was afraid. Mudjekeewis replied that he was afraid of the black rocks, and Hiawatha in answer to a similar question, said that he was afraid of the bulrush. As they continued their conversation, the father told Hiawatha of his brothers; but when he admitted his treatment of Wenoah, Hiawatha began to hurl the black rocks at him. Mudjekeewis, in turn, seized the bulrush, and a mighty struggle ensued. They fought so fiercely that the heavens rang with the tumult. On the third day, Hiawatha forced his father to the portals of the sunset. Mudjekeewis ended the struggle when he said:

Hold, my son, my Hiawatha!
'Tis impossible to kill me,
For you cannot kill the immortal.
I have put you to this trial,
But to know and prove your courage;
Now receive the prize of valor!

The next words of his father's speech gave Hiawatha's mission and the promised reward if that mission were fulfilled. Characteristically in the epic "the great communal struggle
is centered in the subject matter to give the reason for carrying out some great and just purpose against opposing forces, which are destined to be overthrown in the end."

Go back to your home and people, Live among them, toil among them, Cleanse the earth from all that harms it, Clear the fishing-grounds and rivers, Slay all monsters and magicians, All the Wendigoes, the giants, All the serpents, the Kenabaeks, As I slew the Mishe-Mkowa, Slew the Great Bear of the mountains.

And at last when Death draws near you, When the awful eyes of Pauguk Glare upon you in the darkness, I will share my kingdom with you, Ruler shall you be thenceforward Of the Northwest-Wind, Keewaydin, Of the home-wind, the Keewaydin. 40

The legendary account of the struggle, its end, the mission and promised reward are almost identical with that of Manabozho of the Ojibways. The slight variation in the two accounts was that Hiawatha had enchanted moccasins and magic mittens, Manabozho had a giant's height and power.

On his return journey home, Hiawatha stopped at the home of the arrow-maker in the land of the Dacotahs to purchase arrowheads. The romantic element was introduced into the story with the description of Minnehaha and Hiawatha's evident attraction to her. In the epic the "elemental" passion of

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40 Longfellow, Works, II, 156.

41 Schoolcraft, Algic Researches, I, 142-143.
"love—sometimes personal and intimate—is set forth." In the Indian legend the name of the arrowmaker's daughter was not mentioned; so far as we know this name was Longfellow's invention.

Before Hiawatha, the prophet and deliverer, started on his mission to destroy the works of evil to profit his people, he fasted and prayed for strength. It is spoken of in the following manner:

You shall hear how Hiawatha
Prayed and fasted in the forest,
Not for greater skill in hunting,
Nor for greater craft in fishing,
Nor for triumphs in the battle,
And renown among the warriors,
But for profit of the people,
For advantage of the nations. 43

The fast was to last for seven days, and on each of the first three days he was tempted to surrender to material wants as he saw the animals, the berries and wild rice, and the fishes. At each temptation his reaction was the same, he cried, "Master of Life! Must our lives depend on these things?" On the fourth day, as he lay exhausted, a youth approached and said:

O my Hiawatha!
All your prayers are heard in heaven,
For you pray not like the others;
Not for greater skill in hunting,

42
Ibid., p. 132.

43
Longfellow, Works, II, ¶59.

44
Ibid., p. 160.
Nor for greater craft in fishing,
Nor for triumph in the battle,
Nor renown among the warriors,
But for profit of the people,
For advantage of the nations.

From the Master of Life descending,
I, the friend of man, Mondamin,
Come to warn you and instruct you,
How by struggle and by labor
You shall gain what you have prayed for.
Rise up from your bed of branches,
Rise, O youth, and wrestle with me!

Hiawatha wrestled three days with Mondamin, and as he wrestled his strength returned to him. After the third day of wrestling, Mondamin foretold the outcome. He said:

O Hiawatha!
Bravely have you wrestled with me,
Thrice have you wrestled stoutly with me,
And the Master of Life, who sees us,
He will give to you the triumph!

. . . . To-morrow
Is the last day of your conflict,
Is the last day of your fasting.
You will conquer and o'ercome me;
Make a bed for me to lie in,
Where the rain may fall upon me,
Where the sun may come and warm me;
Strip these garments, green and yellow,
Strip this nodding plumage from me,
Lay me in the earth, and make it soft and loose and light above me.

Let no hand disturb my slumber,
Let not weed nor worm molest me,
Let not Kahgahgee, the raven,
Come to haunt me and molest me,
Only come yourself to watch me,
Till I wake, and start, and quicken,
Till I leap into the sunshine.

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46 Ibid., pp. 163-164.
When Nokomis brought food for Hiawatha on the seventh day, he would not break his fast until after he had overcome Mondamin and planted his body as he had been commanded. Thus, the gift of corn was brought to the Indian race. Schoolcraft gave a corresponding account of the myth of Mon-da-min, the Spirit's grain or berry, but the custom of fasting went farther back into primitive folk-lore and was considered an important event in a young man's life. It was one test of heroic self-devotion and an indication that the young man was prepared and fitted to accomplish some great feat. It was through fasting that the Indian was supposed to have visions, and be able to detect the shape of his guardian spirit. The fasting and temptation of Jesus in Paradise Regained is an obvious parallel to this incident in Hiawatha. Similar incidents are common in folk-lore from which they enter easily and naturally into the material of epics.

In the Kalevala the coming of the barley to the Finnish people is comparable to the coming of the corn to the Indians in Hiawatha. In that account Wainamocinen, the hero, "discovered seven grains of barley on the ocean strand; and,

47
Ibid., p. 388 (notes).

48
after being advised by the birds how to plant it, was gratified by the sight of the growing barley."  

Hiawatha had two intimate friends, Chibiabos and Kwasind. Chibiabos was the musician who had power to touch the heart of man and nature; Kwasind was the strong man who helped Hiawatha clear the river to make a safe passage for the people. These two friends of Hiawatha have been referred to as his "cabinet members:"

Long they lived in peace together,  
Spake with naked hearts together,  
Pondering much and much contriving  
How the tribes of men might prosper.  

Legendary accounts of Kwasind's life and death are followed closely in the poem. He helped Hiawatha clear the rivers, and his fame spread among the nations, until no man dared compete with him. The Puk-Wudjies, the envious fairies and pygmies, plotted to kill him by attacking him in his one vulnerable spot. His wondrous strength was seated in the top of his head, and likewise it was the only place where he could be hurt. The only weapons that could harm were the seed cones of the pine trees and the blue cones of the fir trees. The Puk-Wudjies, the Little People, with the aid of the Spirit of

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49 K. M. Rabb, National Epics, p. 102.  
50 Keiser, op. cit., p. 200.  
52 Schoolcraft, Algic Researches, II, 163-164.
Sleep, Nepahwin, caught Kwasind floating down the river asleep. They attacked with the harmful weapons, and hitting him on the crown of the head, caused his death. Kwasind with his vulnerable spot in the crown of his head, is comparable to Achilles with his vulnerable spot in his heel, or Siegfried with his vulnerable spot between his shoulders.

Man, in his ordinary shape, was not the only subject for the Indian legends. Their intellectual creations included giants, fairies, and pygmies. Chibiabos differed from Kwasind and was Hiawatha's most beloved friend. He was

Brave as man is, soft as woman,
Pliant as a wand of willow,
Stately as a deer with antlers.

Hiawatha feared that the Evil Spirits would entice Chibiabos away and harm him. One winter day while hunting, he followed a deer across the frozen Big-Sea-Water. The Evil Spirits were waiting for him beneath the ice. As he crossed, they broke the ice and dragged him under. He was drowned and lay in the deep abysses of lake, Gitche Gumee, until the medicine-men, the Medas, called him forth, gave him a burning fire-brand, and made him Ruler in the Land of Spirits.

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53 Longfellow, Works, II, 265-269.
54 Rabb, op. cit., p. 176.
55 H. R. Schoolcraft, The Indian in His Wigwam, p. 217.
56 Longfellow, Works, II, 169.
57 Ibid., pp. 238-245.
After Hiawatha had persuaded his friend, Kwasind to help in clearing the river, we find him fishing to provide supplies for his people. He did not want the pike or smaller fish, but wanted the King of Fishes. He challenged Nahma, the sturgeon, to take his bait, and the angry fish opened his great jaws, and swallowed Hiawatha and his canoe. Inside the fish's body, Hiawatha smote the beating heart until the fish died. When Nahma drifted to the shore, the sea-gulls opened rifts large enough to release Hiawatha. He found himself freed near his wigwam, and beckoning to Nokomis told her that he had killed the King of Fishes. He said:

Look! the sea-gulls feed upon him,
Yes, my friends Kayoshk, the sea-gulls;
Drive them not away, Nokomis;
They have saved me from great peril
In the body of the sturgeon,
Wait until their meal is ended,
Till their craws are full with feasting,
Till they homeward fly, at sunset,
To their nests among the marshes;
Then bring all your pots and kettles,
And make oil for us in Winter. 58

This story may remind us of the story of Jonah and the whale as related in the Bible, but Longfellow has used the form which is found among many tribes of the North American Indians. 59

58 Ibid., p. 185.

59 Thompson, op. cit., p. 135.
In fulfilling that part of his mission to "Slay all
monsters and magicians, All the giants, the Wendigoes, All
the serpents, the Kenabeeks," Hiawatha went in search of
Pearl-Feather, the merciless Manitou of Wampum. Nokomis had
told Hiawatha that he was the great Magician who was guarded
by the fiery serpents, the Kenabeek. In relating his
history, Nokomis told Hiawatha:

He it was who slew my father,
By his wicked wiles and cunning,
when he from the moon descended,
when he came on earth to seek me.
He, the mightiest of Magicians,
Sends the fever from the marshes,
Sends the pestilential vapors,
Sends the poisonous exhalations,
Sends the white fog from the fen-lands,
Sends disease and death among us! 60

Nokomis urged Hiawatha to arm himself properly and kill
this merciless Magician, the originator of disease and death,
and at the same time avenge her father's murder. Hiawatha in
his fierce struggle with Pearl-Feather had used all his magic
weapons to no avail. When he had only three arrows left,
Mama, the wood-pecker, told him to aim at the tuft of hair
on the head of Pearl-Feather for at the roots of the long
black tresses was the only place where he could be wounded.
Hiawatha's third arrow killed Pearl-Feather, the mightiest
of magicians. Hiawatha took all his material wealth and

Longfellow, Works, II, 187-188.
divided it among his people. His sharing was told in the following manner:

But the wealth of Megissogwon,  
All the trophies of the battle,  
He divided with his people,  
Shared it equally among them. 61

Longfellow omitted the trickery of Manabozho in the legendary account of this incident and made Hiawatha appear more noble. Manabozho tricked the serpents in order to pass by them, and used a trick to get Pearl-Feather to come from his wigwam.

Hiawatha, wishing to assure his people of peace, looked to the hostile Dacotahs for a bride. He set out to win his bride in spite of old Nokomis's warning:

Go not eastward, go not westward,  
For a stranger, whom we know not!  
Like a fire upon the hearth-stone  
Is a neighbor's homely daughter;  
Like the starlight or the moonlight  
Is the handsomest of strangers! 63

Hiawatha's method of wooing was unique for he told not of himself but of home and people and suggested cementing peace between the two nations by a personal union. His proposal of marriage was as follows:

61  Ibid., p. 196.


63  Longfellow, Works, II, p. 196.
That this peace may last forever,
And our hands be clasped more closely,
And our hearts be more united
Give me as my wife this maiden,
Minnehaha, Laughing Water,
Loveliest of Dacotah women!

The arrowmaker let Minnehaha make her own decision for
he answered:

Yes, if Minnehaha wishes;
Let your heart speak, Minnehaha!

Minnehaha rose and took the seat beside Hiawatha, and
said, "I will follow you, my husband!" Thus, it was that
Hiawatha brought Minnehaha, to the lodge of old Nokomis.

The warning of Wainamocinen's mother, in the Kalevala,
is similar to that of Nokomis. In the Kalevala we find:

Take for thee a life companion,
From the honest homes of Svomi,
One of Northland's honest daughters;
She will charm thee with her sweetness;
Make thee happy through her goodness;
Form perfection, manners easy,
Every step and movement graceful,
Full of wit and good behavior;
Honor to thy home and kindred.

Longfellow expanded into a lengthy canto what was re-
corded in legend as one sentence which stated that "Mana-
bozho returned to his former place of dwelling and married

64 Ibid., p. 201.  
66 Ibid., p. 205.

the arrowmaker's daughter." Hiawatha's wooing and marriage have been considered statesmanlike, but in comparison with the love element in the \textit{Iliad} (Achilles's quarrel with Agamemnon over the girl, Briseis, and the entire story centering around the Greek Army's sailing to Troy to recover Helen, the wife of Menelaus) and in the \textit{Odyssey} (Penelope's endurance record of faithful love for Odysseus) and in \textit{Jerusalem Delivered} (Tancred's unrequited love for the pagan maid, Clorinda) Hiawatha's wooing seems a mild touch of pure romanticism.

The wedding feast inaugurated an idyllic time of peace over which Hiawatha ruled. Nokomis prepared a sumptuous feast of fish, deer, buffalo, pones of corn, and wild rice, which was served to the assembled guests. After eating, Chibiabos, the musician, sang songs of love and longing, Iagoo, the great boaster, told tales of strange adventure, and Pau-Puk-Keewis, the mischief-maker, skilled in all the games of hazard, danced the Beggar's Dance. The entertainment parallels feasting and games mentioned in connection with the funeral rites of the Achaians, among the fallen angels in \textit{Paradise Lost}, in Hrothgar's mead-hall in \textit{Beowulf}, and, in general, throughout other epics.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Schoolcraft, Algic Researches}, I, 171.
\item \textit{Keiser, op. cit.}, p. 201.
\item \textit{Longfellow, Works}, II, 207.
\end{itemize}
Hiawatha and Minnehaha lived happily and he instructed his people in how to cultivate the corn. The nations were at peace and Hiawatha became concerned with preserving the great traditions of his race for future generations. He invented the method of communication called picture-writing and taught his people.

Thus it was that Hiawatha,
In his wisdom, taught the people
All the mysteries of painting,
All the art of Picture-Writing,
On the smooth bark of the birch-tree,
On the white skin of the reindeer,
On the grave-posts of the village. 71

The peaceful days soon come to an end. Hiawatha mourned the death of his friend, Chibiabos, and in consoling him the medicine-men, the Medas, instruct him in the use of medicines. Hiawatha, then, taught his people the art to protect them from harm and danger. 72

Longfellow introduced the character of Pau-Puk-Keewis, the mischief-maker, as a symbol of evil. He was the embodiment of evil misdeeds. He aroused the anger of Hiawatha by killing his friends, the birds, and disturbing his lodge. Hiawatha hotly pursued him, but Pau-Puk-Keewis, with wondrous transmigrations, changed to a beaver, a brant, and a serpent. Finally, overtaken in his own person, he was killed. 73

71 Ibid., p. 238. 72 Ibid., p. 245.
73 Ibid., p. 264.
legendary account of this story was recorded of Manabozho, himself, but Longfellow, to retain the dignity and seriousness of his culture hero, transferred the trickster element to a minor character.

In the epic, supernatural agents are prominent in creating the element of the marvelous. Longfellow introduced the supernatural in Hiawatha without "apologizing for it by either word or attitude, but assuming its existence as part of the life of a primitive race." They were visible at times, taking food as if they were famished, and at other times they were invisible. When they first appeared it was recounted:

From their aspect and their garments,
Strangers seemed they in the village;
Very pale and haggard were they,
As they sat there sad and silent,
Trembling, cowering with the shadows.

The ghosts told Hiawatha not to put heavy burdens in the graves of the dead, for the spirits faint beneath such loads. He was instructed to give the spirits only food to carry and fire to light their way. Their instructions were as follows:

Four days is the spirit's journey
To the land of ghosts and shadows,
Four its lonely night encampments;
Four times must their fires be lighted.

74 Thompson, op. cit., p. 136.
75 Keiser, op. cit., pp. 196-197.
77 Longfellow, Works, II, 271.
Therefore, when the dead are buried,
Let a fire, as night approaches,
Four times on the grave be kindled,
That the soul upon its journey
May not lack the cheerful firelight,
May not grope about in darkness.

At the end of their visit,

Hiawatha heard a rustle
As of garments trailing by him,
Heard the curtain of the doorway
Lifted by a hand he saw not,
Felt the cold breath of the night air,
For a moment saw the starlight;
But he saw the ghosts no longer,
Saw no more the wandering spirits
From the kingdom of Ponemah,
From the land of the Hereafter.

Longfellow evidently founded his story on the Ojibway
legend which Schoolcraft recorded. The supernatural is not
explained for it does not ask belief. Thus, it remains one
element in the figurative conception of the poem as a whole.
It will be recalled that Aristotle favored for the epic and
the drama "probable impossibilities to improbable possibili-
ties." Longfellow's natural use of the supernatural is in
keeping with epic tradition. Here again we see the close
relationship of folklore to epic.

The element of melancholy, personal sadness, centered
around Hiawatha when famine and fever caused Minnehaha's

\[78\]
\[Ibid., pp. 275-276.\]

\[79\]
\[Schoolcraft, The Indian in His Wigwam, p. 215.\]
death. However, he realized that he would soon follow her for he said:

Soon my task will be completed,
Soon your footsteps I shall follow
To the Islands of the Blessed,
To the Kingdom of Ponemah,
To the Land of the Hereafter! 80

The deeper tone of melancholy was sounded with the approaching of the white man, and Hiawatha's departure. Hiawatha had prayed to the Master of Life to provide food for his people, while Minnehaha was dying. His prayers had been denied, but the Prophet of the white man promised new hope for his vanishing race. His departure is described as follows:

I am going, O my people,
On a long and distant journey;
Many moons and many winters
Will have come, and will have vanished,
Ere I come again to see you.
But my guests I leave behind me;
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! 81

The Homeric melancholy differed from that expressed in Hiawatha. Homeric melancholy is created by a suffering and despair that predominates, and both mortals and immortals regard man as being destined to unhappiness.

80 Longfellow, Works, II, 282
81 Ibid., p. 296.
Many epics deal with a downfall, whether of hero, fortress, or dynasty. The *Iliad* was a tale of the fall of Troy, and, later, of the fall of Achilles himself. However, the suggestion of mourning is not just peculiar to Greek epics. In the *Song of Roland* is recorded the death of Roland and the annihilation of Charlemagne's rearguard at Roncesvaux. The *Nibelungen Lied* relates the extirpation of the Nibelungs. *Beowulf* was full of threatening dangers, and concludes with the death of the hero.

The authors of classical epics developed certain devices which have been appropriated for use by subsequent poets. Most of these devices were appropriated by Longfellow. *Hiawatha* does not start *in medias res* but has "a beginning, a middle, and an end" as favored by Aristotle. The invocation to the muse and the statement of the epic purpose were merged in the Introduction of *Hiawatha*. The following may be considered the invocation to the muse:

Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,  
Who have faith in God and Nature,  
Who believe, that in all ages  
Every human heart is human  

Listen to this simple story,  
To this Song of Hiawatha! 83

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The purpose is stated in like manner:

There he sang of Hiawatha,
Sang the Song of Hiawatha,
Sang his wondrous birth and being,
How he played and how he fasted,
How he lived, and toiled, and suffered,
That the tribes of men might prosper,
That he might advance his people.

The plot is characteristic of the epic. It unfolds gradually, yet expands to include episodes that embellish and amplify the theme.

Another epic device is the use of epic catalogues and descriptions, such as Homer's catalogues of the ships in the Iliad, Tasso's description of the Christian and pagan heroes, and Milton's description of the hosts of Christ and of Satan. Longfellow made use of this device in several places in Hiawatha, for example, in Canto VII, "Hiawatha's Sailing," where he enumerated all the materials that went into the building of the Birch Canoe. The description of the Birch Canoe is as follows:

Thus the Birch Canoe was builded
In the valley, by the river,
In the bosom of the forest;
And the forest's life was in it,
All its mystery and its magic,
All the lightness of the Birch-tree,
All the toughness of the Cedar,
All the Larch's supple sinews;
And it floated on the river
Like a yellow leaf in Autumn,
Like a yellow water-lily.

Ibid., p. 125.
Longfellow, Works, II, 177.
By close adherence to the definition, we find that *Hiawatha* has organic unity from the interwoven legends of the primitive race. The action moves steadily forward, harmoniously blending the episodes into the main action. The theme is mighty in its scope to extend beyond the circumstances of an individual and encompass a whole race. The subject matter is derived from history and mythology. The culture hero is endowed with dignity, and supernatural agents are introduced to create the element of the marvelous. The whole is arranged to emphasize the communal struggle which leads to the final catastrophe, the decline and fall of the Indian race.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

From the time Longfellow wrote in his diary that he had "hit upon a plan" to "weave together" the beautiful traditions of the American Indians into a "whole," Hiawatha, the "Indian Edda"—as he called it—began to take a definite shape. The adventures of the hero, "a kind of American Prometheus," was to form "the theme." With a truly American background as the setting, Longfellow proposed to write a poem founded on a tradition of a "personage of miraculous birth who was sent among the North American Indians to clear their rivers, forests, and fishing-grounds, and to teach them the arts of peace." By limiting the legendary material to the "North American Indians," Longfellow evidently felt secure in his belief that he had access to authentic sources in the recorded studies of the Indian race which had been compiled by Schoolcraft, Tanner, and Heckewelder.

Such a "personage," as Longfellow sought to make his hero, was known among many different tribes. Longfellow followed the Algonquin legends of the hero, Manabozho, but substituted the euphonious name of "Hiawatha" for Manabozho, thinking the two names were used to identify the same person. He selected the
most interesting of the Manabozho cycle of legends, but omitted those that showed the trickster element, which was contrary to the impression of dignity and seriousness that he wished to create for his culture hero. However, he introduced his hero through legendary material that was not connected with the Manabozho legend in any way. In fact, little of the actual Manabozho legend was used. Longfellow's treatment of the hero and his artistic selection of legends that reflected the typical experiences of the Indian's life seemed to indicate that he was interested mainly in the epic-element, the "saga of a legendary hero sent as a benefactor to the American Indians."

Bayard Taylor had been particularly impressed with Longfellow's skill in representing the "purely poetical aspects of Indian life and tradition" by eliminating or hiding that which was "gross and repulsive, yet without destroying the fidelity of the picture." ¹

Hiawatha was published in 1855, and in Longfellow's own words, it made some "sensation." Several years before, Edgar Allan Poe, Margaret Fuller, and William Gilmore Simms had led an attack accusing Longfellow of "imitation" and "plagiarism," and this immediate success and popularity of Hiawatha caused

¹ Samuel Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, II, 264.
some newspapers and periodicals to make "bold and bitter" charges. Longfellow was accused of imitation and of having "transferred not only the meter but also some of the incidents" from the Finnish epic, Kalevala, to his poem without proper acknowledgment. Longfellow did not refute the charges publicly, but he did explain to his friends that he could prove his story by legendary accounts, and if they did resemble the Finnish epic it was justifiable since Hiawatha and the Kalevala were both based upon legendary materials, each relating the legends of the race it reflected. The meter common to both was peculiarly suited to the expression of a primitive race in narration, chants, and songs. The Kalevala, in comparison, is merely a string of older and newer epic lays arranged chronologically, as far as possible, with the presence of Wainamoinen as the only unity.

The critical evaluations, as shown in Chapter II, reflect the reception and popularity of Hiawatha from its publication to the present time. The first burst of "abusive" criticism was quickly overshadowed by phenomenal popularity at home and abroad. Many critics praised Hiawatha during Longfellow's lifetime. It was called "a truly indigenous American epic," "a forest epic," "superior to all other attempts at epic treatment of Indian legends," "an epic of our Indian life," and "the

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2 Andrew Lang, Homer and the Epic, p. 414.
only attempt worthy of its name to portray the red man amidst his native surroundings." Hiawatha, the hero, was compared to a "semi-divine personage like Buddha in the Hindu mythology and Prometheus in Grecian." It is evident that the early critics were aware of the epic-like qualities of Hiawatha, but not too concerned with classifying it as an epic since its popularity seemed to assure it a prominent place in the literature of America.

From Longfellow's death until 1933, the critics' comments were less laudatory. Hiawatha was variously referred to as "poetry, sentiment, idealization," "an epic poem which paints a romantic picture;" and as "an epic based on the only autochthonous American myths thrust upon the American readers by the Time-Spirit." Longfellow was accused of having "all but humanized the demigod," "creating his heroes in purity," and allowing his descriptions to "supersede plot, characters, and action."

Later critics recognized that Longfellow had done what he could for poetry within his own limits. One critic said that Longfellow, while "worshiping the epic gods afar off, had created near at hand the limpid shadowy eagerness of Hiawatha." Another stated that Longfellow had displayed a "superb artistic élan in carrying this small epic to a satisfactory close." The criticisms did not differ so much
as to whether Hiawatha was an epic or not, but to what extent the epic qualities were noticeable.

By tracing the development of the epic, oral and written, as in Chapter III, the qualities that are characteristic of the epic and the devices associated with the epic through continued usage were found to be the constant factors upon which the definition of the epic is formulated. The application to Hiawatha of the epic definition in terms of form, theme, subject matter, characters, tone, the use of the supernatural, and the use of characteristic devices, strengthens the thesis that Longfellow has written an epic.

Among epics, Hiawatha owes most to the Kalevala, and is closest to it in subject matter. The significant difference between the two is that the Kalevala is a folk epic, while Hiawatha is a literary epic; and the literary treatment of folk material is inevitably lacking in the true quality of folk expression which characterizes the Kalevala and Beowulf.

Nor have critics considered Hiawatha comparable to the greatest literary epics such as the Iliad or Paradise Lost; obviously Longfellow's poetic powers were not those of Homer or Milton. Possibly the limitations of his material contributed to a less grand style, the primitive quality of American Indian civilization lacking the higher literary possibilities of the more highly developed civilizations represented by Homer or Spenser.
The Hiawatha matter is more nearly comparable to the Cuchulainn material of Celtic legend, material which perhaps represents the epic in an unfinished stage. Longfellow did, in his way, work comparable to what Tennyson did in his treatment of the Arthurian material, but without having a Malory as an intermediary.

He has been criticized unfavorably for his romanticization of the Indian, and certainly his representation of Indian life is different from the Indian as described in contemporary anthropological science. Yet he made use of the standard reference works of his time, the best available literary source material. And he succeeded in avoiding the two extremes of "noble savage" and "pesky redskin" characterization.

The peculiar trochaic octasyllabic rhythm with its "fluid measure" and "cadence to fit the thought" was appropriate to give the strange Indian words the proper tone of epic expression. The theme of Hiawatha is mighty in its scope to include a whole race, or nation, thus making it suitable for an epic. The subject matter is taken from the history of a race and based on the legends of mythology of a nation's culture. The supernatural agencies are "assumed to be an existing part of the primitive race," and are used freely without explanation. Hiawatha is characterized as a demigod, Pau-Puk-Keewis as a demon, and the minor characters are under
the influence of the Manitous, or guardian spirits. All are
representative of the epic. Many epic devices, sometimes in
modified form, such as the use of Homeric similes and meta-
phors, the use of catalogue descriptions, and the use of the
element of melancholy are found in *Hiawatha*.

*Hiawatha* not only fulfills the requirements of the
epic definition for the general classification of the epic,
but also, by virtue of its origin and development from
legendary materials—natural and popular—it meets the qual-
ifications of a national, or American epic.
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**Articles**


