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COMMENTARY

“Their Beautiful Storycraft”: Restoring the Original Manuscripts for Schoolcraft’s *Algic Researches* by William Johnston and Others

Eliot A. Singer

Editor’s Note: In the quoted material inset within this article, as well as in the lengthy reprint of the William Johnston translation of “Shagwonabee,” the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization choices remain relatively untouched to preserve the flavor of the original authors’ styles.

> “I am still anxious . . . to increase my knowledge of the original and striking mythology of the Chippewas, and their beautiful storycraft.”
> —Henry R. Schoolcraft to George Johnston, May 16, 1848

Henry R. Schoolcraft, Detroit, January 26, 1838, to Mrs. Henry R. Schoolcraft, Michilimackinac: [1]

> Dear Jane. . . . I have this evening finished a revision of the Indian tales, preparatory to their publication. . . . I shall set myself immediately about the preface. It is my judgment, that the preface should go at some length into the preliminary question, how it comes that the lore of the North American Indians has been permitted to slumber so long. I am of opinion, that the tales cannot fail to attract attention.
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> Novel I know they are, & I cannot help thinking, that they will lay the foundation for a new era in our vernacular literature.
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> I am of opinion that, American literature must be based on the mythology of the Indians. That of Rome & Greece is exhausted, and we can never expect to no’al our English ancestry in its [illegible]. All our poetic associations—and all our ideas of poetic justice must be connected to the Indian tribes, who once occupied the continent. They will become to us what the Celts & Britons are to England. . . .

Algic Researches was the first published collection of Anishinaabe "traditionary tales," and, together with those included in *Oneóta* a few years later, was the only substantial effort to document "their beautiful storycraft" until at least the 1880s.[2]

Schoolcraft insisted on authenticity while fretting about reception. "The narrations themselves are often so incongruous, grotesque, and fragmentary as to require some hand better than mine to put them in shape. And yet I feel that nearly all their value . . . must depend on preserving their original form. . . . If published, incredulity will start up critics to call their authenticity in question. There are so many Indian tales fancied by writers that it will hardly be admitted that there exist any real legends."[3]

Following release, he quoted at length in his *Personal Memoirs* a June 1839 review in a Detroit paper:[4]

> . . . Mr. Schoolcraft, or any other gentleman of taste and skill, might have formed out of these materials a series of Tales, highly finished in their unity and design, strikingly colored by fancy, such as would have caught the popular whim. But this was not his object. He has been honest in his renderings of the aboriginal sense . . . without alteration or embellishment.

Yet, when professional collecting came of age, Schoolcraft's work was likened to those "Indian tales fancied, by writers." In 1914, anthropologist Franz Boas lauded those who attempted "to give a faithful rendering of the native tales; and in this they differ fundamentally from the literary efforts of Schoolcraft. . . ."[5] Folklorist Stith Thompson insisted that "the scientific value of his work is marred by the manner in which he has reshaped the stories to suit his own literary taste. Several of his tales, indeed, are distorted almost beyond recognition."[6] Latter day scholars have felt much the same as Boas and Thompson.[7]

On what evidence? Much of this was Schoolcraft's own fault. Reconstituting the same tales for the 1856 *Myth of Hiawatha* to make them more salable in the wake of Longfellow's popular poem hardly enhances his credibility. Anyone who has tried to make critical use of his myriad tomes has encountered pretentions, routine carelessness, plagiarism, erroneous translations of place and personal names, backdated memoir entries, fabrications, and shoveling in so many irrelevant tangents, it takes great patience to want to verify what might be legitimate.

Algic Researches had no discernable organizational scheme and is difficult to peruse, let alone digest. It was an amalgam of non-*Algic* material from distant correspondents and rewritten previous works, among them those assimilated by John Johnston and family and those authored by the Schoolcrafts for their winter of 1826–27 homemade *Literary Voyager* magazine (of which Jane's contributions, some romanticized, had already been printed in Mrs. Jameson's *Summer Rambles*).[8] In addition, *Algic Researches* has bits and pieces of questionable provenance interspersed with vaguely acknowledged but unattributed "translations" of recognizable tale types. Even Mentor Williams' expertly researched edition could only do so much to separate the wheat from the chaff.[9]

Speaking from my own perspective of four decades undertaking ethnodiscursive translations from William Jones' *Ojibwa Texts*, I have always included Schoolcraft among the versions and variants used for comparative analysis, but have presumed

any discrepancies from the "norm" should be attributed to his tinkering.[10] At the same time, I have been amazed at how many obscure details, including phraseology, jibe with unimpeachable collections.

I knew that some originals by William Johnston, including his stories of Manahbosho, had been preserved in the Schoolcraft papers archived at the Library of Congress. Although intrigued, I figured for my purposes that Schoolcraft, accompanied by provisos, sufficed.

Over time, an interest in William and George Johnston's epistles finally led me to seek the whereabouts of the Manahbosho draft, then to transcribe it. One transcription led to another and another, not only of William Johnston's many pieces but of Charlotte Johnston McMurray's and others. I realized that this was more than an arcane exercise in curiosity: that an entire rethinking of the integrity of these tales was required. In the end, Schoolcraft was *not* the author of much of the material I had felt a need to proviso, or that Thompson had thought "marred."

Having transcribed the manuscripts, it is now possible to make definitive or inferential attributions of specific tales (Schoolcraft's titles in parentheses where needed) to those he had listed as contributors. [11]

In William Johnston's handwriting: "Story of Me She Ge Na Big O" (Undying Head), "Story of Manahbosho," "Manahbosho" (Moose and Woodpecker Bungling Hosts), "Ojeeg, or The Fisher," "Story of Boke Wau Way and His Brother," "Story of Six Hawks" (Broken Wing), Chusco's "Six Indians' Visit to the Sun and Moon," and Chusco's "Shagwonabee" (Wassamo, or The Fire Plume). William Johnston's drafts in the "Book File" manuscript for *Algic Researches* include "The Weendigoes" (broken into two parts for publication, the latter retitled with invented character names, "Owasso and Wayond"), "Paup Puk Keewiss," and "Ishkwondaimeca" (Peeta Kway). "Red Swan" has no manuscript, but was probably from Johnston.

Also in Johnston's hand are his own, lengthy "Manners and Customs of the Leech Lake Indians," an important, hitherto neglected ethnographic document, and Chusco's "Saugemau," a meandering legendary history of the Odaawaa, also important and hitherto neglected, from which Schoolcraft heavily adapted a small excerpt for "The Charmed Arrow."

"Anwe Bahmondung" (Enchanted Moccasons) and "Story of the Bear" (Magic Bundle), in Reverend William McMurray's handwriting, were obtained by his wife, Charlotte Johnston McMurray, from Shaoutahgance (Zhaawitaagens)—Little Salt—of Michipicoten, and included in a September 5, 1836, letter to Schoolcraft.[12] Mary Holliday's "Little Wild Man of the Mountains" (Puk Wudj Ininee) is in her hand. Jane Schoolcraft's "Corn Story," in Francis Shearman's hand, was sent with a January 15, 1838, letter from Michilimackinac to his uncle in Detroit, and thoroughly reworded as "Mon-dau-min, or The Origin of Corn."[13] "The Little Spirit, or The Boy Man," in her handwriting, was published with minimal editing in *Oneóta*.

Anna Maria Johnson Schoolcraft, the youngest sister, was third on the *Algic Researches* acknowledgment list, and she makes most sense as the author of several abbreviated but unquestionably authentic tales in the "Book File" manuscripts for *Algic Researches* and *Oneóta*: "Aggo Dah Gauda, or The Man with his Leg Tied Up," "The

Raccoon and Crawfish," "Shingebiss, or The Fall Duck," "Mukakkee Mindemoeya, or The Toad Woman," and "Wa Wa' Be Zo Win, or The Swing."

About his process of editing these manuscripts, Schoolcraft commented thus:[14]

> I have weeded out many vulgarisms. I have endeavored to restore the simplicity of the original style. In this I have not always fully succeeded, and it has been sometimes found necessary, to avoid incongruity, to break a legend in two, or cut it short off.
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> These legends from the Indian wigwams . . . required pruning and dressing, like wild vines in a garden. But they are exclusively . . . wild vines, and not pumpings up of my own fancy. The attempts to lop off excrescences are not, perhaps, always happy. There might, perhaps, have been a fuller adherence to the original language and expressions; but if so, what a world of verbiage must have been retained. . . . The gems of the legends—the essential points, the invention and thought-work—are all preserved.

Analyzed objectively, what "pruning and dressing" Schoolcraft did turns out to be of much less significance than he implied. Unlike the typical author of "fakelore" children's books and such, he rarely distorted plot, character, or theme, and his most extensive modifications were to his own and his wife's writings from a decade earlier, and to her "Corn Story," which was so blatantly Anglicized, it would have tarnished the credibility of the whole endeavor.

He apparently considered himself a good poet, thus he was prone to adding English-language "songs" whenever opportunity arose. He invented names for characters who had none and changed others—some with the "L" sound, which did not exist in the Anishinaabe-mowin of his day. He threw in Native words, not always correctly, and sometimes inserted ethnography in the text as well as in footnotes, more often a clause or sentence about something he thought needed clarification for his target audience. There were none of the pervasive "obscene" stories, with which Revered Thomas Hulbert was familiar, so "weeding out vulgarisms" was infrequent and tame—replacing "couching" a young woman with "courting" her, for example.[15] He seemed bothered by anthropomorphized animals and their powers, preferring to represent them as human magicians in disguise—animal "women" were rendered "females." Uncomfortable with less than heroic aspects of the Manabozho, he tried to rationalize or make excuses.

For the most part his emendations, in addition to the much-needed normalization of punctuation, consisted of substituting more educated-sounding synonyms, grammar, and usage. My better-informed view is that Schoolcraft's are a good faith effort, not a perversion, but that he would have done posterity better service by limiting his role to copyediting.

By restoring, as much as possible, the originals, we can now isolate the most significant *Algic Researches* and *Oneóta* traditional tales without the morass. I have personally been forced to replace the Schoolcraft versions in my comparative studies and to remove numerous (snide) comments attributing divergences to *Schoolcraftsmanship*.

The originals deserve to have life breathed into them not only because they are of importance to the history of scholarship. It is of equal importance that the Ojibwe-speaking mixed-blood collector-translators should at last be given their due credit. Most are well-told stories and a deserving representation of "their beautiful storycraft." [16]

An example is "Shagwonabee," told to William Johnston, probably in 1836, by Chusco, an Odaawaa (Ottawa) elder, originally from L'Arbre Croche, then residing on Michilimackinac. I am not aware of any corollaries to this tale, but it is replete with traditional cultural content and presents an unusual Manitou perspective on offerings. [17]

> Shagwonabee, we are told, was living with his parents, near the present *Wequadedong* of the Ottawas. [18] It was at that period, when nature furnished all their wants. They used the skins of animals for clothing, stones for axes, flint for knives and for the heads of their arrows. And the under bark of the Cedar boiled and pounded for nets. Their simple ingenuity supplied weapons to procure food for themselves; and also the bark Canoe found necessary in performing their journeys over and in the Lakes and rivers in which their country abounded. [19]
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> One day, when the season had commenced for fish to be plenty near the shore of the lake, Shagwonabee's mother said to him, "My son, I wish you would go to yonder point, and see if you cannot procure me some fish, and ask your cousin to accompany you." He did so, and his cousin consented to go. They started, and in the course of the afternoon arrived at the fishing ground. His cousin attended to the nets, for he was grown up to manhood, but Shagwonabee had not quite attained it. They put their nets in the water and encamped near them, using only one Birch bark to cover them. They made their fire, and sat conversing with each other. The moon rose while thus employed in perfect beauty. Not a breath of wind to disturb the surface of the lake; not a cloud was seen to obscure the rays of it.
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> Shagwonabee looked on the lake, he saw that almost all the floats had disappeared. "Cousin," he said, "let us visit our nets, perhaps we are fortunate." They did so, and were rejoiced to see their nets white here and there with fish. They landed in fine spirits, and put away their canoe in safety from the winds. "Shagwonabee," said his cousin, "you cook that we may eat." He set about it immediately, and soon got his kettle on the fire. His cousin was laying at his ease on the opposite side of the fire, sheltered by the birch bark.
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> Shagwonabee spoke, "Cousin," he said, "Tell me stories, or sing me some love songs." The other obeyed and sung his plaintive songs, and would frequently break off, by telling parts of stories, and then sing again, as suited his feelings and fancy, and while thus employed, he unconsciously fell asleep.
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> Shagwonabee attended to the kettle, and when the fish was done, took it from the fire. He spoke to his cousin, but received no answer. He took the wooden ladle and skimmed off the oil, for the fish were very fat. He had a flambeau of twisted bark in one hand to give light, but when he came to put the fish into the wooden dish,

he did not know how to manage; so he tied his garters round his head, and in that placed his lighted flambeau. He commenced placing the fish in the dish, and every now and then moved his head in blowing off the oil from the broth.

He again spoke to his cousin, but he answered only by snoring. He kept on moving his head as he blew on the broth, with the flambeau flaming over his head. [20] When suddenly he heard one or two persons laughing, and the sound appeared to come but from a short distance. "Cousin," he said, "you who have been telling stories about women and singing about them, awake, some one is come to us." [21]

But his cousin was in a profound sleep. He again heard the laughing; he looked as far as the reflection of the fire extended. He their [*sic*] beheld two beautiful women, smiling on him, and they appeared to be perfectly white, their countenances were exceedingly beautiful. He crouched down and pushed his cousin, saying, in a low voice, "awake! Awake; here are two women." But he received no answer. He started up alone, and went towards the women; he was charmed, and just as he was going to speak to them, he fell senseless, and he and the women disappeared.

Some minutes after the cousin awoke; he saw the kettle near him, and the flambeau had not entirely gone out, and some of the fish was in the dish. He waited and waited, but his cousin did not appear. He thought perhaps he is gone out to visit the nets. He looked but the canoe was in the place they had placed it. He looked and saw his footsteps fresh on the ashes. He became uneasy. "Cousin, cousin," he cried out, but no answer. He cried out louder and louder, "*Newatis*, *Newatis*, where are you gone?" but all was silence. He started for the edge of the woods, crying out "*Newatis*, *Newatis*." But still no answer. He ran in various directions, and where he again cried out "*Newatis*, *Newatis*"; But only the shrill echo answered; "*Newatis*"; He burst into tears and sobbed aloud. [22]

He returned to the fire, he sat down, and he had no heart to eat. Various conjectures passed in his mind respecting his Cousin. He thought he may be playing me a trick, no, impossible. Or he may have become deranged and run into the woods. He thought, however, he should wait, till morning. But again he thought there are his relations and his parents, and although related to me, and although they know our friendship, still they will not believe me, if I say he is lost. But they will require blood for blood, as they will think I killed him.

With these thoughts weighing upon his mind, he could not sleep. Early he got the nets ashore, and started on foot for the village, running all the way. When they saw him, they said, some accident has befallen them; when he got there, he told them how his cousin had disappeared. Some said, he has killed him treacherously, but he denied it; others said, impossible, for they were like brothers, and sooner than do that they would have given their lives for each other. All the men started for the place, they found and saw all as the young man had stated. No footsteps showed that any skuffle had taken place; no signs of blood. And his denying so firmly all

surmises, they thought the young man had got deranged, and strayed into the woods, and was lost.

They all returned to the village. But the parents still waited and hoped he would return. Winter passed but Shagwonabee did not return. Spring came on and the Indians had assembled from different quarters, also Shagwonabee's cousin, he kept saying all the time that he had done nothing to his cousin. Anxiety and fear had altered him very much, the blood of his relation and friend being laid on him.

The parents of Shagwonabee met, and demanded the life of the young man. The village was in an uproar. Some sided with the parents, some with the young man. All showed anxiety in the affair. They at last, however, decided to give the young man's life to Shagwonabee's parents. They said they had waited long enough for the return of their son. They appointed a day on which the young man should give his life for his friend. He still went at large; he said he was not afraid to die, for he had never committed what they laid to his charge. A day or two before the time set to take his life, he wandered in a melancholy mood, from the village, following the beach. his feelings were wrought to such a pitch, to throw himself into the lake. but he thought, they will say, I was guilty, for having done so. No; I will not, I would prefer dying under their hands. He went on, thinking of his coming fate, till he came to the sand banks, that were a short distance from the village. Here we will dismiss him for the present. [23]

When Shagwonabee fell senseless before the women, it must have been some time before he recovered, for when he did come to his right senses, he did not know where he was, but they gradually returned, and before he opened his eyes, he heard persons conversing; one spoke in a commanding tone, saying, "You foolish girls, is this the way you go about at nights, without our knowing it. Put that person you brought, on that bed of yours, and not let him lay on the ground so." Shagwonabee felt himself moved and placed on a bed. Some time after he opened his eyes, and was surprised to find himself in a superb lodge, extending as far as the eye could reach. One spoke to him, saying, "Stranger, awake, and take some thing to eat." He arose and sat up; on each side of the lodge he beheld rows of people sitting in regular order. At the far end he could see two who looked rather older than the rest, and who appeared to have the obedience of the others.

He spoke, the old Spirit man, saying, "My son; those foolish girls brought you here, they found you, and saw you at the fishing ground, and when you attempted to approach them, you fell senseless, and they brought you under ground to this place. But you can remain satisfied we will make your stay with us pleasant. I am the guardian Spirit of what you call *Nagawe wodjiw*.[24] I have wished frequently to get one of your race to intermarry with us; so if you can make up your mind to stay, I will give you my daughter. The one who brought you away from your parents and friends." The young man hung his head down and made no answer, but his silence they took for assent to their wishes.[25]

"Your wants will all be supplied," continued the old Spirit, "only this, do not to stray any distance from here. I am afraid of that Spirit who rules all Islands that are out in the Lakes, for he demanded my daughter in marriage; and I refused him. So when he hears that you are here, it may be an inducement for him to harm you. There is my daughter, take her, she shall be your wife." And they forthwith sat near each other in the lodge, and were considered as married.

"Son in law," said the Old Spirit, "I am in want of tobacco, and you shall return to visit your parents, and you can make known my wishes. For it is very seldom that those few, who pass these sand banks, offer a piece of tobacco. When they do it, it immediately comes to me. Just so," said he, putting his hand out of the side of the lodge, and drawing in several pieces of Tobacco, which some one at that moment happened to pass, and offered it to the Spirit, for a smooth Lake and prosperous voyage. "You see," said he, "every thing you offer to me on earth, comes immediately to the side of my lodge." Shagwonabee saw the women also putting their hands to the side of the lodge, and then handing some thing round to each other; and of which all did eat of. And which he found out to be, the offerings of provisions offered by Mortals on earth.[26]

"Daughter," said the old Spirit woman, "*Nauau gish* cannot eat what we eat, so you can procure him what he is accustomed too [*sic*]."[27] "Yes," she said; and immediately procured from the side of the lodge a white fish which she prepared for him; and which she did day after day, giving him a variety as he wished; some times it was trout, sturgeon, pike, or any of the kind he wished for; also in the same way, all kinds of meats, or the flesh of any animal he asked for. For the waters came near the lodge, the Spirits had only to extend their hands, to the outside of the lodge, and procure what they wanted. So it was also in their procuring meat.

One day the Old Spirit said, although it was perpetual day with them, "Son in law, you must not be surprised at what you will see, for since you have been with us, you have never seen us go to sleep. It was on account of its being Summer, and which is constant daylight with us; but now what you call Winter is approaching, it is six months or less night with us. And soon you will see us lie down, and we will not get up throughout the whole winter. Take my advice, leave not the lodge, but try and amuse yourself; you can find all wish to eat, there," pointing it to him. Shagwonabee said he would obey, and do as he commanded.

One time a thunder storm came on, and all those Spirits disappeared. When the storm was over, they all again appeared in the lodge. The Old Spirit spoke to his Son in law, saying, "You are surprised no doubt, to see us disappear at every thunder storm. The reason is this a greater Spirit, who lives above, makes sound those thunders and sends his fire, so we are afraid, and hide ourselves."[28]

The season approached, and they one after another, laid down for their long sleep. In the mean time Shagwonabee amused himself the best way he could through the

winter, for his relations only once got up, throughout the whole winter, and then they only said it was midnight.

On the approach of Spring they all arose from their beds. "Son in law," said the old Spirit, "you can now start in a few days with your wife to visit your relations, and you can be absent one year, but after that time you must return. When you get to the village you must first go alone, leave your wife a short distance from the lodge, and when you are welcomed, and then send for her. When there, do not be surprised, you or your relations, to see her disappear whenever you hear it thunder. You will also prosper in all things, for she is very industrious, for while you will sleep she will be at work. The distance is short to your village, a road leads directly to it. And when you get there do not forget my wants, as I stated to you before."[29]

Shagwonabee said he would faithfully perform all his commands. He then left them in company with his wife, and travelled on a good road, his wife leading the way, till they got to a rising ground; at the top this, said Shagwonabee's wife, we will get to your country; they continued, and when to the top, they passed a short distance through the water, and emerged from it, near the bay called by the Ottawas *Wequadedong*, near some sand banks which are there.

Shagwonabee left his wife, after concealing herself, and he went towards the village alone. When on turning the first point of land, who should he meet but his cousin. "Oh, *Newatis*, *Newatis*," said his cousin, "you have come just in time to save me, they accuse me of having killed you." Words cannot express the joy of their meeting. His cousin ran off in haste for the lodge and entered where Shagwonabee's mother was. "Hear," he said, "I have seen him, whom you accused me to have killed; he will be here in a few moments."

All the village was in an uproar, all were anxious to see him whom they had thought dead. He entered the lodge of his parents; all was joy at the happy meeting. He told all which had happened to him, of his marriage. And he was welcomed over and over again. He told his mother, that he had left his wife a short distance from the village; she went immediately in search of her, and soon found her. All the women of the village conducted her to the lodge of her relations; they were astonished at her beauty, at the whiteness of her skin. And more so, at her being able to converse with them in their own language. All was joy in the village; nothing but feasting could be seen while they had the means to do so. And Indians came from different quarters of the country, to offer tobacco to her.

Thus passed the summer and the fall, and Shagwonabee's parents and relations, and the Indians around were prospered in all things. But his Cousin would never leave him, constantly near him, and asking him questions. They took notice, at every thunder storm his wife disappeared, and that at nights as well as in the day, she never was idle.

Winter was beginning to approach, and she told her husband to prepare a lodge to pass the winter in. And to tell the Indians before hand, her father's request. He did so, and all now began to move into their winter quarters. Shagwonabee also, he gave one half of the lodge to his wife, who was now in her torpid state. Before laying down, she said, "no one must pass but yourself on the side of the lodge I am on."

Winter passed slowly away, and when the Sap of the Maple began to run, she awoke from her sleep. And commenced her duties as before. She also helped to make sugar. It was never known before or since that so much sugar was made as the Spring Shagwonabee and his wife passed among the mortals on earth. Soon after they all encamped at their village and it was soon filled with people. They offered tobacco constantly, asking for the usual length of life; or to be successful hunters, and never to be in want of food. Shagwonabee said, he would mention all their requests to his father in law.

So much tobacco had been offered, that they had to get two sacks made of dressed Moose skin. And on each was painted and marked Indians totems who had offered tobacco, and also all those who had made any request.[30]

The time arrived for them to leave, they took the two sacks of Moose skin filled with tobacco, and they told their relations not to follow them, or see how they disappeared. His Cousin insisted on going, & when they got to the sand banks, he said he would go along. Shagwonabee told him it was impossible for him to do so; that it was only spirits who could accomplish such power. They then took an affectionate farewell. And he saw them go into the water, and disappear. He returned home, and told his friends how they disappeared.

Shagwonabee and his wife soon reached their lodges at the grand Sand banks. The old Spirit was delighted, and received them with open arms. They presented to him the tobacco, and told him all the requests of the people above. He said he would attend to all, but he must first invite all his friends to smoke with him. He then sent his *Me zhi nauwa* to invite his friends, the Spirits, and they should come at such and such a time.[31]

When the time drew nigh for the Spirits to arrive, he spoke to his Son in law, saying, "Those *Monetos* I have invited, some of them are very wicked, and more so he who wished to marry my daughter but you will find some friendly to you. Take my advice, when they are coming, you must sit close to your wife, so close you must touch her, if you do not, you will be lost, for those who will come in are so powerful, that they will draw you from your seat; but you have only to obey and all will go on well." Shagwonabee said he would obey.

About midday they commenced coming in. Spirits from all parts of the country. One entered who smiled on him. He was the guardian of the Ottawas, and he lived near the present *Gitchey Wequadedong*. Soon after, he heard the roaring and

foaming of waters. As of a great waterfall. Soon they rushed in, and passed through the lodge in a strong current. Tremendous pieces of rocks rolled past, whole trees, dried trees, stumps passed. Like the roaring and foaming of some mighty cataract, when stones, trees and stumps, are carried down the rivers with great violence, when they are overflowed by the melting snows of spring. It appears that Spirit was the guardian of waterfalls rapids rivers &c.

Again they heard the roaring of waves, like when they beat on a rocky shore, deafening to the ear. Soon in rolled the tremendous waves of the Great lake, Mountains high, and the tops covered with sparkling white. The waves rushed past Shagwonabee and touched, and it was with great difficulty he could keep his head, for they appeared frightful, and each one appeared as if it would overwhelm them all. The Spirit entered; he was the guardian of Islands of the surrounding deep.

Soon after, the old Spirit arose and addressed the assembly. "Brothers," he said, "I have invited you to partake with me of the offerings which the mortals on earth have offered, and which have been brought by our mutual relation" (pointing to Shagwonabee). "Brothers, you see their wishes and desires, (Pointing to the figured moose skins). Brothers, the offering is worthy of our consideration. Brothers, I see nothing on my part to prevent our granting them; there is no wish unreasonable.[32] Brothers, shall we comply with their request. The offering is gratifying. We are in such want of tobacco. One thing more I would say Brothers, which is this. There is my Son in law; he is a mortal. I wish to detain him with me, and it lays with us jointly to make him one of us." "Hoke! Hoke!" ran through the whole company of Spirits. The tobacco was then divided equally among them all. They all decided to grant the requests of the people on earth, and also respecting his son in law.

They then left one after another. And when the Spirit of Islands passed Shagwonabee, he looked cross at him with his eyes, and passed out. The guardian spirit of the Ottawa bands said, "It is very curious that he never can appear any where without showing his bad disposition."

The Old Spirit then told Shagwonabee, that he should once more visit his parents and relations, but it should be only for a short time. It is merely to go and tell them that their wishes are granted, and to bid them farewell forever.

Some time after Shagwonabee & his wife left to go and visit his earthly parents. When there, they told, all which you have desired has been granted. "And," said he; "I must now bid you all farewell for ever." His parents and all the Indians raised their voices in one loud heart rending wail. They allowed them to accompany them to the sand banks. And where they all seated themselves, to see them depart. The day was mild, the sky was clear of clouds, not a breath of wind to disturb the blue surface of the water. Not a whisper was heard. Shagwonabee and his wife waded out into the water, waving their hands. His parents, relations, all, one in all, raised their voices and wept aloud. They looked, but Shagwonabee and his wife had disappeared for ever.[33]

Notes

1. Papers of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, General Correspondence, January 1838–June 1839, Box 43, Library of Congress.

2. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Algic Researches (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1839); Oneóta, or, Characteristics of the Red Race of America: From Original Notes and Manuscripts (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845).

3. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 514, 585.

4. Schoolcraft, Personal Memoirs, 653.

5. Franz Boas, "Mythology and Folk-tales of the North American Indians," Journal of American Folklore 27 (1914): 374.

6. Stith Thompson, Tales of the North American Indians (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), xv.

7. William M. Clements, "Schoolcraft as Textmaker," Journal of American Folklore 103 (1990): 177–92.

8. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Travels in Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1825), 410–32; Mrs. Anna Jameson, Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada, Volume 2 (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1839), 160–80); Philip P. Mason, ed., Schoolcraft's Ojibwa Lodge Stories (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1962).

9. Mentor Williams, ed., Schoolcraft's Indian Legends (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1956).

10. The ethnodiscursive translations and accompanying comparative studies may be found on the Nenabozho and Ojibwe tales pages at https://picaresquescholar.wordpress.com.

11. Schoolcraft, Algic Researches, Volume 1, 56.

12. Papers of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, General Correspondence, January–September 1836, Box 41, Library of Congress.

13. Papers of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, General Correspondence, January 6–September 29, 1838, Box 15, Library of Congress.

14. Schoolcraft, Personal Memoirs, 585, 655.

15. Schoolcraft, Personal Memoirs, p. 691.

16. My transcriptions, with annotations, are available at https://picaresquescholar.wordpress.com/w-johnstons-manuscript-tales/ .

17. Papers of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Miscellaneous Writings, 1820–ca. 1860, Muzzeniegun, Box 85, 644–50, Library of Congress. Transcribed by Eliot A. Singer. For readability, I have inserted paragraphing and quotation marks when necessary. It should be understood that as a translator, Johnston was not simultaneously writing down in English while Chusco narrated, and there is much of himself in the end product. For Schoolcraft's modifications, see "Wassamo, or The Fire Plume," Algic Researches, Volume 2, 132–49. I will point to noteworthy emendations as the story proceeds. "Waasamo," which Schoolcraft used as the character name throughout, means "lightnings," an animate intransitive verb (i.e., an animate being, Thunderbird, flashes lightning). Perhaps Schoolcraft confused it with "waaswaagan" (torch or flambeau).

18. The transcription was consistently Wequadedong instead of what in modern orthography is Wiikwedong (Place of the Bay.) Chusco did not use a diminutive for the bay of the Ottawas, Wiikwedoonsing, just contrasted it with Gitchey Wequadedong (Gichi Wiikwedong), Grand Traverse. Schoolcraft eliminated the specific place name and simply referred to "a large bay on the east coast of Lake Michigan."

19. Historically, Odaawaa residence at L'Arbre Croche dates to 1742, and even sporadic use of the area would have been after European tools were standard. Schoolcraft reduced the list of traditional manufactures and added a sentence: "It was long before the time the flag of the white man had been first seen in these lakes, or the sound of an iron axe had been heard."

20. Schoolcraft's rewording to "the plume of fire over his forehead waved brilliantly in the air" accentuated this detail, from which his title derived.

21. Schoolcraft might have thought the comment about singing and telling stories of women was prurient. He changed it to "Cousin . . . some person is near us. I hear a laugh; awake and look out."

22. "N-iitaawis," "my male cross-cousin."

23. In May 1819, Hubbard (The Autobiography of Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard [Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1911], 67–71) witnessed an execution by the Manistee Chippewa Band of an outsider, married to a woman of the band, who had killed the chief's son during a drunken brawl. In that case, "covering" with goods was deemed an acceptable alternative, but the man lacked the means. Chusco did not allude to "covering," likely financially unavailable as an option for the young cousin, anyway. A cross-cousin is not a blood relative in a patrilineal system

24. "Negaw wajiw," "fine-sand mountain." Grand Sable Dune on Lake Superior is the usual referent.

25. Schoolcraft added a footnote accusing the Old Spirit of blaming his daughters for obtaining what he himself wanted: "This subterfuge, to call it by its lightest name, shows that plain truth is not a point of character most strenuously sought after by the Old Spirit." Sometimes Schoolcraft inserted, more briefly, his moral views into a text.

26. In his reminiscence of traveling along the south shore of Lake Superior in 1791, William's father, John Johnston ("An Account of Lake Superior in 1792–1807," in Louis Rodrigue Masson, ed., Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest: Récits de Voyages, Lettres et Rapports Inédits Relatifs au Nord-Ouest Canadien, Volume 2 (Québec: A. Coté, 1889–90), 152–53), noted about the "sand mountain": "The Indians have many superstitions with respect to this mountain which, with every other remarkable or dangerous place on the borders of the lake or interior country, has its genii, to whom they never fail to make a speech, accompanied with a present of tobacco and sometimes their silver ornaments, whenever they pass."

27. "Na'aangish," "son-in-law resident in a family," a term on note in a patrilocal system.

28. The principal underwater manitous who are prey of the thunderers are Michi-ginebig-oog, the Great Serpent, which would fit with one that sleeps through the winter. The chief of the Mishibizhiig (the Great Lynxes), also powerful underwater spirits, is sometimes described as beautifully white in the Flood story, as was the Prince of the Serpents in William Johnston's "Story of Manahbosho." Fear of thunder and lightning is why Schoolcraft's choice of the name of Waasamo was so ill-informed.

29. The idea is that manitous need, or at least desire, offerings, not just that humans make offerings because they want to appease or obtain aid.

30. Chusco here implies that in antiquity, Odaawaa had a strong totemic system, a topic of debate among ethnohistorians.

31. "Mizhinawe," "aide."

32. The concept is that requests to manitous must be reasonable and the offerings proportional to what is being asked.

33. Schoolcraft's ending reads thus: "They looked again, a red flame, as if the sun had glanced on a billow, marked the spot for an instant but the Feather of Flames and his wife had disappeared for ever." This becomes a gratuitous opportunity to resurrect the character's name, which had played no part in the story since the flambeau scene. I am unable to conjecture how Waasamo can be construed as "Feather of Flames." A good example of a Schoolcraft mistake or tangential self-indulgence that has no relevance to the story but mars it, and his reputation, nonetheless.