The World of Tracks

Information pertinent to the authenticity of the novel is taken from the following source:


**MANITOU** is an Algonquian term, used primarily by the *OJIBWAY* to describe the most powerful supernatural beings, as well as the all-pervasive spiritual essence they symbolize. This personification, from the great spirit Gitchi-Manitou (or Kitchi-, or Chi-) to the numerous spirit-beings who dwell in the Ojibway landscape, sets it apart from the other Native American concepts of immanent power, such as the SIOUX “wakan” and the IROQUOIS “orenda”. (53)

**MISHIPIZHEU** (*OJIBWAY*), a horned serpent, lives under lakes and rivers. Mishipizheu (literally, “Great Lynx”) is a very important spiritual presence in Ojibway culture. Unlike many other monsters, his status is closer to that of a god, for he exercises power over the vast network of lakes and rivers within Ojibway lands in the Canadian Shield (north of the Great Lakes).

In some accounts, he was responsible for the primordial flood. He occupies caverns and tunnels beneath the lakes, so he is able to travel easily anywhere in the region. He is said to stir up the waters of lakes and turn rivers into dangerous rapids to drown people—it is therefore wise to leave a bit of tobacco or some other small offering when one enters a lake that might be one of Mishipizheu’s many lairs. When he travels on the land, he crawls like a giant leech, saturating the ground and leaving swamps and quicksand behind.

He may also provide medicine, but is so dangerous that his power can even overwhelm SHAMANS . . . . (54)

**NANABUSH** is the principal CULTURE HERO and TRANSFORMER of the *OJIBWAY*. He is known by several different names, including Manabush, Manabozho, Nanabozho, Wenebojo and Winabojo. This is the result of dialect variation across Ojibway culture . . . .

Nanabush is a highly complex figure, combining the attributes of culture hero, transformer and TRICKSTER. He gave the northern landscape its character and created many living things, fought evil MANITOUS and brought to the Ojibway the defining elements of their culture. In a MIDÉTWIN society story of CREATION, Nanabush made men from earth, but they disappeared—stolen by evil manitous—until he created Thunderers to watch over them . . . .

Some of his transformations combine ribald antics and, perhaps, some rather darker sexual undertones . . . .

For all his antics and noble acts, Wenebojo [thus called by the Wisconsin Chippewa, or southern Ojibway] was subject to lust, envy, greed and the other foibles of humankind—and generally suffered for his temptations. In another southern Ojibway story that carries a serious lesson about incest, Wenebojo tricked his daughters into marrying him, and eventually felt so ashamed that he crawled into the open mouth of a muskie (a species of predatory fish) and remains there to this day. (60)

**THE OJIBWAY** (Anishinabe) [Northern, Plains, Southern], who now prefer their traditional name Anishinabe, are a large Algonquian tribe that once controlled a vast, rugged territory around the shores of Lake Superior.

They may be generally divided into three groups: the Northern Ojibway (including the Saltreaux), who occupy the boreal forests north of the upper Great Lakes; the Plains Ojibway, who live at the edge of the eastern Great Plains;
and the Southern Ojibway (commonly called the Chippewa), who lived in the mixed deciduous and coniferous forests and prairies south of the upper Great Lakes. Each group adapted to its surroundings. The northern Ojibway were hunters and gatherers similar to the Cree and other northern peoples; the Plains Ojibway moved out of the forests to pursue a buffalo-hunting way of life; and the southern Ojibway supplemented their hunting and gathering with horticulture. The Ojibway of the boreal forests produced one of the most striking and enduring forms of art and religious expression on the continent: red-ochre rock paintings, scattered across the great granite cliffs lining the endless waterways of the Canadian Shield, from northwest Manitoba to eastern Ontario. Because the Ojibway avoided removal, they continue to occupy their traditional homelands in a large number of reservations and other communities in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Montana. (64)

Shamans are the religious specialists of hunting and gathering tribes, using spiritual techniques extending back to Paleolithic times. Theirs is a highly individual ability, involving some form of transcendence to carry them into the spirit world. They may be healers (hence the common term “medicine man”), seers (essential in hunting and warfare), or keepers of sacred knowledge. Although agriculturalists tend to have organized priesthoods, their cultures usually maintain shamanic elements, especially in matters of fertility, hunting magic, and the seeking of visions. (73)

Windigo (northern Algonquians) is a cannibal giant with a heart of ice, a personification of madness associated with either winter starvation or extreme gluttony.

The Ojibway see the Windigo as a giant Manitous, in the form of a man or woman, who is afflicted with a never-ending hunger. This ghastly monster resembles a body removed from a grave—withered, skeletal and with the smell of death. When the Windigo prepares to attack a person, a dark snow-cloud rises up, the air turns so cold that the trees crack, and the wind causes a blizzard. The monster tears its victims apart, eating their flesh and bones, and drinking the blood, and some people die of fright when they see it or hear its shriek. Yet, the more the creature eats, the hungrier it gets, and so it perpetually rages through the dark forests in search of new prey. One lesson of the Windigo, therefore, is moderation—it teaches of the need for people to manage critical food supplies so that they can avoid winter famine. (85)

Shamans on the Northwest Coast conduct a ritual outside a cedar plank house. They wear woven cedar bark blankets. (Photograph by E. J. Curtis, 1914). (73)
MISHIPIZHEU, the great horned serpent, is painted in red ochre on a sheer granite cliff overlooking Agawa Bay, Lake Superior. Travellers appeased this powerful Manitou with prayers and offerings so that he would keep the waters calm as they passed. (51)

This Southern Ojibway ceremonial drumstick is made of an animal jawbone carved in the shape of Mishipizheu, the great horned water serpent who lives in deep lakes and rivers. (84)