

in exchange for commercial success (Francis 1992:116–17, 143).³⁰ Others would argue she was an advocate of Native cultures but that Johnson was limited by what her mainstream Euro-Canadian, Euro-American, and European audiences would accept from her (Lyon 2008:3–4; Weaver 1997:63–64).

Pauline Johnson was certainly much more complex than the public persona she promoted. Although her autobiographical accounts, articles, prose, and poetry claim otherwise, her actions and behaviors often belied her public statements that she identified exclusively with her Mohawk heritage. Even her performances hinted the cultural ambiguity that marked her life more than either half of her dual heritage: during her recitals Pauline Johnson would wear her “Indian” stage costume for the first half of her performance and change into a ball gown for the second half. Many would argue that she did this for dramatic effect; however her change of clothes can be viewed as the perfect metaphor for her life. Europeans, Euro-Americans and Euro-Canadians alike perceived Pauline Johnson as an Indian. In fact, by Canadian law, once married to George Johnson, Emily Johnson lost her status as a British citizen and was recognized by the government as a Mohawk. And though her children were recognized as Mohawk by the Canadian government, by tribal law they were not, because their mother was European (Strong-Boag and Gerson 2000:48).

Pauline Johnson’s status among the Native communities of Grand River is ambivalent at best. As Strong-Boag and Gerson (2000:37) point out, Pauline Johnson never performed at the Six Nations Reserve for the Haudenosaunee residents but she did perform for the nearby settler town of Brantford. They also note that she chose to retire to Vancouver, British Columbia rather than her childhood hometown in Ontario (Strong-Boag and Gerson 2000:37). Tales of her childhood and adolescence also indicate a measure of social isolation from the people of the Reserve due to internal familial pressures, personal behavior and the Reserve children’s perception of the Johnson siblings as “not quite Indian” (Keller 1981:25–26, 33–34).

Pauline Johnson’s career as a traveling recitalist lasted 17 years. During her heyday she toured extensively throughout Canada and parts of the United States. She made two tours of England, once in 1894 and again in 1906. Although famous and considered to be successful as a performer, Pauline Johnson constantly struggled with money. Her frequent illnesses, lifestyle preferences, generosity with friends, and bad luck with partners and managers often left her in tight financial situations (Keller 1981:99; Keller 1999:55, 70–71, 81–82).³¹ Such was the situation when she had funded her England 1906 tour through the proceeds of the sale of the zigzag wampum belt discussed

³⁰ Pauline Johnson herself once lamented that she was obliged to pander to her audiences to maintain her popularity when she complained that “the public will not listen to lyrics, will not appreciate real poetry, will in fact not have me as an entertainer if I give them nothing but rhythm, cadence, beauty, thought” (Foster 1931:63).

³¹ Pauline Johnson was known to borrow money from friends and relatives and at least once, she requested an advance from the rental income from Chiefswood (Keller 1981:154; 157; Keller 1999:70, 77). To illustrate, once while recovering from “acute rheumatism” while on tour in 1900, her manager Charles Wurz, disappeared with her money and she was required to perform just so that she could pay for her hotel and medical expenses (Keller 1999:71–72).