

Joseph Brant's Masquerades  
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The 18<sup>th</sup> century Mohawk leader Joseph Brant, also known as Thayendanegea, traveled widely. Born in Ohio country, raised in the Mohawk Valley, and educated in Connecticut, Brant came to know a wider swath of the Colonies through his military service during the Seven Years' War and the Revolution. But Brant's most notable journeys were the trips he took to London in 1775/6 and 1785. Undertaken primarily to present Iroquois grievances to the crown, these trips included diversions, including sitting for portraits by George Romney and Gilbert Stuart, which present the public face of the Native American warrior. This experience clearly appealed to Brant, as he consented to sit for at least three more painters after his final return to the Americas.

These paintings are the subject of my paper. Scholars have generally treated Brant's appearance in these portraits as a meeting of cultures, tracing the origins and meanings of each piece of his regalia within Iroquois culture and looking at the artist's choice of pose and style as a symptom of European primitivism. My reading emphasizes the artificiality of separating Iroquois and English worlds at this time, particularly for a cosmopolitan subject like Brant. Instead, I suggest that the paintings reflect contemporary constructs of identity, including the role of visual self-presentation in constructing of indigenous, masculine, and American identities.

Key to my argument is Brant's attendance of masquerade balls during his London trips in the guise of a Mohawk warrior. Brant's costume, which was described in the contemporary press, conformed to a conventional one used by ball attendees for most of the 18th century. It also conforms to his appearance in the Romney and Stuart portraits. Terry Castle has argued that the masquerade ball challenged the stability of social order during this difficult moment for the British Empire by collapsing the boundary between self and other. I propose that Brant's self-conscious roleplay similarly undermines the notion of a coherent and discreet Iroquois identity. This insight casts new light on his own role in the production of the portraits, but it also does more than that: it links Native subjectivity in this period to more broadly-shared concepts about identity in motion in the colonial Atlantic.