Stylistic Stratification in an Oral Tradition

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur examine le contenu et le style de certains contes propres aux Indiens Skagit.

The assumption that a people's literature projects the very essence of their social life is old in Western thought. An hypothesis I have borrowed for story analysis from Jacobs is that some, perhaps much, social conflict which was unresolved in realistic ways found expression in narrative art. Jacobs, for example, has shown for Clackamas Chinook folklore that content centers about stress situations in the daily life of Clackamas, points of especial conflict between society's members (Jacobs, 1959:127-208). Jacobs treated myths much as Fromm treated dreams. Fromm suggested that dream content consists of two basic types of projections: those of wish fulfillment and those of anxiety (Fromm, 1951). This applies, too, to the content of Clackamas stories as well as to the content of Skagit Indian stories upon which this paper is based.[1] As in dreams, both anxiety and wish-fulfillment may be magnified out of proportion to reality or even to possibility. Or both may be expressed as trivialities which mask the real meaning or mitigate affective response to it. Either may express feelings of hostility, or its opposite, love. And both may refer to the same objects or situations, sometimes within

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[1] Skagit tales and myths, along with ethnographic materials, were obtained between the years 1952 and 1954 from elderly natives living on and off Reservations in Skagit and Whatcom Counties, northwestern Washington State. The story collection numbers 21 tales and 111 myths.

the same story. One of Fromm's maxims for dream interpretation is, "What we think and feel is influenced by what we do" (Fromm, 1951: 29). And as humans we are notorious for being mixed in our feelings about what we are doing. Conversely, our ambivalence influences our behaviour. But in oral literature, because it is a public depersonalized creation and reproduction, the destructive side of ambivalence — the socially discountenanced act and feeling — can be given freer play without drastic personal or social consequences. Thus, the more bizarre content of oral literature — its symbols which are most removed from the reality of everyday life — come to have great significance for the analyst of culture.[2]

To what extent story-telling discharged or alleviated feelings about irresolvable problems we cannot say. For the Skagit Indians narration of stories was also educational, entertaining and explanatory. But the fact that narration concentrated on problems must mean that the act of stating them, sometimes laughing at them, and turning them into highly interesting fictions, had still another function — to make life more pleasant.

Fromm pointed out that dreams function to free the dreamer from the restraining logic of reality, but that dreams have another logic which is experiential (Fromm, 1951). That is, dreams express experience affectively. In *An Essay on Man* Cassirer said much the same thing for myth. Calling mythical categories "physiognomic characters," he saw them as subjective perceptions of nature which have no scientific objectivity. But as features of human experiences, physiognomic experiences have a claim to reality. Myth contributes a truth of its own as a psychological vision of reality through its own symbolic forms (Cassirer, 1953:97-104).

Skagit Indian recitalists expressed a similar view about their own mythology. And examination of Skagit stories discloses that

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[2] The distinction I make between culture and folklore is only for convenient reference, and rests on no presumption that folklore is different from and not a part of culture. Skagit stories are simply data of Skagit ethnography which must be examined in order to discern certain features of culture. And going to folklore to discover features like moral precepts, personal and social values, areas of social tension and inadmissible feelings is taking as direct an approach as description of economic life enables the scholar to construct from it the economic system.

the two kinds of reality intermingle. Truths of Skagit myth, as Cassirer describes mythical truths, need to be carried by literal expressions, a reality-substance in order to give them context for meaning and continuity for plot. In a mythology characterized by a blend of literal and figurative categories, such as Skagit, the first task of the analyst is to distinguish one from the other: which of its elements are faithful reflections of culture, and which are stylized distortions of it?

Oppenheimer conceived of style as a writer's solution to handling the implicit: "The problem of doing justice to the implicit, the imponderable, and the unknown is of course not unique to politics. It is always with us in science, and it is one of the great problems of writing and all forms of art. The means by which it is solved is sometimes called style." (Oppenheimer, 1949:30-31)

With such concepts about the psychological functions of mythical thought, and a minimum definition for style, by which is meant pattern of communication in a sense of problem-solving, the folklorist can examine a body of folk literature from some particular tradition and usually discover among the stories striking contrasts both in style and content which parallel one another. The discovery of this correlation suggests that a consideration of style apart from content provides a poor working construct for analysis of either aspect of literature, and has typically led to the setting up of classifications for stories within single traditions as well as typologies assumed to be of universal application.

Literary categories are revealed variously, but nearly always they suggest an historical progression. Nineteenth century European folklorists generally viewed myths or stories that have archaic, pre-Christian elements as being of greater antiquity than heroic legends, romance and nursery tales, to which in that order old Germanic belief, for example, disintegrated according to the Brothers Grimm. Early in this century Friedrich von der Leyen (1912) furnished for his edition of the *Nursery and Household Tales* nine categories, arranged chronologically from *I Primitive Belief* (Märchen or myth) to *IX Jokes and Anecdotes,* the latter of which is presumably the most recent in meaning, function and symbolism. The European collections upon which stratifications are based are unique because they survived to be recounted within

literate traditions. Thus, the tales of Europe are considered to be vestigial. But such schemes as these which give myth historical primacy tell little about mythical thought as a psychological process, and for all they tell about origins, myth might well have sprung full-blown from the brow of man.

There seems to have been real confusion among the early and some recent folklorists about origins, and curious theories have, accordingly, been invented for genesis of myths, ranging from "disease of language" to Jungian archetypal imagery in a human collective mentality, because validation has been impossible or disregarded when possible. Native classifications usually refer one set of stories which we popularly call "myths" to an era preceding the present one of modern humanity, or to a "myth-age". The second set, typically lacking in supernatural elements and frequently alluding to historical figures and events, is supposed to be based in fact and refers to the historical present. Native classifications are valuable to the ethnologist's comprehension about native cosmology and values; but, as for the early European scholars native schemes do not explain origins of myths, as a creative process. For a live oral tradition, unlike the dying or dead one of early nineteenth century Europe, it is possible for the folklorist objectively to "see" myths in the making. The analysis undertaken of Skagit story transmission suggests that myths are older than non-myths, but not simply because the content of myths refers to a prehuman condition or because of the mere presence of archaisms, but for reasons of patterned change through transmission itself. Furthermore, the process of change in style and content reveals that the evolution proceeds from tale to myth, not myth to tale, although myths in a collection are more ancient than tales.

Most of the Skagit myths and tales were recorded in English from bilingual Skagit Indian recitalists. There was considerable variability in English vernacular style because of more or less familiarity with English among the several narrators. And certain portions of stories were given in the native language and translated, when they became too difficult for immediate Skagit-to-English delivery. Quality of narration and repertoire size varied among narrators due, I think, not to degree but to kind of religious acculturation. Inquiries and observations revealed that within

stylistic limits a good recitalist is also a melodramatist, who conducts a narration as a one-person play, impersonating and projecting roles as he or she sees fit. Judging from the profundity of myth actors' dialogue, and the vocal mannerisms and numbers of songs, dances and gestures required to project stories, theatrical projection contributed to what Skagit considered to be a good narrative style.

For recitation of myths, good Skagit narrative style is compactly trenchant. Content is placed in actors' performances first, words second. Asides and soliloquies are absent and even dialogue is at a laconic minimum. Two conspicuous features of the verbal art are ellipses and obliquities. Stories are action-packed, actors are extroverted and introspection is rare. Most of what actors think must be filled in by the audience, and the seasoned Skagit audience understood minimal cues to meaning and intention. Real talent was needed to satisfy these criteria of style, and it was a talent not so much of original creativity as of technical mastery. Direct expression would expand Skagit verbal artistry to conversational circumstantiality. Omission of literary figures would reduce the story to mere plot outline. In either case, entertainment value would be lost.

The limits of individual creativity which good style permits have to do with elaboration or omission of descriptive materials that are not essential to character and plot development. Details of fishing, hunting, collecting, butchering, preparation and serving of food, etiquette, gambling, spirit-power quests, shamanism, and ceremonial dancing and singing may or may not be included, depending upon narrators' choice. Even so, descriptions of these activities are circumscribed. Their inclusion is not meant to be didactic, I think, but to serve as literary devices to delay action for the sake of suspense.

Skagit literature is lacking in psychological realism: feelings are externalized into situations which are interpersonal and are not "within the soul of the character," as, for example, Racine conceived them. And so notations on personality are rare, beyond what the standardized action and dialogue of story actors tell. They consist, at the most, of thoughts or plans expressed in a few words. Emotional states of performers, their private thoughts,

and especially hints to forthcoming plot development, are given by indirection through dialogue and action.

Purely descriptive notations which nearly always are omitted from stories are features of landscape, statements about weather, appearance and particulars of villages and houses, and of actors who are supernumeraries and plot expeditors. A single clue like the mention of a wealthy headman let the audience know that the village is large and prosperous. Or where a father-daughter relationship is the focus of a story, reference to wife and mother may be omitted. Skagits felt no need to provide a general setting or atmosphere, for their audience needed no acclimatization, and such notations create no suspense. My inquiries on "untold" story material revealed that Skagits included only personal relationships which are vital to plot. Narration about foods and ceremonial do not confuse plot as unnecessary actors and their delineations might. Consequently, as soon as actors are no longer useful to the story, they are dropped without reference to their respective fates, a feature often disconcerting to the Westerner who feels need to follow through to the outcome of personalities once they become at all important. Skagit thought of people in terms of social interaction. Delineation of personality for its interest alone was meaningless to them. Even the Skagit characterization of a principal story actor is extremely terse. A principal may be limned by as few as one or two traits and these are really only clues by which the audience creates a character type. But what otherwise might be meagre representation is manipulated by several literary devices which operate to heighten the significance and to relieve the starkness of the character. One of the most effective and common is the presentation of actors in contrasting pairs, conforming nicely to the Law of Two to a Scene, which is often regarded as a device of simplification, but which actually for Skagit, at least, through hyperbole serves meaning. By varying combinations of actors throughout the literature, Skagit present many facets of a single personality type. Thus, the total literature, when analyzed for delineation of personality type is not barren in this respect, but rich. A device that augments significance of personality traits within individual stories is multiplication of a personality. This form appears as a series of actors, usually siblings of the same sex who act in succession but as a unit to

represent a single type. For such teams stories sometimes present minute differences of character between the several actors for the type that they represent. This stratagem is particularly well-adapted to Skagit tenets of good literary style since it does not really increase numbers of actors which would, in terms of Skagit esthetics, only clutter up the plot. Thus, nuances of character within a stereotype can be portrayed in a most economical way. The multiple hero also functions as one of the standard means of building to story climax: it nearly always is expressed by pattern-number, and it combines with one of the most important themes of the literature which is the "youngest-smartest."

Characterization of Skagit plot is a matter that again forestalls content analysis. Alternate versions show variation in identification of minor myth actors, omissions and inclusions of scenes and supporting actors, and stresses on actors and situations. Since informants' sources differ for each set of cognate stories we cannot ascertain how much difference is due to source and how much to recombination of scenes and forgetting at the hands of my recitalists. For complete stories, a plot is present: that is, there is an introduction, one or more crises, and closure. Raconteurs indicated whether or not the stories they told were complete. Examination of stories shows that they must do one or several of the following:

1) make a moral point. Stories that present content overtly usually end on a strong ethical note. Stories of this type often tell of combat between individuals or groups whose values differ.

2) point up problems, which is most characteristic of stories for which central themes are masked. Moral lessons are embedded within these stories, but their expressions are covert, and hardly discernible to a non-native. The entire story content must be analyzed for our comprehension.

3) or be explanatory, although no myth of this collection is purely so. Explanatory content of myth consists largely of appendages by which the story is neatly capped off in a pleasant way. Historical Era tales are more inclined to be explanatory in themselves.

My determination of what are stories and what are variants thereof is arbitrary since I did not have the opportunity to test informants on this matter. But that they considered their own

renditions complete, unless otherwise specified, is certain. Even acculturated Skagits were compulsive about telling stories "right." If a story was imperfectly recalled, it was wrong to "guess", meaning to pad, improvise, or omit. It was better not to tell it at all for it is dangerous to omit scenes or to shorten myths. Nubile women in the audience might give birth to deformed children, incomplete or malformed like the abbreviated or truncated story. And shortening of myths would shorten the lives of all listeners. Perhaps the tendency of Skagit myths to be short was influenced by these compulsive ideas assisted by the principal tenet of oral art — terseness.

Skagit recitalists' delivery of stories was in a spirit of good-natured relaxation, probably much like that of old-time Skagit story tellers. Although stories were told for entertainment, the weightiest lessons and deepest truths of human existence were purveyed by myth, their full appreciation essential to enculturation. And although the tenor of myth recitals was probably light-hearted, narration of myth had to be accompanied by certain oral ritualism on the part of both raconteur and audience. The recitalist must introduce the myth by the word *habo*[3] followed by a terse standardized introductory phrase such as "High-class (people) live there." These brief prefaces do not serve as true titles since the introductions to several myths are identical. But, like titles, they do intimate to the audience something of what will follow. Throughout the myth narration the audience responded with *habo's* to indicate "go ahead" to the story-teller, should he pause, or to signify "I know. Proceed." Skagit believed that unless the audience participated, prompted and signalled alertness in this way future generations would be harmed. So listening to myths had as formidable a conscientiousness about it as their telling. Interruptions were tolerated, and exhortations to young people on ethical precepts suggested by myth material occasionally broke narration. But moralizing was not considered a proper part of the story nor even a digression since it was phrased in such a way that it interfered in no wise with precepts of laconic style and indirection of myth-telling. In other words, it neither added to nor detracted from the story.

3 This word may be related to the word *siyaho'b,* "myth."

Skagit myth has language forms of its own. That is, actors sometimes are referred to by terms never used in everyday parlance. In one myth Mink is called not "Mink" but *łi'łqʷəlqe,* "Wet-hair," which is a euphemism. Myth actor Wolf is never called *stəkai'u,* "wolf" of common speech, but *ǰa'ǰadəb* or *so'b'x̣əd,* both untranslatable. Mink in several stories employs a Myth-Age language of his own, composed of suggestive nonsense syllables. This allows for development of humour through punning and word-play. But it is more significantly rooted in Skagit belief that there was a universal language understood by all men, animals and objects in the animistic era, the Myth Age, which preceded the present one. Esoteric language, believed to be a Myth Age survival, was important to formula magic and shamanism. The retention of these speech-forms in the dialogue of some myths bespeaks the fidelity of recitation if not the retentive minds of the better Skagit narrators.

Skagit classification of stories puts them into two named groups: that of myth, *siyaho'b,* set in an era before the present one, and the *təłsiyʌ'c'əb* to which I refer as tales and which are supposed to have occurred within the present era. The Skagit word *təł,* a stem of *təłsiyʌ'c'əb* ("true story") means "true." This would seem to cast some doubt on the "truth" of the Myth Age in a Skagit world-view. But the Myth Age and myth constituted another realm of reality to Skagit, but one which no longer exists, therefore is no longer true in the present-day world. However, there is no doubt in Skagit minds that the meaning, the content of myth is applicable to all times. It is merely the external wrappings of myth, its symbols and vehicles which are modern impossibilities. In the Myth Age the world was populated by creatures who metamorphosed at will from human to animal form and back again, or even to inanimate objects. Some had wondrous powers to defy distance and every conceivable obstacle, while others were wretchedly human. Slaying monsters plundered the myth-world and monster-slayers pursued and wiped them out. All stories possessing these characteristics were told as myths, and Skagit readily identified any story in which there are anthropomorphized animal actors as *siyaho'b.*

In addition to myths and tales there is a vague category that refers to a period transitional between the Myth Age and the

present, which natives refer to as the "Change." They include a group of stories which feature the Skagit transformer, $Duk^{w}ib\partial t\check{s}$. The stories are told as myths because they refer to the terminal Myth Age. The Skagit transformer seems to have been a literary afterthought by which the world was hastily prepared for modern humans. Informants compared him to Jesus Christ or George Washington. This pallid actor in human form is very different from the vividly portrayed and often amoral trickster-transformers and trickster-announcers of other myths. The $Duk^{w}ib\partial t\check{s}$ stories are few, and brief. Informants had little to say about this transformer and his works. The $Duk^{w}ib\partial t\check{s}$ concept is not at all well integrated into Skagit cosmogony and seems to have been of recent acquisition. Other stories of the "Change" were unclassified as to myth or tale. They contain elements principally of well-mythicized "true stories." Their principal actors are personifications of spirit-powers and have marvelous powers of transformation. Like many tales, one of these tells of spirit-power acquisition. There are no clear-cut features of stories about the "Change", and most of them combine features of style and content pertinent to myths and tales.

When did the historical era begin? This is not a rhetorical question. Skagit provided an answer through genealogies which carry back seven or eight generations to tribal founders named in tales of the "Change" and the early historical present. Thus, the beginning of the historical era was no more than eight generations before the immediate present. And the Myth Age, too, keeps pace behind the "Change." In other words, lacking a concept of time in years and written historical and genealogical records, Skagit history, from our point of view, has forward progression in time. And for any Skagit, whether alive today or two-hundred years ago, the beginning of the modern era is only several generations ago.

Skagit historical-era tales display a wide range of style and content and some do not differ appreciably from myth. Generally, their telling allows for greater latitude in style of delivery, which for some approaches conversational circumstantiality, as compared to the succinctness, abstractness and obliquity of myth style. Nor is the telling of tales ceremonialized by the utterance of standard-

ized prefaces and by *habo's* throughout narration. Tale-telling is not hedged in by the raconteur's needs compulsively to duplicate the story as he originally heard it. All that has been said so far on narrative style applies primarily to myth recitation and less so to tales, depending upon how much the tale has been subjected to mythicization. Some whole tales nearly fall short of meeting the minimum criteria of plot. Many are attempts to be explanatory when they relate merely extraordinary events. And then these are probably founded upon unique experiences which hardly had wide appeal to Skagits: they lack content and amount to citations of curious situations. Another feature of all tales is that they are humourless; they are even devoid of clever pleasantries. Humour is a central feature of many myths and intrudes as comedy-relief upon some of the most sombre of them. Story analysis reveals that most myth humour is reaction-formation against social tensions; humour appears to have been a manipulation of content of the highest order, requiring many years, many raconteurs, and many audiences.

Some tales appear to be in process of becoming mythicized as to use of symbols. For example, the wide-spread dog-husband story explains the origin of a lower-class lineage out of an upper-class village. The tale handles in a literal way the concept of the species dog which Skagit associated with lower-class behaviour, so that a mere dog is represented as the lineage founder. Unlike a true myth would do for this actor, the dog of the tale is not anthropomorphized as Dog. A version of the same event is told not in tale form but as fact. This account says that a dispute between villagers led some of the lower-class amongst them to establish a new settlement. In content the two versions are similar, but with the tale form moralizing on the iniquities of the lower-class as Skagit myths never fail to do. Another mythicized tale is such a hodge-podge of historical fact and of myth elements that it confounded its narrator who could scarcely believe that it is a "true story," as he was told, because of its performers' abilities to metamorphose to animal forms.

As a tentative hypothesis, I suggest that the best of historical era tales of wide circulation and repeated narration became mythicized by piecemeal artistry in the hands of many raconteurs and critical audiences over many generations. Examination of one

of the transitional tales suggests how this process might have occurred. In this story the human actors and their spirit-powers became identified as one by recitalists. The female principal has a spirit-power associated with fog. A recurrent mythical association is fog-Wolf-vengeance-slave-raiding. The protagonists' problem is to rescue a kidnapped relative from an enemy camp, and in a sneak attack through fog created by the woman her brothers transform to Wolves and in the style of slave-raiding recapture the youth. Thus, by manipulating data of "true stories" which have reference to myth elements, secondary associations to myth symbols are included and a myth is in the making. Probably only the rare favourites among "true stories" ever survived retelling and remodelling so as to eventually contribute to the repertoire of Skagit mythology. To add to the reconstruction of myth-making processes, I might indicate that content analysis of Skagit mythology reveals that many of its actors function as humans or as anthropomorphizations on the one hand, and on the other as their own spirit-powers. Myths of the most archaic content in other respects present actors in this dual role of supernatural and human. An intermediate form of such fusing of *personae* is seen in tales as well. For example in two tales spirit-powers are personified as kinsmen or villagers to become, in the future, spirit-powers which do not reside among and marry with humans, but which must be sought out by them.

At the other extreme there are tales which lack myth elements and which tell solely of outlandish experiences, spirit-power acquisition, shamanism, or curiosities like humans who transform into animals without supernatural or naturalistic explanation. Yet these tales, which are probably grounded in recent fact, show signs of fictionalization. Two of them tell of occurrences that date two generations before that of their present narrators, and both stories are remarkable but not as remarkable as mythicized tales. One of these and a third came to me only second-hand, told to my raconteurs by individuals who were personally associated with the respective events. These stories, at the hands of two narrators and their audiences, already reveal a great deal of imaginative refashioning by the filling-in of dialogue and detail, and of stylization by the use of pattern number. Apparently the creation of story out of fact involved an initial expansion of

content so that intriguing details are present that never were necessarily part of the facts as they were originally understood. Stylistically "new" stories, then, are turgid and usually recounted in conversational style except for structuring here and there.

This process of "invention by inflation" may be experimental, a test of audience response to determine which portions of the embryonic tale should be dropped and which portions should be retained. After this comes reduction and further stylization of the tale material, along with what further distortion of fact that style creates for plot interest, content and the like. Then a good story is produced. As the story becomes mythicized by acquiring traditional symbols and stylistic features of myth, it will perhaps be eventually remodelled into a full-fledged myth according to the processes already outlined. I would infer that audience criticism was most influential on story-creation in regard to half-fictions, in other words, to "true stories." And perhaps it was with this particular art-form that Skagits' individual creativity was unclimaxed, for here, permissibility of imagination was unbound provided, of course, that it went in the right direction — toward myth. Real myths, on the other hand, at least those that had been part of the Skagit story repertoire for many generations, had already attained relative perfection and could only be discussed but not altered significantly unless their cultural context changed, too.

Skagit esthetics, verbal art style, artistic creativity, unconscious fabrications and symbolism were interwoven with their epistemology. Stylization in verbal communication of factual knowledge of the present world occurred through traditional symbols and led to the most paradoxical of communicative modes which is myth — paradoxical because it anneals the ultimate of truth with the ultimate of non-truth.

Processes of tale-creation and myth-making may be arranged along this continuum which ranges from experience or fact to myth, with examples given from the Skagit story collection. The four steps of Skagit literary growth, presented below, are only convenient abstractions to illustrate points along its evolutionary sequence, and they do not represent Skagits' classification of their oral literature.

Step 1: Yarn spinning

Experience, if second-hand or more remote, is particularly subject to "invention by inflation." It is human to highlight, by detail and exaggeration, what is interesting and to underplay what is trite. A yarn is spun by shaping experience into a plot and emphasizing situations that provide climax and closing. Good continuity may be subtly introduced by filling in with fictions such as dreams, which really consist of a flight of ideas and are often recalled by the dreamer as having logical sequence and sometimes plot. Skagit recounted fairly recent experience in this manner. Much ethnographic information, I suspect, was presented as semi-fiction, and in a style similar to the diffuse, blown-up, informally conversational tales of this first step. Through her dictation, the narrator of a story of this type invited listeners' comments for the opinions and interpretations about motive, and the responses she got may have well influenced her next recitation of the tale. This is why I speak of "test of audience response." The auditors' reinterpretations and displays of approval and disapproval are vital to the fate of the story — if the raconteur is alert to the audience. New stories which survived to become retold probably were of rich content in terms of values. That is, they were moralistic or potentially so, or presented problem material as several of these do which point to new social stresses set up by contact conditions.

Step 2: Tale-creation

Stories of Step 2 have survived the prolix yarn-spinning of Step 1. They have been reduced and simplified by narrators, auditors, and community discussions. Elements which remain are essential to plot and exhibit good Skagit verbal art style. Nevertheless, some of them approach zero content. Of these, one might anticipate eventual loss or absorption into more meaningful tales or into myths. As succinctness in presentation develops, a story sharpens in focus. Only then can the worth of the story be evaluated. For example, one of the tales which is not yet reduced from Step 1 could evolve in one or several directions in thematic stress. It could come to center upon oedipal feelings,

status of women, or on upper-ranking men who behave scur-
rilously; these are some dominant stresses of Skagit society. But
as the tale was recounted it was inchoate and stylistically un-
developed. The stories of Step 2 contrast with those of Step 1
because they are true tales in terms of style: pithy reductions
to one or two points. For example, a tale which tells of the
transformation of a woman into a horse expresses only the feeling
that women become like the men who want and love them. An-
other very new tale still shows here and there signs of expansion
in its retention of some incidental detail and dialogue, but in
most parts it has the succinctness of good verbal art. And by
slight mythicization, through animal-human metamorphosis, it
expresses neatly a significant attitude which Skagit had toward
older women.

Others of this second group of tales show early signs of
mythicizing by their association of story data with traditional
myth symbols. For example, as in Skagit myths, good women are
identified with bears; a modicum of personification of spirit-
powers is another kind of identification found in three of the
stories, and the gifts bestowed by spirit-powers are personified
in two tales. Four other tales have elements of the miraculous
but are primarily explanatory. There are no true animal anthro-
pomorphizations in tales of Step 2, nor are there close and
frequent associations with myth symbols. The *double-entendre*
of laconic myth dialogue and the multiple connotations of myth
symbolism are lacking. These tales therefore convey far less
than myths.

Step 3: Mythicizing of Tales

The study of Skagit mythicized tales of Step 3 reveals as
much if not more about the nature of myth than the study of
true myths. It discloses what there is about a story that puts it
into the category of tales (Steps 1, 2 and 3). By elimination we
can then discern why all remaining stories are called "myths."
Even given a formula for separating tales from myths, the non-
native must examine closely the mythicized tales and myths to
understand how they differ. For that reason myths will also be
discussed in this section.

Rudimentary mythicizing, exemplified in some tales of Step 2, gives the impression of tentative and uncertain identification of actor with symbol, and contrasts with tales of Step 3 in which personifications are definite, and other symbolic associations, too, are made. Several of these stories are chronicles of spirit-powers, from their Myth Age modes of existence to their spectral forms in the historical era.

In one of these, an anthropomorphized spirit-power marries a human female. Myth-like, the in-law families have magical powers of transformation to become like one another; that is, they become land-dwellers or water-dwellers. But the offspring of the alliance of human with spirit, although sired by a spirit, is like any modern mortal who must seek supernatural assistance.

In another tale, spirit-powers are personified as brothers who function as culture-heroes. As in myths, the brothers are named after their attributes — Fire, Knife and *Skʷdi'lič* (a spirit-power). They create two human beings, a male and a female, and give them fire and show them their foods and how to prepare them. Then they announce that, in the future, people must earn their foods through spirit-power relationships. They will never again be given something for nothing, as in this tale. And the brothers metamorphose into features of the countryside, recognizable today.

The mythicized elements of the dog-husband tale consist of a symbolic association of class-status with the concept "dog." But the tale lacks real anthropomorphization of any of its actors. The father is a mere dog. His litter of twelve human-dog offspring have removable dog-skin coverings which, when worn, conceal their essentially human forms. But one of the children, a girl, cannot completely shed her canine covering, so that the stigma of the paternal ancestry is ever-present, represented by her half-dog, half-human face.

Most stories grouped under Step 3 carry into the modern world, bridging the Myth Age and the historical era. The latter begins when a mere human is born of a union of human and spirit, when the brothers Fire, Knife and *Skʷdi'lič* retire from human society, and when the dog children found a Lower Skagit

village. The fact that the later scenes of these stories are in the historical present may warrant their classification as tales, but chronology is secondary to Skagits' categorization of stories. Other traits of Skagit myths must be examined to show why mythicized tales are not myths.

I have discussed in broad terms the stylistic features of myths and how they set a standard for good verbal art form. And I presented stylistic features of tales to show that they are unpolished products of Skagit literary art. In addition, myth style differs from that of tales, even those which are most mythicized, in its use of real symbols which intensify the laconicism of style. Selective reduction produces some laconicism; but real myth symbols increase it greatly.

The myth symbol is loaded so as to convey incisively ideas that otherwise would have to be represented by lengthy circumlocution. For example, the stereotype of a myth actor (which is a stereotype expressing values about character) itself expresses in a single word everything that there is known about that type of story performer. We may therefore say that the language of myth tends to be connotative; that of tales, denotative. Thus, the identification of a story actor as a man tells no more than that he is a man. But the identification of a myth actor as a man named Coyote summons the image of a colourful, many-faceted personality. This mechanism applies not only to personality stereotypes but to other symbolic representations, too. In one of the most archaic myths of Skagit the psychotic Grizzly Woman serves her family feces, calling them "good berries." The story could merely have said that she serves spoiled berries, a phrase which would yet function excellently to provide a contrast to her co-wife, Bear, a good wife and housekeeper who serves good food. This would be fine style for any tale and many a myth since it selects a single act to set forth succinctly two feminine character types and a value about women. But the substitution of feces for berries is symbolic of much more than housewifely inefficiency. It also refers to regressive anal sadism, a psychotic fantasy that feces are berries, and the hostility of the insane which is directed toward anyone and everyone. The selection of feces shows crazed hostility, which spoiled berries could never do.

Another type of story symbol which is common to myth and also appears in some tales of Step 3 expresses ideas that seem illogical but are nevertheless true. Such ideas are presented as situations or acts which are contrary to modern custom. For example, two myths are about oldsters who live alone without kin, despite the fact that elderly persons had secure positions in Skagit households. These myths really express inner loneliness, the feeling of no longer being useful, which is difficult to express in a more direct fashion because it hardly makes sense in terms of the externalities of social life. Another myth tells of young women who seek out husbands and take the initiative in marriage without family intervention. Their action is opposite to normal conduct, but it reveals feelings that Skagit had about women as being their society's real aggressors. Again, the familiar theme, in a number of myths and some tales, in which a recreant son or daughter is abandoned, does not mean that such children were physically deserted. The theme simply expresses emotional desertion, disapproval and rejection.

A major feature in which myths differ from all tales is that of expressive content. Tales project principally feelings which are admissable to consciousness. But myths often communicate unverbalized attitudes with many of which any Skagit in his right mind would never have openly sympathized. For example, in two of the myths, a woman, Crow, is abused by her vicious brother, Raven, because she is too competent and skilful. She constitutes a threat to his masculinity. These myths conclude with the sadistic man escaping punishment, not in accordance with cultural expectations. Appropriate justice meted to Raven would devalue Skagits' real but inadmissable feelings about such women and thereby negate the cathartic function of this myth projection. In tales, on the other hand, women who are maligned are creatures who deserve to be despised. But myths allow hostility to be shown toward women just because they are women. In real life, like their expression in tales, social controls did not permit mistreatment of females unless there were provocations in terms of other controls.

Humour has been mentioned as a feature peculiar to Skagit myths and not to tales. Humour ties in with the function of myth;

that is, myth is a screen upon which feelings and ideas are projected that cannot be given expression in real life. Humour is one of the most effective theatrical devices of Skagit mythology because it so disguises inadmissable feelings that they may be projected without arousing anxiety. The brutal Raven is a myth-actor whose manoeuvers, whether harmless, silly, or horribly sadistic, are nevertheless comical. It is not that murderous hostility *per se* was funny to Skagits; it is how murder is accomplished that can be funny. Raven's murderous character is amusing because it is his great voraciousness that compels him to kill; and the slaughter is funny because he kills in such a manner that he defiles himself. Plot interest centers on Raven, whose character is well-delineated, not on his victims who receive less depiction. So, the audience is more interested in how Raven's treachery may backfire than in the feelings of the comparatively anonymous supporting actors. Nevertheless, these actors are stereotyped as exuberantly competent women, and so they arouse positive feelings, whether these be empathic, as in some female auditors, or hostile, and therefore in accordance with most myth projections of such women and with Skagit feminine status.

Since all tales which I collected lack humour, I suggest that burlesquing of the tragic or disapproved is a final step in myth-making. Perhaps community discussions on story material which was uncomfortably listened to, which precipitated guilty hostility, were responsible for myth comedy. We are aware of the nervous giggle or have felt embarrassment over jokes which are in poor taste because they are at the expense of some unfortunate. Humour is a means of denying identification with the scapegoat; it objectifies the situation so that we are involved by neither guilt nor identification. Once victim and situations are patently fictitious, the giggle is not so very nervous, and it may be a hearty if not hostile guffaw at what is now a good joke. Skagit can therefore laugh at matricide, incest and adultery committed by myth actors. Although I did not observe any mythicizing in process by means of joking, travesties in Skagit myth are so dexterously integrated with other features of style, such as laconicism and indirection, that they must have already received many years of literary handling.

An outstanding trait of regional oral art style is saturation. It often is effected by one humourous episode after another, so that a slapstick is produced. Saturation is also a device for creating suspense, which is most effective through a concatenation of horror scenes, as in the Grizzly Woman stories. Grizzly is understandably disadvantaged because she has an attractive, competent and younger co-wife in her polygynous marriage. But her character develops as a literary hyperbole, a stereotype in the guise of a ferocious beast. And saturation with horror carries Grizzly Woman's relentless pursuit of her kin so such extremes that, when she is finally murdered by her own daughter, no member of the audience can sympathize with Grizzly, only with the daughter and the necessity for matricide. Saturation is a device discernible in tales of Step 3, but frequent in myths.

Step 4: Myth-making

Prominent features of Skagit myths have been discussed under Step 3. Accordingly, it is clear that there is no hard and fast line stylistically between mythicized tales and myths. Skagits distinguished a myth from a tale not by one but by several diagnostic traits. Furthermore, there was not always agreement among narrators as to how certain stories were to be classified. Certainly, the animal actors are a central feature of Skagit myth, a point raised by every recitalist. And I have indicated that there are a number of traits of style and expressive content by which myths typically contrast with tales. Two questions, then, arise in reference to certain borderline cases of myths which seem more like tales and tales which seem more like myths: (1) Why do not spirit-power personifications, which are the most mythicized elements that appear in tales, justify the classification of such tales as myths? (2) What are the characteristics of some myths that render dubious their status as myths?

In answer to the first question, even the most indisputable personifications of spirits in tales do not represent true stereotypes; they are delineated no further than by the attributes they bequeath. Such personification is close to facts of the historical present, for visionary manifestations of spirit-powers were often in human forms. Personification of supernaturals does not mask any perva-

sive truth of any and all existences as a true symbol does; instead, it amounts to an imaginative and stylized representation of reality. Other animistic aspects of Skagit religion project human will and emotion into food animals. Therefore, anthropomorphization of guardian-spirits and their food-gifts barely mythicize a story, compared to myth representations of supernaturals.

The compacting of spirit-power and recipient-owner into a single actor in a myth is a far more complex literary manipulation than mere personification of the supernatural. To consolidate spirit and human partner into one representation is to express in a single stroke a relationship which personification alone cannot convey. Thus, the stereotyped myth actor is a true symbol for a relationship that is expressed in tales in a protracted way, as, for example, by a human and spirit-power marital alliance.

To answer the second question, I offer first an example in a myth which, although classed as a myth, has the characteristics of a highly stylized tale of Step 3. Except for its explanatory ending, which is definitely myth material, this story lacks much mythicizing, even personification of any kind. Its epilogue appears to be an afterthought tacked on, but it alone justifies the telling of the story as a myth. Its scenes, such as the manner of killing a faithless wife, are well-stylized. But a fully-developed version of the story might, to give a hypothetical example, allow the avenging brother of the woman to transform himself to a female rather than to disguise himself as one in order to kill his brother-in-law.

In the case of another story, because of its protagonists' human and animal transformations, the raconteur wished to call it a "myth" instead of a "true story," although he had been told that it is a tale. It was because the story lacked a stylized prologue that he could not accept it as a myth. It appears from this that there was a lag in Skagits' classification of story content: until there was general agreement that a story is indeed a myth, it would not be given a myth preface, and such a preface meant position in the myth inventory. The most remarkable instance of lag, if that is what this amounts to, concerns a story which was told to the narrator as a "true story." He insisted that it must be a myth, although neither he nor his source chose to elevate it

formally to that stature by providing it with a ceremonial in-
troduction. The raconteur recognized it as a myth because its
actors are Coyote's son and Salmon People, and it includes other
myth motifs such as magical rejuvenation and inexhaustible food
production from a miniscule dish. It is an exceptionally advanced
mythicization of a tale about spirit-power acquisition by a man
who once lived and whose name is still remembered. But because
this name is not represented in the genealogies of the living,
classification of the story is difficult for Skagit to make.

Skagit myths themselves display degrees of mythicization,
according to this reconstruction of mythicizing and story evolution.
But any evolutionary arrangement is perforce hypothetical, as is
the scheme of four steps of literary processes for stories. Such
deductions must be made from internal evidences and informants'
opinions. It is obvious that sheer quantity of mythical elements
are principal determinants that establish the relative antiquity of
a story. And the quality or characteristics of the individual symbol
or mythicized item aids in this relative dating.

Society acts out many complex values by simple gestures
which stand as terse statements of those values. But when such
action is expressed in tale-form, despite certain symbolisms, it
cannot be credited with having received much literary treatment.
For example, Skagit exposed adulterous wives to public humiliation
and then usually killed them, or, more rarely, sent them back to
their natal villages. It would be impossible to accomplish the
alternatives except in fantasy as in a myth where the delinquent
wife is murdered by piercing atop a tree; that is, she is in public
view and in sight not only of her husband's village but of her
own. Dying and humiliated she is, in effect, returned to her own
family. Although there is no equivalent expression of the handling
of adultery elsewhere in the collection, its representation in the
story is not really a symbolized statement, for it carries several
activities through two scenes, and is merely an extravaganza and
compacting of real-life drama.

A well-developed symbolic presentation of the same expression
toward unfaithful wives would incorporate within a single act all
alternatives of dealing with them. It could, for example, send

(magically) the genitalia of the offending woman to her parental community. Although such a motif does not appear in the Skagit collection, it would be consonant with Skagit stylization and symbolic representation. I suggest that the relative age of myth motifs may be estimated by inventorying the number of meanings in terms of attitudes and actions that each represents. And the more fantistic the representation (such as the synecdoche of genitalia), the more it can include. I mentioned this earlier as being accomplished by compacting of *personae*, and it applies as well to almost any object or situation. One of the most highly symbolized representations of Skagit literature is Coyote's "excrement advisors." This motif comprises, all in one, notions of class-status, spirit-power acquisition, and negative attitudes toward a certain personality type. These items amount to a summary of values which are central in Skagit culture.

Some loaded representations which are not bound to particular actors, as excrement advisors are to Coyote, attach freely to actors in stories that are otherwise less developed. So in order to estimate the relative age of a full story it is necessary to examine it as a totality. From this point of view the Grizzly Woman myths seem to be the most archaic of Skagit stories, the least in touch with exoteric circumstances of reality because of their wealth of symbols. Content analysis reveals, not unexpectedly, that they are the richest for stories of their length. Nearly every character is a stereotype, and there is hardly any significant action which is not represented symbolically. Many of the elements are among the most compact of the literature.

The stylistic finesse of myths like those about Grizzly Woman raises a question as to whether Skagit set limits to obliquity, terseness, stereotypy and other features of good verbal art style. May all tenets of style be carried to their conceivable ultimate and remain good? The answer is No, although Skagit literary manipulation of these features is always in the direction of symbolization. Good style demands that narration be terse: too many symbolic representations could clutter plot with irrelevancies, which would be tantamount to prolixity. Plot requirement demands that there be continuity: and transitions which connect scenes are necessarily contentless. That which lacks meaning over and above

what it denotes, such as the journey which carries an actor from scene to scene, cannot be represented symbolically; it is merely stylized. Thus plot requirement, along with other features of style, exclude total symbolization lest the effect become surrealistic: pure symbols cannot be given continuity, and continuity cannot be provided through symbols. Nor, for that matter, are there a large number of Skagit literary symbols which are far removed from social reality. Excrement advisors is one of the few extremes. And even such highly esoteric figures are always presented in a context which has social reference. If such a frame were not provided for these most oblique and esoteric motifs, it would be impossible for the folklorist ever to fathom their intent so as to analyse for expressive content. Thus, there must a hypothetical point of development at which myth achieves saturation, and is perfect; and beyond which, it would no longer properly convey its intent or conform to story pattern. Like a flight of ideas it could be interpreted too variously to fulfill its normalizing function.

Regional comparative folklore discloses that no plot types, actors and very few motifs and themes are uniquely or typically Skagit. For example, the distribution of Coyote actors extends far to the east and south of the Northwest Coast culture-area; and on the Northwest Coast, Mink to the south and Raven to the north and east of Skagit tribes. It is possible that none of the myths in the Skagit collection and few myth components originated with Skagit in spite of the fact that informants identified most stories as "belonging to" one or another Skagit bands. Consequently, the processes of tale-creation, mythicizing and myth-making which I have given must be accepted as applicable to an area far wider than Skagit. The processes of literary manipulation deduced from Skagit folklore must have occurred beyond the Skagit area as well as within it, for most myths probably came to Skagit in well-developed forms which Skagit then subjected to alterations to conform to their own values of style and world-view. Except for a few non-Skagit myths and tales which have specific loci it is impossible to estimate the time during which a story has been Skagit property. It is possible only to assign relative dates to stories in terms of the contiguous area which shows in its oral literature basic features of style and symbolization exemplified by Skagit.

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