THE ORIGIN OF HERRING:
RE-EXAMINATION OF AN 1894 KWAK'WALA TEXT

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[The mythical value of the myth is preserved through the worst translation. Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world (Levi-Strauss 1963:210).]

On October 4, 1894, Franz Boes was told a dirty story and didn't know it.1

The story was a "myth"2 which describes the origin, or at least a magical local manifestation, of herring. Boes dutifully transcribed and translated the text, but he didn't understand it. Boes' mistakes and misinterpretations are so numerous that, in the English version, the story seems incoherent.

The story is in fact perfectly coherent, if somewhat ribald. His translation, if not the worst conceivable, is at least a very bad one, and we are left wondering how much of the "mythical value" of a myth really does emerge in a bad translation. The truth about the origin of herring is bound up in word play and metaphor, and hidden in a word or two which Boes simply didn't understand.

Once its true content is revealed, this text points to some extremely interesting lines of inquiry for further research. The disingenuous sexual humor in the text coexists with -- and indeed is a commentary on -- more serious topics, such as the nature of transformation, and the relationship between the animal-people who are story characters and their everyday counterparts in forest and sea.

1. Provenance of the Text.

On that day in October, 1894, Boes was confined in bad weather on a steamship bound for Kincolith, British Columbia, to continue his survey of British Columbian Indians for the British Association for the Advancement of Science (Boes Letters; Rohner 1969:81-83). Boes was suffering badly from boredom, inactivity, and the expectation of seasickness. He was a workaholic deprived of his work, and the Barbara Boskowitz was so crowded with stacks of wood and oil barrels that he couldn't even pace the deck.

His only solace was an Indian hand on the boat who had promised to tell him some "folktales." Boes quickly pressed this Indian, a Kwak'wala-speaking Adxemlitsel's village named Qumgiles, into the service of Science (Boes 1910: 165-7). He pumped Qumgiles for three days, rain or shine, ceasing only when the Indian left the boat at Alert Bay, with, we can imagine, some relief.1

In those three days of miserable autumn weather, Boes had obtained, among other things, a series of traditional stories in Kwak'wala, most of which were eventually published some fifteen years later in a volume called Kwak'iul't tales (1910:187-244). These stories recount certain of the cosmogonical efforts of A̓n̓a̓g̓íl̓x̱ (Anangilex), the Kwagul Transformer. They are rare in the voluminous Kwak'wala material published by Boes in that they were collected in the field by Boes himself, rather than written down by George Hunt.

Boes' surviving field notes from 1894 show that his acquaintance with Kwak'wala was as yet brief and superficial, and his transcription skills undeveloped. The fact that he did not transmit these texts for publication in 1900 with the others obtained by George Hunt (1905, 1906) seems to indicate that he was waiting for the opportunity to revise his

1 The date could be October 5th; dated through Boes' Field Notes and Letters of Franz Boes to Marie Boes, October 3, 1894 (1 and 2); Letters of Franz Boes to his parents, October 3, 1894 (1 and 2; see also Rohner 1969). My attention was first called to this text, and to the existence of field notes and correspondence from the time of the collection of the text, by Ralph Mead.

2 Nuxam "myth, tradition" in Kwak'wala.

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1 Letter to parents, ibid. The port of departure may have been Fort Rupert.
transcription. He subsequently undertook such revisions, perhaps with the assistance of George Hunt, or perhaps with William Brothwell, a half-Aboriginal resident of Alert Bay whom he had consulted extensively for the 1905 volume of texts (1905:3).

In these consultations Boas seems to have neglected translation to focus on transcription. He apparently felt confident enough to leave the glosses from his original field notes in place, and the eventual 1910 publication preserves a number of mistakes and misinterpretations. One error persisted in glossary and dictionary throughout his whole life (Boas 1921:1436–7; Boas n.d.: 441).

Figure 1 shows the text of one of these Qa'niglax stories, “Qa'niglax and Cału,” as it originally appeared in the 1910 volume (1910:190–1). I have altered it only to the extent of placing the Kwak'wala above the English; the two were situated on facing pages in the original.

A casual glance leaves the reader with many questions. Why does Qa'niglax command Oolchen-Woman to stay off the beach? What is their relationship that Qa'niglax cares one way or another about her actions? What’s the significance, whether in ordinary narrative logic or in non-logical mythological symbolism, of the dried herring? What do the herring have to do with gambling?

There are two methods for getting at the truth about the herring, either of which is sufficient by itself. One is retranslation, the other is “rhetorical” analysis (cf. Hymes 1981). Translation in the strictest sense looks at word meanings and sentences mean. Rhetorical analysis looks at the way the narrator uses words and sentences to tell a story, the way in which topic and setting are established and then change, the way in which imagery and the actions and responses of story actors are patterned. Though rhetorical analysis deals with a “higher” level of linguistic organization than translation, let us begin first with it.

3. “Qa'niglax and Cału.” Rhetorical structure.

The body of Boas’ text is printed as a prose paragraph. As the first step in rhetorical analysis, let us rewrite text and translation (using

Figure 1. “Qa'niglax and Cału,” from Boas 1910:190–1.
Orthography somewhat different than Dean's, so that each numbered English line corresponds with a single, numbered Kwak'ala clause.

"Come," said Chilkat, "that we may play to table and card in each the game?

Then the woman of Utinit, ?elso'uyufa, found it difficult to scoop up the herrings. Then she took her public hair net and fished out the herrings.
Let us begin by looking at changes in topic, setting and character.

The first few clauses of the text (clauses 1-6) appear to describe a scene in which two actors, Ṭə'luq and Oolochen-Woman, are gambling. We are not told where this gambling game takes place.

Then a new character is introduced — Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax (clause 7). Seemingly out of the blue, he commands "Don't go on the beach!" We guess that he is addressing Oolochen-Woman, because she responds "Don't say that to me, lord!" The next few clauses (7-17) are taken up with the interaction of Oolochen-Woman and Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax; Čăču is no longer on stage.

In the first part of the text, the narrator is not explicit about setting, but on the basis of changes in topic, and in the characters who appear onstage, we can divide the first part of the text into "scene A" and "scene B":

A. Čăču and Oolechen-Woman are gambling
B. Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax and Oolechen-Woman are discussing something

The topic of scene B is obscure. Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax and Oolechen-Woman are discussing something, but we can't tell exactly what it is or why they are discussing it. Yet there are several hints. Given the overall circumstances of the story, and knowledge of Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax's nature from other stories (e.g. 1906:192-5, 225-7), we suspect that Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax's speech has magical power. If he forbids Oolechen-Woman from going onto the beach, she will not be able to do it. But when Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax says the magic words, as it were, she is able to go down to the water's edge.

Their argument and the events which follow it only make sense if we posit a metaphorical/magical identity between herring and oolechen. This is not a bizarre connection. Both herring and oolechen are small, silvery, oily ocean fish with forked tails (see Figure 2). Oolechen are more slender and somewhat smaller than herring, commonly measuring about 6 or 7 inches, while herring usually reach about 10 inches when mature. Both come inshore in vast numbers to spawn, the oolechen to fresh-water rivers in early spring, the herring to shallow salt water in spring or summer (Encyclopedia Americana 1986).

However, Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax is apparently ignorant of this magical relationship. This is how Oolechen-Woman is able to trick him, how she is able to go on the beach after he has sung his song, and how she is able to create herring once she is on the beach.

Scene A could be understood as a Speech-Response pair, an Invitation (clauses 1-4) plus a Consequence (clauses 5-6). At first glance, scene B appears to have two Speech-Response pairs, an Prohibition and a Protest, a Permission and a Consequence.

1. Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax forbids Oolechen-Woman to go on the beach; Oolechen-Woman protests.
2. Ḍá̱n̻iʔl̻ax inadvertently permits Oolechen-Woman to go on the beach; Oolechen-Woman does it.

Dell Hymes has used words like line, verse and stanza to label various units of rhetorical structure. Here, let us refer to each numbered unit as a verse. The relationships could be represented in the following way (for brevity's sake the Kwak'wala is omitted here):
A. 1. "Come," said Čăçu, 

"that we may play," thus said Čăçu to Oolachen-Woman. 1

2. Then Čăçu gave his blanket to Oolachen-Woman. 2 Then she put on the blanket she had gained in gambling. 3

B. 1. Ōqiniqilax said, 4

"Don't go on the beach," thus said Ōqiniqilax. 5

Then Oolachen-Women spoke: 6

"Don't say that to me, lord," thus said Oolachen-Women; 7

"Say to me 'Dried herrings are jumping on the beach;' lord." 8

2. Then he said,) 9

"Jump on the beach, jump on the beach, dried herring, dried herring,' say to me, lord." 10

Then she put corner of her blanket into sea. 11

In many oral narrative traditions, such rhetorical structures are linguistically marked. It will be noted that up to this point in "Ōqiniqilax and Čăçu," each main clause except the very first has begun with the auxiliary form iłalı. Boas translates iłalı consistently as "then" (except for clause 7, where Boas omits translating it). "Then" is as good a gloss as any; iłalı has no concrete meaning. The main function in narrative of iłalı and other auxiliary forms is to mark the movement of the narrator's focus from one character, locale, or activity to another, and to relate them causally and temporally (Berman 1982). However, such auxiliaries do also function, in a limited way, as a marker of rhetorical units (Berman 1983). Explication of these points need not concern us here; let it suffice to say that auxiliaries usually mark what could be called lines — the most basic rhetorical element which forms verses and stanzas of what are often intricate patterns of four-fold and four-stage action (Berman n.d.). As a rule, auxiliaries are present in every main clause of a narrative. They are only absent from the very first line of a narrative and from the quoted speech of story actors, and, sometimes, during the climactic action of a story.

The next few clauses of the text, 1-19, lack auxiliaries. This is because they describe the climactic moments of the story — the moments in which Oolachen-Women is creating herring for her tribe. What is the place of these clauses in the story's overall rhetorical structure? Do they form a separate scene C or do they topically and organizationally belong to scene B?

Certainly clause 22 is the end of a scene, whether this scene is a scene B or a C. The following clause 23 introduces a new actor, Fog-Women, and a new topic, Fog-Women's inability to catch herring.

But there seems to be more than one possible analysis of the clauses describing the appearance and resuscitation of the dried herring. Consider a scene C which includes these clauses:

B. 1. Ōqiniqilax said, 7

"Don't go on the beach," 8

thus said Ōqiniqilax. 9

2. Then Oolachen-Women spoke: 10

"Don't say that to me, lord," 11

thus said Oolachen-Women; 12

"Say to me 'Dried herrings are jumping on the beach;' lord." 13

3. (Then he said,) 14

"Jump on the beach, jump on the beach, dried herring, dried herring,' say to me, lord." 15

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4. Then she put the corner of her blanket into the sea.

5. Behold dried herrings;
   Herrings made a noise, "Ssssl"
   Shoels of herring were jumping ashore on the land.
   They were taken by the tribe.

The foregoing analysis is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, the preference of Kwagul narrators for the number four in all levels of narrative organization is quite striking. This is not to say that four-fold patterning is rigidly adhered to in absolutely every instance, and that no narrator would ever add a fifth verse. But clauses 19-22 do not seem to belong with the rest of scene B for other reasons. They have a different topic and different actors. In the rest of scene B, Önegoqinaak and Oolachen-Woman are arguing about whether she should go on the beach or not; in these clauses Önegoqinaak is absent and irrelevant and the main action is with the herring.

However, there are arguments against these clauses standing by themselves as a verse C. First, it would be unusual, I believe, for a Kwagul narrator to begin a major rhetorical unit, to make a scene shift, without some rhetorical marker. There is no such marker whatsoever in clause 19. Second, all other scenes in this text share an action-response pattern. In scene A it is Invitation-Consequence. In scene B, it is Prohibition-Response. In the final scene, clauses 23-27, it is Problem-Solution. Here, the action which provoked the magical manifestation of herring occurs in clause 18, which the previous analysis has put with scene B. An analysis which would seem to better reflect the organizational realities of the text is:

C. 1. Then she put the corner of her blanket into the sea.

2. Behold dried herrings;
   Herrings made a noise, "Ssssl"
   Shoels of herring were jumping ashore on the land.
   They were taken by the tribe.

In this scheme, scene C begins when Oolachen-Woman leaves Önegoqinaak and goes down to the waterside to dip her blanket in the ocean; a change of setting, character, and topic. Such an analysis, however, destroys the (previously argued) four-part action-response symmetry of scene B.

I believe the solution to these difficulties lies in reconsidering Oolachen-Woman's role in the story.

Though the title of the text leaves her out, Oolachen-Woman is surely the main character, the main mover of the action in this story. If we look at the action from her point of view, the story becomes a series of her victories and accomplishments. First, she wins ÇÇSU's blanket. Second, she tricks Önegoqinaak so that it becomes possible for her to go on the beach.

Third, she manifests herring for her tribe. In the final sentences of the text, another woman, Fog-Woman, achieves a minor victory of her own. From this point of view, the action is clearly and unambiguously organized into four scenes, and each scene has a two-part structure of problem-problem solved. In the first verse of each scene (labeled 1 below), a problem or difficult task is presented, and in the second verse (labeled 2), the problem is solved or the task accomplished:

A. 1. "Come,"
   said ÇÇSU,
   "that we may play,"
   thus said ÇÇSU to Oolachen-Woman.

B. 1. "{H}ere,"
   said the woman's blanket,
   "please be herring,"
   thus said the blanket to Önegoqinaak.

C. 1. Then she put the corner of her blanket into the sea.

1 The title does not occur in Boas' field notes. It is probably a later addition by Boas, or, perhaps Hunt or Brethcke, with whom Boas would seem to have consulted in the revisions he made of this text before publication.
2. Then Çāçu gave his blanket to Oolachen-Woman. Then she put on the blanket she had gained in gambling.

B. 1. Řë́niq̓íłəx̣ said,  

"Don't go on the beach;" thus said Řë́niq̓íłəx̣.

2. Then Oolachen-Woman spoke:  

"Don't say that to me, lord;" thus said Oolachen-Woman. 

"Say to me 'Dried herrings are jumping on the beach; lord.'" (Then he said,)  

"Jump on the beach, jump on the beach, 
dried herring, dried herring;  
say to me, lord;"  

C. 1. Then she put the corner of the blanket into the sea.

2. Behold dried herrings;  

Herrings made a noise, "Ssss!"  

Shoals of herring were jumping ashore on the land.  

They were taken by the tribe.

D. 1. Then the wife of W̱áx., ʔ̱ṣ̓iíṣ̓x̣suw̓suw̓x̣,  

found it difficult to scoop up the herrings.  

2. Then she took her pubic hair and netted a net to take the herrings.

In scene A, the task at hand is to win in the game with Çāçu. In scene B, the problem is how to get round Řë́niq̓íłəx̣'s prohibition. In scene C, the task is to bring the herring into being. And in scene D, the problem is how to catch the herring.

4. "Řë́niq̓íłəx̣ and Çāçu": Retranslation.

Close attention to organizational logic -- to rhetorical structure -- has brought the apparent incoherencies of the text into focus but has not converted them into sensible narrative. We still do not understand the significance of the first gambling scene. Does this supply the reason why Řë́niq̓íłəx̣ orders Oolachen-Woman to stay off the beach? Logically, it must. Oolachen-Woman's trick with the herring must also be related to her gambling, but how? What is the real substance of the conflict between Řë́niq̓íłəx̣ and Oolachen-Woman?

Boas went astray in his translation of this text because his narrator was playing with words, deliberately punning with sound and image. Each word-play has at least two interpretations. Boas consistently picked the superficial, playful meaning while consistently missing the underlying, substantive meaning. As a result, the individual sentences of his translation make sense but most of the overall logic and substance is missing.

The interpretive key to "Řë́niq̓íłəx̣ and Çāçu" is to be found in clauses 3 and 10.

In clause 3, Boas has Çāçu say, "Come that we may play!" From subsequent lines it is clear that Boas understood this as an invitation to gamble; however, the narrator surely intended it as a pun, with gambling as the playful but not the substantive meaning.

In Kwak'wala Çāçu's speech consists of three words: Gílə géen̓é č̣əmt. The critical word is č̣əmt, which derives from the stem č̣əmṭ. Boas glosses this stem as simply "to play." Now, in English, "to play" has multiple connotations, as is evidenced by such words and phrases as "children playing," "to play cards," and "to play." Though Boas does not acknowledge this in his glossary or dictionary (1921, n.d.), a comparable or even wider semantic range exists in Kwak'wala. In fact, there appear to be four main uses of č̣əmṭ: "to play" in the textual corpus:
1. Child's play 1 *P'ma'tla b'lt wc'gennamess nu:zhinistel* "All the children of the myth people were playing" (Boas 1906:81).

2. Gambling play 2 *lc'ga gi:ga'mewa: a:la: I:txa gu:kalutti* "Wixexonens *P'ma'tla:b'lt wc'gennamess nux Q'lnxistel: wesen Wixgexameminaqista k'nnwla: The chief... said to his tribe, "Let us play with the tribe of Half-Circle Beach, with my rainbow gambling-stone" (Boas 1905:295).

3. Sexual play *W'es. 1:txa Belamgamaqdl:ga tc'db:n x:wa la to inunemi Q'nxqunxqunqun: h:x?Q'xamglawisi P'ma'tla:b'lt pqida. "Well, they lay down together, the woman and Q'nxqunxqunqun, who was now her husband... at once they began to play with each other" (Boas 1905:65).


By far the most common use of *P'amet* "to play" in Boas' texts is in its sense of sexual intercourse. Used in this sense, it often but not always takes the form *P'ametla: to play with each other.*

The second clue to the real meaning of this text, in clause 16, is not even a pun. Boas' translation of this clause, "Then she put the corner of her blanket into the sea," is simply wrong. The line consists of four words, an auxiliary *talal*, a verb *Amet*, and an indirect object phrase, *tsix damax* "into the saltwater." The critical word here is *Amet*. It can be analyzed as a root *Am* - and a suffix *-tsix* "into the water." Boas glosses *Amet* in his 1921 Kwak'wala-English glossary, and again in his unpublished dictionary (Boas n.d.: 441) as "to dip into water"; but the only reference he gives in each case, C190.24, is this very page and line.

Boas probably arrived at his gloss via a related story told by another *Qaqemglisla* man, in which Oolachen-Woman is *Q'lnxistel:*'s mother. She keeps all the fish in her blanket, and *Q'lnxistel:* concerned that there should be abundance in the world, borrows it and dips it into the water. The fish are thus released into the ocean (Boas 1995). This version of the story was evidently collected in English. At any rate, Boas seems to have assumed that he already knew *Qunxilas* story well enough to guess how Oolachen-Woman would create hurling. The mention of a blanket at the beginning of the story probably reinforced his assumption.

A glance at other occurrences of *Amet* in Kwak'wala and its closest relatives, shows that the meaning of the root *Am* - has nothing to do with blankets, or dipping, or water (Lincoln and Rath 1980:192; root = 1043). It means "to pull limbs close to the body." Boas does give examples with a correct gloss, "to climb a smooth pole, tree, or steep bank," in his glossary and unpublished dictionary, but with the stem spelled *Am* - (Boas 1921:1437, n.d.: 456). With his original misunderstanding in place, he never connected this *Amet* with Oolachen-Women's *Amet*.

Another meaning of *Amet* in Kwak'wala is "to clutch something to one's body." A Hellsak word derived from the same root is *Amet*: "to squat on the ground outside." To repeat, *Amet* has nothing to do with blanket corners, or dipping. The most literal translation of clause 18 would be "she pulled her limbs close to her body in the saltwater." The most probable interpretation of this is that Oolachen-Woman is squatting down. The next line makes the matter completely clear: "She... said the herrings." The dried herring are Oolachen-Woman's genitalia, and she is urinating into the water.

The gambling game has an underlying sexual meaning, and the dried herring has an underlying sexual meaning. In fact, the whole story is full of sexual humor. But it is so disingenuously phrased that, unlike many similar
In 11 tlRRIN6, person nallze uses the stones for melling ·blenket; lind a so-called ·'ncholltlv,· IIIspect mllrker ;: lilk:: hilS several meanIngs.

Instead IndulgIng In sexuel plly.

This word lldIIe!lelCpnssIng lin IncIpIent chllnge In stille

Boas translates bllnkell chllnged pessIng ·the sense,

combined t. be good/nlc./.atl.fylng

However, IdDIm has other possible Interpretations. 2Iko means "to be victorious," but the root 2Iko- can also mean "good, nice, causing satisfaction, capable, etc." In the most literal sense, 2Ig6un could be translated as "the thing obtained through isomething| good/nice/satisfying..." In otherwords, Čedu gives Dolachen-Women a blanket as a gift after intercourse.3

There are other minor problems with Boas’ translation of these two lines. It is difficult to render Kwak’wala phrases which are quite incompatible with English sentence structure. A technically correct translation would be:1

A. 2. Lelal 6ū Čedu yasis Rat̓eʔəl1 lax Zəzaʔxitałega
Lelal Rat̓eʔəl1idəsis ?igənəm

A. 2. Čedu gave Illl, the (visible) blanket (which up till now had been his), to Dolachen-Women.

She [took] the (visible) blanket (It changed state) which she had obtained through something satisfying/nice. 6

Or, more idiomatically, “Čedu gave his blanket to Dolachen-Women. She got that blanket because of something [she did that was] satisfying.”

Given the real meaning of this “gambling” game, Ȧnq̕iłx̱’s “Don’t go on the beach” would seem to be a order to Dolachen-Women to stay close to home, not to “play” around. The narrror does not specify what relationship exists between them that Ȧnq̕iłx̱ has the right and the need to control her sexual activities. In the related version from the Qaadgimisala, Dolachen-Women is Ȧnq̕iłx̱’s mother. Because of the sexual theme In this story, I think it possible that Dolachen-Women is instead his wife.

Ȧnq̕iłx̱’s first command, In clause B, merits closer attention. The phrase consists of two words, C̓eziš Ȧng̕išəh. The first term, C̓eziš, is

1. Clause 5 is particularly difficult to translate. Gender is not marked In Kwak’wala pronouns, and In any case the third-person pronoun is always unmarked. The only clue as to who is the subject of the sentence is the possessive marker -la at the end of Rat̓eʔəl1idəsis. This marker signifies that the possessor of the thing obtained through something satisfying, and the subject of the sentence, are the same person. Since the blanket Is no longer Rat̓eʔəl1 “(Čedu’s) former blanket,” but Rat̓eʔəl1 “the blanket which has just changed state,” it would seem that Dolachen-Women is now the possessor of the blanket, and Boas is right to make her the subject of the sentence. If that is so, because of word-order the verb of this sentence must be “blenket(which just changed state);” though such a subject-verb combination seems bizarre it is evidently not impossible In Kwak’wala. The “verbal” notion expressed would be the changing state of the blanket as It passed into Dolachen-Women’s possession.

2. There are some difficulties In morphology and grammar In the text which may be connected to the fact that the narrator speaks the Ts’uq’astə’ala dialect of Kwak’wala, which is less well described In the literature than the Kwagul dialect. In Kwagul Kwak’wala, I believe one would expect either ?Igənəm (Iko and -anəm); or ?Igənəm (Iko- and -anəm).

3. It is also possible that clause 5 refers to Čedu’s disrobing before intercourse.

1 The remaining suffices -la and -la are case and possessive markers referring to the following noun.
2 There are some difficulties In morphology and grammar In the text which may be connected to the fact that the narrator speaks the Ts’uq’astə’ala dialect of Kwak’wala, which is less well described In the literature than the Kwagul dialect. In Kwagul Kwak’wala, I believe one would expect either ?Igənəm (Iko and -anəm); or ?Igənəm (Iko- and -anəm).
relatively straightforward, an imperative meaning "don't you do it!" The second term is problematic. The stem could be ye-, meaning "to do, to be, to move." This is clearly what Boas had in mind. If the stem is ye- the word can be analyzed as following:

ye-  "to do, to be, to move"
-le  "continuative suffix"
-get  "continued or repeated motion"
-is  "beach, world, bottom of the sea"

The first word ye-le-get-is could be translated as "to move continuously/exist with continuous motion throughout the world," or as "to do something continuously outside/on the beach." The first gloss has a somewhat cosmic ring to it, and in fact, Yelegalsis happens to be a name of a Kwagul warrior deity (Boas 1695:713). Furthermore, the suffix combination *galls "continual motion throughout the world" is very often used as an epithet descriptive of divine nature. Given that Dolechen-Women has magical powers, given that (in the context of the myth-age world in which these stories take place) she is a fish-supernatural, Okis *ylegals might mean "Don't act according to your divine nature!" The more concrete and restricted meaning would be: "Don't be doing that outside/on the beach all the time!

The tricks that the narrator plays elsewhere in the text suggests that something else might be going on here as well. The clue to this is a small mark (!) over the /g/ (Boas #). This mark is not found in Boas' field notes, but does, for whatever reason, appear in the published version. It represents glottalization, which is a distinctive feature in Kwak'wala. It may be a simple error. However, there are dialectal differences between the thirteen Kwak'wala-speaking villages, and this was even more true in the nineteenth century, and it may be that the form from the Kwagul dialect, *ylegals, was legitimately *ylegals in the Ti'l'asq'wala dialect of the narrator of this text. However, it is also possible that the narrator was playing with the the sound of a stem similar to ye- "to do, to be, to move."

This stem is ye- "to spread legs for intercourse" (L&R 1607). The form *ylegals would be analyzed as follows:

*ylegals would mean "Don't fornicate all the time on the beach!" In Kwagul Kwak'wala, at least, the form which occurs in the text, *galls, is halfway between this *ylegals, and the standard yelegals. "Don't be doing that outside/on the beach all the time!"

The nature of the trick Dolechen-Woman plays on Dfiniqilex is becoming clear. "Cik'ustis demeviron, Dolechen-Woman says, and Dfiniqilex repeats "Cik'ustis demeviron" -- the difference is subtle. The first word in Dolechen-Woman's speech is cik'ustis, which Boas translates as "jump on the beach." It can be analyzed as:

ckst-  "to flap (like a fish when caught); to be stranded"!
-w-  "(moving) out of"
-ste  "in the water"
-is  "outside, on beach, world, bottom of sea"

The second word, demeviron, can be analyzed as:

demx-  "herring, (dried herring?)"
-evar  "mouth, entrance, entrance to inlet, opening of hollow object"
-
fix  "2nd-person demonstrative (this visible thing near you)"

The meaning of the stem demx- presents some difficulties. Lincoln and Rath (1980:361) note that it is an archaic form. They gloss it as "[live] herring," but do not list demx- which would seem to be the stem of demx. 1

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1 In Kwagul Kwak'wala this would sgg- (see Lincoln and Rath 1980:148, root #707)
"shoals of [live] herring" in clauses 20 and 24.1 Ḃəməx- in the meaning "dried herring," and Ḃəməx- in the meaning "live herring," may be Tl'etx'elgswəle dialect forms which are untested outside this text. It is also possible that Boas' transcription and his translation were both in error here, that Ḃəməx- should be glossed as "[live] herring," and all occurrences of Ḃəməx in this text should be Ḃəməx (the stem of which is Ḃəməx-).

The whole phrase is cɪʔɪstəs Ḃəməxʷəstik, "the (dried?) herring at the entrance to the inlet -- these here near you -- are stranded, flapping as they move out of the water onto the beach/into the outside world." Note that the coordinates expressed by the locative and demonstrative elements of each word, cɪʔɪstəs and Ḃəməxʷəstik, are apparently in conflict. The dried herring themselves are offshore, at the entrance to an inlet (-əxstə). However, they are also at the beach (-cíc), stranded near the person Olāchen-Woman is talking to, that is, near Ḃənəq̓iIłəx. However, once we realize that the herring are on the body of Olāchen-Woman, that the inlet they are stranded at is her vagina, this conflict is resolved. The herring are near Ḃənəq̓iIłəx -- nearer than he realizes.

俟ənəq̓iIłəx does not repeat the phrase in exactly as Olāchen-Woman tells it to him. He alters it, perhaps to his song more euphonious. What 俟ənəq̓iIłəx says is cɪʔɪstəs Ḃəməxʷəstik. The difference lies in the suffixes. Cɪʔɪstəs is missing the locative suffix -cíc found in the word as Olāchen-Woman says it, and Ḃəməxʷəstik has a different terminal demonstrative suffix. 俟ənəq̓iIłəx's speech can be analyzed as:

- cɪʔɪstəs: "to flap (like a fish when caught), to be stranded"
- -cíc: "in the water"
- -l: "pronominal 3rd-person subject marker"
- Ḃəməx-: "(dried?) herring"
- -əxstə: "mouth, entrance, opening of hollow object"

-1 "3rd-person demonstrative (that visible or invisible thing over there)"

What 俟ənəq̓iIłəx sings is "Those herring over there -- in the water at the entrance to the inlet -- are stranded/ flapping.

The difference between the demonstrative suffixes should be noted. Olāchen-Woman says "these herring which you can see, near you." 俟ənəq̓iIłəx is saying, "those herring over there." The consequence of this change seems to be that Olāchen-Woman is compelled to go down to the water to flap her herring, instead, perhaps, of doing it on the spot.

In Kwak'wala, the moment in which the herring come to life reads:

cebəxwəstik;
Səsəxəxəl Ḃəməx.
cɪʔɪstəs čɪxəxətə Ḃəwənəxəqəs.

Clause 19 in its entirety is the same word as we saw in the magical song, Ḃəməxʷəstik ("dried) herring at the entrance to the inlet." Here it is used as a verb: "there were (dried) herring at the entrance to the inlet."2 Clause 20 consists of a verb followed by a subject. The verb stem is Səsəxəxəl, "to say 'ssss...'; the subject Is Ḃəməx "herring."

This clause describes the moment of transformation. Our interpretation of it depends somewhat on whether Ḃəməxʷəstik is legitimately "dried herring," or whether it only means "live herring."

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1 The two phrases may also differ syntactically. In Kwak'ala, a third-person pronoun subject ("he/she/it/they") is unmarked; a third-person nominal subject is marked by a suffix -l, attached to the preceding verb or auxiliary. Olāchen-Woman's speech might have a third-person pronoun subject, but the case marker would expect the Kwak'ala dialect for the noun (which is Ḃəməxʷəstik, "herring in the inlet") is missing; we don't know whether the noun's case is subjective, objective, or oblique. The simplest analysis seems to be to treat the noun as a subject as it is in 俟ənəq̓iIłəx's speech.

2 The final suffix on Ḃəməxʷəstik in this clause is the demonstrative -l, third-person visible/invisible, because the frame of reference is the world of the third-person narrative, rather than a story actor's (first person) frame of reference.
If Ḏamwəxəsti does mean "dried herring at the entrance to the inlet," then what is emphasized in this clause is the transformation of Ḏamx- "dried herring" into Ḏamə- "live herring." Peter Furst (in press) has called attention to the magical powers of urine in Kwakw’ala mythology: urine as the "water of life." Generally, the water of life is used to resuscitate the dead and to cure the mortally wounded. Here, on one level of meaning, Dolachen-Women’s urine turns dead herring into live jumping herring. The implication that herring are Dolachen-Women’s labia suggests a further level of interpretation: it is not so much dried herring as dry herring, and what transforms dry herring into wet, slippery, and flopping herring is the moisture of sexual arousal; another kind of water of life.

If Ḏamwəxəsti means "(live) herring at the entrance to the inlet," then the emphasis in this clause is on their detaching themselves from Dolachen-Women. Ḏamwəxəsti becoming Ḏəmx- (that is, Ḏəmxəsti)

An entry in Boos’ unpublished dictionary supplies a clue to a possible solution to this problem (Boos n.d.). On page 349, the word Ḏamwəxəsti appears with the reference C.190.21 -- this very text.

As he worked on his Kwakw’ala dictionary over the years, Boos must still have been trying to make sense of this text, and of his translation of it. Sometime late in his life, Boos seems to have decided that he had misheard the word Ḏamwəxəsti in this text; that he really should have written down Ḏəmxəsti.

Now, there are good reasons for Boos to have made such an alteration. If the stem Ḏamx- means simply "herring," as it always does elsewhere, then a suffix is needed to arrive at a form which can be glossed "dried herring." The suffix -əxəsti means very specifically "dried meat of something" (Boos 1947:319): compare ʔəxəstə "dried silver salmon" (zəxl- "silver salmon"); ʔəxəsə "dried deer meat" (gɪx- "deer"). If Ḏamx- means only "herring," Ḏamwəxəsti would presumably mean "dried herring.”

There is a morphophonemic objection to such an analysis, however: because of the rules of stem-expansion for the suffix -əxəsti, we ought to get * دقائق, which is even further from Boos’ original transcription.1

If the narrator of this text gave "dried herring" for the word Ḏamwəxəsti, he may have intended yet another pun. Ḏamwəxəsti Ḏəmxəsti "the herring at the entrance to the inlet are dry." In other words, all interpretations given above of clause 20 are correct.

To continue, we can now see why Fog-Woman needed a net of public hair to catch the herring (clauses 22–26). This code to the story, along with the other myths to which this story is related, points to a moral about proper containment of women’s sexuality and the proper role of her productivity.

There is one last point about the translation of this text to be raised, and that is the translation of names.

The three men named, ᖲccdən, ᖲʔəłiʔəł, and ᖲʔəł, have almost untranslatable names. ᖲʔəłiʔəł and ᖲʔəł are characters found in a number of other myths. ᖲʔəłiʔəł’s name can be translated only as "born to be ᖲʔəł-" whereas ᖲʔəł- is untranslatable (L&R 1980:371).

Boos translates ᖲʔəł as "Chief-of-the-ancestors" (1903:312 et passim), probably deriving it from a stem ᖲʔəł-: "great, chiefly, high" and an undetermined suffix.

ccdən is a character who does not seem to be found in any other myths. The name is difficult to translate, but it may derive from either the stem ʔəł-: "to stretch out, be taut" (Lincoln and Rath 1980, • 835) or ᖲʔəł- "to dive deep (said of whale)" (Lincoln and Rath 1980, • 837); the only likely candidate for the suffix would be ᖲʔəł to "inside, within." So his name could be "Stretching out taut inside," or "Diving deep inside," either might be appropriate given his role in the story.

Boos’ gloss of ᖲʔəłʔəłʔəłʔəłʔəł "Fog-Woman" is incorrect. ᖲʔəłʔəłʔəłʔəłʔəł can be analyzed as:

1 Though, again, the difference may be explained by the fact that the narrator spoke a different dialect of Kwakw’ala.
It is difficult to interpret this name. In a later volume Boas glosses ?3ixso?ayuŋa as "Revenge-Woman" (1906:170), presumably deriving it from the sense in which ?et: means "to bury." I would suggest, however, a better reading might be "Something stuck inside a hole/enclosed space." and that it has its origin in another story. In this other story, ?3ixso?ayuŋa uses an unorthodox place to hide her lover when they are surprised by her husband in flagrante delicto. Note that here it is the herring which would be stuck in -- or at least near -- the hole in question.

The most interesting of the names is zëzeXitësge, which Boas translates as "Dolachen-Woman." The full meaning of this name is actually more subtle and suggestive:

zëzeX-  "oolachen (distributive plural)"
-íglit  "all over surface of body of person"
-xo  "multiplicity of parts" (Boas 1947:306)
-ga  "woman"

Dolachen-Woman is the "Woman whose body has oolachen all over its surface."

This name proves the metaphorical identity of herring and oolachen which we were forced to assume to make sense of the story's plot development. It also suggests that not only are Dolachen-Woman's genitals made of herring/oolachen, her whole body-surface is. Somehow Qñiqilax doesn't realize this, doesn't fully guess her powers.

5. "Qñiqilax and Côcu: Reprise.
"Qñiqilax and Côcu" is a coherent, well-formed story. It is concise, clever, and thematically unified.

To review, the story opens on Dolachen-woman and her lover "playing." The lover is quite happy and satisfied with the "game," and offers a gift of a blanket to Dolachen-Woman.

Then Qñiqilax discovers what Dolachen-Woman has been up to. "Stay at home!" he orders. "Stay off the beach, stay away from the waters' edge! Don't fornicate! Don't act like what you are, a divine being who is constantly on the move!" He wants this fish-being to keep away from the water. It seems as if he intends her to become human.

But Dolachen-Woman is of no mind to obey. She wants sex and she wants the ocean. She knows that Qñiqilax's commands have considerable force in the world, and that even she is bound by what he says. She also knows, however, that being human, Qñiqilax might not really know the myth-people, might not know their nature or powers; perhaps he can't see that her skin is made of numerous small, silvery fish. "Oh, no, lord," she says, deceptively humble. "I think you could come up with a better Transformation then that. Try this one instead, lord: 'Dried herring are stranded on the beach, these herring here are flapping vainly at the mouth of the inlet.' Say that to me, lord."

This may sound confusing to Qñiqilax, but perhaps he likes the image of fish helplessly stranded on land -- precisely the fate he is trying to impose on Dolachen-Woman. He decides to try it out, but he gets the words somewhat muddled: "Flapping in the water, flapping in the water," he sings. "Over there, over there. Herring at the entrance, dried herring at the entrance. Say that to me, lord."

The song is good enough for Dolachen-Woman. She walks down to the water's edge (surely to Qñiqilax's dismay?), and squats down until her vulva is in the water. She urinates -- "Sss...!" Water of life refreshes the herring. The ocean restores her divine nature, perhaps awakens her sexually. The multitudinous fish on her skin slip off into the water, multiplying fantastically. All around her in the shallows, little silvery fish are jumping, smacking, wriggling, flapping.

The whole village must come running to look. What an incredible abundance of food! Then ?3ixso?ayuŋa has difficulty catching them; these fish show little affinity for ordinary nets. Thinking about where they came
from, she has an idea. In order to re-capture them, one needs the substance which kept them confined in the first place. So she makes a special net and with it manages to catch the herring.

And there the narrator ends his story.

6. "Öänüğiłəx and Çču": Masks and blankets

Boas was not one for interpretation or commentary, and it is often a frustrating task trying to make sense of his texts, or to relate them to anything else he said about nineteenth-century Kwagul culture. Fortunately, he did publish enough material, and enough frustrating task trying to make sense of his texts, or to relate them to anything else he said about nineteenth-century Kwagul culture. Fortunately, he did publish enough material, and enough frustrating task trying to make sense of his texts, or to relate them to anything else he said about nineteenth-century Kwagul culture. Fortunately, he did publish enough material, and enough frustrating task trying to make sense of his texts, or to relate them to anything else he said about nineteenth-century Kwagul culture. Fortunately, he did publish enough material, and enough frustrating task trying to make sense of his texts, or to relate them to anything else he said about nineteenth-century Kwagul culture. 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"see god" whose attributes are consistent over a wide range of stories, but instead a whole range of different supernaturals in some way associated with the sea, whose attributes overlap from story to story. Qən̓iqlax̣ is only a partial exception to this. He is acknowledged to be the same personage in the various versions of his life from different narrators and different villages. Certainly attributes, for instance his human-ness, are consistent from story to story. Others vary widely. It would be no surprise to find, as is evidently true in the two stories from Ḫaqəm̥gihlisələ, that Oolachen-Woman Is Qən̓iqlax̣'s mother in one story and his wife in another. In a story from the nearby Yu̱k̕inux̣, a character named Oolachen-Woman Is Qən̓iqlax̣'s maternal grandmother (Boas 1906:180).

Plots and thematic material, on the other hand, tend to repeat from Ḫaqəm̥ to Ḫaqəm̥. There are two stories in the Boas corpus which are thematically very similar to "Qən̓iqlax̣ and Č̓a:lu. We have already mentioned the first, the other Ḫaqəm̥gihlisələ story featuring Qən̓iqlax̣ and Oolachen-Woman. To repeat, in this story, Oolachen-Woman Is Qən̓iqlax̣'s mother, and keeps all the fish in her blanket. Qən̓iqlax̣ wants to see the waters of the world alive with fish, so he borrows his mother's blanket, and dips the corner of it in the water. Fish appear in the water and soon populate the rivers and ocean.

The second is from the Na̱x̱ałaqə. This story is longer and more complex. The hero is Ūhīlet, a chief of the myth-people, who is troubled because there is neither river nor fish where they live (Boas 1905:322-330). He creates the river, and then plans to marry a twin, that is, a salmon-changeling (q̓əl̓ək̓e) who has incarnated among humans. He searches until he finds one among the dead. He sprinkles her with his water of life and she comes alive. Her name is Məlisə ("fish-maker," from mə- "fish, especially salmon"). She is beautiful, and Ūhīlet's brothers warn each other not to think about committing adultery with her. She favors the brothers over her husband, however. She refuses to make salmon for Ūhīlet, but will produce them for his brothers when he is away. She makes salmon by putting her little finger in her mouth and then into a kettle of water. In the end, Ūhīlet finds out about it and he makes Məlisə fill his river with salmon. She creates salmon in the river by walking into the water. If she were to immerse herself entirely, she warns Ūhīlet, the river would dry up with such a huge mass of salmon. Now Ūhīlet has what he wanted, but his marital difficulties are not over. He grows proud from his new wealth, insults a salmon-bone, and then speaks angrily to his wife. She calls "her tribe, the dried salmon"; they all return into the sea (though salmon eventually come back again to Ūhīlet's river).

There are several elements shared among these stories. In each of them we find a woman with supernatural powers who hoards fishy abundance. She is either wife or mother of the male hero. In two of them, there is either a suggestion or fact of extracurricular sexual activity by this woman, which leads to friction with the hero. In each of them, the fish are created by dipping part of her body or clothing into the water.

Let us look more closely at this last element. In "Qən̓iqlax̣ and Č̓a:lu" Oolachen-Woman dips (dried) herring, that is, her table, into the water. The herring are resuscitated by the water of life, magically multiply, and populate the ocean. In the related version from Ḫaqəm̥gihlisələ, Qən̓iqlax̣ dips her blanket into the water to achieve a similar result. Now, Oolachen-Woman's full name, Z̓əl̓a ndəl̓a, means "many oolachen all over the surface of her body." The name allows some ambiguity as to whether the fish on her body are attached to her skin, as they appear to be in "Qən̓iqlax̣ and Č̓a:lu," or merely covering her skin, as they would be if she wore her blanket full of fish in the related story.

That these two conditions are essentially the same is, I believe, an important insight into the notion of human and animal physiology which underlies all transformations in the Ḫaqəm̥. This notion comes into focus when we turn our gaze from Boas' English translations to the Kwak'ala of the original.

Kwak'ala has a poorly described shape-gender system which classifies all objects and beings into several shape-categories. The most important of these categories are long, round/bulky, flat, and hollow/dish-like. There are circumstances, such as counting, in which use of a shape-suffix is obligatory, but generally the system is used more in derivation than in grammar. For example:
1. mukt̓ən “four long objects,” from mukt̓ “four,” -ən “long objects.”
2. uhxwəłə “headwaters of river,” from uhx: “empty root,” -ən (?), -ən “end of long standing object.”
3. ḥə̱xənəłə “to take hold of (of long horizontal object),” from ḥə̱xə “to take hold of,” -ən “end of long horizontal object,” -ən “inchomitive.”
4. ḥə̱xənəłə “to poke branch or pole in water,” from həx: “long object is somewhere,” -ən “in the water,” -ən “inchomitive.”
5. hə̱xənə “where canoe is on beach,” from həx: “hollow object/vessel is somewhere,” -ən “on beach,” -ən “place of something.”
6. hə̱xənə “food mat” from həx: “to eat,” and -ən “flat object.”

Not only are there suffixes and stems which express the basic meaning of the shape category (long, flat, hollow, etc.), there are many suffixes and stems which express more specific ideas about shape. For instance, “to carry” is a different stem depending on whether one is carrying a long object (e.g. a pole) or a round, bulky object (e.g. a bundle). “Edge” must be either “edge of flat horizontal object,” or “edge of vertical plane.”

This topological specificity is quite idiomatic and is ubiquitous in Kwak’wala. The suffix -əłəl used in Dolachen-Woman’s name, which means “all over surface of person’s body,” is yet another example. By paying close attention to how these suffixes are used in Boas’ texts it is possible to glean some hints as to how the narrators of the text conceived of human and animal physiology, and of the nature of transformation between the two.

Essentially, humans are classified grammatically as long objects, animals as round, bulky objects. The basic classifying suffix for animals is -əłə “round object,” as in, for instance, mułəməłə “four seals” (muk: “four,” -əłə “round object,” -əl demonstrative suffix, məłə “seal”).

Now, in the texts, animals generally appear in human form, and are described as such, standing on two feet (ʔə̱’ə̱) as opposed to four feet.

1 In some instances, for instance in counting, humans are treated separately from inanimate long objects (ʔə̱”human” and -ən “inanimate long object”). For many verb stems which express shape categories, however, humans and inanimate long objects are merged.
The mask is a covering, but to human eyes, the mask appears as the flesh and bone of the animal. The mask is both the thing which transforms and the end result of the transformation. Only the core, the bones, intestines, blood, fins, etc., of an animal are substance separate from the mask (cf. Boas 1905:304-305.)

Since the mask is the food that humans depend upon for their sustenance, from the human perspective, the mask is the valued element of the transformation. It is the mask which signifies abundance and satisfaction. But the important thing about the mask is that it is in a sense disposable. The animal is not destroyed by human consumption. After its mask has been eaten, and it has been reduced to bones and offal,1 after it becomes a "ghost," it can be reincarnated.

Consider the fate of Háiške, the Fish-maker. She begins as a salmon, incarnates among humans as a twin, and then dies. As a human, she is buried. Háiške revives her by sprinkling her water of life (urine, salty like seawater?) on her bones. She calls her tribe, the salmon, and they are taken and dried by Háiške's people. Later, Háiške mistreats a salmon bone. Insulted, the dried salmon-tri be returns into the water, resuscitating, and swims away.

In the contract between humans and animals, so long as humans treat the essential remains -- bones and offal -- correctly, the animal can come to life, return in mask-shape and feed humans again. In most of Boas' texts, the proper way to dispose of salmon bones is in the water. Once the bones are immersed in saltwater, the salmon come to life again.

Note the similarities of the following passage with Ódòntíqiei and Ččúč: the husband who orders his wife not to go on the beach, the immersion in water which brings a multitude of fish into being:

Then she gathered the backbones, fins and the blood of all the salmon and put them into an old pot. She carried the pot out of the house. She walked to the beach. Thunderer [a Thunderbird] went out and called to her. He said, "Oh, mistress! Don't take it to the beach; just throw it down the embankment," thus he said. But Thrush-Woman just walked to the beach. She said [to Thunderer], "This is the way of our tribe." Then she went into the sea. When her bones were covered with water, the pretty women poured the contents of the old pot into the water. As soon as the bones, intestines, and blood went into the water, the little silver-salmon came to life again, and all the salmon came to life. All the salmon jumped into the [shallow] water on the beach. And then Thrush-Woman disappeared, because she was taken away by her [former] husband [who was wearing the mask of the little silver-salmon] (Boas 1905:307; e.g. also Boas 1905:390-2)).

Actually, masks are not so much disposable as they are transitory representations of a durable transformative idea. The mask that is consumed by humans is but one iteration, one exemplification of this idea, which remains in the possession of the near-immortal animal. Such a mask-idea is not a Platonic idea, because the idea has a physical, perceptible existence -- it is the ur-mask, if you will. It exists as part of the "supernatural" power of the animal, though of course it is not "super"-natural; it is the essence of nature.

That is how fish-women such as Dolochen-Woman and Fish-Maker create great plenty by simply immersing their body parts. Dolochen-Woman's blanket, her skin, is fish. It is the notion of fish, the form of fish. When placed in water, this ur-form creates thousands of representations, fish-masks which at the same time are part of the blanket itself, but different, transitory, expedient.

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1 This suggests a line of inquiry as to why the Kwakiutl's sweating recorded by George Hunt refers to death and bones, etc., instead of sex and body effluvia, as in English (Boas 1921: 793-4).

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1 Thrush-Woman is a being of considerable supernatural powers. Her special ability is to sing berry-bushes into blossoming and then fruition.
There are a number of texts in which male humans with supernatural power, such as Q̕ən̓iqləx̱, create an abundance of fish. These men, though, create fish by placing rotten wood or wooden carvings in the water (e.g. Boas 1905:94-99, 390-2). In order to manifest some of the original ur-
fishness, humans, even those with supernatural power, must “imitate” the animal, by making the closest possible exemplification of it.

There are two Kwak’wala terms which Boas translates as “imitate,” nanətə and hayələ?

The first, nanətə, derives from the stem nan- “straight, to be straight, to go straightway, to be correct, to coincide, to meet, the middle of something, half,” and the suffix -tə “inside, inside hollow object.” The form nanətə means “to do in the right way, to be correct inside.” The reduplication of nan- to nanə- probably expresses the plural notion of “action occurring in all parts,” as for instance in the word nanətə “end of long object is flush with something” (kələ “end of long standing object”)—literally, “end of long object is straight/correct in all parts.” Nanətə, then, is “to do in the right way in all parts, to be entirely correct inside in all parts, to do with all parts doing in the correct way, or to coincide or meet (internally) in all parts.”

The second term, hayələ? derives from the Northern Wakasalan root hə-. ye-. y-, meaning “to be the case, to exist, to live, to go.” A number of Kwak’wala verbs of motion are formed from this root, using the form of hay-: for instance, hayə “to pass by” (using -ə “to pass, go by”); hayətəla “coming out of the woods, moving seawards” (using -ə “to continue motion,” and -təla “seaward direction”); and so on. Hayələ? “to imitate” is formally similar. Literally it means “to follow in some action” (from -lə? -lə “back, in back of, afterwards, to follow behind.” To imitate is to follow behind some being’s motion (existence).

It is interesting that “to obey” and “to reply” are formed from the same stem as “to imitate.” Nanəwə? “to reply” is nan- “to coincide or be correct in all parts” and the discourse suffix -ə, which on auxiliaries at least signifies that the action of the stem to which it is attached is not separate or discrete from a previous action. A reply coincides with or is correct after the question, it is an inseparable part of the question.

Nanətələ? “to obey” uses the same suffix -lə? -lə “back, in back of, following,” which occurs in hayələ? “to imitate.” It is instructive to compare some of the forms using this suffix more closely:

nanə- “to be straight, correct, to coincide or meet, to do straightway” nanətə “to obey”

eyə- “to be, to exist, to go” hayələ? “to imitate”

də- “to look”

dələ? “to look back and imitate deeds of one’s ancestors, to watch what others are doing”

kə- “to err, to miss, do wrong, disagree”

kələ? “to miss one’s way, to not take after parents” kələ? “to disobey, to refuse” (Boas 1947:327).

It is clear that the suffix -lə? “to follow” has more than a purely locative meaning. The notion of “following” contains, or gives rise to, a political and a moral meaning. “To obey” is “to follow correctly”; “to disobey” is “to follow wrongly.” In all these forms with -lə?, the action taken is not original or authoritative, it depends upon a prior state of being or doing in another — one’s ancestor’s, parents, rulers. First (gələ) come the animals (gələ) and the ancestors (gələzə), who lead (gələbə). The chief (gələmə?) is the one in front (gələmə?). The others follow (-lə?). If they do it in the right way (nəxə?), they approximate in all parts (nənətə?) those who come first.

One interesting aspect of the Oolache-Woman stories is the way in which fish are linked to female sexuality, and in which the ur-mask which creates an abundance of fish is a feminine prerogative. There is apparently a feeling of sensory similarity between fish and female genitalia. There are also hints of another symbolic linkage which derives from the role of women as food-preparers and providers. If women are food-providers, and food per excellence is salmon, then, perhaps, women are like salmon.
Interestingly, in one Kwak’ala idiom appearing in Boas’ texts, the sexual act is related to blankets and transformation. The stem of one common term for blanket, ḥeḵam, ḥeḵ- “covering” is used to mean “to engage in sexual intercourse.”


This suggests an analogy between generation of plenty through the mask and generation of children through sexual intercourse.

A final comment is called for on the relationship of these ideas to the potlatch, which featured large-scale prestations of blankets (coverings). Such prestations accompanied the movement by chiefs and nobles from one status to another, giving up one name and seat and taking on another. It might be that these changes are analogous to the gift of masks salmon make to humans when they die and are reborn.

There is a term which encompasses both name-changing and animal transformation: ḥeḵ (also ḥeḵu). ḥeḵu means “to change, to exchange”:

Ἀωράς ὁ ὁμοι τὸν ψεύτη Ἐγγίζομεν ἐν ὁμοιοτάτῳ Ἐγγίζομεν... “the [descent group called] Aowe... just recently exchanged this name (Ἀωράς-Ἀωράς) for the name Gigilgem” (Boas 1935-43:189).

Ἀωράς also means “to transform.” An example of this meaning is found in the word which Boas glosses as “Salmon twin,” Ἐγγίζομεν. Literally, Ἐγγίζομεν is:

+)/ (to change, transform distributive plural?)

-αὖ (hallow object, receptacle for some object or activity)

Or, “receptacle for transformation.” The twin is the physical receptacle in which the transformation was accomplished: the salmon-being now in human flesh.

Some conclusions: Boas as a translator and interpreter.

This discussion has carried us a long way from somewhat unlikely beginnings. Clearly a number of roads lead onward from this point, but any one of them would take us further than can be traversed in an essay of this size.

Perhaps the main conclusion to draw is that Boas is not a reliable translator. “Qenigilex and Che’u” is a particularly egregious example, but there are many lesser instances which result from the same kind of mistake.

Because of Boas’ eminence in the history of anthropology, his Kwak’ala texts have been used time and again by scholars with no knowledge of Kwak’ala (e.g. Locher 1932, Müller 1955, Reid 1974, Goldman 1975, Dundes 1979, Walens 1981, Sanday 1986), and thus no way to check their reinterpretations. They are forced to rely on Boas’ skill and accuracy as a translator.

I don’t believe Boas ever tried extremely hard to provide completely accurate, utterly reliable translations. Not that he was deliberately careless, either, but his goal was to record to native mentality, the Kwagul mentality (1909.309). For him, the texts were in themselves the end products of ethnography, and the translations were only an aid. The translations were never intended to be the primary source that they have become.

Levi-Strauss once claimed that it was unnecessary to read mythology in the original language, or even to have good translation, because the underlying structure emerged no matter what. Not, as a professor of mine once phrased it, to beat a dead horse to death, but it just ain’t so. All translation is inevitably interpretation. What we see in Boas’ translation of “Qenigilex and Che’u” is not le pensee sauvage, but la pensee de Boas.

And it is because this particular translation is so bad that we can see Boas’ interpretive style so clearly. Like Qenigilex, Boas was fooled into blindly repeating something without comprehending its intent. This is the flavor of his ethnography as a whole. The personality trait which stands in sharpest relief in Boas’ work is literalness. While it led him to publish and preserve texts on everything from Kwagul dreams to Kwagul dinner menus,
It was an obstacle to ever really describing Kwagul culture. In fact, it is not clear that he understood how much he didn’t understand.

In the end what can be said of Boas as an ethnographer is that he left these texts. We may no longer agree that texts without significant commentary or annotation serve a useful ethnographic purpose. Still, long after Boas and George Hunt and the Kwagul they talked to are gone, we have some words that were said by someone, rather than a record only of what Boas thought such words might have meant.

REFERENCES


