

"Why do we find the same fabula beautiful when presented by one [author] and trite when presented by another?"

-- Mieke Bal, Narratology

A few years ago I proposed Martha Lamont's telling of "Pheasant and Raven" for inclusion in a volume of translations of Native American stories. The anthologist had said that he wanted "the best" stories, and I have always considered Martha's "Pheasant and Raven" with its virtuoso management of plot parallelism one of the best of its kind -- the kind, found the world over, being that in which two characters of differing temperaments set out to do the same thing, and therein lies the tale. Translations always leave a lot behind, but because of its structural symmetry, which can be transferred intact, I thought "Pheasant and Raven" would fare better in translation than many other stories. The anthologist rejected Martha's story, writing back that he found it not very good because "too predictable."

It is probably true that anyone who encounters a story for the first time is interested in the plot as the unfolding of an unpredictable sequence. But traditional Native American stories do not grow in a setting in which stories are typically told for the first time or in which they are ever heard for the first time by most members of any audience. Interest in plot within a traditional storytelling setting centers not on the unexpected but on the manipulation of the familiar -- the inclusion or exclusion, expansion or contraction of the usual elements in a particular storyteller's version; the addition of material from other storytellers' practice of the same story, or even from other stories. After all, the word "story" in the context of oral literature never means just one telling; it means the intertextual domain of all tellings.

An anthologist, as part of the storyteller's audience, needs to be interested in a text as a retelling. The stories have been around longer than any one teller, and the teller's activity is important because it continues an old story, not because it initiates a new one. As well, stories are told so that their familiarity will not be lost and people will keep on knowing how to tell them again. In the context of

transmission, the criterion of "unpredictability" makes no sense. It comes from a print-based system of values that does not define itself in terms of people who know each other. When the sound of a well-known voice speaking an ancestral language in familiar company has been transformed into an English-language sequence of pages in a book that an unknown and unknowing person may read, more is lost than the often-regretted resources of the original language: the community-based intertextuality is gone, along with the transmission context. What is left, one may ask. Whatever the anthologist saw on my pages, it was not Martha's story, or he would have loved it. Let me make clear here it was not the translation he objected to (though maybe it should have been), but the quality of the story as story.

Rather than too predictable, I would guess, what was left of Martha's story in my translation was not predictable enough. Readers cannot appreciate how "Pheasant and Raven"'s predictability on the level of rhetoric (figuration, diction, rhythm) prepares the way for the value-laden predictability of the event structure (mirror episodes) unless they are in tune with the predictability of the telling as it fulfills the requirements of Lushootseed oral-literary tradition. In the same way, the inventiveness of any moves that Martha Lamont makes within the tradition is apparent only to someone who knows what to expect and is thus capable of being pleased when expectations are met in unexpected or particularly skillful ways. "Too predictable" here means that this reader did not know what to expect.

Translators think often about how to deal with the enormous losses, textual and metatextual, that a story suffers in cross-cultural/cross-linguistic/cross-medium transfer. We need to think also of how to remedy the deficits of readers who come to the translated stories from outside the storytelling community. Some producers of texts take what might be called a Jungian stance and assume that all stories are at some level panhumanly transparent. Thus we see collections of stories "retold" in English (lacking accountability to any source telling) with commentary brief or absent (lacking accountability to a source culture), seemingly produced on the assumption that there is no readerly deficit. Stories at their panhuman level are not tellable, having become symbolic modes, no longer narrative. Furthermore, stories are never told to panhumans.

It seems to me that maintaining accountability to the source telling and to the oral tradition from which a translated story comes is a preferable way to deal not only with losses in transfer but also with the reader's likely deficit. This inevitably means requesting of publishers and editors that they be willing to change their practices and of readers that they be willing to change their expectations and habits. To some extent, this has already been successfully done: we see accountability at work in the texts produced by those who use typographical innovation not only to reflect qualities of the original acoustic properties of stories (school of Tedlock), but also to reshape the reader's activity, requiring a slow

down to bring reading speed closer to "listening speed" (school of Hymes).

In my own work, among the translation strategies I have tried has been a method borrowed from French cultural criticism, the split page. The story is on one side of the page. On the other, keyed to the triggering places in the text, are my thoughts about the story (including language and art), the storyteller, and the audience. This method has the advantage of letting me remain myself, doing my duty but not needing to pose as an expert. I do not interfere with the story any more than a given reader wants in any particular reading, since it remains the reader's choice whether and to what extent to look at the commentary. Editors have objected that in this format it takes too long to get the story read. Although they have not objected to the obvious disadvantage of the split page, the long blank spaces between parts of the story when my commentary runs longer than the portion of the text that occasioned it, I think that the objection expressed in terms of speed is in fact an expression of discomfort with the interrupted focus. As a translator I do not feel at all obligated to make the reader's experience of the story a short one. Why should it take less time to read a story than to listen to it, for example? A listener's experience is always one of split focus: you are watching the storyteller as well as listening; you are aware of other people's reactions as well as your own. Is there a law that says that these experiences, when they are available to the translator, should not be made part of the translation? There is no such law, but there is the force of habits based on publishing practice and an attendant print-based value system.

Whether trying to replicate the teller's pace on the page by means of lineation, typeface, variable margins and spacing, or trying to replicate the listeners' experience by means of concurrent annotation, translators are all concerned at some point with trying to regulate the pacing of the reader's reception of the text. The dedication to speediness on the part of some editors and the dedication to novelty on the part of some anthologists stand in opposition precisely to the pace of listening and to the traditional oral delivery of stories. Thinking about listening time as opposed to reading time does not presuppose that the listener's mind is vacant while he waits for the next event to be told -- in fact, it is the reader who races along whose mind has no chance to be other than vacant. Repetition, figuration, predictability in stories open up space for the mind to get busy in. If these aspects of story structure and delivery are handled well, they make a story more, not less, interesting.

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"Pheasant and Raven" has continued to be told, I would guess, in part because of the way skillful storytellers have capitalized on its predictability. It consists of an introduction, two parallel episodes connected by a pivot scene, and a cap scene that mirrors the pivot. The introduction names the main characters and places them in relation to each other. In Lushootseed tradition, the names of the

characters already tell the audience something about what is going to happen. In the first episode, Pheasant announces his intention of going out into the mountains. There he meets two hunters who give him an opportunity to claim for his own their dogs and the game they have brought down. Pheasant refuses, and the hunters then butcher the game and put it in a pack for him to take to his family. In the pivot scene, Raven sees the Pheasant family's food, finds out how they got it, and determines to get some for himself. In the second (mirror) episode, Raven goes up into the mountains, meets the same hunters but does everything wrong, and is given a pack to take home. In the cap scene Raven finds out that his pack is full of rotten wood.

Despite the fact that the parallel episodes have the same plot, they are in fact two entirely different kinds of stories. Pheasant is a singular character: not the hero of a corpus in Lushootseed tradition, he may be defined as the storyteller wishes for any telling. In this telling of Martha Lamont's, Pheasant's story is about the resolution of a crisis; the landscape is interior; the turning point is a change in his character, and the events are generative of teachings. Raven is an iterative character, overdetermined in the tradition, he must act as we expect; his story is a display of himself as he fails to change; the world is his stage; his is a comic turn without a turning point; his misadventures illustrate teachings that are already in place in the story but do not touch him. You could tell Pheasant's story by itself; Raven's has no meaning except in reference to Pheasant's. Who could have predicted so many oppositions at all levels of narration in two parallel sequences of events?

Mrs. Lamont's realizing of the latent oppositions within the story's symmetry is accomplished in part by her use of repetition, a kind of retrospective predictability which is after all a definition of cohesiveness. Throughout the story Mrs. Lamont rhythmically deploys a key rhetorical figure (for a discussion of such figures, see Langen 1996) and a key word in order to shape the audience's expectations of her story.

Another kind of repetition, perhaps inaudible but nonetheless at the forefront of awareness in the audience, is the position of Mrs. Lamont's telling within the tradition of tellings of "Pheasant and Raven." She begins this way:

(Figure 1)

A ʔəstəʔlil tiʔit ʔi sgʷəlub ʔi tiʔəʔ qawqs.

A ʔəstəʔlil ʔəsqʷuʔaxad tiʔəʔ sgʷəlub ʔi tiʔəʔ qawqs.

a qahqahiʔt tiʔəʔ sgʷəlub;

a ʔabsbibəbədəʔ ʔə tiʔəʔ qahah tiʔəʔ sgʷəlub.

b gʷəl xʷiʔ kʷi gʷədsəshaydxʷ stab tsiʔəʔ čəgʷass ʔə tiʔəʔ

sg^wəlub -- ?ah tsi?it čəg^wass.

a' g^wəl ti?ə? qawqs g^wəl ʒal' ?absbibədbəda? ?ə ti beqah,

b' g^wəl q^wəlq^wəlwič tsi?ə? čəg^wass.

A' ?əstafilil --

They were living there, both Pheasant and the Raven.

They lived there as neighbors, this Pheasant and Raven.

Pheasant was a father many times over;

Pheasant had a brood of many little chicks.

And I don't know who Pheasant's wife was, but he had a wife.

As for Raven, he also had a brood, also of many,

And q^wəlq^wəlwič was his wife.

They were living there --

This is a circular figure [AA-A'] with a parallel-constructed core (aa-b') which repeats the reduplication pattern of the figure's circumference ring. In AA, the first statement is reduplicated with the increment of ?əsɟ^wu?axad (neighbors). In the core, we see the first statement reduplicated (aa) with the addition of ?absbibədbəda? (to have children [the verb is in a form used for animal or bird]). In addition, the second statement in a stands in a relation of hysteron-proteron with a' (?absbibədbəda?--sg^wəlub/qawqs--?absbibədbəda? [the hysteron-proteron is not reflected in the translation]). As our knowledge of other Lushootseed stories leads us to expect, the circumference ring of this initial figure introduces the characters by name and relation, and the core supplies information about what will motivate events. A great part of our pleasure in the deployment of this figure is in its elegant and total traditionality. In my view, my work as a translator is not done until I have made it possible for the reader to know how traditional the figure is. This is not something that can be done through the translated text alone. The quality of the craftsmanship, on the other hand, evident in the verbal echoes, incremental repetition, parallelism and cohesiveness, can be transferred into the English text.

In other Northern Lushootseed versions of "Pheasant and Raven," storytellers include in the opening move the information that Raven has a fish trap but doesn't give Pheasant enough fish to meet his family's needs. Often, this is the case despite the fact that Pheasant and Raven are brothers-in-law. Martha Lamont and her audience surely knew versions of the story with this information in them. But

in Martha's introduction there is no fish trap, and the relationship that is established between Pheasant and Raven is only that they are both fathers of large families. In Martha's wanting to name both wives we may see her handling of the elision of the in-law relationship present in the traditional story material. In her own telling, it is not going to be anything about his relationship with Raven that will send Pheasant into the mountains. Martha's introduction, formally completely traditional, opens up a new way of looking at Pheasant's journey, and thus departs from tradition.

In the next move of the story, Pheasant leaves home. Again Mrs. Lamont deploys traditional formal rhetoric in the service of her own departure from tradition.

(Figure 2)

A huy, ?ibəšəx^w ti?ə? sg^wəlub.

cuucəx^w tsi?ə? čəg^wass:

a "tučubə čəd, tu?ibəš.

b paʒaxʒ čəd tux^w tu?ibəš.

a' tu?ibəš čəd, tu?ux^w dx^wfaqt."

A' huy, ?ibəšəx^w ti?ə? sg^wəlub.

cap ?i, ?ibəšəx^w dx^wčad.

paʒaxʒ ?u?ibəš.

pendant xət ti ʒastag^wəx^w əlg^wə?.

Now Pheasant set off on foot.

He told his wife:

"I'm going inland, I'm going to walk.

It doesn't matter where, I'm just going to walk.

I'm going to walk, I'm going up into high country."

So now Pheasant set off on foot.

And he did, he walked all over.

It didn't matter to him where he went.

It seems as though they were always hungry at home.

This is a circular figure (A-A') with Pheasant's speech to his wife at its core (a [direction/walk] standing in a hysteron-proteron relation to a' [walk/direction]) and a cap (repetition of material from the core that serves as a coda to the figure), as well as a pendant (a statement at the close of a figure that extends its focus toward what follows). The word ?ibəš, which can mean "travel" and "go" as well as specifically to walk, appears in every line of the figure except "he said to his wife" and the pendant, has been translated variously as "set off on foot," "walk(ed)," and "went." The iterative used of ?ibəš here may be seen as representative on the figural level of Pheasant's state of mind in much the same way that the reduplication at the beginning of ?ibəš (walk) in ?ibibəš (walk around, wander) represents lack of aim at the level of the single word. Not until the pendant of this second circular figure does Mrs. Lamont suggest a reason for Pheasant's leaving home.

In other versions of this story, Pheasant leaves specifically to go hunting to feed his family. Usually he takes his bow and arrow, and usually his immediate motivation is Raven's failure to share food. Mrs. Lamont's Pheasant departs without weapons or stated reason. Again, in her omission of available story material, Mrs. Lamont has opened the way for us to see Pheasant's journey as not immediately practical, as perhaps interior or spiritual, as a seeking up in the mountains for a solution to a longstanding problem that cannot be remedied with one successful hunt. The problem, purposely not identified as having to do with Raven, may be perceived as having to do with Pheasant himself.

It is possible at this point in Mrs. Lamont's telling, in which so far there has not been one word that is not richly traditionally presented, to see her giving the story her own stamp. We may see that Pheasant is looking not for food, but for the ability to provide for his family. This ability is one of the gifts of sqelalitut (spirit power). From this point on, the story takes place in no specific mountain region, but in the intersection of this world and the ləli? swatix^wtəd, where the beings one deals with know you better than you know yourself. The story is about how well Pheasant can come to know himself and how much courage he has, and it has been focussed this way for the audience by Mrs. Lamont's traditional rhetoric working along with her selection from the tradition story materials. It seems inadequate to call such manipulation of tradition "innovation."

Pheasant's speech to his wife (in Fig. 2) is echoed in the speech he makes to the hunters when they call upon him to give an account of himself. If we had doubts about the nature of his wandering, this speech to the hunters resolves them. They ask him where he has come from, and he answers: (Figure 3)

A ?u, tuχ^w čəd χu?ibəš pəχaχ.
core dx^wtaqt ti?ə? ds?ibəš,

tu^l?al tə cəx^w?ah, cəx^w?əstatlil.

A' pəχaχ čəd tuχ^w χu?ibəš.

cap cick^wəx^w χastag^wəx^wi? čəd ?ə ti?i? dbibədbəda?.

Oh, I just walk around, it doesn't matter.

I walk toward the mountains,

Just from where I was, the place where I live.

It doesn't matter, I just walk around.

I have a lot of hungry children, those little fledgelings of mine.

The two parts of the circumference stand in a hysteron-proteron relation to each other (χu?ibəš - -- pəχaχ [walk/doesn't matter]/pəχaχ -- χu?ibəš); like the core in Fig. 2, which this speech echoes, this core concerns itself with directions, the first line stating the direction toward which Pheasant travels, the second, where he came from. The information contained in the forward-looking pendant of Fig. 2 is now in the cap, reflecting the unstated meaning of this circular figure back into the figure's own suggestive shape.

Mrs. Lamont's stories are typically circular-figured throughout 40 to 80% of their length. In "Pheasant and Raven," however, this kind of figuration is much more sparse, possibly a result of the influence of the giant figure of the plot parallelism. In place of the circular figures whose presence audiences familiar with her work might predict, Mrs. Lamont employs among other strategies the rhythmic repetition of a single word, s?ušəbābdx^w, in the course of which she establishes a specific new meaning for it in this story. Based on the root ?ušəb, meaning "pity," s?ušəbābdx^w is defined in the Lushootseed Dictionary as "pitiful," "poor" or "unfortunate," with an extension into "humble." (It is also used as an endearment, but this use does not, so far as I can see, occur in this story.)

In its strategic occurrences in "Pheasant and Raven," s?ušəbābdx^w seems to have always the meaning of lacking help, until after the turning point for Pheasant, when it now means "having received help." Four examples will demonstrate this very clearly.

Example 1. When he meets the hunters and they tell him, "Call your dogs" (the dogs being in fact theirs), Pheasant says, "x^wi? k^wi g^wədsq^wəbay?. s?ušəbābdx^w čəd. [I don't have any dogs. I am s?ušəbābdx^w.]" Whatever else it may mean here, s?ušəbābdx^w at one level means "without hunting dogs," and possibly by extension without the knowledge to handle them, for Pheasant does not attempt

to interact with the dogs.

Example 2. When the hunters ask him if the elk lying at his feet belongs to him, Pheasant says, "x^wi? k^wi g^wədsx^wi?x^wi?. s[?]ušəbābdx^w čəd. [I don't have any game (-- or possibly "I don't go hunting," or perhaps both meanings at once.) I am s[?]ušəbābdx^w.]" Here s[?]ušəbābdx^w means without game and possibly by extension not successful at hunting.

Example 3. When the hunters have given Pheasant the pack full of elk meat to carry, they tell him they will make it light for him. He says, "huy čələp ɬuk^wax^wadubšəx^w [Then you really will have helped me]," because the hunters still have to train him before he is able to carry the pack. Mrs. Lamont begins her description of the training this way: ʔuɬ^wəx^w ti?ə? s[?]ušəbābdx^w s^gwələub, g^wəl ləg^wədil [Now s[?]ušəbābdx^w Pheasant started off, and as he went, he kept sitting down]. s[?]ušəbābdx^w here describes someone who needs help to be able to receive the help he came seeking.

Example 4. As Pheasant starts for home, he thanks the hunters: huy ʔig^witəbəx^w ʔə ti?ə? s^gwələub ti?ə? s[?]uʔubədi?. huy, ʔibəšəx^w ti?ə? s[?]ušəbābdx^w ʔuɬiltəb. čəd k^wi s[?]ibəšs. [Then Pheasant thanked the hunters. Now he started off on foot, this s[?]ušəbābdx^w who had been given food. Where would his walking take him?] s[?]ušəbābdx^w here now means one who has been able to receive help.

Examples 3 and 4 frame the part of the story in which Pheasant is trained to carry the pack and to conduct himself ritually. It is interesting to note that Pheasant as he learns to carry the pack needs periodically to be "stood up" by the hunters, perhaps as the workers stand new dancers up after they are given something to "carry." Pheasant begins as a seeker and becomes a finder, changes from one whose thanks are for future aid to one whose thanks are for what he has under control. ʔibəšəx^w, "started off on foot," continues and develops the spiritual valence of its previous occurrence in Pheasant's parting speech to his wife (Fig. 2), and this is underscored by the obvious reference to the cap of that figure (ʔi, ʔibəšəx^w dx^wčəd) in čəd k^wi s[?]ibəšs [Where would his walking take him?], which is otherwise puzzling, since we know he is going home.

In the course of his misadventures, Raven is never spoken of as s[?]ušəbābdx^w. Indeed at the point in his adventure that mirrors Pheasant's "x^wi? k^wi g^wədsx^wi?x^wi?. s[?]ušəbābdx^w čəd. [I don't have any game. I am s[?]ušəbābdx^w]," Raven is saying to the hunters that the elk is indeed his:

ʔi, ds^gw^a?

huy čəd s[?]uməni?

s[?]uməni? čən.

diɬ čəx^wəsbəčəlq ʔə ti?it.

Yes, it's mine.

For I am a hunter.

A hunter am I.

That's how come I could bring down that game.

It is possible to regard this as a little circular figure if you count the repeated possessives in ds^gw^a? (mine) and čəx^wəsbəčəlq (my way of bringing down game) as enough to establish a circumference. The hysteron-proteron of the core is evident. This is Raven's only figured speech, and it shares formal features with the two speeches in which Pheasant characterizes his own situation (Figures 2 and 3). Raven gives this speech twice, the second time being at the point when his story mirrors the part of Pheasant's story in which Pheasant is saying to the hunters: "Xastag^wəx^w ti?it dbibədbəda?. cick^wəx^w s[?]ušəbābdx^w əlg^wə? i? tsi?it dčəg^was. hawu čət ʔəstəɬil. [My little brood is always hungry. My wife and they are very s[?]ušəbābdx^w. We are living without resources.]" As the story begins, s[?]ušəbābdx^w is played out in opposition to s[?]uʔubədi? (accomplished hunter), and as the story ends, s[?]ušəbābdx^w is placed in a different kind of opposition to s[?]uməni? (Raven's pronunciation of and performance of "hunter").

In her use of circular figures that echo one another and in her calculated iterations of s[?]ušəbābdx^w, Mrs. Lamont gives cohesiveness to a pair of parallel plot lines whose distance from each other in terms of valency she has in fact increased by the use of these very strategies. Her telling of "Pheasant and Raven" is one of the most surprising performances of predictable material in Lushootseed tradition. Some of the qualities of her storytelling are transferrable by the medium of translation; but others, as I hope I have demonstrated, require the medium of commentary.

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