

**Four Upper Skagit Versions of "Starchild"**  
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Because Vi Hilbert's collection of Lushootseed stories, Huboo (privately printed, 1980), offers for several of its storytellers more than one story and for several of the stories more than one version, it offers also a temptation for the reader. Huboo's four versions of "Starchild" are especially inviting: can one read comparatively and evolve some notion of the poetics of Lushootseed narrative?

Three of the versions are told by women and among them there is substantial agreement as to the plot. Long ago, two women spending the night in the open were kidnapped by two stars and taken up to the sky. One woman escapes back to earth and has a little star son, who is in turn kidnapped by some women from the North or East. While the mother is washing her son's diaper, a new little Diaper Boy appears. The two boys grow up separated from each other, but in the course of time are reunited. The Starchild helps out his little brother and mother, who have been having a hard time, and he gets a wife from among the people his mother has been staying with. The two brothers then become the sun and moon. This summary of the story includes only elements which are common to all three versions, but it bears little resemblance to any one of them. Variation among the three is a matter of whether elements are elaborated or merely adumbrated, whether the focus is on cosmology or scandal, whether the supernatural power in an episode resides within a character or comes from outside, and in the way the actions are motivated. The longest of these versions of "Starchild," Susan Sampson Peter's, is twenty-four typed pages long and contains twenty-three episodes. The other two are approximately nine pages each, but Dora Solomon's contains twenty-one episodes, while Lucy Williams' contains nineteen.

The version told by a male narrator, Harry Moses, is interesting in that it leaves out the kidnapping of the woman by the stars and only begins with the earthly kidnapping of the little boy. This story concentrates on the two brothers' finding each other and then making themselves into the sun and moon. It is four pages

long and contains twelve episodes.

Mrs. Williams' and Mr. Moses' versions were tape recorded by Leon Metcalf in Lushootseed during the 1950's; Mrs. Solomon's was recorded in Lushootseed by Vi Hilbert in 1976. All of these have been transcribed and translated by Mrs. Hilbert and are available in Huboo. Mrs. Williams' version was collected by Sally Snyder in English during the 1950's and is also to be found in Huboo. Due to limitations of space, I will be quoting from all of these only in English.

The stories vary not only in how many episodes they contain, but also in the narrative techniques they employ.

As the longest version, Susan Sampson Peter's "Starchild" in its multiplicity and elaboration might be seen to need more unifying devices than any of the other versions, and indeed Mrs. Peter does employ great variety.

On the level of narrative technique, we find her using interlace, parallelism and the rhythmic repetition of figures. While all of the narrators use some degree of interlace in telling how the two brothers gradually work their way toward a reunion, most of the versions are content with a four-part pattern. Mrs. Peter's, however, is seven elements long, the second and fourth parts, concerning Starchild, being split into two, and information about the other brother interleaved. In all of the women's versions there are two "marriages" and two disobeyings of orders, but only Mrs. Peter handles these pairs as parallels. For example, as soon as the kidnapped woman is told not to dig roots, she says to herself, "Now why have we been told not to do that?" And her disobedience is given impetus by the view she has of her home from her vantage point in the sky. Later, when Starchild is told not to follow game in a certain direction, he says, "Now why do they tell me not to chase game over that way?" And his disobedience is given impetus by the view he has of inhabited territory from the top of a hill. In Mrs. Peter's story, the first disobedience sets in train all the misfortunes that happen to the woman and her children, while the second one sets in train the events that will make everything all right again. The parallel details invite us to see the whole scenes as parallel and to think about their relation to each other. The rhythmic repetition of figures is unique to Mrs. Peter's version. Clean and dirty faces, dung, smoke, the

that they are about to make "what will be for the coming generation," and they use the ashes from the wedding feast. Mrs. Peter's wedding feast also ends with plans for the future, as an old lady (probably Frog's mother) asks the brothers, "What will the coming people do for light?" The lack of narrative bridge here in Lucy Williams' story seems to signal the lack of an underlying concept.

Harry Moses' "Diaper Boy" as it appears in Vi Hilbert's collection is very short, leaving out all the episodes in which the interest centers on women characters--the kidnapping by the stars, the woman's attempts to fend for herself in the forest, and the contest during which Frog becomes Starchild's wife. The day that this story was recorded, Mr. Moses commented that his wife was sick, and he was short of time. But another version of "Diaper Boy" by Mr. Moses has been collected by Sally Snyder, and, while it is somewhat more detailed, it leaves out the same episodes. We may assume, then, that for Mr. Moses the story is essentially one focussing on the two brothers. His story ends with the episode of the creation of the sun and moon. Despite the fact that the concept of the brothers' returning to their patrimony in the sky is unavailable to him because he has left out the facts of their paternity, he succeeds in integrating the sun and moon into his story far better than does Lucy Williams, who does retain the star husband theme. In Mr. Moses' version, Diaper Boy and his mother have been enslaved by Raven. After Starchild sets them free, Diaper Boy becomes a man of importance, and this status enables him to do something about the fact that the world at that time was a very cold place.

The problem of establishing the status of the two boys who become the sun and moon exists with special difficulty for Mr. Moses, but even in those stories which retain Starchild's genealogy, there remains the task of narrating their hardships on earth without disqualifying them from their later roles as supernaturals. A closer look at the way the women storytellers have handled the interlace section and the material dealing with Frog will make this clearer.

I have been discussing the narratives in terms of episodes because it seems to me that discussions in terms of functions, narremes or acts do not give sufficient weight to the distinction between summary and dramatic narration. This distinction, a concept from literary criticism, was given its definitive

formulation by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction*, and because of the light it sheds on the mechanics of story construction, I think it is worth considering in terms of oral narrative as well as of the novel. Summary narration is that part of a story which tells how time passes; dramatic narration is that part of a story which gives a blow-by-blow account of what happens. Time passes quickly in summary narration--a decade may go by in a sentence. It slows down to something like real time in dramatic narration. In the work of a storyteller like Susan Sampson Peter, who dramatizes her summaries, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two forms of narration; further, Lushootseed storytellers use their characters' direct speech in summary passages far more frequently than do narrators in European tradition. Looking at all four versions of "Starchild" together makes the distinctions clearer, since a given episode tends to be summary or dramatic in all four. Summary episodes function as bridges between dramatic episodes.

The longest bridge section in the story is the one which brings the two brothers together again. The problem at this point is to narrate two summaries at once. The sequence is this: (A) Diaper Boy and his mother move away from the place where Starchild has been kidnapped; (B) Diaper Boy gets big enough to be entrusted with getting the wood supply; (C) Starchild gets big enough to become a hunter but is prohibited from following his game in a certain direction; (D) Diaper Boy sings his song as he gets wood; and (E) the elk leads Starchild to his singing brother. We see that there is one segment for each brother telling how he grew and one segment for each defining his role in the recognition scene.

Mrs. Peter and Mrs. Solomon handle this transition narrative in ways we can consider typical of them: for Mrs. Peter, elaboration, as she seizes upon the parallelism of the basic pattern and multiplies it in a structure of interlace seven elements long (A, C, B, C, E, D, E); for Mrs. Solomon, economy, in this instance as elsewhere in her work realized by a telescoping of the time sequence and combining two elements into one (A, B and D, C, E). Mrs. Peter ornaments the summary with dramatic interludes. Her Starchild does not just become a hunter, he sees "someone with big eyes" in the forest and shoots it--a squirrel; next, it is "someone with long ears," and then "someone with bugged-out eyes"; although these occurrences are played out like mini-dramas, complete with dialogue, they function as summary because their chief task is to convey the

passage of time. Mrs. Solomon, on the other hand, shows her concern for the interpenetration of spirit time and real time by displaying the coexistence of layers of future and present: "This Diaper Child grew fast the way the sun rises, because this Diaper Child is the sun"--indeed, he becomes an adult in just a few days. Both Mrs. Peter and Mrs. Solomon have Diaper Child sing his song about his lost brother in segment D. In Mrs. Peter's version there is a suggestion that the song, taught to Diaper Child by his mother, has the power to draw the brothers together, just as an earlier song of hers proved powerful when she was wringing out a diaper. Mrs. Solomon frames her narrative of Starchild's elk hunt with references to the song. (That is why segments B and D are combined in her version.) I suspect this instance of framing is another example of her anticipating the movement of the plot by stating the goal toward which it is moving before she tells how it gets there, and she is showing Diaper Child surrounded by his future.

Mrs. Williams and Mr. Moses both leave out segment B, and they both also leave the song out of C and D. This means that for them the supernatural aspects of Diaper Boy's identity and his status in the story are reduced. Mrs. Williams' Diaper Boy cries as he gathers wood, "I'm poor now, but I wasn't so poor when I had a brother," and she continues to refer to him as a little boy. He continues his lament: "I'm too weak to get wood, that's why I cry." A little later he says, "I'm just from a diaper of my kidnapped brother. I'm not real." Mrs. Williams seems to have lost sight of the fact that the little wrung-out particle must be as real as the sun. As we shall see, this difficulty shows up again near the end of her version. Diaper Boy's physical weakness and his "unreality" also appear in Harry Moses' and, in addition, his Starchild is treated in the story as an ordinary mortal until Diaper Boy sees him shining. It is interesting to note that the two versions which diminish the brothers' status during this bridge section also leave out the later episode in which the brothers name and/or create aspects of the world as we know it.

Different as these four versions of "Starchild" are, they all contain something about Raven and Frog. Raven may be a major character, as in Mrs. Peter's version, or an amusing ornament, as in Lucy Williams'; Frog's story may be a major structural element, as in Mrs. Peter's version, or an afterthought, as in Harry Moses': what is interesting is that no one leaves them out altogether. I suspect that this means that Raven

and Frog must have played structural roles in "Starchild" as it was handed down, and that, further, remembering their roles was a way for the storytellers to keep the story straight.

In those versions which include a full treatment of Frog, we see that she figures in four consecutive episodes. She is mentioned as a good candidate when Starchild says, just before the brothers arrive home, that he is looking for a wife (A); the homecoming episode (B) is the one in which Frog wins the contest (Ba) and then acts as hostess at a feast (Bb), and the feast is followed by the episode in which Frog travels to the sky (C). Structurally, the material about Frog serves as a bridge between the part of the story which takes place on earth and its ending, which takes place in the sky. Mrs. Peter emphasizes this fact thematically as well: Frog's decorum prefigures the new orderliness of the realm of sun and moon; her journey to the sky recapitulates and redeems the earlier journey of the boys' mother. The sequence A-B-C is a unit unbroken by intervening material. This can be seen very clearly in Dora Solomon's version, in which the brothers' travels on earth precede their becoming the sun and moon. Mrs. Solomon completes the narrative pattern in the episode directly following the feast, even though this is not the "right" episode. . At the feast, Starchild is already being referred to as Moon by Mrs. Solomon, though Diaper Child is still Diaper Child. "Moon spoke to his brother: 'This woman who packed the animal will be what you see marked on my face.'" This becomes not only the end of Frog's story, but the first of Starchild's acts in creating the world.

What happens when segment B of the Frog pattern is not treated as bridge material, when its dramatic elaboration of the contest supersedes, instead of ornamenting, its summary feast? Lucy Williams' version shows us: her episode B consists of the contest only, there is no feast; segment C has become structurally detachable, though the final part of the Frog pattern is still visible in the sentences which close the whole story. It is possible that we are seeing here the beginning of a process by which the sun and moon episode will be left out of Lucy Williams' version or a version descended from it--simply because the brige to it has disappeared first.

Raven is present in all four versions, and the interplay between the summary and dramatic functions of his story is fascinating. The only element common to

all four versions is that Raven is the first to notice something different about Diaper Boy after the brothers have been reunited. In Lucy Williams' and Dora Solomon's stories, Raven does not enslave anybody, and both storytellers preface his noticing Diaper Boy's shining face with the remark that Raven was living at Diaper Boy's house. This is all Lucy Williams has to say about him, and in her story he remains an aside. Dora Solomon goes on to tell how garrulous and greedy Raven is, and how Moon silences him by feeding him a bone he chokes on. In this way, though he is never the persecutor of people that he is for Susan Sampson Peter, Mrs. Solomon's Raven still represents disorder. It is interesting too that in both Mrs. Peter's and Mrs. Solomon's stories Raven makes his first appearance in the same episode (the one in which Diaper Boy starts to grow up, A of the interlace section) and disappears in the same episode. Is it possible that in some common ancestor to both versions, Raven material served to frame and connect the narrative from the time Diaper Boy begins to grow up until the time he is ready to become the sun? For in Mrs. Peter's version, that is exactly what he does, and he is present in both summary and dramatic modes. Raven and Frog are foils for one another, their territories in the stories slightly overlapping, their sphere of activity the bridge between misfortune and fortune, earthly fortune and heavenly. In Harry Moses' version, Raven is mentioned as having enslaved Diaper Boy and his mother in segment B of the interlace section. This is close enough to what Mrs. Peter and Mrs. Solomon do to count as corroborative.

So far I have been talking about the storytellers as though they were to a large extent autonomous authors, making their own decisions about what to include and what point of view to take. This has been a matter of rhetorical convenience. I think it is probably impossible to distinguish individual contributions by present storytellers from what they received as the story, which probably contained individual contributions and surface commentary by still other storytellers.

At the end of "The Swinomish Flood" Dora Solomon remarks, "This was *gi'əg'was*'s story, this," and goes on to add, "She says the people there had dykes before the flood." We can see that Mrs. Solomon felt free to leave out *gi'əg'was*'s dykes while still considering herself to be telling the story *gi'əg'was* gave her. As current teller, Mrs. Solomon stands at a little distance from the story, glossing words that the

passage of time has rendered obsolete, identifying place names for an audience no longer familiar with the ancestral countryside, and explaining old methods of doing things. This sort of storytelling activity I see as being on the surface: Mrs. Solomon does not remake *gi'əg'was*'s story to the extent either of leaving out the obscure material or of integrating her own glosses into the story. I suspect that *gi'əg'was*'s information about the dykes was her own surface addition and that may be why Mrs. Solomon deals freely with it. This activity on the surface of the story, indicative of the storyteller's critical distance from the material as she received it,--a stance she may be forced into either by the passage of time or by her own opinions--does not occur with uniform frequency in all the versions of the "Starchild" story we have been considering. Harry Moses' story is for all intents virtually free of it. In Susan Sampson Peter's version the surface activity is frequent, has a variety we do not find in the others, and is sometimes integrated so closely into the purposes of the story--characterization, development of theme and scene depiction--that we cannot really call it surface any more.

We have no way of knowing how quickly social and technological change took place in aboriginal times or whether aboriginal storytellers habitually dealt with information rendered "historical" by such change. My guess about Mrs. Peter's treatment of such information is that it is traditional: where historical information is elaborated, it is done for thematic or pictorial reasons; where historical information is not provided, this is because in this instance the reason for providing it is only historical. If her Starchild kills an elk, for example, she does not let him leave the scene until he has properly butchered it, thrown away the entrails, hung it up and disposed of the tallow. There are several factors that make it clear, however, that this information is not included for history's sake. For one thing, the scene in which Starchild kills the elk is divided into two parts by interlace (this is the part of the story in which Mrs. Peter is telling about both boys at once), and in both parts the statement that Starchild has killed an elk is followed by a description of how he treats the carcass. The information about what to do after you kill game may very well be repeated because it is part of a formulaic way of handling a game-killing scene or because Mrs. Peter wants to reinforce the presentation of Starchild as a well-trained, reverent person.

I suspect that the inclusion of historical information is a surface feature very much under the control of the individual storyteller, because while all of them except Harry Moses include some historical facts, they each include different ones: the historical background of cradleboards and cedarbark diapers, hot rocks and ballast, exists apart from the story and may be drawn on at random. The same is not true of topographical information: that the rope  $sx^wi^?x^wtil$  used in her descent fell into a coil that is now a certain rock near the fork of the Big Lake and Mt. Vernon roads is not a fact that exists outside the context of the "Starchild" story. Although the topographical information must be considered as belonging to the category of the received--that is, of what was handed down as a basic element in the story--it is clear that to some extent it is treated as a surface feature: Mrs. Williams and Mr. Moses include no place names at all. Mrs. Solomon includes the information about the rope rock (though not its name), and her version of the brothers' travels includes three tribal names. I do not feel that Mrs. Solomon's treatment of topographical material is brief because she considers it dispensable, however: her mode is economy, and she includes just enough facts to underline the continuity between past and present, another facet of her central theme, the interpenetration of spirit and human worlds.

As we have pointed out before, Mrs. Peter's version of the brothers' travels contains a long list of place names. In the body of her narrative, too, Mrs. Peter's handling of topographical material is unique: she provides names for the place where  $sx^wi^?x^wtil$  first lived, for the river it was on, for the place to which she moved after Starchild was stolen, for Raven's village and for the place where Diaper Boy was sent to gather wood; she locates the hill from which Starchild saw the smoke and gives us some idea how high it was, and she gives the direction in which he ran to find his brother. For her the story takes place in a landscape, a triangle of territory formed by the Nookachamps River on the southwest, Clear Lake on the east and that part of the Skagit River between Sedro Woolley and a point a few miles south of Sterling on the north. Starchild is taken by his captors across the Skagit, to the north, while  $sx^wi^?x^wtil$  is removed by Raven to the south, upstream along the Nookachamps.

It has been remarked that it is such material, which validates the aboriginal life of a people in their aboriginal territory, tends early to disappear from

stories when the people are dispossessed of their land, because that material is no longer felt to be relevant to the concerns of the community (Dell Hymes, "In Vain I tried to Tell You," p. 133). It is interesting to note that neither Mrs. Peter nor Mrs. Solomon still lived in her ancestral Upper Skagit home; they both lived on the salt water. Both identified with their new communities, Mrs. Peter becoming Swinomish tribal historian and Mrs. Solomon speaking Lummi instead of Skagit as her language of primary use. In fact, the storytellers who continued to live upriver on the Skagit--Mrs. Williams at Concrete and Mr. Moses at Marblemount--tell versions which are largely free of validating material--totally free of it in the topographic sense. I think we must see that Mrs. Peter and Mrs. Solomon regarded this information as essential to the story, even if it were not of interest to a community. And as they strove to keep the story alive, their commitment to the validating material may even have been quickened by the fact of their exile.