

Creativity with Tradition:

Susan Sampson Peter at Raven's Feast

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In the third volume of the recently edited Walker papers--Lakota Myth--the editor, Elaine Jahner, remarks: "Scholars working with American Indian materials have tended to stress the communal and traditional aspects of oral literatures and to neglect the role of the individual artist who shaped the tale to meet the needs of a particular situation. Fortunately," she goes on, "more and more scholars are balancing the emphasis on the social function of narrative with careful consideration of the narrator's creativity and reasons for transmitting traditional material" (Walker 1983:12-13). Most interesting to note here is Jahner's implicit definition of "particular situation" not as the logistics of a given storytelling event, but rather as the storyteller's reasons for transmitting traditional material. The narrator's personal relationship to the story takes its place as part of the matrix in which a particular narration takes form.

There is a good reason why this critical emphasis should emerge in a work dealing with the stories in the Walker collection. These exceptional narratives have driven everyone who has studied them into making some sort of attempt to account for their high quality and unique characteristics: Jahner's explanation adduces the fervor of the storytellers--all holy men who had lived through Wounded Knee and the demoralization that followed. Out of these difficult times came a literary revival, underlain by the reassessment of tradition that goes on during periods of great change and given impetus by the sympathetic interest of Walker and by the decision of the few remaining members of the Buffalo Society to work with him.

A. I. Hallowell, considering the fact that the northern Ojibwa hold all their stories to be true, concluded that "consequently there is no art of imaginative fiction in this society, and no incentive to its creation" (Hallowell 1947:547). The narratives in the Walker collection demonstrate that, on the contrary, the holding of stories as true does not block the fictive imagination. The Buffalo Society was no band of renegade

storytellers, but a group of elders specially charged with upholding certain traditions. They consulted with each other and assembled the body of their stories and teachings in the form in which they wanted them passed on to the coming generations. It should be clear that when I speak of the unique or individual shaping of a traditional story I do not mean innovation. It seems, in fact, that the more committed to tradition a storyteller is, the greater the likelihood that his or her stories will bear a personal stamp, though they can in no way be regarded as invented.

In Skagit County there was no one incident as devastating to Indian morale as Wounded Knee was at Pine Ridge, nor, to my knowledge, did a group of elders ever come together to assemble a canon of Skagit literature. Yet in the long years during which the traditional Skagit way of life was curtailed and their territory lost, there was, it seems, literary revival. This happened for people personally, as individuals, and it was for the most part unvalidated. One thinks of Andrew Joe--not Skagit, but living in the area--convinced that he alone really understood the tradition, whose lengthy and fervent stories told to collectors earned criticisms from many sides. And one remembers Susan Sampson Peter, who for years lacking any audience, kept her stories alive by telling them aloud to herself.

In her isolation, she continued to make a home for what she had been given. When she told "Starchild" and several other stories to Leon Metcalf in the early 1950's, she was in her mid-eighties. She had been blind for some time and felt that this made her dependent on other people. She was living with her family in a house in Tacoma and missed conversing with other women her own age. Though she spoke English, she was never comfortable with it. To talk about important things she always used Lushootseed, which her grandchildren neither spoke nor understood. Her remarkable skills in weaving, basketry and oratory, the healing powers and spiritual knowledge which had come to her both as an Indian doctor (dax'da'ab) and a Shaker, her special training in Skagit history and geography--the very abundance of her gifts must have increased for her a sense of the distance between the house in Tacoma and the land where her home was; though it is true that by 1950 there no longer existed a community in which she could have taken the place she knew to be hers as a highly gifted and well-trained upperclass Skagit elder.

There are characteristics of Mrs. Peter's storytelling which I think owe something to the circumstances of her old age and more particularly to attempts to find a setting for concerns which could scarcely even be enunciated in terms of her daily life.

For example, her concern with blindness shows itself I think in the

way she treats sightedness as a moral quality. Mrs. Peter is not the only storyteller to use this metaphor, but the degree to which she employs it is extraordinary, leading us to wonder whether her own blindness was not somehow connected for her with a moral lack. Both June Collins (1974:194) and Vi Hilbert (1981-82) tell of Indian doctors who regarded the blindness that came on them in later life as a punishment for past misuse of their powers. It was common in the old days for doctors to make people ill or to kill them in service of a grudge. During the last years of the nineteenth century, when Mrs. Peter was a young woman, some Skagits, in the despair and paranoia that accompanied the destruction of their way of life, turned on their own doctors and murdered them. One of Mrs. Peter's brothers was killed under such circumstances. In later years, Mrs. Peter said that for a time she had planned to use her own powers against those who had killed her brother; and at the end of her life she still spoke of feeling a need for forgiveness because of those intentions.

Whatever her personal interpretation of her blindness may have been, it is evident that in her stories Mrs. Peter used keen sight as a metaphor for enlightenment. Wisdom, as we shall see, is demonstrated by someone's recognizing the image seen with the eyes. Important recognition scenes are always prefaced with views of landscape seen from unusual angles. In the 1950's, according to Snyder (1964:17), landscape description was all but non-existent in Skagit literature. It is difficult to know whether Mrs. Peter's descriptions represent an innovative extension of the traditional sight-wisdom metaphor or whether she is preserving in her own stories an old trait, perhaps not from storytelling practice, but from her training as a historian.

Certainly we would be able to tell more about her storytelling style if we had "non-fiction" formal texts (as opposed to informal reminiscences) to compare with her stories. "It was interesting to hear Mrs. Susan Sampson Peter, a tribal historian, speak of Noo-wha-ah history as if it were yesterday. Until her death in 1961, although she was 95 and quite blind, she could still give graphic descriptions of places as she last saw them" (Sampson 1972:26). From this remark of Martin Sampson, Mrs. Peter's son, we learn that striking landscape description was a mark of her historical as well as her "fictional" style.

Another characteristic of Mrs. Peter's storytelling that must have been informed by her feelings about her own old age is the highlighting of the role of older women and--a concomitant--of the kinds of expertise they had. There has been abundant scholarly comment about the presence of powerful older female characters in Northwest Coast literature. What is unique to

Mrs. Peter's storytelling is the attention given to all old women, powerful or not, major character or not. Whether they are valued elder counsellors or just log grandmothers, they are always given dialogue and paused over in some way.

In the fifties and sixties, the status of elders in the Skagit community became diminished as participation in ancestral traditions declined. In 1952, for example, Snyder felt that spirit-dancing was a thing of the past, and she still held that view ten years later (1964:iii). Mrs. Peter did not live to see the revitalization of tradition and the resulting resurgence of prestige for elders that took place in the seventies. Legitimation of elder status occurs when the community calls on its older members to share their knowledge of how things have always been done. But it seems that for Mrs. Peter at the end of her life, her condition as elder was lived out in the absence of a community which needed her. Her sense of value as an elder must have come to rest on foundations relatively private.

If the community-based aspect of elder status may be defined as an expert relationship with the past that enables elders to promote order in the future, then the past-future dynamic disappears when the old person lives in isolation. In some way, Mrs. Peter managed to act out her elderhood by putting into her stories not only a certain tenderness for the capabilities and frailties of old women, but also the ethical and technological information she could not pass on to younger people. The stories themselves took the place of the community--and the past, where the information came from, and the future, where it ought to have gone, coalesced into one transcendent temporal concept, both source and goal of values. Mrs. Peter's niece, Vi Hilbert, interprets her aunt's continued rehearsing of the stories "when she had no reason to expect anyone was ever going to listen again" as the carrying out of a duty (1981-82). In light of this interpretation, Snyder's remark (1964:16) that details of hunting, butchering and the preparation of food are included in Skagit stories only to delay the action and increase suspense--while undoubtedly true of some storytellers--does not seem an adequate explanation of what Mrs. Peter is doing.

If for Mrs. Peter at the end of her life the telling of stories was the expression of a sense of duty--let us say, part of that on-going process of "making a home for what you've got" in which every person who has obtained spirit powers is involved (Amoss 1977:138)--then to what extent do the personal concerns of blindness and old age we have been discussing actually shape any story, other than accounting for a vivid description here and the little blanket pinned around the shoulders of a log grandmother there? Do these concerns affect the meaning of the story, or only its surface? Their

chief contribution, I think, is to the formation of the persona of the narrator: while Mrs. Peter's relationship with the stories was vital and intimate--they seem to have nourished her as she nourished them--I do not think that we hear her own personal voice as narrator.

The most convenient way to assess this is through a consideration of class-consciousness, a third concern for Mrs. Peter, but--unlike blindness and old age--an issue that was important to her from childhood on. Both Collins (1950) and Amoss (1982) note in the recent past a certain unease in the Skagit community when it came to making class distinctions, the saltwater people having been wealthier, but to some extent dependent on, upriver people. The status of upriver people seems to have declined as their access to game was curtailed and as mountain goat wool ceased to be ceremonially important. I suspect that bearers of Upper Skagit identity in Mrs. Peter's lifetime, especially in the early years of this century, were conscious of being considered socially inferior by saltwater people. Up river, that stigma was no doubt held to be unjust. I suspect that a tension between Utsaladdy's notion of itself as a high class saltwater village and Mrs. Peter's estimate of herself as a better, though upriver, representative of upperclass values is what gives her story "Nobility at Utsaladdy" part of its ironic suggestiveness. I suspect, in fact, that it is class consciousness that electrifies the surface of many of her stories. For it is true that the narrator of Mrs. Peter's stories comes across as quintessentially upperclass. The vitality of the narration--the role playing, the authorial asides, the powerful presence of the "background" detail--seems to stem from a boundless self-confidence and an insider's relation to the values that underlie the stories. I say "the narrator" because it seems probable to me that Mrs. Peter when she told stories used a voice from the past, the voice of someone successful at meeting the requirements of a society in which "high class" was synonymous with "capable."

When white people began settling in Skagit country, social stratification based on new sources of wealth and on access to political power delegated by whites came to the upriver people. Collins points out that there arose a need for new kinds of leaders, men who could hold their own in dealings with white people (1950:339)--men in fact like Susan Sampson Peter's grandfather, Tul-la-had-bid, and father, Dr. Bailey, who negotiated for their people both with the federal government and in local matters. At the same time, confusion arose about the sort of behavior expected from such men. Traditional, upperclass leaders cultivated a reserved manner which made it difficult for them to deal with white people, while those leaders who displayed "the loud, aggressive behavior regarded as typical of lowerclass

persons, which they used to good advantage in dealing with whites, were disparaged at times for this evidence of improper breeding" (Collins 1950: 341). Mrs. Peter's family, despite its position in the forefront of change as a provider of intermediaries with the white people, was at the same time very conservative. The valency of old values must have been debated within this family circle as it was within few others.

The family, for example, was Catholic, yet it took extraordinary measures to keep the old religion alive, training three children in Mrs. Peter's generation--herself and two brothers--to be Indian doctors. This training for girls was uncommon; a segment of the community, it seems, regarded it as extremely uncommon for a girl in her teens (Snyder 1964:209; 216ff.): the family must have heard adverse comment in the community. Yet Mrs. Peter became not only a doctor, but a respected one, her upperclass status conferring on her the freedom to transcend the limitations usually placed on young women. At the end of her life, we still hear this freedom in the timbre of her narrator's voice.

Since Mrs. Peter grew up in a milieu in which the old values were compared with the new and then consciously re-chosen, she must have begun for herself as a young woman the process of reassessing her culture. Thus, as I have said, I do not think that any detail about traditional etiquette, food preparation, dress or technology appears in her stories without a thematic burden. I think, too, that for Mrs. Peter the information itself came to have a significance we must call religious. The ultimate concern of Skagit religion is access to the supernatural. The vehicle for gaining that access was for Mrs. Peter being a member of her particular family-- or, to put it more generally, upperclass status. If one has chosen to take an obsolete etiquette (obsolete in that it is not effective in dealing with the new dominant culture) as a paradigm of that religiously-charged status, then stories in which the etiquette of the past is still acted out become in a new way religious texts. Pamela Amoss suggests that "it is the idea of an aboriginal past and access to spirit power as it used to be" that takes the place of the myth age in the thought of contemporary people (Amoss 1982). The past has become a transcendent resource, accessible to prayer. I think that Mrs. Peter had gone through this process in her own relationship to the past decades before it began to happen in the community at large.

It will be noticed that the areas of concern which I have been discussing--blindness, old age and class status--overlap: blindness is associated with old age, which is associated with possessing wisdom, which is a quality particularly available to upperclass people. I have also suggested that there is probably religious content in each area. The result for our

consideration of a particular story is this: we may identify these concerns as they operate at the surface level (we may say that Mrs. Peter emphasizes the roles of old women, that she uses class distinctions to make fun of villains, and that she includes an unusual amount of visual detail), but at the same time we must recognize that their conceptual freight gives them a function at the thematic level as well. And as we follow the concepts deeper into a story, it is not always possible to tell where Mrs. Peter's personal connection to the subject merges with the meanings society has provided, or where her personal control of a symbol yields to a function that it had in the story long before she was born.

In every story we may distinguish two kinds of narration--the set piece or dramatic scene, in which characters interact with each other--and the bridge or summary passage, in which time passes, people travel, events are summarized, and whose function is to link the dramatic scenes. Bridge passages are more important in long stories than in short ones, because the more set pieces there are, the greater the need for tying them together, both narratively and thematically. The set piece is the story element least likely to change beneath its surface: it may be abridged or elaborated, but whatever action is supposed to take place must take place. The bridge passages, which express the relationship of the set pieces to each other, are more susceptible to individual reshaping.

I would like to look in some detail at a highly unusual bridge passage from Mrs. Peter's "Starchild." It is unusual because it is a dramatic scene, the feast Raven gives when Starchild is reunited with his mother, which also functions as a bridge, linking the adventures of the brothers on earth with their later careers in the sky world. In her narration of this scene, Mrs. Peter brings into play her concerns with blindness, female old age and class distinctions. Because in its function as bridge the scene gathers together meanings from both halves of the story and operates both reflexly and proleptically, there is in it a particularly rich interplay between surface and theme.

"Starchild" is basically the story of two brothers who become the sun and the moon, though in Mrs. Peter's version the role of the boys' mother is of equal importance with those of her sons. The story begins when two sisters, surprized by nightfall, sleep out in the open. They joke about marrying stars and in the morning awake to find themselves in the sky world, married. The elder sister is unhappy with her husband and escapes back to earth, where she bears a son, Starchild. He is kidnapped, but as the woman is rinsing his diaper a new little boy, Diaper Child, appears. Raven captures and enslaves the woman and her new son, but in time the two boys are

reunited, meeting each other in the woods. When Diaper Child brings his brother home to see their mother, Raven gives a feast. This feast scene is the culmination of a long bridging process designed to convey the passage of time while the boys grow up and gradually work their way toward their meeting.

In Skagit society, one way of marking the assumption of adult status for a boy was the giving of a potlatch to validate the acquisition of spirit power. I have been speaking of the party at which Raven feeds his people the elk that Starchild has brought as a "feast," but it may be regarded as a potlatch-by-analogy. The feast occurs at the same time as two events usually signalized by a potlatch: a marriage and the validation of spirit power. On the other hand, no gifts are given, no speeches made, no guests invited. It seems to me that rather than giving a detailed description of a potlatch, Mrs. Peter is suggesting certain features of it, bringing into play certain expectations about the occasion and relying on the way her story does or does not fulfill these expectations to provide the narrative with thematic richness. For instance, though not a religious ritual, a potlatch was nonetheless a display of the religious strength of the host, for without spirit help he could not gather sufficient surplus goods to provide a feast or give gifts. However, this feast does not demonstrate Raven's spiritual strength: both the occasions it marks and the means for marking them belong not to the nominal host, but to his slaves.

A potlatch marks the end of a maturation process of which a spirit quest forms a part. Since the feast scene is analogous to a potlatch, we may be justified in asking whether the bridging narrative of which it is the culmination also contains an analogue of the spirit quest. Because Starchild is a half-supernatural being, he may be regarded as the spirit helper of his brother. Certainly, what he does for his brother is what spirit helpers do for the people who obtain them: develop their self-confidence, increase their competence at necessary skills and give them a sign--usually a power song and its dance--of their connection with the spirit world. Secondary results of these gifts are increased status in the community and success in life.

When Starchild comes upon his brother, Diaper Child is bemoaning his slave status, his lack of relatives and his incompleteness as a human being:

hə? ʔi hə? ʔi hə? ʔi
tuʔikʷtub kʷəʔ kʷi tudsqə?
ʔə kʷi səsaliʔ sʔəʔadəyʔ, dəbəʔ tulqixʷ
čəd gʷəʔ ti spicikʷ ʔə tsi kʷuyəʔ
ʔəshuyutəb čəd studəq ʔə ti kəwqəs (282-286)¹

Oh woe, oh woe, oh woe. My brother was stolen, it is said, by two women from upriver. And it is also said that I'm from the wringing of my mother. I've been made a slave by Raven. (47)

Diaper Child's weeping, analogous to the distraught state of the spirit quester, expresses at once spiritual and social needs, needs the institution of the spirit quest was designed to meet. A parent sent the child out in search of a vision experience, a contact with the supernatural. Upperclass parents were able to give their children information about places where contact might be made with the most powerful spirits. This information was kept as a family secret. One purpose of the secrecy was that the family might gain or keep ascendancy over others. It may be that Diaper Child's having a brother for a spirit helper is a metaphor for the fact that upper-class people had better access to the spirit world. It is these notions about the spirit quest underlying the story here that enable Mrs. Peter to bring ironic depth to the narrative as the boy's mother converts Raven's dastardly behavior to her own upperclass purposes.

For Raven has not sent Diaper Child out in order that he may rise in the world: the job of wood collecting was typically kept for slaves. Just before Diaper Child goes on his errand, however, his mother gives him some advice. The juxtaposition of ideas in her speech as well as Mrs. Peter's choice of words here indicate that something secret is going on:

di?k'w i s'uq'u'citi ti?ə? sp'icik'w ?ə tsi?ə? sk'uys
 "ʔu luk'əx'w k'w'ada? k'w(i)adse'x'studeq, ?aləx'w ?u ti?ə?
 se'x'studeq k'w i čacas'ux'w, luk'əx'w x'u?alə? stub
 l'uxa(h)əb čəx'w ?ə k'w i ?əscut ?ə ti?ə? ?al k'w'adi? adəx'usəkap"
 (263-265)

Diaper Child's mother advised him. "Oh, I guess your dear relative must be older now. It is not probable that he would still be a child. I suppose by now he is a grown man. You will cry with these words while you are burning down a fir tree: . . ." (46)

What is the relationship between "I suppose by now he is a grown man" and "You will cry with these words . . .," sentences which are juxtaposed in the mother's speech? In what way is "Oh, I guess your dear relative must be older now" really advice? Why does his mother use the term "studeq" (slave) to refer to Starchild? I suspect that the mother here is giving her son the equivalent of the secret advice (x'w'dik'w) that is given to upperclass children going questing; that the implied relation between Starchild's adult status and Diaper Child's lack of status is that Starchild can help; and that the song is to be a means of bringing him to his brother. The woman

refers to Starchild as adse'x'studeq, literally "your person who exists for the purpose of being a slave," though figuratively a term of endearment. The pun is another signal of the secret meaning of her advice: Diaper Child's "slave" is really a half-supernatural being, the noblest class of person, and Diaper Child himself is about to take his rightful place in his true family. The secret (upperclass) nature of the communication between mother and son is re-emphasized in their conversation later after Diaper Child has met his brother and takes his mother aside to tell her about it. Raven flaps around in a parody of the orphan or slave youth who must get his advice by eavesdropping, trying to guess what the boy and his mother are saying, and being fobbed off with false explanations.

Diaper Child's experience with wood collecting, then, is not what Raven has intended. The smoke rising from the scene of the boy's labors is not, as Raven would interpret it, a sign of the worker's slave status, but a way of communicating with the spirit world; and the burning of the fir tree, carried on while singing the song, becomes the ritual the boy's mother means it to be. It is by emphasizing the mother's role here that Mrs. Peter underlines the analogy between the recognition scene and the vision encounter. In no other version of Starchild that I know does the mother teach the song to her son.

With his brother's help, Diaper Child is able to gather wood faster; he becomes stronger and more mature. In his new-found self-confidence he even becomes an advisor to Starchild and eventually does a better job of being the sun than his brother. The visible sign of his power at this stage of the story is that his appearance is so changed that no one recognizes him. At the potlatch which follows the successful spirit quest, the young man takes his rightful place in the community. Diaper Child's community, however, is in disorder, because its leading citizen is plebeian and its upperclass people are slaves. The metaphor for this disorder is that when Diaper Child emerges in his true colors there is no one capable of recognizing him, a point emphasized by Mrs. Peter:

g'w'a'g'w'etub k'w i sp'icik'w, x'w i'əx'w g'w'essux'w'təš
 x'w i'əx'w g'w'essux'w'təš ti?ə? sp'icik'w (440-441)

Diaper Child is spoken to but no one recognizes him.
 No one recognizes Diaper Child. (53)

At one level, of course, the boy's mother merits her place in the disorder because she has offended a supernatural being, her Star husband. But on the other hand, it is not proper that Starchild's mother and brother be slaves. The entrance of Starchild into the village is the beginning of the

restoration of order, an order disrupted not by Raven's act of capture, but by the woman's irreverent looking up into the sky at the beginning of the story.

While Starchild is the standard-bearer of order, it is by women that the ideal is translated into action (manners) at the community level. The lack of social training of almost everyone in Raven's village is signalled by their improper behavior in relation to food. Raven is grotesquely greedy: he will not share food (and sharing food is the signal activity of the upper-class person), and he eats anything, even feces. His relative, Mouse, unable to carry the elk carcass up from the canoe, begins to gnaw it (in the vicinity of its anus) as it lies. The young men in their eagerness are making roasting sticks before the elk is even prepared for cooking--and provoking sarcastic remarks from the narrator for doing so. Raven's greediness is the common property of Northwest Coast storytellers; the other details seem to be unique to Mrs. Peter as they occur in this scene. In contrast to the other people at Raven's village, Starchild and Diaper Child are both careful to see that their mother gets the choice tallow--they keep none for themselves. But again, it is Mrs. Peter's highlighting the role of an older woman--and again by quoting her words of advice to her child--that points up the true meaning of the scene.

Little Green Frog is getting ready to try and lift the elk and so to qualify to become Starchild's bride. Her mother advises her (x^Widig^Wid) first about her demeanor: she is to speak last; and then about food: it belongs to the invited guests; she is just to serve them. It is noteworthy that the advice does not contain instructions about to pick up an elk carcass; the implication is that being upperclass, with access to upper-class instruction in manners, is all you need.

Furthermore, this advice is given in relation to a proper potlatch, not this one: there are no invited guests here--just whoever happened to be around. Gradually the focus of the narrative shifts from Raven and his rowdy relatives and the disorder they represent to the elders and the re-establishment of order. (In fact, Starchild and Diaper Child are later called "elders" by Mrs. Peter.) Raven's last big scene is played against the backdrop of the proper behavior of Little Green Frog and her mother. While he, the host, gulps all the tallow he can get, Frog and her mother feed the elders. As Raven flies out of the story, one of the elders (a woman) brings the feast scene to an end by enquiring about future order: "What will the coming people use for light?"

I think we may say with confidence that in this scene Mrs. Peter's choice of words, the order of her sentences, her use of repetition and her selection of detail all highlight the roles of class-distinction and of

female old age as a vehicle of class values. A concern with class-distinction is of course already latent in the sub-plot of an upperclass woman's enslavement by Raven. Many storytellers are content to leave it latent, and in such versions a rise in social status is not part of the story, and certainly cannot be a metaphor for personal rehabilitation and the establishment of order, as it is in Mrs. Peter's. The contest to see who can lift the elk and become the bride of Starchild is an essentially "empty" pattern whose slots may be filled according to whatever quality one wishes to extol; in Mrs. Peter's case, good manners are the key to success--manners, of course being the signal of access to secret information. The story of someone who goes into the woods and comes out changed is probably almost always the story of a spirit encounter: the analogy with the spirit quest only arises when the narrator has the person prepare for his trip into the woods, as Diaper Child does when he receives privileged instruction from his mother. Though I am proposing for Mrs. Peter a fairly active role in shaping the Starchild story that she tells, I do not think she added very much that was not already implied. I suspect that in telling a story over and over one becomes more and more aware of latent possibilities in it, and probably this is especially true if one tells it over and over to oneself, without the constraints of performance.

Mrs. Peter's use of visual imagery and visual themes to call attention to the meaning of a scene also makes use of detail latent in the story. In the recognition scene in the woods, Starchild sees the smoke from Diaper Child's burning tree and approaches his brother, keeping the tree between them so Diaper Child cannot see him. Even when they are talking together, Diaper Child is blinded by his tears (dx^Wtug^Wus, 295) and hiding his face in his hands, so he cannot see, as Mrs. Peter emphasizes. It is worth noting that in this version the source of his not being able to see is his own emotional state, not the overwhelming brightness of the Starchild, as in many other versions. When Starchild is sure the young man is his brother, he brushes his face, and suddenly Diaper Child is able to look at his shining brother and to feel joy. Diaper Child's vision encounter, then, is an encounter with vision, with becoming able to see: he can look at a supernatural being and he can see his relatedness to it. He is made happy because he knows himself.

The relation between sight and insight is underlined in Diaper Child's words to his mother:

ʷudxʷtašusc, tɔdsɛxʷšudxʷ (tiʷiɫ dɛxʷšudxʷ) haɫ
ʷaciɫtalbixʷ (331)

He then brushed my face. That made it possible for me

to see that he was a nice (lit.: good) person. (49)

The meaning of the seeing conferred by Starchild's brushing is elaborated further in two parallel passages. During the encounter itself, Mrs. Peter says :

hiwisax^w ti'a^o su'suq^wa's g^wel dx^wtašused, tašed (307)

Starchild approached his younger brother and brushed him, brushed him. (48)

And at the beginning of the feast scene, in which Diaper Child is to demonstrate his adult status, Mrs. Peter comments:

ʔu, ʔuluxillex^w ti spičik^w, huy, ʔutašetabax^w ʔe ti'a^o sqa's. (373)

Diaper Child has now grown up. His older brother has brushed him so. (50)

The equation of being able to see with being grown up is made by the repetition of the word "brushed." Bearing this in mind helps us to understand another passage, which Mrs. Peter also highlights by repetition of the same word. Starchild has just arrived at Raven's village:

g^wediličed tsi'a^o sk^wuys g^wel dx^wtašused, tašed. (383)

He sat by his mother and brushed her face, brushed her. (51)

The boys' mother, of course, has had her own vision problems.

At the beginning of the story, she camped out with her sister and, looking up, joked about becoming the wife of a star. Stars, it seems, are too important for such jokes: in the morning the sisters are star wives. When she sees him close up, the woman finds her aged husband repulsive. But in a speech which bears the unmistakable cadence of Mrs. Peter's narrator's voice, the star husband says:

u^oexidex^w ti'il adex^wdzilic, g^wel tu^wčex^w tubahiq^wabic.
adsg^wa^o adx^oč tadshiq^wabic, adsg^wa^o. (26-27)

Why do you reject me when you chose at first to admire me?
It was your own idea to desire me. Yours! (38)

The young woman has used her vision improperly, and she pays by being enslaved by Raven and periodically having her face covered (being blinded) by his feces.

One of the techniques that holds this long story together is the periodic recurrence of motifs--ascents, descents, marriages, kidnappings, acts of disobedience. As they recur, they balance each other. The woman's ascent into the sky as a captive later leads to the triumphant ascent of her sons. The disorder brought about by her act of disobedience in digging

roots begins to be rectified by Starchild's act of disobedience in chasing the elk, which leads him to his brother. The balance between complication and resolution is reflected in Mrs. Peter's diction, as well as in the plot.

After the boys' mother has been enslaved by Raven, Mrs. Peter remarks:

huy six^w tuduk^willex^w tsi'a^o tudzilid tadi^o t^oč^owa's,
huy pa^oak^oillex^w. (205)

So now the one who rejected the star way up there became a slave (lit.: worthless). (44)

The words pa^oak^o (worthless) and duk^wil (become changed) sum up the woman's loss of her proper place in the order of the world. With this authorial aside, the plot's complication phase is marked as at an end. The second part of the story, the resolution, is about to begin: ʔa g^wel sal^oi'ilex^w (206).

Later, just before Starchild is reunited with his mother, he asks his brother whether there are any marriageable women at Raven's place. Diaper Child cautions him that three out of four are pa^oak^o (364). During the bride contest, Starchild is almost swept off his feet by the vivacious Maggie, in a near replay of the improper use of vision that got his mother married to an unsuitable husband. It is Diaper Child who dissuades him: "ʔu, pa^oak^o" (415). His warnings keep Starchild, following his eyes, from making the sort of mistake that his mother made, following her eyes, and that led to her becoming pa^oak^o. When Raven finally gets his comeuppance, Mrs. Peter comments:

duk^willex^w, duk^wutabax^w ʔe ti'a^o deb^oč t^oč^owa's. (460-461)

He was changed. He was changed by the ones from the stars. (54)

The woman's having been changed by the star is now undone and transferred to the one who was used for the star's revenge. The whole sequence, then, from the woman's enslavement to her restoration into the social order can be summed up by saying that her improper seeing has been rectified by her son's learning to see and by his prevention of Starchild's improper seeing. That the later events are a rectification of earlier things gone wrong is signalled by the recurrence of the words pa^oak^o and duk^wil.

The technique of reiterating in the resolution of a story key words from its complication is not unique to Mrs. Peter. It is used, however, most often in shorter stories than "Starchild." Hagan Sam's 1963 version of "Rock and Coyote," only two pages long in transcript, balances six pairs of repeated words. I think that Mrs. Peter's use of this technique to enclose and unify a passage eleven pages long in transcript is a tour de force,

especially considering that the feast scene with which the passage ends begs to be played as a dramatic set piece complete in itself and not as bridge material.

Inescapably, the impression given by the feast scene is one of long and careful thought on the part of Mrs. Peter. Narrative of this density is not created in a few tellings. The interplay between Mrs. Peter's consideration of the myth itself and of her thoughtful assessment of the conditions of her own life provides telling support for Gaster's contention that "what memory is to the past, and hope to the future, that is Myth to the present" (1954:212).

FOOTNOTE

1. The Lushootseed text from which quotation is made is an unpublished transcription by Vi Hilbert of the tape recording by Leon Metcalf (Reels 1 and 2, dated 12-13-50, in the Metcalf Collection, Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum). Line numbers refer to that transcription. The English translation quoted from is to be found in Mrs. Hilbert's Huboo (1980) and page numbers refer to that publication.

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