



HAL
open science

Poetic Inspiration and the Contextualization of Misunderstanding

Catharine Mason

► **To cite this version:**

Catharine Mason. Poetic Inspiration and the Contextualization of Misunderstanding. Cahiers de Littérature Orale, 2017, Le poète et l'inspiration, 81, pp.25-50. <10.4000/clo.3124>. <hal-01900591>

HAL Id: hal-01900591

<https://hal.science/hal-01900591v1>

Submitted on 30 May 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0 - Attribution - Non-commercial use - International License

Poetic Inspiration and the Contextualization of Misunderstanding

Le malentendu comme source d'inspiration

Catharine Mason



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/clo/3124>

DOI: 10.4000/clo.3124

ISSN: 2266-1816

Publisher

INALCO

Printed version

ISBN: 9782858312566

ISSN: 0396-891X

Brought to you by Université de Caen Normandie



Electronic reference

Catharine Mason, "Poetic Inspiration and the Contextualization of Misunderstanding", *Cahiers de littérature orale* [Online], 81 | 2017, Online since 24 May 2018, connection on 30 May 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/clo/3124> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/clo.3124>



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

Poetic Inspiration and the Contextualization of Misunderstanding

Catharine MASON

Université de Caen-Basse Normandie

Poetic inspiration is a highly intuitive experience of verbal interaction in which linguistic signs are perceived and experienced—by the inspiring and by the inspired—as being charged with extra-sensorial effect. This effect allows for a sort of enlightening of any one or more of the six communicative functions of Roman Jakobson's (1960) paradigm (referential, emotive, conative, metalinguistic, phatic, and/or poetic). Much like falling in love, it gives rise to a powerful energy that seems to be confined to private recesses—whether these be material spaces or sheerly of the mind—shared by the poet and her or his admirer. One might also refer to the differentiated inner experience of the individual artist and the inspired heart as, alone, capable of attesting to the original-most compositional intentions and effects inspired by the poetic message. If we look closer, however, at the verbal artistry involved in processes of inspiring and being inspired, we will discover a chorus of voices that anchor the poetic text in interpersonal and historical realities.

I would conjecture that any successful working relationship between an ethnographer and performer is fueled, at least partially, by poetic inspiration. The ethnographer is motivated by heartfelt admiration of some aspect of the performer's artistry, while the artist is stirred to performance when she or he senses the ethnographer's appreciation of her or his work. The processes of inspiration—enhancement of semiotic representation and interpretation evoking or evoked by sentiments of admiration, trust, and respect—are grounded in representations that each party has of the other; of their messages; of the context of their work; of the topics and images that are put forth; of the language being used; and of the poetry that emerges. One might think that strong accord or consistency between the representations constructed by the individual participants of the communicative event is necessary for a successful performance to emerge

in an ethnographical context. This paper will show, however, a context of performance ethnography that results in a very well performed and meaningful narration/narrative in response to ethnographical misunderstanding.

In what follows, I will seek to show that Clackamas Chinook performer Victoria Howard contextualized¹ a personal/family narrative as a response to linguist Melville Jacobs's failure to grasp the far-reaching semiosis of the native myths and traditions that she had been exposing to him. In my analysis, Howard interpellates her associate metaphorically into the role of novice with regard to Clackamas culture and language. She addresses Jacobs's skepticism of native beliefs and spiritual practices, not as a form of contradiction or argumentation, but as a means of pointing to the limits of their cross-cultural attempt to study and expose discursive coherence in Clackamas oral literature.² I will attempt to show that "I and my older sister-cousin" emerges as a *breakthrough into performance*³ in response to a dialectical tension between the ethnographical associates that had been building throughout the sessions.

Reconstructing the Howard-Jacobs recording sessions: context and contextualization

In the summer of 1929, a young PhD graduate of linguistics knocked on the door of an elderly woman of Clackamas Chinook/Molalla (maternal)

1. The concept of contextualization is developed in Bauman and Briggs (1990) to account for the way in which a discourse emerges in context: "In order to avoid reifying 'the context' it is necessary to study the textual details that illuminate the manner in which participants are collectively constructing the world around them. On the other hand, attempts to identify the meaning of texts, performances, or entire genres in terms of purely symbolic, context-free content disregard the multiplicity of indexical connections that enable verbal art to transform, not simply reflect, social life" (p. 69).

2. In one of his earlier notebooks, Jacobs writes, "Note that Mrs. H. believes all this" with regard to a story about a man whose daughter dies due to her father's rattlesnake spirit-power (JACOBS, 1929b, 85/53, p. 72). This and other similar notes concern Howard's beliefs in supernatural forces. Such beliefs were beginning to dissipate among Grand Ronde communities, and it would have been an important matter for an ethnographer to ascertain the convictions of a native associate. Nevertheless, Jacobs's questioning of supernatural beliefs would have also proven inhibiting, and possibly annoying, to Howard, raised by a traditional Grand Ronde elder, who had been a respected shaman in the Clackamas village and later at Grand Ronde. Given that Howard was a very modern woman by Euro-American standards, having left Grand Ronde to work near Oregon City and speaking fluent English, Jacobs may have found it difficult to consolidate having supernatural beliefs and grasping the aims of linguistic science.

3. For a description of the Hymesian notion of "breakthrough into performance," see HYMES, 1981, pp. 79-86.

and Tualatin (paternal) heritage, living with her husband and granddaughters in West Linn, Oregon.⁴ The prolific recording sessions that were to take place beyond that door have been the source of locally renewed indigenous traditions, ethnohistorical documentation, and widespread research developments in verbal art. They have also been the source of local and regional tension with regard to cultural materials as well as one more reference for a more general examination of ethnographical purpose with respect to indigenous rights.

From the time that Jacobs and Howard set to work, to the emergence of “I and my older sister-cousin,” five months will have lapsed and nearly 8 notebooks will have been filled with linguistic, cultural, and historical discourse materials. Among these materials, we find 100 spirit-power songs, 19 myths, 1 personal narrative, 2 family narratives, and 1 human interest narrative. In addition to the literary pieces, 100s of ethnographical elements describing Grand Ronde culture and life, linguistic distinctions between the various languages that Howard knew, along with biographical details about family and community members will have been poured into Jacobs’s notebooks.

Concerning the interaction between this odd pair, Howard will have been able, at the moment of narration of “I and my older sister-cousin,” to evaluate Jacobs’s progress as well as his difficulties in understanding Clackamas discourse and literary forms through their translation work. She, herself, will have become familiar with the technologies of transcription and audio recording. All of these activities and achievements will have given her ample time to evaluate both the purpose and the quality of the work in which she was engaged. She would have had the opportunity to contemplate the interpretability of Clackamas narratives and beliefs by non-natives, as well as to consider potential native audiences for her recorded materials.

There is little room for doubt that Howard saw something promising in Jacobs and the editorial apparatus that he brought along with him. In a letter to the linguist in which she inquires as to his return to Oregon City, she thanks him for sending news about his work on Molalla, adding: “I wish I was there I would learn some of the hard words.” We know from this exchange that Howard was motivated by the linguistic aspect of their work and particularly enthusiastic about the intellectual challenge of its difficulties. As one of the last speakers of Clackamas Chinook,

4. The Clackamas people originally formed a village culture in the Willamette Valley along the Clackamas River. Speaking a variety of Upper Chinookan, they lived in close association with the Chinookan peoples who inhabited both sides of the Columbia River, from the mouth to the Cascade Mountains. Signs of Chinookan civilization date back to over 15,000 years. The transcription system used in this paper is the Americanist orthography devised by the Boasian school of ethnolinguistics in the early 20th century.

and having minimal proficiency in Molalla, Howard's involvement in the linguistic enterprise that Jacobs had initiated could not have been anything less than whole-hearted.

We can also see, from the following short passage in Jacobs's introduction to *Clackamas Chinook Texts*, to what extent Howard and her family took her work seriously:

Few interruptions marred the hours spent in her home. Mr. Howard, the Howards' daughter, the latter's children, and occasional guests rarely intruded in the small quiet room where I sat writing comfortably on a Singer sewing machine, with Mrs. Howard in a rocking chair beside me (Jacobs, 1958, p. 2).

While Jacobs had inspired a productive and, I would claim, academic spirit in Howard, we also know that his admiration of her artistic skills and native communicative competence was genuine. We find the following passage inscribed in his field notebook not long before Howard's performance of "I and my older sister-cousin:"

I might note, at this point, a conviction that has been growing upon me with increasing intensity, since I commenced working with Mrs. H.; it is that here is the unsurpassably intelligent and sublimely loquacious informant. Her dictation, too, is nicely distinct, perfectly timed for the most rapid dictation, and never a moment hesitant, even in more non-ik'áni narrative (Jacobs, 1929b, 85/59, p. 2).

I am not the first to suspect that Howard judged her linguist as particularly naive with regards to his understanding of Chinookan worldview, and that she may have projected him into her narratives as a means of opening his eyes to the complexities of spirit-power beliefs and practices. My analysis should lend weight to the parallel that Hymes draws, in a 1987 study, between Jacobs and Howard on one side, and Blue Jay and his older sister on the other:

The telling itself may have had a certain note of irony. This is the first myth that Mrs. Howard told Jacobs, and it is about an older woman who says extraordinary things to a younger man, who does not reply with anything of his own, but takes what has been said always at face value and acts upon it. I cannot resist the speculation that Mrs. Howard thought it fun to begin with this story, as a way of alluding to and naming the relationship just begun between herself and the earnest young linguist (Hymes, 1987, p. 330).

It is certainly not unrealistic to imagine, given the intensity and the complexity of their ethnographical documentation, that communication between Howard and Jacobs was not always smooth or without disagreement. My reading of “I and my older sister-cousin” will show the likelihood of a running interpretive tension between the two, and that this tension ultimately became a source of inspiration for Howard’s performance of a personal narrative.

Verse Form in “I and my older sister-cousin”

“I and my older sister-cousin”⁵ is a personal/family narrative that Howard shared with Jacobs about half way through their sessions. In the top margin of the first page of his transcription, the linguist writes, “Just a little account Mrs. H. had to tell of herself;” and in note 508 of the edited and published text, we read, “Mrs. Howard pressured me to let her tell this little narrative about herself. I did not know what she was planning to dictate.” The surprise narrative depicts events that would have occurred a half century prior to its narration. Though the events would have hardly occurred in the Myth Era of Chinookan literature, Howard recounts them using stylistic elements common to myth tellings: high frequency of the remote past tense prefix, *ga-*; high frequency of the rhetorical suffix *-x̄*; formal segment markers; elaborate patterns of movement in space (travelling); and younger/smarter character relations.

Howard’s narrative also contains casual elements. Two of the more prominent ones are a frequent use of a two-part version < go – arrive > of the classic three-part formula < go – going – arriving >, and the narrative’s abrupt ending. The use of first person narration by the narrator is also a clear indicator that this performance is not a myth and would certainly have been striking to the Clackamas ear amidst the mythical rhetoric. It is quite likely that Jacobs, himself, found the style of “I and my sister-cousin” awkward.

I will attempt to show below that the coexistence of these two generic forms is representative of the distinction made in Chinookan worldview, and in the narrative itself, between the sacred and the profane. This distinction may be projected onto the interactional meta-text portraying the artist and the scientist—Victoria Howard and Melville Jacobs—, marking a distinction that I will

5. Throughout my interpretive analysis, I will refer to the performer as “Howard” and to the first person representation of herself as “Victoria.” I have modified the title from its original in *Clackamas Chinook Texts* by adding “cousin.” In Clackamas, cousins are referred to as sisters. My modification is for purposes of clarification only.

identify, generally, as mythical thinking and scientific thinking, practiced by the two respectively. Neither of these distinctions will prove impermeable, however, just as the formal combination of myth and personal narrative makes clear.

Parts	Sub-parts	Stanza	Lines	Total lines	Action
prologue			1-7	7	The cousins arrive in the mountains and set up camp. The older cousin (Āaxšni) declares that they will go pick berries the following day. The younger cousin (Victoria) agrees. Another fire is seen in the distance.
A	1	a	8-13	6	Āaxšni announces that she will not give her horse water, rather will let her get it on her own. (The younger cousin says nothing.)
A	(1)	b	14-18	5	Victoria hears her horse neighing and is concerned for Āaxšni's horse. She calls out to her cousin who doesn't hear her.
A	(1)	c	19-27	9	Victoria discovers Āaxšni's horse dead. She tries again to call out to her but in vain. Another woman tells her that she is "way down below."
B	1	a	28-36	8	Victoria goes to Āaxšni and informs her that her horse is dead.
B	(1)	b	37-49	13	Victoria and Āaxšni go to see the dead horse. Āaxšni asks what they are to do and Victoria proposes that they share the one remaining horse.

B	(1)	c	50-56	7	Āāšni rejects the plan and tells her cousin to take the horse alone, return her things to her daughter, and tell her that she will be on in the night.
B	2	a	57-60	4	Victoria waits for Āāšni along the descent. Āāšni is following her with a cane.
B	(2)	b	61-74	14	Victoria waits again and notices that Āāšni's face is red and that she is carrying a little pack on her back. Āāšni commands that she go on, pointing out that it is already evening.
B	(2)	c	75-85	11	Victoria waits again and notices that Āāšni is panting. Worried that she is exhausted, she proposes that Āāšni ride her horse. Āāšni blurts out one last command for her to get on her way, pointing out that night is falling.
C	1	a	86-95	10	Victoria leaves her cousin and takes her things to her daughter, who asks where her mother is. She tells the daughter that the mother will be along shortly.
Epilogue			96-97	2	Victoria returns to her own home.

Table 1 displays an outline of the verse form that my analysis has attributed to Howard's narrative. Verse analysis seeks to tie together the various discursive segments into a coherent whole by accounting for elements that are manipulated for stylistic effect. We will see that "I and my older sister-cousin" is rich in parallels that highlight important signifiers.

The narrative progresses in three main parts. Part A establishes the setting of a berry-picking trip, the neighing of only one of the two horses, discovery of the death of one horse, and the disappearance of ǰaxšni, Victoria's older cousin by twenty years. Suspicions are aroused. Part B stands out in the slowing down of narrative time with the extensive use of dialogue. Indeed, more than a third of this part is made up of conflictual verbal exchange between Victoria and ǰaxšni. It describes the decision of the older cousin to hike down the mountain as opposed to sharing the remaining horse as proposed by Victoria. It also describes detailed changes in her appearance. Part C begins with the younger woman's reluctant abandonment of her cousin, the return of the cousin's belongings to her daughter, and Victoria's return to her home.

The formal construction of this short narrative is remarkable for its symmetry and for its stylized patterning. Parts A and B relate events that may be qualified as routine and ordinary, except, perhaps, for the death of the horse. But all of the events, including the death of an animal, represent the sphere of the profane, where spirit powers and shamanistic energies are peripheral. Each of them may be explained "scientifically," and would no doubt be a part of ordinary conversation in Grand Ronde life. Part B describes, albeit implicitly, the transformation of ǰaxšni into a grizzly, and carries the narrative to a distinctly different level, namely the sacred. The description of her changes of appearance may all be attributed to the hike down the mountains: redness in the face, the carrying of a walking stick, and heavy panting. The only exception is the description of a little bag (*ičtǰwǰla*) that she is carrying on her back (ll. 67-68). However, numerous other indicators point to an extraordinary event of a high-spirited nature.

The verse profile in table 1 interprets the narrative as framed with segments that are labeled as prologue and epilogue. The events contained in these framing devices are detached from the main action while anchoring the story in Grand Ronde life and culture. The prologue serves as a background of seasonal and social harmony while the epilogue provides an ordinary ending of safely returning home. Berry-picking in the mountains is a traditional autumn activity during which Grand Ronde women, like their elders and ancestors, would set up camp in the mountains to collect berries and prepare foods for winter while the men hunted. The older cousin asserts her natural authority by stating that they will go berry-picking the following day, and the distant fire places them within a larger context of social life. These depictions of normality and social protocol serve to focus our attention on (false) appearances as dramatic action unfolds at the start of part A. ǰaxšni announces, the following day, that she will not take her horse to get water. The suspense is heightened with the neighing of only one horse, Victoria's, and the disappearance of ǰaxšni.

emphatic use of *ağa* highlights an attempt on the part of the younger traveler to take charge of the fate of her older companion.

In response, *Āxšni* rejects Victoria's plan in the first of three commands that are woven throughout this part. Victoria is to take her things to her daughter and tell her that she (*Āxšni*) will arrive in the evening. *Āxšni* is explicit and clear. She elaborates that all—*dánmaḥ*—of her things are to be transported by the younger cousin, and she employs a demonstrative—*dáwax*—to reinforce the specific time of her arrival: *this* evening. Two reflexive markers are used, the suffix, *-aḥ*, and the particle, *yaxa*, in l. 53 for emphatic effect. The expression could be translated as “I, my own self” or “as for me, I, myself.” We read:

“K'úya,” gagnulxámḥ.
 (“No,” she told me.)
 “amúya,
 (“you go on,
 “amdúkwla dánmaḥ itgákdi.
 (“you take all my things.)
 “Yaxa náyaḥ ankdáya.
 (“As for me, myself, I will hike.)
 “Anúyama dáwax wápul.
 (“I will get there this night.)
 “K'wáλqi amulxáma.”
 (“That is what you will tell her.”) (ll. 50-55)

Āxšni's formula establishes a dissonant echo with the simpler reflexive combination (“I, myself”) used by the younger cousin in her proposal to share her horse. By expanding the formula, *Āxšni* seems to be mocking her younger cousin, putting her in her place with a rephrasing of the tightly knit discourse used by Victoria. Unable to determine if this parallel carries sharp ironic tones in the Clackamas version, we understand that *Āxšni*'s orders are both categorical and firm in opposition to Victoria's plan. The elder is calculated about what she expects of her younger cousin. Her plan is to reach home in the night. However, the younger woman betrays the wishes of her older cousin, concerned for her well-being, and waits for her at several intervals.

In comparing *Āxšni*'s three commands in which she sends her cousin go on ahead of her with the horse, we observe a development that coincides with her transformation. Each of the intervals of waiting describes changes in *Āxšni*'s appearance that frighten Victoria. The changes, however, increase the concern of the younger, clear-sighted cousin for her older, impractical cousin to the extent that she risks making *Āxšni* angrier. A vicious circle of abnormal,

frightful behavior evoking fear and concern, in turn evoking increased frightful, abnormal behavior seems to enclose these events in a sort of nightmare. In her second command, the older cousin reacts:

“Néšqi aməngəmláyda.
 (“Do not wait for me.”)
 “Míya!
 (Go on!”)
 “Ağa lálax!
 (“Now hurry!”)
 “Lawíska-aq!”
 (“It is evening now!”) (ll. 70-74)

This second monologue varies from the original command in telling Victoria not to wait. It demonstrates a spontaneous, life-like response of growing impatience at being disobeyed. In this and the third of *Āxšni*’s persistent commands, the cousin’s transformation is marked by a progression in tone and style.

Gagnulxámx̄,
 (She said to me,)
 “Kúya.
 (“No.)
 “Yamuxúla míya-aq!
 (“I told you to go on!”)
 “Kwálá xábixix aliúxayaǵdixa.” (ll. 82-85)
 (“Soon night will be falling.”)

In the above, *Āxšni* has lost all patience and blurts out her final words without any of the elaborate phrasing of her first command. Her original 6-line plan is reduced to 3 lines. “No,” she protests just as before. But the more indicative form of the initial *Amúya* (“You will go on”) becomes a direct order, punctuated with an exclamative “now”: *Míya-aq* (“Go on, now!”). The repetition of her original plan to arrive in the night becomes a reproach not only of her cousin’s stalling, but also of her defying the elder’s authority.

Other Semantic, Syntactic, and Versical Parallels

Before continuing on to narratological considerations of Howard’s artistic configuration of “I and my older sister-cousin,” we will look at some of the parallels that stand out in the configuration.

“Álqi káwuxčwa atxlúkšama.”
(“*Later on tomorrow, we will go berry picking.*”)
“Álqi áxka aqlúgúmšda.”
(“*Later on, on her own, she will drink it.*”)

Āxšni makes 3 declarations in the narrative, two of which begin with *álqi*. Victoria responds favorably to her cousin’s first declaration. She remains silent, however, when the elder declares that she will not give water to her horse. This absence of response recalls the formulaic *néšqi qá nákim* (she said nothing whatsoever), a Chinookan myth pattern of reticence on the part of a younger and supposedly weaker, but smarter, member of a pair.

“Aga ga-n-i-š-čóm-l-idəm-š” (l. 14)
(“*now I heard it*”)
“Néšqi ga-(g)-a-n-š-čóm-aqwa-š” (l. 18)
(“*she did not hear me*”)

The aptitude to detect trouble from a distance is symbolized by a broken digging stick in Clackamas myth episodes. A woman will be out digging camas roots and will hurry back home if she breaks her stick. In light of this mythic reference, the parallel between ll. 14 and 18—hearing/not hearing—draws our attention to the inappropriate, or irresponsible, behavior of the older woman. Victoria responds appropriately by immediately seeking to inform her cousin while, despite her repeated calls to her cousin, the elder woman does not hear her. In the one case, the absence of sound becomes an alarm; in the second case, the absence of reception (of an alert) is troubling. This short passage informs the reader, not only of double trouble, but also that the travelling companions have been separated and that their senses are not of equal capacity.

“Lúx^wan sdúx igaxáykušix agáxyutan.” (l. 16)
(“*Maybe her horse has come untied there.*”)
“Lúx^wan tál akíxax.” (l. 79)
(“*Maybe she has become tired.*”)

We have here two instances of speculative diagnosis uttered as internal monologue. In both cases, the younger cousin is concerned with the condition of another being (her cousin's horse and then her cousin herself)⁶ and the modal particle is directly followed by an adjective particle: *sdúx* (untied) and *tál* (tired). Both instances also employ the verb *-x̄* (do, become, act). This pattern (*lúx^wan* + adjective + *-x̄*) tightens up the parallel between ll. 16 and 70, which is a considerable time lapse (a space of approximately two-thirds of the narrative) in the narrative action. In this way, speculation frames a large chunk of the narrative and serves to tie together the narrative with the narration itself.

The verb complex *ga* + (subj. pron.) + *úyḫ* occurs in 8 of the 12 stanzas that make up the narrative structure of Howard's telling. As we can see from table 2, we find 2, 5, and 1 occurrence(s) in parts A, B, and C respectively. In part A, the two women move about together; in part B, they are separated in the first two and last two instances, and are together for the third and pivotal segment of this part. In the final part, the younger traveler is again alone.

Part	Sub-part	Stanza	Line	Verb complex	Subject pronoun	Stanza position
A		a	1	Gandúyḫ	1st person dual	initial
A		b	13	Gandu· yḫ*	1st person dual	ending
B	1	a	19	Ganúyḫ	1st person sing.	initial
B	1	b	28	Ganúyḫ	1st person sing.	initial

6. *Lúx^wan* is a modal particle that is often translated by Jacobs as "maybe" or "to wonder." In the present occurrence, it would be possible to use either translation. "I wonder if her horse has come untied" and "I wonder if she has become tired."

B	2	a	37	Gandúyǵ	1st person dual	initial
B	2	b	56	Ganúyǵ	1st person sing.	ending
B	3	b	74	Ganu'·yǵ	1st person sing.	ending
C		b	87	Ganu'·yǵ	1st person sing.	initial**

* The mid-line dot in *Ganduv'·yǵ* represents vowel prolongation as indicated by Jacobs in his field notes and in his text edits. The acute accent represents stress placed on the preceding vowel.

** The verb complex *ganuv'·yǵ* in l. 87 is positioned in the second line of the initial verse of the stanza.

As early as 1958, before having access to the Clackamah corpus, Hymes documented formulaic expressions characteristic of Chinookan myths. He tells us that certain types of expressions “recur in a number of myths, whether at boundaries of myths or myth segments, or within segments (Hymes, 1958, p. 256).” Though he lists formulae that express movement on land and on water, as well as the state of rest or the act of settling somewhere, Hymes does not seem to recognize, at this stage of his life-long study of Chinookan languages and narratives, the importance of spatial movement in Chinookan narrative semantics.⁷

Temporal and Spatial Configuration in Howard’s Narrative

Frequent use of the remote tense (*ga-*) situates the action of the narrative in a time that is to be perceived, not only as completely removed from the instance of narration, but also outside of its governing order. An unusual number

7. Hymes’s documentation of Chinookan formulae and particles as markers of various levels of segmentation in narrative design provided a concrete stylistic starting point for later innovations of his method of verse analysis. One of the major advances of this method was Hymes’s discovery of the tertiary < go – go along – arrive > as a minimal verse formulae widely reflected in larger structures of < initiation – continuation – end result > in Chinookan myth narratives.

of occurrences of the rhetorical suffix *-x̄* (48 in a 97-line text) heightens the mythical feel to the extent that it is surprising that Jacobs could have remained indifferent to its quality. One set of three definite temporal particles and another of three indefinite temporal particles, respectively in parts A and B, combine to create an ambiguous organization of time. In contrast with the natural sequence of < evening – next day – evening >, which configures the action of part A, we are confronted with a time lapse, or what I interpret as an arrestation of narrative time. This lapse begins following the neighboring woman's indication as to the whereabouts of *Āxāšni*. One final marker of narrative time in part A indicates the defined moment at which Victoria hears the neighing of the one horse (in the evening).

Would this be the same evening referred to by *Āxāšni* towards the end of part B? If this is so, Victoria hears the neighing of the horse; discovers its death; searches for her cousin; meets up with a neighboring camper who directs her to her cousin; rejoins her cousin in some far off place; takes her back to see the dead horse; discusses a plan; and descends the mountain, waiting periodically for the elder cousin to reach her on foot, all in one evening. Possibly, though it seems unlikely. What's most significant, from a narratological point of view, is that there is no indication whatsoever as to how much time lapses between the neighbor's indication of *Āxāšni*'s whereabouts and the moment at which the cousins meet up again. Such an absence of narrative temporal markers is, indeed, unusual in Howard's corpus.⁸

Temporal ambiguity—same evening or different evening?—is thus marked by a distinction between narrative point of view and character point of view. The three instances of temporal marking in part B are, in effect, not expressed by the narrator, but by a character. As such, we refer to this as meta-time. The first and third of these are proleptic references to the coming of the night, while the second punctuates the moment of her utterance, "It is already evening." Time is differentiated by a narrative break in which the narrator no longer explicitly specifies time of action; temporal organization in part B is thus qualified as indefinite with respect to narrative time. The ambiguity develops not in the differentiation between narrative time and meta-time, but in the relationship between the two. If they are the same, the narrator controls the narrative semantic through the character. If different, the character takes over narrative authority. Poetic use of ambiguity allows for both interpretations as dialectically meaningful.

8. It might be of necessity to state that Howard's expertise in narrative configuration precludes accidental ambiguity in temporal organization.

We have followed the cousins in logical chronology to the end of part A where a third woman informs Victoria that *Āaxšni* may be found “far off down below.” We will now turn to spatial configuration as it reinforces the textual divide between A and B at this point. The neighbor’s spatial designation is expressed by a combination of two particles—*yaxi gig^wlix*—in which *yaxi* measures the distance (far off, way over there) between the geographical situation, *gig^wlix* (down below) of the speech event, and the place where *Āaxšni* may be found. We will see how the particle, *gig^wlix*, serves as a spatial pivot upon which the heretofore profane activities will give way to mysterious behavior and uncertainty with regard to interpreting that behavior. It also marks a radical split in spatial point of view between the two cousins.

In a corpus review of Howard’s uses of *gig^wlix*, we find that all of the 8 occurrences detected qualify a spatial plane that is below another. Active conflict between actors situated on the separate planes develops in all of its narrative instances. More specifically, an antagonism in which one agent threatens another is to be expected with the use of this particle. Curiously, there is no consistency in the below/above positions with regard to who is threatened and who is threatening. Indeed, a threat may come from below or from above. What is important for our current study is that *gig^wlix* provides an explicit marker of danger that, when combined with the omen of the death of the horse, the conflict of authority, temporal ambiguity, and formulaic configuration, clearly places “I and my older sister-cousin” in the category of high drama.

Combination of these temporal and spatial tropes serves to develop the overall theme of the narrative by further distinguishing binary, coexisting realities in both empirical and spiritual reality. The ambiguity of narrative temporal perspective in part B corresponds with this radical split in spatial point of view between the two cousins. We see here a combined spatial and temporal shifting that provides semantic and narratological indice for a supernatural event. The transformation of *Āaxšni* into a grizzly is not an explicit factor of the denotational text and we, as inheritor’s of the piece, would not be able to discern the transformation without the ethnographer’s footnotes:

At each step, as the cousin hit the ground with her cane, she blew vigorously, ha. Such puffing, blowing, and steaming along frightened Mrs. Howard. The cousin must have had a grizzly power! In Mrs. Howard’s mind her relative and companion may have been on the verge of metamorphosis into a grizzly (Jacobs, 1959a, p. 657 fn. 511).

It is, moreover, clear that Jacobs, himself, was not aware of the grizzly “metamorphosis” without the explicitation of it by Howard:

Note the understatement, or avoidance of explicit statement, in Mrs. Howard’s proffered dictation. Obviously, she dictated this in order to point up the fact that her comrade could turn into a grizzly and probably did so during the scary return from the berry patch. But the thought was implicit. Mrs. Howard did not say, in so many words, that her cousin was a real grizzly for an hour or so during the journey downhill. Both the belief and Mrs. Howard’s manner of discussion of it are significant (Jacobs, 1959a, 657, fn. 512).

We can see that, at the time of publication, thirty years after their sessions, Jacobs had begun to view this narrative as a bit more than “a little account.” He also sensed that Howard was seeking to prove a point in her narrative development, namely, according to him, that *these things happen*. I agree with Jacobs that Howard consciously embedded the transformation in rhetorical devices, and that her narrative contextualizes most meaningfully in its interpellation of the linguist. I am afraid, however, that Jacobs, in his stigmatization of Howard as bearing incredulous beliefs, will have missed the more scientific point that Howard was trying to get across: knowing, or believing, cannot be reduced to making a truth call.⁹ It requires a careful examination of both the empirical evidence and the symbolic references that shape one’s perception of that evidence.

Interactional Textuality

We have looked at various features of Howard’s narrative design and considered specific elements and devices that she used to give meaning to a personal experience. I would like to turn now to what is referred to by Michael Silverstein as the *interactional text* (1998), the discursive coherence that emerges as a result

9. I must add here that Jacobs nonetheless seems to be inspired by Howard’s poetics as he adds to the ethnographical record an expressive, “ha” and the exclamative, “The cousin must have had a grizzly power!” I must also point to the syntactic ambiguity of “Obviously, she dictated this in order to point up the fact that her comrade could turn into a grizzly and probably did so during the scary return from the berry patch” in which one might, in good faith logic, read, “Obviously... she probably did so (turn into a grizzly).”

of a shared context of meaningfulness between two or more interlocutors.¹⁰ While Silverstein's 1998 analysis demonstrates interactional textuality in a conversational exchange, I will seek to adapt his model to a context of dictated performance intended for ethnographical documentation. I will propose here an interpretation of Howard's use of implicit markers of the supernatural, and consider the ways in which she will likely have consciously configured her narrative as a means of leading Jacobs to a better understanding of Clackamas worldview. More precisely, I will outline the possibility that Howard was inviting Jacobs to explore, in narrative fashion as opposed to explanation, the complexities of traditional native beliefs.

Several traits of character and context make it feasible to draw a parallel between Jacobs and Howard, and Victoria and *Āaxšni* in a search for interactional meaning. First, and most obvious, is the age differences. Though the difference in age between Jacobs and Howard would have been superior to that between the story protagonists, the sense of that difference would have been of equal significance. Most importantly, in each of the pairs, the elder/youth statuses prove to be a part of the inter-relational roles that configure into discursive development. Table 3 exposes 6 textual/contextual parallels as they relate to profane and sacred realms in "I and my older sister-cousin" and in discussions between the artist and the ethnographer.

	Metaphysical Realm	Text	Context
1	Profane	Campsite	Howard's work room
2	Profane/ Sacred	Separation of <i>Āaxšni</i> and Victoria	Howard and Jacobs's distinctly different worldviews

10. "An interactional text, in such a view, is a structure-in-realtime of organized, segmentable, and recognizable event-units of the order of social organizational regularity, the ways that individuals of various social characteristics are 'recruited' to role-relations in various institutionalized ways, and consequentially, through semiotic behavior, reinforce, contend with, and transform their actual and potential inhabitation of such roles" (Silverstein, 1998, p. 268).

3	Sacred	Āaxšni's transformation	Howard's performance of sacred materials
4	Profane	Victoria's fear/lack of knowing	Jacobs's skepticism
5	Sacred	Āaxšni's back pack	Hidden meanings
6	Profane	Victoria carries worldly belongings to Āaxšni's daughter	Jacobs carries transcribed discourse to future generations
7	Sacred/ Profane	Community	Closed doors

Earlier we considered the warm orderliness of the campsite as depicted in a prologue to “I and my older sister-cousin.” This scene may be compared to the description of the quiet work room in “Mrs. H’s” home as described in Jacobs’s 1958 introduction to *Clackamas Chinook Texts*, quoted earlier. In both situations, each member of the pair has a specific role to play, and things go smoothly. Both situations, likewise, contrast with a certain messiness found outside of these intimate spaces. What seems like a simple task (berry-picking, recording dictation) becomes, in fact, quite complex when opposing viewpoints come to the surface.

Parallels 2 and 3 are related in that Victoria and Jacobs remain in the world of the profane while Āaxšni and Howard, as spirit-power invested and myth recitalist respectively, travel in the obscure semiosis of sacred realms. Āaxšni is invested with grizzly power while her cousin observes; Howard reconstructs the Clackamas Myth Era while Jacobs listens and takes down the denotational text in scientific fashion.

Parallel 4 would provide, in light of this analysis, the contextual dialectic upon which Howard constructs her entire narrative: how can the linguist understand the materials that he is collecting if he does not understand the beliefs that are tied up with them? And how can Howard make Āaxšni’s transformation explicit if she did not actually witness it? As discussed earlier, the dialectic of truth and appearance runs through Howard’s narrative. If my interpretation holds,

Howard would have been seeking to open Jacobs's eyes to the complexities of spirit-power beliefs and practices, not as a means of convincing him, but as a means of guiding him to a deeper understanding of Clackamas semiotics.

In addition to Hymes's speculation of a parallel between Jacobs and Blue Jay, a third example of Howard seeming to question Jacobs's ability to interpret her works may be found in an unusual epilogue added to the performance of a Kitsimani myth. The message, constructed in the form of a metanarrative told by the protagonist in very awkward Clackamas, contradicts, in three short lines, the events as they unfold in the body of the myth (see Mason, 1999, pp. 402-405; Mason, 2004).

Parallels 5 and 6 displayed in table 3 involve, as with 2 and 3, cross-referential meaning. Just as Āaxšni entrusts her worldly belongings with her younger cousin, the Clackamas grandmother entrusts profane-like performances of her oral tradition with the linguist. In this parallel, the little bag that Āaxšni is carrying on her back represents the more profound meaning of "I and my older sister-cousin" and, more generally, of the myths and spirit-songs performed by Howard. Such meaning, I would say, is not only a matter of semiotic decryption but of community participation. The participation of family and community members in shamanistic healing and spirit dances was essential to the success of ritual performances. The voice of the woman in the mountains would, in light of this, serve to fulfil this requirement, while the absence of family and guests from the work room would detach the myth-tellings from the sacred realm.

I am convinced that Howard did not witness, or claim to witness a literal transformation or "metamorphosis" of her cousin into a grizzly, and that the absence of concrete manifestation of such an event explains, *literally*, why she does not explicitly point to one. She did, of course, suspect that Āaxšni had had a spirit-power encounter of some sort, and the profound and transforming effects of this encounter are alluded to in her descriptions of Āaxšni's hike down the mountain as a central part of the narrative semantic. It also seems improbable that the lack of explicit reference to transformation issues would stem from a wish to mystify complex cultural references after having revealed a plethora of details about spirit practices and beliefs over weeks of documentation.

The idea or image of a woman turning into a grizzly also seems to me a gross simplification, lacking in understanding of the role of spirit-powers in Clackamas life. As opposed to a Dr Jekyll-and-Mr Hyde-type personality disorder, an encounter with a spirit-power, as I understand it, is the investment of a human by a power, usually an animal spirit, for purposes of guiding her or him in life. It is a major inner struggle for the invested to adapt to the new power and to the risks of harboring a heretofore alien force. Such an investment involves a complex

psychic state that is usually part of a ritualized search, in which case the invested is, inasmuch as possible, somewhat prepared for what is to come. It may also occur spontaneously in a chance encounter with a particular spirit-power, which is probably what occurred with *Āaxšni*. Spirit-power investment is a highly personal experience, and it was commonplace at Grand Ronde, though not always, for people to refrain from disclosing the experience of acquiring a power, or even the identity of the power that has come to inhabit them.

Needless to say, spirit-power possession also has social implications and an example of this is found in “I and my sister-cousin.” Howard would naturally have been concerned about her cousin’s welfare in the midst of a chance encounter with a grizzly power. Jacobs was aware of these facts of social and spiritual life, but nevertheless seemed to ignore the deeper implications of this personal narrative.¹¹ And, despite his impression that Howard constructed the narrative as a means of getting him to see that *Āaxšni* had become a grizzly, the interactional implications of Howard’s narrative seem to have escaped him altogether. I would venture to say that interpretive tension between the ethnographical associates was at play in his unwitting refusal to take this narrative seriously.

Support for such speculation is found in a previous entry to Jacobs’s field notebook. Soon before the narration of “I and my older sister-cousin,” Howard told a story about her uncle, Moses Allen, who had encountered a part-horse/part-snake creature during a hunting trip. Allen had recounted this event as the only hunting incident in which he had been frightened.¹² Other anecdotes and references to Howard’s maternal uncle describe a powerful Molalla hunter, who, like his parents, upheld native traditions with fervor and authority. It is possible that Howard saw in Jacobs’s reaction to this narrative, an opening for broaching the topic of Clackamas references and

11. The following note, taken down by Jacobs prior to Howard’s narration of her cousin’s grizzly adventure, confirms that Jacobs would have been conscious of the exceptional strength of grizzly power as well as the risks of being invested by such a power: “Grizzly claws were strung along a buckskin string, on an inch to two inches from another, and worn around the neck, by both sexes, if they had a grizzly power they did this; you don’t wear such a thing ‘for nothing, for fun;’ when they see you with it they know you have a grizzly power. It would be bad to wear it if you did not have such a power; if you wore it a grizzly power might come to you, and you would sicken and die if you were not strong enough to use it; your other power is not as strong as grizzly power” (JACOBS, 1929b, 85/58, p. 24).

12. The two narratives have significant parallels, both occurring in the context of a camping trip for gathering foods and highlighting the element of fear with respect to supernatural powers.

metaphysical visions. Given Howard's sense of humor and her expertise in manipulating narrative structures, she is likely to have seized up the occasion of gaining his respect with her Molalla uncle's experience to challenge his perception of spirit-powers.

We also find support for the intertextuality of misunderstanding as presented here in an admission by Jacobs himself of his naiveté: "Years ago, my Clackamas Chinook informant, Victoria Howard, who died in 1930, dictated in the native language and then translated a short myth which at the time seemed to me dull, possessed of slight meaning, and bleakly ritualistic—a kind of abracadabra."

Conclusion

Interactional textuality, as was suggested at the outset of this paper, is not confined to an enclosed encounter between two interlocutors. It is founded in a dialogical formality that links texts to previous texts, and voices to previous voices (see Bakhtin, 1981). We have seen how the personal narrative of Howard's Molalla uncle participates in the dialogical emergence of a personal account of a similar type of event. We have also seen how the neighboring camper symbolizes cultural knowledge necessary to full understanding and appreciation of the events of the story, and of their formal organization through speech. These plurivocal contours are more than textual integers that serve in a mathematical equation. They are the "role-inhabitances," to use Silverstein's terminology, that anchor a performance in social and historical life.

One of the controversies surrounding the achieved body of literature known by its published title, *Clackamas Chinook Texts* is the individual parceling of an essentially plurivocal tradition. Much like the parceling of community lands that resulted in the selling of tribal properties to non-Indians, the ethnographical interview resulting in the recording of tribal intangible cultural heritage poses a threat to indigenous traditions. Though this matter is of a universal kind, indigenous peoples do not have the same history or traditions concerning the use of their materials. In the case of the Howard-Jacobs corpus, the recital of myths outside of the sacred winter season, designated by strict custom for their formal tellings, marks a severe breaking of taboo. The performance of the spirit power songs of others is also viewed as impermissible. Howard was no doubt highly conscious of these taboos as she placed her faith in ethnography as a means of preserving traditional myth forms that she knew would die with her otherwise. The dialectical interpretive tensions between herself and Jacobs thus constitute the *entailed social situation* that reflects the *presupposed social situation* of Silverstein's model of culture in discursive practice.

The personalization of traditional oral literature is indeed a distortion of the deepest meanings and purposes of a cultural and historical achievement. “I and my sister-cousin” is just one example of how Howard seeks to adapt a chorus of cultural and historical voices to a context of post-colonial loss and grievance, interpellating her academic associate into “the role of a clever, foresightful traveler, able to respond efficiently to problems, and considerate of her companion” (see above) in full knowledge of his *abracadabristic* interpretation focusing on referential and emotive functions. Though the denotational textuality of her traditional narratives resemble those of her grandmother and of other narrators having performed in traditional contexts, the contours of the interactional text—interpellation, dialectical tension, parallelism, etc.—are inspired, shall we say contextualized, by the immediate task of performance ethnography in which a grandmother of mixed native heritage attempts to guide a young Euro-American admirer, equipped with the technology of his day, through the semiosis of her literary heritage. What we have seen here is the way in which the artist inscribed the limits of Western science to grasp the full implicature of Clackamas literature.

Bibliographie

- BAKHTIN, Mikhael, 1981, *The Dialogic Imagination by M. M. Bakhtin edited by Michael Holquist*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- BAUMAN, Richard & BRIGGS, Charles L., 1990, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 19, pp. 59-88.
- DYK, Walter, 1933, *A Grammar of Wishram*, thèse de doctorat, Yale University.
- FRENCH, David, 1958, “Cultural Matrices of Chinookan Non-Casual Language”, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, vol. 24, no 4, (Oct.), pp. 258-263.
- GENETTE, Gérard, 1972, *Figures III*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- HYMES, Dell, 1958, “Linguistic Features Peculiar to Chinookan Myths”, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, vol. XXIV, no 4, October, pp. 22-47.
- HYMES, Dell, 1981, *In Vain I Tried to Tell You*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

HYMES, Dell, 1983, "Victoria Howard's 'Gitskux and his Older Brother': A Clackamas Chinook Myth", in Brian SWANN (ed.), *Smoothing the Ground, Essays on Native American Oral Literature*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

HYMES, Dell, 1987, "A Theory of Irony and a Chinookan Pattern of Verbal Exchange", Jef VERSCHUREN and Marcella BERTUCCELLI-PAPI (eds.), *Selected papers from the 1985 International Pragmatics Conference (Pragmatics and Beyond Companion Series)*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

HYMES, Dell, 2003, *Now I know Only So Far, Essays in Ethnopoetics*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska.

JACOBS, Melville, 1929a. *Field Notebooks (Languages), Northwest Oregon Music Notes, Texts and Translations to Sound Recordings*, 14501-14548, 85/50, Melville Jacobs Collections, Special Collections, Seattle: University of Washington.

JACOBS, Melville, 1929b, *Field Notebooks (Languages), Chinook (Clackamas)*, 85/52-54, 85/55-60, Melville Jacobs Collections, Special Collections, Seattle: University of Washington.

JACOBS, Melville, 1958, *Clackamas Chinook Texts*, vol. 1. Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics, Publications 8, *International Journal of American Linguistics* 24 (1), pt. 2, Bloomington : Indiana University.

JACOBS, Melville, 1959a, *Clackamas Chinook Texts*, vol. 2. Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics, Publication 11, *International Journal of American Linguistics* 25 (2), pt. 2, Bloomington: Indiana University.

JACOBS, Melville, 1959b, *The Content and Style of an Oral Literature: Clackamas Chinook Myths and Tales*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

JACOBS, Melville, 1960, *The People are Coming Soon: Analyses of Clackamas Chinook Myths and Tales*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

JACOBS, Melville, 1966, "A Look Ahead in Oral Literature Research", *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 79, no 313 (Jul.-Sep.), pp. 413-427.

JAKOBSON, Roman, 1960, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics",
in T. A. SEBEOK, *Style in Language*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 350-377.

MASON, Catharine, 1999, *Méthodologies de l'ethnopoétique appliquées à l'art verbal de Victoria Howard*, thèse de doctorat, université de Bordeaux Michel-de-Montaigne,

MASON, Catharine, 2004, « L'ethnopoétique et l'anthropologie structurale dans un récit de Victoria Howard, Chinook Clackamas », *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, t. 90(1), p. 25-55.

OLSON, June, 2011, *Living in the Great Circle, The Grand Ronde Indian Reservation 1855-1905*, Clackamah: A. Menard Publications.

SILVERSTEIN, Michael, 1998, "The Improvisational Performance of Culture in Realtime Discursive Practice", *in* K. SAWYER (ed.), *Creativity in Performance*, Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corp., pp. 265-312.

Abstract: This paper focuses on performance ethnography in which an academically trained ethnographer produces a corpus of culturally configured verbal art in professional association with a competent performer of the culture of study. More specifically, we will consider the role of inspiration in bridging the gap(s) between cultural references and expressions that are grounded in distinctly different semiotic systems. A stylistic study of Victoria Howard's "I and my sister-cousin" (Clackamas Chinook) as told to Melville Jacobs during their ethnographical recording sessions in 1929 will highlight dialogical and contextual indices to artistic motivation inspired by the linguist's misunderstanding of spiritual beliefs and practices.

Keywords: Clackamas Chinook, Victoria Howard, Melville Jacobs, Grand Ronde, performance ethnography, poetic inspiration, verse analysis, contextualization, verbal interaction

Le malentendu comme source d'inspiration

Résumé : Cet article traite de l'ethnographie de la performance, c'est-à-dire d'une situation d'enquête dans laquelle un ethnographe recueille un corpus d'art verbal lié à une culture donnée, en association avec un exécutant compétent de la culture étudiée. Plus précisément, on considérera le rôle que joue l'inspiration pour combler le hiatus entre des références et des expressions culturelles liées à des systèmes sémiotiques différents. Une étude stylistique du récit « I and my sister-cousin » de Victoria Howard (Clackamas Chinook), livré à Melville Jacob au cours de leurs sessions de collecte en 1929, tentera de mettre au jour les indices éminemment dialogiques et contextuels d'une motivation artistique inspirée par les difficultés du linguiste à comprendre des croyances et des pratiques liées aux esprits.

Mots-clés : Clackamas Chinook, Victoria Howard, Melville Jacobs, Grand Ronde, ethnographie de la performance, inspiration poétique, analyse métrique, contextualisation, interaction verbale

Note about the author

Catharine Mason is an Associate Professor of English and Linguistics at the université de Caen-Normandie. Her work focuses on methods for creating visual representations of stylized oral discourse with the goal of advancing comparative studies of speech styles.

Catharine Mason est maître de conférences en anglais et en linguistique à l'université de Caen-Normandie. Elle conduit une étude comparée des styles de parole, en vue de laquelle elle a entrepris de mettre au point des procédés de représentation graphique du discours oral stylisé.