

Genderic and Racial Appropriation in Victoria Howard's "The Honorable Milt"

Jarold Ramsey

I

One of the major limitations of the system of structural analysis of oral narrative formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss and developed by Edmund Leach and others is that it resolutely ignores the bearing on the stories being examined of individual performances and performers working within literary conventions, seeking instead to understand the generation and evolution of myth-narratives as being, in Dell Hymes' trenchant phrase, "an imperturbable self-transmogrification" (1981:327).

The perception that, on the contrary, oral narratives (mythic and otherwise) are significantly localized, textured, and sometimes highly personalized entities is one of the chief contributions of the *ethnopoetic* movement, as it has emerged in recent years in the translative and interpretive work, chiefly on Native American oral literature, of Hymes, Dennis Tedlock, J. Barre Toelken, Joel Sherzer, and others. Looked at "emically," that is, scrupulously "from inside" the originating culture, beginning if possible with the Native language itself, and drawing on ethnographic data, many Native American texts turn out to be not "imperturbable" artifacts of a classical and fixed tribal tradition, but rather literary expressions of particular and identifiable viewpoints between and within tribal communities—on matters of gender, morality, social class, race, aesthetic preference, and so on.

On the basic issue of literary modality, for example, whereas structural analysis does not challenge the long-standing Western assumption that traditional oral narrative is a kind of *prose* (so far as it worries about such issues at all), recent ethnopoetic analysis of several Native oral repertoires indicates that, on the contrary, they constitute a *poetic* art,

involving measure according to line-units, expressive repetition, and other elements of versification. Hence to translate, present, and read such material in text-form as prose may well be a fundamental misappropriation of modes.

And in some instances—fewer, alas, than would be the case if only more Anglo fieldworkers had seen fit to identify and interrogate their “informants” as more than just linguistic or ethnological sources—it is possible to delineate and appreciate the individual literary skills, the distinctive *styles*, of Native recitalists. This is true, for example, in the texts recorded in the Pacific Northwest between the 1890’s and the 1930’s from the tellings of three gifted individuals who happened to be the last bearers of their tribes’ repertoires: Charles Cultee (Kathlamet Chinook), Clara Pearson (Nehalem Tillamook), and Victoria Howard (Clackamas Chinook).

In his ethnopoetic study of Cultee’s performance of “The Sun’s Myth” (as recorded by Franz Boas in the 1890’s in Bay Center, Washington), Dell Hymes has found compelling evidence of Cultee’s re-shaping of traditional Kathlamet material so as to formulate a personal view of his people’s apocalyptic predicament under Anglo encroachment at the end of the nineteenth century (Hymes 1975). And in my own recent work on Clara Pearson’s Tillamook stories, as told in English to Elizabeth Jacobs in the 1930’s, I have been able to identify what appear to be Mrs. Pearson’s distinctive narrative adaptations of her tribal repertory (which she learned in the Tillamook language) for Anglo understanding—specifically for reading rather than hearing (Ramsey 1990).

Further, close study of the transcribed repertoires of Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Howard reminds us that one of the crucial “local” variables capable of operating in oral tradition is *gender*—especially so where the line of story-transmission is known to have run through only one sex over several generations. Mrs. Howard told Melville Jacobs that her knowledge of Clackamas oral literature had come from her mother-in-law *wa’susgani* and her maternal grandmother *waga’yuh*, with some indication that this female lineage may have extended even further back in time (Jacobs 1959b: 120-21).

Hymes and I have both explored *en passant* what appear to be female appropriations and reconfigurations of a traditionally male-centered hero-story-type in Mrs. Howard’s “Seal and her Younger Brother Lived There.”¹

¹ Hymes 1981:274-98; Ramsey 1983:76-95.

The hero-story, widely distributed throughout the Northwest and typified by “The Revenge against the Sky People” narrative of the coastal Coos tribe, recounts the exploits of a young man in revenging the murder and decapitation of his elder brother by “the Sky People.” By means of a ladder of arrows, he ascends into the Sky Country, locates and interrogates the murderer’s wife and then kills her and puts on her skin, and then after several near-disasters (notably when a child in the murderer’s household observes that “she” looks like a man) succeeds in killing his brother’s slayer and returns to earth with the missing head—which is then reattached to the brother’s reanimated body.

This rousing story dramatizes the young hero’s ability to be both “smart” and “proper”—indeed, he is heroically successful in his proper moral mission of revenge and recovery of kin precisely because he is so “smart,” so self-controlled and resourceful in carrying out his mission. Mrs. Howard’s “Seal and her Younger Brother” in effect turns this narrative inside out, for what appear to be special women’s purposes. The young male hero is replaced by a young girl, who lives with her mother Seal and her brother, the girl’s uncle, who is head of the household. When the uncle takes a “wife,” the girl notices that the “wife” sounds like a man when urinating at night, but she is repeatedly chided for making this observation by her decorous mother: “Shush, your uncle’s wife!” When the girl is awakened one night by something dripping down on her from her uncle’s bed, she finds that it is blood—and that her uncle’s throat has been cut, apparently by the ambiguous “wife,” who has vanished. In this compelling story, as Dell Hymes was the first to point out, being “smart” and being “proper” are tragically in conflict—as the story ends, while Seal is conventionally mourning the death of the head of their household, her daughter bitterly denounces her for not paying attention: “In vain I tried to tell you!” (Hymes 1981:287ff.)

Although it is difficult to generalize about Mrs. Howard’s narratives in terms of her culture, because we have so few instances of Clackamas literature from other recitalists, there is warrant, I believe, to claim that one of the persistent cultural themes reflected in *Clackamas Chinook Texts* is the predicament of women in a time of rapid and chaotic change.² How should

² The Clackamas people were living precisely at the end of the Oregon Trail, around what became Portland and Oregon City; hence their culture had been engulfed by the 1870’s, and had vanished by the turn of the century—except for the remarkable survival of

the old ways of keeping a home and dealing with members of the opposite sex be adjusted to the new realities of Anglo life? What should older women be telling young girls—about the traditional Native values of hospitality and deference to strangers, for example; and how much of the traditions of social propriety should the young girls credit, given the disruptive pressures of acculturation? No wonder that the perplexities and anguish of older women and young girls figure so prominently in Mrs. Howard's stories, and no wonder that she (or one of her female storytelling predecessors among the Clackamas) turned the "Revenge against the Sky People" story quite inside out, replacing its point of view of the heroic disguised invader with the point of view of the "invaded" household, and specifically replacing the "smart and proper" male protagonist with the terribly conflicted young female protagonist, caught between her mother's traditional sense of propriety (which the story does not denigrate in principle), and what she comes to know experientially about the threat to her household from the sinister "wife."³

Another one of Mrs. Howard's Clackamas narratives, "The Honorable Milt! I Supposed Him for Myself," can provide us with a purer and in some ways more revealing instance of the process of appropriation in Native oral literature, and it also offers a welcome glimpse of the possibilities of humor in such appropriations. Before giving the text of the story, I should explain that its original title, as derived by Melville Jacobs from the protagonist's magical song, was "She Deceived Herself with Milt," but recent work text by Hymes makes it clear that the words of the Widow's song and hence of the title are more accurately rendered as given above (1987:323-29). Words and phrases in brackets are Jacobs' editorial interpolations for the purpose of clarification, as in cases of pronoun

Mrs. Howard's repertory. For ethnographic descriptions of the Clackamas and their Chinookan neighbors, see Jacobs 1959b:8-21 and *passim*; 1960:vii-xi; and Beckham 1977.

³ In part because of the rigidities of his psychoanalytic approach to literary interpretation, Jacobs is notably insensitive to the distinctly female perspective of much of Mrs. Howard's repertory. For a discussion of this defect in Jacobs' monumental work, see Thompson 1991.

ambiguity—which would not be problematic in oral performance in the original language.⁴

II

People were living there. They were continuously smoke-drying salmon and various things. There was one widow. They [fishermen] would come, they would come ashore there. Now she would be going about at that place. Right after they threw them [their catch of fish] ashore, she would get one or two to take with her. She smoke-dried them. [In consequence] her house was full of food. In the winter they [other villagers] would get hungry, and they would buy various things from her. That is how she had many valuables.

I do not know how long a time, and then she got one [large and fat] salmon, she butchered it well, she took out its milt. She thought, “Dear oh dear. It is nice. I shall not eat it.” She wished, “Oh that you become a person.” I do not know where she put it.

I do not know how long a time afterward, and then some person was sleeping beside her. She thought, “Oh my! I wonder where the person came from to me.” She lay there for a while. Then she thought, “Perhaps he is not from here. Perhaps the person got to here from a long distance away.” Presently as she was thinking about it, he then said to her, “What is your heart making you know [what are you thinking about]? You yourself said to me, I wish that you would become a person.” She reflected. “Oh yes,” she thought. “It just has to be that milt.” She looked at him in the morning. “Goodness. A fine-looking man, he is light of skin.” Now they remained there, I do not know how long a time they lived there.

Then some other woman began to steal him away from her. After quite some time then she [the other woman] took him away from her. She continued to live there. When she [the other woman] saw her, she would say, she would tell him, “Oh dear me. Your poor poor [former] wife! Look at her!” He would reply to her, “Leave her alone!” After quite some time then she laughed at her all the more. They [villagers] said to her [the deserted wife], “Dear oh dear. Why does your co-wife laugh and mock you all the time?” She said, “Oh let it be!”

⁴ Hymes’ work on Clackamas texts makes it clear that “The Lordly Milt” ought to be recast as measured verse. But for the purposes of this essay, with no competence in the Clackamas language, I must rely on Jacobs’s prose translation, with the title and the Widow’s song reworded by Hymes, as noted above. The text is quoted from Jacobs 1958:359-60.

Now time after time when they [the married couple] were sitting there, she [the deserted wife] passed by them [two], she [the second wife] nudged her husband, she said to him, "Look at your [former] wife! Oh dear! The poor poor woman!" He replied to her, "Leave her alone!" She laughed at her all the more. She [the deserted first wife] went along, she went back to them [the married couple], and now she danced in front of them. She said [in the words of her song]:

"The honorable Milt!
I supposed him for myself.
The honorable Milt!
I supposed him for myself."

She [the second wife] nudged him again [and again mocked his first wife by saying], "Oh dear oh dear! That poor poor wife of yours." He continued to say, "Do leave her alone." The fifth time [when she had sung the song five times], she extended her spirit-power regalia [toward the couple]. The woman [the second wife] turned and looked, only milt lay beside her. She [the second wife] arose, she went away. That first woman took the milt, she threw it at her, [saying] "This thing here is your husband!" She [the second wife] went back home, she reached her house, and there she remained, she stayed there. And that is what she continued to do.

Now I recall only that much of it.

This funny and revealing story, although unique in its details in the surviving Clackamas repertory and in the literatures of neighboring tribes, *is* relatable to several narrative patterns in Native American oral tradition.⁵ Many tribes, for example, have had stories about girls who "wish upon a star" for husbands—and wake up finding, often to their distress, that the star has come down to take up housekeeping with the wisher! Such stories, classified in Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk-Literature* under the heading "C15, Tabu: Wish for star husband realized" (1928:489), generally convey a Native conviction that wishing is no idle imaginative indulgence, but rather a powerful and potentially risky mental activity for both sexes—the psychological implication of this belief being that even if wishes do not come true, they are important as training for real-life volitions.

⁵ Jacobs' commentary on the Milt story (1960:243-47) concentrates mainly on the dynamics of Milt's spirit-power relationship with the Widow, noting the story's generic and racial perspectives only in passing.

So it seems to be in Mrs. Howard’s own Clackamas Star-husband offering, titled “The Two Stars Came to the Two Girls.” One of the girls, the elder, is rewarded with a young man, but the younger finds herself encumbered with an old man for a husband (Jacobs 1959a:468). Mrs. Howard’s rich widow in “The Honorable Milt” is no green girl, of course, and the object of her wishing is not a celestial object but the sexual fluid of a male salmon; but her story of wishing leading to complications can be seen as part of a general trans-tribal “set” or field. Presumably Mrs. Howard and her Clackamas listeners would have recognized the relationship—just as, in our own literary/cultural competence, we recognize fictional or movie “extensions” of the Cinderella story when we see them, or an analogue of *Othello*.

Another set of Clackamas stories premised on wish-fulfillment involves not heavenly bodies as objects of wishing and transformation, but—coming closer to “The Honorable Milt”—earthly items, tools, foodstuffs, and so on. Mrs. Howard offers several such narratives from Clackamas tradition—involving, interestingly enough, mostly male wishers. For example, in “Stick Drum Gambler and His Older Brother,” a solitary hunter, having cut a limber hazel branch to tie some deer meat to a tree, later says to the branch, “I wish you would become a person and keep me company.” *Voilà*—the hunter soon discovers that a male being, “Hazel Drumstick Gambler,” has come to live with him as the result of his wish, taking the role of a helpful and spiritually potent younger brother (Jacobs 1958:246-55).

A less auspicious story of wish-fulfillment in a tool or useful article is “Awl and Her Son’s Son.” A hunter breaks his awl while at home repairing his mocassins, and throws it under his bed, saying as he does, “I wish you would turn into a person.” Returning home later from a hunting trip, he finds a fire burning, and his bachelor household all spruced up. Eventually he discovers that his mysterious housekeeper is none other than “Awl,” transformed into an older woman, who claims and dotes on him as her grandson. At length five sisters notice how well the hunter is living, and one by one (eldest to youngest) they visit his house—only to be murdered by the homicidally jealous Awl, until at last she is killed by the youngest sister, who then marries the hunter (Jacobs 1958:226-40).

For a wishing story specifically involving *milt*, we must go outside the Clackamas culture, to their Sahaptin-speaking neighbors the Cowlitz, across the Columbia River in what is now Washington State. The Cowlitz

have a story, “Coyote Loses His Milt Daughters” (collected by Melville Jacobs from Joe Hunt), in which Coyote, the Trickster, finds white milt in a salmon, and wishes for it to become “something nice.” The sexual inclinations of his wish are soon manifested: two “very pretty girls” appear—and before long Coyote has them rowing him in a canoe like dutiful daughters, but true to his tricksterish nature, he commits a Freudian slip and addresses them lecherously as “my nice little girl wives”—whereupon the Milt girls, offended, run away (Jacobs 1934:139-40).

I have taken this much time to contextualize “The Honorable Milt” in Clackamas/Chinookan literary terms in order to set off its own distinctive features within a thematic “field”—in particular its patterning as a woman’s story. If most Chinook wish-fulfillment narratives focusing on objects seem to involve male wishers, “The Honorable Milt” involves a *female*, whose wish brings her a husband-of-sorts—and with a story like “Coyote Loses His Milt Daughters” in mind, it therefore appears that “The Honorable Milt” represents a generic appropriation, equivalent to the transformation of “Seal and Her Younger Brother Lived There.” But to understand the whys and wherefores of this appropriation and its full scope, we must now turn to the details of Mrs. Howard’s text.

III

First, unlike her analogues in the “Star-husband” stories, our protagonist is presented as a mature, sexually experienced, canny woman, a widow whose affluence is the result of astute trading in salmon. Further, she possesses the advantage of spirit-power, as expressed in the story’s climax, when she is able to ritually transform her errant “husband” back to milt. So her wishing on the seminal fluid of a male salmon is not idle or “innocent”; rather than eat it, or offer it for sale (both interesting alternatives!), she chooses to “wish” on it for herself, with an expectation that her wishing will be “profitable.” Although Mrs. Howard’s Clackamas phrasing for her actual wish, *ánixčwa əmg^wštilx mɣátɣax* (“Oh that you become a person”) is apparently an oral formula, appearing verbatim in every one of her stories when someone wishes for something to be humanly transformed, here the neutral “person” clearly means “male person,” and so, when the Milt-man makes his appearance, it is in the posture of a husband,

obligingly sleeping beside her.⁶

What should we make of his attractive whiteness, which seems to draw the widow’s attention initially when he is just milt, and after his metamorphosis elicits her satisfied admiration, “Goodness. A fine-looking man, he is light of skin”? Salmon-milt *is* in fact a pure milk-white, but clearly the Milt-man’s coloring figures more expressively in the story than just as a piece of ichthyological realism. For once, we can refer an interpretive question directly, emically, to a Native critical source—specifically, to an ethnographic note Mrs. Howard herself gave to Jacobs, which implicates this story. (I use a new translation of the note by Hymes [1987:322-24].)

Our house (was) near the road.
 Someone will pass by us.
 She will look at them.
 Now she will laugh and laugh,
 she will say:
 “Dear oh dear . . .
 “A light one!
 “Maybe it’s milt!”
 Now she will sing,
 this is what she will say:
 “The Honorable Milt!
 “I supposed him for myself.”

Mrs. Howard’s amusing note serves to remind us that a Native oral literature served, even as ours does, the social purposes of allusion, quotation, and embellishment of occasions, for those competent in it: in fact such competency amounts to a better illustration of the workings of what Stanley Fish has called “interpretive communities” than anything he provides in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). But for our story about the Widow, Mrs. Howard’s note indicates that Milt’s whiteness is to be understood in a *racial* context, and that the story therefore involves not only a generic appropriation, but a kind of racial appropriation as well, one reflecting with wicked humor a particular set of Contact-era tensions between Indian women and Anglo

⁶ The Clackamas phrasing for “Oh that you become a person” appears verbatim, for example, in Mrs. Howard’s “Awl and Her Son’s Son,” “Stick Drum Gambler,” and elsewhere in her repertory.

men. Jacobs notes that when Mrs. Howard got to the Widow's exultant remark about her husband's whiteness, she "bubbled with mirth," and wondered in an aside if maybe he was a "half breed" (1959a:652).

It looks as if our Widow has gotten herself, then, one of those white husbands by wishing, instead of through the troublesome and in fact often tragic cross-racial/cross-cultural alliances common in the Far West of Mrs. Howard's own early life. But her new husband's true colors (so to speak) appear as soon as he is noticed by "some other woman." If he has great sexual attractiveness to both women, in his actions between them he is revealed to be a wimp, a will-less and passive embodiment of male sexuality, the potency without the affect—a "milt-man" indeed. He allows himself to be taken away from the Widow, and when the Other Woman obnoxiously mocks her for losing him, he merely protests the insults, telling his new wife to "stop it" but doing nothing.

With Mrs. Howard's anecdote of her mother-in-law's joke in mind, it is irresistible to see Milt-man in his story as a mischievous depiction, from a Clackamas woman's perspective, of the white male as sexual object . . . attractive, but unstable, not to be depended upon and likely to be the source of much trouble, and in some ultimate cultural sense, not real. The fact that Milt-man is such a colorless actor in the story's romantic triangle—no more than a pawn, really—serves to emphasize how completely the story has appropriated its traditional male elements to become a woman's narrative. In an odd sense, in fact, it is a very grown-up and ironical version of the cautionary "Star-husband" tales. What is "cautionary" here, as the plot unfolds, is that women's sexual wish-fulfillment and romantic predation are seen to be equally risky, especially when the object of either or both is a male "white-eyes" (to use a very old but still current Indian racial epithet).

"Equally risky" and likely to be profitless—but at least the Widow, with her command of spirit-power, has the advantage over her odious rival. Apparently at first willing to give up her new husband (that she is willing perhaps indicates her knowledge of his unreality), she is at length provoked to take a most peculiar but fitting revenge. Having "wished" Milt into a kind of manhood, now she ritually un-wishes him (perhaps his disapproving remarks to his new wife earlier express not so much feckless sympathy for the Widow as fear over what she will do if provoked?), in the form of a magical song and dance in public view, repeated the requisite five times, with appropriate gestures involving spirit-power regalia—until only a pile of fish-semen remains, where there had been an attractive man.

The Widow’s deployment of her magical song represents yet another line of appropriation in the story, involving a generic switching from narrative to lyric; but such switching is a conventional feature of Clackamas and other Native literary art, typically brought into play, as it is here, at some especially dramatic moment in the story, where formal lyrical expression of emotion can briefly refract and focus action and dialogue, very much as Shakespeare’s lyrics do in the romantic comedies. In Hymes’ retranslation, the words of the song bristle with sarcasm in context—an impression that is heightened if one listens, as I have, to Jacobs’ Ediphone recording of Mrs. Howard singing the song in a separate performance.⁷ Her voice seems to descend, as she vocalizes the Clackamas words, in a kind of sarcastic sing-song suggestive of schoolyard mockery and abuse.

But of course the mockery here is “adult” and complex, beginning with the Widow’s socially conscious sneer at her quondam husband’s status as head of two households: “The Honorable Milt!” The complexity is compounded in the second line—“I supposed him for myself”—in that “suppose” seems to have a double force: (1) meaning “making-up” or conjuring into a kind of suppositious existence, mere milt into Milt-husband; and (2) meaning, with a certain rueful admission of lack of knowledge about outcomes, “I thought he was mine,” applying directly to the Widow, because she is speaking, but also of course applying to the Other Woman, who foolishly did her own “supposing”—and now stands publicly humiliated, indeed bespattered with gobbets of milt because of her “supposes.”

In an extended commentary on Mrs. Howard’s rendition of *wa’susgani*’s literary joke about white men being Milt-figures, Hymes identifies in it and in several other short texts a pattern of Chinookan humor: a two-step exchange involving a joshing insult or insinuation, and then a second statement that tops or outdoes the first by echoing it ironically. So, in the anecdote from *wa’susgani*, she first mentions the possibility that the white passerby is just milt (“Maybe it’s milt!”), and then she caps her own sly insinuation by identifying the uncomprehending victim of her humor for all Clackamas speakers listening by quoting the myth and actually performing “The Honorable Milt! / I supposed him for myself.”

⁷ The recording is in the Ethnomusicology Archives of the Melville Jacobs Collection at the University of Washington, #14542 (45), Tape 11, Band 2. I am grateful to Gary Lundell, Archival Specialist, for help in working in the collection.

What Hymes goes on to say about the effect of *wa'susgani's* "two-step invention" seems to me to identify the complex irony of the myth itself, lacking only the specifically *female* emphasis I have been laboring to illuminate here (1987:328):

The first echoic mention ["Possibly it is Milt"] demeans the white; the second entertains the possibility that the white is but a figment of Indian imagination, existing on Indian sufferance Probably there is a sense of satisfaction in being able to name the situation of the presence of a white as one encompassed by Indian tradition stretching back before whites came. Certainly there is satisfaction in being able to entertain the proposition, through quotation of myth, that whites are shameful and that a widow could both conjure them up for sexual satisfaction and dismiss them.

In applying this comment on *wa'susgani's* literary joke to her daughter-in-law's narrative itself, I would add only two related points: (a) that throughout the narrative, as in the anecdote alluding to it, a Clackamas woman's perspective seems to be all-pervasive and self-consciously "appropriative," and (b) that the Widow's song in effect "out-tops" her sarcasm at the expense of Milt and the Other Woman, by including *herself* within the range of her irony: "I supposed him for myself" (as if to say, "How could I have been so dumb!").

IV

At the outset, I argued that a serious inadequacy of Lévi-Strauss' procedure for structural analysis of oral narratives (at least for literary purposes) is its disregard of mode, texture, verbal and narrative style, and indeed the possibilities of local, "authorial" inventions and appropriations of traditional elements. But, as Hymes and others have shown, a modified form of structural analysis—using the procedure as a supplement to close reading of verbal patternings—can be profitable. It can usefully identify a given narrative's structural and thematic affiliations with other stories comprising its "set" within a tribal literature, or between tribal groups; and it can, in the very abstractness of its attention to synchronic rather than diachronic or narrative form, help to illuminate the way a given story is organized.

The latter advantage seems pertinent to "The Honorable Milt." In

what follows, I will assume that the reader is familiar with Lévi-Strauss’ brilliant, sometimes exasperating “demonstrations” of his method in the celebrated essay, “The Structural Study of Myth” (1967:207-25). Beginning with the reduction of the story to its basic narrative elements (Lévi-Strauss calls them “sentences”), we arrive at the following diachronic outline:

1. Widow notices and wishes on milt.
2. Milt-man appears.
3. Other Woman notices and desires Milt-man.
4. Other Woman steals Milt-man.
5. Other Woman mocks and harasses Widow.
6. Widow sings her magical song.
7. Milt-man is transformed back into milt.
8. Widow mocks and harasses Other Woman.

The next step is to break this diachronic listing up into vertical columns of related sentences, so as to “discover” the true synchronic structure of the story—whose elements the story’s narrative repetitions are, according to Lévi-Strauss, accentuating. Typically, following his conception of the *mediative* function of myth, this step should reveal a pattern of bipolar oppositions, which the story serves to mediate (to use his own examples, “Nature” vs. “Culture,” “Raw vs. Cooked,” the autochthonous account of human origins vs. the sexual account, and so on). What emerges with “The Honorable Milt” after this step seems odd: a diachronic list with *three* columns (note that, as Lévi-Strauss would have it, the story can still be “read” from left to right as well as vertically):

1.	2.	3.
Widow notices/wishes on milt.	Milt-man appears.	
Other woman notices/ desires Milt-man.	Other woman steals Milt-man.	Other Woman mocks/ harasses Widow.
Widow sings her magical song.	Milt-man transformed back into milt	Widow mocks/harasses Other Woman

The “sentences” in Column One pertain to *wishing*; those in Two, *transformations*; those in Three, *mocking and harassment*, so that in its ultimate structuralist reduction the story can be seen to embody the formula *Wishing:Transformation:Mockery*, with the first and third terms in the

position of bipolar opposites, and the second standing as a mediating term. But what would this formula mean? Wishing and mockery are not *prima facie* opposites, in the abstract; and yet in the generic narrative patterning of this story perhaps they are. Wishing for a husband is to posit sexual and social gratifications for which mockery and ridicule *are* exact emotional opposites; such wishing, then, even for someone with the Widow's special powers, involves a certain vulnerability, a wearing of the heart on the sleeve. As for transformation as a middle or mediating term: as the modality whereby wishing leads to consequences, it seems to express both the potency of wishing, and the instability of what it leads to. There is something of this pattern in the Native "Star husband" stories mentioned earlier as distant cognates to "The Honorable Milt"—for the unlucky girl-wishers, the ones who obtain elderly star-husbands, mockery and ridicule are often at least implied. But of course, as we have seen, "The Honorable Milt" is very much an adult story, involving both sexual wishing or supposing and sexual predation by women—and although our structural-analytic procedure shows its interpretive limits by failing to register the *racial* overtones in the story, those overtones are crucial to the understanding Mrs. Howard and her mother-in-law (and presumably other Clackamas women) had of the Rich Widow's romantic adventure.

The tonality of that understanding is difficult to verbalize, but surely it involves sympathy for the Widow throughout, along with reservations about the "raw material" of her wishing; concomitant disapproval of the Other Woman's predation and her outrageous harassment of the Widow; and finally, satisfaction both righteous and hilarious in the exposure of Milt for what he really is, and the truly devastating exposure of the Other Woman for her choice of a husband. As the story closes, the Other Woman is keeping indoors, in shame, while the Widow is at large again, unencumbered, freed from the consequences of her "supposing." Perhaps she is wiser, but I do not imagine her forlorn: given the literary, sexual, and racial appropriations at work in the story, perhaps her condition at the end constitutes an ultimate Contact-era Clackamas woman's wish-fulfillment!

V

Finally, having endeavored to contextualize "The Honorable Milt" in Native literary and cultural terms, I want to sketch out a place for it in a

wider context of women’s appropriative storytelling. In the domain of Native autobiography, Maria Chona’s telling of her life story, as edited by Ruth Underhill in *Papago Woman*, emphasizes her “official” acceptance of and fulfillment within the restrictions of the traditional Papago concept of womanhood—but all through her narrative, she seems to resent and subvert this limiting concept, sniping at men’s privileges and asserting her equality with men in knowledge and power. Her feminist bias is nowhere more tellingly expressed than in her conspicuous appropriation of the Papago myth of the origin of Corn. Whereas standard versions of the myth relate that the Corn God simply bestowed the plant and its ceremonial mystique upon the Papagos after taking up with one of their women (see, e.g., Saxton and Saxton 1973:28-44), in Chona’s version (unique to her, so far as I know), full mythic credit is given to the woman (Underhill 1979:52):

The corn was once a man and he lured a woman away to sleep with him. She stayed a long time, and when she came home, she knew the songs that made the corn grow. So when the men all went to their meetings, this man [her husband] did not go but he stayed home hearing his wife sing. The men from the meeting came to speak to him. “Why are you absent?” “Because I am listening to my wife.” “How can it be that a man can learn more from a woman than from talking with us? Let us hear her, too.”

So she came to the men’s meeting and she sat between the chief and her husband. “Sing.” And she sang the corn songs.

At the first song those men began to sing. At the second, they danced. At the third, the women came out of the houses, creeping to the council house to listen to the singing. At the fourth, they were all dancing, inside the council house and outside, to that woman’s singing.

I have no doubt that close inspection of mythic and personal texts from other Native American cultures will turn up similar *pro femina* appropriations of traditional material—and something of the same impulse seems to operate in modern literary terms in Ursula Le Guin’s remarkable 1985 novel, *Always Coming Home*. Le Guin’s novel concerns a people, the Kesh, who “might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California,” after some unspecified catastrophe. The Kesh have taken on many of the folkways of California’s original Indian cultures, including a rich and complicated oral-literary tradition of stories and songs. Le Guin’s invented Kesh myths sound like their Indian prototypes—except

that her Coyote stories invariably feature a *female* Trickster! The manner of Le Guin's slyly feminist/subversive appropriation of the mystique of "Old Man Coyote" can be illustrated by the beginning of a Kesh myth about a war between bears and humans (54):

Well, Coyote was going along inside the world, you know, and she met old man Bear.

"I'll come with you," Coyote said.

Bear said, "No, please don't come with me. I don't want you. I'm going to get all the bears together and make a war on the human beings. I don't want you along."

Coyote said, "Oh, that's terrible, a terrible thing to do. You'll all destroy each other. You'll be killed, they'll be killed! Don't make war, please don't make war! We should all live in peace and love each other!" All the while she was talking, Coyote was stealing Bear's balls, cutting them off with an obsidian knife she had stolen from the Doctors Lodge, a knife so sharp he never felt it cutting.

When she was done she ran away with Bear's balls in a pouch. She went to where the human people were. . . .

(Coyote hopes to sabotage the war by getting the bears and the men to use each others' testicles as ammunition, but her plan fails, and after a one-sided battle the humans drive the bears into the wilderness, where they live to this day.)

An equally remarkable imaginative appropriation of gender has appeared in our popular culture in the crypto-feminist rewritings and reinventions of *Star Trek* narratives. Produced so far mainly in the specialized realm of "Trekkers" and "fanzines," such stories take as their premise that the heroes of the original *Star Trek* series, the earthling Capt. Kirk and his half-Vulcan associate Spock, are homosexual lovers, with a wholesale sexual and political revision of the *Star Trek* mythology proceeding from this discovery. According to Constance Penley, the authors and readers of such "slash" fiction (after "Kirk/Spock") are nearly all women, and most of them—despite the gay-pornographic coloring of their work—are probably heterosexual.

Penley has argued that much can be learned from slash fiction "about how women, and people, resist, negotiate, and adapt to their own desires the

overwhelming media environment that we all inhabit” (1993:484).⁸ In her view, the “slash” authors and their fans are co-opting the *Star Trek* stories and gay pornography to each other not just for the rebellious, subversive, naughty pleasure of it, but also in order to imagine for themselves a utopian condition of free equality in love for which the Kirk/Spock alliance is, however startling, a satisfying projection out of popular culture—satisfying because *outré*, far out, requiring (or rather licensing) the making up of new rules for self-determination and romance.

Penley’s analysis of slash fiction usefully invokes the work of the French ethnomethodologist Michel de Certeau, and although his fascinating study of the everyday tactics whereby we subvert or co-opt mass culture is literally worlds removed from the culture and oral literature of the Clackamas Chinookans, he has I think identified an art of appropriation humanly common to contexts as radically different as French factory-employees “working” the System; American women “Trekkers” co-opting a popular commercial TV series to make it functionally their own; and Contact-era Clackamas Indian women appropriating a male-oriented story-tradition to “say” something mischievous and useful about the sexual and racial inequalities in their lives (1984:29):

A way of using imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations. A practice of the order constructed by others redistributes its space: it creates at least a certain play in that order, a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference. That is where the opacity of “popular culture” could be said to manifest itself—a dark rock that resists all assimilation Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other’s game, that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have.

University of Rochester

⁸ What Penley calls “this overwhelming media environment we all inhabit” has no exact equivalent in traditional Indian life—but if not “overwhelming,” the oral literature of any Native culture was certainly all-pervasive, and always subject to “local” appropriations and co-optings, as I have tried to show here.

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