

THE POWER QUEST THEME

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will consider the theme of the power quest in Lushootseed tales. It is apparent that many tales reflect this theme in varying degrees of abstractness, and indeed, in the three tales which I have chosen to consider the power quest is a common denominator.

I will begin with a brief discussion of the power quest and summarization of the tales. Then, the role of the antagonist and the nature of the protagonist must be considered in order to reveal the quest, and ultimately, the acquisition of power in each of the tales.

2.2. THE POWER QUEST THEME

According to Suttles (1987), the power quest occurs very often during adolescence. It is the quest for a vision involving bathing and fasting in isolation. The vision was an encounter with an animal which conferred upon the seeker a particular skill and spirit song. From that point forward, the vision became the seeker's guardian spirit.

3.0 A SUMMARY OF THE TALES

The three tales which I will be analysing are *Crow and the Son of Shell*, *Little Crippled One*, and *The Seal Hunting Brothers*.

3.1 Crow and the Son of Shell

Crow is of very high class, and in this tale she embarks on a journey for a suitable husband, the son of shell. On route she encounters many suitors who believe that they are the goal of her journey. In anticipation she breaks into song. Insultingly, she dismisses each and every one of them when she discovers that they are mere underlings. Eventually, she arrives at her point of destination where she weds the son of Shell and feasts with the village in honour of the occasion.

3.2 Little Crippled One

This tale describes the journey to the spirit mountain by a little crippled boy whose 'soul' is ailing.¹ Accused of being a bother to his family, he leaves his people bereaved. He reaches the people of spirit mountain where his 'soul' and his disability are healed. They instruct him to return to his people and marry the orphans of the village. He does so bringing with him great wealth. However, his people are slow to recognise this fine young man. Eventually, they do and his new wives and family prepare a great feast at which he sings his spirit song.

3.3 The Seal Hunting Brothers

This is a tale of two brothers taken, under a spell, to the land at the edge of the world. They were great hunters who provided well for their sister, as her husband failed to do so. Angry at her husband, the sister claims that her brothers are not bringing food; and consequently, her husband conspires with his family to retaliate. The grandfather puts a spell on the brothers and they embark on a hunt after a cedar seal which takes them to the land of the dwarves where they are kidnapped. A skirmish breaks out between the dwarves and the ducks leaving the dwarves dead. The brothers remove the deadly quills from the dwarves and consequently, return life to them. Grateful, they send the brothers home with many precious shells in a whale. Yet another misfortune occurs and results in their losing the shells. The brother's spirit powers come to them before they arrive home where they are greeted with a great feast at which they can sing their spirit songs.

4.0 THE PROTAGONIST

Having described the power quest theme and summarized the tales, I will now discuss the nature of the protagonist. The protagonists of these stories are Crow, the little crippled boy, and the hunting brothers, as each takes the leading part in the tale.

Each protagonist has a goal and embarks on a journey to attain such. In spite of setbacks and obstacles, they succeed in their endeavors, thus revealing a trait of their character, determination.

In the story of Crow she sets out to marry the son of Shell, and she instructs her seagull slaves to take her to him:

dx^w ʷál k^wi bədáʔ ʔə k^wi x^wəyáliwa k^wi ʔusʔúx^w tubšləp. (34)²
'You folks take me to the son of Shell.'

Clearly, her goal is the son of Shell, and Crow must travel a distance to find him.

Crow's determination is revealed in the repeated encounters with her suitors, the first of which was Raccoon:

ʔəx^w [s]cútəb cədfi k^wi dəx^w əʔúx^w ʔə tsíʔəʔ k'áʔk'aʔ. (84)
'She thought that this was the one that was why Crow went [there].'

But, he was not her husband-to-be, and so she continues on her way similarly encountering Drake Bufflehead, Deer, Bear, and Mallard. Although each turns out to be the wrong one, she does not get discouraged and persists in her search for the son of Shell.

The little crippled boy also sets out on a journey and bears this same determination as Crow. His feelings hurt, he leaves his family to journey to the land of the mountain people:

tul'ʔá g^wəl húyucutəx^w tíʔə' diʔə' cədiʔ bədáʔs əlg^wə ʔəsq^w ʔpǫ^w ʔp.
k^wədádəx^w tíʔə' d(ə)č'ú' s'íčəbs ʔi tíʔə' sǫašəds tul'ʔá g^wəl [tu]d^zəgɪl.
(31-33)

'And then their son who was crippled got ready. The child took a blanket and moccasins. And from there he crawled.'

Regardless of his handicap he embarks on an arduous journey, and this exemplifies his determination. He overcomes a physical obstacle.

In the final story the hunting brothers undertake a journey, but not of their own choice. Under a spell they are led on hunt by a cedar 'seal':

"He [the grandfather] made the seal and instructed it to act just like a live seal and it was to run off with the hunters... to the very edge of the world far away" (Hilbert 1983:3).

Their determination is apparent in their survival and insistence on returning home despite the misfortunes which they endure. They survive the long journey without food, the kidnapping by the dwarves, the attack by the ducks, and the accident during their journey home.

Upon consideration of the protagonists in these three tales it becomes quite obvious that the common denominator between the three is that they all are seeking a goal with great determination, which can be interpreted as a quest for power.

5.0 THE ANTAGONIST

The antagonists perform an integral role in these tales, as they are responsible for providing the motivation for the quest. However, in Crow's case the motivation appears to be somewhat abstract. The encounters with Raccoon, Drake Bufflehead, Deer, etc. act as catalysts for the journey. With each failure she is spurred on closer to the village of her husband-to-be.

In the case of the little crippled boy, the antagonist is his mother who complains of her son being a bother, because he is crippled:

dəx^w ʔúluʔs six^w tíʔə' dbədá' g^wəl ʔ'ul' cədiʔ k^wi səsx^w áq^w. (26-27)
'We are moving my son there again. He will just be a bother.'

Consequently, she hurts his feelings, thereby providing the motivation for the little crippled boy to venture off.

The motivation for the journey in the Seal Hunting Brothers is considerably more complex than that of the little crippled boy tale. The antagonists of the tale include: the hunter's sister, her husband, and her husband's brothers and grandfather. The sister, annoyed at her husband, lies and creates the impression that her brothers have failed in their obligation to provide food with each visit. Consequently, her husband becomes angry:

"Now, the woman's husband gets very angry as he observes his hungry family, and he asks his wife, 'your brothers as usual have not given you any food?' His wife answers, 'no, sir, no'" (Hilbert 1983:2).

The husband wants revenge and seeks counsel with his brothers and grandfather. His grandfather states that he will put a spell on these hunting brothers to be gone with them. And indeed, under the spell they are motivated to journey and pursue their kill. In this tale, as in the others, the antagonist necessitates a quest.

6.0 ISOLATION AND FASTING

As I have described earlier, the power quest often occurs in isolation and involves fasting. While neither of these occur in Crow's quest for a husband, they do in the other tales.

In the Little Crippled Boy the protagonist is in isolation for a great deal of time during his quest:

dəč'u' sɬuk^w ʔalb ti'fɬ sə'uχ^ws səd^zəqɬls ʔal ti'fɬ ləqəlqəlb dx^w ʔal sɬčils
dx^w ʔal ti'ə' cədfɬ. (64)

'For one month he was camping out in several places until he arrived at the mountain.'

He spends this time alone in the wilderness. Even when he had arrived at the place of the mountain people, he spent a month isolated until his 'soul' was purified.

The seal hunting brothers also experienced isolation on their long journey. Not only are they alone in the wilderness, but they become isolated from their own world. As well, the fog which blankets the earth during their journey serves to intensify the sense of isolation.

"The earth was covered with fog instantly as the seal ran off with them... 'we [the hunting brothers] are far away, far away. It seems that we have been taken across the ocean'" (Hilbert 1983:4).

In addition to isolation, the brothers, as I have mention previously, are forced to fast. They did not prepare for their journey, and therefore failed to bring food along. They survive a great deal of time without food, as is mentioned after the brothers hunt for ducks:

"They had been without food for so long!" (Hilbert 1983:7)

Considering these examples, the main characters, for the most part, experience the same isolation and fasting that is associated with quest for a spirit power.

7.0 THE SPIRIT POWER

In each of the tales the goal or spirit power is attained. Again, in Crow's case her marriage to the son of Shell must be interpreted as the attainment of the spirit power. As well, the plethora of food at the marriage feast is a sign of Crow's power:

təl(ə)abx^w q'ɬl tsɬ'ə' ká'ká' tɬ'ə' qa. tɬ'ə' šɬd^zus, k^wi bək^w stab, st'ú'əl
k^wi bək^w stab. (212)

'Crow brought a canoe full: smelt and things, herring and things.'

In the other tales the attainment of the spirit power is far more explicit. For example, in the Little Crippled Boy, which is an account of a power quest, is welcomed into the home of the spirit power:

tí'ə' sqəlálitut dæx^whəd'íw 'ə tí'ə' sqáqag^wəí. (104)
 'This is the spirit power where this noble young person entered.'

Not only does the spirit power cure his ailment, but also bestows unto him such great hunting skills that the animals would come to the young man instead of being hunted:

g^wəl tučág^wəx^w tí'ə' cədíí tátáčulbix^w. tuččís 'al tí'íí swátix^wtəd. (205-206)
 'And the animals came down. They arrived at that place [where he was].'

The spirit power comes to the seal hunting brothers on their journey home after they had lost their treasured shells:

"Their spirit powers came to them as they felt sad over all the misfortune they had had to endure" (Hilbert 1983:12).

But this spirit power does not bestow the same skills to them as those given to the young man in the last tale. The seal hunting brothers receive great warrior skills. This is evident from the spirit songs that they sing, they are those of **tubšadəd**, the song of the warrior.

8.0 THE SPIRIT SONG

Once the spirit power has been found and has conferred special skills upon the seeker, it became necessary to sing the spirit song that was also received. This is evident in each of the tales.

Repeatedly, Crow sings a mock spirit song while travelling:

ləbək'íx^wk'íx^w káyəyə
 ləbək'íx^wk'íx^w káyəyə
 dx^w'al k^wi bədá' 'ə x^wəyáliwa, x^wəyáliwa. (70)
 'Crow is travelling to find a husband, Crow is travelling to find a husband, to the son of Shell, the son of Shell.'

After the young man returns to his people and tells them of his quest in the second tale, he sings his spirit song:

tupíg^wədæx^w 'al tí'íí dx^w'al tushúys buusəídat. (218)
 'He sang his spirit song according to the way it is done for four days.'

In the last tale, the Seal Hunting Brothers, also sing their spirit songs. The people prepare for the spirit song feast and the brothers arrive:

"They come in then from outside. Just as soon as they enter they begin to sing their spirit songs" (Hilbert 1983:13).

In each tale the main character sings his spirit song after they have succeeded in their power quest, and as is generally the case, their people benefit greatly from the song.

9.0 CONCLUSION

After a closer analysis of the three tales, it is apparent that each can be interpreted as power quest. The Little Crippled One is an obvious description of such, while the Seal Hunting Brothers is more abstract, and Crow Marries the Son of Shell is even more so.

In each tale there is a protagonist who is provided the motivation to undertake a journey by the antagonist. Determination is a key trait of these characters which assists them in their quest. Each character encounters the spirit power and has special skills conferred upon them, after which they sing their given spirit song. Consequently, the people benefit from such.

NOTES

- 1 In this case, 'soul' only vaguely expresses the referent in Lushootseed.
- 2 The number in brackets in each of the Lushootseed examples refers to the line number of the tale.

REFERENCES

- Conrad, Emma. *"Little Crippled One": A Legend.*
- LaMont, Martha (1983). *The Seal Hunting Brothers.* (Vi Hilbert, Trans.).
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