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Transformer sites and sxwōxwiyám: An examination of the published and unpublished works of Wilson Duff

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Stó:lō Archives

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INTRODUCTION

The oral narratives (*STMwoTMwiyam*) concerning the remote past and the time of transformation in Stó:lō territory have been a recurrent topic of interest for ethnographers, anthropologists, and historians. A number of these professionals have allocated a large portion of their academic careers (if not all) to developing a thorough understanding of the narratives and their place within Stó:lō culture and society. Much research has been carried out to determine the position of village sites in relation to transformer sites—as well as the significance of the Halq'eméylem place names associated with such locations.

Many of the key figures in the field (Ames 1976, Borden 1977, and Ridington 1978) have held Wilson Duff's work to be some of the most credible ethnographic sources of information on this topic. But while Duff's published literature is remarkable for what it says about Stó:lō culture and history, disconcerting inconsistencies exist between his publications and his unpublished fieldnotes. These variances are particularly evident in Duff's discussion of the Upper Stó:lō Halq'eméylem place names for village locations and sites of transformation¹. Through this paper, I plan to explore three different bodies of Duff's writing on the upper Stó:lō: his published book, his unpublished Master's thesis, and his unpublished field notes. My examination will show that at every stage Duff has censored himself and left out important ethnographic information. This paper concludes with some discussion of the reasons behind Duff's

¹ I will note discrepancies throughout Wilson Duff's unpublished *Stalo Notebooks* (1950), unpublished *Masters Thesis* (1952), and his subsequent publication *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia* (1952) in this paper.

obvious modifications and/or omissions of certain details and discussions in his written work dealing with Upper Stó:lō transformer sites.

The area of the Fraser Valley that this paper examines is the Upper Stó:lō territory and will primarily focus on the region known as ‘Tait’ in the literature². Although the Pilalt and Chilliwack regions are also part of the Upper Stó:lō territories, Duff does not provide a substantial amount of information in his written materials, regarding the transformer sites in these areas—therefore they will be mentioned only briefly in the text.

WILSON DUFF: AS A NORTHWEST COAST ANTHROPOLOGIST, ETHNOGRAPHER, AND INDIVIDUAL

In order to evaluate the writing of an author, one must have some familiarity with the author as a person to be able to critically evaluate his or her work. An individual’s writing is highly reflective of the person they are and this knowledge can be an asset when evaluating their work. Wilson Duff was a fascinating and very complex individual and it is worth spending some time to recapitulate his life and academic career.

Wilson Duff died tragically by his own hand August 8th, 1976 in his office at the University of British Columbia. Duff was a professor of Anthropology and a leading specialist in Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples. Prior to his death, Duff was influential as an anthropologist in both the academic community and the indigenous community. As the majority of Duff’s work and career was based on the Coast Salish people, he often referred to himself as a “home-grown anthropologist”³. Duff obtained his Bachelor of

² The term Tait is used by Wilson Duff in addition to Hill-Tout (1902) and Smith (1950).

³ Michael M. Ames, 1976, *A Note on the Contributions of Wilson Duff to Northwest Coast Ethnology and Art*, BC Studies, no. 31 (Autumn): 3.

Arts degree in 1949 from the University of British Columbia and his Master of Arts thesis in 1952 from the University of Washington under the direction of Erna Gunther—his M.A. thesis focused on the indigenous people living in the upper region of the Fraser Valley. Wilson Duff's thesis *The Upper Stalo Indians an Introductory Ethnography* paved the way to his subsequent publication *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia* in that same year⁴.

Duff played a leading role in the development of anthropology in British Columbia. In his use of ethnographic data, Duff was able to contribute to academic studies of indigenous culture and history in addition to supplying the people he worked with (the indigenous communities of the Northwest Coast) a 'native voice' in public and academic discourse. Wilson Duff's expertise was sought by professions from all fields and disciplines⁵ which allowed him to continue his research and fulfill his desire to further his understanding of indigenous culture and lifeways. One example of Duff's contributions is his continued efforts to guide anthropological studies in a direction that would prove useful and meaningful to the indigenous people of the Northwest Coast. In the volume *History, Territories and the Laws of the Kitwancool*, Duff acted as a coordinator to provide the Gitksan an opportunity to author a 45-page volume on their own cultural traditions.⁶

⁴ The later is an edited and published version of the former.

⁵ Wilson Duff acted as an expert witness in the Nisga'a land claim case in 1969; served on the totem pole preservation committee with the B.C. Provincial Museum in the 1950s; worked for the Smithsonian and the Alaska State Museum in 1959 surveying totem poles; acted as director in 1971 for a project that recorded the history of indigenous people in southwestern Alaska.

⁶ Wilson Duff, 1959, *Histories, Territories and Laws of the Kitwancool* (Anthropology in British Columbia Memoir no.4), 45 pages.

During the later part of his career, Wilson Duff's research turned from a participatory method of ethnography to a more theoretical approach⁷. Duff became interested in the interpretation and dissemination of Northwest Coast art—more specifically, his interests moved to understanding the deep symbolic meaning within Haida art.

In his final publication, *Images: Stone: B.C.*, Duff attempted to delve into the deep analysis of artistic renditions of symbolism and imagery. Duff, labeling himself as an “anthropolog[ist] with a great deal of artistic licence [sic]”, integrated psychological theories of sexuality and analysis with the structuralist theoretical perspectives of Claude Levi Strauss⁸. At the end of his life, Duff left behind numerous unfinished manuscripts, notes, and writings on Northwest Coast cultural traditions, beliefs, and ideologies. It is apparent through the limited studies of Duff's unpublished (and often unfinished work) that he was a man often at unease with academic discourse and the theoretical perspectives associated with it.

TRANSFORMER SITES IN THE LITERATURE: A COMPARISON OF WILSON DUFF'S UNPUBLISHED AND PUBLISHED TEXTS

An interesting aspect of Duff's writing is in the inconsistencies throughout his interpretations. A relevant example of this inconsistency is Duff's descriptions of the villages, place-names, and archaeological sites in his unpublished M.A. thesis and subsequent published monograph; when comparing his published memoir to his unpublished M.A. thesis and his notebooks, it looks as though Duff has omitted all

⁷ Ames, 1976, p.4

information in his publication pertaining to the transformer sites associated with the villages he is describing through the Upper Stó:lō region.

To provide context to the questions posed in this paper, comparative sections of Duff's literature are provided in the following section. Cited quotes are presented in such a fashion as to provide clear examples of the irregularity within Duff's published and unpublished materials. Brief discussions, inclusive of the material cited, are provided in an effort to support and pose questions and to act as a segue into the final section of this paper which will discuss the possible reasons for Duff's obvious omissions and/or deletion of important ethnographic data on Stó:lō transformer sites.

TRANSFORMER PLACE NAMES FOR THE TAIT REGION

To understand the patterns of village dispersal throughout the Upper Stó:lō territories (or the patterns of the entire Coast Salish region for that matter), one must acknowledge the transformer locations and narratives associated with them. In an effort to be concise, the following section of the paper focuses on the Tait region (I have also reviewed Duff's discussions regarding the Pilalt and the Chilliwack regions)⁹.

Of interest in Duff's published text, is the statement that initiates the section on the 'Pilalt' (as it raises a few questions of reliability) In his opening statement, Duff affirms that none of the villages in the Pilalt region were lived in by his informants and that "they did not know the exact locations [of the sites], but the following information

⁸ Wilson Duff, *Images: Stone: B.C.; Thirty Centuries of Northwest Coast Indian Sculpture* (Saanichton: Hancock House), 191 pages.

⁹ The Chilliwack region is described in association with prior work completed by Smith (1950) and Hill-Tout (1902). The information collected and transcribed by Duff is from his informant RJ (who was also an

[referring to the subsequent listing of sites] is roughly correct”¹⁰. This statement, in addition to the fact that none of his informants were Pilalt, makes Duff’s use of this material problematic¹¹. The following section is a listing of the transformer sites from Duff’s MA thesis. I have noted where there is additional information or discrepancies in his field notes. None of this material appears in the published version¹².

i’γ²m “Lucky Place”

“About three quarters of a mile above the village, there is a large rock, now called Steamboat Island, in the river. According to PC, this was a canoe which had been turned to stone by xñ’ls”.¹³

“Small places and features at i’γ²m had separate names, most of which have been forgotten. Half a mile above the graveyard is a fishing place called x²’k’teyuk “legs stretched apart” (to step from rock to rock) which PC is entitled to use from his mother’s side of the family. Just below that is a rock in the river called q²²l·²’s “whale”, which is said to be a whale turned to stone by xñ’ls. A fishing spot at this place was owned by siñ’miya, an important and prolific man of three generations ago. Through him, a large number of people now have the right to fish here”¹⁴.

x²’xñ² “injured person”

On the west side, there is “a rocky point [that] juts out into the river. This point was called e...ælis “making faces, with mouth open and teeth bared”. On its point are several V-shaped grooves or scratches in the rock, such as would be made by rubbing stone arrow points back and forth to sharpen them. These scratches are attributed to xñ’ls’ “fingernails”¹⁵.

informant for Smith while visiting the Nooksack territory). There are no transformer sites discussed in the published or unpublished text for either the Pilalt or Chilliwack regions.

¹⁰ Duff, 1952b, 35.

¹¹ The page from Duff’s MA thesis (1952a: 69) that is associated to the first two village sites in Pilalt is missing from the copy held at Stó:lō Nation archives.

¹² The list of the transformer sites has been compiled from the section(s) Villages, Place-Names, and Archaeological Sites (unless otherwise stated) in Duff’s unpublished M.A. thesis and his subsequent publication on the same material. The material in the notebooks is Duff’s interpretations of Stó:lō culture through interviews with informants.

¹³ 49.

¹⁴ 50.

¹⁵ Duff, 1952a, 53.

This transformer site is associated with the transcribed interview Duff had with RJ on xñ' 1s journey down the Fraser River¹⁶.

“He came down to a place just above Yale, across from x²' Ɂñ' Ɂ, where there was an Indian doctor who had been causing trouble to other people. He sat on the rock bluff, waiting for a chance to work his power on that man, but the man just popped up and down here and there, not long enough for x²xa' y1s to work on him. As he sat waiting he whistled some kind of tune. That is why if you look at the water up there where he was sitting even on a calm day you can see the place where a breeze is ruffling the water. You can also see scratches in the rock which he made with his fingernails”.¹⁷

Strawberry Island¹⁸

The story associated with this transformation site is in the mythology section—
Duff did not discuss it in the section Villages, Place-Names, and Archaeological Sites.

“He came down to the upper end of Strawberry Island, where there was a powerful doctor who could turn himself into a serpent, which was his power. x²xa' y1s turned that serpent to stone. They say that you used to be able to see the jaws and teeth of the serpent but time and strong water is wearing it away. On the serpent's head is a tiny mountain ash tree with poisonous red berries that has always been there, growing in no soil”.¹⁹

uhñ' m² 1

It is noted in Duff's published material that the real name of uhñ' m² 1 is uk' °e' 1 | s which means “facing down river” (this is not clarified in his M.A. thesis).

The transformer story however is discussed in his thesis.

“Below uhñ' m² 1, a stretch of the east bank is called swi' 1t', down to the mouth of Jones Creek (Wahleach Creek). This creek is called

¹⁶ The transcribed interview is a part of Wilson Duff's M.A. thesis entitled 'Mythology'

¹⁷ 1952a, 328-329.

¹⁸ There are no Halq'eméylem words associated with this site in any of Duff's texts

¹⁹ Duff, 1952a, 329.

xutxutō | 'l·^əm after one of [sic] twin brothers who was turned to stone by the Transformer while bathing in the creek".²⁰

In this case, this discrepancy between the unpublished and published work is more than likely a simple case of clarification of terminology between the writing of the two documents.

pa'pkam

Duff neglects to include in his publication (but does include in his M.A. thesis) that the peak of Mount Cheam, "south of Popkum, is called xi'xəqe, the name of the three sisters who were turned to stone by xñlɬ".²¹

Stalo Notebook 2: Patrick Charlie; Robert Joe, July 1950, Yale; Tzeachten

"x^əxñ·'lɬ means one of 2 things
'something great or holy'
Turned people into stone,
Also taught people how to make net,
Spear salmon, use hook".²²

Xexals (anglicized, to act as a 'generic' term) is written throughout the notebooks in a variety of ways (i.e. x^əxñ·'lɬ, X^ə·'lɬ, xñlɬ). There are a number of descriptions in the notebooks, from Duff's informants, that describe the 'transformer' and the reasons for transformation.

Stalo Notebook 5: Mr. and Mrs. Ed Lorenzetto, September 1950, Ohamil

In Duff's discussion with his informants from Ohamil comes a story about a Wildman who burns his nephew at age 5—and then goes on later to kill many people.²³ Is

²⁰ 65.

²¹ Duff, 1952a, 66.

²² Duff, 1950, 44.

this the same story as the man who killed his sister and caused the village near Seabird Island to relocate to avoid the repercussions from the Island Coast Salish and to distance themselves from the ‘troublemaker’?

xʷ · ' l s “turning things into anything he wanted”²⁴

“Thinks Thompsons have stories about same man. So did Chilliwacks, and some of Cowichans told what he did when he got over there...Knows hunter, deer story scratches – are from xʷ · ' ɬ ɬ ” .²⁵

“L... ' m...ɬax “taking oil out of the fishheads” People were sitting around a big bowl getting fishhead oil. xʷ l s turned them all into stone. Up near Yale [sic]. Mrs. L has seen it across the river quite a ways this side of Emory Creek: not seen in high water. xʷ l s didn't turn everybody into rock. Just the ones that's proud, and got power”.²⁶

Was the transformation a reward for ‘good’ behavior or a punishment for ‘bad’ behavior?

Some anomalies evident between the published and unpublished versions of Duff's thesis, as well as his notebooks cause some confusion as to which name and site it is associated with and it's accuracy. In both his thesis and his publication there are inconsistencies with the term “facing downriver”.²⁷ Duff's description of u h ʷ ' m ɬ l (which is supposed to be the short-form for u k ' ɔ e ' l | s) is noted to mean “facing downriver”—yet in his summary of the Tait place names he designates “facing downriver” to “[the] troublemaker who watched for canoes coming up [the river] which he could destroy”²⁸.

Subsequently, Duff's notebooks state that u k ' ɔ e ' l | s means “facing downriver” but that it is not representational of the “troublemaker” but rather the

²³ 20.

²⁴ 52.

²⁵ Duff, 1950, 52.

²⁶ 53.

²⁷ Duff, 1952b, 34-35.

²⁸ Duff, 1952a, 67; Duff, 1952b, 35.

Restmore Cave that he [the troublemaker] lived in—while $uh\tilde{n}'m^{\text{a}}l$ means “up to almost Restmore” rather than being the short-hand version of $uk'oe'l|s$.²⁹

Although these anomalies are obvious in Duff's work, it does not appear intentional and may be the result of different informants telling different stories.

In Duff's summary (in both his published material and unpublished thesis) he discusses the importance and relevance of each name discussed for the Tait area; unfortunately, he does not elaborate this individually in his publication as he does in his thesis. The Section in his thesis entitled “Mythology” is completely omitted from his published text³⁰. It is interesting that Duff's descriptions in his publication lack the indigenous narrative associated with them (such a narrative is evident in his unpublished M.A. thesis) and seems to have been sterilized for an academic or non-indigenous audience. It does not seem to fit his characteristic style of written expression—one that tries to provide a complete ‘picture’. On the one hand, Duff may have omitted this section because the museum series had a word limit that caused him to drop a section or perhaps Duff felt that there were too many inconsistencies to be a viable chapter in the published text

Another issue worth raising is Duff's discussion of the Tait region provide contradicting opinions and statements regarding tribal identity, boundaries, and structure in the upper Stó:lō regions. On one side, Duff takes the position that the people of the Tait region did not have any strong boundary divisions.³¹ Duff goes so far as to state that the Tait “could be considered either as one tribe, or as a large group of Upper Stalo who

²⁹ Duff notebook #7, Mr. and Mrs. Edmond Lorenzetto, Ohamil, Summer 1950, 110.

³⁰ Transcribed from a story told to him by RJ (Duff 1952a, 328-333).

³¹ Duff, 1952b, 81; 197.

had no tribal concept. They had no real feeling of internal unity, nor did they have a mythological basis for unity as had some of the downriver groups”.³² Subsequently, Duff further states in his publication that the perception of tribal strength is apparent in the boundaries evident between tribal units.³³

So a question is, if the Tait (or “Upper Stalo”) did not display tribal unity in their mythology and in their boundaries, why is it that Duff seemed to focus on listing and describing transformation sites in the upper region rather than in the lower Stó:lō areas? Additionally, it seems quite obvious through Duff’s descriptions of sites (with maps of their locations) that the upper region was quite populated—particularly with villages at or near transformer sites.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON WILSON DUFF: HIS OWN TRANSFORMATIONS

In exploring Wilson Duff’s literature on the transformer sites, it is apparent that there are modifications and omissions of certain details and discussions between his unpublished and published material—details seemed to either change or be missing completely when comparing the earlier material (fieldnotes and thesis) to the later publication (and subsequent publications). There are of course multiple explanations that could conceivably account for this—perhaps the missing or modified sections were simple errors in the process of writing between documents, Duff may have come across additional information in the process of transcribing his field notes into his thesis, and then his thesis into a publication, or perhaps the format of the series he was publishing in required him to omit sections of his initial notes and thesis for his publication. In view of

³² 18.

these options however, the most probable explanation is Duff's consistent desire to be successful in the academic community—a community that, at the time, was based solely on the extrication of facts and the subsequent dismissal of ethnohistoric inference.

Through the analysis of additional literature associated with ethnographic and anthropological studies of Northwest cultures, it is apparent that 'mythology' was positioned in a context of indigenous storytelling and was not viewed or interpreted as an intrinsic part of indigenous culture—one that provided lessons and understanding of behaviours and consequences of such actions³⁴. Duff's literature is an excellent example of this; his unpublished material affirms the position of the transformer sites in relation to the village locations of the people in the region while his published manuscript on the same material is devoid of many of the intricacies of the people's culture and ideologies associated with transformation sites within their territories.

In evaluating Duff's initial published works, an understanding of the theoretical framework of the time is necessary. While writing his thesis and publication, Duff and his ideas were probably heavily 'shaped' by the beginnings of processual theory; the 1950s had academics in social sciences "transcend[ing] the limitations of social anthropological analyses of static structures by studying not only structure-maintaining but also structure-elaborating (or morphogenetic) processes"³⁵. This perspective was far different than its predecessor, the Boasian position, which viewed culture as "...monolithic, superorganic entities, rather than treating them as the sum total of learned ideas and habits that guided

³³ 93.

³⁴ Smith, 1950; Suttles and Maud, 1987.

³⁵ Trigger 1989

individuals' thoughts and behaviors".³⁶ This theoretical 'shift' happened during the time that Duff was writing his thesis and subsequent publication and may have caused him to reconsider and/or re-evaluate his own personal desire to be inclusive of all aspects of Stó:lō culture in his writing. As so effectively noted by Duff, a quarter of a century later, that to "attempt to answer the symbolic meanings associated with Northwest coast art [or, in this situation, transformer sites] is a "hazardous enterprise for one who values a reputation for scholarly discipline".³⁷

In retrospect, it also fair to say that Duff was very intuitive in addition to studious and his thoughts and ideas developed parallel to what he perceived to be logical routes of assessment.³⁸ In his later studies, Duff seemed to be 'personally' intrigued by the psychological aspects of his relationship to his studies and the psychological aspects within his studies. It was through his interest in psychology that Duff began to work extensively with "hypnagogic and hypnopompic experiences—that being the sensations and realizations one has in the drowsy states of falling asleep and waking up, respectively".³⁹

It is interesting that Duff had so many inconsistencies between his unpublished and published work. On one side, Duff was critical of earlier ethnographers on the Northwest Coast (such as Boas and Marius Barbeau) for their complete reliance on informants to make assessments of the cultures they were studying. Yet, it is evident that Duff's own work was flawed with the same discrepancies. What is even more intriguing

³⁶ Foreword by Bruce G. Trigger in George P. Nicholas and Thomas D. Andrews, 1997, *At a Crossroads: Archaeology and First Peoples in Canada*, Burnaby, Archaeology Press, Simon Fraser University, x.

³⁷ Duff, 1975, 12.

³⁸ Anderson, 1996, 107.

is after Duff was critical of other ethnographic works, he submitted his own original 'Stalo' notebooks to the Royal British Columbia Museum. It is more than likely that Duff was aware that there were inconsistencies in his texts which does make one wonder if he donated them specifically to provide others the opportunity to do what he was unable to do—write more extensively and passionately about the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast.

Wilson Duff has provided a wealth of information for anthropologists and historians alike to delve into the culture and ideology of the Northwest Coast indigenous peoples—including the fascinating world of the transformer narratives of the Stó:lō. Duff has made available a stepping stone (of sorts) towards reaching a research methodology that would look at culture as living and changing—one that would be more representational of the people that the culture represents. This paper, in its epigrammatic look at Duff's unpublished and published writing, provides an entry point (and hopefully an intrigue) into the much needed assessment of the work and life of Wilson Duff—a man that provided much to the ethnographic understanding of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast.

³⁹ Anderson, 1996, 108.

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