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## **'A glimpse into Bushman mythology': interpretation, power and knowledge**

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### **Abstract**

In 1873, Qing, a young man of Bushman background, recounted a cycle of stories and commented on some of the rock paintings he and the magistrate Joseph Orpen saw on a journey through the Maloti mountains. A year later Qing's narratives and comments on rock art, as recorded by Orpen, were published along with Orpen's account of the journey in an article in *The Cape Monthly Magazine*. The article is a blend of European and indigenous discourses and forms of knowledge, the latter mediated by the processes of recording, translation, writing and publication. This essay explores the different sorts of knowledge that are represented in the text, in Orpen's statements about his research and in Qing's stories in particular. It uses the literary technique of close reading in order to open the text up to different possibilities of reading and interpretation.

### **Introduction**

A number of articles in this special issue turn on the relationship – often conflicted – between indigenous knowledge (however this is staged and constructed) and the knowledge of the sympathetic, self-reflexive researcher, operating often, but not always, from within the institutional base of the academy. Questions regarding the relationship between researcher and researched are as central to the reading of colonial texts that represent and produce indigeneity and indigenous knowledge as they are when interacting with contemporary indigenous people. The context in which indigenous knowledge was collected, produced and reproduced cannot be altered, but it can be critically re-evaluated, as several studies of the Bleek–Lloyd Collection have done (Bank 2006; Moran 2009). Another strategy involves paying close attention to the ways in which indigenous forms of representation, even in heavily mediated form, can be brought into conversation with the systems of knowledge production that seek to interpret them.

This article explores the question of knowledge and power in relation to Joseph Orpen's 1874 piece in *The Cape Monthly Magazine*, in which he describes his meeting with a young Bushman man, Qing, and relates a series of stories told to him by Qing. Accompanying Orpen's article are 'Remarks' by linguist Wilhelm Bleek, some of which were based on the response of the |Xam informant Dia!kwain (unnamed in the article itself) to rock art copies Orpen made on his journey. The discussion is generated chiefly through a close analysis of





refers to Qing again in his writing in the years that followed (De Prada-Samper 2016: 29; King 2015: 425).

Bushman culture is often presented as a mystery; the task of the interpreter is to unlock this mystery. This project is encapsulated, for example, in the title of Lewis-Williams and Challis' (2011) *Deciphering ancient minds: the mystery of San Bushman rock art*. Bushman art is positioned as a product of the premodern mind which can be decoded by the modern mind. That there is a meaning waiting to be deciphered in the art is implied also in Orpen's first question to Qing: 'I commenced by asking him what the pictures of men with rhebok's heads meant'. Orpen (1874: 2) describes Qing's response as providing 'at least a partial clue, which may perhaps lead to others'. Rock art is a mystery to be solved step by step. Orpen himself emphasises in the title of his article that he is able to obtain only 'a glimpse'. He goes on to describe the difficulty of finding Bushman informants who could reveal the meaning of rock paintings. One of the problems, in Orpen's view, was that there were very few Bushmen left. Qing was an exceptional find because a 'couple years ago [he] escaped from the extermination of their remnant of a tribe in the Malutis'.

He was also an exception because he was willing to speak to Orpen about rock art, unlike the 'one old Bushman questioned by Mr. Stowe [sic] [who] was obstinately mysterious and silent' (ibid: 2). The title of De Prada-Samper et al.'s study of the Qing-Orpen material, *On the trail of Qing and Orpen* (2016), signals a shift in the narrative whereby the Western scholar seeks knowledge of the Bushman: what is being tracked now is not just the indigenous but the colonial as well.

The present article also pays attention to the interplay of indigenous and colonial voices in Orpen's article, treating both Orpen and Qing's words (as conveyed by Orpen) as forms of representation. This is not to suggest that the two discourses can be conflated. Qing's narratives – even edited, transcribed and translated – belong to a different order of knowledge from the kind of scholarship that seeks to classify and elucidate them. Two different discursive orders are juxtaposed in a context of differential power relations. Both these discursive orders, though, possess complex histories and anatomies. Neither is monolithic or stable. Orpen's views, King (2015: 412) argues, have to be located 'within the tensions of Cape scientific circles', itself the result of intersecting 'metropolitan and local scientific trends' (see also Dubow 2004). He 'navigated an uncomfortable or ambivalent position' between 'liberal and expansionist imperial views' (ibid: 413). Menán du Plessis' (2016) analysis of the untranslated terms in Qing's stories shows that Qing's use of language is indicative of rich histories of cultural cross-pollination in the region.

Like the image of rhebok-headed men that occurs in Orpen and Qing's discussion of rock art, the Qing-Orpen article is a hybrid of European and Bushman storytelling (Orpen and Qing) and also of European and Bushman interpretation (Bleek and Dia!kwain). Up until the time of their collection by Orpen, Qing's stories participated in an entirely different sphere of cultural and material production from the one represented by *The Cape Monthly Magazine*. It is one that would have included indigenous modes of

interpretation, a vital part of the reception of stories in what Mathias Guenther (1996: 81) calls a 'high context group'. Hints of this indigenous interpretation can be gleaned from the text in the form of explanations by both Qing himself and, later, in Bleek's 'Remarks', by an unnamed |Xam informant, now known to be Dia!kwain. No doubt Qing's stories, or ones like them, continued to circulate in indigenous circuits of literary production and consumption at the same time as they became part of European fields of knowledge and interpretation, but to track this indigenous genealogy (if it is indeed possible) will require a different sort of study.

Before Orpen begins to question Qing – not in real time, but in the way he represents the encounter retrospectively – he sets the scene, introducing the reader to the area briefly before establishing something of his own scholarly credentials and the background to his enlistment of Qing in the expedition to intercept Langalibalele and his men. A hint of the wide range of Orpen's (1874: 1) interests is evident in the opening of the article in which he supplies both the Sotho and Nguni names for the Maloti and in his exact description of the sandstone outcrops that form the overhangs under which the rock art is painted. One of his many interests was geology (Orpen 1964: 6), an interest suited to his work as a surveyor. Surveying also provided him with access to rock art. He began making rock art copies at the request of George Stow 'during surveying trips in the outskirts of the Malutis in the Wodehouse district' (Orpen 1874: 1). Orpen is not a rock art specialist, but his role as an amateur scholar in the Victorian era gives him the confidence to contribute to a wider body of rock art research by assembling materials, offering opinions and proposing new lines of research: 'I may here suggest inquiry how far these paintings extend in South Africa, and whether any difference exist between the traditions, mythology, and religion of those Bushmen tribes who do not paint of those who possess a talent so remarkable in a savage tribe' (ibid: 1). His further suggestion of a resemblance between Bushman rock art and 'representations from ancient mythologies' reflects the interest in comparative mythology of the time and is later repeated by Bleek, who notes 'There is something reminding one much of the Egyptian mode of mythological representation in these animal heads on human bodies' (ibid: 14).

Orpen is clearly one of the 'many gentlemen who could afford a few hours' leisure to make enquiries' that might contribute to Wilhelm Bleek's greater research project on the Bushmen (ibid: 1). It is not so much a question of leisure time in his case, though (a scarce commodity for the busy Orpen), as the epistemological authority conferred by class and education at a time when knowledge production was much less the preserve of specialist academics whose knowledge was institutionally authorised than it is now. Orpen exhibits both confidence in his abilities as a researcher and a certain deference to experts like Bleek. This deference is signalled by a number of qualifications in the text and the repeated use of the word 'suggest'. He proposes rather than asserts: 'I may here suggest' and also expresses the opinion that 'Dr Bleek could probably suggest the direction of inquiries supplementing his research' in a way that leaves the final decision for Bleek himself to make (ibid.). Orpen also proposes possible interpretations of the rock paintings he finds but does not insist on them: these paintings had 'apparently a mythological meaning' or represented 'certain quasi-religious rites' (ibid.). He reveals a

typically Victorian squeamishness about sexuality when he says that the paintings ‘are not always fit for publication’ (ibid.), referring to figures with erect penises. The Victorian context also underlies Orpen’s evaluation of the art itself: ‘many of the paintings and men are surprisingly well done’; the Bushmen ‘possess a talent so remarkable in a primitive tribe’ (ibid.). His surprise at the quality of the art is underpinned by ideas of cultural evolution that were current at the time.

Orpen positions himself in the article as a gentleman scholar who provides support for the research of others, for Stow and Bleek, in particular. Knowledge production, for Orpen, is clearly a collaborative, incremental enterprise, which has space for energetic and curious individuals such as himself. It was his position as part of an ‘intellectual network’ that cohered around *The Cape Monthly Magazine* that prompted him to submit his rock art copies in the first place (Dubow 2004: 127– 128; King 2015: 425). While the beginning of Orpen’s article reveals something of his relationships with this scholarly network, the next section establishes the nature of his relationship with Qing and the credibility of the materials he elicits from him. It also provides a nuanced insight into power relations between researcher and informant in the colonial era, when the nature of this relationship had not yet been institutionalised and formalised.

### **Orpen and Qing**

Orpen goes to some lengths to describe how he obtains the services of Qing, first as a guide and later as an ethnographic informant. This requires establishing a relationship of trust. Qing ‘had never seen a white man but in fighting’ (Orpen 1874: 2). Orpen had enough experience of settler brutality towards Bushmen in the Free State to know what this means. Orpen ‘has almost given up’ on getting Qing when the latter arrives. Orpen turns Qing into an individual in only a few evocative words, describing him as a ‘diligent and useful guide’ with an appealing personality: he ‘became a favourite, he and his clever little mare, with which he dashed and doubled among the stones like a rabbit when his passion for hunting occasionally led him astray’ (ibid.). Qing is reliable and industrious but also free; his freedom is figured by his mobility in the landscape. The ‘clever little mare’ serves as a metonymic signifier for Qing himself. It is the animal that ‘dashes’ and ‘doubles’, but these qualities belong also to Qing, the subject of the verbs. And it is Qing who is compared to a rabbit even as it is the motion of the horse which is being described, imbuing the man with the speed, ingenuity and cleverness of a rabbit. While this description invests Qing with agency and agility, it also reproduces the well-worn colonial trope of the loyal servant and the association of Qing with a hare verges on infantilisation.

Orpen ‘got stories and explanations of paintings’ from Qing (ibid.). The use of the verb ‘get’ emphasises Orpen’s role in accordance with his earlier focus on the efforts required to obtain information from Bushman informants. He has succeeded where before both he and Stow had failed: ‘We could not obtain a clue, and one old Bushman questioned by Mr. Stowe [sic] was obstinately mysterious and silent’ (ibid: 1). Nevertheless, Orpen represents the storytelling as occurring on Qing’s terms. Orpen can establish the conditions but it is Qing who has to experience the right state of mind before he speaks:

‘When happy and at ease smoking over camp-fires, I got from him the following stories and explanations of paintings, some of which he showed and I copied on our route’ (ibid: 2). Once again the text is ambivalent: it both signals Qing’s free will and Orpen’s power to manipulate the interaction by establishing the convivial setting of the camp fire and sharing his tobacco (Wessels 2016).

We cannot tell exactly from the text itself what sort of interaction over an extended period of time produced the questions and answers that follow. As Orpen’s own comments show, he interviewed Qing again after the initial journey (Orpen 1874: 3, 10). As represented in the text, however, the questions and answers read as a single conversation that serves as the prelude to the ensuing stories. In Orpen’s words the interaction begins when he asks Qing ‘what the pictures of men with rhebok’s heads meant’ (ibid: 2). Qing replies: ‘They were men who had died and now lived in rivers, and were spoilt at the same time as the elands and by the dances of which you have seen paintings’ (ibid.). The cue for the stories that Qing goes on to tell, from the logic of the published text, is a series of questions that follows on from Orpen’s initial question. Qing’s concise and dense answer to this question has teased interpreters ever since. Later in the article, after telling the stories, Qing returns to Orpen’s initial question: ‘The men with rhebok’s heads, Haqwé and Canaté, and the tailed men, Qweqweté live mostly under water; they tame elands snakes. That animal which the men are catching is a *snake* (!)’ (ibid: 10, emphasis in the original). Orpen signals his surprise at the identification of the animal as a snake by italicising the word ‘snake’ and placing an exclamation mark after it; in the painting the animal is clearly a large bovine creature rather than a snake.

De Prada-Samper (2016: 45) shows how Orpen changes the questions and answers from indirect speech in the manuscript to direct speech in the final article, employing a representational strategy that returns immediacy to the encounter and also reinvests it with the spoken word. Orpen’s questions elicit short, even abrupt, answers and quickly lead to mention of Cagn, the mantis, trickster figure that is central to |Xam mythology as well. The questions also reveal Orpen’s preconceptions about Bushman belief, as De Prada-Samper notes. When asking how Bushmen pray to Cagn and where Cagn lives, Orpen ‘was trying to ascertain if Cagn could be considered something close to a proper sky-dwelling god, as conceived by his contemporaries, and if he was the object of a structured worship’ (ibid.). The question and answer sequence also suggests that Qing was at least partially in control of the situation. Even though Orpen asks leading questions, it is Qing’s answers that direct the movement of the dialogue. The text here also discloses something of Qing’s attitude towards knowledge. He answers where he can, but also insists on the right not to know. This lack of knowledge is not his alone but is socially and culturally shared. In answer to a question about where Cagn dwells, Qing replies in the first person plural: ‘We don’t know, but the eland do’ (Orpen 1874: 2). This absence of knowledge is constituted as a form of knowledge, knowledge that the eland know what humans do not. This is followed by the assertion that this fact about eland, which authorises the limitations of human knowledge, is obvious to all who listen, not just to Bushmen. Qing asks a single question of Orpen himself: ‘[H]ave you not hunted and heard his cry, when the elands suddenly start and run to his call?’ (ibid: 2). Qing’s tone here, as represented by

Orpen, is ambiguous. Is he admonishing Orpen for not hearing the cry or is he expressing surprise that he has not? Soon after, in answer to a question about where Cagn's wife, Coti, comes from, Qing responds that he does not know and then almost seems to reproach Orpen for wanting to know things that should not be known: '[Y]ou are now asking the secrets that are not spoken of' (ibid: 3). Orpen persists, 'Do you know the secrets?' Qing answers in the negative, with another statement that has generated a great deal of scholarly debate: 'No, only the initiated men of the dance know these things' (ibid.).

It is not surprising that Qing's efforts to answer his questions perplex Orpen. The fact that Qing does not explicitly mention rainmaking in his explication of the paintings suggests that he radically underestimated the extent of the conceptual gap between his and Orpen's understanding of the world. It is left to Dia!kwain to make the link between rainmaking and the painting to Bleek (ibid: 13). Orpen's bafflement, evident from the tenor of his questions and the use of the italic and exclamation mark, may have been a factor in Qing's decision to switch genres, from explanation to narrative. Qing engages in explication only briefly and then moves into another, much less direct, sort of elucidation when he launches into the stories. In so doing he establishes a close link between painting and story. The nature of this link, though, has been the source of dispute among scholars over the years: at one end of the spectrum are those who see the paintings as directly illustrative of mythology, beginning with Orpen (ibid: 2) and Bleek (ibid: 13) themselves, while at the other end are scholars like Lewis-Williams (1981; 2003) who consider painting and storytelling as belonging to different spheres, to ritual experience and mythology respectively, although both are informed by a single world view and stories often refer allegorically to the shifts in consciousness produced by trance.

The relationship between the explanations of the paintings and the stories is ambiguously staged in the text itself. The stories follow from the questions and answers about Cagn and the eland, rather than from the initial question about the meaning of 'the pictures of men with rhebok's heads' (ibid: 2). The first story concerns Cagn's creation of the eland and not antelope-headed men. Nevertheless each question and answer, as Orpen represents the dialogue in the text, follows naturally from the one that precedes it. De Prada-Samper (2016: 41), for one, traces a direct line from Orpen's initial question to the stories, claiming that 'Qing's answer' to the first question 'soon took the form of a story'. There is also a break in the text between the explanations and stories, which Orpen uses to comment briefly on the status of the stories he records. He indicates that he regards Qing's stories as 'fragmentary' and suggests that his efforts to 'string' them together and 'make them consecutive' have entailed a fair degree of editorial intervention (Orpen 1874: 3). At the same time he downplays the degree to which he himself shapes Qing's narratives; he reproduces the stories, he claims 'as nearly as I can as he told them to me' and changes them 'only' to make them 'consecutive' (ibid.). He is himself not sure of the authenticity of the stories: 'They either varied a little, or I failed to understand him accurately when speaking through different translators' (ibid.). They could accurately reflect Qing's intentions or be completely off the mark. What emerges clearly through Orpen's words here is the provisional nature of knowledge production in a situation like this. Orpen has found an authentic indigenous informant but cannot vouch for the quality



of his record. He says something of the translation process but in a cursory way that has afforded later scholars much room to speculate about the exact procedure. 'The stories seem in part imperfect' to Orpen, but his use of the word 'seem' indicates that he is not sure if they are (ibid.). If they are imperfect this may be due either to Qing's 'not having learnt them well' or to 'imperfect translation' (ibid.). Ironically, by recording and transmitting mythology that might be corrupt, Orpen could himself be participating in the loss of mythological authenticity. Mythology, in his view, is a system sanctioned by tradition rather than a mode of representation contingent on history. This means that stories should be evaluated in terms of their fidelity to an original. Somewhere, he believes, there might exist authoritative versions that would make this possible: 'perhaps they may be corrected if heard from other Bushmen of the same race in Basutoland, Kafirland, &c., or they may be different from those of other Bushman tribes' (ibid.).

### **Qing**

Different modes of knowing circulate in the text, as we have seen. Qing is sought by Orpen because of his knowledge of the area and of Bushman culture. Qing is a reader of cultural signs and a repository of cultural information. But he is not simply a repository; he is also a storyteller and, therefore, a practitioner and producer of knowledge. The text suggests that he is uneasy with Orpen's research strategy of asking leading questions, indicated by his abrupt answers and his refusal to speculate, but much more at home with the discourse of storytelling. The stories themselves also explore what today would be called themes of power and knowledge in ways that provide an indigenous perspective on these themes, although we should be cautious about assuming that the stories of one storyteller can be taken as representative.

In the very first story Qing tells, Cagn punishes his wife for spoiling his knife by making her fall pregnant (Orpen 1874: 3; see Wessels 2014 for an analysis of the story). She gives birth to an animal whose identity is unknown to both Cagn and Coti:

[S]he told her husband, and said she did not know what sort of child it was, and he ran to see it, and came back and told Coti to grind cannā, so that he might inquire what it was. She did so, and went and sprinkled these charms on the animal, and asked it 'Are you this animal? Are you that animal?' but it remained silent till he asked it 'Are you an eland (Tsha)?' when it said 'Aaaa'. (Orpen 1874: 3-4)

Just as Orpen earlier gives Qing speech by his use of the dialogue form, Qing here gives Cagn speech, who in turn gives the young eland speech or, more accurately, the right to silence, which presupposes speech. The knowledge deficit of a creator who is said to have made all things is striking. Cagn, after all, 'gave orders and caused all things to appear, and to be made, the sun, the moon, stars, wind, mountains, and animals' (ibid: 3). Alberto Manguel (2010: 5) notes that in the book of Genesis God brings 'every beast of the field and every fowl of the air to Adam to see what he would call them'. 'For centuries,' continues Manguel (ibid.), scholars have puzzled over the curious exchange. Was Adam in a place ... where everything was nameless, or was he supposed to invent names for the creatures and things he saw? Or did the beasts and the fowl that God created indeed

have names, which Adam was meant to know and which he was meant to pronounce like a child seeing a dog or the moon for the first time?

In Qing's story Cagn is in part God the creator, albeit an incarnate God who in trickster fashion is also man and animal, and in part Adam, the man who names. His ignorance of the eland's identity seems to be peculiar to it. Cagn's other acts of creation, referred to above, involve calling things into being by means of naming. The eland's name is constituted as an absence rather than as a blank. It exists; the animal itself knows it. Cagn also knows the word 'eland', but only as a possibility which has to be matched with the animal through a process of trial and error.

The animal is given the power to understand speech, to speak and, significantly, to remain silent. The communication between Cagn and the eland is enabled by the use of a charm, the powder of the plant canna which Coti grinds on Cagn's orders. Cagn does not know the animals' name but he knows how to discover it. In other words he knows how to acquire knowledge of that which he does not yet know. The canna cannot reveal the identity of the animal directly: the use of the powder only enables Cagn 'to inquire what it was' (Orpen 1874: 3). It gives him the power to ask questions. Sprinkling canna on the eland brings the animal into a dialogical space of question and answer. Nevertheless, its interpellation into language occurs on its terms – it can be hailed but it does not assent to this hailing until the word corresponds to its self-identity. When Cagn finally chooses correctly from the repository of names, presumably from a list of animals that still await material existence, it responds by making the sound, 'Aaaa'. This expression is one of the most evocative elements in the text. What is its tone? Are the letters whispered or shouted? Is the eland anguished or happy to be named? Does the sound signify assent? Lewis-Williams (2013), following Dorothea Bleek (1956), notes that 'Orpen took the monosyllable ['a'] to mean "yes"', but both he and Du Plessis (2016) note the varied and rich significations of the lexeme 'a'. Could the eland even be praising Cagn for finding the right name, thereby inverting the pedagogical parent/child relationship which Cagn soon tries to restore with his efforts to train the eland? Or does the animal indicate its resistance to its naming? A little later in the story Cagn sharpens three sticks and throws them at the eland in order to make it 'fit for the use of men'? (Orpen 1874: 4). The eland resists its violent socialisation, running away each time Cagn hurls one of the sticks at it. Is 'Aaaa' perhaps the same sound it would have made had one of the sharpened sticks reached its target? Is the violence of language and its power to classify analogous to the violence of being made 'fit for the use of men'? We do not know. Our position, in effect, is the same as Qing's when it comes to the whereabouts of Cagn (ibid: 2).

The story of the eland's creation itself explores the dangers of interfering with things of which one does not know. When Cagn's sons and his friends find the eland 'they did not know about it. It was a new animal' (ibid: 4). This does not deter them and after some difficulty, Gcwi, Cagn's oldest son, kills the animal. As soon as he sees the blood, Cagn knows what has happened. He punishes Gcwi for 'his presumption and disobedience' (ibid.). Only after killing the eland do the young men see 'the snares and traps of Cagn,

and knew it [the eland] was his, and they were afraid' (ibid.). Should they have known? Could they have known? The story suggests that ignorance is no justification. It is presumptuous to act when you do not know.

The themes of power, and of knowing/not knowing continue to feature in the stories that follow. Cagn himself does not know everything. He is often ignorant, for example, of the best course of action to follow in a given situation. He does, though, have an experiential knowledge of what in the |Xam materials is termed 'tapping', the way in which people receive information through their bodies. The |Xam informant ||Kabbo calls this sort of knowledge 'Bushman letters'. The metaphor of the letter is apt because 'tappings' in the body 'take a message' or convey an account of what happens in another place (Bleek and Lloyd 1911: 331), but ||Kabbo is also asserting an equality between Bushman means of knowing and those of his European interlocutors.

When one of Cagn's daughters runs away, intending 'to destroy herself by throwing herself among the snakes' (Orpen 1874: 5), Cagn, 'who used to know things that were far off', knows where she is and that the chief of the snakes has married her. This story does not reveal how Cagn obtains such knowledge, but in the very next story Cagn's toothache tells him how to set about retrieving a young woman who has been kidnapped by the Qobé cannibals. In this case Cagn does not learn of the woman's location but receives magical advice as to the correct course of action to follow. Although the source of Cagn's knowledge is not identified as toothache in the story in which Cagn's daughter runs away, there is a tooth in it as well, and this tooth reappears in the story in which the cannibals or giants kidnap the woman. In the first story Cagn sends his younger son Cogaz to fetch his sister from the snakes and 'lent him his tooth to make him strong' (ibid.). Here the tooth is a source of power rather than knowledge. Power and knowledge are nonetheless entangled: 'Cagn used to know things that were far off, and he sent his son Cogaz to bring her back', lending him his tooth to give him the power he needs to resist the snakes' attacks (ibid.). In the second story Cagn also lends Cogaz his tooth. Here the tooth does more than strengthen Cogaz. When the giants attack him he used to get upon the tooth of Cagn and it grew up to a great height, and they could not reach him. He used to cook his food up there, and then he used to play on his reed flute, and this put them to sleep; and he would go on, and they would wake up, follow him, and he would get up on the tooth again. (ibid: 6)

Cagn himself is not seen making use of the power tooth unless, of course, the tooth he gives Cogaz is the same one that tells him to send Cogaz to deliver the woman from the giants by aching. I think this remains a possibility, although De Prada- Samper (2016: 57) regards the tooth that knows and the tooth that gives power as separate, suggesting that the tooth Cagn lends Cogaz is a charm that does not originate in his own body, perhaps 'a carnivore's claw or tooth considered to have magical properties'. One of the teeth conforms to the motif of the 'magic tooth' while the other is consistent with the motif of the "knowledge tooth" [that] reveals events in distant place' (ibid: 59).

On the evidence of the story, the powers the tooth gives Cogaz include the power of self-preservation and the courage to face the giants, but not the power to actually defeat them. Cogaz resorts to killing some of the giants with poisoned arrows after they persist in besieging him on the tooth but even this does not deter them. Cagn has to intervene and destroy the giants. He himself uses his possessions rather than a tooth to accomplish this: '[h]e cut up his kaross and sandals and turned them into dogs and wild dogs, and set them at the Qobe giants and destroyed them' (Orpen 1874: 6). Nevertheless, Cagn's tooth possesses astonishing transformative powers. It grows to a size almost instantly that dwarfs the giants who cannot reach Cogaz when he takes refuge on top of it. It becomes a white mountain with sheer enamel sides. It is not just a place to which to flee but a place to inhabit. Cogaz prepares meals on the tooth. It is a space of culture – of cooked food (Lévi-Strauss 1969) and a space of music – Cogaz plays a magical tune on his reed flute that puts the giants to sleep. Can such a music, we wonder, only be played on Cagn's tooth? Is the music merely a soporific or does it possess a beauty so powerful that it overwhelms the senses and renders its listeners unconscious? The tooth also appears to extend itself in time as well as space. Cogaz spends enough time on top of the tooth to develop a routine: he 'used' to cook and play his flute on it 'and he would go on, and they would wake up, follow him, and he would get up on the tooth again' (Orpen 1874: 6). The tooth gives him the power to quickly return to his refuge whenever he leaves it. And the taller but less magically endowed giants cannot reach him.

In both stories that feature teeth Cogaz sets out to bring back a young woman, although in the first story the woman herself flees to the snakes while in the second she is abducted by giants.<sup>2</sup> As previously mentioned, Cagn's knowledge of 'things that were far off' (ibid: 5) in the first story is not directly attributed to toothache as it is in the second story. Nevertheless, there is a textual proximity between Cagn's ability to know and the power of the tooth because in the very next line after he learns about the girl he gives Cogaz the power tooth. In the second story Cagn explicitly receives knowledge from the aching tooth. He does not, as in the first story, learn of what is happening but of what to do about what is happening. Once again, in the very next line, he gives Cogaz the power tooth. The conjunction in both stories of knowledge and power is striking.

Qing's stories show that Cagn knows how to deal with a range of situations although he is not omnipotent. He knows, too, what sort of help to enlist at critical points, even though this sometimes involves trial and error. In the eland story he does not know the species of the animal but he knows how to find out. At one point in the story in which the Qobé giants abduct a young woman, Cagn learns about what is happening by means of birds he sends to investigate:

Cogaz went, and when he was coming back Cagn saw the dust, and sent the little bird that flies up and says tee-tee, called moti in Sesuto, and qouka in Bushman language, but it told nothing; then he sent another bird, the tinktinki, or tintinyane, – qinqininya in Bushman, – and it brought no news. Then he sent a third, the qeiv, a black and white bird that sings in the early morning, called tswanafike in Sesuto; and he rubbed cannā on its beak, and it flew to the dust and brought back word that the giants were coming. (ibid: 6)

Cagn knows something is wrong when he sees the dust, but not what is wrong. He knows that he can send out birds to discover what causes the dust but not which bird will bring him the information he requires. Only the third bird he sends is able to tell him and then only after canna is rubbed on its beak.

In a story about Cogaz and a group of baboons, Cagn awakes, knowing that something is wrong but not exactly what. He asks Coti to 'give him his charms, and he put some on his nose' (ibid.). This enables him to know that a group of baboons 'have hung Cogaz' and he sets about rescuing him. Here the father helps the son. In several stories, though, it is the son from whom the father seeks advice. De Prada- Samper (2016: 77) notes that it is 'unclear what this transfer of "power" from Cogaz to his father consists of', but that 'it is a reversal of what the usual folktale situation would be'. In one story, Cagn is tricked by an eagle when he wants a share of the honey it is taking from a precipice and becomes stuck to a rock. He manages to take some charms from his belt and send the charms 'to Cogaz to ask advice' (Orpen 1874: 7). Cogaz knows what his father must do to escape and sends the charms back with this advice. In the two stories that follow, Cagn again has to send 'to ask Cogaz for advice through his charms' (ibid.). In the second of these, Cogaz restores his father to full health after he has come off second best in a fight with a gang of thorns at a time when thorns 'were people' (ibid: 8). Earlier we saw the conjunction power and knowledge in the motif of the tooth. In the story of the thorns, Cogaz not only gives his father the knowledge of how to fight the thorns but the power to do so: 'Cogaz gave him advice and power, telling him how to fight them, that he was to make feints and strike as if at their legs' (ibid.). Cogaz helps his father escape from present troubles and also tries to warn him against the sort of behaviour that will lead to trouble in the future: '[h]e will get into trouble some day by these fightings' (ibid: 9). There is a similar reversal in the |Xam stories in which ||Kaggen's grandson, the ichneumon, possesses the wisdom usually associated with age and ||Kaggen the recklessness of youth. Power needs to be accompanied by knowledge.

## **Conclusions**

The sort of reading employed in this article could be extended to a discussion of other elements of the stories besides knowledge and also to a critical analysis of Wilhelm Bleek's 'Remarks' (1874: 11). This does not mean that the literary strategy of close reading should replace other approaches. Historical, linguistic, folkloristic and ethnographic work, for example, is indispensable to a richer understanding of Qing's stories. It is true, too, that these approaches include a degree of close reading. I would suggest, though, that the consistent use of the sort of strategies of reading associated with literary studies is capable of delivering fresh insight into the text, even as it recognises that interpretation is contingent and uncertain. We will never know exactly what Qing's stories mean and in this lies their power. Their elusiveness is partly attributable to their cultural and historical distance from contemporary readers and to the difficulties of translation that attended their recording. But they also possess a power that is inherent in literary language itself, a power that survives their transcription and translation. While the

researcher is authorised to interpret, the text (and the indigenous voice it in some way embodies) eludes the power of the researcher to fix its meaning.

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### **Notes**

1. Stow's thesis about the displacement of the Bushman was one with which Orpen disagreed (King 2015: 229–230). He felt it betrayed a bias towards non-Bushman African people.
2. There is a complex gender and sexual politics at play throughout Qing's stories.

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