

Voici une version de l'histoire tsimshian intitulée *Le récit d'Asdiwal* (ceci devient, pour Lévi-Strauss, "Le geste d'Asdiwal"). La version originale est de la plume de Henry Tate, le collaborateur tsimshian de Franz Boas, résident à Port Simpson. Boas a publié trois versions (1895, 1902, 1912), mais la dernière (*Tsimshian Texts*; Washington, D.C.: Publications of the American Ethnological Society, vol. III, 1912) est la plus complète et la plus connue. Ce texte est en tsimshian avec « traduction » interlinéaire en anglais, qui est assez difficile à lire. Le texte ici est a été nettoyé et transposé en anglais standardisé. Que je le sache, il n'y a aucun détail à propos de l'origine du texte, et plusieurs chercheurs ont conclu qu'au moins une partie du texte était composé par Tate lui-même, car Boas a fait quelques commentaires (dans ses lettres, qui ont été étudiées par l'historien Ralph Maud) de la qualité de l'anglais, qu'il a attribuée à Tate. Il est possible que d'autres personnes aient contribué à la version de Tate. Il semble que Tate ait écrit le texte en anglais, et qu'il l'a traduit plus tard en tsimshian pour Boas. Quelques années après cette publication, l'historien et ethnologue renommé Marius Barbeau l'a contesté; il avait travaillé avec des collaborateurs tsimshian et possédait une connaissance directe du peuple et de la culture, que Boas n'avait pas (Boas avait visité souvent la côte ouest, surtout les Kwakwaka'wakw, dans les années 1890 quand il travaillait pour divers Musées américains, mais il n'a lui-même pas transcrit des mythes). La version présentée ici avait été préparée pour mon livre *Beyond Values and Ideology*.

In the beginning there are two women: one, a Chief, while the other is her daughter, an outsider who lives in her husband's town up river; the Chief, however, is in her own town at a place called Canyon.¹ The husbands of both these women die in a winter famine. Both women leave their towns of residence and meet mid-way, where there is nothing to eat. The daughter finds food (half a rotten berry) and builds a house. During the night a stranger arrives and lies with the daughter,² although the mother does not notice anything.

In the morning the man departs, the young woman also leaves to collect bark for the fire, hears *Hats!enàs*³ and finds food.⁴ This episode repeats several times and each time she finds bigger game. Each time she finds bigger game she increases the size of her house in order to dry the ever-increasing supply of meat. One day, following her routine of getting bark and finding meat, she meets *Hats!enàs*, who admits to having supplied her and her mother with animal food over the last few days and having slept with the young woman at the outset of her adventures. The young woman is glad and realizes she is pregnant by *Hats!enàs*. *Hats!enàs* wants to marry her if the woman's mother agrees.⁵ *Hats!enàs* appears while the two women are talking and showers them with all sorts of game.

Hats!enàs and the young woman marry and build two large houses to dry the meat. The child is born and is "pulled up"⁶ by the forehead by his father *Hats!enàs* so that he grows up quickly. *Hats!enàs* gives his son [Asdiwal] a bow and four arrows, a lance, a hat, a cane, a basket and a bark raincoat, plus magical instructions that guarantee Asdiwal success in his endeavours. Asdiwal is to be a mighty hunter. *Hats!enàs* disappears, never to be seen again.

The people from up the Skeena⁷ came and bought meat from the two women; then villages from "all around" [the vicinity] also bought meat and the women became rich. The older woman dies and her daughter gives a great potlatch with all the people of surrounding villages as guests. She calls the name of her son [he assumes his proper social identity]. The mother and Asdiwal return to Canyon.

Asdiwal faces the first of his tests: a dangerous white bear⁸ comes down river from the northeast during the winter, and all have failed to stop it. The bear reaches Asdiwal's town [at Canyon]. Asdiwal puts on his father's magical gifts and chases the bear, who goes up river and eventually up a mountain. The bear manages to temporarily escape by creating a gorge in the mountain that Asdiwal at first cannot cross until he uses his magical instruments. The chase continues and the episode is repeated. The bear and Asdiwal reach a "plain" [a plateau or mesa] on the top of the mountain, where they find a ladder that leads towards the sky. The bear climbs up, followed by Asdiwal. They come upon a beautiful springtime prairie. There is a path which leads to a house in the middle of the prairie. The bear enters the house and is revealed to be a beautiful woman who was wearing a bear blanket [skin]. The Chief of the house questions the woman as to whether or not she has obtained what she wanted: it is clear that she enticed Asdiwal into following her, and Asdiwal enters the room. The Chief is in reality the Sun. The Sun unites Asdiwal and the young woman, his daughter, in marriage

The woman loves Asdiwal and warns him that her father will try to kill him as he has killed her other suitors: by magically causing them to fall off a mountain while they were hunting mountain goat. It is now clear that the woman is trying to escape her father's control, and since he is the Sun, he is a great Chief.⁹

Asdiwal laughs off the danger and agrees to go up the mountain to hunt for his father-in-law. He again puts on his magic outfit and again runs as fast as a bird flies.

Asdiwal fools his enemy by placing his cane in the ground and stretching his raincoat over it. Even the stars are fooled, except for the Kite.¹⁰ Asdiwal has in fact gone over the other side of the mountain, where he encounters another large house standing in the middle of a plain or mesa. Asdiwal sees a shaman-mountain goat predicting the future in a crowd of mountain goats, which he kills except for the shaman and a young female; they escape by jumping over his head. Asdiwal magically carries all the meat back to his wife's house, where he presents it to his father-in-law.

The sun orders Asdiwal to draw water from a spring inside a mountain fissure, which he intends close as soon as Asdiwal is inside. Again, Asdiwal is warned by his wife but laughs off the warning, secure that his supernatural powers are greater than the Sun's. He enters the mountain with a slave of the Sun and causes the slave's death and draws the water; this time, Asdiwal was successful by ruse rather than by magical powers. The Sun brings the bones of his slave home, and his daughter steps over them,¹¹ causing the slave to come back to life.

The Chief orders Asdiwal to get firewood for him. The wife once again warns her husband, who again shrugs off the warning, trusting in his supernatural powers. Asdiwal is again accompanied by the sun's slave. Asdiwal strikes the tree designated by the Sun and it falls on the slave, killing him once again. This time his daughter must step on the bones of the slave four times to revive him, and the Sun causes the tree to be put together in one piece.

The wife warns Asdiwal of the last test her father has prepared for him, which is to bake her husband in the fire.¹² This time Asdiwal is scared. A fire is built and the Sun commands his daughter to order Asdiwal to lie down on the hot stones; she refuses. Asdiwal goes outside and encounters his father *Hats!enàs*, just when his magical powers appear to have deserted him. His father gives him some magical ice. The Sun derides and taunts Asdiwal as he lies in the fire, but no harm comes to him. The Sun Chief admits that Asdiwal's powers are greater than his own, and comes to like and accept him. Everyone lives in harmony.

One day Asdiwal gets homesick. His father-in-law sends him back to his earthly village and he is shown the way by his wife. He and his wife arrive amidst famine. Asdiwal is given a Chief's name in a potlatch and assumes his titles as head of the house.¹³

Asdiwal continues to live with his wife in his mother's village. His wife discovers that Asdiwal has betrayed her and leaves to return to the land of the sun. Asdiwal tries to follow her and is killed. This time it is the Sun who gathers the bones and without his daughter's help restores Asdiwal to life. Everything is well, but Asdiwal is homesick once again. Asdiwal returns to earth with his wife, and she leaves him after showing him the way home. Asdiwal's mother has died in the meantime and he goes down the Skeena. He meets a woman, daughter of a Chief and who has four brothers, and asks her hand in marriage. They live in her village.

Everyone is again happy. Asdiwal hunts mountain goats with his brothers-in-law and kills many animals at the top of a mountain; he gives everything away to his brothers-in-law and his father-in-law. The family as a group moves to another town and some rivalry emerges between Asdiwal and his brothers-in-law. Asdiwal wins a hunting contest and in a fit of pique the brothers-in-law leave and take their sister with them.

Other people arrive at Asdiwal's now-deserted camp. They too are four brothers and a sister. The brothers take pity on Asdiwal and offer him their sister in marriage, and he offers them the bears he had killed in his contest with his previous set of brothers-in-law. Asdiwal kills more bears but does not distribute them equally among his new brothers-in-law. They all move towards the coast and Asdiwal becomes even richer and more powerful. His wife has a boy,¹⁴ but more rivalry develops, again a contest between land and sea hunting. Asdiwal is confident his magical snowshoes will enable him to clamber over the rocks and hunt sea lions successfully. He is successful, but his brothers-in-law abandon him on the rocks, although the youngest returns and offers to bring him back to their camp. He declines because of his rivalry with the oldest and stays on the rocks. *Hats!enàs* helps him survive a great storm.

After the storm abates a little mouse¹⁵ invites him to his grandfather's underground house, which is in fact the house of the sea lion Chief. The people [sea lions] are in fact suffering because of wounds from Asdiwal's arrows (inflicted in a previous hunt), and he offers to cure them. He pulls the arrows out and is immediately accepted and loved by the people for his aid. Yet Asdiwal is homesick for his wife and child; his wife misses him as well. He returns home in a sea lion stomach¹⁶ (pushed along by magical winds which the Chief tells him about). He is reunited with his wife and child. He goes inland and enlists his wife's aid in obtaining his tools, which are in his brothers'-in-law house. Asdiwal discovers that his eldest brother-in-law has mistreated his wife. He and his wife make a new camp and he carves two killer whales.¹⁷ The killer whales are made to come to life but die in the water. He and his wife repeat the experiment with various types of trees; finally, the killer whales carved of yellow cedar¹⁸ succeed, but only after his wife has made sacrifices to the spirits. He instructs the killer whales to upset the canoe of his brothers-in-law when they go hunting sea lions on the following day. The whales are to start with the eldest and upset all the brothers'-in-law canoes, except the youngest brother's, whose boat is to be tipped over when he is close to shore. This comes to pass, and Asdiwal gets his revenge but spends some time with his youngest brother-in-law.

He gets homesick once again and desires to return to his old group up the Skeena River. He leaves his wife and child. He arrives at a town, holds a potlatch and receives a new Chief's name. His boy by his first wife comes to him and Asdiwal gives him his magical bow and arrows. They part company and Asdiwal goes hunting mountain goats but forgets his magical snowshoes. He only had a little dog that his son had given him in exchange for the bow and arrows. Asdiwal is rescued by his father Hu⁰t¹⁹ who takes Asdiwal with him, but Asdiwal's body, lance and little dog all turn to stone.²⁰

¹The town is at the border between the Skeena valley hinterland, recently abandoned at the time of the formulation of the myth, and the Coast. Hence, the myth calls into question the 'over there' at its outset. The Coast Tsimshian claim the region that is 'up river', but do not actually have villages there. Asdiwal seems to be part-Gitksan.

²Not an uncommon theme in Tsimshian stories; for example, see Cove (1987:93ff) on the previously unpublished myth "The Origin of Devil's Club".

³'Good Luck' (Boas 1912:73,261), a small bird like a robin that "... conferred luck to those who saw it" (Halpin and Seguin 1990:271). Luck was especially important in a predominantly fishing-based culture that depended heavily on hunting to supplement the fish runs.

In Boas' notation (used here), '!' as in *Hats!enàs*, represents stress, '0' as in 'Hu⁰t' represents a glottal stop. The final 'a' in *Hats!enàs* is a long 'a'. See Boas (1912:67,68).

⁴A common Tsimshian theme; see Garfield (1950:51).

⁵Obviously, a young man would normally 'ask' (although the higher the rank, the lesser the choice) for the hand of his betrothed from her father, his mother's brother. As Garfield states (1950:24), "Young people had little to say since romantic love was not regarded as a basis for marriage."

⁶The usual Tsimshian idiom is that a person is "pushed up".

⁷i.e., from the area where the young women had lived before the famine.

⁸Bear tales are common in Tsimshian mythology. Both men and women may marry bears, who appear in human form; see Garfield (1950:49).

⁹This is not clear in Tsimshian statements. Normally, daughters of great chiefs would marry far away, viri- or patrilocally, although a stated preference for avunculocal (MB) residence (for men) suggests that women of the chiefly class would not change residence after marriage.

¹⁰A kind of hawk.

¹¹It is worth mentioning that salmon, the Tsimshian staple, was prepared by cutting it longitudinally by a woman sitting on the ground with her legs spread apart. Most Indian menstrual taboos, Tsimshian and others, specifically forbid a woman to step over a male's hunting equipment for fear of contaminating it and rendering it ineffective (Garfield 1950:40). Furthermore, Tsimshian mythology contains many references to *vagina dentata*; see Cove (1987:53-64).

The inversion between everyday values and myth (a woman stepping over something produces a positive effect and revives instead of harms the slain Asdiwal, a hunter *par excellence*) seems to call attention to Asdiwal's 'normality' by a double contradiction: Asdiwal is an outsider and is such is not subject to 'normal' rules and prescriptions (hence the inversion), and yet he is very much a kind of role-model. Shamans (another facet of Asdiwal's identity) are especially susceptible to malign influences from menstruating women; see Cove 1987:207-208).

¹²Fire and consumption may be necessary for reincarnation, just as reincarnation is necessary to conserve within the House the powers and status inherent in a name held by the deceased. In a myth that Cove considers important to understanding Tsimshian world view, the carcasses of salmon (and the bodies of chiefs) were to be completely consumed by fire for reincarnation (and hence survival of the Tsimshian) to occur; see Cove 1987:(53-64, 72-73), Seguin (1984b:119).

¹³A completely normal procedure. Status is inherited among the Tsimshian, but must be validated by public recognition in a potlatch ceremony.

¹⁴Waux, himself the hero of various Tsimshian myths.

¹⁵Mouse-Woman is probably meant here; she is an important intermediary between Tsimshian and the world of animals. See McNeary (1984:7).

¹⁶Cove (1987:52-63) describes a parallel situation in a key Tsimshian myth he analyzes; a young prince is returned to his people from the Land of the Salmon in a giant salmon's stomach. See Boas (1916:192ff) for similar tales of life in the Land of the Salmon.

¹⁷One of four main phratric symbols among the Coast Tsimshian, even though Asdiwal's suspicious origins (possibly Gitksan Tsimshian) suggest that he is using the wrong symbols; The Gitksan equivalent of the Coast Tsimshian Killer Whale crest is Fireweed.

¹⁸The main material used in construction and carving by the Tsimshian was red cedar; see Halpin and Seguin (1990:271, 273).

¹⁹'To escape', Boas (1912:262).

²⁰Stone, according to Cove (1987:49-156ff, 173), is a metaphor for chiefly qualities; the ideal Chief is silent, immobile and intransigent.