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The Story of Asdiwal

Since 1963 Lévi-Strauss and his associates have published a variety of 'structural analyses' of myth, but prior to the appearance of Le Cru et le cuit *in the autumn of 1964 'La Geste d'Asdiwal' was, by general consent, the most successful of all these pieces. 'Asdiwal' has twice appeared in French, but this is the first English translation. The Editor is deeply indebted to Professor Lévi-Strauss for granting permission to publish the translation and to Mr Nicholas Mann for making it.*

I

This study of a native myth from the Pacific coast of Canada has two aims. First, to isolate and compare the *various levels* on which the myth evolves: geographic, economic, sociological, and cosmological – each one of these levels, together with the symbolism proper to it, being seen as a transformation of an underlying logical structure common to all of them. And, second, to compare the *different versions* of the myth and to look for the meaning of the discrepancies between them, or between some of them; for, since they all come from the same people (but are recorded in different parts of their territory), these variations cannot be explained in terms of dissimilar beliefs, languages, or institutions.

The story of Asdiwal, which comes from the Tsimshian Indians, is known to us in four versions, collected some sixty years ago by Franz Boas (1895; 1902; 1912; 1916).

We shall begin by calling attention to certain facts which must be known if the myth is to be understood.

The Tsimshian Indians, with the Tlingit and the Haida, belong to the northern group of cultures on the Northwest Pacific coast. They live in British Columbia, immediately south of Alaska, in a region which embraces the basins of the Nass and Skeena Rivers, the coastal region stretching between their

estuaries, and, further inland, the land drained by the two rivers and their tributaries. The Nass in the North and the Skeena in the south both flow in a northeast-southwesterly direction, and are approximately parallel. The Nass, however, is slightly nearer North-South in orientation, a detail which, as we shall see, is not entirely devoid of importance.

This territory was divided between three local groups, distinguished by their different dialects: in the upper reaches of the Skeena, the Gitskan; in the lower reaches and the coastal region, the Tsimshian themselves; and in the valleys of the Nass and its tributaries, the Nisqa. Three of the versions of the myth of Asdiwal were recorded on the coast and in Tsimshian dialect (Boas, 1895, pp. 285-288; 1912, pp. 71-146; 1916, pp. 243-245 and the comparative analysis, pp. 792-824), the fourth at the mouth of the Nass, in Nisqa dialect (Boas, 1902, pp. 225-228). It is this last which, when compared with the other three, reveals the most marked differences.

Like all the peoples on the Northwest Pacific Coast, the Tsimshian had no agriculture. During the summer, the women's work was to collect fruit, berries, plants, and wild roots, while the men hunted bears and goats in the mountains and seals and sea-lions on the coastal reefs. They also practised deep-sea fishery, catching mainly cod and halibut, but also herring nearer the shore. It was, however, the complex rhythm of river-fishing that made the deepest impression upon the life of the tribe. Whereas the Nisqa were relatively settled, the Tsimshian moved, according to the seasons, between their winter villages, which were situated in the coastal region, and their fishing-places, either on the Nass or the Skeena.

At the end of the winter, when stores of smoked fish, dried meat, fat, and preserved fruits were running low, or were even completely exhausted, the natives would undergo periods of severe famine, an echo of which is found in the myth. At such times they anxiously awaited the arrival of the candlefish[1] which would go up the Nass (which was still frozen to start with) for a period of about six weeks in order to spawn (Goddard, 1934, p. 68). This would begin about 1 March, and the entire Skeena population would travel along the coast in boats as far as the Nass in order to take up position on the fishing-grounds,

which were family properties. The period from 15 February to 15 March was called, not without reason, the 'Month when Candlefish is Eaten' and that which followed, from 15 March to 15 April, the 'Month when Candlefish is Cooked' (to extract its oil). This operation was strictly taboo to men, whereas the women were obliged to use their naked breasts to press the fish; the oil-cake residue had to be left to become rotten from maggots and putrefaction and, despite the pestilential stench, it had to be left in the immediate vicinity of the dwelling-houses until the work was finished (Boas, 1916, pp. 398-399 and 44-45).

Then everyone would return by the same route to the Skeena for the second major event, which was the arrival of the salmon fished in June and July (the 'Salmon Months'). Once the fish was smoked and stored away for the year, the families would go up to the mountains, where the men would hunt while the women laid up stocks of fruit and berries. With the coming of the frost in the ritual 'Month of the Spinning Tops' (which were spun on the ice), people settled down in permanent villages for the winter. During this period the men used sometimes to go off hunting again for a few days or a few weeks. Finally, towards 15 November, came the 'Taboo Month', which marked the inauguration of the great winter ceremonies, in preparation for which the men were subjected to various restrictions.

Let us remember, too, that the Tsimshian were divided into four non-localized matrilineal clans, which were strictly exogamous and divided into lineages, descent lines, and households: the Eagles, the Ravens, the Wolves, and the Bears, also, that the permanent villages were the seat of chiefdoms (generally called 'tribes' by native informants); and finally that Tsimshian society was divided into (three) hereditary castes with bilateral inheritance of caste status (each individual was supposed to marry according to his rank): the 'Real People' or reigning families, the 'Nobles', and the 'People', which last comprised all those who (failing a purchase of rank by generous potlatches) were unable to assert an equal degree of nobility in both lines of their descent (Boas 1916, pp. 478-514; Garfield, 1939, pp. 173-174 and 177-178; Garfield, Wingert & Barbeau, 1951, pp. 1-34).

II

Now follows a summary of the story of Asdiwal taken from Boas (1912) which will serve as a point of reference. This version was recorded on the coast at Port Simpson in Tsimshian dialect. Boas published the native text together with an English translation.

Famine reigns in the Skeena valley; the river is frozen and it is winter. A mother and her daughter, both of whose husbands have died of hunger, both remember independently the happy times when they lived together and there was no dearth of food. Released by the death of their husbands, they simultaneously decide to meet and set off at the same moment. Since the mother lives down-river and the daughter up-river, the former goes eastwards and the latter westwards. They both travel on the frozen bed of the Skeena and meet half-way.

Weeping with hunger and sorrow, the two women pitch camp on the bank at the foot of a tree, not far from which they find, poor pittance that it is, a rotten berry, which they sadly share.

During the night, a stranger visits the young widow. It is soon learned that his name is Hatsenas,[2] a term which means, in Tsimshian, a bird of good omen. Thanks to him, the women start to find food regularly, and the younger of the two becomes the wife of their mysterious protector and soon gives birth to a son, Asdiwal (Asiwa, Boas, 1895; Asi-hwil, Boas, 1902).[3] His father speeds up his growth by supernatural means and gives him various magic objects: a bow and arrows which never miss for hunting, a quiver, a lance, a basket, snow-shoes, a bark raincoat, and a hat, all of which will enable the hero to overcome all obstacles, make himself invisible, and procure an inexhaustible supply of food. Hatsenas then disappears and the elder of the two women dies.

Asdiwal and his mother pursue their course westwards and settle down in her native village, Gitsalasert, in the Skeena Canyon (Boas, 1912, p. 83). One day a white she-bear comes down the valley.

Hunted by Asdiwal, who almost catches it thanks to his

magic objects, the bear starts to climb up a vertical ladder. Asdiwal follows it up to the heavens, which he sees as a vast prairie, covered with grass and all kinds of flowers. The bear lures him into the home of its father, the sun, and reveals itself to be a beautiful girl, Evening-Star. The marriage takes place, though not before the Sun has submitted Asdiwal to a series of trials, to which all previous suitors had succumbed (hunting wild goat in mountains which are rent by earthquakes; drawing water from a spring in a cave whose walls close in on each other; collecting wood from a tree which crushes those who try to cut it down; a period in a fiery furnace). But Asdiwal overcomes them all thanks to his magic objects and the timely intervention of his father. Won over by his son-in-law's talents, the Sun finally approves of him.

Asdiwal, however, pines for his mother. The Sun agrees to allow him to go down to earth again with his wife, and gives them, as provisions for the journey, four baskets filled with inexhaustible supplies of food, which earn the couple a grateful welcome from the villagers, who are in the midst of their winter famine.

In spite of repeated warnings from his wife, Asdiwal deceives her with a woman from his village. Evening-Star, offended, departs, followed by her tearful husband. Half-way up to heaven, Asdiwal is struck down by a look from his wife, who disappears. He dies, but is at once regretted and is brought back to life by his celestial father-in-law.

For a time, all goes well; then, once again, Asdiwal feels a twinge of nostalgia for earth. His wife agrees to accompany him as far as the earth, and there bids him a final farewell. Returning to his village, the hero learns of his mother's death. Nothing remains to hold him back, and he sets off again on his journey downstream.

When he reaches the Tsimshian village of Ginaxangioget, he seduces and marries the daughter of the local chief. To start with, the marriage is a happy one, and Asdiwal joins his four brothers-in-law on wild goat hunts, which, thanks to his magic objects, are crowned with success. When spring approaches, the whole family moves house, staying first at Metlakatla, and then setting off by boat for the river Nass,

going up along the coast. A head wind forces them to a halt and they camp for a while at Ksemaksén. There, things go wrong because of a dispute between Asdiwal and his brothers-in-law over the respective merits of mountain-hunters and sea-hunters. A competition takes place – Asdiwal returns from the mountains with four bears that he has killed, while the brothers-in-law return empty-handed from their sea expedition. Humiliated and enraged, they break camp, and, taking their sister with them, abandon Asdiwal.

He is picked up by strangers coming from Gitxatla, who are also on their way to the Nass for the candlefish season.

As in the previous case, they are a group of four brothers and a sister, whom Asdiwal wastes no time in marrying. They soon arrive together at the River Nass, where they sell large quantities of fresh meat and salmon to the Tsimshian, who have already settled there and are starving.

Since the catch that year is a good one, everyone goes home: the Tsimshian to their capital at Metlakatla and the Gitxatla to their town Laxalan, where Asdiwal, by this time rich and famous, has a son. One winter's day, he boasts that he can hunt sea-lions better than his brothers-in-law. They set out to sea together. Thanks to his magic objects, Asdiwal has a miraculously successful hunt on a reef, but is left there without food or fire by his angry brothers-in-law. A storm gets up and waves sweep over the rock. With the help of his father, who appears in time to save him, Asdiwal, transformed into a bird, succeeds in keeping himself above the waves, using his magic objects as a perch.

After two days and two nights the storm is calmed, and Asdiwal falls asleep exhausted. A mouse wakes him and leads him to the subterranean home of the sea-lions whom he has wounded, but who imagine (since Asdiwal's arrows are invisible to them) that they are victims of an epidemic. Asdiwal extracts the arrows and cures his hosts, whom he asks, in return, to guarantee his safe return. Unfortunately, the sea-lions' boats, which are made of their stomachs, are out of use, pierced by the hunter's arrows. The king of the sea-lions therefore lends Asdiwal his own stomach as a canoe and instructs him to send it back without delay. When he reaches

land, the hero discovers his wife, and his son alike, inconsolable. Thanks to the help of this good wife, but bad sister (for she carries out the rites which are essential to the success of the operation), Asdiwal makes killer-whales out of carved wood and brings them to life. They break open the boats with their fins and bring about the shipwreck and death of the wicked brothers-in-law.

But once again Asdiwal feels an irrepressible desire to revisit the scenes of his childhood. He leaves his wife and returns to the Skeena valley. He settles in the town of Ginadâos, where he is joined by his son, to whom he gives his magic bow and arrows, and from whom he receives a dog in return.

When winter comes, Asdiwal goes off to the mountains to hunt, but forgets his snow-shoes. Lost, and unable to go either up or down without them, he is turned to stone with his lance and his dog, and they can still be seen in that form at the peak of the great mountain by the lake of Ginadâos (Boas, 1912, pp. 71-146).

III

Let us keep provisionally to this version alone in order to attempt to define the essential points of its structure. The narrative refers to facts of various orders. First, the physical and political geography of the Tsimshian country, since the places and towns mentioned really do exist. Second, the economic life of the natives which, as we have seen, governs the great seasonal migrations between the Skeena and Nass Valleys, and during the course of which Asdiwal's adventures take place. Third, the social and family organization, for we witness several marriages, divorces, widowhoods, and other connected events. Lastly, the cosmology, for, unlike the others, two of Asdiwal's visits, one to heaven and the other below the earth, are of a mythological and not of an experiential order.

First of all, the geographical framework.

The story begins in the Skeena valley, when the two heroines leave their villages, one upstream, the other downstream, and meet half-way. In the version that Boas recorded at the Nass

estuary (1902) it is stated that the meeting-place, this time on the Nass, is called Hwil-lê-ne-hwada, 'Where-they-met-each-other' (Boas, 1902, p. 225).

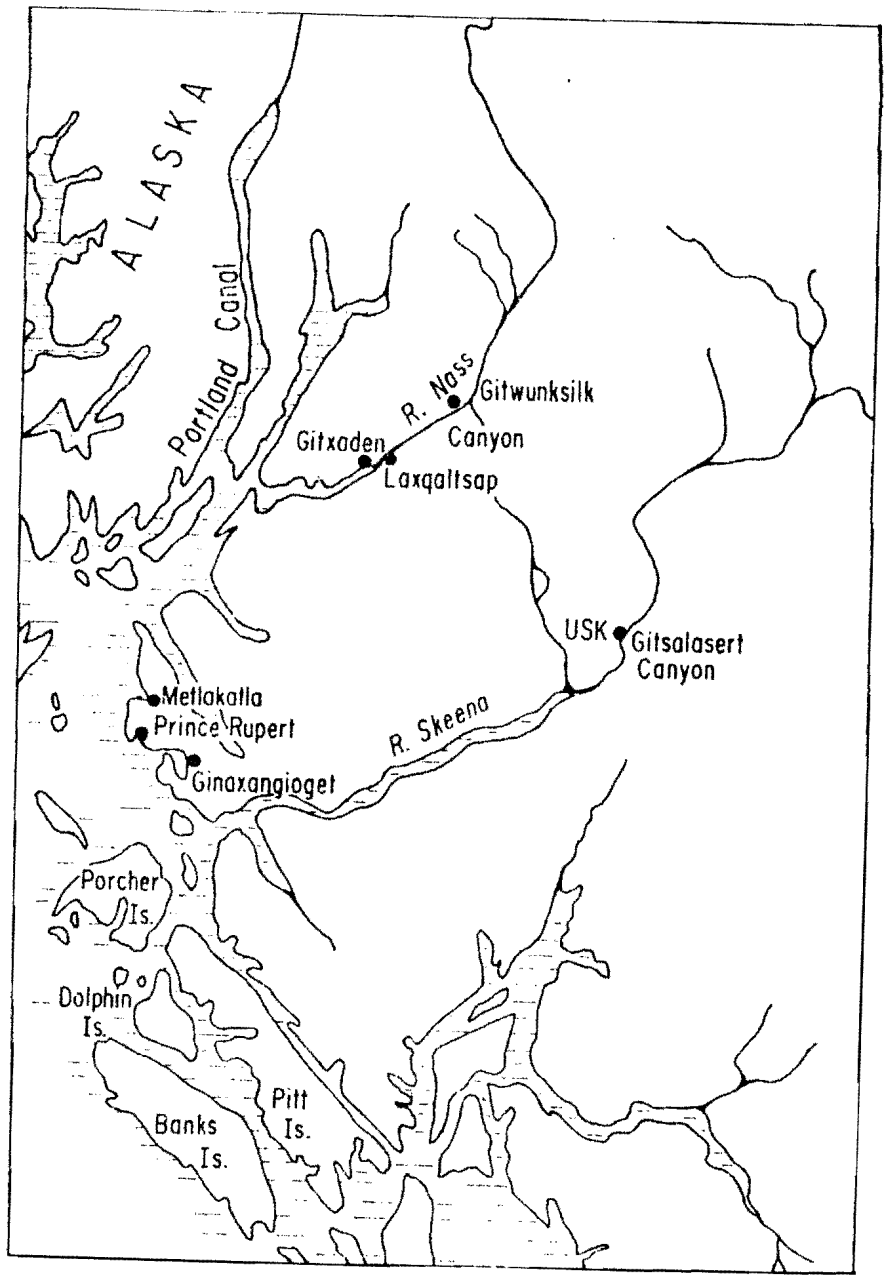
After her mother's death, the young woman and her son settle in her native village (i.e. her father's, where her mother had lived from the time of her marriage until her husband's death): the downstream village. It is from there that the visit to heaven takes place. This village, called Gitsalasert, 'People of the (Skeena) Canyon', is situated not far from the modern town of Usk (Garfield, 1939, p. 175; Boas, 1912, pp. 71, 276). Although the Tsimshian dialect was spoken there, it was outside the 'nine towns' which strictly speaking formed the Tsimshian province (Boas, 1912, p. 225).

On his mother's death, Asdiwal continues his journey downstream, that is to say, westwards. He settles in the town of Ginaxangioget, where he marries. This is in proper Tsimshian country on the lower reaches of the Skeena. Ginaxangioget is in fact a term formed from the root of *git* = 'people' and *gi.k* = 'hemlock tree' from which comes *Ginax-angi.k* 'the people of the firs' (Garfield, 1939, p. 175). And Ginaxangioget was one of the nine principal towns of the Tsimshian (Boas, 1916, pp. 482-483; Swanton, 1952, p. 606, gives 'Kinagingeet, near Metlakatla').

When Asdiwal leaves with his in-laws for the Nass to fish candlefish there, they go first by the Skeena estuary, then take to the sea, and stop at the capital city of the Tsimshian, Metlakatla – a recent town of the same name, founded by natives converted to Christianity, is to be found on Annette Island in Alaska (Beynon, 1941; Garfield, Wingert & Barbeau, 1951, pp. 33-34).

Old Metlakatla is on the coast, north of Prince Rupert and half-way between the Skeena and Nass estuaries. Ksemaksén, where the first quarrel takes place, and where Asdiwal is first abandoned by his brothers-in-law, is also on the coast, a little further north.

The Tsimshian-speaking tribe called Gitxatla, which is independent of those centres around Metlakatla, is a group of islanders living on Dolphin Island, south of the Skeena Estuary. Their name comes from *git* 'people' and *qxatla* 'channel' (Garfield, 1939, p. 175. Also Boas, 1916, 483. Swanton, 1952,



p. 607, gives 'Kitkatla, on Porcher Island'). Having travelled from East to West, Asdiwal accompanies them to the Nass, that is to say in a South-North direction, then in the opposite

direction, to 'their town', off-shore from which (and probably to the West, since it was a deep-sea expedition) the visit to the sea-lions takes place.

From there, Asdiwal returns to the Skeena, that is to say this time from West to East. The story ends at Ginadâos, Ginadoiks perhaps, from *git* 'people', *na* 'of', *doiks* 'rapid current'; the name of a torrent which flows into the Skeena (Garfield, 1939, p. 176; cf. also Boas, 1912, p. 223: Ginadâiks, 'one of the nine towns of the Tsimshian').

Let us now consider the economic aspect. The activities of this order which are brought to notice by the myth are no less real than the geographical places and the populations evoked in the preceding paragraphs. Everything begins with a period of winter famine such as was well known to the natives in the period between mid-December and mid-January, before the moment at which, theoretically, the spring salmon arrived, which was just before the arrival of the candlefish; the period called 'the Interval' (Boas, 1916, pp. 398-399). After his visit to the heavens, Asdiwal takes part in the spring migrations to the Nass for the candlefish season; then we are told of the return of the families to the Skeena in the salmon season.

These seasonal variations – to use Marcel Mauss's expression – are on a par with other differences none the less real which are emphasized by the myth, notably that between the land-hunter (personified by Asdiwal, born on the river and upstream, that is to say inland) and the sea-hunter, personified first by the People of the Firs who live downstream on the estuary, and then, still more clearly, by the inhabitants of Dolphin Island.

When we move on to the sociological aspects, there is a much greater freedom of interpretation. It is not a question of an accurate documentary picture of the reality of native life, but a sort of counterpoint which seems sometimes to be in harmony with this reality, and sometimes to part from it in order to rejoin it again.

The initial sequence of events evokes clearly defined sociological conditions. The mother and daughter have been separated by the latter's marriage, and since that time each has lived

with her own husband in his village. The elder woman's husband was also the father of the younger woman, who thus left her native village to follow her own husband upstream. We can recognize this as a society where, although there is a system of matrilineal filiation, residence is patrilocal, the wife going to live in her husband's village; and where the children, although they belong to their mother's clan, are brought up in their father's home and not in that of their maternal kin.

Such was the (real) situation among the Tsimshian. Boas emphasizes it several times: 'In olden times it was customary for a great chief to take a princess from each tribe to be his wife. Some had as many as sixteen or eighteen wives . . .' which would clearly be impossible if a man had to live in his wife's native village. More generally, says Boas: 'There is ample evidence showing that the young married people lived with the young man's parents', so that 'the children grew up in their father's home' (Boas, 1916, pp. 355, 529, 426; cf. also pp. 420, 427, 441, 499-500).

But, in the myth, this patrilocal type of residence is quickly undermined by famine, which frees the two women from their respective obligations and allows them, upon the death of their husbands, to meet (significantly enough) half-way. Their camping at the foot of the tree on the bank of the frozen river, equidistant from up-river and down-river, presents a picture of a matrilocal type of residence reduced to its simplest form, since the new household consists only of a mother and her daughter.

This reversal, which is barely hinted at, is all the more remarkable because all the subsequent marriages (in the myth) are going to be matrilocal, and thus contrary to the type found in reality.

First, Hatsenas's marriage with the younger woman. Fleeting though this union between a human being and a supernatural being may be, the husband still lives in his wife's home, and therefore in her mother's home. The matrilocal trend is even more apparent in the version recorded on the Nass. When his son Asi-hwil has grown up, Hatsenas (who here is called Hôux) says to his wife: 'Your brothers are coming to look for you. Therefore I must hide in the woods.' A short time after he had left, the brothers came, and left again the following morning,

laden with supplies of meat given to the women by their protector:

> 'As soon as they left, Hôux returned. The [women] told him that their brothers had asked them to return home. Then Hôux said "Let us part. You may return to your home; I will return to mine." On the following morning many people came to fetch the women and the boy. They took them to Gitxaden. The boy's uncles gave a feast and his mother told them the boy's name, Asi-hwil . . .' (Boas, 1902, p. 227).

Not only does the husband seem an intruder, regarded with suspicion by his brothers-in-law, and afraid that they might attack him, but, contrary to what (really) happens among the Tsimshian and in other societies characterized by the association of matrilineal filiation and patrilocal residence (Boas, 1916, p. 423; Malinowski, 1932), the food gifts go from the sister's husband to the wife's brothers.

Matrilocal marriage, accompanied by antagonism between the husband and his in-laws, is further illustrated by Asdiwal's marriage to Evening-Star; they live in her father's home, and the father-in-law shows so much hostility towards his son-in-law that he sets him trials which are deemed to be fatal.

Matrilocal, too, is Asdiwal's second marriage in the land of the People of the Firs, which is accompanied by hostility between the husband and his brothers-in-law because they abandon him and persuade their sister to follow them.

The same theme is expressed in the third marriage in the land of the People of the Channel, at any rate to start with. For after Asdiwal's visit to the sea-lions the situation is reversed: Asdiwal recovers his wife, who had refused to follow her brothers, and was wandering in search of her husband. What is more, she collaborates with him to produce the 'machination' – in the literal and the figurative sense – by means of which he takes revenge on his brothers-in-law. Finally, patrilocality triumphs when Asdiwal abandons his wife (whereas, in the previous marriages, it had been his wife who had abandoned him) and returns to the Skeena where he was born, and where his son comes alone to join him. Thus having begun with the

story of the *reunion of a mother and her daughter*, freed from their affines or *paternal kin*, the myth ends with the story of the *reunion of a father and his son*, freed from their affines or *maternal kin*.

But if the initial and final sequences in the myth constitute from a sociological point of view a pair of oppositions, the same is true, from a cosmological point of view, of the two supernatural voyages which interrupt the hero's 'real' journey. The first voyage takes him to the heavens, and into the home of the Sun, who first tries to kill him and then agrees to bring him back to life. The second takes Asdiwal to the subterranean kingdom of the sea-lions, whom he has himself killed or wounded, but whom he agrees to look after and to cure. The first voyage results in a marriage which, as we have seen, is matrilocal, and which, moreover, bears witness to a maximal exogamous separation (between an earth-born man and a woman from heaven). But this marriage will be broken up by Asdiwal's infidelity with a woman of his own village, which may be seen as a suggestion of a marriage which, if it really took place, would, so to speak, neutralize matrilocality (since husband and wife would come from the same place) and would be characterized by an endogamous proximity which would also be maximal (marriage within the village). It is true that the hero's second supernatural voyage, to the subterranean kingdom of the sea-lions, does not lead to a marriage, but in any case, as has already been shown, this visit brings about a reversal in the matrilocal tendency of Asdiwal's successive marriages, for it separates his third wife from her brothers, the hero himself from his wife, their son from his mother, and leaves only one relationship in existence: that between the father and his son.

IV

In this analysis of the myth, we have distinguished four levels: the geographic, the techno-economic, the sociological, and the cosmological. The first two are exact transcriptions of reality; the fourth has nothing to do with it, and in the third, real and imaginary institutions are interwoven. Yet in spite of these differences, the levels cannot be separated out by the native

mind. It is rather that everything happens as if the levels were provided with different codes, each being used according to the needs of the moment, and according to its particular capacity, to transmit the same message. It is the nature of this message that we shall now consider.

Winter famines are a recurrent event in the economic life of the Tsimshian. But the famine which starts the story off is also a cosmological theme. All along the Northwest Pacific Coast, in fact, the present state of the universe is attributed to the havoc wrought in the original order by the demiurge Giant or Raven (Txamsen, in Tsimshian) during travels which he undertook in order to satisfy his irrepressible voracity. Thus Txamsen is perpetually in a state of famine, and famine, although a negative condition, is seen as the '*primum movens*' of Creation.[4] In this sense we can say that the hunger of the two women in our myth has a cosmic significance; these heroines are not so much legendary persons as incarnations of principles which are at the origin of place-names.

One may schematize the initial situation as follows:

Mother	(is opposed to)	Daughter
Elder	(,, ,,	,,) Younger
Downstream	(,, ,,	,,) Upstream
West	(,, ,,	,,) East
South	(,, ,,	,,) North

The meeting takes place at the half-way point, a situation which, as we have seen, corresponds to a neutralization of patrilocal residence and to the fulfilment of the conditions for a matrilocal residence which is as yet only hinted at. But since the mother dies on the very spot where the meeting and the birth of Asdiwal took place, the essential movement, which her daughter begins by leaving the village of her marriage 'very far upstream' (Boas, 1912, p. 71), is in the direction East-West, as far as her native village in the Skeena Canyon, where she in her turn dies, leaving the field open for the hero.

Asdiwal's first adventure presents us with an opposition: heaven/earth which the hero is able to surmount by virtue of the intervention of his father, Hatsenas, the bird of good omen. The latter is a creature of the atmospheric or middle heaven and consequently well qualified to play the role of mediator between

the earth-born Asdiwal and his father-in-law the Sun, ruler of the highest heaven. Even so, Asdiwal does not manage to overcome his earthly nature, to which he twice submits, first in yielding to the charms of a fellow-countrywoman and then in yielding to nostalgia for his home village. Thus there remains a series of unresolved oppositions:

Low	High
Earth	Heaven
Man	Woman
Endogamy	Exogamy

Pursuing his course westwards, Asdiwal contracts a second matrilocal marriage which generates a new series of oppositions:

Mountain-hunting	Sea-hunting
Land	Water

These oppositions too are insurmountable, and Asdiwal's earthly nature carries him away a third time, with the result that he is abandoned by his wife and his brothers-in-law.

Asdiwal contracts his last marriage not with the river-dwellers, but with islanders, and the same conflict is repeated. The opposition continues to be insurmountable, although at each stage the terms more closer together. This time it is in fact a question of a quarrel between Asdiwal and his brothers-in-law on the occasion of a hunt on a reef when the seas are running high; that is to say, on land and water at the same time. In the previous incident, Asdiwal and his brothers-in-law had gone their separate ways, one inland and on foot, the others out to sea and in boats. This time they go together in boats, and it is only when they land that Asdiwal's superiority is made manifest by the use he makes of the magic objects intended for mountain-hunting:

> 'It was a very difficult hunt on account of the waves which swept past [the reef] in the direction of the open sea. While they were speaking about this, [Asdiwal] said: "My dear fellows I have only to put on my snowshoes and I'll run up the rocks you are talking about".' He succeeds in this way, whilst his brothers-in-law, incapable of landing, stay shamefacedly in their boats (Boas, 1912, pp. 125-126).

Asdiwal, the earth-born master of the hunt, finds himself abandoned on a reef in high seas; he has come to the furthest point of his westward journey; so much for the geographic and economic aspects. But, from a logical point of view, his adventures can be seen in a different form – that of a series of impossible mediations between oppositions which are ordered in a descending scale: high and low, water and earth, sea-hunting and mountain-hunting, etc.

Consequently, on the spatial plane, the hero is completely led off his course, and his failure is expressed in this *maximal separation* from his starting-point. On the logical plane, he has also failed because of his immoderate attitude towards his brothers-in-law, and by his inability to play the role of a mediator, even though the last of the oppositions which had to be overcome – between the types of life led by the land- and sea-hunters – is reduced to a *minimal separation*. There would seem to be a dead end at this point; but from neutral the myth goes into reverse and its machinery starts up again.

The king of the mountains (in Nass dialect, Asdiwal is called Asi-hwil, which means 'Crosser of Mountains') is caught on a mockery of a mountain, and doubly so because, on the one hand, it is nothing more than a reef and, on the other, it is surrounded and almost submerged by the sea. The ruler of wild animals and killer of bears is to be saved by a she-mouse, a mockery of a wild animal.[5] She makes him undertake a *subterranean journey*, just as the she-bear, the supreme wild animal, had imposed on Asdiwal a *celestial journey*. In fact, the only thing that is missing is for the mouse to change into a woman and to offer the hero a marriage which would be symmetrical to the other, but opposite to it; and although this element is not to be found in any of the versions, we know at least that the mouse is a fairy: Lady Mouse-woman, as she is called in the texts, where the word *ksem*, a term of respect addressed to a woman, is prefixed to the word denoting a rodent. Following through the inversion more systematically than had been possible under the preceding hypothesis, this fairy is an old woman incapable of procreation: an 'inverse wife'.

And that is not all. The man who had killed animals in their hundreds goes this time to heal them and win their love.[6] The

bringer of food (who repeatedly exercises the power he received from his father in this respect for the benefit of his family) becomes food, since he is transported in the sea-lion's stomach.[7]

Finally, the visit to the subterranean world (which is also, in many respects, an 'upside-down world') sets the course of the hero's return, for from then onwards he travels from West to East, from the sea towards the mainland, from the salt water of the ocean to the fresh water of the Skeena.

This overall reversal does not affect the development of the plot, which unfolds up to the final catastrophe. When Asdiwal returns to his people and to the initial patrilocal situation, he takes up his favourite occupation again, helped by his magic objects. But he *forgets* one of them, and this mistake is fatal. After a successful hunt, he finds himself trapped half-way up the mountain-side: 'Where might he go now? He could not go up, he could not go down, he could not go to either side' (Boas, 1912, p. 145). And on the spot he is changed to stone, that is to say paralysed, reduced to his earth-born nature in the stony and unchangeable form in which he has been seen 'for generations'.

V

The above analysis leads us to draw a distinction between two aspects of the construction of a myth: the sequences and the schemata (*schèmes*).[8] The sequences form the apparent content of the myth; the chronological order in which things happen: the meeting of the two women, the intervention of the supernatural protector, the birth of Asdiwal, his childhood, his visit to heaven, his successive marriages, his hunting and fishing expeditions, his quarrels with his brothers-in-law, etc.

But these sequences are organized, on planes at different levels (of abstraction), in accordance with schemata, which exist simultaneously, superimposed one upon another; just as a melody composed for several voices is held within bounds by constraints in two dimensions, first by its own melodic line which is horizontal, and second by the contrapuntal schemata (settings) which are vertical. Let us then draw up an inventory of such schemata for this present myth.

1. *Geographic Schema.* The hero goes from East to West, then

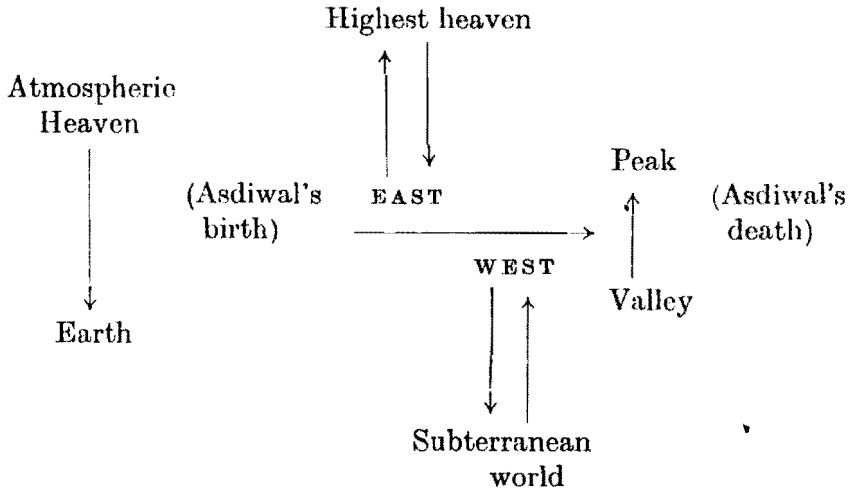
he returns from West to East. This return journey is modulated by another one, from the South to the North and then from the North to the South, which corresponds to the seasonal migrations of the Tsimshian (in which the hero takes part) to the River Nass for the candlefish season in the spring, then to the Skeena for the salmon-fishing in the summer.

NORTH

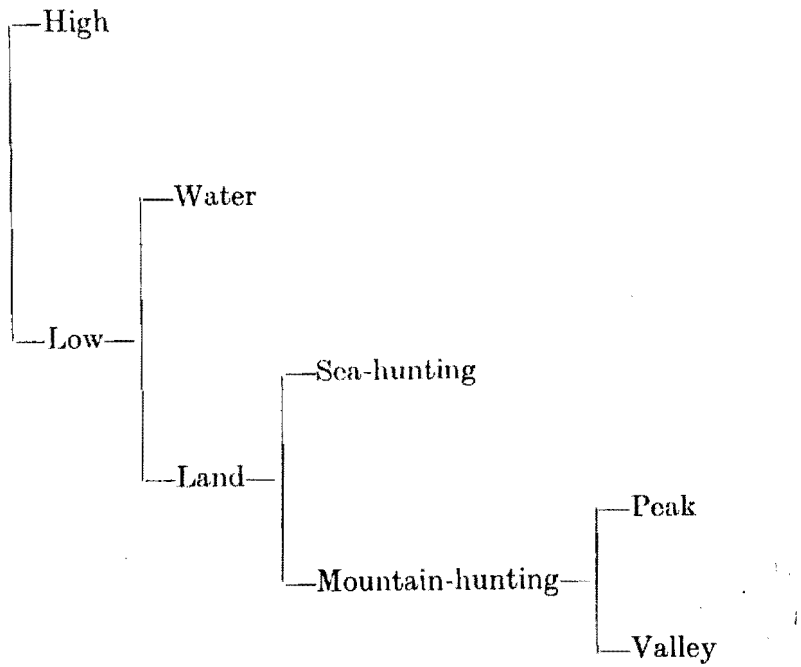
EAST ——→ WEST ——→ EAST

SOUTH

2. *Cosmological Schema.* Three supernatural visits establish a relationship between terms thought of respectively as 'below' and 'above': the visit to the young widow by Hatsenas, the bird of good omen associated with the atmospheric heavens; the visit by Asdiwal to the highest heavens in pursuit of Evening-Star; his visit to the subterranean kingdom of the sea-lions under the guidance of Lady Mouse-woman. The end of Asdiwal, trapped in the mountain, then appears as a *neutralization* of the intermediate mediation (between atmospheric heaven and earth) established at his birth but which even so does not enable him to bring off two further extreme mediations (the one between heaven and earth considered as the opposition low/high and the other between the sea and the land considered as the opposition East/West):



3. *Integration.* The above two schemata are integrated in a third consisting of several binary oppositions, none of which the hero can resolve, although the distance separating the opposed terms gradually dwindles. The initial and final oppositions: high/low and peak/valley are 'vertical' and thus belong to the cosmological schema. The two intermediate oppositions (water/land and sea-hunting/mountain-hunting) are 'horizontal' and belong to the geographic schema. But in fact the final opposition (peak/valley), which is also the narrowest contrast, brings into association the essential characteristics of the two preceding schemata: it is 'vertical' in form but 'geographical' in content. This double aspect, natural and supernatural, of the opposition between peak and valley is already specified in the myth, since the hero's perilous situation is the result of an earthquake brought about by the gods (see below, p. 22). Asdiwal's failure (in that, because he forgot his snow-shoes, he is trapped half-way up the mountain) thus takes on a threefold significance: geographical, cosmological, and logical:



When the three schemata are reduced to their bare essentials in this way, retaining only the order and amplitude of the oppositions, their complementarity becomes apparent.

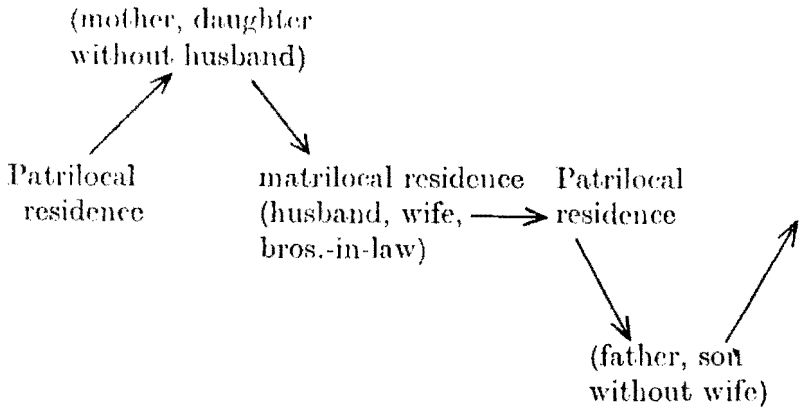
Schema 1 is composed of a sequence of oscillations of constant amplitude: East – North – West – South – East.

Schema 2 starts at a zero point (the meeting half-way between upstream and downstream) and is followed by an oscillation of medium amplitude (atmospheric heavens – earth), then by oscillations of maximum amplitude (earth – heaven, heaven – earth, earth – subterranean world, subterranean world – earth) which die away at the zero point (half-way up, between peak and valley).

Schema 3 begins with an oscillation of maximum amplitude (high-low) which dies away in a series of oscillations of decreasing amplitude (water – land; sea-hunting – mountain-hunting; valley – peak).

4. *Sociological Schema.* To start with, patrilocal residence prevails. It gives way progressively to matrilocal residence (Hatsenas's marriage), which becomes murderous (Asdiwal's marriage in heaven), then merely hostile (the marriage in the land of the People of the Firs), before weakening and finally reversing (marriage among the People of the Channel) to allow a return to patrilocal residence.

The sociological schema has not, however, a closed structure like the geographic schema, since, at the beginning, it involves a mother and her daughter, in the middle, a husband, his wife, and his brothers-in-law, and, at the end, a father and his son.[9]



5. *Techno-economic Schema.* The myth begins by evoking a winter famine; it ends with a successful hunt. In between, the story follows the (real-life) economic cycle and the seasonal migrations of the native fishermen:

Famine → Fishing for Candlefish → Salmon Fishing → Successful Hunt

6. *Global Integration.* If the myth is finally reduced to its two extreme propositions, the initial state of affairs and the final, which together summarize its operational function, then we end up with a simplified diagram:

(Initial State)		(Final State)	
FEMALE	axis	MALE	axis
EAST-WEST		HIGH-LOW	
FAMINE		REPLETION	
MOVEMENT		IMMOBILITY	

Having separated out the codes, we have analysed the structure of the message. It now remains to decipher the meaning.

VI

In Boas (1916) there is a version of the story of Asdiwal that is remarkable in several respects. First, it brings a new character into play: Waux, the son of Asdiwal's second marriage, who seems to be a doublet of his father, although his adventures take place after those of Asdiwal. In chronological order, they form supplementary sequences of events. But these *later* sequences are organized in schemata which are at the same time *homologous* to those which have been described and more *explicit* than them. Everything seems to suggest that, as it draws to its close, the obvious narrative (the sequences) tends to approach the latent content of the myth (the schemata); a convergence which is not unlike that which the listener discovers in the final chords of a symphony.

When Asdiwal's second wife (his first earth-born wife) bore him a son, he was called Waux. That means 'very light', for this son used to fly away like a spark.[10]

The father and son loved each other very much and always

hunted together. And thus it was a cause of great sorrow to Waux when his uncles forced him to follow them after they had left his father (Asdiwal) at Ksemaksén. The mother and son had even secretly tried to find Asdiwal and had only abandoned the attempt when they were convinced that he must have been devoured by some wild animal.

Waux, following in his father's footsteps, became a great hunter. Before his mother died, she made him marry a cousin, and the young couple lived happily. Waux continued to hunt on his father's hunting-grounds, sometimes in company with his wife, who gave birth to twins.

Soon Waux's children went hunting with him, as he had formerly done with his father. One day he went with them into an unexplored region. The children slipped on the mountain and were both killed. The following year Waux returned to the same place to hunt, armed with all the magic objects he had inherited from his father, except the lance, which he forgot. Taken unawares by an earthquake, he tried in vain to make his wife (whom he saw in the valley) understand that he needed her ritual help. He shouted to her to sacrifice fat to the supernatural powers in order to appease them. But the wife could not hear and misunderstood, repeating not what her husband had said, but what she wanted to do herself, 'You want me to eat fat?' Discouraged, Waux agreed, and his wife sated herself with fat and cold water. Satisfied, she lay down on an old log. Her body broke apart and was changed into a veined flint which is still found all over that place today.

Waux, because he had forgotten the lance which enabled him to split the rock and open a way through the mountain, and having lost his last chance of placating the elements because of the misunderstanding which had arisen between his wife and himself, was turned to stone, as were also his dog and all his magic objects. They are still there to this day (Boas, 1916, pp. 243-245).

Several significant permutations will be noticed if this is compared with the version which we have taken as a point of reference.

Asdiwal had an only son (in fact, as we have seen, two only sons, born of consecutive marriages and confused into one single one in the story), whereas Waux has twins. We do not know much about these twins, but it is tempting to set up a parallel between them and the two magic dogs that Asi-hwil was given by his father in the River Nass version: one red, the other spotted – that is, marked by a contrast which suggests (when compared with the symbolic colour systems so common among the North American Indians) divergent functions.

Moreover, the existence of twins already provides a pointer. In the American series of mediators, twins represent the weakest term, and come at the bottom of the list, after the Messiah (who unites opponents) and the trickster (in whom they are in juxtaposition). The pair of twins brings opposites into association but at the same time leaves them individually distinct (see Lévi-Strauss, 1963a, Ch. XI, 'The Structural Study of Myth').

The change from a single mediator to a pair of twins is thus a sign of a weakening in the function of the mediator, all the clearer because only shortly after their appearance on the mystical scene the twins die in unexplored territory without having played any part.

Like Asdiwal, Waux ends by being turned to stone as a result of forgetting a magic object; the identity of this object, however, changes from one version to another. In Asdiwal, it is the snow-shoes; in Waux the lance. These magic objects are the instruments of mediation given to the hero by his supernatural father. Here, again, there is a gradation; the snow-shoes make it possible to climb up and down the steepest slopes; the lance enables its owner to go straight through walls of rock. The lance is thus a more radical means than the snow-shoes, which come to terms with the obstacle rather than doing away with it. Waux's omission seems more serious than Asdiwal's. The weaker mediator loses the stronger instrument of mediation and his powers are doubly diminished as a result.

Thus the story of Waux follows a dialectic regression; but, in another sense, it reveals a progression, since it is with this variant that a structure which had remained open in certain respects is finally closed.

Waux's wife dies of *repletion*. That is the end of a story which

opened by showing Asdiwal's (or Asi-hwil's) mother a victim of *starvation*. It was this famine which set her in *motion*, just as, now, abuse of food brings Waux's wife to a *halt*. And before leaving this point let us note that in fact the two characters of the initial sequence were two women who were *single*, *unfed*, and *on the move*, whereas those of the final sequence were a *couple* composed of a husband and his wife, one a *bringer of food* (who is not understood) and the other *overfed* (because she does not understand), and both *paralysed* in spite of this opposition (but also perhaps because of the negative complementarity that it expresses).

The most important transformation is that represented by the marriage of Waux. It has been seen that Asdiwal contracted a series of marriages, all equally unsuccessful. He cannot choose between his supernatural bride and his fellow-country-women; he is abandoned (though against her will, it is true) by his Tsimshian spouse. His Gitxatla wife remains faithful to him and even goes so far as to betray her brothers; it is he who abandons her. He ends his days, having joined forces with his son again, in a celibate state.

Waux, on the other hand, marries only once, but this marriage proves fatal for him. Here, however, it is a case of a marriage *arranged* by Waux's mother (unlike Asdiwal's *adventurous* marriages) and a marriage with a *cousin* (whereas Asdiwal marries complete *strangers*), or more precisely, with his cross-cousin, his mother's brother's daughter (which explains the intermediary role played by his mother).[11]

As Boas explains in the text quoted in the footnote above, there was a preference for marriage with the mother's brother's daughter among the Tsimshian, especially in the noble classes from which our heroes are drawn. Garfield doubts whether the practice was strictly in accordance with mythical models (Garfield, 1939, pp. 232-233), but the point is of secondary importance, since we are studying schemata with a normative function. In a society like that of the Tsimshian, there is no difficulty in seeing why this type of marriage could be thought ideal. Boys grew up in their fathers' homes, but sooner or later they had to go over to their maternal uncle when they inherited his titles, prerogatives, and hunting-grounds (Boas, 1916, p. 411,

where he contradicts p. 401. We shall return to this contradiction later.) Marriage with the matrilateral cousin provided a solution to this conflict.

Furthermore, as has often been found to be the case in other societies of the same type, such a marriage made it possible to overcome another conflict: that between the patrilineal and matrilineal tendencies of Tsimshian society, which, as we have seen above, is very deeply conscious of the two lines (p. 3. See also on this point E. Sapir, 1915, pp. 6 and 27, and Garfield, Wingert & Barbeau, 1951, pp. 17-25). By means of such a marriage, a man ensures the continued existence of his hereditary privileges and of such titles as he might have within the limits of a small family circle (Swanton, 1909; Wedgewood, 1928; Richards, 1914).

I have shown elsewhere that it is unlikely that this interpretation may be seen as the universal origin of cross-cousin marriage (Lévi-Strauss, 1949, pp. 158-159). But in the case of a society which has feudal tendencies, it certainly corresponds to real motives which contributed to the survival, or to the adoption, of the custom. The final explanation of this custom must, however, be sought in those characteristics which are common to all societies which practised it.

The Tsimshian myths provide, furthermore, a surprising commentary on the native theory of marriage with the matrilateral cross-cousin in the story of the princess who refuses to marry her cousin (her father's sister's son).

> No less cruel than she was proud, the princess demands that her cousin prove his love by disfiguring himself. He slashes his face and then she rejects him because of his ugliness. Reduced to a state of despair, the young man seeks death and ventures into the land of Chief Pestilence, master of deformities. After the hero has undergone rigorous trials, the chief agrees to transform him into a Prince Charming.
>
> Now his cousin is passionately attracted to him, and the young man, in his turn, demands that she sacrifice her beauty, but only in order to heap sarcasm upon her head. The now hideous princess tries to move Chief Pestilence to pity, and at once the maimed and deformed race of people who make

up his court set upon the unfortunate woman, break her bones and tear her apart.

Boas's informant sees in this tale the myth which lies at the origin of the rites and ceremonies celebrated at the marriages of cross-cousins.

> 'There was a custom among our people that the nephew of the chief had to marry the chief's daughter, because the tribe of the chief wanted the chief's nephew to be the heir of his uncle and to inherit his place after his death. This custom has gone on, generation after generation, all along until now, and the places of the head men have thus been inherited.'

But, the informant goes on, it is because of the disaster that struck the rebellious princess that it was decided that on such occasions 'no young woman should have any say about her marriage. . . . Even though the young woman does not want to marry the man, she has to consent when the agreement has been made on both sides to marry them' (that is to say after negotiations between the maternal descent groups of the young people).

> 'When the prince and princess have married, the tribe of the young man's uncle mobilize. Then the tribe of the young woman's uncle also mobilize and they have a fight. The two parties cast stones at each other, and the heads of many of those on each side are hit. The scars made by the stones on the heads of each chief's people are signs of the marriage pledge'.[12]

In his commentary Boas notes that this myth is not peculiar to the Tsimshian, but is found also among the Tlingit and the Haida, who are likewise matrilineal and likewise faithful to the same type of marriage. Thus it is clear that it portrays a fundamental aspect of the social organization of these peoples, which consists in a hostile equilibrium between the matrilineal lineages of the village chiefs. In a system of generalized exchange, such as results, in these feudal families, from the preferential marriage with the mother's brother's daughter, the

families are, so to speak, ranged around a more or less stable circle, in such a way that each family occupies, at least temporarily, the position of 'wife-giver' with respect to some other family and of 'wife-taker' with respect to a third. Depending on the society, this lopsided structure (lopsided, because there is no guarantee that in giving one will receive) can achieve a certain equilibrium – more apparent, however, than real – in several ways: democratically, by following the principle that all marriage exchanges are equivalent; or, on the contrary, by stipulating that one of the positions (wife-giver, wife-taker) is, by definition, superior to the other. But given a different social and economic context, this amounts in theory, if not in practice, to the same thing, since each family must occupy both positions (Lévi-Strauss, 1949; 1963a, pp. 311-312). The societies of the Northwest Pacific Coast could not, or would not, choose one of these points of balance, and the respective superiority or inferiority of the groups involved was openly contested on the occasion of each marriage. Each marriage, along with the potlatches which accompanied and preceded it, and the transfers of titles and property occasioned by it, provided the means by which the groups concerned might gain an advantage over each other while at the same time putting an end to former disputes. It was necessary to make peace but only on the best possible terms. French mediaeval society offers, in terms of patrilineal institutions, a symmetrical picture of a situation which had much in common with the one just described.

In such circumstances, is there anything amazing about the horrid little story in which the natives see the origin of their marriage institutions? Is there anything surprising in the fact that the ceremony of marriage between first cousins takes the form of a bloody battle? When we believe that, in bringing to light these antagonisms which are inherent in the structure of Tsimshian society, we are 'reaching rock bottom' (in the words of Marcel Mauss), we express in this geological metaphor an approach that has many points of comparison with that made by the myths of Asdiwal and Waux. All the paradoxes conceived by the native mind, on the most diverse planes: geographic, economic, sociological, and even cosmological, are, when all is

said and done, assimilated to that less obvious yet so real paradox which marriage with the matrilateral cousin attempts but fails to resolve. But the failure is *admitted* in our myths, and there precisely lies their function.

Let us glance at them again in this light. The winter famine which kills the husbands of the two original heroines frees them from patrilocal residence and enables them first to meet and then to return to the daughter's native village, which will correspond, for her son, to a matrilocal type of residence. Thus a shortage of food is related to the sending out of young women, who return to their own descent groups when food is scarce. This is symbolic of an event which is illustrated in a more concrete fashion each year, even if there is no famine, by the departure of the candlefish from the Nass and then of the salmon from the Skeena. These fish come from the open sea, arrive from the South and the West, and go up the rivers in an easterly direction. Like the departing fish, Asdiwal's mother continues her journey westwards and towards the sea, where Asdiwal discovers the disastrous effects of matrilocal marriage.

The first of his marriages is with Evening-Star, who is a supernatural being. The correlation of female heaven and male earth which is implicit in this event is interesting from two points of view.

First, Asdiwal is in a way fished up by the She-Bear who draws him up to heaven, and the myths often describe grizzly bears as *fishing for salmon*.[13] Like a salmon too, Asdiwal is fished up in a net by the compassionate Sun after he has crashed to earth.[14] But when Asdiwal returns from his symmetrically opposite visit to the subterranean kingdom of the sea-lions, he travels in one of their stomachs, like a food; comparable to the *candlefish* which are scooped up from the bed of the River Nass, the 'Stomach River'. Furthermore, the hero now goes in the opposite direction, no longer from East to West like the food disappearing, but from West to East like the food returning.

Second, this reversal is accompanied by another: from matrilocal to patrilocal residence; and this reversal is in itself a variable of the replacement of a celestial journey by a sub-

terranean one, which brings Asdiwal from the position of: earth, male, dominated, to that of: earth, male, dominant.

Patrilocal residence is no more successful for Asdiwal. He gets his son back but loses his wife and his affines. Isolated in this new relationship, and incapable of bringing together the two types of filiation and residence, he is stuck half-way at the moment when he has almost reached his goal; at the end of a successful hunt, he has reconquered food but lost his freedom of movement. Famine, which causes movement, has given way to abundance, but at the price of paralysis.

We can then now better understand how Waux's marriage with his matrilateral cousin, following that of his father, symbolizes the futile last attempts of Tsimshian thought and Tsimshian society to overcome their inherent contradictions. For this marriage fails as the result of a *misunderstanding* added to an *omission*: Waux had succeeded in staying with his maternal kin while at the same time retaining his father's hunting-grounds; he had managed to inherit in both the maternal and the paternal lines at the same time; but, although they are cousins, he and his wife remain alienated from one another, because cross-cousin marriage, in a feudal society, is a palliative and a decoy. In these societies, women are always objects of exchange, but property is also a cause of battle.

VII

The above analysis suggests an observation of a different kind: it is always rash to undertake, as Boas wanted to do in his monumental *Tsimshian Mythology*, 'a description of the life, social organization and religious ideas and practices of a people . . . as it appears from their mythology' (Boas, 1916, p. 32).

The myth is certainly related to given (empirical) facts, but not as a *re-presentation* of them. The relationship is of a dialectic kind, and the institutions described in the myths can be the very opposite of the real institutions. This will in fact always be the case when the myth is trying to express a negative truth. As has already been seen, the story of Asdiwal has landed the great American ethnologist in no little difficulty, for Waux

is there said to have inherited his father's hunting-grounds, while other texts, as well as eye-witness observation, reveal that a man's property, including his hunting-grounds, went to his sister's son, that is to say from man to man in the maternal line.[15]

But Waux's paternal inheritance no more reflects real conditions than do his father's matrilocal marriages. In real life, the children grew up in the patrilocal home. Then they went to finish their education at their maternal uncle's home; after marrying, they returned to live with their parents, bringing their wives with them, and they settled in their uncle's village only when they were called upon to succeed him. Such, at any rate, was the case among the nobility, whose mythology formed a real 'court literature'. The comings and goings were one of the outward signs of the tensions between lineages connected by marriage. Mythical speculation about types of residence which are exclusively patrilocal or matrilocal do not therefore have anything to do with the reality of the structure of Tsimshian society, but rather with its inherent possibilities and its latent potentialities. Such speculations, in the last analysis, do not seek to depict what is real, but to justify the shortcomings of reality, since the extreme positions are only *imagined* in order to show that they are *untenable*. This step, which is fitting for mythical thought, implies an admission (but in the veiled language of the myth) that the social facts when thus examined are marred by an insurmountable contradiction. A contradiction which, like the hero of the myth, Tsimshian society cannot understand and prefers to forget.

This conception of the relation of the myth to reality no doubt limits the use of the former as a documentary source. But it opens the way for other possibilities; for in abandoning the search for a constantly accurate picture of ethnographic reality in the myth, we gain, on occasions, a means of reaching unconscious categories.

A moment ago it was recalled that Asdiwal's two journeys – from East to West and from West to East – were correlated with types of residence, respectively matrilocal and patrilocal. But in fact the Tsimshian have patrilocal residence, and from this we can (and indeed must) draw the conclusion that one of the orientations corresponds to the direction implicit in a

real-life 'reading' of their institutions, the other to the opposite direction. The journey from West to East, the return journey, is accompanied by a return to patrilocality. Therefore the direction in which it is made is, for the native mind, the only real direction, the other being purely imaginary.

That is, moreover, what the myth proclaims. The move to the East assures Asdiwal's return to his element, the Earth, and to his native land. When he went westwards it was as a bringer of food putting an end to starvation; he made up for the absence of food while at the same time travelling in the same direction as that taken by food when it departed. Journeying in the opposite direction, in the sea-lion's stomach, he is symbolically identified with food, and he travels in the direction in which the food (of actual experience) returns.

The same applies to matrilocal residence; it is introduced as a negative reality, to make up for the non-existence of patrilocal residence caused by the death of the husbands.

What then is the West–East direction in native thought? It is the direction taken by the candlefish and the salmon when they arrive from the sea each year to enter the rivers and race upstream. If this orientation is also that which the Tsimshian must adopt in order to obtain an undistorted picture of their concrete social existence, is it not because they see themselves as being *sub specie piscis*; that they put themselves in the fishes' place, or rather that they put the fish in their place?

This hypothesis, arrived at by a process of deductive reasoning, is indirectly confirmed by ritual institutions and mythology.

Fishing and the preparation of the fish are the occasion for all kinds of ritual among the natives of the Northwest Coast. We have already seen that the women must use their naked breasts to press the candlefish in order to extract the oil from it, and that the remains must be left to rot near the dwellings in spite of the smell. The salmon does not rot, since it is dried in the sun or smoked. But there are further ritual conditions which must be observed: for instance, it must be cut up with a primitive knife made of a mussel shell, and any kind of stone, bone, or metal blade is forbidden. Women set about this operation sitting on the ground with their legs apart (Boas, 1916, pp. 449-450 and 919-932 (Nootka)).

These prohibitions and prescriptions seem to represent the same intention: to bring out the immediacy of the relationship between fish and man by treating fish as if it were a man, or at any rate by ruling out, or limiting to the extreme, the use of manufactured objects which are part of culture; or, in other words, by denying or underestimating the differences between fish and men.

The myths, for their part, tell of the visit of a prince to the kingdom of the salmon, whence he returns, having won their alliance, himself transformed into a fish. All these myths have one incident in common: the prince is welcomed by the salmon and learns that he may in no circumstances eat the same food as they, but must not hesitate to kill and eat the fish themselves, regardless of the fact that they thenceforth appear to him in human form (Boas, 1916, pp. 192-206, 770-778, 919-932).

It is at this point that the mythical identification hits upon the only real relationship between fish and men: one of food. It persists, even in the myth, as an alternative: either to eat like salmon (although one is a man) or to eat salmon (although they are like men). This latter solution is the right one, and thanks to it they are reborn from their bones, which had been carefully collected and then immersed or burned. But the first solution would be an *abuse of identification*, of man with salmon, not of salmon with man. The character in the myth who was guilty of this was transformed into a root or a rock – like Asdiwal – condemned to immobility and perpetually bound to the earth.

Starting with an initial situation characterized by irrepressible movement, and ending in a final situation characterized by perpetual immobility, the myth of Asdiwal expresses in its own way a fundamental aspect of the native philosophy. The start presents us with the absence of food; and everything which has been said above leads us to think that the role of Asdiwal, as bringer of food, consists in (bringing about) a negation of this absence, but that is quite another thing from (saying that Asdiwal's role equates with) the presence of food. In fact, when this presence is finally obtained, with Asdiwal taking on the aspect of 'food itself' (and no longer that of 'bringer of food'), the result is a state of inertia.

But starvation is no more a tolerable human condition than is

immobility. Therefore we must conclude that for these natives the only positive form of existence is a *negation of non-existence*. It is out of the question to develop this theory within the limits of the present work. But let us note in passing that it would shed new light on the *need for self-assertion* which, in the potlatch, the feasts, the ceremonies, and the feudal rivalries, seems to be such a particular characteristic of the societies of the Northwest Pacific Coast.

VIII

There is one last problem which remains to be solved, that which is posed by the differences between the Nass River version and those recorded on the coast, in which the action takes place on the Skeena. Up to now we have followed these latter ones, which are very similar to each other. Boas even says that the two versions are 'practically identical'.[16] Let us now look at the Nass version.

Famine reigns in the two villages of Laxqaltsap and Gitwunksilk – it is possible to place them: the first is the present Greenville on the Nass estuary,[17] and the second is on the lower Nass, but further upstream.[18] Two sisters, separated by marriage, each live in one of the villages. They decide to join forces, and meet half-way in a place which is named in memory of this event. They have a few provisions. The sister from down-river has only a few hawberries, the one from up-river, a small piece of spawn. They share this and bewail their plight.

One of the sisters – the one from up-river – has come with her daughter, who does not enter the story again. The one from down-river, the younger of the two, is still unmarried. A stranger visits her at night. He is called Hôux, which means 'Good Luck'. When he learns of the state of the women, he miraculously provides food for them, and the younger woman soon gives birth to a son, Asi-hwil, for whom his father makes a pair of snow-shoes. At first they are useless, but once perfected, they bestow magic powers on their wearer. Asi-hwil's father also gives him two magic dogs, and

a lance which can pass through rock. From then on, the hero reveals himself to be a better hunter than other supernatural beings against whom he is matched.

Then follows the episode of Hôux's retreat from his brothers-in-law which has been summarized above (see pp. 11-12). They carry off their sister and their nephew at Gitxaden, down-stream from Nass Canyon.[19] There, the hero is drawn towards the sky by the slave of a supernatural being, disguised as a white bear; but he does not succeed in reaching the heavenly abode and returns to earth having lost track of the bear.

He then goes to Tsimshian country, where he marries the sister of the sea-lion hunters. He humiliates them by his superiority, is abandoned by them, visits the sea-lions in their subterranean kingdom, looks after them and cures them, gets a canoe made of their intestines which brings him back to the coast, where he kills his brothers-in-law with artificial killer-whales. He finds his wife and never leaves her again (Boas, 1902, pp. 225-229).

Clearly, this version is very poor. It has very few episodes, and when compared with Boas (1912) which has been our point of reference up to now, the sequence of events seems very confused. It would, however, be quite wrong to treat the Nass version simply as a weakened echo of the Skeena ones. In the best-preserved part, the initial sequence of events, it is as if the richness of detail had been preserved, but at the cost of permutations which, without any doubt, form a system. Let us therefore begin by listing them, distinguishing the elements which are common to both versions from the elements which have been transformed.

In both cases, the story begins in a river valley: that of the Skeena, that of the Nass. It is winter, and famine reigns. Two related women, one living upstream and the other downstream, decide to join forces, and meet half-way.

Already, several differences are apparent:

Place of the Action	Nass	Skeena
State of the River	?	Frozen

Situation of the Two Villages	Not far apart	'Very far apart'[20]
Relationship between the Two Women	Sisters	Mother and daughter
Civil Status	1 married / 1 unmarried	2 widows

These differences, it is clear, are equivalent to a *weakening of all the oppositions* in the Nass version. This is very striking in the (contrasted) situations of the two villages and even more so in the (contrasted) relationships between the two women. In the latter there is a constant element, the relationship of elder to younger, which is manifested in the form: *mother/daughter* in the one case, and *elder sister/younger sister* in the other, the first couple living *farther apart* from one another than the second and being brought together by a *more radical event* (the double simultaneous widowhood) than the second (of whom only one is married – it is not stated whether she has lost her husband).

One may also prove that the Nass version is a weakening of the Skeena version and that the Skeena version is not a strengthened form of the other. The proof lies in the vestigial survival of the original mother/daughter relationship in the form of the maternity of the elder sister, who is accompanied by her daughter, a detail which in every other respect has no function in the Nass version:

(*a*) [mother : daughter] :: [(mother + daughter) : non-mother]

the constant element being given by the opposition between *retrospective fertility* and *prospective fertility*.

But these differences, which one could consider as being 'more' or 'less', and in this sense quantitative, are accompanied by others which are genuine inversions.

In the Skeena version, the elder of the two women comes from down-river, the younger from up-river. In the Nass variant, the contrary is true, since the pair (mother + daughter) comes from Gitwunksilk, upstream of the Canyon, and the unmarried sister (who will marry the supernatural protector and is therefore identical with the daughter in the Skeena version) arrives from Laxqaltsap, which is downstream.

In the Skeena version, the women are completely empty-

handed, reduced to sharing *a single rotten berry*, found at their meeting-place ('a few berries' in Boas, 1895). Once again, the Nass version shows a weakening, since the women bring provisions, though they are in fact very meagre: a handful of berries and a piece of spawn:

	Down-river	*Up-river*
Skeena version:	0 ⟶ rotten berry ⟵	0
Nass version:	berries ⟶	⟵ spawn

It would be easy to show that on the Northwest Pacific Coast and in other regions of America, decomposition is considered as the borderline between food and excrement.[21] If, in the Skeena version, a single berry (*quantatively*, the minimal food) is the bearer of decomposition (*qualitatively*, the minimal food), then it is because berries in themselves are thought of *specifically* as a weak kind of food, in contrast with strong foods.

Without any doubt, in the Skeena version the two women are deliberately associated not with any particular food, but with the lack of any sort of food. This 'dearth of food' however, though a negative category, is not an empty category, for the development of the myth gives it, in retrospect, a content. The two women represent 'absence of food', but they are also bound respectively to the East and to the West, to the land and to the sea. The myth of Asdiwal tells of an opposition between two types of life, also bound up with the same cardinal points and the same elements: mountain-hunters on the one side, fishermen and sea-hunters on the other (Boas, 1916, p. 403: 'The sea-hunter required a training quite different from that of the mountain-hunter'). In the Skeena version the 'alimentary' opposition is therefore double: (1) between animal food (at the extreme positions) and vegetable food (in the intermediate position) and (2) between sea-animal (West) and land-animal (East), thus:

Vegetable food:	middle		not defined[22] (*non-marqué*)
	↑ (1) ↓		
Animal food:	(sea) (West) ⟵	(2) ⟶	(land) (East) strongly defined[23] (*marqué*)

From this we obtain the formula:

(*b*) [land : sea] :: [(sea + land) : middle]

and the analogy of this with (*a*) [p. 35] is immediately obvious.

The alimentary system of the Nass version is based on a *simplified structure* (with two terms instead of three) and on *weakened oppositions*. From being 'not-defined', vegetable food moves to a state of being 'weakly defined'; from a borderline state between 'food' and 'absence of food', it becomes a positive food, both quantitatively (a handful of berries) and qualitatively (fresh berries). This vegetable food is now opposed not to animal food as such, a category which is strongly defined (and here distinguished by a minus sign (−1)), but to the weakest imaginable manifestation of this same animal food (to which we still assign a plus sign (+1)). This contrast between 'weakly defined animal food' and 'strongly defined animal food' is exhibited in three ways:

fish and not meat
fish spawn and not fish
a piece 'as big as the finger'

Thus we have a system:

sea West vegetable food (relatively abundant in quantity)	⟵ weakly defined opposition ⟶	land East animal food (relatively weak in quality)

From the point of view of the alimentary system, the correlation between the two variants of the myth can thus be expressed by the following formulae:

(c_1) [(− meat) : (− fish)] :: [dx(meat + fish) : dx(vegetable food)]

or in simplified form (ignoring the minute quantity dx):

(c_2) [meat : fish] :: [(meat + fish) : (vegetable food)]

where the sum of (meat + fish) constitutes the category of animal food. It will be noticed, once again, that there is an analogy between the three formulae *a*, *b*, and *c*.

The two types of food in the Nass version are berries (downstream) and spawn (upstream). Spawn is an animal food from the river, berries a vegetable food from the land (earth), and,

of all earth-grown foods, this (in contrast to the game that is hunted in the mountains) is the one most commonly associated with the river banks (Boas, 1916, p. 404: 'Women go out jointly by canoe or walking in the woods to gather berries').

Thus the transformation which has occurred in the process of transferring the story from the one version to the other can, from this point of view, be written as follows:

(*d*) [West : East] :: [sea : land] :: [water : land (earth)]
:: [river : bank]

But the opposition between the river and its banks is not only a weakened form of the fundamental contrasts between 'East' and 'West' and between 'land (earth)' and 'water', which are most strongly defined in the opposition: sea/land. It is also a *function* of this last opposition.

In fact, the opposition river/bank is more strongly defined inland (where the element 'water' is reduced to 'river') than towards the coast. There the opposition is no longer so pertinent because, in the category 'water', the sea takes precedence over the river, and in the category 'land (earth)', the coast takes precedence over the bank. One can thus understand the logic of the reversal whereby, *up-river*, we are led to put:

(*d*) [water : land (earth)] :: [river : bank]

whereas *down-river* – when the whole of the river and its banks are assimilated into the category 'land,' this time in opposition to the category 'sea' – we are led to write:

(*e*) [water : land (earth)] :: [sea : (river + bank)]

where the combination (river + bank) has, by permutation, been moved into the position originally occupied by 'land'.

Since (*d*) and (*e*) can be recast in the form:

(*f*) [land : water] :: [(river + bank) : sea]

which is analogous to formulae (*a*), (*b*), and (*c*), this example shows how a mythological transformation can be expressed by a series of equivalences, such that the two extremes are radically inverted (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1963a, pp. 228-229).

In fact, in the last stage of the transformation, the (downstream, West) position is occupied by a vegetable food, that is to say by an 'earth-food', while the (upstream, East) position is occupied by an animal food, which, since it consists of fish-spawn, comes from the river and is therefore a 'water-food'.

The two women, reduced to their common denominator, which is the relationship older/younger, have thus, in coherent fashion, had their positions changed over with respect to the relationship upstream/downstream.[23]

Consequently, in the Skeena version, the weak opposition between river and bank is *neutralized* (this is expressed in the myth by specifying that the river is frozen and that the women walk on the ice) in favour of the strong opposition between sea and land which is, however, negatively evoked (since the women are defined by their lack of the foods which are associated with their respective (territorial) positions). In the Nass version it is the strong opposition which is neutralized, by weakening and inversion, in favour of the weak opposition between river and bank, which is positively evoked (since in this case the women are provided, albeit meagrely, with the appropriate foods).

Parallel transformations are to be found in the episode of the supernatural protector as related by the two versions. In that of the Skeena, he provides meat alone, in an ever-increasing quantity (in order: little squirrel, grouse, porcupine, beaver, goat, black bear, grizzly bear, caribou); in the Nass version, he provides meat and fish at the same time in such large quantities that in the one case the hut is 'full of meat and fish' but only 'full of dried meat' in the other. In the Skeena version this balance between the two types of life is brought about only much later and in a transitory way: during Asdiwal's third marriage with the sister of the Gitxatla people, when, accompanied by his brothers-in-law, he is abundantly provided with 'salmon and fresh meat' which he sells to the starving Tsimshian (cf. Boas, 1902, pp. 225-226, and Boas, 1912, pp. 74-77 and 120-123).

On the other hand, Asdiwal's father gives him magic objects which are immediately effective (Skeena version), whereas those given to Asi-hwil have to be gradually perfected (Nass version). In each case, the hero returns from the West like the food, transported in the insides of a sea-lion; but in the second case the change from stomach (Skeena) to intestines (Nass) suggests a food that is nearer to putrefaction, a theme that is final here and no longer initial (a rotten berry and rotten bark

were the women's first food in the Skeena version). Nor must it be forgotten that, from this point of view, the candlefish, the only hope of escaping from starvation (in Tsimshian, candlefish is called: *hale-mâ'tk*, which means 'saviour') must be tolerated up to the point of decomposition – otherwise the fish would be offended and would never return.

IX

How can a concrete content be given to this double mechanism of the *weakening of oppositions*, accompanied by a *reversal of correlations* the formal coherence of which we have now established? It should first be noted that the inversion is given in the respective geographical positions of the two populations: the Nisqa, people of the Nass, are found in the North; the Tsimshian (whose name means: 'inside the river Skeena' from *K-sia'n*: 'Skeena') in the South. In order to marry on (relatively speaking) foreign territory, the Nass hero goes to the land of the Tsimshian, that is to say, towards the Skeena, in the South; and the Skeena-born Asdiwal's last marriage shows him, up to the time of the break, camping with his in-laws on the Nass and thus in the North. Each population spontaneously forms symmetrical but inverse conceptions of the same country.

But the myths bear witness to the fact that the duality: Skeena valley/Nass valley, which, with the region in between, forms the Tsimshian country (in the broadest sense) is seen as an opposition, as are also the economic activities which are respectively associated with each of the two rivers:

> A young man of miraculous birth decided to go up to heaven while night reigned on earth. Changed into a leaf, he impregnated the daughter of the Master of the Sun, who bore a son called Giant. The child seized the sun, made himself master of daylight and went down to earth where he found himself a companion, Logobola, who was master of mist, water, and marshes. The two boys had a competition, and after several undecided contests they decided to shoot arrows and play for the River Skeena against the River Nass. Giant won by a trick and was so overjoyed that he spoke in Tsimshian – in

> the dialect of the lower reaches of the Skeena – to voice his feelings 'And Logobola says: "You won, Brother Giant. Now the candlefish will come to Nass River twice every summer." And Txamsem (Giant) said, "And the salmon of Skeena River shall always be fat." Thus they divided what Txamsem had won at Nass river. . . . After which the two brothers parted.' One of the versions recorded by Boas says: 'Txamsem went down to the ocean and Logobola went southward to the place he had come from' (Boas, 1916, p. 70. Cf. also Boas, 1902, p. 7ff.).

In any case, the symmetry of the geographical positions provides only the beginning of an explanation. We have seen that the reversal of correlations is itself the function of a general weakening of all the oppositions which cannot be explained merely by a substitution of South for North and North for South. In passing from the Skeena to the Nass, the myth becomes distorted in two ways, which are structurally connected: first, it is reduced and, second, it is reversed. In order to be admissible, any interpretation must take account of both of these aspects.

The Skeena people and the Nass people speak similar dialects (Boas, 1911). Their social organization is almost identical.[24] But their modes of life are profoundly different. We have described the way of life on the Skeena and on the coast, characterized by a great seasonal movement which is in fact two-phased: between the winter towns and the spring camps on one hand, and then between the spring candlefish season on the Nass and the summer salmon-fishing on the Skeena.

As for the Nass people, it does not seem that they made periodic visits to the Skeena. The most that we are told is that those who lived very far up the Nass were called 'kit'anwi'like', 'people who left their permanent villages from time to time', because they came down towards the Nass estuary each year, but only for the candlefish season (Sapir, 1915, p. 3). The largest seasonal migrations of the Nisqa seem thus to have been limited to the Nass, while those of the Tsimshian were based on a much more complex Skeena-Nass system. The reason is that the candlefish only visit the Nass, which therefore becomes the

meeting-place of all the groups who anxiously await the arrival of their 'saviour', whereas the salmon goes up both rivers indiscriminately. Thus the Nisqa lived in one valley, and the Tsimshian in two.

Since this is so, all the natives are able to conceptualize the duality Nass/Skeena as an opposition which correlates with that of candlefish/salmon. There can be no doubt about it, since the myth which lays the foundation of this opposition was recorded by Boas in two practically identical versions, one in Nass dialect, the other in Skeena dialect. But an opposition which is recognized by all need not have the same significance for each group. The Tsimshian lived through this opposition in the course of each year; the Nisqa were content to know about it. Although a grammatical construction employing couplets of antithetical terms is present in the Tsimshian tongue as a very obvious model, and probably presents itself as such quite consciously to the speaker,[25] its logical and philosophical implication would not be the same in each of the two groups. The Tsimshian use it to build up a system which is global and coherent but which is not communicable in its entirety to people whose concrete experiences are not stamped with the same duality; perhaps, also, the fact that the course of the Nass is less definitely orientated from East to West than is that of the Skeena adds to the obscurity of the topographical schema (among the Nisqa).

Thus we arrive at a fundamental property of mythical thought, other examples of which might well be sought elsewhere. When a mythical schema is transmitted from one population to another, and there exist differences of language, social organization or way of life which make the myth difficult to communicate, it begins to become impoverished and confused. But one can find a limiting situation in which instead of being finally obliterated by losing all its outlines, the myth is inverted and regains part of its precision.

Similar inversions occur in optics. An image can be seen in full detail when observed through any adequately large aperture. But as the aperture is narrowed the image becomes blurred and difficult to see. When, however, the aperture is further reduced to a pinpoint, that is to say, when *communication* is about to vanish, the image is inverted and becomes clear again. This experiment is used in schools to demonstrate the propagation of light in straight lines, or in other words to prove that rays of light are not transmitted at random, but within the limits of a structured field.

This study is in its own way an experiment, since it is limited to a single case, and the elements isolated by analysis appear in several series of concomitant variations. If the experiment has helped to demonstrate that the field of mythical thought, too, is structured, then it will have achieved its object.

NOTES

1. The candlefish (*olachen*) is a small very oily fish caught in very large numbers. Valued mainly for its oil, the meat can be eaten in times of scarcity [E.R.L.].

2. Hatsenas (Boas, 1912), Hadsenas (Boas, 1895): it is a bird like the robin but not a robin (Boas, 1912, pp. 72-73). In another myth the robin announces the summer (cf. Boas, 1912, pp. 200-201). The term 'robin' is applied to a variety of birds by the English and the Americans. It would be rash to try to identify the species. According to Boas (1895), Hadsenas means 'luck', and describes a bird sent as a messenger from Heaven (p. 286).

In this work, which has no linguistic pretentions, the transcription of native terms has been simplified to the extreme, keeping only those distinctions which are essential for avoiding ambiguities between the terms quoted.

3. The name Asdiwal certainly has several connotations. The Nass form, Asi-hwil, means 'Crosser of Mountains' (Boas, 1902, p. 226) but cf. also '*asdiwal*', 'to be in danger' (Boas, 1912, Glossary, p. 257) and Asewaelgyot: a different name for and special variety of the Thunder Bird (Barbeau, 1950, Vol. I, pp. 144-145 and Vol. II, p. 476).

4. For a summary and comparative analysis of all the texts which have been listed as referring to the greed of the Demiurge, see Boas (1916, p. 636 ff.).

5. As the smallest mammal to appear in mythology, and also because in the mythology of the Northwest Coast the mouse represents the animals of the earth at their most modest level: that of domestic life. The mouse is in fact the domestic animal of the earth. With this distinction she is entitled to the tiny offering of fat which drips from woollen ear-ornaments when they are thrown into the fire in her honour.

6. 'The love of the master of the sea-lions and of his whole tribe increased very much' (Boas, 1912, p. 133).

7. The Tsimshian of the Nisqa group 'look to the river [Nass] for their food supply, which consists principally of salmon and candlefish. Indeed it is owing to the enormous numbers of the latter fish that run in to spawn in the early spring that the name Nass, meaning "the stomach, or food depot" has been given to the river' (G. T. Emmons, 1910).

8. In Lévi-Strauss's writings the notion of a structured conceptual scheme (*schème conceptuel*), which lies at the back of explicit cultural forms and

consists in the main of elements linked in binary opposition, is of basic importance. See, in particular *La Pensée sauvage* (1962b, p. 173). Throughout this translation the French *schème* has been consistently rendered as English 'schema' and French *opposition* as English 'opposition' even though in places it might have been more elegant to write 'framework' or 'setting' for *schème*, and 'contrast' or 'antithesis' for *opposition* [E.R.L.].

9. As we shall see later, the apparent gap in the cycle is explained by the fact that in the story of Waux, Asdiwal's son, the closure will be the result of a matrilateral marriage which ends in a terminal situation: husband and wife without children.

10. Asdiwal himself had inherited from his father the lightness and speed of a bird, qualities which are ideally suited to a hunter who, according to native thought, should be as light-footed as a bird on the wing (Boas, 1916, p. 403). Boas's informant considers Waux as Asdiwal's only child (Boas, 1916, p. 243). This is a mistake, for Asdiwal also had a son by his third marriage (Boas, 1912, pp. 123, 133, 135). But this point is unimportant since the third marriage was simply a doublet of the second.

11. Boas's informant seems to have made a mistake which Boas has only partially corrected. In Boas (1916) the text is as follows 'Before his mother died she wanted her son to marry one of her own cousins, and he did what his mother wanted him to do' (p. 244). Thus it would be a cousin of the mother and not of the son. The corresponding native text is to be found in Durlach (1928, p. 124) of which herewith a transcription (in simplified signs): na gauga(?) dem dzake na'ot da hasa'x a dem naksde lguolget a k!âlda lgutxaât. . . .

The kinship term *txaâ* denotes the father's sister's or the mother's brother's children – that is to say, all cross-cousins. *Lgu-* is a diminutive. The suffix *-t* is a third person possessive. In his summary of the story of Waux, Boas repeats the suspect phrase: 'He marries one of his mother's cousins' (Boas, 1916, p. 825). But in the commentary he corrects his interpretation by placing this example quite rightly with all those he quotes of marriages with a matrilateral cross-cousin. 'The normal type of marriage, as described in the traditions, is that between a young man and his mother's brother's daughter. Thus . . . a mother requests her daughter to marry her cousin (244)' (Boas, 1916, p. 440). Since p. 244 only mentions Waux's marriage, it is clear that this time Boas rectifies the kinship relations, but confuses the sex of the husband and wife. From this there arises a new contradiction, for this cousin would be the father's sister's daughter. The real meaning seems to be: before dying, his mother wanted him to marry one of his own cousins.

12. Boas (1916, pp. 185-191): Describing the marriage ceremonies of the Nisqa as reported by another informant, Boas explains that the fight between the two groups can become so violent that one of the slaves in the suitor's guard is killed: 'This foretells that the couple will never part' (Boas, 1916, p. 531).

13. Boas (1916, p. 403). Asdiwal's double visit to heaven (which contrasts with his single journey below the earth) seems to be intended to make even clearer the analogy with salmon-fishing. In fact, his return to heaven takes place exactly as if it were a 'catch', in a net which is let down through an opening in the heavens: just like the ritual fishing for the first salmon of spring, which is carried out with a net, through a hole made in the ice which still covers the river.

14. Boas (1912, pp. 112-113). If our interpretation is correct, it must be

admitted that the explicit opposition: sky/earth is here realized in an implicit form: sky/water, which is the strongest opposition inherent in the system of the three elements as used by the myth.

This system can in fact be represented by the following formula (read the sign : to mean 'is to', the sign :: to mean 'as', the sign > to mean 'is above', and the sign / to mean 'is opposed to')

1. sky : earth :: earth : water

which can also be written

2. sky > earth > water

Then the hypothesis put forward above about the 'fishing up' of Asdiwal can be verified by the following permutation:

3. sky : water :: earth : earth

which may be said to correspond to Asdiwal's second supernatural voyage, where the opposition to water (earth) is expressed by a subterranean voyage. We are therefore perfectly entitled to put

4. sky/earth :: sky/water (where 'water' stands for 'beneath the sky')

5. earth/water :: earth/earth (where '/earth' stands for 'below the ground')

But this duplication of the 'earth' pole is only made necessary by the assimilation (in veiled terms) of the major opposition between sky and earth to the minor opposition, still implicit, between earth and water: Asdiwal is fished up like a fish off an earth which is confused with the liquid element, from the heights of a sky pictured in terrestial terms as a 'green and fertile prairie'.

From the very beginning the myth seems governed by one particular opposition which is more vital than the others, even if not immediately perceptible: that between earth and water, which is also the one most closely linked with methods of production and the objective relationships between men and the world. Formal though it be, analysis of a society's myths verifies the primacy of the infrastructures.

15. See Boas's hesitations in Boas (1916, pp. 401, 411, 412). Even Garfield, who gave the problems much attention, cannot bring herself to admit to the existence of succession in the paternal line. See Garfield, Wingert & Barbeau (1951, p. 17).

16. Boas (1916, p. 793). None the less, there are a few minor differences which suggest that Boas (1895) is a weak variant of Boas (1912).

17. J. R. Swanton (1952). 'Lakkulzap or Greenville' (p. 586); 'Gitwinksilk . . . near the mouth of Nass River' (*idem*). In any case, Barbeau's map (1950) places Gitwinksilk (Gitwinksihlt) upstream of the Canyon.

18. E. Sapir (1915): 'Greenville (laxqaltsa'p) . . .' (p. 2). According to Sapir, the Gitwankcitlku, 'people of the place where lizards live', from the third Nisqa group, starting from downstream.

19. Sapir (1915): 'Gitxate'n, people of the fish traps' (p. 3). Barbeau (1950, map) Gitrhatin, at the mouth of the estuary and downstream from the canyon.

20. That is, at any rate, what the myth emphatically affirms – but the village of the younger woman is not named.

21. Many myths treat of the loss of salmon by mankind, thanks to men's refusing a piece of mouldy fish, or to their disgust on discovering that the Mother of Salmon gives birth by her excretory canal.

22. Lévi-Strauss's distinction *marqué/non-marqué* is here rendered 'defined'/'not defined', but note also the distinction 'marked'/'unmarked' as it occurs in general linguistics. In the latter context the words *man* and *author* are 'unmarked' in comparison with the words *woman* and *authoress* which are

'marked'. Here the 'unmarked' term will be presumed to include the 'marked' category unless the latter is explicitly distinguished. For a full discussion, see Greenberg (1966).

23. The younger woman, representing prospective fertility, shows a markedly feminine character; in the elder this is not so marked. The younger must always be in the (earth) position: in the Skeena version, because she is to bear Asdiwal, master of mountains and earth-born hunter; in the Nass version for the same reason, and also because of the strictly feminine character of the gatherer of berries, which stand for earth-food. Cf. Boas (1916): 'while the men procure all the animal food except shellfish, the women gather berries and dig roots and shellfish' (p. 52, also p. 404).

24. E. Sapir (1915, pp. 3-7), where it is clear that Goddard (1934) was wrong in attributing only two exogamic divisions to the Nisqa instead of four. This mistake can probably be explained by the fact that the Nisqa, immediate neighbours of the Tlingit, find it necessary more often than the Tsimshian to apply the rule of the lowest common multiple to their social organization, so that the laws of exogamy may be respected in marriages with foreigners.

25. Boas quotes 31 pairs of 'local particles' in oppositions of the following type: up along the ground–down along the ground; up through the air–down through the air; into–out of; backwards–forwards, etc. (Boas, 1911, pp. 300-312).

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