

... I had been thinking about the glyphs all morning after finally being ferried across" Too bad he didn't take the time to speak with the Edgars, who have intimate knowledge of the area and the tliiy'aa'a of Clo-oose.

Serious students will find little of value in this book, and it is unlikely that the general public, at whom the

book is aimed, will be able to critically assess its lack of scholarship. This can only lead to entrenching preconceptions about, and ignorance of, First Nations in British Columbia. The sad thing is that, although this result is no doubt the furthest thing from Johnson's intention, it will be the legacy of his book.

*Transmission Difficulties: Franz Boas and Tsimshian
Mythology*

Ralph Maud

Burnaby: Talonbooks, 2000. 174 pp. Illus. \$16.95 paper.

*Potlatch at Gitsegukla:
William Beynon's 1945 Field Notebooks*

Margaret Anderson and Marjorie Halpin, Editors

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000. 283 pp. Illus., maps. \$29.95 paper.

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BOTH VOLUMES REVIEWED here explore the present utility and quality of Tsimshian archival and published materials. There the resemblance ends. The scholarly methods and standpoints are diametrically opposed; a rhetoric of continuity and respect for tradition contrasts sharply with one of revolutionary discontinuity. Let us examine each product in turn.

The long overdue publication of William Beynon's four field notebooks from two weeks of potlatch and totem pole raising at the Gitksan village of Gitsegukla in 1945 reflects over two decades of collaboration between the editors and Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan peoples. Their commentary

respects the integrity of Beynon's participant-observation documentation, simultaneously reassessing and contextualizing it relative to other extant work on the Gitksan and closely related peoples. Beynon was invited to the potlatches primarily in his chiefly capacity, although he was also an ethnographer bringing thirty years experience to describing how the feast system organizes Gitksan daily lives through a great variety of publicly witnessed transactions. Beynon's fieldnotes are followed by a brief history of the Gitksan "encounter with the colonial world" (193) by James A. McDonald and Jennifer Joseph – particularly poignant given recent denigrations of

Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en land claims based in the feast system.

Introductory material focuses on how central cultural and linguistic categories played out in the 1945 events. We are told, for example, how cross-cousin marriage consolidates and recycles names and crests, how ceremonial forms are modified (consciously or inadvertently), how particular name images are dramatized in performance, how stagecraft is compatible with genuine religious feeling (as individuals respond to the same ceremonies at different levels of abstraction and engagement), and how aesthetic criteria are subordinated to the proclamation of inherited rights.

Anderson and Halpin are adamant that Beynon's ethnographic data must remain paramount. Whatever the flaws of earlier materials, more recent theory-driven works "may become dated as academic discourse moves on to other questions" (13). Exceptions include sometime Tsimshianists Franz Boas, Philip Drucker, Viola Garfield, and Wilson Duff, all of whom collaborated with Beynon or used his materials extensively.

Community permission was obtained to prepare the manuscript; its draft was returned to contemporary elders for clarification and approval; and the product is intended for use in reinvigorating traditional culture after a century of intense assimilative pressures. Both Beynon's recordings and their present publication are attributed to the commitment of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en to their culture.

Beynon (1888-1958), son of a Welsh father and high-ranking Tsimshian mother, began his ethnographic collaboration with Marius Barbeau in 1914. Edward Sapir, Canada's paramount

anthropologist of the day, reassured Barbeau that Beynon's independent text collection provided an ideal method, with "no absolute reason why every bit of material that one utilizes in [one's] work should have been personally obtained" (6). Sapir's teacher, Franz Boas, applied this ethnography-at-a-distance method to Kwak'wala (with George Hunt) and to Tsimshian (with Henry Tate), as Sapir did to Nuw'chah'nulth (with Alex Thomas). Beynon began as an interpreter but, increasingly, his work stood on its own scientific merits, tempered by his personal engagement with the culture he documented – what Boas valorized as "the native point of view."

After considerable internal contestation, traditional potlatch forms were employed. Beynon watched carefully the young men who had wanted to modernize the ceremonies, revealing "the cultururation expressions in the different generations" (69). He was fascinated by recent decreases in Christian influence, with ceremonies matter-of-factly being held on Sundays. Beynon produced the fullest record we have, both of a particular potlatch and of the processes underlying the form itself. Its publication is invaluable.

Ralph Maud's self-indulgent diatribe on Boas's Tsimshian work with Henry Tate contrasts at multiple levels with the meticulous, respectful scholarship of Anderson and Halpin. His title properly pinpoints the inevitability of "transmission difficulties" between English and Tsimshian. Maud goes on, however, to castigate Boas for being a man of his own time, an ethnographic pioneer, without whose collaboration with men like Beynon, Tate, Hunt, and Thomas, the BC ethnographic record would be decimated.

Maud's world comes in black and white. His heroes (Beynon, Barbeau, Tate, Hill-Tout, McIlwraith, Duff, and Halpin) are counterpoised with his villains (Hunt, Lévi-Strauss, and especially Boas). The choices are self-serving: Maud extols localism in BC anthropology, endorsing only those Ottawa anthropologists outside the Boasian tradition, thereby isolating British Columbia from the North American scholarly mainstream.

Maud is not a fieldworking anthropologist. Without himself attempting to command the Tsimshian language, he castigates Boas for errors in his attempts to do so. Maud lives in a house of glass, disrespectful both of the disciplines of ethnography and linguistics and of Native peoples themselves. His comments about Northwest Coast peoples are frequently insensitive at best: "Crest stories are boring to anyone not party to the one-upmanship of the potlatch game" (91).

Maud's analysis properly highlights the significant limitations of Boas's Tsimshian work, particularly his awareness that Tate recorded stories in English and only later translated them into Tsimshian. Maud equates authenticity with a "primary text" in "some old story-teller's Tsimshian words" (17). He fails to acknowledge the salvage project in which Boas believed himself to be engaged: any record was better than none. Maud rails about Boas's penchant for assuming that any knowledgeable Native person represented "the culture" rather than foregrounding the creativity of individual storytellers. Boas did, indeed, published Tate's texts quite uncritically. Ignoring the publishing standards and audience expectations of the time, Maud concludes that Boas was a prude because he left so-called obscene passages in untranslated Tsimshian.

In a particularly muddled passage, Maud "imagines" that Tate infers that Boas "hates Tsimshian culture, really hates it" because Boas urges him to include then scandalous material. Either this "disqualifies Boas as an anthropologist" (38) or he was "faking a like-mindedness in order to get more out of" Tate (39). Boas was "so ethically mixed up [about 'savage practices' versus professional distance] that one should hesitate to believe any single thing he said" (39). This overwrought hyperbole is compounded by a parody of cultural relativism. Maud's version of an anthropologist must admire and identify with "ethnic necessities," even "ethnic cleansing": "Northwest Coast anthropology is defined by head-hunting warfare, the cheating gluttony of the trickster, and the lineage boasting in the interminable garage sales called potlatches. If you cannot get into this stuff, then quit" (39). For most practitioners, anthropology is not defined by wallowing in the negative, formulated in terms external to the culture in question.

Maud is kinder to Tate than to Boas. Tate is a better English stylist, while Boas's native German, "official superiority" (23), and "misplaced meticulousness" (31) obscure textual vitality. Maud fails to acknowledge that the translations were intended not as literature but as an elucidation of Tsimshian grammar. Maud wishes Boas had studied Tate's transition between oral and written cultures; however, such a project was inconceivable at the turn of the century. Maud's consideration of how to retrieve the original texts from the canons of an earlier scholarship is much more productive.

Tate is praised for doing what Boas wanted, and Boas is denigrated for requesting specific information, bizarrely

styled as “something of a no-no in the profession” (72). Tate was not culpable for what would now be considered plagiarism (i.e., borrowing from models that appeared in previous Boasian texts) because authorship was elusive in Northwest Coast cultures, and the borrowing of story elements was commonplace. Oral tradition included “innumerable acts of plagiarism ... Tate is following this old tradition” (66). Collaboration with Boas expanded his repertoire. Boas, however, should have known better, as Maud anachronistically interprets Boas’s own scholarly standards.

Maud is irate that Boas declines a role he never claimed – that of literary critic. Indeed, Boas does not express personal opinions on the aesthetics or cultural value of the texts he records, translates, and publishes. Maud claims that Boas didn’t understand fiction (120), although the texts in question are hardly “fiction” in Tsimshian terms. Maud’s own efforts at literary criticism, with regard to Asdival for example, ignore the Native point of view. Comments such as “personally ... I find nobody to root for” (105) or “pasteboard supernatural” (113) are irrelevant to the integrity both of the storytellers and of the storied tradition. Boas should have pushed us towards “a radical apprenticeship” in “reverence for the workings of the natural world,” the “archaic sub-

stratum” from which the stories emerge. Had Boas indulged in such New Age pseudohistory, his texts would scarcely have come down to us as exemplary!

Maud’s venom apparently arises from the failure of his more civil critique of Boasian methodology, “where some suspicious activities of both Boas and Hunt were exposed” (129), to defrock the disciplinary hero. After deciding Boasians closed ranks to marginalize his work, Maud upped the ante. His book is more about himself than about Boas, Tate, or the Tsimshian. In contrast to Maud, most anthropologists recognize the foibles of their ancestors while building on their attainments.

Maud’s polemical discourse – within which he uses rhetoric such as “charade,” “chimera” (9); “annoying,” “exasperating,” “sleight-of-hand” (15); “disingenuous” (57); and “dishonesty” (59) – alienates his potential scholarly audience while encouraging the public, Native and non-Native alike, to ignore early ethnographic documents. Although he purports to render Boas’s work useful for the future, Maud’s bizarre combination of wishful thinking and snide disparagement has precisely the opposite effect. The substance of Maud’s critique is lost in his un-scholarly verbiage. To take this book seriously would be dangerous; it is merely tiresome.