

Dell Hymes

MASSET MOURNING SONGS

A Note to the Editors

Each of these translations is based on work with the original text, with the aid of the available information on Masset grammar and vocabulary, in order to make as certain as possible the meaning and form. The accompanying analysis gives the reader access to the original. It seems to me that to publish translations one place, texts another, and nowhere the analysis and commentary that link them up, would leave us about where we were before. If a field is to be built up and others encouraged to do similar work, then we really have to treat the originals as seriously as originals are treated in other "world" literatures. And where the spadework that permits really dealing with the originals hasn't been done, and can be, then the doing of it is one of the things Alcheringa should encourage; no conventional anthropological, folkloristic or linguistic journal will be interested in scholarship that is only a means to poetry.

Hence the individual notes, and prefatory context, for these Masset mourning songs. I think it essential to the responsibility assumed in working with them. Someone else could conceivably decide I'd been wrong or missed a good chance, and have reason for it, because enough is pulled together here about the language of the originals to show what it is I thought I was translating. That seems to me one kind of tribute to be paid to the originals.

Preface

These song texts were transcribed and first translated by John R. Swanton (1912, #89-100). In the winter of 1900-1901, Swanton worked among the Haida, who lived on the Queen Charlotte Islands off the coast of British Columbia. Masset is the name of a community at the northern end of Graham Island, and the name Swanton adopted for the northern of the two main dialects of the Haida language then surviving.

There are some 14 or more categories of Haida song (1905a: 121). One of these, the so-called "mourning song" has two alternative names in Haida: kí:lhðjao qagán, and s!aíga s!alanga. The first contains a stem kilh- "by means of the voice" and instrumental suffix -o, the word altogether meaning "crying". The second contains the Masset stem "to weep" (s!ai(ga), s!ai(lh)). So, "crying songs" or "weeping songs". I cannot analyze the

second word of either term, but almost all of the types of song reported by Swanton (1905: 121) contain s!á:langa. The end and beginning of life, mourning songs and cradle songs (git qagá:n, literally, "child songs"), are set apart.

Before retranslating all twelve of the mourning songs given by Swanton, I have analyzed each one in the light of Swanton's grammatical sketch of Haida (1911), in so far as possible, and have made use of grammatical meanings and hints. (See "notes to the individual songs").

Phonetic Symbols

Vowels. Quite probably there are only three basic vowels in Haida, a i u (taken with continental values). a, A, ae are variants of the first; i, e of the second; u, o of the third. Whether or not vowel length is distinctive is uncertain; in part at least it varies with stress and emphasis.

- ae : approximately the vowel in English hat.
- A : "obscure a", presumably like the vowel in English hut.
- : : the colon indicates length of the preceding vowel.

Consonants. On the complex Haida system, see Sapir 1923. For relative ease of typesetting, the following symbols have been adopted:

- dj : the voiced affricate similar to that in English judge.
- G : voiced velar stop, usually written today (and by Swanton) with g and subposed dot; analogous to that in English guard.
- kw : k followed by an almost whispered u.
- lh : voiceless lateral fricative, as in Welsh Lloyd; somewhat like simultaneous English th and l.
- L : voiceless lateral affricate, or tlh
- ng : velar nasal, analogous to that in English sing (Swanton's ñ).
- q : voiceless velar stop, analogous to that beginning English cog.
- X : voiceless velar fricative, analogous to that in German ach.
- ! : glottal stop, and glottalization of preceding consonant.

Also:

- between words in a text separates morphemes.
- between words in a translation links words translating one text word.
- [] between spaces in an interlinear translation marks lack of translation

7

Something makes me heartsick, older brother,
Something makes me heartsick.

8

You thought like that,
And yet you did not set me in the shelter of a tree?

9

For what then, where, am I made to be searching?
Alas, my niece!

10

Had you seen land, dear one,
Then I with you, dear,
Would have been two going over the sea.

11

Do not go, looking back at us (repeated over and over)

12

Your voices tire out?
My voice does not tire, does not,
My thought has kept on.

Notes to Individual Songs

1

Swanton translates this song: "Are you going down? / The sun there is going down, dear," with the note, "The dead man is likened to the sun." To explain the difference in translation, the original text must be cited:

Hao gua dang qá:gułhagi:.

DjiGó:es gu qagu:lhaga kudál.

Interlinearly,

[?] ? you are-going-down.

Sun there is-going-down, dear.

The dash indicates an element left untranslated, the question mark an interrogative (following Swanton's usage in the latter case). The structure of the Haida line, however, makes me think that gua is not the interrogative of that shape, but the homonymous locative element, modifying the preceding general demonstrative in a common Haida type of construction. Hao is otherwise unexplained (which may be why it was left untranslated, both interlinearly and in the smooth version quoted at the outset of this note). Hence, 'to it' of my first line.

One might argue further that there is a parallel structure in the two Haida lines, and that gua is a locative because gu in the second line is taken as one (and not as the homophonous interrogative); that if gu/gwa alternate in the second song as interrogatives, they must both have the same status here: both interrogatives, or both locatives. They might both be interrogatives here, but the analysis of the first line pretty clearly excludes that, and Swanton's putting of a period at the end of the first line pretty clearly excludes that, and Swanton's putting of a period at the end of the first line (if not a misprint) indicates that he was at least uncertain. The semantic parallel noted by Swanton (dead man : sun) would seem further to call for parallel structure.

The -s of the word for 'sun' in fact seems internal evidence of the comparison. Presumably it is the element that Swanton describes as sometimes having the force of 'aforesaid' (254). That it is not part of the stem is shown by another occurrence of 'sun,' ch!í:Goy-ai (225). The role of -s in setting off a topic initially, however, indicates that 'sun' is not in immediate construction with 'there', as is hao with gua. Hence the later placing of 'there' in the present translation. The syntactic order of both lines is in fact normal in Haida: object plus subject plus verb, when both the first two are expressed by pronouns; subject furthest from the verb when expressed by a noun (267).

I have translated 'out,' not 'down,' because the first part of the verb in each line appears to comprise qá:- 'to go (one person)' plus guł-a- 'motion out of something, especially a house' (Swanton 269, 245). (Swanton gives the second element as -guł, but the only example of this allomorph in his grammar has a following vowel, interpreted there as "á: carries the accent". In fact, the vowel and the -a following some other allomorphs

in the examples, almost certainly belong with the suffix. The allomorphs in Masset apparently are -gula, gull, -guala; cf. Sapir's discussion (1923: 152) of the interconnection of syllables of the type 1a : 1l. The remainder of each verb (-gi:, -ga) may express 'down,' but the grammar gives no hint. It is attractive to speculate that -gi: is the element for 'under water' (247), but it may also be 'completion of action' or 'continuation, presumably to the end' (241). -ga is probably the element analyzed by Sapir (and Boas) as 'declarative,' 'to be, to be so' (Sapir 154). Haeberlin's argument (1923) that the order of stem elements is not so rigid as Swanton's grammar would imply would support these interpretations.

I have let the singular number of qa- suggest 'alone.'

Some mourning songs do have a first line as a question, the rest as statement. If you want the first line interrogative, delete 'to it' and replace the period by a question mark.

2

Swanton translates, "Did warriors kill you, did warriors kill you, dear daughter that I bore? Did warriors kill you, did warriors kill you?" The text is:

qedáo gu wa qedáo gu wa, gadái lhi: qe:gána.

qe:dáo gwa wa, qe:dáo gwa wa.

Interlinearly,

War-men? killed you, war-men? killed-you, dear daughter I love.

War-men? killed you, war-men? killed you.

Gu, gwa are parallel interrogative elements. The verb wa is actually 'do, make,' here simply 'did.' Gadái is distinct from the common form for daughter (257). Other sources by Swanton indicate that the repeated noun, qedáo, can mean both 'to make war, warriors' (HT: 807). One wonders if there was intentional choice or consciousness of the homophony between the two verb stems that state the opposition in this song, qe:- 'to give birth' (269), qe(:)- 'to go to war.' In the latter -da- is presumably either originally a 'causative' auxiliary (237) or a plural element, as in the verb 'to kill' (276). If causative, perhaps the first element is derived from Gai 'blood' (271), the vocalic interchange at least being common enough in Haida. The final vowel is likely the -u that forms 'names of instruments, manufactured and store articles' (254). It is an etymology at least appropriate to this song: 'instruments to cause blood.' In the second line the lengthening of the first vowel in qe:dáo (without change of stress) and the use of the longer interrogative gwa (reportedly the normal form in Skidegate rather than Masset (252) suggest an amplification or intensification.

I would have liked not to add 'it,' trusting to the context of lament to make clear what 'War (or soldiers) did,' but the absence of an object proves a stumbling-block to some readers.

Swanton translates, "It becomes too much, it becomes too much, dear" (four times), with the note, "That is, my grief is too great to bear." The text is:

qoanGé:dang, qoanGé:dang, qoyásga (4 times).

Swanton's interlinear and smooth translations are identical.

The present translation differs because I came to it before the Haida forms, as it turned out, had been correctly identified. The verb stem is adjectival qoan- 'many, much' (270, HT 807); the second element most likely is -Ge:t- 'to be like, to be so' (although the Masset form would be -!et, -Get being Skidegate (211, HT 808)); -ang is a continuative suffix (269, 250). Qoya- is a stem 'dear; to be dear' (237) and -sga has the shape, and questionably the connotation, of a future ending (249, Sapir 154). Crudely, 'It goes on being much,' addressed to a 'now and future dear.'

I had first discovered the resemblance of the stem to sGoan 'forever, for a long time.' Undoubtedly there is a link, involving also sGoan-sin 'one,' sGun-xan 'on-ly,' in terms of the meanings 'unity, all,' and by hyperbole, 'much' (cf. 'forever, for a long time'). But my use of 'forever' here is a liberty. So also use of 'begin' (Skidegate Xid, Masset id), which on first analysis appeared as good a guess as the Skidegate Geilh, Geal, but Masset !elh, !el (237) implied by Swanton's translation, 'become.' All three forms, for 'become,' 'be like,' 'begin' indeed pose at least some problems, the first least, if one can assume it is Skidegate; and all three probably are connected, 'become' and 'be like' in their beginnings (Ge-), 'be like' and 'begin' in their ending (-t) and perhaps also by some ablaut relationship of their initials (Ge- : Xi).

The present translation is retained because I like it better than any other that has come to me. What is probably a grammatically accurate version might be:

It goes on, so great, it goes on, so great, my dear.

Swanton translates, "What medicine shall I use (in my affliction)? / What medicine shall I use? I have nothing to comfort me. / Your dear face (I long for)." The text is:

gú:stas Lí:-nang a q!é:n-ang a-náng Xí:la-di:-gwang-dang? (twice)

Q!é:n-ang a di: alhkú(-)ski:-de:-gwang.

Qoyá-s dang xang-hing-ái.

Interlinearly:

What (nothing) [-] my-self certain-thing shall use for medicine? (twice)

For-myself [-] I have-nothing.

Dear your face.

In the first line, gustas contains gus 'what;' probably -sta, an indefinite stem (Haeberlin 159) with 'reversative' or 'agart from' connotations (see note 9); and probably -s with a force of topicalizing, something like 'as for.' The second word seems to contain indefinite third person pronoun base -nang. a is untranslated and unexplained. The next two words

contain the reflexive possessive suffix -ang and the indefinite base -nang again. The verb contains Xil- (probably Xila-) 'medicine' (HT 809). The succeeding elements apparently introduce senses of definiteness, here and now (di:, 241); of around, about, along (-gwang, 241); -d(a) is perhaps the vaguely causative auxiliary (237), and -ang, or -ng no doubt the ubiquitous verbal ending, presumably here continuative (250). In the third line alhku is clearly a demonstrative pronoun (261), but its actual force, apart from containing 'this' (alh), is obscure. ski- is very likely connected with, or an instance of, the element for 'in vain' (240). In the last line I conjecture that in the last word the second element (after xang- 'face') is cognate with the stem of hing-an 'only' (265).

I have tried to capture something of the structure built around indefinite pronominal forms.

5

Swanton translates, "Parting the clouds with your hands, look down (from Ta:xet's house). / We wish to see your body and your face." He notes that the song is sung only by the women of the family. The text is:

Qoe:s L-Língal-ang !ai lh kusi:-t!alh

Dang lhú:y-ing-ai dang xAng-ing-ai.

Interlinearly:

Clouds open-with-your-hands through, [-]look-down.

Your body-all your face-all (we wish to see).

The untranslated element in the first line (4) is an imperative. The present version perhaps better conveys its force.

6

Swanton translates, "If I could see the trail (of the dead), I would enter upon it. / Elder brother, (I want to see) your whole body." The text is:

K!iw-ái L! nang qáe-nga-s dlu: gwi: nang qá:-id-ang.

Gwaiye:, dang á:lh-djiw-ai.

Interlinearly:

The [ir] -trail-(of the dead) but one could-see if upon one could-go.

Elder-brother, your whole-body. [=body-whole-possessive]

The -ai is a possessive element (257-9). L! has the sense of 'however, contrary to fact.' The -s marks the preceding as subordinate clause and topic. dlu: is translated elsewhere by Swanton (cf. song 10, and 262, 268) with temporal reference, not as 'if.' The verb is literally 'to go (one person), inceptive ('begin'), continuative ('-ing'). The sense of a logical structure is there in the original line.

7

Swanton translates, "Something (i. e., the loss of you) makes my heart sick, elder brother. / Something makes my heart sick." The text is:

Gin st! é:-di:-gung-ai gwaíyai,

Gin st! é:-di:-gung-ai.

Interlinearly,

Something makes-my-heart-sick-(or very sad), elder brother,

Something makes-my-heart-sick.

The verb stem has the range of meaning 'to be sick, sad, angry' (269).

Both this and the preceding song were sung by a man named Skilqoé:Las for his brother.

8

Swanton translates, "If you thought so (i. e., if you chose to die), why did you not seat me in the shelter of a tree?" He notes, "The last part of this is metaphorical. It means, 'Why did you die so suddenly?'"

The text is:

Hák!un dang gud-an-s k! ien gu gam qéid Lak!ala !a di: dang
q! a-o-dang-u:dja.

Interlinearly,

Like-that you thought although ? not tree shelter-of in me you
seated-(me)-?

The subordinate, topicalizing suffix -s on the third word dictates the line division followed here, together with the interrelation of interrogative element and suffix gu . . . -u:dja (252). The stem 'to think' has connotations of 'to want' (and is so translated by Swanton in Song 12 here). The second line of the text, however, poses a problem. To translate its first word, k! ien, 'although' makes little sense here, except as taken as part of the first clause ('Although you thought like that, you...?'). In both its attested occurrences in texts (HT 276.7, 277.8) it does appear to precede the rest of its clause, and in one (HT 276.7), 'and yet' fits quite well. (Swanton translates with 'although' as beginning the preceding clause, which fits the meaning if not the syntax).

The form translated 'tree' (also qait, qe:t, 27, HT 807) can also mean specifically 'spruce.' The final verb is literally 'cause-to-sit.'

More on k! ien: one could see it as connected with the second element of yen-k! ien 'very much' (cf. yen 'truly') (265), and speculate that the first line overflows the subordinate marker, so to speak, to add something like 'so much': 'You thought like that, so much,/[And]...'

9

Swanton translates, "For what am I, unfortunate one, looking? /Alas! my niece." He notes, "This was composed by Qadjiqó:kw when his niece drowned in Q! ánan River, and her body could not be found." The text is:

Gú:stas, gi: lh dáin-dA-awAng-gAng?

Há:djadia ná:d-ai.

Interlinearly,

What for I poor-one-searching?

Alas! my-niece.

The second line is not in answer to the first, I think, but breaks off into direct lament, as do the last lines of some preceding songs (4, 5, 6). The

first word seems to contain gú:s 'what?' and -stA, a sort of 'reversative' element. (Cf. gut "with, together with": gutstA "apart, from each other"; Gei "into": GeistA "out of"; q! ó:lhGa "near by": q!ó:lhGAstÁ "from near" (262)). stA itself is glossed 'from, after, "in which one might see "apart from, " "not with. " Notice that gú:stas also begins Song 4, followed by an element explicitly interpreted as "(nothing). " The comma after the word further suggests that it is a distinct, coordinate element, and that the -s is the sometimes subordinating, topicalizing element. The second word is rendered as "for" by Swanton, but that would be in the Skidegate dialect; it should have the form ga in Masset (262). I conjecture that gi: is here the form "where?", coordinate with preceding "what?" (261), and that together the two interrogative pronouns express the sense of disorientation of the mourner.

The stem of the verb is dayín, dǐng 'to search' (HT 804). The rest of the verb appears to contain the vaguely causative auxiliary stem da, -gwang 'along, about' and -gang 'continuative' (241, 250). If what Swanton gives interlinearly as 'poor one' is present, I cannot identify it from the grammar, songs, or the vocabulary in HT (803-811).

10

Swanton translates, "If you had seen land, beloved, you would have saved yourself, dear." He notes that the song was sung by the wife of one lost at sea, and says of the translation, "This merely the sense of the Haida." The text is:

LÁga-s dAng qǎeng kú:gits dlu: agÁng lh ku:stAng gín-da-giǎ:-nga-xAng.
Interlinearly,

Land you see, beloved-one, when yourself [-] dear-(or chief) two
if -you-made-in-canoë.

The two addressed endearments provide a structure, on which the three lines of the present translation are based: The text is obscure, as Swanton implies, but attention to the structure and words, and analysis of the last two lines, suggest a solution. First, in the second line, lh would seem to be first person 'I.' The only other apparent alternative, an imperative element, seems impossible here. The "reflexive" pronoun is then indirect object, 'I' subject, and 'two' direct object, displaced for emphasis, of the verb (cf. 267). Something like 'I with you Verb- two.' The verb would seem to begin gin- 'to go by, move by sea' (239, HT 812), a post-posed stem also used initially; following appear to the be auxiliary stem -da (sometimes having causative force), plus a secondary stem for motion straight on to a certain place (-gia) (239), plus a suffix for events not directly experienced (-(a)nga 248, cf. Sapir 154), plus continuative -xAng. (250) This analysis is not certain, but it makes sense out of all the elements in the text.

11

Swanton translates, "Do not look at us." The text is:

GAm lha í:L! dA qé:GaxangGo.

Interlinearly,

Not you us-at look.

The only possible alternative in interpretation would come with the verb.

It is not transparent, but may contain, beside an initial stem *qé*:- 'to look,' a second stem *Ga* (*qa*) for 'go,' continuative *-xang*, and, possibly, a final element linked to the initial negative element of the sentence. (Cf. *gAm*...!ang (251)).

12

Swanton translates: "Your voices are tired, but I do not want to have a tired voice (i. e., I do not want to cease wailing)." The text is:

DalÁng gu kílstaús di: L!ao gAm kílstaštA di: gudÁnghanggAn.

Interlinearly,

Your [you plural] ? voices-are-tired, I but not have-a-tired-voice
I want-to.

The song appears to have three parts, corresponding to its three verbs, each part beginning with a pronoun (you, I, I). (This is the objective form of the first person pronoun, used with verbs expressing states and qualities as subject (256)). Within this structure, the verbs hold the key to interpretation and they are not entirely clear. The first verb begins with *kil*- 'by means of voice;' the second element, *sta*-, may be related to the adverbial *stA* 'from, after' with reversative effects, and/or may be the stem *sta*- 'to remove from a certain place' (269). In any case the sense of withdrawal fits. (-us is an interrogative element (252)). In the second line there appears to be reduplication of the *-sta* element. The continuative suffix *-gang*, *xang*, *-ang* may be reduplicated at the end of a verb (250, 215); this case may be analogous. In the third line the verb begins with *gud*- 'think, want.' The rest seems to contain continuative *-Ang* and 'past experienced,' *-gAn*. I cannot identify *-hAng*. At least the three-line structure, and an interpretation within its framework of the sort given, would seem to be established.

Sources

All page references are to 1911 unless otherwise indicated. 1908a is cited HT.

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