

The salmon hook speech

Íxt'ík' Éesh A. P. Johnson's theory of language

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In 1971, at a Tlingit language workshop on the campus of Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka, Alaska, a distinguished elder named A. P. Johnson—or Íxt'ík' Éesh, to give his true name—gave a speech about speeches.¹ Keixwnéi Nora Marks Dauenhauer (who, along with her husband Richard, was to become one of the great scholars of Tlingit) recorded and transcribed it:

Lingít áyú yéi yanakéich,
“Yee eedéi x'akkwatáan.”
Kaa yoo x'atángi
héen yíx kei nagut káa yáx yatee,
k'éx'aa teen.
Héen wánx oowax'agi xáat áyú
du k'éx'ayi a kát ax'eilhaashch.
Agak'éx'in ch'a yóo kaawahayi xáat
du eenx nasteech.
Yéi áwé yatee kaa yoo x'atángi.
Ch'a yóo kaawahayi yoo x'atánk
du eenx nasteech.

I wish to thank the many tradition bearers and scholars who have nourished me during my time on Lingít Aaní: my *Dlaak' Hás* Satóok' Linda Belarde, *K'ashGé* Daphne Wright, and *Daalsak'ú* Tláa Barbara Craver; my *Atléé* Ljáak'k' Alice Taff; my *Tláak'w* Yeilt'ooch' Tláa Collyne Bunn; as well as *Kaagwáask'* Ishmael Hope, *Chályee* Will Geiger, *Dzéiwsh* James Crippen, *Yeidilatseen* Millie Hall, *Shkooyéil* Tim Hall, *Ch'et* Wú Joe Binger, *Xwaanlein* Virginia Oliver, *Yeidikook'áa* Dionne Brady-Howard, and *Shanak'éit* Kim Perkins, among many others. Many of these belong to the “Lingít Nerdz Ku.oo”—an extraordinary group of scholars, teachers, learners, and protectors of the Tlingit language. I hope this essay offers some little nourishment to these people in return. Errors and idiosyncrasies of interpretation are my own, and I take full responsibility for them.

1. I alternate in this essay between using Tlingit and English names, as is often done in the Tlingit community when referring to tradition bearers. The unmarked letters in Íxt'ík' Éesh have the same values as in English, while the diacritics add the following “x” is a voiceless uvular fricative that sounds rather like the “ch” in “chutzpah.” The apostrophe indicates that the “k” is ejective—the sound is “pinched” by closing off the vocal chords. And the acute accent over the “i” and “ee” is a high-tone marker—the vowel is sounded at a slightly higher pitch, and the stress falls on it. The name means “father of the little shaman.”

A person will often say
“I am going to speak to you.”
Public speaking
is like a man walking up along a river
with a gaff hook.
He lets his gaff hook drift
over a salmon swimming at the edge of the river.
When he hooks on it, the salmon way over there
becomes one with him.
That is the way oratory is.
Even speech delivered at a distance
becomes one with someone.²

Íxt'ík' Éesh's words unspool as a single long metaphor. Like in so much of the finest Tlingit oratory, a deceptively simple image is gradually elaborated into a multifaceted conceit (the Dauenhauers were fond of comparing Tlingit speeches to the metaphysical poetry of John Donne and the heroic similes of Homer).

According to A. P. Johnson, language is like fishing (the Dauenhauers translate the word as “public speaking,” but the Tlingit word really just means “speech”; as with the later Wittgenstein, there seems to be no possibility of private speech for Íxt'ík' Éesh). When speaking to others, a person is walking along the river with his gaff hook drifting over the water, near where a salmon is swimming. The picture is painted with the marvelous precision of a man who really knows how to fish. Consider a more literal translation of these lines:

Héen wánx oowax'agi xáat áyú
The water-edge-along-swimming salmon, that one,

du k'éx'ayi a kát ax'eilhaashch.
his [the fisherman's] hook, over it [the salmon], it is drifting.

2. Nineteen years later, the Dauenhauers would publish her transcription as the opening text in a monumental anthology of Tlingit oratory. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Tuwunáagu Yís, For Healing Our Spirit: Tlingit Oratory* (Seattle, 1990), 156–57. The translation here is the Dauenhauers'. The more literal translations of certain lines that follow are my own.

Correction: This article was reposted on July 1, 2024, to change all instances of “Íxtik'” to “Íxt'ík'.” An erratum will appear in the 2024 issue.

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The fisherman does not go straight for the salmon; he lets his hook drift just above it, waiting patiently for the right moment to make the catch. It might be possible that a fine-grained detail about the physics of fishing is also expressed in that tiny post-position *kāt*, meaning “over” or “on.” Because of the refraction of light through water, fish usually appear higher up in the water column and horizontally farther away from an observer than they actually are. To hook a fish requires waiting for enough movement to guess where exactly it will go from its present position. In other words, a good fisherman must be able to correct for weaknesses in the human perception of diffracted light (as well as to outmaneuver the capabilities of the fish’s own cone-shaped visual field).

We might infer: public speaking requires patience, and the ability to see beyond the limits of one’s own subjectivity. Perhaps it requires persuasion and seduction as well as decisiveness. There is undoubtedly a violence to it as well. To speak effectively is to become one with a creature that is killed and consumed.

But who consumes whom? The most obvious reading—which it seems the Dauenhauers subscribed to—is that the speaker is the fisherman, and his or her audience is the fish.³ Words are so powerful they can fuse together different people, different species (perhaps different cultures?). Words can even kill. The great Inland Tlingit tradition-bearer Seidayaa Elizabeth Nyman used a related, if blunter, image for the power of speech, learned long ago from her father:

Suppose [someone were to take] a long
[pole or] something, say a tree, and bring it inside,
and were to walk around in circles with it,
[acting] in anger.
Someone in the corner, or in the middle,
or one of those who sat around the fire,
[the pole] might hit him on the face.
This is what the phrase means,
“Be sure, then, to control your speech!”⁴

3. In their endnotes for this speech, the Dauenhauers write, “the next lines develop the simile of speech being like a man with a gaff hook.” For them, the key unstated fact in this speech is kinship: “Although it is not stated directly in the speech, the correct use of kinship terms is one of the technical skills involved, and when people address each other by kinship terms, they both know they are one.” Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, *Haa Tuwunáagu Yís*, 325.

4. Elizabeth Nyman and Jeff Leer, *Gagiwduł.át: Brought Forth to Reconfirm; The Legacy of a Taku River Tlingit Clan* (Fairbanks, AK, 1993), 157–59. The brackets are translator Jeff Leer’s own: he uses them to indicate words that he feels are not directly present in the original Tlingit but are nevertheless implied.

Control your speech because speech reaches beyond the body. It is an extension of the will beyond the radius of the physical self, a tool that can easily and unintentionally become a weapon.

But the structure of A. P. Johnson’s finely crafted Tlingit makes me think another reading of his metaphor is possible. Consider a more literal translation of these later lines:

Agak’éx’ín ch’a yóo kaawahayi xáat
Whenever he hooks it, thus that appearing-invisibly-
from-a-distance salmon

du eenx nasteech.
[one] with him it always becomes.

That *ch’a yóo kaawahayi xáat* contains the verb *ka-ya-haa*, whose root, *haa*, is sometimes said to describe “occulted,” or invisible, motion—that is, the kind of movement that surges up out of nowhere, that comes over you, that suddenly swims into view. A relative marker turns the verb into an adjectival phrase for *xáat*, salmon: the appearing-from-out-of-nowhere salmon.

It is a beautiful phrase. The *haa* verb vividly evokes the way a fish materializes out of the depths—one moment inseparable from the murk, and the next moment distinct, clear, darting up into the shallows by the riverbank. There are also profound echoes here of Tlingit cosmology and psychology. That *haa* is one of the most spiritually pregnant words in the language. The expression of hunger makes use of it (*ax éet yaan.uwaháa*, it [hunger] comes over me), as does the passage of time (*gaawt kuwaháa*, it has come to the time). The word for the spirit that dwells within all things, *a yakgwahéiyagu*, is also expressed through this verb of occulted motion: the *héi* in the middle of that long word is an ablaut form of *haa*. The literal translation of this word for the soul is something like “a face that will invisibly move to and fro.”⁵

5. See the entry on *haa* in Gillian L. Story and Constance M. Naish, *Tlingit Verb Dictionary* (Fairbanks, AK, 1973). On a *yakgwahéiyagu*, see Frederica de Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit*, pt. 2 (Washington, DC, 1972), 765, and Sergei Kan, *Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Seattle, 2016), 56. In addition, see the beginning of Kaalkáawu Cyril George’s telling of the story of Aak’wtaatseen, in which he speaks the words: “ch’a Idakát át a yakgwahéiyagu kudzitee” (in all things, a *yakgwahéiyagu* exists). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wCmlb7Viqw&t>. The line is at approximately 0:42. My thanks also to Shkooyéil Tim Hall for conversations about the meaning and etymology of this deep and difficult word.

What is most arresting to me, however, is how Johnson's phrase about the salmon parallels the phrase about language in the speech's climax:

Ch'a yóo kaawahayi yoo x'atánk
Thus appearing-from-a-distance speech

du eenx nasteech.
[one] with him it always becomes.

That same *haa* verb used to describe the salmon, in the same adjectival form, is now used to describe speech, and it is followed by that same "it becomes one with him." Presumably that means that the speech becomes one with the listener. Let us then look at the parallel:

- salmon appearing from a distance becomes one with the fisherman
- speech appearing from a distance becomes one with the listener

If the form of Johnson's speech is governed by this analogy, then the speaker (or at least the speaker's speech) is the salmon, and the listener is the fisherman.

This brings about a quite dramatic transvaluation of the meanings at play. Rather than the orator being the fisherman taking the salmon, the orator is the salmon who gives itself to the fisherman for his sustenance. The gaff hook drifting over the water is perhaps the audience's attention, waiting to hook onto something that will feed and nourish the listeners. When that living, nourishing thing comes, it emerges from the depths by way of a spiritual motion, that *haa*, which brings with it echoes of the soul, of powerful emotions, of hunger, need, and desire, as well as of the vast and secret migrations of underwater animals, upon which everything in a coastal ecosystem depends.

In Tlingit, as in many Indigenous thought-systems, animals are understood to give themselves to the hunters who take them. In the story of "Aak'wtaatseen," for instance, a young Kiks.ádi Clan boy is taken to live among the Salmon People, and he learns of the great joy with which they undertake their migration to the spawning grounds, anticipating a winter they will spend in their "forts"—that is, in the smokehouses where their gutted bodies will be stored (Aak'wtaatseen himself returns to the human world when he wills himself to be caught in fish form by his own father).⁶ As long as the salmon remains are treated with respect, then being

eaten is no death or loss, but rather part of a cycle of immortality, a continuous circulation of life-force from sea to land and back to sea, from salmon to human, bear, and forest, then back again through the loamy riverbanks into the spawning of uncountable future generations of salmon. This is an ancient way of thinking about the world; it also has many parallels with more recent models of ecological interdependence.

Perhaps, then, the speaker gives himself to the listener, throws himself on the fish hook hanging in the water, makes the ultimate sacrifice. But the speaker's sacrifice is also a way of continuing his own role in the life cycle of language. As long as the salmon-speaker's remains are honored by the listener, then what he has given will return to him and his people.

I am not suggesting this is the only possible reading of this speech. Perhaps A. P. Johnson intended these words to be understood in both of these ways—to speak is both to fish and to be fished. Or perhaps he meant just one of them. Yet this second reading I have offered seems consonant not only with the Tlingit cosmology of hunting, but also with the deep sense of reciprocity entailed in Tlingit speechmaking. Oratory is especially focused on the respect and love shown for the "opposites"—those relatives who stand on the opposite side of the kinship structure from the speaker, those who are the speaker's paternal relatives and in-laws as opposed to maternal relatives. (In the traditional Tlingit kinship structure, your mother's people are your people, while your father's people are your opposites. This repeats on and on up through the lineage, so that the direct line of mothers—the mother's mother, and her mother, and her mother—is the line of a person's clan, while each mother's husband, along with his respective clan, constitutes a close protector from the other side.)⁷

To speak respectfully to the opposites is linked to hosting and feeding them at the *ku.éex'*, the potlatch or party. It can mean consoling them after a loss, or offering them payment for all of their help in a time of need. It helps ensure that they will do the same for the speaker's clan in the future. The opposites will host and

6. Deikeenaak'w, "Moldy-End" [Aak'wtaatseen], in John R. Swanton, *Tlingit Myths and Texts* (Washington, DC, 1909), 305.

7. The two "sides" of the Tlingit kinship structure are often called in English "Raven" and "Wolf" (this latter side is also called "Eagle"), after their principal crests. Anthropologists often call them moieties, though in the Tlingit account they are said to be the two original clans from which all the others have descended. If your mother belongs to a Raven-side clan, then you do too, no matter your gender. In the traditional system, that would make your father, your maternal grandfather, etc., as well as your own spouse, all Wolves. If your mother were a Wolf, then the situation would be reversed, and your father, maternal grandfather, and spouse would all be from Raven clans.

feed those who had once hosted and fed them; they will console them and offer them payment in the years to come. Thus a speaker who honors his opposites ensures that the opposites will care for future generations of his own clan. To speak is also—here we have metaphysical echoes of that *haa* verb again—to transmit words beyond yourself, to speak in the voices of your ancestors, in the voice of your whole clan, past, present, and future. Even though the occasion for this particular speech was a language workshop and not a *ku.éex'*, I cannot help but think that the high ritual underpinning of Tlingit oratory is also moving invisibly behind these remarks.

I once heard the late Shangukeidí Clan Leader Kingeistí David Katzeek say that in the old days, after a great orator had spoken, people would say, “thank you for letting me eat from your mouth.” The image is like a mother chewing up food for her child, or an eagle feeding a chick from its own belly. To speak is to nourish. To speak is to be beyond vulnerable; it is to let yourself be consumed by your listeners, to put your honor and your life in their hands. But if your words are right, and the listeners treat them with the proper respect, then it means you and yours will one day be nourished in turn.

A. P. Johnson gave his speech on speeches in 1971. Then (as unfortunately now), the Tlingit language was in danger: the number of speakers was dwindling every year, and almost no households were raising their children in the language.⁸ The workshop at which Johnson spoke was meant to bring together speakers and scholars and learners to rekindle a tradition from the embers. The ground upon which this meeting took place was itself a witness to the catastrophe of language loss. The Sheldon Jackson College campus had previously been home to the Sitka Industrial Training School, a boarding school for Native children committed to the

principle “kill the Indian, save the man.”⁹ The school aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream Anglo-American society by extirpating their Indigenous cultures, their family ties, and, above all, their languages. The school and its successor college were eventually named after the Presbyterian minister Sheldon Jackson, the ringleader of the assimilationist movement in Alaska.¹⁰

This cruel history was imbricated in complex ways with a more positive one. On this same campus, generations of Native leaders had been trained. The founders of the Alaska Native Brotherhood—the first Native civil rights organization in the country—met each other at the Sitka Industrial Training School. On its grounds, the master boatbuilder *Ƙaa.ooští* Andrew Hope, Sr., oversaw the construction of the Princeton Hall, “flagship of the Presbyterian Navy,” widely said to be the most beautiful wooden vessel in Alaskan history, and still afloat as of this writing, eighty years after it was first launched.¹¹ The civil rights hero *Ƙaaɣgal.aat* Elizabeth Peratrovich studied on that campus too; in 1945 she spearheaded the passage of the Alaska Equal Rights Act, the first antidiscrimination law in the United States.¹² A generation later, the school would produce *Yeidikook'áa* Isabella Brady, founder of the Sitka Native Education Program, a major force in Tlingit cultural revitalization.¹³ In the years following the

9. The phrase is associated with Captain Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the flagship assimilationist Native boarding school. But his views were influential across the country, including in Alaska.

10. For the history of the Sitka Industrial Training School, and the vexed role of Sitka in the transition from Russian to US colonialism in Alaska, see Richard L. Dauenhauer, *Conflicting Visions in Alaskan Education* (Fairbanks, AK, 1997), esp. 9–26.

11. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Ƙusteeyí, Our Culture: Tlingit Life Stories* (Seattle, 1994), 251–68.

12. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, *Haa Ƙusteeyí*, 525–44.

13. “Isabella Brady,” *Daily Sitka Sentinel*, April 23, 2012, <https://sitkasentinel.com/7/2012-05-10-22-08-43/obituaries/4555-isabella-brady>. *Yeidikook'áa* embodied the contradictions of Sheldon Jackson: raised in an assimilationist time, she had little connection to her ancestral language or culture. But her Western education made her a powerful advocate for Indigenous culture. In her adult life, she raised money, wrote grants, and organized the bureaucracy that would make it possible to launch cultural revitalization projects in Sitka and throughout Southeast Alaska. The modern political legacy of which she is a part is also profoundly, Indigenously, kinship-based. Her grandfather Peter Simpson was one of the central founders of the Alaska Native Brotherhood; her daughter Louise Brady currently leads the Herring Protectors activist group; and her granddaughter Dionne Brady-Howard (also named *Yeidikook'áa*) now teaches Tlingit culture at Outer Coast, a nascent school on the Sheldon Jackson campus where I have the honor of calling her my colleague and co-teacher.

8. In the 1970s and '80s, the Dauenhauers estimated the number of Tlingit speakers to be in the low thousands. At present (2023), the number of birth speakers is estimated to be fewer than one hundred; by some informal estimates, the number is only a few dozen. At the same time, there are many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of learners of the language, and courses are being taught across Southeast Alaska and the Yukon. Exact numbers are hard to come by, in part because language endangerment is a sensitive topic tied to deep historical and personal traumas. Some of the clearest work tabulating numbers of speakers and learners of Tlingit has been done by X'unei Lance Twitchell, in material he often presents in lectures and in his classes at the University of Alaska Southeast. See, for instance, his lecture “Shifting Value Systems: Indigenous Language Revitalization Strategies,” Sealaska Heritage Institute, January 27, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQkFFgj321>.

language gathering of 1971, writing workshops on the Sheldon Jackson campus organized by Xaastáanch Andy Hope III would bring together Gary Snyder, Ishmael Reed, and a host of other West Coast writers; what they did there would help lay the groundwork for the multicultural ideal in modern American letters.¹⁴

These conflicting strands—the dismay, the trauma, the continuing violence of colonialism, the pride, the political and artistic accomplishments of recent generations, the inklings of cultural renaissance and revitalization, the precarious sense of walking between worlds—were all present at the 1971 workshop. This is the backdrop against which A. P. Johnson spoke about the capacity of language to cross the boundary between beings. Íxt'ík' Éesh—which is only the best known of his many Tlingit names—straddled the bifurcated world created by the boarding schools and the American empire as much as any Tlingit. He belonged to the Kiks.ádi Clan, deeply rooted in Sitka; he was a child through his paternal line of the Kiks.ádi's long-standing opposites (in-laws), the Kaagwaantaan Clan. He was also an ordained Presbyterian minister who had spent twenty-six years outside of Alaska, first studying in Missouri, and then serving as a missionary on Native reservations in the American Southwest. For two decades after his return to Alaska he worked in the crafts department at Mt. Edgecumbe High School, yet another Native boarding school in Sitka. He was a devout (some might even say, strenuous) Christian; but his stories and speeches are venerated legacies of a tradition stretching far back beyond contact.¹⁵

A. P. Johnson seems to have had a particular interest in aquatic hunting implements. In 1972, the year after the language workshop, he recorded the story of the Kiks.ádi Clan ancestor Xaax'achgóok, who was blown out to sea like Odysseus after violating a hunting taboo. In his telling, Johnson lingers for a while on the weapons and methods used for taking seals:

When spring came
fur seals would drift in on the tide.
They would be throughout all these islands.
This is what people used to tire out and kill
with spears.

They used two different kinds of spears.
How long
were the thongs
that were tied to the spear point?
They were called *at s'aan.aaxw dzáas*.
They were for a deep place.
And the thongs that battered the head
for a shallow place.¹⁶

There are two types of seal-hunting *woosáani*—that is, spears. The first, with a spearpoint called *at s'aan.aaxw dzáas*, is meant to be used while tiring out seals in deep water. The long thongs to which the harpoon is attached wrap around the seal, so that the seal becomes tangled in the line, and then it can be pulled into the canoe before it sinks. In shallow water, a different spear called *at shaxishdi dzáas* is used, this one with a harpoon head attached to a club on a swinging thong that repeatedly hits the seal as it swims along.¹⁷

In this story, as in the speech, the human connection to the animal world is mediated by a detachable spearpoint. Xaax'achgóok realizes that ill omens are accompanying his sealing, so he returns to shore and breaks off his spearpoints to protect himself from the malevolent power that might travel through them into his own life. When, out of shame at not being able to feed his wife, he picks up his relatives' spears to go out sealing again, he and his crew are blown violently out to sea and marooned on a distant island.

Johnson made the tape recording of “Xaax'achgóok” himself, and gave it to Nora Dauenhauer to transcribe. Two years later the images held in his memory and relayed through his mouth became material realities by way of his hands. In 1974, he was hired by the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka to make a series of thirteen traditional tools—spears, harpoons, arrows, bows, and clubs—to be displayed in the main exhibition hall, where they remain to this day (fig. 1).¹⁸ Among these were the *at s'aan.aaxw dzáas*, that binding, tangling spear for deepwater seal hunting mentioned in the story of Xaax'achgóok, as well as its shallow-water counterpart, *at shaxishdi dzáas*, the head-clubbing spear. The project was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts connected to the impending 1976 bicentennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence: the idea

Elder Harriet Beale once told me that the Brady family is “the real history of Sitka.”

14. Hence the title of Ishmael Reed's groundbreaking anthology, *From Totems to Hip-Hop: A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry across the Americas, 1900–2002* (Boston, 2002).

15. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, *Haa Kusteeyí*, 305–10.

16. Íxt'ík' Éesh A. P. Johnson, “Xaax'achgóok,” in *Haa Shuká, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives*, ed. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer (Seattle, 1987), 85.

17. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, *Haa Shuká*, 326–27.

18. The Sheldon Jackson Museum is next door to the old college and holds the collection of Indigenous artifacts that the missionary Jackson had amassed while in Alaska.



Figure 1. Tlingit hunting and fishing tools made by *Íxt'ík' Éesh* A. P. Johnson. Sitka, AK, Sheldon Jackson Museum, nos. SJ-IA-475, SJ-IA-476, SJ-IA-473, SJ-IA-474 (four long spears); SJ-IA-482a-f, SJ-IA-483a-f, SJ-IA-484a-f, SJ-IA-556a-c (arrows arranged in an arc); SJ-IA-481 (bow hanging vertically in front of arrows). Also visible is part of a carved pole not made by Johnson (SJ-IA-294). Photo: Tukaan Ezra Dan, courtesy of Sheldon Jackson Museum. See the electronic edition of *Res* for a color version of this image.

was to support cultural projects that would explore what Sitka (and presumably many other communities) had been like in 1776.¹⁹

The irony of the project is as striking as its concreteness. For the bicentennial anniversary of the colonizing power that had stripped his people of their land, A. P. Johnson created the tools that had been in use to bridge land and water at the very moment when, thousands of miles away in Philadelphia, a few men in wigs signed a piece of paper severing themselves from their kin across the sea. Johnson's contribution to American Independence Day was to create objects of profound interdependence: these long twisting objects, not without their own danger and violence, that tie

humans to the other creatures of the land and sea, making visible with their cords one thin strand of the food web that connects all living beings.

When A. P. Johnson speaks of such tools in his stories and speeches, they are not just metaphors or anachronisms. He is thinking of actual things he has made with his hand and held with his hand, and used to touch the land and the water. There are cassette recordings in the Sheldon Jackson Museum archives of him describing just how the spears are to be used. The deep-sea spear, for instance, had to be carefully designed so that the length of the rope would be sufficient to tangle up the spear without unbalancing the harpooner's canoe.²⁰ In his story of *Ƙaaχ'achgóok'*,

19. This information can be found in the Sheldon Jackson Museum catalogue, in the narrative data for the thirteen objects made by Johnson, which have catalogue numbers SJ-IA-473 to SJ-IA-486.

20. A. P. Johnson, "Descriptions of the uses of his reproductions of early Tlingit hunting tools" (1973), Sheldon Jackson Museum Hands-On Loan Audiotape Collection, tape 100.

Johnson calls this spear by two names: its conventional name, *at s'aan.aaḡw dzáas*, and also by a second name, almost a mystical name, one that binds it to the world: *Gaadlaani yé yís aa á*, the for-the-deep-place thing. The seascape itself is built into the object's description, part of its ekphrasis.

As we hunt and kill and eat, so we play our part in a radiating series of exchanges. For us to extract and live, we must also give ourselves up, as seals and salmon do; we must seek out the harpoons for which we are meant, just as we send out those that will bring us sustenance. Only in this way can we prevent subsistence from turning into gluttony, survival into extraction. To give yourself for nourishment knowing that you too will be nourished: such a philosophy denies both the performative sacrifice of martyrdom and the ruthlessness of natural selection. It is about giving knowing you'll get in return, and getting knowing you'll eventually give. This action, in A. P. Johnson's mouth, is resonant with the strenuous project of keeping alive the ancestors' language in a present that disdains it, and it is redolent of the careful diplomacy required to bridge worlds—Christianity and animism, Anglo-American Alaska and *Lingít Aaní*: the Land of the Lingít.

In Tlingit, the peacemaker sent as a hostage and negotiator between warring clans is called the *guwakaan*—the deer. This is yet another gentle game animal as metaphor; the *guwakaan* puts himself in harm's way to provide the nourishment of a final reconciliation.²¹

For the bicentennial project *Íxt'ík' Éesh* also built a salmon fishing spear, also with a detachable point. He calls it *áadaa*—the one who attacks.²² This tool is different from the *k'éḡ'aa*, or gaff hook, mentioned in his speech, but the principle is much the same. A light spear-shaft is thrown into the water, catching the salmon with its harpoon point. The barriers between beings—perceptual, physical—must be breached, and the result is real contact, a true encounter, not some mere fraudulent misunderstanding where two creatures see only what they want of each other. In a 1973 presentation about these hunting tools made at Sheldon Jackson College and recorded on a cassette tape that lives in the Sheldon Jackson Museum, *Íxt'ík' Éesh* tells his audience just how it's done, and why: "As the salmon come up, you don't actually throw the spear at the salmon. You learn to calculate how deep the salmon is swimming, you usually spear underneath. By the time it reaches the salmon, you connect."²³

21. "While peace is being negotiated, both sides take a hostage into captivity; this is called 'Guwakon,' meaning 'deer.' The reason it is called 'the deer' is because, as we all know, a deer that roams the forests of Alaska is as the sheep in other lands. They are harmless and cannot hurt anyone. They are helpless to those who prey on them." Cyrus E. Peck, *The Tides People: Tlingit Indians of Southeast Alaska: A Narrative Account of Tlingit Cultures and Values Written by a Tlingit* (Privately published, 1986), 25.

22. The catalogue number is SJ-I-A-473.

23. Sheldon Jackson Museum Hands-On Loan Audiocassette Collection, tape 100.