

THE SHAMAN WHO CAME IN FROM THE OCEAN: MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS'S VISUAL NARRATIVES*

José Manuel Correoso Rodenas
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

ABSTRACT

Between 2001 and 2023, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas recovered many of the traditions of the Haida nation in the North-Western Pacific coast, creating hybrid narratives halfway between the textual and the pictorial. Yahgulanaas used different adaptations of the ancestral figure of the shaman to express the journey his people have gone through. Yahgulanaas's shamans are usually elements of confrontation between the static world of the Haidas and the external world, being the last barrier of defense against the destruction of the natural and social context in which the stories are held and told. The objective of this article is to focus on Yahgulanaas's so-called "Haida mangas" in order to explore how his shamans (his transcendent characters) can heal society and history through a deep connection with the spiritual world of the Haidas and through a deep understanding of how the supernatural is connected to them.

KEYWORDS: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Haida Manga, Native American Literature, Shaman, Linguistics and Literature.

EL CHAMÁN QUE LLEGÓ DEL OCÉANO: LAS NARRATIVAS VISUALES DE MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS

RESUMEN

Entre 2001 y 2023, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas se ha dedicado a recuperar muchas de las tradiciones del pueblo Haida, creando narraciones híbridas entre lo textual y lo pictórico. Yahgulanaas ha usado diferentes adaptaciones de la figura ancestral del chamán para expresar este proceso. Los chamanes de Yahgulanaas son frecuentemente elementos de confrontación entre el mundo estático de los haida y el siempre dinámico mundo exterior, presentándose como una de las últimas barreras frente a la destrucción del contexto natural y social que las historias presentan. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar los mangas haida de Yahgulanaas a la luz de la perspectiva chamánica de sus personajes transcendentales, y cómo estos pueden sanar la sociedad y la historia mediante la íntima conexión que mantienen con el mundo espiritual de los haida, así como mediante la comprensión de cómo lo sobrenatural está conectado con ellos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, mangas haida, literatura nativo-americana, chamán, lingüística y literatura.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the reader may be recalling, the title of the present article is derived from John le Carré's (1931-2020) best-selling novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), and we will be returning to that notion in the following paragraphs, for the idea of the shaman (and of the visual narratives analyzed below) is deeply connected with this assumption. The idea of bursting into a community and the relation with the cold environments (see below the etymological conception of the shaman) that surround that community, will be crucial to understanding the primary sources that are going to be considered. Many of le Carré's Cold War novels display a context in which two opposing worlds collide, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's (born in 1954) visual narratives also aim for a similar depiction, with his particular re-consideration of the East-West divide.

1.1. TRACING THE PATH OF THE SHAMAN

The present article will be fluctuating between two different poles: the aforementioned visual narratives of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and how they coalesce with the representation of the shaman (and how these shamans are usually included in the graphic novels that are going to be explored as a source of environmental action and conflict). Tracing the origins of the word "shaman" is a quite complicated issue, and we need to search for different sources when doing it. Usually, when the concept is discussed today, readers and audiences tend to think about indigenous communities of a wide variety, which rely on these figures as their connection with the spiritual world. Although this may be considered acceptable in a very broad sense, shamanism has deeper linguistic roots that cannot be obviated. Even if the debate still goes on and on, it seems more or less clear that the origins of the term need to be searched for in Central Asia, at the conundrum of the Indo-European, Tungusic, and Uralic languages (approximately in what today is Russian Siberia), as Ronald Hutton confirms: "Virtually all who use it are aware that it derives originally from Siberia, even while it has long been applied to phenomena in many other parts of the globe" (2001[2007], vii).¹ As most of this author's testimonies declare, the most

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¹ As for the written records of the term, Hutton (2001 [2007], VII) also offers an evaluation, stating that it was first coined in Russian (шаман) by Avvakum Petrov (1620/1621-1682) in the 1670s. The first English usage of the term would appear in 1698, in the translation of the memoirs of Adam Brand (born before 1692-1746), published in German as *Driejaarige Reize naar China* and translated as *A Journal of an Embassy*.



reliable semantic association of the word “shaman” (in its different variants: šamán [шаман], samān, śramaṇa [श्रमण], śāmaṇ, šamāne, shāmén [沙門])² could be the Tungusic root “sā-” which, according to authors such as Vilmos Diószegi (1962, 13) or Mihály Hoppál (2005, 15), should have a similar meaning to the English verb “to know.”³ In any case, delving into these definitions triggers two main (and problematic) conclusions: on one hand, and in relation with what is being explored below, a narrative containing the presence of a shaman invariably aims to explore the connections of the earthly world with the supernatural/spiritual realm that has been traditionally inherent of most historical societies; on the other hand, the generalized assumption of the shamanic role applied (indiscriminately) to different cultures worldwide leads to a complicated situation in which a Europeanized re-definition of the concept is applied to realities that lie both beyond the European and the original Tungusic-Siberian realms. As we are going to explore, Native American societies are a specially interesting target in this sense, for notions such as medicine-man, traditional healer, spiritual visionary, etc., have been assimilated with the conception of the shaman (via Mircea Eliade’s [1907-1986] *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l’extase* [1951]).⁴

1.2. SHAMANISM AND MYTH

Focusing on the first premise that has been posted above, prior to the discussion of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas’s works, we need to further state what a shaman is understood to be, in order to see how the Canadian author incorporates them in his visual narratives, and how this can be re-interpreted through the notions of natural healing. Shamans are usually depicted as the connection between the earthly and the spiritual worlds, playing a role similar to that of the priest in other, parallel cultures. In consequence, the relation of the shaman with the mythical conception of the society in which it is regulated (with independence of its geographical/cultural basis) lies in the transition from the immanent to the transcendent conception of time and space. As José Manuel Losada argues:

El mito designa un aspecto temporal frontalmente distinto de los tiempos de la inmanencia; una temporalidad también marcada por un antes y un después –toda sucesión es constitutiva de tiempo–, pero desmarcada de la nuestra. Lo mitológico es que esta cronología exclusiva de la divinidad, esencialmente irreducible a la

² See B. Laufer (1917).

³ On the other hand, as it usually happens with Uralic-Tungusic languages, these conclusions are not totally accepted by the academic community, with researchers such as Juha Janhunen (1986, 98) opening the door for a potential denial of the postulate.

⁴ A view that authors such as Sophie Dardenne (2005) or Sophie Golding (2018) have praised, for it constitutes a positive revisitation of how shamanism is culturally conceived, especially after the materialist, Marxist views of the central decades of the 20th century.



nuestra, se integre, puntualmente, con esta. El comercio con los seres humanos no desmerece a los divinos. Lo numinoso no es menos divino por incluir la dimensión cronológica; antes al contrario: precisamente porque entra en el flujo temporal –en el acontecimiento, al margen del ser puro y simple–, el mundo divino se da a conocer, muestra que no le somos indiferentes y, de algún modo, nos ayuda a comprender más nuestro propio tiempo inmanente. (2022, 250)

As for what the shaman means, his actions, his wisdom, and his social presence are usually directed towards the progressive clearance of the gap that, according to Losada, exists between the two different (sometimes confronted) layers of reality. As we are going to explore in Yahgulanaas's visual narratives, the role of the shamans he portrays also takes the task of becoming a nexus between the two different worlds that have constituted the cultural background of the author, at the conundrum of the Haida and the European presence in Western Canada. Along with this, shamans have also played a leading role, being presented as referential figures among the different societies in which they have existed, something that will also appear in the texts that are being analyzed in the following pages.

1.3. MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS AND HAIDA CULTURE

The second main aspect that needs to be considered is that of Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas's own cultural presence. As mentioned above, Yahgulanaas belongs to the Haida (Xaayda) Nation of Western Canada (native to the Queen Charlotte Islands [Haida Gwaii]). In the late 1970s, Yahgulanaas began his artistic career under the guidance of traditional sculptor and visual artist Robert Davidson [Guud San Glans] (born in 1946),⁵ also a member of the Haida Nation.⁶ Davidson, as it will happen with Yahgulanaas, is considered today as one of the main revitalizers of the Haida traditional arts and the Haida culture, having given to it a transnational scope beyond the limits of Haida Gwaii. Along with the influence of Davidson, Yahgulanaas will also be indebted to his own family history, in which the traditional creation of the Haidas will be imbricated. Actually, he is a descendant of the prominent Edenshaw family (Charles -ca. 1839-1920- and Isabella [K'woiyeng, Yahgujanaas, S'itkwuns] -ca. 1842-1926-), which by the early 20th century had given some of the most remarkable examples of non-totemic art in Haida Gwaii.⁷

The ancestral cultural production of the Haidas has traditionally manifested through the creation of two separate products that will coalesce in Yahgulanaas's production: carved totem poles [gyáa'aang]⁸ and stories explaining the ethnogenesis of the Haidas and the subsequent stages of their relationship with the outer world

⁵ See <https://www.robertdavidson.ca/> or Ian Thom (1993).

⁶ For a general overview of Yahgulanaas's artistic production, see <https://mny.ca/en/>.

⁷ See Colin Brown (2016).

⁸ Understood as Mircea Eliade's cosmic column (2020, 36-38).

(with the whites [Xhaaydla Gwaayaay]), being a (mostly) isolated society prior to the 18th century. As it will be seen below, the (recreational) figure of the shaman Yahgulanaas offers to the world will gather these two concepts together.

The aforementioned contact with the outer world will have two main ways of penetration in Haida Gwaii. During the first stages of the process, contacts will come from the South, from the Spanish possessions in California, as M.L. Rodríguez-Sala (2006) or F.M. Tovell (2008) have explored. José Manuel Correoso-Rodenas has recently addressed this context, offering a multimodal approach and contextualizing some of the expeditions that took place around Haida Gwaii between 1774 and 1790:

Within this context of fiction-reality conundrum, the end of the eighteenth century witnessed one of the most picturesque historical circumstances that the European presence in the North American territories would offer for modern historians: the presence of a Spanish expedition taking possession of what today is Alaska in the name of the Spanish king Charles IV. That territory received the quasi-legendary denomination of San Francisco del Mar Ártico and, later on, was known as San Lorenzo de Nutca (...)

That day, June 3rd, 1790, would mark a culmination for the Spanish expansionist aspirations in the Northwest of the American continent. Departing from Alta California, the last quarter of the century had hosted several independent expeditions to the unknown north, towards the search of the (also quasi-legendary) Strait of Anián. These milestones in the exploration of Northwest America will produce, as a result, along with a rosary of demonyms along the coast,⁹ a vast and interesting amount of documents which included the narration of these journeys. (2024, 271-272).

Some of these texts will directly address the reality of the pre-contact Haidas, with descriptions about them, their customs, and their languages. Later on, especially since the early 19th century and the cessation of the Spanish presence in the area, this contact will come from the East, from British Canada, creating the boundary of the Hecate Strait [Kandaliigwii] that Yahgulanaas will reproduce and revisit in his Haida mangas, and creating that “heterogenous space” that Mircea Eliade proposes in *Das Heilige und das Profane* (2020, 23).

Up to the 1990s, Yahgulanaas continued exploring different branches of artistic production, from sculpture to visual performance, always placing the Haida cosmology at the center of his creations.¹⁰ By the end of this decade, Yahgulanaas would get acquainted with artistic expressions coming from the other side of the Pacific (China, Japan, and Korea) through the increasingly growing Asian community in Western Canada. Through these, Yahgulanaas would begin an exploration of the possibilities of merging the traditional stories of the Haidas with the modern, more

⁹ And other linguistic interchanges, such as those explored by Henry Kammler (2009, among others) for the Natives of Vancouver Island.

¹⁰ Thanks to this, along with Davidson, Yahgulanaas would enter the main artistic circuit of Canada, being his creations displayed within the most important venues of the country.



attractive format of the manga (and the manhwa¹¹),¹² coining the term “Haida manga,” in a similar way to what had happened in France with the manfra. According to Nicola Levell, this mode of expression can be defined as “(...) a kind of transpacific fusion that transculturates Haida formlines, ideas and oral histories with manga, the Japanese genre of cartoon and comic illustration” (2013, 94).¹³ These characteristics will be clearly seen in the following paragraphs.

2. MICHAEL NICOLL YAHGULANAAS AND HAIDA MANGAS

Since the early 21st century,¹⁴ Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas has been publishing different hybrid volumes in which he mingles images and narrations. Although his production is way more extensive,¹⁵ here we will focus on those publications that gather the circumstances of containing Haida narrations under the format of the manga and which depict recreational shamanic figures. Thus, the subsequent analysis will be devoted to the four following works: *A Tale of Two Shamans* (2001), *Red. A Haida Manga* (2009), *Carpe Fin. A Haida Manga* (2019), and *JAJ. A Haida Manga* (2023). All of them revisit either episodes of the folkloric past of the Haidas or the historical journey the nation has gone through, especially since the arrival of the Europeans in Haida Gwaii. As it will be seen below, there is a structural and narratorial difference between *A Tale of Two Shamans* and the rest of the volumes that contributes to make this story a special effort within the modernization the Haida manga means.

2.1. *A TALE OF TWO SHAMANS*: THE SHAMAN’S PROGRESS

A Tale of Two Shamans [*Ga Sgaagaa Sdáng, Ga Sgaaga Sding*] was conceived as a federally sponsored project in order to protect and promote the legacy of the Haidas specially in linguistic terms; something that explains the peculiar format in which it was created. Unlike the following narrations, *A Tale of Two Shamans* combines fully drawn pages with pages in which images and text are confronted,

¹¹ For more information, see Son Sang-ik (1999), Christopher Hart (2004), or Rika Sugiyama (2004).

¹² Something that, in the most recent decades, has been a shared effort among many different Native American groups, trying to bring their ancestral traditions to the younger generations. One of the most famous examples is the videogame *Never Alone [Kisima Injitchujja]*, developed by Upper One Games (2014) adapting a traditional Inupiat story “Kunuksaayuka.” See <http://neveralongame.com/>.

¹³ José Manuel Correoso Rodenas has briefly evaluated the interrelations between the verbal and the visual in Yahgulanaas’s Haida mangas (2022).

¹⁴ He already participated in the publication of the first volume of the *Tales of Raven* series (1977). See Nicola Levell (2016, 16, 20).

¹⁵ Even within the realm of Haida mangas, including titles such as *Flight of the Hummingbird* (2008) or the collaborative work *The Canoe He Called Loo Taas* (2010).





playing Yahgulanaas with different shades of black and white. As mentioned, one of the main purposes of *A Tale of Two Shamans* was to modernize the legacy of the Haidas,¹⁶ so the story it encompasses is recreated in the three main surviving dialects of the Haida language [Xaat Kíl, Xaadas Kíl, Xaayda Kil, Xaad kil],¹⁷ Old Massett, Skidegate, and Kaigani (being this last version proper of continental Alaska), along with Yahgulanaas's own English translation.¹⁸ Of all the four volumes that are being explored here, *A Tale of Two Shamans* is the only one in which the traditional figure of the shaman is explored. As mentioned above, by doing so, Yahgulanaas is already going through an exercise of adapting a non-Haida notion, such as that of the shaman, to potentially pre-existent, related figures, such as those of the keeper of the traditions, the medicine man, or the storyteller.

The plot of *A Tale of Two Shamans* is the only one dealing with the pre-contact era and discussing how the (argued) shamans acted as conductors and elements of agglutination for their respective communities: "The work you are about to read is old, much older than any of us still living. It is probably older anything one could even call Canadian. It precedes us all" (Yahgulanaas 2018, 4). The story presents two sole characters, the shaman and Elder, who will be finally depicted as the real shaman. Thus, the narration pivots between the conception of real shamanism (Elder) and fake, posed, impure shamanism (the shaman). In order to comprehend how Yahgulanaas recreation of shamanic Haida purity works, we need to revisit the aforementioned definition of what a shaman is, for here we have two characters who are closely linked to the mythic/religious views of the shamanic role. According to Yahgulanaas,

My 2001 English version (...) is an interpretation of the elements of meaning. The conceptual structure of this parable is about sightedness and the role of transgressions and transitions in a world of symmetry, moieties within the cycle of rebirth. My paintings and text constitute a theory that there is a unified structure of meaning in what was recorded as three separate stories and that these three stories were once a single parable. (2018, 5)

Elder is presented as the actual bearer of the connection with the transcendent, trimming the shaman how to subvert his arrogance (hubris) to be dignified with the leading communal role the narration has given him:

¹⁶ In a similar sense, the 2018 movie *SGaawaay K'uuna* [*Edge of the Knife*], filmed entirely in Haida, tried to bring the ancestral traditions of the nation to the modern format of the psychological horror thriller.

¹⁷ Some other dialects, such as Ninstints (traditionally spoken on Moresby Island [Gwaii Haanas]) are today extinct and poorly documented, as John Enrico states (2003, 1).

¹⁸ Something that will not happen in the future books that are going to be explored, written entirely and originally in English (with the only exception of *JAJ*, which will include some brief fragments in Haida).

As soon as the shaman passed the skin back to Elder, he felt the otter's spirit in his insides.

Then the shaman's belly began to ache.

"That is happening to you because you asked me for the otter," Elder cried.

"You speak the truth," the shaman replied.

And in three days, he died. (Yahgulanaas 2018, 23-25)

This episode, which will mark a rebirth in the life of the shaman, will also mark the transition from the mythic agent to the mythic subject according to the definition of the myth José Manuel Losada offers: "El mito es un relato funcional, simbólico y temático de acontecimientos extraordinarios con referente trascendente sobrenatural carentes, en principio, de testimonio histórico y remitentes a una cosmogonía o a una escatología individuales o colectivas, pero siempre absolutas" (2022, 193). Thus, the shaman (and, tangentially, Elder) enters the realm of transcendence, becoming a supernatural entity who has shared the mythical characteristic of the returnee, adding to his own shamanic (although posed) knowledge what is brought from the other side.

2.2. A TALE OF TWO SHAMANS: *RED* AND *CARPE FIN*

As mentioned before, the three Haida mangas that came after *A Tale of Two Shamans* have the common background of depicting a scenario in which the contact of the Haidas with the Europeans (Anglo-Europeans) has already become a visible reality. More specifically, *Red* (2009) and *Carpe Fin* (2019) are indebted to the representation of the same reality, being *Carpe Fin* a prequel to *Red*. In consequence, these will be considered together here. However, prior to the literary discussion of the narrations, we should briefly consider how Yahgulanaas structurally conceived them. As mentioned above, the totem poles (also crucial for understanding *JAJ*) are some of the most characteristic Haida cultural products. In consequence, Yahgulanaas created his Haida mangas (especially *Red*) depicting this recognizable Haida trait which, according to Ishmael Reed, are also used to narrate stories:

Some of the figures on the poles constitute symbolic reminders of quarrels, murders, debts, and other unpleasant occurrences about which the Native Americans prefer to remain silent... The most widely known tales, like those of the exploits of Raven and of Kats who married the bear woman, are familiar to almost every native of the area. Carvings which symbolize these tales are sufficiently conventionalized to be readily recognizable even by persons whose lineage did not recount them as their own legendary history. (2003, n.p.)¹⁹

¹⁹ For more information, see Ruth Brindze (1951); Viola E. Garfield (1951); Viola E. Garfield & Linn A. Forrest (1961); Edward L. Keithahn (1963); Joseph H. Wherry (1964); John Smyly & Carolyn Smyly (1973); Edward Malin (1986); Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith (1990); Hilary Stewart (1993); Pamela Rae Huteson (2002); Pat Kramer (2008); or Richard D. Feldman (2012).



When considering all the different scenes that compose *Red*, what the spectator actually gets is the depiction of one of the faces that have traditionally adorned Haida totem poles.²⁰ The actual organization of the vignettes also addresses a reality of the Haida nation, reproducing the grammatical structure of the Haida language, an isolate language arguably one of the slowest on Earth. Thus, the manga offers an inter- and intra-page distribution completely different to European and Asian models.²¹ Along with the following shamanic traits *Red* shows, this utilization Yahgulanaas makes of the linguistic reality of the Haidas. In the most recent decades, the linguistic research of Edward J. Vajda (2010a, 2010b, 2012, and 2013)²² has proposed the theory of a Yeniseian-North American language connection through the Na-Dene languages (a macro-group which would include Haida).²³ Although this still remains at a very theoretical research level, it undoubtedly triggers new questions about the historical migration of the shamanic figure. Let's be clear: there is no evidence yet of that connection, but in the future decades, proving it would mean a huge step in the reevaluation of how spiritual figures have traditionally worked for Native societies, not only being an adaptation of the Siberian reality, but also a tangible recreation.

As it happened with *A Tale of Two Shamans*, *Red* also depicts a traditional Haida story,²⁴ narrated from the perspective of the Native side:

After a few weeks, I became acutely aware of the difference between settler stories about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous stories about Indigenous peoples. Settlers, it appeared, were interested in decontextualized trauma and relegating Indigenous strength to the past. Indigenous authors, however, were more likely to write stories about recovering from trauma, or stories more specifically about the ways that we are strong now. Indigenous authors avoided stereotypes, while building a canon of their own voices. (Daigneault, Mazowita, Rifkind, and Callison 2019, 152)

In this manga, the peaceful Haida village of Kiokaathli is traumatized with the sudden arrival of a white raid that concludes with the kidnapping of Jaada, Red's sister, creating the liminal (chronological and spatial) space of the shore:²⁵ "Out there is where we are conceived (...) here on the beach is where we are born (...) and in there, that is where we becoming adults" (2014, 5). This will be the first moment of epiphany within the narration, for Red, who had been trained to become

²⁰ For a further depiction of Yahgulanaas's creative process, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POMbyPLhqRI&t=10s>.

²¹ A more detailed discussion of the layout of *Red*, *Carpe Fin*, and *JAJ* would excessively exceed the limits and scope of the present publication. In consequence, for further notice on this, we recommend R. Harrison (2016); Cara Tiemens (2019); or José Manuel Correoso Rodenas (2022).

²² Being contested by other major linguists such as George Starostin (2012).

²³ Something that Michael Fortescue had already venture in his archaeological research (1998).

²⁴ Which itself is a Pacific version of the Roman tradition of the rape of the Sabine women [Sabinae raptae].

²⁵ Also linking with Eliade's conception of the *templum-tempus* (2020, 67-69).



the future shaman of the village (“So, going on a spirit quest, eh? Gonna become a shaman?” [2014, 10]) is defied by reality, and thus adopts the role of warrior leader of Kiokaathli, using his future life to seek revenge. This will become a real possibility through the second moment of epiphany in *Red*, when the main character finds Carpe, a shipwrecked white character who will also become a shamanic figure himself (linking two realities, adopting them, and linking this manga and *Carpe Fin*). Carpe, a talented ship builder, creates an artificial whale (SGaanaGwa),²⁶ recreating an animal that is very relevant in Haida cosmology, which is used as a war machine to attack the Europeans on the continent, disclosing the reality in which Jaada has actually married a white man and had his children; in consequence, Red becomes a murderer, his shamanic-spiritual guidance has been surpassed by his own hubris, which leads to destruction through the perfidious utilization of the SGaanaGwa.

The shamanic conversion of Carpe is completed with the exploration of his own personal history in *Carpe Fin*. This volume, presented as a prequel to *Red*, explains how the character suffers his own process of sublimation by being separated from his own community. On a fishing expedition, due to an accident and poor weather conditions, Carpe is stranded on a rock in what is assumed to be Hecate Strait. There, he will be confronted with different elements belonging to the Haida spirituality,²⁷ which will demand explanations for Carpe’s past actions: “Why do you murder women? I demand an answer!” (2019, n.p.). Thus, the rock in the ocean will become Carpe’s own *axis mundi*, as Mircea Eliade explains it: “Wo eine Hierophanie zur Durchbrechung der Ebenen geführt hat, ist zugleich eine ‘Öffnung’ nach oben (in die göttliche Welt) oder nach unten (zu den unteren Regionen der Welt der Toten) entstanden. Die drei kosmischen Ebenen –Erde, Himmel, untere Regionen– sind miteinander in Verbindung gesetzt” (2020, 36). There, he will be found and rescued by Red, triggering the whole episode with the whale that is narrated in the previous manga. However, these scenes on the rock will be presented as crucially more important as we approach the end of the narration. As it happens with any character who has been in contact with the supernatural, Carpe is transformed forever, his previous Xhaaydla Gwaayaay nature is modified and now he has become a different person, a true shaman, for he is now able to connect the different worlds he has been in contact with. This transition is explicitly stated in the last two pages of *Carpe Fin*. After the adventure of the whale, and after Red has to suffer the consequences of his hubris, Carpe is offered the possibility of returning to British Canada, to his own community, to be re-integrated with his pre-shamanic self. However, his decision will go in a completely different direction: “Skaanaa, we have one more task (...)

²⁶ The presence of the whale in traditional (and folkloric) literature is also quite interesting. See Anne Simon (2021) or Justine Scarlaken (2024).

²⁷ In an episode that clearly resembles what José Manuel Losada mentions about the oneiric dimension of the myth: “los sueños acarrean una enorme carga íntima, cuya garantía de verosimilitud explica en buena medida su recurso por muchos escritores y su poder cautivador entre tantos lectores. A estas características se añade la convicción tradicional de que los sueños vienen siempre preñados de una significación: son metáfora, alegoría o símbolo de algo” (2022, 254).

take me back to Lord's rock" (2019, n.p.). This quotation marks the sacrality of the rock on which he had been shipwrecked, a space that has become sacred (his own hermit) through the experience Carpe has lived there. On the other hand, this final passage also states how Carpe cannot deny his own fate, and goes on embracing his new (we assume, future) shamanic role.

2.3. *JAJ*: THE SHAMAN THAT CAME IN

The last stage of this shamanic journey deals with the Haida manga *JAJ*, published in 2023. Unlike in the previously visited examples, here Yahgulanaas does not explore the early colonial era of Haida Gwaii, but he sets his hybrid narration in the last quarter of the 19th century, when the European presence in British Columbia is already a well-established reality. The shamanic implications of *JAJ* are far more challenging than in the previous narrations, as Yahgulanaas recognizes before the opening of the manga: "JAJ: (1) one who decides (Hindi),²⁸ (2) Johan Adrian Jacobsen" (2023, n.p.). As this definition presents, the story is going to deal with a dual reality of spiritual connection between the ancestral and the modern, and also with the actual, historical expeditions of Johan Adrian Jacobsen (1853-1947) to Northwestern America in the early 1880s.²⁹ The main objective of these expeditions was collecting Native material to be displayed at the newly created Ethnological Museum of Berlin: "Bastian needed a museum collection grand enough for the new Germany: one to rival the British, the Americans, and everyone else out looting the planet. But such a collection required world-class material... and the services of one willing to deliver it to him" (Yahgulanaas 2023, 51). Among some of the most valuable items Jacobsen brought back to Germany, we can find a totem pole, still displayed at the museum.

Unlike Carpe, Jacobsen will not go through a shamanic, supernatural experience due to his connection with the Haida spirituality. However, the narration Yahgulanaas creates around him will disclose some traits that need to be considered. The first of them, in relation to the Hindi/Sanskrit meaning(s) of "जाज," will be religion. In the previously considered mangas, religion is absent (beyond the religious implications the spiritual and shamanic mentions imply). However, in *JAJ*, religion is directly addressed since the opening of the narration, and it is presented as an important factor for the Haidas in the late 19th century. The opening of *JAJ* deals with the legendary journey of Bartholomew the Apostle (died ca. 69/71) to the Americas, along with Thomas the Apostle (died 72):³⁰ "Old stories remind us that centuries

²⁸ जाज. Actually, the Hindi word encompasses a wider meaning than that exposed by Yahgulanaas, being it also possible to translate it as "judge," making a clear connection with the shamanic social leading role.

²⁹ As a result, Jacobsen would write a chronicle entitled *Captain Jacobsen's Reise an der Nordwestküste Amerikas, 1881-1883* (1884).

³⁰ See Louis-André Vigneras (1977, 82).



after a Buddhist monk arrived in these waters, Bartholomew was the first European” (2023, 3). Leaving apart the Indian connection of this sentence (Bartholomew also visited India, as recorded by Eusebius [*ca.* 260/265-339] in his *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία*), what Yahgulanaas expresses here is the arrival of Christianity to the Haida world and to the Haida cosmology. Historically, this process began with the British and American missionaries that visited the archipelago by the mid-19th century, within the context of the short-lived Colony of the Queen Charlotte Islands (1853-1858), and consolidated after 1876, with the presence of the Church Missionary Society,³¹ as John R. Henderson explains:

Although these appeals for a missionary brought no minister immediately to the Queen Charlotte Islands, missionary activity was stirring on the mainland during the 1850’s and 1860’s. The Church Missionary Society of London (Anglican) sent William Duncan to establish Metlakatla near the Hudson’s Bay Company post at Fort Simpson. Duncan’s mission provided a church and school to teach, convert, and minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the local Tsimshian Indians. In addition, Duncan used Metlakatla to train local Indians to serve as lay ministers to spread the Word up and down the north Pacific Coast. Later, novice missionaries from Great Britain interned at Metlakatla before embarking alone to other Anglican outposts along the coast. (1974, 304)

This meant, still in historical terms, the beginning of the decline of the Haida culture, vanished through conversion, assimilation, and smallpox, as also narrated in *JAJ*:

Dr. Helmcken³² was an MLA and speaker of the Vancouver Island Assembly.³³ He was also a physician: he knew the difference between inoculation (illegal) and vaccination (legal).

Helmcken: “Let’s inoculate.”

(...)

British law was clear that the sole and correct response to a smallpox outbreak was quarantine. James Douglas³⁴ and his son-in-law Helmcken knew that law. (2023, 23-24)

This pernicious presence of the Europeans in Haida Gwaii, which Yahgulanaas also adds to the presence of missionaries,³⁵ will be the one of the main sources of shamanic clash in *JAJ*, for leading role the shaman has traditionally hold is perturbed by other spiritual and social elements of guidance, such as the priests and the civil authorities: “Indigenous laws regulated access to land and water, preventing

³¹ See the anonymous *The Hydah Mission*.

³² John Sebastian Helmcken (1824-1920).

³³ The Legislative Assembly of Vancouver Island, existing between 1856 and 1866.

³⁴ Sir James Douglas (1803-1877).

³⁵ Who will help Jacobsen in the negotiations necessary to bring the totem to Berlin.

newcomers from claiming everything for the British Empire. Those laws troubled Governor James Douglas. They made him look weak” (2023, 16). The second main source of shamanic clash (also derived from the pernicious presence of the Europeans, in his case Jacobsen) will appear towards the end of the narration. Here, Yahgulanaas presents a disruption with the actual course of historical events, in which the totem arrived in Germany and was displayed at the museum. In *JAJ*, on the contrary, the cultural pre-eminence (pseudo-shamanic) of historical Jacobsen (bearer of the secrets of the Haidas) is neglected: “As for Johan, his time at Haida Gwaii was, in reality, one stop of many on a long journey. Though he was welcomed when he returned to Berlin, he was no ethnographer, and no German, and so there would be no permanent position for him at the Ethnological Museum” (Yahgulanaas 2023, 107). However, what is even more relevant is what actually happens at the very last page of *JAJ*, when the academic authorities of the Berlin Museum open the boxes in which the totem had been stored, “And the totem?” (2023, 108), opening the possibility for a disappearance of the item. Deprived of the spiritual, cultural, and geographical substrates that made the existence of the totem something valuable and recognizable, his material reality (what is valuable and recognizable for the museum) disappears. In consequence, Yahgulanaas displays the Europeans (Jacobsen and the museum and, by extension, the missionary and civil authorities of British Columbia) as irrelevant in the spiritual (shamanic) connection the totem had historically meant for the Haidas.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, as we have had the opportunity of exploring through the previous paragraphs, the notion of the shaman is extremely tricky and malleable. Although the origins of the term (and the figure) still remain unclear, it is undeniable that the shamanic perspective has permeated cultures and societies that have had a special connection with the ancestral across the globe. Although its assimilation when dealing with Native American cultures may not be totally accurate, it has been successfully incorporated into the Native cultural and spiritual discourse (both endogenously and exogenously). Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, one of the last cultural figures of a vanishing indigenous tradition, that of Haidas, means an extremely useful link between the traditional world of his nation and the modern world of Anglophone Canada. His more or less original creation of the Haida mangas has played (and still plays) a decisive role when connecting young Haidas with an almost lost legacy (something that, unfortunately, cannot be done linguistically anymore). The examples that have been considered in the previous pages, *A Tale of Two Shamans*, *Red*, *Carpe Fin*, and *JAJ*, offer different visions of what a shaman is supposed to be, and what the shamanic role is supposed to mean. From the most traditional views that *A Tale of Two Shamans* offers to the intermingled universe *JAJ*, Yahgulanaas revisits how the Haidas had always been in search of a shaman, and how the shaman has always been in search of a respectable person to host what he is. Red and Carpe are good examples of this, for they follow different patterns that finally converge, and they also have to go through their own hubris-led spiritual quest in order to be sublimated



into the shamanic realm, something that Jacobsen is denied. It is a mystery where shamans come from, but for Yahgulanaas they have always come in from the ocean; the shore, the whale, and the ship have always been their resources. As it happens with Alec Leamas in John le Carré's novel, Yahgulanaas shamans are always a source of turmoil, something that not only leads the Haidas, but also triggers their own comprehension of what their history, their identity, and their cosmology are.

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