

BEAR MOTHER
MYTH AND TABOOS

The Bear-Mother Myth. Over two hundred years ago the Jesuit Charlevoix, historian of New France, discovered the ritual Dance of the Bear among the nomads of the northeastern woodlands. He called it "La chasse de l'ours" and described it as "Cérémonie ridicule, qui se pratique quand on a tué un Ours."¹ In his description we read the significant comment (translated from the French):

Before coming to the feast where the guests are to partake of bear meat, their custom is to [purify themselves by means of] a sweat bath, and, instead of gorging themselves as at other banquets, they eat only moderately. The host does not eat any of that meat himself but . . . addresses new invocations to the soul of the Bear . . . Further ceremonies aim at appeasing the other Bears, and at bringing about a new reconciliation. The spirits presiding over the living Bears otherwise would interfere with the hunt and bring poor luck to the impious hunter.

Another of many records made among the northwestern Indians is that of Père Emile Petitot, the French Oblate missionary among the Déné-Athapascans, 1866-1879.² Entitled *La danse de l'ours*, this study shows how the Dénés of the Arctic circle, each time they kill a bear, dance, pray to the soul of the dead bear, and sing: "*Mèni n'ayétri . . . who has lured you out of your den ?*" In a familiar ritual, they endeavour to atone for their deed and confess their shame and confusion, in order to keep the soul of the bear from avenging itself upon the murderers, or even from being able to recognize them.

Father Petitot, aware of the Old World origin of this worship of the Bear Spirits, goes on to describe similar customs among the Ostiaks of Finland, who also hold a dance of propitiation over the bears they have killed in the hunt.

In his admirable monograph entitled *Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere*,³ Dr. A. Irving Hallowell has compiled an immense number of records and described in great detail the customs and rituals relating to the killing of the Bear wherever they occur in the Far North on two huge continents. He shows that, to the native Americans and Siberians, the Bear is not only an animal but also a spirit: in this last quality, it stands above man: a semi-divinity, higher than all other spirits. It is easy to realize that the centre of diffusion for such customs is, as often happens, Asia, not America, and that there is a hidden or symbolic meaning behind the mass of related observances and rituals, all of which are somehow inter-related historically.⁴

Bear ceremonialism is explained, at least in part of its area of diffusion, by the native story or myth of the young Indian woman who once was changed into a bear and bore twin cubs. This tale, in so far as we know it, belongs to the Tsimshians, the Haidas, the Tlingits, and other neighbouring tribes of the north Pacific Coast and northern Rockies of America, and the bears concerned are grizzlies.

¹ *Journal d'un Voyage fait par ordre du Roi dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (6 vols., à Paris, chez Didot . . . , 1744) 5: 168-75. Record dated 1721.

² *Exploration de la Région du Grand Lac des Ours* (Paris, 1893) 13-17.

³ (114: 1-175) (Referred to hereafter as Hallowell, *Bear Ceremonialism*).

⁴ For other related data, see Ivan Petroff, (80:168); James Deans, *The Story of the Bear and His Indian Wife* (*Journal of American Folklore* 2:255-60; 1889); Franz Boas, (22:29-979); M. Barbeau, *Totem Poles of the Gitksan*, (5:108-42).

Among these Mongolian-like people, the Bear Mother myth is a favourite theme for illustration; indeed, no Indian myth or tale has ever been treated better or more extensively. The treatment assumes two forms: one heraldic, in the totem poles of the Tsim-syans of the Skeena and Nass Rivers; of the Tlingits of Alaska, and of the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands. The other is purely anecdotal or decorative as in the argillite carvings of the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Among the Tsim-syans of the mainland, the mythical Bear Mother was made into the totem of a clan within the Wolf phratry. It is perhaps the only true totem on the north Pacific Coast, answering more or less to the classical definition of clan totem as first given by Sir James George Frazer.

The totemic carvings of Bear Mother and of Bear Mother and her two semi-human cubs belong to the sub-nations of the Tsim-syans, in particular the Gitskans of upper Skeena River, and the Niskæs of Nass River to the north; also to the intermediate tribe of Gitwinkul near the lake of the same name on the Grease (oolaken) Trail linking the two rivers that flow south-westward from the Rockies into the Pacific, a short distance south of the Alaskan border.

As we know them, the totem poles illustrating this myth are: that of the now deserted village of Angyedæ on the middle Nass (this pole now stands in the Musée de l'Homme, in Paris);¹ a dozen or so other poles of the upper Skeena river — the poles of the "Ensnared Grizzly" and "The Bear's Den," at Kitwanga and Hagwelgyet, of the "Sitting-Grizzly," at Gitwinkul, of "The Climbing-Bears" and "Ribs-of-Bear," at Hazelton, and of "Half-of-Bear," at Kispayaks; and a number of Haida and Tlingit poles. The Kwa-kiutls and other tribes south of the Tsim-syans, and the Haidas have often



Grizzly Bear of the Kaigani-Haidas

¹ I purchased it, in 1929, for Sir Henry Thorton, who, on behalf of the Canadian National Railways, presented it to the French Government for the old Trocadero Museum, now Musée de l'Homme.



Two Tlingit totems of chief Shaiks, at Wrangell

orphan! Here he has dropped his excrement!"

She might just as well have said, "You bastard!"

Her packstrap broke and, while she tried to mend it, her sisters went on their way, leaving her far behind. Ill-tempered, she did not sing as she should have, but only scolded and groaned.

As it grew dark, she heard voices in the bush behind her, men's voices. Then two young men, looking like brothers, came toward her and said, "Sister, you are in trouble, with nobody to look after you. Come with us, we will carry your berries for you."

Following them she noticed that they were wearing bear robes, and they were taking her up the mountain. After dark they came to a large house near a rockslide and entered with her. Around a small fire a number of people sat, looking at her, all of them dressed in bear robes.

The white mouse Tseets — Grandmother — came to her and pulled at her robe, which

resorted to the Bear Mother theme.

The myth, as illustrated on the poles of the Tsimshians and the Haidas, was told at great length. Its recital was accompanied by a ritual and two songs. In brief the tale is:¹

Peesunt, a member of the family of Arhteeth of Kitwanga, long ago was gathering huckleberries on the mountain with two other young women of her tribe. Instead of singing like the others, to warn the bears of her presence there as she should have done, she kept chatting and laughing while gathering the wild fruit. The bears in the end pricked up their ears and listened. "Why does she always babble as if she were mocking someone?" they asked each other. Perhaps she was mocking them. That is why they spied on her in the bush and followed her down the trail when she packed a large basket of fruit for the camp.

One evening all three young women, one after the other, followed the trail, stooping under their loads, which were held on their backs by backstraps from their foreheads. Peesunt, the babbler, was the last of the three, a short distance behind the others. Suddenly she slipped, nearly fell down, and looked at her feet. Then, bursting with angry laughter, she sneered, "Boo to Naæk — bear-

¹ A brief summary is given in the author's *Totem Poles of the Gitksan*, op. cit., 131. In the author's *Mountain Cloud* (111a), the above summary has been set in appropriate surroundings (130-34).

was now coated with long grey hair like a bear's. And the mouse squeaked, "Granddaughter, the bears have taken you to their den; from now on you shall be one of them, bearing children."

As she heard this she grew frightened, the more so when one of the young grizzlies approached her and said, "You shall live, if you agree to become my wife; if you refuse, you die."

It is from the moment of the first encounter, as related in the myth, that the carvers of the totems usually found inspiration for their illustrations. The latter part of the myth is subject to many interpretations. In brief, the story goes on:

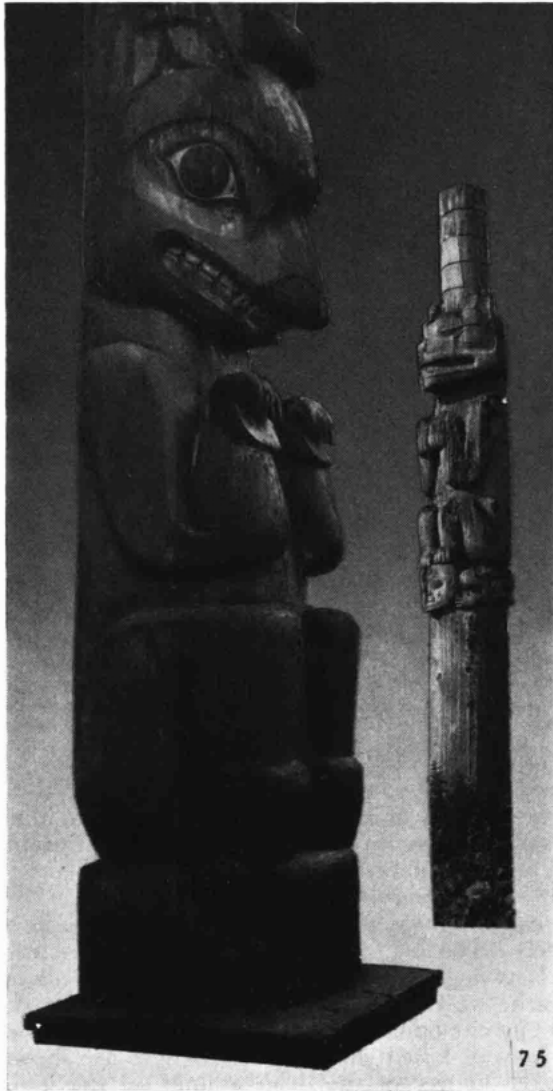
After being taken to wife by the nephew of the Grizzly Bear chief, Peesunt was raised to a higher state among the Spirit Bears on the mountain side. She gave birth to twins, which were half human and half bear. Her brothers meanwhile searched for her. She saw them, as they stood at the bottom of a rock slide, and squeezed a handful of snow in her hand and let the tiny ball roll down the slide. The brothers, thus made aware of her presence, climbed the rock slide and slew the Bear, sparing her semi-human children. Before dying, the Bear husband taught his wife two ritual songs, which the hunters should use over his dead body, to ensure good luck. Peesunt's children behaved like bears part of the time; they guided their uncles to the dens of bears in the mountains, and helped them to set their snares. With their assistance and through the use of the dirge songs, which they always sang over dead bears, the families of Tenemgyet, Hrpeelrhæ, and Arhteet became prosperous bear hunters. And they adopted the Ensnared-Bear as their crest.

Ever after the Indians used dirge songs over the remains of bears. A clan of hunters on the Skeena River, the Gitksans of the Niskæs and the Tsimsyans proper, probably also of the Haidas, adopted the Grizzly Bear as their emblem or totem.

Native story tellers repeated the tale of Bear Mother at evening gatherings; clan chiefs explained it at the foot of newly erected totem poles illustrating it, and the hunters resorted to ancient rituals of sacrifice and propitiation after they had killed a bear and made ready to eat its flesh.

The Tsimcyan totem pole carvers meanwhile selected special features of the story and treated them freely according to their own ideas and standards. This was true of Tewalas of Kitwanga, who carved the Ensnared-Bear on the totem pole of chief Arhteet,¹ at Kitwanga on the Skeena, over sixty years ago. Differing from the current opinion, the Grizzly had been snared instead of shot down with arrows or killed with spears. Its eyes are shown tightly closed in two impressive figures of the dead animal on the main shaft of the pole; and its tongue is hanging out of the mouth in a third figure, attached crosswise at the top. Obviously the carver and the owner of this memorial — they were always different — meant to enhance the distinction of the crest by means of an innovation in the common pattern. Indeed, this totem is one of the most remarkable of the dozen poles illustrating the Bear-Mother myth, in five upper Skeena River villages: Kitwanga, Gitenmaks Gitivinlkul, (Hazelton), Hagwelget (a Carrier village, on the lower Bulkley River, a confluent of the Skeena), and Kispayaks; also of the

¹ Other informants attributed the same totem pole to Hlamee, a well-known Gitwinkul craftsman.



A Tlingit pole of the Bear, at Wrangell

and offspring often are repeated twice, decoratively, on the same pole, so as to cover the twenty, thirty, or forty foot shaft, from the ground up to the top.

One of the choicest poles showing Bear Mother, although not among the tall ones, is a second pole of Kwarhsuh which was formerly at Angyedæ, on

several Grizzly-Bear poles on the Nass river, and on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

In a totem pole of Angyedæ on lower Nass River,¹ one of two Grizzlies is caught by the neck in a snare at the end of a long rope; the other end of the rope is held by a puny hunter shown upside down further up the pole. Two human faces within the paws of the erect Grizzly presumably represent the cubs, as does the small bear squatting crosswise on the head of the upper Grizzly, at the top of the shaft. This fine carving, the property of the Kwarhsuh family, is one of the oldest in existence, possibly more than ninety years old.

On a few other poles, all outstanding, Bear Mother is shown sitting erect, either with a human face, or with the face of a bear, holding in her arms, or between her thighs, her two Cubs.² The cubs also appear in human or animal form; or one Cub is human and the other animal. More than once a Cub in human form sits upon the head of its mother, holding on to her ears. The three figures of mother

¹ This totem is now preserved at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. I purchased it, in 1928, together with two other outstanding poles of Nass River, for this institution.

² At least one pole of the Kwakiutls, farther south on the British Columbia coast, represents Bear Mother with a Cub between her paws. Perhaps it is merely derivative.



Painted wall board of the Tlingits, at Klukwan

the lower Nass River.¹ This remarkable work of art, about 40 feet high, is one of the oldest, now nearly ninety years of age. It was the work of two of the ablest craftsmen of their generation, Yaragwenohs, of the Gitzarhlæhl tribe (Tsimshyan proper), and Oyai, the most original on the Nass. Peculiarities were introduced intentionally by the carvers and the owner. The pole itself, like the other one of Kwarhsuh, is called Kansuh — Shaking-Tree — because it was supposed to shake under the weight of the Grizzlies climbing it

¹ It now stands within the stately entrance of Musée de l'Homme in Paris, a gift of the Canadian National Railways to the French Nation. It was unveiled there in a public ceremony about 1930.

and playing on it. The main figures of the Grizzly were termed "Bear with closed eyes," referring to Ensnared-Bear. Prince-of-Grizzlies at the top was known to be a white Grizzly. These bears with their special names were the privilege of the family of Kwarhsuh, the owner.

The two dirge songs of the Ensnared-Bear¹ also indicate that whoever composed them in the past referred to features in the myth that remain unrecorded. Their words are: "Give me my belt. I am near death," and, "I came from mountain caves at the headwaters, where the small streams have now dried up."

As a myth of this kind underwent marked transformations in its natural development, the family of Malee of Gitwinkul, a Gitksan tribe (of the Wolf phratry), used the same story while adapting it to their own individuality. Both myth and totemic emblems illustrating it, under new treatment, became a different and striking conception. The Grizzly or the White Bear emblems and the symbolic figure of the ancestress Disappeared illustrate a variant of the Bear-Mother myth, and the myth itself is given as a reason for their representation. While the ancestors of Malee were living at Salmon Creek (Shegunya), a young woman of their family was lost in the forest. Her name was Disappeared (Temdee-mawks). A year afterward, at the time when the bears come down to the river's edge to feed on salmon, she was seen walking down to the mouth of Salmon Creek, followed by her two bear Cubs, her offspring, and a huge Grizzly Bear, her supernatural husband. She called to her people across the stream. Her two brothers Ka-ugwaits and Kishæ responded to her appeal and took her into their canoe with the Cubs. The Grizzly, a mythical being, sitting a short distance away, began to cry aloud, and the Cubs jumped from the canoe and returned to his side. Then he swam after the canoe with the Cubs sitting on his ears. His lament was like a song which the people of this family have preserved as a dirge. As the Grizzly entered the house of his human wife's brothers he was stabbed to death. His skin, his head with his teeth, and his paws were preserved, as well as his ribs, after the flesh had been removed and buried. These were thereafter used as crests in the family.

The totem poles of Malee and his relatives in other tribes are characterized by features in the Grizzly-Bear story that are their own. To Hæsem-hliyawñ goes the credit of carving the pole of the Sitting-Grizzly, a fine example of native decorative treatment, particularly in the lower figures of the Grizzly and the smaller human-like beings on his head. Here we find Tsimsyan carving at its best, in its most typical form. Hæsem-hliyawñ belonged to the household of Wutarhayæts, of the Larhsail phratry at Gitwinkul.

The poles of the Ribs-of-the-Bear and of the Cormorant were carved by Hlamee, a member of Ramlarhyælk's family, of the Larhsail phratry at Gitwinkul. As an interval of over twenty years lapsed between their erection, we can compare on the spot the work of Hlamee in his earlier and later periods; we find that the older of the two poles reveals him at his best. The figures of the climbing Cubs, the head of which, in relief, is turned aside, and of the other cub over the head of the Grizzly show genuine originality

¹ Recorded on the phonograph, in 1924, from Lælt or Snake, who then bore the name of chief Arhteet, and interpreted by Alfred Sinclair.

and independence, both in their treatment and plastic feeling. Here the carver was passing out of the merely conventional style of his fellow artists into the domain of pure sculpture.

Deviation from the normal patterns went even farther on the poles of Skabæ of Kispayaks, another Gitksan tribe on the upper Skeena River. The Bear, which is a distinctive crest of the Prairie clan of the Wolf phratry at the headwaters of Skeena River, appears in the form of Half-of-Bear on the poles of Skabæ. The body of the Grizzly Bear cut in half is restricted to this family, and its origin is accounted for as follows: A quarrel arose at Gitwinkul fairly long ago between various nephews of Malee, over their wives. Love intrigues made it impossible for them to live together any longer. Instead of seeking redress in feuds, they decided to part and live in different villages. But they wrangled over the possession of the whole Grizzly-Bear crest. Finally, the difference was settled without bloodshed; the Gitwinkul branch would retain the right to use the hind quarters of the Bear as a crest, and the Kispayaks group the front part.

The tale of Bear Mother, popular on the mainland in the northern Rockies, spread from the mainland to the Queen Charlotte Islands, where the Grizzly Bear was known only by hearsay. There on the Islands we discovered some of its best illustrations, both in wood and in argillite carvings.

These small argillite carvings were made from a slate-like mineral soft enough to be carved like wood. The right quality of this mineral, black or grey, is found in one quarry only, close to Skidegate, in the centre of the island. The use of argillite in native carving cannot be traced beyond 1820, among the earliest known specimens are those secured by Scouler, about 1825, and later given to the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. From the beginning all such carvings were made for sale to white seamen and visitors.

The incidents in Bear Mother selected by the Haida illustrators differ from those in favour for totemic representation among the Tsimshians. Haida illustrations mostly bring out the earlier incidents in the story: (1) the capture of the disrespectful young berry-picker by the two spirit Grizzlies; (2) the marriage of, and supernatural relationship between, Woman and Bear; (3) the childbirth and the nursing of cubs by their human-like mother.

All these argillite carvings, in so far as we know, come from the hands of four leading carvers of the Haida: Skaoskeay, of Skidegate (circa 1880), Charles Edensaw (1834 ?-1924), Walter King-ego (circa 1900), and Chapman, the Cripple. In the case of a few pieces it is difficult to identify them as the work of Edenshaw or of Kingego.

The Cultural Growth of its Concept over two or three continents, and its spread to America.

Bear Mother and her Cubs is an important theme not only because of its vital incorporation in Northwest Coast art, but because of its significance in a complex cultural growth now covering the globe. This growth embraces such basic motifs as:

1. The mystic union between a spirit or a divinity and a human being for the procreation of offspring, which offspring shares in both the supernatural and natural attributes of its parents, and becomes an intermediary or intercessor between two worlds.

2. The self-sacrifice and the immolation of a supernatural being for the benefit or salvation of a clan, a tribe, or of mankind.

3. The communion or sacrament of partaking reverently, after self-purification, of the sacred flesh of the immolated supernatural being.

4. Atonement, rituals, offerings, and prayers addressed by representatives of human society below to the powers above.

The motif of mystic union between two beings, one supernatural or divine, the other human, and the mystic procreation of a child belonging by nature to both parents, need not be stressed here. It is well known in Asia, and has spread beyond forest into tundra, across Bering Strait into North America, during the last stages of prehistory.

The Grizzly Bears overtaking the berry-picker of the Tsimshians were no common animals, but spirits. They could hear blasphemy at a great distance, and were offended by disrespect or impiety. They assumed human form and were mistaken for ordinary men. Then the young woman, unaware, became a spirit and was united to a spirit procreator, to give birth to children that changed form at will, now being bear-like, then human. Her offspring were agents of good will between the mighty Grizzly spirits who withhold success in the bear hunt or, if respectfully dealt with, allow themselves to be slaughtered to feed their earthly protégés.

Dr. Hallowell, in his comprehensive review of the evidence widely scattered over the northern parts of Asia and America, mentions that the Laplanders call the slain bear, if a male, "sacred man," and if a female, "sacred virgin". They try to transfer the power and strength of the dead animal to the hunter's household.¹



Painted front of the old Tlingit house of chief Shaiks at Wrangell

The theme of mystic fertilization or immaculate conception is familiar in Asia; it also occurs on the Northwest Coast of America. For instance, the divine Raven at one time, at the creation of this continent, chose to be reborn as an Indian child from the womb of the virgin daughter of an old halibut fisherman of the Queen Charlotte Islands. To accomplish this he

¹ Hallowell, *Bear Ceremonialism*, pp.100-101.



Bear house frontal of Shaiks, by Miguel Cavorrubias



Tlingit totem pole at the Museum, University of Washington, Seattle

took the form of a salal leaf on a wild berry bush, and was plucked and swallowed by a maiden who became pregnant and gave birth to him who was to discover the fire ball in the lodge of the fisherman and make it into the sun in the sky.¹

The themes of self-sacrifice and immolation are even more widespread and deeply rooted on at least three continents.

When the Grizzly, in spite of his superior powers, chose to be killed by the Tsimshyan hunters or to be caught in their simple snares set on his mountain trail, he was voluntarily sacrificing himself to the future welfare of the human hunters, his protégés, who were to use him as their clan totem or as a heraldic symbol on their totem poles. The Ensnared Bear on the pole of Arteeah at Kitwanga was crucified as it were, for the salvation of his chosen clan among the Tsimshyans. But before dying he exacted from the hunters definite atonement and propitiation. Two sacred songs, formulated by himself before his death, were to be repeated reverently over the remains of each bear falling to the spears or snares of his clan confederates.

These are primitive reminiscences of mystic ideas and rituals far more developed among advanced nations in Asia. Of this Dr. Hallowell's study provides many instances. The Ural-Altaiic people of Siberia consider it a sin to pronounce the actual name of the bear. They call it "grandfather" "beloved uncle" "lord" "worthy old man" "good father."² So do other tribes over a wide area. They vary the invocation to "the Master" "Illustrious". The Indo-Europeans add "golden friend of fen and forest".

At the eastward end of the area of diffusion we find the Tête-de-Boule Indians of Lake St. John calling the Bear "grandfather," and requesting it to "allow itself to be killed."³ The Thompson River Indians petition the bear "not to be angry with the hunter nor fight with him". The Lamuts in Siberia pray, "Do not frighten us! Die of your own choice".

After the animal's death at the hands of his allies of the Plateau and Mackenzie areas in the Northwest, a "mourning-song" is chanted. The Lillooets, as reported by James Teit, sing: "Oh, thou greatest of all animals, thou man of animals, now my friend, thou art dead. May thy mystery make all other animals like women when I hunt them!



Tlingit post showing the Bear,
at Saxman

¹ Marius Barbeau, (12:60).

² Hallowell, *Bear Ceremonialism*, pp. 45-51.

³ *Idem*, 53-4.

May they follow thee and fall an easy prey to me!" Similar songs are found among the Lapps.¹

In Eurasia (Siberia and Northern Europe) the bear festival is the occasion "for a very elaborate socio-religious event . . ." and the "bear ceremonialism reaches its peak in the Amur-Gulf of Tartary region . . ."²



Tlingit Bear on posts, at Saxman

The Koriaks of northeastern Siberia, after they have danced around the dead bear and entreated it not to be angry, cut up its meat and, placing some of it on a wooden platter, pass it around to the attendants, saying, "Eat, friend!"³

Finally, the Finns, in similar rituals, sing poems to the "lord of the forest":

The illustrious is coming,
Pride and beauty of the forest,
'Tis the Master come among us,
Covered with his friendly fur-robe,
Welcome, Otso,⁴ welcome, light-foot,
Welcome, Loved-one from the glenwood!"⁵

¹ *Idem*, 59-60,45-51.

² *Idem*, 53-4.

³ *Idem*, 59-60.

⁴ *Idem*, 81.

⁵ *Idem*, 84.

The Lapps cook the bear meat in a specially erected hut, to which the women are not admitted . . . The males stayed three days here . . . After entering the hut they sang songs of joy and thanks to the animal that had allowed them to return to safety.¹

The Sakhalin Ainus, at the edge of Bering Sea next to Alaska, pray the spirit of the bear who has sacrificed itself for them: "You will ask God to send us, for the winter, plenty of otters and sables, and for the summer, seals and fish in abundance."

At this stage of development, we reach the threshold of temple, altar, symbolic sacrifice, confession and communion, in a world-wide belief that embraces primitive and civilized man alike, in a sweeping upsurge from daily reality to spiritual idealism and worship.

The Worship of the Bear in Asia (Holmberg), among the Finno-Ugric people . . . The Lapps, Finns, Ostiaks, and Voguls. *See* Uno Holmberg. (115:85-99).

The Myth of Bear Mother, as dictated by Salæben (John Tate, aged 65), a Tsimshyan member of the Eagle phratry. Recorded by William Beynon, in 1947.

The people were living on Skeena River. It was the berry season, and the women were picking on their different grounds (*'ntæhlk*). Among them was a great chief, and his daughter, a beautiful young woman. Her father kept her under the watchful eyes of the women of his tribe. She had frequent proposals of marriage, but her over-ambitious father was never satisfied with any of the young men trying to court her. So he continued to keep careful watch over her.

One day, the women decided to go to a place high up in the mountains to pick berries, and they asked the young princess to come along. As she did not usually go out she was glad to accompany them, and they started up the mountain trails, each with her berry basket. Having gone some distance, with the princess following, they finally reached a spot where berries were abundant.

While she was moving about on one of the trails, the princess stepped on bear dung that was quite fresh; her foot was covered with it, to her great annoyance and embarrassment. "The stinking bear had to come here and execrate, so that I could not help stepping on its smelly dung!" she exclaimed angrily, and this kept up for a long while. Though amused, her companions chided her, and she became the more angry.

It was now past midday. The young women, having filled their berry baskets, prepared to return. They awaited a few of the others who had not quite filled their baskets, and among these was the princess. Her companions

¹ Here Dr. W. H. Alexander, president of Section II, Royal Society, drew attention to the striking similarity between the Bear-Mother myth and the myth of Odysseus and the Cyclops Polyphemus as interpreted by some scholars, Odysseus being identified as the Bear Otus, or one of two giants of that name. As the names Otus of the Greeks, and Otso of the Finns may be fundamentally the same word, they may form part of a common mythological concept widely diffused in Europe and Asia, and even beyond, in Northwestern America. More surprising still is the realization that the radical for grizzly bear in the Na-Déné languages of Northwestern America seems also to be identical. For the Tlingits of southern Alaska, it is Huts! *See* John R. Swanton, Social Condition, Beliefs, and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians (*Twenty-Sixth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 391-485, 1908), 476. For the Haidas it is Huadjí. Among the Dénés (Emile Petitot, *Déné-Dindjé*) it is, variously according to the dialects: Ot'elsas, Yutic, stacho, sasdjí.



Bear Mother, at Old Tongas

helped her finish, and they set off, the princess bringing up the rear. She had not gone far, however, when her packstrap broke. Her berry basket fell down, spilling her berries. Her companions helped her to gather them; then they sought to catch up with the others. Again the princess lagged, and again the packstrap broke. This time only a few of her companions helped her, as it was getting towards sunset, and they wanted to reach their village before dark.

When the princess' berries were all gathered, she hurried after her companions who were going much faster. But she had not gone far when her

The princess walked behind her guide for a long while, and at last they came to a strange village, one with many people going about, though none took any notice of her. The young man led the princess into the largest house. She saw a huge man sitting at the rear. He wore a bear garment and a bearclaw head-dress. As they came in he said, "Did you get what you were seeking, my nephew?" "Yes," he replied, "she stands here with me now." Then the great chief said, "Bring her here, that we may see the princess whom her father refuses to all suitors." The girl now knew that she had been taken by some strange people. The young man led her to the rear of the house to his uncle, the great chief; on each side of him sat a woman, his wives. When the chief saw the princess, he said, "She seems indeed very pretty, and it is well that her father should be so particular. Bring out the marriage mat, and sit my daughter-in-law upon it." The slaves brought out this mat and placed it before the chief. "Now, dear woman, sit down, and my nephew will sit by you. He is the only one fit to be your husband." Turning to his slaves he said, "Bring food, for my daughter-in-law is hungry."

While they were doing this, the princess felt something pulling at her leg. She glanced down, and not seeing anything, wondered what it could have been. Then she felt it again. This time she saw a wizened little old woman, who spoke: "I am Mouse Woman. Have you any wool (wool was used as an ear ornament) and fat? (fat was rendered mountain-goat fat which women used as a facial cosmetic, much in the same manner as cold cream is used). If you have, give them to me, that I may help you." The princess took off her woollen ear ornaments; from her breast she took the ball of mountain-goat fat which she used as a cosmetic, giving them to the little wizened old Mouse Woman.

Soon the food was brought. First they ate salmon, and then berries, in great quantity. When they had finished, Mouse Woman came forward and said to the great chief, "This is what your daughter-in-law has given you." With that she put a great quantity of fat before the chief, who tasted it on a stick, and then ate it as it melted. He and his wives fell asleep shortly afterwards, and soon only the Princess remained awake. It was then Mouse Woman came and spoke to her.

"You have been taken by the Bear people for two reasons; you were so angry when you stepped on bear dung, and your father was always refusing the pleas of all that came to marry you. These two things angered the great bear chief, so he sent his nephew to fetch you here. You must be careful. When you go outside to excrete, take a piece of your copper bracelet and lay this on. Otherwise the Bears will make you a slave. You see all these old women in here? They were taken by the Bear people, just as you, but they were not so well prepared. They did not meet with favour, and were made slaves. They are really young women who have become suddenly aged. Do not forget what I have told you. They will also send you for wood. When they do, you must not gather dry wood, but green, wet wood; that is the kind that the Bear people use." (It is common among the Tsimsyans to refer to wet wood as "Bear fuel".)

When it was time to retire, the princess said to her husband, "I wish to go and excrete." She went out, followed by the slaves of the great chief. When she came in after doing as the Mouse Woman had said, the slaves ran to where she sat and examined her excrement. They found on top of it



Grizzly Bear, at old Kasaan

part of her copper bracelet, and this they took into the house, calling to the chief: "She has a right to ridicule our excrement, when her own is copper. No wonder she was angry with us, whose excrement stinks!" The great chief was very pleased.

For many days the princess lived here, well cared-for, but never alone. She was always followed about wherever she went, and always her excrement was watched. She noted that when many of the bear men returned, some were missing, and there was sadness in the village. For the rest, she continually thought of her own people, especially of her younger brother and her pet dog, Mæsk [Red].

Back in her village the people were grief-stricken. Searchers were still out, and among them were the four brothers of the princess, the greatest

bear hunters among the people. These men were so certain that some animal had taken their sister that they planned to hunt all the bears in the vicinity with Mæsk, the princess's dog, and the best bear dog in the country. No matter how well concealed the den, Mæsk would always scent it. Then the brothers would smoke the bears out and kill them. They kept on with the hunt, since their *halait* seers had visioned the princess as having been taken by the bears and held as a captive. The older people believed that animals have supernatural powers and can, when necessary, take human form. The same with birds, and even the fishes of the sea. That is why the people greatly respect them.

The Bear village was now in constant fear, as more and more of their members failed to return from food quests. The princess, now wife of the great chief's nephew, soon became pregnant, while her husband lived in fear that his wife's brothers would soon overtake and kill him. So he went to his uncle, saying, "I am going to my winter village (*tsap*), as Mæsk is now getting too close. There he will never find me."

Before leaving with the princess, the young man prepared his uncle's supply of wood for the coming winter. He summoned all in the house to come and gather fuel. The princess went along too, and gathered dry wood which she placed along with the rest. That night, someone took some of the wood she had gathered and put it on the fire. The flames were almost extinguished, to the displeasure of the chief. "Who has brought in the fuel of the dead?" he cried. "Throw it out! Place our own fuel on it." They pulled off the dry sticks and replaced them with the heavy waterlogged ones, and the fire started to burn brightly again. When all the fuel was brought in, Mouse Woman came and said to the princess: "Take care of yourself! It is your fault that the fire was nearly extinguished. That is very bad. Whenever you gather wood for the Bears, you must gather waterlogged wood. Now your husband is going to take you away, as your brothers are pressing too close. They are very near, but you will be going a long way off. Keep a careful watch, as your brothers may be able to rescue you."

The young man took the princess and together they went up into the hills. Every night when they made camp, he took devil's club and scattered it all around as a precaution against harm. Finally they came to a steep mountain, and climbed up a rocky trail. Sometimes the man carried the princess as she was now heavy with child and unable to travel over difficult ground. They came at last to a large cavern on the face of the hill, almost unapproachable. Here the young man and his wife now lived. Whenever he went away to gather food, he transformed himself into a bear, changing to human form when he returned. One day the woman became ill, and gave birth to twin bear cubs. The father was happy, but became increasingly sad, as he returned from each of his trips. His wife was much taken up by her two bear children, who were growing rapidly. One day, their father returned more depressed than usual. "I am not going to live long," he told her. "Your brothers will soon find me and kill me." Each day his gloom grew worse.

The princess's father sent out the eldest son who was known as the foremost hunter. When he had been away for many days he returned empty-handed, saying, "I have been unable to find *Rhpeesunt*."* Again the father

* Beynon: "This was the first time the informant mentioned the name *Rhpeesunt*. I was waiting that this name should come of itself, for there are other names besides it. I am hoping to get these versions."



Haida-Kaigani Bear of old Kasaan

consulted his seers (*halait*s), and all were in agreement that the daughter of the great chief was alive, in the hands of the Bear people.

The next eldest brother was then sent by the father to try and find the lost princess. Taking along the foremost hunters, he went into the valleys on the Skeena right up to the headwaters, but found no trace of her. They even went to other tribes and enlisted the aid of the most famous seers to guide them; all agreed that the woman was alive, and that she would be found. After the second brother had searched a long while, he also gave up.

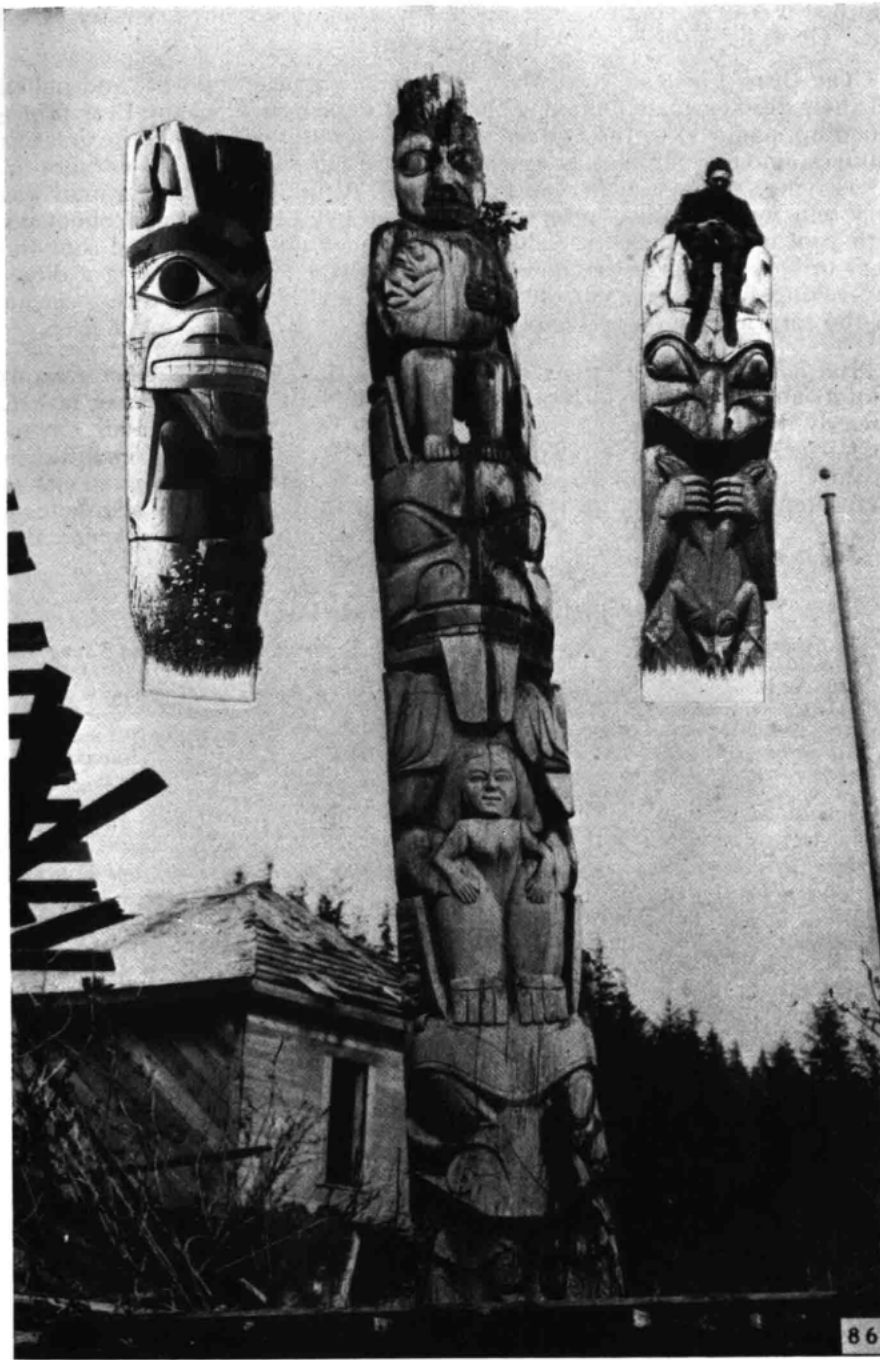
The Bear prince always retreated to the cavern when he was hunted. As soon as the search was given up he was relieved, and immediately went out to look for food. He was happy for a time, but his wife did not give up hope of being rescued.

The father of the missing princess now called the third brother. He took his own hunters and searched new hunting grounds. They were now getting close to the hiding-place, and the Bear prince, who knew just when each of the brothers set out, would go into hiding again. "They will never find me," he said to his wife, "they will pass by; my powers are great enough." And it was so. Although he came very close, the third brother and his searchers went right by, failing to detect any sign.

Now the princess had another brother who was not as yet a great hunter. This man, too young to go out on big hunting trips alone, accompanied others in theirs. Yet he was the favourite brother of the lost princess, and had been her companion, together with Mæsk. When the third brother failed the grief of the chief was great. "My daughter is now lost for good," he thought. It was then the younger brother said, "I will go and find my sister. Together with Mæsk, I will find her." The older brothers ridiculed the presumption of their puny brother. "How can a child who does not know his way in the mountains unaccompanied find his way? We will have to search for him, should he be lost," they said. But the young brother was insistent, begging his father to permit him to go. After a while the great chief agreed, "It is well that you should try and find your sister." The young man, quite pleased, prepared to leave with his sister's dog. "Mæsk, we will find my sister, and you will help me," he said, talking to the animal as if it were human.

When this young man set out, the Bear prince grew sadder than ever. He knew by his supernatural powers that the youngest brother of his wife had now set out, and that he would, with the help of the princess's dog, find her. He himself would be killed by his own brother-in-law. So he called his wife and their two bear children, "My brother-in-law has now set out to look for you. With him is your dog Mæsk. It is Mæsk whom all the Bears fear. This time your brother will find you. I will be killed." Again he wept with grief.

The youngest brother was now on his way up Skeena River with many of the best hunters of his father. From the start they followed Mæsk, who by now had scented the princess and was going up the valley where she lived. They came to the foot of the high mountain where the cave was, and Mæsk kept barking up towards the cave. But the Bear prince had spread devil's club all around, smothering the scent, and again the young brother was on the point of turning away. Just then the princess looked out from her hiding-place in the cave and, seeing her brother and Mæsk, became very happy. Taking some snow in her hand, she made a ball, and threw it down towards her brother. When the ball of snow rolled down to his feet, the young man saw marks of a human hand upon it. He held it to his dog, Mæsk, to see whether Mæsk would recognize it. He was glad when the dog began to bark furiously. He glanced up and saw something moving away up on the bare hillside. The trail was almost impassable. After a long climb the young hunter and the dog Mæsk were able to reach the mountain ledge at the entrance of the cave. The Bear prince knew that he was to be killed. He came out of the cave and called, "Wait awhile, my brother-in-law. I want first to sing the dirge which I will then pass on to my children. Then I will give my powers to them, so that they may become great hunters, the greatest among the people." The youngest brother, seeing his sister



Bear Mother and her Cubs, of Klukwan

and her two Bear children, did not know what to do, but his sister called out, "Do as he wishes you to do, my brother!"

The Bear prince sang his dirge, took his two Bear children, and pulled off their Bear garments, making them human beings. Then the Bear prince stood up, and said to the two children, "You will now become the greatest hunters among your mother's people." He then turned to his brother-in-law, saying, "Now I want you to kill me." Although the young man was very reluctant, the Bear prince was insistent. "Come, be quick! Shoot me with your arrow," he said. So the young man drew his bow, and shot the Bear prince. The princess, now that her husband was dead, sang a dirge, and taking a knife, she cut off his head. Then she and her brother set off on the return journey to their village.

Her children grew up as human beings and were the most famous hunters among the people. Their power they had received from their father. Latterly, this was shown in the Wolf house of Asaralyæn household, among the Gitsees tribe of the Tsimsyans, who own the crest of the Woman taken by the Bear. This totem was shown on the pole, where the Woman sits at the bottom, surrounded by the figure of the Bear, and in each arm holds a Cub Bear. (The informant stated that others on the Nass and Skeena also have this same pole and myth.)

The Grizzly-Bear Husband (Patalas).

As a sample, this is one of several versions of the Tsimsyan myth of "The Young Woman and the Grizzly Bear" or "Bear Mother", recently recorded (in 1947) by William Beynon from Edmund Patalas, assisted by John Starr. Patalas belongs to the Gidestsu tribe, and Starr (whose name is Larahnitsk), to the Klemtu tribe — both tribes being southern frontier tribes between the Tsimsyans and the Kwakiults. He had heard this narrative from a Gidestsu friend, at the time when his people were seal hunting together, camping side by side and telling stories.

One of the Gidestsu villages was at Laredo Inlet, and here the young people were chasing a hell-diver (*ts'emsme'awn*). Soon they caught it, and splitting it open, they saw that its insides were as wool. They laughed and said, "Look, the poor thing is starving. It has no insides." Now the hell-diver is related to the loon (*kwal*), and has great supernatural powers.

Although it was late spring, the next day it began to snow. It snowed heavily all night. For many days snow kept on falling, and the people were nearly perishing from want of food and fuel. They could not get out of their houses. Then the chief in anger said, "Great Chief of the Sky, who will make smoke come out of the houses, if we all perish?" Soon after, the snow stopped falling, but the whole village by then was wholly covered up, except for the smoke-holes.

One morning, the chief saw a bluejay in the smoke-hole with a sprig of elderberry in its bill. He stood up, and said to his people, "Something has happened. It is now long past summer, as the elderberry is ripe. Come, we must leave this place!" The people went to Matheson Channel (*marhle-k'unen*), and upon reaching that country, they saw that berries were plentiful there. The women planned to go up to the hills for berry-picking. Now the chief's daughter, who was kept in constant seclusion at the time of her puberty, hearing that the women were going away, coaxed her parents to allow her to follow them. Very reluctantly the chief consented.



Tlingit poles of Bear Mother, at Saxman

They had far to go, and when they arrived there, they scattered out, all within hailing-distance of one another. Soon they were moving about, and as they did, the chief's daughter slipped on bear excrement. Angry, she cursed the bear several times for this, washed her feet, and kept grumbling all day. The women meanwhile had filled their baskets and were now ready to go back home. The princess was among the last to leave. As she did, her packstrap broke, and her berries spilled on the ground. Some women helped her and, the strap repaired, they went on.

They were now far behind the others, who were themselves a long way from the village. So they had to travel fast, as they wanted to get back

before nightfall. They had not gone very far when the princess's packstrap snapped again, delaying them further. When it broke for the third time she said, "Never mind me, go on! It is not far home, and I will take care of myself." So the others left her, as she started to pick up the berries.

While busy, she did not notice that someone was beside her, but when she looked up, behold! a very handsome young man stood there. He addressed her, saying "What are you doing, my dear woman? What has happened to you?" She replied, "My strap keeps breaking. Now my sisters have left me behind." "Let me help you," the young man said, carrying her berry basket. They travelled some distance in what seemed to be the direction of her village.

Naturally enough she could not recognize her helper as she had been kept in seclusion. She hardly knew any of the young men of her father's village. So she confidently followed her escort. Soon, however, they came to a village, and then she knew that something strange had happened.

They stood in front of a very large house at the foot of the hills. "Wait outside for me," her escort said, "while I tell the people that you are here." He went in, and she heard a very low voice asking, "Did you find what you were looking for?" "Yes, she stands outside." "Bring her in, my son. I want to see my new daughter-in-law." The young man came out and spoke, "My father wants you to come in." She followed him into the house. A great fire was burning in the centre, and at the rear sat a great chief wearing a bear costume. Beside him sat his wife, also wearing a bear costume. All the people in the house wore bear garments and head-dresses. After the chief had looked at her, he called out, "My dear, sit here! My son will sit by you as your husband." As soon as she had seated herself, a small squeaky voice came from behind, saying "I am Mouse Woman. Have you any fat for me?" She meant the mountain-goat fat which the women always carried with them as a face cosmetic. The princess gave the fat she had to Mouse Woman, who was old and wizened. Then Mouse Woman said, "The Bears have taken you. You must be on your guard. The way you cursed the Bear because of the excrement you stepped on today has angered them. They have captured you. When you go out to excrete, first dig a hole, and conceal your excrement. As soon as you have finished, put one of your bracelets where you sat. For you will be watched. Whatever the women in the house do, you do likewise."

Food was now brought in, and the people held a feast for the wedding of the young man who had taken the princess as his wife.

When the princess wanted to excrete, she went out, and was escorted by the slave women of the great chief. These women had all been captured by the bears, and they were many. The princess drew away, and dug a hole into which she excreted. Then she filled it in, and placed her bracelet on the ground there. One of the slaves came to look at her excrement, and behold! she saw a copper bracelet. This she took in to the great chief who examined it, and said, "There is good reason why she should ridicule our excrement when hers are copper bracelets." Then to his daughter-in-law: "Here, my dear, keep this bracelet; it is your own excrement." He gave her back the bracelet. Whenever she went out to excrete, she always did the same thing, and the chief would return the bracelet to her.