

THE ORPHEUS MYTH

Orpheus in America. Once there were two lovers, perhaps the most famous the world has ever known. Soon after their wedding they were marked by fate, in the haunts of their Arcadian bliss. She died, and he mourned her. Moons passed without soothing his grief, and, disconsolate, he started on a journey never undertaken before by a living soul, into the spirit world. There he hoped to find the shadow of his beloved and bring it back to earth for the fulfilment of their love. Everywhere pitfalls strewed his path. A bridge across a river rocked under his feet and monsters guarded the approaches to her ghostly abode. He overcame them in the end, and travelled with her back to earth. On the threshold of a renewed existence, curiosity prompted him to turn his head, and make sure that she was still following him. She fell back lifeless, for it was a condition that he should not look at her while on their way. He could not survive, for he would not part with her in life or in death.

This ancient tale of enduring love is easily recognizable wherever it occurs. It is one of the ageless store of myths and tales so dear to the heart of humanity, just like the stories of the Knight who slew the Dragon to deliver the maid, the Flood, the Golden Age, the Phoenix, the Thunderbird, the Unicorn, the curly-haired Lion, Pygmalion who carved himself a beautiful wife and made her live, the Strong Man whose parallel in the Bible is Samson, Jonah and the Whale, Sinbad's Roc — the giant bird carrying people on its back, the Well-Frog that swallowed all the water on the globe and caused a parching drought, and a host of others familiar in various forms on all continents.

The myth of the great lovers usually bears the symbolic title of Orpheus and Eurydice, bestowed upon it by the ancient Greeks. But its other names are many, according to time and country where they are part of traditional lore. In the main its pattern always remains the same. Yet chameleon-like, it absorbs local colour everywhere, and feeds on shifting elements in the course of its slow progress.

Orpheus was the ideal poet and musician of the Golden Age, an Elysian divinity. His bride, Eurydice, smitten by a viper while trodding the bridal lane with other maidens, was the loveliest of the nymphs. After her death, Orpheus sought her in the lower world, had to cross the Styx, a dark river, and to face Cerberus, a huge dog on guard. He had to stand the test of the spiked wheel of Ixion, and to encounter monsters: Sisiphus resting upon a large rock, Tantalus parched with thirst, and the Furies or Gorgones with hair of twisted serpents. With his æolian lyre and accompanying incantations, he subdued them all to the last. After Eurydice was surrendered to him upon condition that he would not look back, he had already reached the great portals of Hades when he turned to her enraptured, only to lose her forever. His fate was not to survive very long, for the Maenads, finding him immune to their charms, slew him out of jealousy.

Other names for the great lover are Theseus, who entered Hades in pursuit of Corè's shadow; and Pollux, Heracles or Hercules. Among the Romans to the west, it was Æneas who, guided by the Sibyl, journeyed to the lower world on a similar errand. The people of Asia, Oceania, and America were no less interested in the tribulations of Orpheus and Eurydice

under varied designations. The roles at times were reversed, as in Hindu folklore, where the aggrieved wife survived and sought the soul of her lost husband. In Japan, it was the goddess Izanami, who died while her husband Isanagi went to the Land of Gloom (*Yomotsukuni*) to retrieve her ghost and restore her to life. On their way back, she begged of him not to look at her while still in the nether world. But he did, to his mortal loss.

The same tale sailed on across the Pacific to sundry islands in the coral seas of Oceania. There it is Mataora who finds his wife in the undersea regions of Po and tried to coax her back home; but, like the others, he failed on the threshold. Hiku, disguised as a butterfly, in a Hawaiian tale of Polynesia, captured the ghost of his wife Kawalu and succeeded in restoring her to life, a rare exception of a happy ending in the diffusion of this tale of woe.

Orpheus, under other appellations, is also well known in the countries of Western Europe and their former American colonies; for instance, in France and in French America, Jean de l'Ours, visiting the lower world, is a familiar figure in Canadian folk tales, as well as in the folklore of the motherland. A pagan theme at first, it proved too popular to be uprooted with paganism. It was handed down to Christianity. We find St. Patrick of France and Ireland making a return journey to inferno, his starting point a grotto. The adventure of St. Patrick was retold by the mediæval writer Marie de France in a tale entitled "St. Patrick's Purgatory (*Le Purgatoire de Saint Patrice*)."

Later in the Christian era, Dante's descent to hell, in the *Divina Commedia*, is a branch of the epic story of Orpheus, and it is by no means the only one of its kind in the Christian tradition. In familiar legends like that of Saint Martial de Limoges, Christ is shown in a miniature as a visitor to limbo, or as stepping, like St. George on the Dragon, on the head of a horned monster of the lower regions. There the mouth of a vampire is the horrible doorway to a burning inferno, where lost souls tumble in droves. In a French-Canadian folk tale, Our Lord escorts into the other world a young man who seeks the souls of his parents, and they go through heaven and purgatory before they find the departed in hell and bring them out safely by means of a magic sash studded with thorns (a symbol of expiation). The whole journey had lasted fourteen years.

The world-wide diffusion from an unknown source of a tale so typically classical as Orpheus and Eurydice must have required milleneums. It was part and parcel, like many others, of racial migrations out of Asia into Europe and Africa, or into America with the colonists; or again, the other way, from Asia into North America via Bering Sea.

Like the Asiatic folk, the myth of Orpheus migrated two ways across Bering Sea into North America. With the Siberians on the move eastwards, it passed from the tundras of Asia into those of Alaska at Bering Strait, where the old and the new continents stand nose to nose, as it were, on both sides of a strait fifty miles wide and frozen most of the year. With the sea folk of the Chinese and Japanese coasts it sailed north and eastwards, past the Kurile and Aleutian Islands, until it reached Kodiak Island on the Alaskan Coast, where it split two ways, northward into the Eskimo fringe of the Arctic ice cap; and southward with the North Pacific tribes.

Within America we find Orpheus under two forms. In the first, the native hero journeys into the sky where the souls proceed after death, or else into the nether world below. Among the sea-coast tribes, the souls after death dwell under the ocean, just as they do among the Eskimos. The Tahltans of the Northern Rockies believe that the trail of the dead is obscure and hard to find. Souls travel to the sky on snowshoes, and follow the Milky Way westwards. Among the Tsimsyans of the Northwest Coast, the home of the dead is in the Killer-Whale centre at Kwawk out to sea.

Folklorists have collected and compiled a large number of versions of the Orphic tale. Miss A. H. Gayton, in her "Orpheus in North America," states that stories "of the recovery of the beloved person from the dead are common in North American mythology." Like Miss Gayton, Stith Thompson has built up a long list of occurrences in his *Tales of North American Indians*, p. 337. Yet these scholars seem to have overlooked one of the most significant branches of the same theme on our continent: that of the north Pacific Coast.

The earliest reference among our historical records, in *The Jesuit Relations* by Father Brébeuf (1636 or so), is to the man who took a trip to the Village of Souls where he found his lost sister, but was unable to touch her. The soul was so small that he could imprison it in a pumpkin, embark the "white stone canoe", and take it back, provided "no one raises an eye to observe." Life was already returning to the lifeless body when a curious witness looked. The soul shrivelled up and was lost forever. This missionary record inspired Moore's ballad "The Lake of the Dismal Swamp". A similar legend, familiar in the Northeastern Woodlands, was called "Qu'appelle? — Who calls?" among the Algonkins of Manitoba. And some evidence of it crops up among the Powhatans or a kindred tribe of Virginia.

In a narrative heard by J. G. Kohl among the nomads of Lake Superior (Cf. *Kitchi-gami* . . . 1860), an Indian hunter was startled by a huge and luscious strawberry, which was deadly to touch. Farther along, he encountered a dog (the classical Cerberus or the Minotaur) as large as a house guarding the path, but allowing everyone to pass westward unhindered. It did not suffer anybody to return from the land of ghosts. On the river across the trail (the native Styx), a bridge which the souls must



Blackfish of the Tlingits of
Pennock Island

cross looked like a tree stump, but really was a great serpent. Its head rested on one side, and it thrust its tail upon the far shore.

In a Pawnee tale of the Upper Missouri, the wife brought back had given birth to a child. But as soon as a taboo is broken, she goes back to limbo. Among the Eskimos, the Angakok (a sorcerer) is less successful in his journey to spirit land. He only catches a glimpse of the lost soul, and returns to earth empty-handed.

Although the Tlingit version, recorded by J. R. Swanton, is from the north Pacific Coast, it belongs to the inland branch of the myth, as those who journey to the other world must go up the road, and when they return they step down. After his wife had died shortly after their wedding, a hunter started on his fateful errand after the burial, walked for days through a forest at first, then along a valley. He came to the edge of a lake on the death road. On the other side he saw a village, and perceived afar his wife among the shadows. He shouted to call attention, but could not be heard. It was only when he whispered that they became aware of him, and sent the ghost canoe for him. After he overtook her, he prepared to eat what seemed to be food, but she begged him to beware; he would die at the first mouthful. He was fortunate enough to bring her back to his village, with the help of Spider Woman, who placed them both in her web and lowered them to earth. In his village, he was the only one alive who could see her. The others alongside only heard her, and observed her shadow on the ground. As soon as a jealous cousin lifted her veil, the rattling of her bones was heard as she departed forever.

In bold contrast, the sea-coast form of the same myth takes the woeful couple to the undersea abode of the Killer-Whales, where human souls resort after death. Instead of being called Orpheus, like the Thracian musician, the Pacific Coast hero is harshly called Gunarhnesemgyet, characteristic of a rugged panorama. Yet this unmusical word does not preclude lyrical echoes, for it means: "Hear you what I say!" or "Listen, and you fall under a spell!" Like the Orpheus, Gunarhnesemgyet chants incantations to overcome the monsters blocking the ghostly trail. A Tsimshyan text relates that "Gunarh anchored his canoe and climbed down the anchor rope into the deep". While going down, he encountered the Giant Clam (*hagwen*) guarding the entrance. There he sang his song . . . , took some snuff, rubbed it on the Clam, and it died. And the other guardians down the road were brushed aside by a similar spell. Elsewhere in North America music also forms part of the same concept. In a Wishram tale recorded by Edward Sapir, near the mouth of Columbia River, we read: "Coyote and Eagle (two friends seeking their wives in the nether world) arrived at a great river. Eagle took a flute, and blew into it . . . Coyote also blew into the flute, and looked across yonder. Then they looked and could see the ghost people on the far shore. Music and incantations, on the lyre or on the flute, are the appanage of both European and American heroes. Although far apart now on the face of the globe, they hark back to a common incantation in the remote past.

The wild Orpheus of America, just like that of ancient Thrace, has inspired carvers and painters who have illustrated his adventures on totem poles and heraldic symbols.

In the north Pacific variant of Gunarh here briefly outlined, we find the



Killer-Whale of the Kaigani-Haidas

following episodes, all of them imbued with the sea-coast background of the story-tellers.

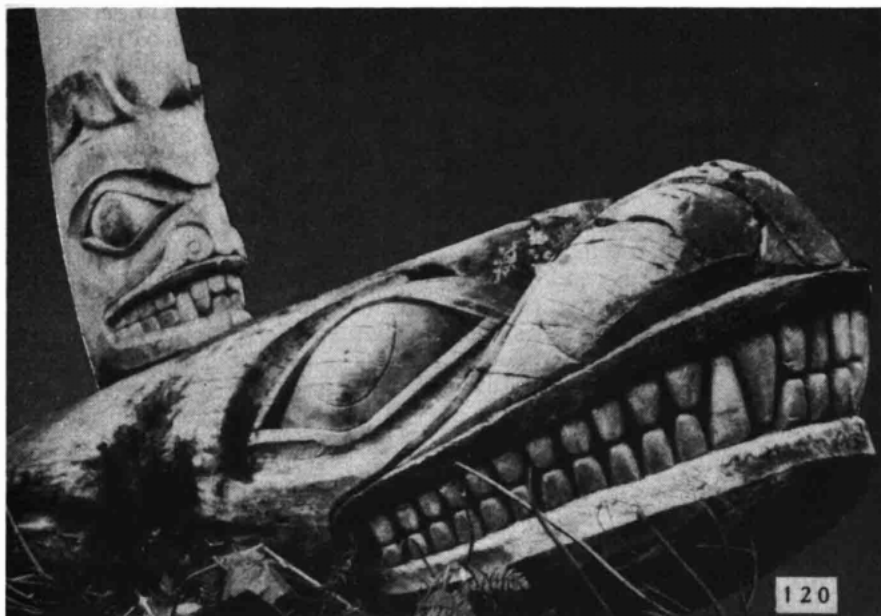
Every day a white sea otter passed in front of the village on the seashore where the hunters tried in vain to capture it. Gunarh, the most skilful among them, found it asleep on the water, clubbed it to death, and gave his wife the wonderful pelt to clean. While fixing the skin, she broke a taboo and deeply incensed the dwellers of the sea. Unnoticed the sea otter drifted away from the shore, carrying along the offender.

The people on the shore noticed that the white otter had two dorsal fins. By this they recognized Gilsadzant, a great spirit of Kwawk, who was taking Gunarh's wife on his back to the lower world. Gunarh, with escorts, at once set out in a dug-out and tried to overtake the swift otter. But the sea mammal disappeared at the spouting hole of Kwawk's under-sea abode. The pursuer anchored his craft and climbed down the anchor rope. But the Giant Mussel (*hagwen*) guarding the portal wanted to hold him back. He killed it with an incantation and a handful of snuff which he had been chewing. Next the Giant Clam (*hahloon*) tried in vain to stop him. Many blind women then called out, "We smell Gunarh". He rubbed saliva on their eyes and restored their sight, thus winning their gratitude. They gave him advice and guidance, saying, "We will help you recover your wife". Farther down, he paused in front of the blind Giant Crane guarding the trail. "I smell Gunarh," said the Crane, and Gunarh likewise restored its sight, thus making another accomplice. "Your wife is just ahead," warned the Crane. "A giant man, Gilsadzant keeps her. But he is too fat. If you trip him, he will never be able to get up again." Soon he reached the Killer-Whale house. There they were making a blackfish cloak for his wife.

Gunarh, using a subterfuge, extinguished the fire in the ghost house, rushed in, captured the beloved soul, and ran out with it. Then he tripped Gilsadzant, who was so huge that he blocked the narrow trail to those pursuing the fugitives. The Crane did likewise; for a while she blocked the trail to the pursuers, and cried out, "Rush on, brother! You will escape." So with the blind women, who were Geese Women in disguise; they also obstructed the steep trail. When he came to the anchor rope of his canoe his human escorts waiting at the spout-hole pulled him up.

Gunarh's story is akin to the Hawaiian tale, in the coral seas mentioned above. Just as Hiku had brought back to life Kawalu, so did Gunarh successfully emerge from the sea with his wife. A child was born to her. But this woman kept breaking taboos. During the absence of her hunter husband at the hunting grounds, she was unfaithful to him. He was soon to avenge this wrong by fighting the Larahwais, a double-headed Dragon, whose enmity, coupled with the complicity of the Hermaphrodites (*kanawdzet*), was to bring about his downfall.

This cluster of mythical characters brings us back to what was known to us as classical myths — Orpheus; the Hermaphrodites or doubled-sexed monsters; the double-headed or seven-headed Dragon or the Hydra, familiar in China, Europe, on the north Pacific Coast, and in Mexico; and Cerberus, the trail-keeper. Yet these features are just as deeply rooted in America as in Europe and Asia. Indeed, the recorded versions of Orpheus on our continent far exceed in bulk and content the literature about them that has come down to us from classical antiquity.



Killer-Whale of the Kaigani-Haidas

The wealth of native American folklore, derivative of Asia, is also impressive in many other myths and tales. Bear Mother, for instance, is about the union in wedlock of a young Indian woman of the Pacific Coast with the eldest nephew of the supernatural Grizzly Bear of the mountains. Twin cubs, half human and half divine, were born to them; they appeared at will in human form, and as quadrupeds. The Bear husband consented to be killed by the Indian brothers of his wife, provided rituals and songs forever after accompanied his self-accepted sacrifice. And here we find a primitive Redemption, many variants of which have been recorded in the northern regions of America, Asia, and Europe.

Perseus and Andromeda more than any other famous myth has tarried on our continent and assumed varied garbs. Perseus fought the Dragon to liberate a beautiful princess held in captivity in a cave or on the mountain. The Dragon, or the Hydra, belongs to the mythology of many countries on at least three continents. It was greedy for human victims, and its features inspired terror everywhere. It appeared as a Dragon of Fire, the Beast with Seven Heads, the Lion with Two or Seven Heads, and eventually was slain by a gallant knight in armour, who married the princess as a reward. For illustrating the Gospel of the Apocalypse by St. John, the fifteenth century French tapestries of Angers (recently exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum) show both the seven-headed Dragon and the seven-headed Lion in the process of having their heads cut off, and the lovely princess here called "the Harlot" admiring her own beauty in a mirror while sitting on the Dragon's tail.

This semi-Asiatic tale shows that the Dragon and the Maiden had a friendly compact, just as in the ageless tale of the Beauty and the Beast. So on the north Pacific Coast of America, we find a chief's daughter adopting in secrecy a grubworm or a caterpillar as a pet. But this greedy infant, fed from her breast, soon grew to an enormous size, burrowed a tunnel under the village, devoured all the food within reach, terrified the tribe, and brought catastrophe to all concerned. This American Hydra, called Larah-wais or Sisiutl on the north Pacific Coast, was the most potent of all charms wielded by medicine-men and sorcerers. It also became an outstanding coat of arms on the totem poles and house posts. We are thrilled by its illustrations, wonderful wood carvings of the Tlingits, the Haidas, and the Kwakiutls, down along the coast. And the gap between this symbolic monster of the northern Rockies and the Plumed Serpent or Dragon of the other North American and Mexican Indians is more apparent than real. The serpent of the Orphic tale among the Algonkins of Lake Superior, with its long body forming a bridge over Ghost River, its head on one side and tail on the other, reminds us of the world-famous Hydra, whose head, plume, copper-like scales, coils, and tail once stretched without a break from Western Europe across Asia to Central America, and sowed all the way its dragon teeth.

Story of Gunarhnesemgyad, among the Tsimshians, recorded by Franz Boas. The story in Tsimshian Texts, (112a:147-192.) One of the best versions recorded. Comparative study of the same story in Boas (22: 835-846).

Gunarhnesemgyet (Tsimshian-Patalas.) Myth recorded in 1947 by William Beynon from Edmund Patalas Wæmawdemhik, (aged about 75), assisted by Heber Clifton, Gispewudwade, both of Gitka'ta.

The Gidestsu people were living at their sea-hunting village of Skæsæmint at Aristobel Island, where they fished and hunted hair-seal, fur seal, sea otter, and other sea animals. At this village also the Gidestsu would occasionally meet the Gitrhahlas, the Gitka'tas, and the Haidas.

One day a seal hunter and his companions set out for a group of islands in the sea to look for seals. When they had gone half way, they passed over a shallow spot and, on looking down, the steersman saw a sea anemone with a hair-seal in its flower-like mouth; the hair-seal was gradually drowning. He called to his companions, "Look here! A sea anemone has a seal in its grip! Let us take it!" But the others scoffed at him, and said, "Who are we? Are we not capable of getting our own seals instead of taking remnants from a sea anemone?" So the steersman said no more, and they kept on until they reached the group of islands.

Now a narhnorh (spirit) had impersonated the sea anemone which they had scorned and about which they had even made taunting remarks. They landed on the island, intending to stay but one day, since they had food for that long. They made a shelter. During the night a terrific storm came up, and lasted for many days. Not only was their food all gone, but the storm kept them from hunting. Finally, however, the four of them started to look for sea urchins, but only the steersman had any luck. The four urchins that he found he shared with his three companions. Still the storm continued to rage. "Come, let us look for fern roots", the steersman finally said in despera-

tion. Again the other three could find none, and again the steersman had four. They made a fire, roasted the roots and ate them. They were now very weak, as they had been many days on those storm-bound rocks. With the food all gone, the bowman of the canoe died from hunger and was followed soon after by two of the others.

Now only the steerman was left. They had made a shelter of branches with a small doorway, and as the lone survivor sat here with his dead companions he thought he saw someone pass by. Rising weakly, he went out, and saw something disappear into the water. He decided to wait and see what it was, and suspected that he was now being watched by other beings. So he waited, and soon he heard a sound as of someone approaching. He took his war club and waited, and behold! it was a hair-seal. He rushed out and killed it. After skinning and cleaning it he made a big fire and barbecued it. When everything was ready, he took his dead companions and propping them up, placed a portion of the cooked seal in front of each, saying, "Come now, brothers, we have plenty of food!" just as if they were alive.

The wind died down and everything became calm. So he took the canoe, dragged it down the beach, and placed each of his dead companions in his proper place. He was now fully recovered and strong again. He took the paddles of his companions and placed them in their lifeless hands. The dead men had every appearance of life, and the steersman spoke to them as if they were alive. He headed the canoe toward the village from which they had come, and where they were mourned as dead — they had been gone so long.

When they reached the large group of islands near their village, a man approached all alone in a very bright canoe. This craft moved very swiftly and was soon alongside them. "What has happened to your companions, that they do not move?" its occupant asked. "O great narhnorh," the lone survivor said, "My companions scoffed at what a spirit anemone was offering them, so we became



Gunarh, a Haida totem of Old Gold Harbour

victims of a great storm. They died, and I alone survive." "Let me see them," the narhnorh said. He touched each man with his spear. As he did, each was awakened to life. Then he spat on his hand, and rubbed it over their eyes. Their sight was restored. "You will give me your canoe, and you will take mine, also this club. This you will keep, since it is a spirit club." And he gave his club to the steersman. He went on instructing them what to do: "When you arrive at your village, you must not go near your wives. Let the bow man keep away from his wife one day, the next man two days, the next man three days, and you, the steersman, four days. During this time, you will wash yourselves with the juice of the devil club. If you do not do this, you will die again." The spirit disappeared, and they went on to their village in the new canoe.

It seemed to them that they had been gone only a few days, yet they discovered they had actually been away many years. They had been given up as dead, and so now on their return their wives were very eager to be with them. The man who had been told to forego relations with his wife for one day, and then wash himself, did so. As soon as the day was over he went to his wife, and after cohabiting with her, he fell dead. The same thing happened to the men who had been given two and three days; each died immediately on cohabiting with his wife.

The survivor, the steersman, now realized that the spirit meant years where he had said days. So he told his wife he would fast the four years, adding, "I will have a son, and you must call him Gunarhnesemgyet. You will take him to his grandfather's country, the Gidzarhlæhl, and you will give him my magic club and the magic canoe which I have received from the spirit." Just before his time of fasting was over, he went with his wife, and when he cohabited with her, he died. She became pregnant, and soon a son was born whom she called Gunarhnesemgyet, as her husband had instructed her to do. While her son was yet a boy, she went to the tribe of her uncle, the chief Neeshawt, at Krhado. He was not very pleased to see them, and when the boy cried he chased them to one corner of the house, keeping them in great humiliation.

When the boy was grown, he took three youths of his own age as his companions, and said to his mother, "Let me have the club that my father left for me, and I will now also use the canoe". There was a great famine in the country when Gunarhnesemgyet and his companions set out. They had gone some distance when Gunarhnesemgyet saw some seals on a rock. He took his magic club and hurled it towards them. The club brought back the seals. When it was just getting dusk, they landed at their village. Then the mother of Gunarhnesemgyet went to her uncle saying, "My boy has been paddling about and found a few seals. They are on the beach, so send your slaves down for them." Neeshawt could hardly believe her, saying, "How can a boy who is sickly and who cries all the time bring in seals, when my best hunters are returning empty-handed?" But she was insistent, so the chief sent down his slaves. There were many seals! Next day Gunarhnesemgyet and his companions went out again and returned with more seals.

From then on he brought in many sea-lions and all manner of sea food. But always he departed without being seen and returned by night when he could hide the club and canoe.

Some time later, however, he returned by day, and everyone marvelled at the great beauty of his canoe. His mother said, "That is my son who has been named Gunarhnesemgyet by his father, and he has great supernatural powers." The chief Neeshawt could hardly believe it, but when he was finally convinced that this was really his own nephew, he took him and sat him by his daughter as her husband.

Now every day a white otter passed in front of the village. It went by very swiftly. Though many tried to get it, none was successful. So Gunarhnesemgyet set out after it, and found it sleeping on the water. He thereupon killed it with his club and pulled it to shore. His wife said, "I will clean it," and took it to the water's edge. While thus engaged she paused to urinate, and, unnoticed for a moment, the white sea otter gradually drifted away from shore. She rushed out to seize it before it drifted away.

Now the people saw that the sea otter had two fins, and they recognized it as Gilksædzæntk, a great spirit of Kwawk, who was trying to overcome Gunarhnesemgyet. Gilksædzæntk escaped with the woman, and Gunarhnesemgyet immediately set out with his companions to try and overtake the swift-swimming sea otter who had stolen his wife. He saw his enemy disappear just about the spouting hole of the abode of the spirit Kwawk. He anchored his canoe here and climbed down the anchor-rope. When he got down, he came to a giant mussel (*hagwen*) that was guarding the entrance. So Gunarhnesemgyet started singing his song: "Will grant mussels around along here." With this he took some snuff he was chewing, and rubbed it on the giant mussel, and it died. He went on farther and saw a giant clam (*kæhl'awn*). Again he took his snuff, and killed it likewise. He followed a trail, and heard many women calling out, "We can smell Gunarhnesemgyet." These women were all blind, so he took some of his spit and rubbed it in their eyes, restoring their sight. "We have been blinded by Gilksædzæntk, and we will help you recover your wife. They are going to make a blackfish of her. Gam'asnærhl captured her by sending his giant slave Gilksædzæntk after her. But if you hurry you will get her."

Gunarhnesemgyet kept on in the direction that they sent him. He came to a blind giant crane who was guarding the trail. "I smell Gunarhnesemgyet," he called out, so Gunarhnesemgyet restored his sight. Very happy, the giant crane said, "I will help you. Your wife is just on ahead. They are going to make a blackfish of her. You will see a giant man there. He is Gilksædzæntk. If you trip him, he will not be able to get up again." Gunarhnesemgyet then saw Gilksædzæntk splitting timber with a copper wedge, and he determined to get the wedge on his return. He reached Gam'asnærhl's house and found them making a blackfish cloak with which to cover his wife. She

was hanging on the smoking racks to dry thoroughly before being invested with her blackfish raiment.

Gunarhnesemgyet, waiting his chance, rushed in and extinguished the fire, took his wife, and ran out. He reached the spot where Gilkædzæntk was splitting timber and tripped him, taking the copper wedge. Gilksædzæntk was so huge that he blocked the path of those who were pursuing Gunarhnesemgyet, just as did the huge crane. "Rush on, brother! You will escape!" he cried, and fell in the narrow trail to block it. The same with the women who had been blind (they were geese women): they helped him by blocking the way. When he came to his canoe anchor-rope, his companions pulled him up, and thus they made their escape to Krhado.

Gunarhnesemgyet continued to hunt as he used to, and soon a son was born to him. He killed many seals, but of these his wife would eat only the sexual organs of the male seals, which she relished greatly. Now when Gunarhnesemgyet was gone on his hunting trips, a very handsome young man would visit his wife and sleep with her. This he did for a long time. One day, Gunarhnesemgyet's son went to his father, and said, "My mother is unfaithful to you. Every night a very handsome young man comes in, and sleeps with her. They play all night. When it is day, he goes away up into the hills." So Gunarhnesemgyet planned to catch his unfaithful wife. One day, he said to her, "I will be gone many days. I will be hunting sea otter." He went off with the three companions who were always with him. They had not gone far from the village when Gunarhnesemgyet turned his canoe about and, waiting until nightfall, returned to the village. When he reached his house, he went in and found the young man with his wife. Both were asleep. Gunarhnesemgyet cut off the head and the sexual organs of his wife's lover, and left.

When she awoke and found her dead lover beside her, she took the body and hid it in the smoking racks of the house. When Gunarhnesemgyet returned, she took up what she thought were the sexual organs of the male seal and, as was her custom, ate them. But they were those of her dead lover, and as soon as she had eaten them she died.

The people from whom the young lover had come were the Wolf people, and soon a slave woman entered the houses at Krhado, saying, "My master's fire has gone out, and he sends me to get red embers." She visited each house in turn and when she came to that of Gunarhnesemgyet she saw, on glancing up, the remains of her prince. She went back to her people and told them. That night a woman's voice cried out, "Only the gus'agal'yæn garment of my brother return to me." This kept on for many days, but no heed was taken.

Now the Wolf people were afraid of Gunarhnesemgyet. They called in all of the creatures both of the woods and sea. As soon as Gunarhnesemgyet heard this

he was very much afraid, and felt he would be overcome. When he sought refuge in his great house, all the animals came and started undermining it by digging. Just before it collapsed, however, Gunarhnesemgyet, taking his son with him, rushed down to his canoe and paddled away, taking his two war clubs with him. The animals swam after him and had almost overtaken him when he came to an abode of a supernatural being at Kemæhlku (Jap Point). Here he ran his canoe into the mud and said, "This mud will be sand!" That is why there is a big sandbar there to-day. He and his son now took refuge in the *spenarhnorh* there. Many people were living at this place. There was, however, no water, since the chief spirit would not allow anyone to drink the water; when anyone tried to drink, he fell upon obstacles, and was drowned.

They had not been there very long before Gunarhnesemgyet's son wanted to drink, so his father took a bucket and went out. As he walked along the pathway, he noticed lumps of wool. They were traps in which people perished. When he returned to the house, the chief, seeing him with the water, said, "Did you see anything on the trail?" "Yes," replied Gunarhnesemgyet, "I saw obstacles on the trail, but I threw them aside." This angered the chief, who said, "To-morrow we will test our strengths, to find out who is the stronger." The next day the chief sat on one side of the great house and Gunarhnesemgyet on the other. The club he held was the *larah'wæs*, and the chief's club was called *tsaol*. The chief threw his club first, but Gunarhnesemgyet caught it, and threw it to one side. He then cast his own and it killed the chief. Gunarhnesemgyet was the victor.

Now the dead chief's wife was a very beautiful woman, and Gunarhnesemgyet, in love with her, had intercourse with her. This was to be his downfall.

For a long while Gunarhnesemgyet had planned to invade the Stikine country. Now he prepared his raid. He gathered his warriors under his three companions, and they set out for the Stikine. Now at this point lived people called *kanawdzet* (Hermaphrodites). They had been kept in captivity by the chief of *Kenrhæhlku*, who was making slaves of them. When they saw the two war clubs that Gunarhnesemgyet was planning to use against the Stikine, they caused him to forget the clubs. When he set out, the clubs were left behind.

After the Tsimsyan raiders had gone, the women found these clubs. Gunarhnesemgyet's new wife, picking them up, said, "Let us take them to the warriors," and they set out. When they had gone quite a distance, they saw cedar trees from which they could get good strips of bark for making mats and baskets. This forgetfulness was also produced by the *Kanawdzet* whose



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influence caused the women to forget their mission and to gather cedar bark instead. Meanwhile Gunarhnesemgyet had reached the Stikine before he found that he had forgotten his clubs. The Stikines easily overcame the attackers, and Gunarhnesemgyet paid with his life. The victors cut off his head and placed it at the top of a cedar tree. Now it gives warning whenever invaders approach. The head calls out: "This was the end of Gunarhnesemgyet."

Gunarhnesemgyet (Tsimshyan — Lewis), as related in 1916 by Sam Lewis and Andrew Jackson at Metlakatla, and recorded by Wiliam Beynon.

One day, the wife of a great Gitrahla hunter (of Porcher Island, a Coast Tsimshyan) — a beautiful woman and quite white, with very bright hair and supernaturally endowed — was walking along the beach where they were camping. She saw a dead sea otter drifting near the shore and ran down to the beach to get it, because it was a beautiful white one. It was just out of her reach, so she cried to her husband who was sitting near, "There is a beautiful sea otter here, and I can't get it!" "Step into the water; it is not deep," he replied. He was angry because he could not get any game since he had killed his wife's lover, and he seldom spoke to her. She stepped into the shallow water, but the sea otter kept drifting out. She followed it out, as it kept on drifting into deeper water, and made a reach for it. But the water was too deep; she fell, and the sea otter, springing up, took her off with the aid of many other sea otters.

The woman's husband did not know what to do. He called her many times, but she did not answer. He sat down by the edge of the water and wept. Though he continued to call her, he received no reply.

While he was sitting there, the Blackfish which had seen everything and was sorry for the man, swam close, and asked, "Why do you cry?" "The sea otter has taken my wife, and she is dead," he answered. "I will take you to where your wife is," said the Blackfish. "You must bring a lot of fat of the mountain-goat (*matih*). Sit tight on my back." "I will bring much mountain-goat fat," he said. Having done so, he climbed on to the whale's back and rode away.

After some time the man saw his wife far ahead of them, and many sea otters. Near the mountain of Quawk (home of the *spenarhnorh*), the sea otter went under the water and did not emerge again. The Blackfish and the hunter arrived too late: the woman had been taken into the home of the monster of Quawk. "Throw down some of the mountain-goat fat, and then hold on to me," the Blackfish said. "I will take you to the entrance of the *spenarhnorh*. When you go in, you will find what you want." The Blackfish dove, and when they were at the entrance of the *spenarhnorh*, the man jumped into the doorway and went up the path. He had not gone far when he saw sitting in the path a huge double-headed monster. It was asleep. When it breathed it emitted sounds like thunder. The man was afraid and did not know what to do. So he crouched down to hide. He sat there for a long while. Then something came up behind him and asked, "Have you any fat?" When he looked around, the person who had spoken had gone. This made him still more frightened. A little later he again heard the voice behind him: "Have you any fat?" He looked round and saw no one. Now he meant to watch, and sat very still. Soon some one came out of a hole; it was Mouse Woman. She asked him, "Have you any fat?" "Yes, I have lots of fat," he

replied. Then Mouse Woman said, "I will take the fat from you and help you get what you came after. You must do what I tell you."

He gave the fat to Mouse Woman, who said, "Be very careful. Dze'enk is watching for you. I will call him away and give him some of this fat. He will go to sleep, then you will follow the path and find what you want." Mouse Woman then went away and gave the double-headed monster some fat. When it had taken it, it fell asleep. Mouse Woman came back to the man, and said, "You will go now, and when you meet a flock of geese, walk among them, but do not touch them. They are blind. They used to be wives of the *narhnorh*, who has taken your wife. When he gets tired of them he puts them out, turns them into geese, and makes them blind." The man did as Mouse Woman told him. When he came to the flock of squawking geese, he passed among them, frightened to touch them because Mouse Woman had said that if he were to touch one, they would go to the *narhnorh* and warn him. He went on and finally came to a large hole in a rock. Mouse Woman told him to wait while she went in. As she went into the house, she became a mouse, though when she appeared to him, she had the shape of a woman. Inside, she went in to where the woman was sitting and said, "Get ready to go away with your husband! He will give a feast, and will take you away." Mouse Woman then came out, and told the man, "Give a feast to the monster of Quawk, and when he has seen you he will be angry because you went past Dze'enk. But don't be afraid." When Mouse Woman again went into the house of the monster, she said, "Chief, a great chief, a grandson of yours, is going to give a feast."

The monster knew that the man had gone past Dze'enk, and was angry, and said, "Call my grandson in." A slave went out and called him in. When he entered he saw his wife, but pretended he did not know her. "Sit down, my grandson!" the *narhnorh* said, and a place was made for him, beside the *narhnorh*. Then Mouse Woman got the fat ready, and said, "Your grandson has brought you food, which he will give you." Fat was the best food, and all the supernatural beings of the waters wanted it. When Mouse Woman chewed the fat and threw it into the fire, twice as much came out. Then the monster and his people partook of it. When it was all eaten, the monster became sleepy and dozed off, as did all those who had eaten.

When they were all asleep, Mouse Woman called the man "Go away now, and take your wife along." She ran on ahead to give more fat to the blind double-headed monster. As they approached, Mouse Woman said, "The *narhnorh* is now awake and is coming after you. He will swell out so as to fill the passage, and no one will be able to get past." When the man and his wife got to where the path was very narrow, Dze-enk, the double-headed monster, became very large and nearly closed the whole passage. Mouse Woman then came to her protégé and his wife, and said, "When you go back take the Gusnærhs (deer hoof garment), which the monster's son wore as a crest when you killed him. Then burn it, and the *narhnorh* will not come after you again. If you do not burn it, he will go on pursuing you."

The man and his wife emerged where the Blackfish was waiting for them, and it took them back to their village at Metlakatla.

Nuchnoosimgat, an Indian version of the classical myth of Orpheus, as recorded among the Haidas by James Deans. (36:71-75).



Haida house post of Massett

This story of the Scannah totem has long been told by the Hidery tribes, who borrowed it originally from the Simshean [Tsimshyan] tribes on the mainland of British Columbia, in whose country the scene of the story is laid. It is called "The adventures of Nuch-noo-simgat in search of his lost wife." The meaning of the name is, "Hear you what I say?" The Hiderys pronounce it Nah-nah-simgat.

The tale is as follows: At the head of a bay near the present town of Mithla-Kathla, in Northern British Columbia, in by-gone days, stood a small Indian town in which lived Nuch-noo-simgat, with his wife and several other families. One day a beautiful white sea otter came into their bay and swam about in front of the village. In order to get it for its beautiful white fur, all the people took their bows and arrows and tried to shoot it. Nuch-noo-simgat's wife, seeing what was going on, called to them to be careful how they shot, because they might spoil its beautiful white fur. "Shoot it," she said, "on the end of its tail, where its skin won't be spoiled." They did so, got it ashore and skinned it. When they spread out the skin they found a few blood stains on it. In order to wash them off, Nuch-noo-simgat's wife waded out into the sea, and all the others went home. Hours passed silently away. She did not return. Her husband went to look for her. He found the skin washed ashore, but of herself nothing was either heard or seen. After days of anxious and fruitless search, Nuch-noo-simgat thought he would visit a Skaggy (medicine man), who was clairvoyant. The Skaggy told him that the Scannahs had captured her and had taken her home with them. She was then living with the king in his palace, as his wife. So in order to find her, he had to take two servants along with him, a martin, and a swallow; the martin to go on before and smell, the swallow to fly about overhead and watch. Both had to keep a strict lookout as they went along, then come

and report what each had found. The Skaggy said they were to go on until they found a canoe, in which they were to sail to where they would find two heads of kelp. From the two heads they would find a road leading onward to the house of the Scannah. So, Nuch-noo-simgat got the two servants and started, determined to find his wife, if it should take years. After a long travel to no purpose, they came to the sea where they found a canoe. Nuch-noo-simgat said, "Let us go and try if we can find the kelp from which the road leads onward." After a long sail they noticed the two heads, where between them they tied the canoe and had a consultation. The martin said, "We can only do this; you try to find the road, and I will take care of the canoe in your absence; as for the swallow, he can go back and tell our friends." To this they all agreed. The swallow went home and reported, and the martin took charge of the canoe, while Nuch-noo-simgat went down under the water to find the road leading to the palace of the king of the Scannahs. From the two heads of kelp he was able to trace the road straight ahead. This he followed until he saw something moving about like worms digging up roots. When he drew nearer to them he noticed they were a lot of blind geese. While digging about they jostled each other in their blindness. This led to quarrelling, and from that to fighting. As he drew near, they stopped their fight and all together said, "Hello! here comes Nuch-noo-simgat; we smell him." It was then he received his name. While he was looking at them fighting, he saw strange men coming along. When they spoke to him, they said they were all slaves sent by their master to get some dry hemlock. One of the slaves exclaimed, "Look! there is a dry tree. I will go over and see how it looks." On reaching the tree, he found it to be old, dry and hollow. He went inside and sat down. While there he seems to have fallen asleep. After a while the other two followed and



A fallen totem pole, at Yan

began to fell the tree. When it was nearly down, one man with a strong blow sent his axe through the tree right into the mouth of the sleeper inside, who awoke, and came out. After felling the tree they all began to cut it up; while doing so one of them broke his axe. Seeing the broken axe, all of them felt very bad, saying "What shall we do? Our master will be very angry with us when he sees the broken axe." Nuch-noo-simgat said to them. "I am travelling about, trying to find my long lost wife; if you will all help me to find her, I will mend your broken axe." They all readily agreed. So Nuch-noo-simgat rubbed his axe on the two pieces placed together; after a few passes their axe was returned as good and

as strong as ever it was. When they saw it restored, they told him they knew where his wife was, and for his kindly act they would take him to her, at a place where there was a fire and a woman standing by it, warming herself. This woman was his lost wife, but as a long time had passed since she left, he would not know her. To help him, they would put a large kettle of water on the fire, then one of them would get an armful of wood and place it on the fire. While doing so, he would throw himself down and upset the kettle in the fire, which would put it out; then all Nuch-noo-simgat would have to do would be to jump over and get hold of the woman, who, as soon as she knew who he was, would go home with him, because she was his long lost wife. They told him to hold her firmly, because the Scannahs would try to keep her. If he had a good hold, they could not take her from him nor keep her any longer.

Another version of this tale is to the effect that the Scannah who took her away gave her for wife to another whose name was Scannah-cah-wink-a-dass. What the name signifies, I have yet to ascertain. The first part, Scannah, shows his connection with the totem or crest of that name. The geese, it appears, were all women, who by some evil genii were enchanted and turned into geese. These our hero restored, and the men finished their wood-chopping. After this agreement, all four, that is, the three men and Nuch-noo-simgats started on the road to the house of the Scannah. Of the geese women, nothing more is said. After travelling a considerable distance, they came to where a crane was mending a canoe. As soon as he mended it in one part, he broke it at another, this being done for a blind, as he was watchman for the Scannahs outside of their abode. When the crane saw the strangers approaching, he gave the alarm. After watching the crane at work, they noticed he used a feather for drilling the holes. Because of the time wasted, as well as of the trouble he was taking to make a hole, they gave him an iron drill and showed him how to use it. (All the Indians on this northeast coast use drills to this day. The drill is used between both hands; motion is given to it by passing the hand backwards and forwards.) When the crane saw how much faster he could drill a hole with an iron drill than by the old feather style, he was very much pleased. As soon as he knew what they had come so far to obtain, he promised to help them all in his power, although he was in the service of the Scannahs, whose house was close by. At their watchman's alarm, the Scannahs came in force to his assistance, inquiring what had happened. "Oh," he said, "nothing; only seeing these four men coming and not knowing but that they might be foes, I gave the alarm. Since they came, and I know who they are, there is no danger, because they are all my friends." So, all the Scannahs went inside, somewhat displeased. After all was quiet, the four men, led by the crane, went inside. The crane introduced them as his dear friends, whom he had not seen for a long time. Inside of the house was a large fire. Alongside of it stood a woman, who, with a few others, was warming herself. To cook a meal, one of the party took a large kettle, which he filled with water and placed on the fire. A second man went for a few sticks to make a good fire and boil the water. Nuch-noo-simgat all the while stood looking at the woman and all around the house, but said not a word. Soon the slave returned with the wood, which he put on the fire. He over-balanced himself and fell, upsetting the water into the fire, making steam and smoke, through which little could be seen. Our hero, who was prepared for this, jumped over and captured the woman by her arms, holding her fast, saying, "I am your real husband; I have wandered afar to find you. Now that I have, come back home with me; will you?" "I will," she replied. The Scannahs, completely taken by surprise, made no effort to retain her. After thanking the others for their services, and bidding them all keel-slie (good-bye), our hero and his long lost wife started for home. Returning by the way he came, after a while they reached the ascent ending at the two heads of kelp, up which they went. Here they found the canoe where it had been tied, old and rotten. On its bottom lay the bones of the koo-hoo (martin) old and mouldy, having long been dead. To restore the faithful koo-hoo, our hero took from his pocket some herbs which he always had along with him, to meet any emergency. These he chewed, and squirted their juice over the old bones, and under its influence the martin jumped up as good as new. The canoe was also restored under the influence of the same potent herbs, and in it all three pulled for the shore. Once more on dry land, they found the trail for the old home, at which they all arrived in safety. There Nuch-noo-simgat and his wife passed the remainder of their days in peace and comfort; as for Martin, no more has been preserved of him.

The Gunarhnesemgyet Myth, recorded by Swanton (97:202, 203).

A chief's daughter displeased the Grizzly Bears, and was taken away by them to their town. There a woman who was turned into stone from the hips down helped her, and enabled her to escape. She gave her a comb, some hair, hair-oil, and a whetstone; and when her pursuers had almost reached her, she threw these behind her, where they were transformed into thick fallen trees, thick brushwood, a lake, and finally a steep place which they got through only with difficulty. At last she came to a person fishing in a canoe, who took



A fallen totem pole, at Skedans

her in; and when her pursuers came into the lake after her, the canoe cut off their heads. Now, the canoe-man took her home and married her; but one day she disobeyed instructions in looking at her husband's first wife while she was eating, and was killed by the latter. When her husband came home, however, he killed his first wife and restored his second wife to life. By and by she had a son, Gunanasimget. After a while they went back to her people, and her son married the daughter of one of his uncles. One day he shot a white sea-otter; but while his wife stood in the sea, washing its skin, a killer whale carried her off. Then her husband, who had seen where she was taken in, set out in pursuit. Letting himself down to the bottom of the sea, he restored the sight of the Geese-Women, and met a Heron at the end of the town, who concealed him in his arm-pit in return for receiving twisted cedar-limbs, a gimlet, and a whetstone. Then he met two slaves, Raven and Crow, who helped him to recover his wife, and delayed pursuit until he reached his canoe. When he got home, he put his wife into the innermost of five boxes which fitted one inside of another, but, on looking for her one day, he found that there was a hole in the bottom and she was gone.

Another version for Massett is mentioned on p. 220.

The Nurhnoo-semgyet Pole of New Gold Harbour, a former Haida village on Maud Island near Skidegate, now at the National Museum of Canada (Collected by C. F. Newcombe, in 1901).



Gunarh, a Haida pole,
Colorado Museum, Denver

This stately pole, about 45 feet high, formerly stood in front of a community house, presumably that of the Squahladas family, at New Gold Harbour (Rhaina), in the bay of Skidegate. It can be seen in an old photograph reproduced here, by Bourne and May, Calgary, Alberta. On both sides stood houses of the same type and age, dating back to about 1875 to 1885; in front of these other houses stood large totems apparently by the same carvers and showing the same crests and figures disposed differently.

The figures on the pole, from the top down, can be identified as follows:

1. The three conventional Watchmen familiar on the poles of the highest chiefs, mostly in the southern Haida villages; the central watchman has, on his head, the fin of what is presumably the Killer-Whale; the two others, sideways, wear *skil* or cylinder hats on their heads, with 3 cylinders each;

2. The Eagle or Bird-of-the-Air (with some Thunderbird stylistic features);

3. Nurhnoo-semgyet (from the Tsimshyan name of Gunarhne-semgyet) or the ancestor, of the sea-coast south of Skeena River who, Orpheus-like, tried to rescue the soul of his deceased wife from its keepers in the nether world under the sea. Here the wife, holding on with both hands to the dorsal fin of the Killer-Whale, is riding on to the country of the Whales under the sea. Under her feet appear, stylized, the side fins and the upturned tail of the Killer-Whale.

4. Nurhnoo-semgyet, in a crouching position, holding onto the head of the quadruped-like Whale in his errand of mercy; he belonged to a Bear clan of the sea-coast Tsimshyans;

5. The Killer-Whale, whose fins and tail are shown above, but whose four limbs (arms and legs, animal-like) appear under, holds on to the *skil* or cylinder hat of the figure below;

6. The Grizzly Bear at the base, whose body surrounds the oval entrance to the ceremonial house behind. The figure below the door (now almost obliterated) must have been of the young woman who was kidnapped by the Bears.

The Whale Totem (Alert Bay) (*kwaw'yim*), in front of the Whale house next to the Thunderbird house of Waw'kyas. It belonged to chief L'akwagyilaw — Copper-Maker, of the Nimkish tribe (Alert Bay).

Description. It consisted of a large whale on the pole. On the back of the whale stood a little man, spear in hand.

Carver, age. The Whale crest belonged to L'akwagyilaw, the owner of the pole, who himself carved it, although he was not much of a carver. Yet his work was considered "pretty good". It was erected when the informant was grown up, about 1900-1905. Later it was sold to an outsider, whose identity is not remembered. The maker said to the informant, "Never mind, son, I'll make a better one still". But he never did.

(Informant, Daniel Cranmer, Alert Bay, 1947.)

The Gunarhnesemgyet Myth at Rivers Inlet, according to Daniel Cranmer, of Alert Bay.

The story was known, among the Awikyenorh of Rivers Inlet, of the man who went for the soul of his wife. He was taken on the back of the Killer-Whale. The place where this happened is known to have been at the village near the mouth of Rivers Inlet. (The informant had heard this tale, but had not memorized it, as it did not belong to his tribe.)