Introduction

One of the favourite stories of the Tlingit- and Athabascan-speaking Indians of southern Yukon Territory is about a girl who married a bear. This was one of the first tales I heard when I began my initial field-work in 1948, and I was thrilled by the experience.[1] It was told to me voluntarily by an aged Tagish woman, named Maria Johns, and was translated by her daughter, Dora Austin Wedge. The narration was superb, and I knew from my previous reading that the story was also told by the coastal Tlingit with whom I was hoping to link the Tagish. Furthermore, it was offered as an explanation of Tagish ritual that seemed to be part of the circumpolar complex of bear ceremonialism, not yet reported for this region. Could a beginning anthropologist ask for more?

Although I have not specialized in collecting folklore during my field-work in Yukon, in subsequent years the Yukon Indians told me this story ten more times. Eight of the informants volunteered it, as Maria had done, and five of them also chose it as their first selection. I specifically requested only the two Southern Tutchone versions which I recorded in 1968 (9, 11). In sum, I have two versions of the story from the Inland Tlingit (1, 2), one from the neighbouring Tagish (3), and eight from the adjacent Southern Tutchone (4-11). I have also heard the story several times from the nearby northern Coastal Tlingit and the Athabascan Atna of the Copper River Valley in Alaska.[2]

Because my academic preoccupation was then with classic distributional problems, I first judged the tale's chief importance to be its probable extension of the known distribution of bear ceremonialism; I paid little attention to other aspects of the story. Only later did I ask myself—Why its great popularity? Why did both men and women so often volunteer to tell it?

Actually the Tagish women who first told me the story had revealed one of the obvious reasons for its importance, which is simply that it is an outstanding piece of creative narrative. Old Maria was a gifted raconteur and Dora an excellent translator. Together, their skills carried me across the language differences and lifted their story into a realm beyond all my earlier ideas of folklore. Although at that time I knew little of the story's cultural context, I still could sense the tremendous psychological and social conflicts within the plot. For the first time I began to realize that many of the Indian myths that I had been reading in professional collections were more than rather one-dimensional 'fairy stories.' Today I believe that this particular story attracts the Southern Yukon natives with the same power as does a first-rate psychological drama or novel in our own culture. The themes probably evoke the same intense response in the Indians as those evoked in the Greeks by the great Attic dramas.

Anthropologists have paid relatively little attention to the criteria by which non-literate people themselves rate their various oral traditions. Nor do anthropologists often venture to rate oral narratives even by western standards (Hymes 1965). One should not, of course, be surprised that native informants rarely explain just why the style and

content have a greater appeal in one story than in another. It is difficult for any one—native narrator or anthropologist—to make this kind of analysis, for it requires one to make a series of subtle judgments about language manipulation, creativity, and other even more ineffable qualities. It also presumes a firm grasp of total cultural context.

In this paper I have not tried to deal with style. Most of the texts were recorded only in English; hence any special magic derived from linguistic skills, which may have been in the Indian texts, was almost certainly lost.[3] However, I should point out that, like myself, many of the younger Yukon Indians understand very little in the traditional language of their parents. Often they have heard their mythology only in the kind of broken English that is used whether or not an anthropologist is present. In this sense, English often *is* the 'native language' nowadays, and hence many versions of a story told in English are as suitable for stylistic analysis as those told in Indian. The gross structural arrangements of a story undoubtedly remain much the same regardless of the language used (but cf. Hymes 1965). Yet, no matter how powerful it may be, style alone can never create a narrative masterpiece. Every great story must have substance as well, and the special point of this study is to explore why the story of The Girl Who Married the Bear has a strong 'literary' attraction for both old and young Yukon Indians, no matter in what language they hear it told.[4]

The story has a good plot with considerable action and suspense, but what probably grips the story-teller and the audience most strongly is the dreadful choice of loyalties that the characters have to make, as well as the pervasive underscoring of the delicate and awful balance between animals and humans, which has existed since the world began. In short, the tale touches on key concerns of everybody in the society. We must consider it as much as possible in its general cultural context, so that we can try to understand its substance at approximately the same overt level as the Indians do and, at the same time, we can regard the story itself as a priceless guide to cultural context.

The outline of the story remains essentially the same in all versions recorded, but noteworthy variations occur in the emphasis given to particular incidents and the details incorporated in them. As I have explained elsewhere, I believe that the oral narration of all the Southern Yukon Indian groups is, in fact, characterized by the rather wide latitude allowed to individual narrators in their choice and handling of episodes, and that this freedom contrasts with the more formal and restricted approach required of coastal Tlingit story-tellers (McClellan *n.d. a:* 18, 25-26). I think, also, that for this story, at least, I can trace some variations quite directly to the special life circumstances of the individual narrators. The importance of this source of variation is frequently underplayed because folklore collectors so often know very little about those who tell the stories. I freely grant that to explore the personality of every informant in its deeper levels and to analyse his stories in the psychoanalytical terms so fashionable in current folklore study would be to ask for a virtual monograph on every version of a

given story; that is hardly feasible. But can one not operate at a somewhat more obvious and perhaps less sophisticated level and still gain something of value in understanding cultural processes? Thus, in addition to treating varying versions of a tale as examples of abstract stylistic differences, sheer historical accidents, or mere distributional data, one must consider them, too, as the direct products of real people whose real experiences have coloured the tales they tell us.[5]

The Basic Plot[6]

In outline, the plot of the story is as follows: A young girl repeatedly jumps over grizzly bear excrement and says insulting things to it, although such behaviour is tabu. While she is out berrying she meets a handsome young man who takes her away and marries her. Later she discovers that he is really a grizzly bear in human guise who has kidnapped her because of her disrespectful behaviour toward the bear people.

The two spend the summer together eating berries and gophers. When they begin to make a den in the fall, the girl tells her husband that she wants it to be at a place where she knows her brothers usually hunt in the spring time. She tries to mark the place, hoping that her brothers will find her.

During the winter the girl gives birth to two (or three) children. Each month of the winter seems to be only a night's sleep. In the spring the girl rolls a ball with her scent on it down into the valley so that her brothers' hunting dog (or dogs) will find it. The bear-husband, who has shamanistic powers, dreams that he will be found by his wife's brothers and asks his wife why she has betrayed him. Although he has the power to kill his brothers-in-law and at first plans to do so, in the end he decides to let them kill him instead. He instructs his wife how his body should be treated after his death and in the songs her brothers should sing.

After the brothers have killed the bear, they discover their lost sister in the den. In most versions she makes her presence known by tying together a bunch of arrow shafts and putting them in front of the den or attaching them to a dog. Sometimes she uses a glove instead of the arrow parts. When the youngest brother comes to look for the arrow parts, she tells him that he and the others have killed their brother-in-law, and she explains how they must treat his body. The girl also asks that her mother come as soon as possible with clothes for herself and her children. All have become partly furry.

After she has received the necessary clothes, the girl and her children return to her mother and brothers, although they must do this by stages, because at first the girl cannot tolerate the smell of humans.

The following spring her brothers (or sometimes just the youngest or the two younger brothers) beg their sister and her children to put on bearskins and walk around on the hillside so that they can pretend they are real bears and shoot at them with toy arrows. In distress the girl tries to resist the request, warning her brothers that she may turn into a real bear if she does what they want. The brothers insist, and she and her children finally put on the skins. When the boys start to shoot at her, she turns into a grizzly and kills them—or in some versions only the younger or the older brother, or the two younger brothers. The girl and her children have now become bears forever, and they go up into the mountains. Because the girl had told her brothers the proper ritual, Indians now know how to treat a bear's corpse so that the bear will not be angry that it has been killed.

The preceding is, of course, a composite of the main incidents in all the stories. In order to gain the full flavour of the individual tales, the reader is urged to turn now to the various versions in the appendix lest any analytical remarks in the sections which follow spoil the strength and freshness of the stories as they were actually told. Each has its special virtues. Version 3 is the Tagish story, which I first heard myself, and its translator had the fullest command of English of all the narrators.

A rather complex network of relationships links the three groups of Yukon Indians from whom the stories were collected (McClellan 1953, 1954, 1961, n.d.*b*: Chapter 1). The Tagish and Inland Tlingit speak Tlingit, while the Southern Tutchone speak an Athabascan dialect. Some cultural differences exist both between these linguistic units and within them. However, all the southern Yukon Indians have a very great deal in common in both their material and their ideational culture, and in a broad sense the cultural context for all versions of the story is much the same. Thus all groups have matrilineal reckoning and moiety organization. The Inland Tlingit, Tagish, and the southernmost of the Southern Tutchone bands have Tlingit-named sibs also.

Throughout the area a strongly developed cross-sex sibling avoidance is the rule after puberty, although a younger brother may speak circumspectly to an older sister. The Inland Tlingit have brother-brother avoidance as well (McClellan 1961: 110-14). Yet sibling unity is strong and is, in fact, at the heart of the matrilineal lineages that comprise the sibs and moieties. The oldest brother is the 'boss'—responsible for his younger brothers and sisters throughout his life, and ideally they may never question his actions.

The brother-in-law tie is also extremely important, and this is the relationship that the Indians stress as the prime social link between those of opposite moieties. The most enduring economic and social unit of the past was often a man and his brother-in-law and their families. True brother-sister exchange marriages were an ideal for the Southern Tutchone. 'Brothers-in-law' are the formal go-betweens on ceremonial occasions such as the all-important funeral potlatches or peace ceremonies between those of opposite moieties. A man who is adressed as 'brother-in-law' is immediately obligated to aid and defend his reciprocal in all possible ways. Only good fellowship should prevail between the two.

The kin terminologies of all groups are such that all persons of one's own generation within one's own moiety may be classified as 'siblings,' hence all those of the opposite moiety are real or classificatory siblings-in-law, unless for some reason one chooses to capitalize on some other real or extended kin tie.

In their broadest extensions, the social systems of the southern Yukon Indians incorporate both humans and animals. For example, a man of the Crow moiety would address a wolf or a bear as 'brother-in-law' or perhaps, 'grandfather.' Indeed, the major philosophical concern of all the Yukon Indians is how they may best live in harmony with the animals who basically have so much more power than do humans, especially since the Indians continually have to confront and kill the animals if they are to stay alive themselves. In my monograph on the Yukon Indians, I suggest that perhaps the Tlingit of the coast and the more Tlingitized of the interior Indians have tried to solve the problem primarily by socializing the animal world through their system of sibs and sib crests, while the Athabascan speakers by and large have tried to relieve their guilt about the killing and eating of animals by creating a mythology in which most animals of early days appear as man-eating giants. Now it is man's turn to eat the animals (McClellan, n.d.*b*: Chapter 2).

Whatever truth there may be in these conjectures, it is certain that all Yukon Indians tell of a long ago time when it was very difficult to distinguish between animals and humans, and any animal might appear as a human, or else he might pull up his animal mask and wear

his animal clothes. Under rare circumstances such a thing might even happen today (McClellan n.d.*a*: 21; n.d.*b*: Chapter 2).

Some Yukon Indians may acquire special powers from encounters with animals, but all are careful to observe the many ritual acts and tabus which they believe will keep the animal people happy and content even if they kill their bodies. They know that breaches of the rules can only result in disaster for humans.

Even the reader who knows only the preceding few facts about its cultural context begins to appreciate the drama of the story more fully. As soon as the girl breaks an important tabu relating to the animal world she is in danger. Soon she is faced with a series of anguishing dilemmas. One set has to do with whether she should be more loyal to her matrilineal kin—her brothers, her mother, and her children—or to her husband. (Note that her father is given a brief mention in only two of the eleven versions, 2 and 3.) Of course the supreme irony of the story is that, although she begs her husband not to kill her brothers and although in acceding to her wish he loses his own life, in the end she herself does the unthinkable deed of killing one or all of them.

The interplay between the girl and her brothers is complex and subtle. In Version 3, it is specifically stated that because of the rules of sibling avoidance she can communicate directly only with her younger brother. In five of the versions, only the youngest brother or the two younger ones want to 'play' with her, and he or they are the only brothers whom their bear sister kills (cf. Versions 5, 6, 8, 9, and 11—all Southern Tutchone). While Versions 1, 2, and 3 (Inland Tlingit and Tagish) imply that all the brothers request their sister to don a bearskin, they state that she does not kill the youngest brother. In version 10 (Southern Tutchone) it is the oldest brother who urges his sister to act like a bear. She then destroys all but one brother who is 'away,' but it is not clear whether or not he was the oldest or the youngest. Version 7 (Southern Tutchone) has all the brothers killed. Only Version 4 (Southern Tutchone) omits the incident entirely.

Were one probing the deeper psychological levels of this story, it would be easy to interpret all these varied accounts as veiled treatments of the consequences of forbidden incestuous desires, but even at the overt level of narration, the episode is terrible and dramatic. The helpless girl must turn and kill those very kinsmen who should have been her protectors rather than her tormentors. Every rule for sibling relationships is violated, and the narrator and audience cannot fail to be shaken by it, especially those who have themselves been restive under the social restrictions that theoretically lessen tension between siblings (McClellan 1961). Some of the narrators seem to make the tragedy the greater by emphasizing that the girl had sacrificed a husband whom she had come to love (*see* especially Version 3). In any case, her loyalty to the lineage that should have cherished her has been in vain.

The bear husband comes out as a truly noble character, for he properly fulfils his role as a brother-in-law. But whether he will do so provides perhaps the greatest suspense in the story. We may suspect that the girl will turn on her brothers, because we know that from the minute she has gone with the bear, she has had to struggle against becoming an animal. She predicts her fate. But we do not know quite so much about the bear husband, only that grizzly bears are more powerful than

humans and that this bear is also a shaman and has become angry because of the way the girl has treated his excrement. There is no doubt that he could kill his brothers-in-law if he wanted to, but will he?

In choosing to die, he seems to be guided by human rules of social behaviour. His course of action also makes it possible for Indians ever after to cope with the presence of grizzly bears, for he gives explicit instructions how his brothers-in-law should treat his corpse and how peace ceremonies can be carried out between humans and the bears they kill. The feathers, the songs, and so on are all similar to elements in the peace ceremonies that take place when a member of one moiety kills a member of the opposite moiety (cf., Version 7 and McClellan n.d.*b:* Chapter 16). But in the last analysis, one wonders if the bear did not really gain his own personal revenge on the girl, using her rather than his own strength to kill his brother-in-law. In typical Athabascan fashion, has he not achieved his end through indirect means?

Basically, however, it is the uneasy confrontation between animals and humans which permeates the entire story, just as it permeates the entire fabric of Indian life. By reducing the situation to just a few individuals, the plot brings home sharply the folly of flaunting the rules of behaviour towards animals. The doomed girl can never again be fully human. Stepping under (or over) the windfalls with her bear companion, she enters a world in which time is distorted, and things and people are not what they seem. She herself begins to acquire a furry coat, and it is no accident that all but two of the versions (Nos. 1 and 2, both Inland Tlingit) include the incident in which the girl asks for clothes for herself and her children. The Southern Yukon Indians, especially the Athabascans, seem to have strong feelings that humans should be clothed from birth to death whenever it is feasible (McClellan n.d.*b*: Chapter 11), and the donning of human clothes was an important step in the attempt to bring the girl back to her human kin. In a sense, the bear hair with which she and her children were partly covered was the equivalent of animal clothing, and of course it was the putting on of the entire skins that changed the girl and her children so that they became bears forever.

A good many other Yukon stories about humans who have stayed long enough with animals to begin to acquire animal-like characteristics stress the repugnant smell that humans have, and the need for the returning person to conquer this 'wild' trait by slow degrees. Indeed this attention to smells seems to be quite characteristic of several northern Athabascan groups, who have various remedies for body odours and who associate bad smells with evil super-humans (McClellan n.d.*b*: Chapter 12; de Laguna and McClellan field notes for the Atna of the Copper River).

Ethnographic data make it plain that body wastes are also of considerable concern to Yukon Indians. Men and women have separate toilet areas and, unlike the Eskimo, are rather secretive about their excretory functions and rarely discuss them. On the other hand, many of their beliefs and stories, including this one, make it clear that excrement and urine may contain rather strong spiritual powers. Thus a man may capture Wealth Woman's baby by throwing urine on her; she will then give him 'Good Luck' by defecating golden balls (McClellan 1963). Excrement may also have a comic shock value. I recently saw two elderly Southern Tutchone women chuckle for a good ten minutes over the incident in which Crow puts

frozen dog feces under the man who controlled all the water. When the feces began to melt, he thought that he himself had made the mess, so he fled outdoors leaving Crow to steal the water. After a long story-telling session, the two women once more returned to this bit and laughed heartily again. However, these same women, and others, all warned me (a comparative stranger) not to step over bear excrement if I saw any in the bush.[7]

It may be worth pointing out, too, that Indians do not class dogs with the rest of the animals. In this story dogs clearly ally themselves with the humans in league against the bear, and like humans, dogs have personal names (McClellan n.d.*b:* Chapter 4, for details).

The localization of the story is of interest, since, when it is mentioned at all, it is always in connection with the coast, usually in Chilkat Territory, or just over the Chilkat Pass in Southern Tutchone country where the Chilkat Tlingit have long had contacts with the interior Southern Tutchone (McClellan n.d.*b*: Chapter1). Swanton and Krause both cite the story for the northern Tlingit (Krause from Veniaminof), and de Laguna and I heard it from the Yakutat Tlingit and the Atna of the Copper River, who associated with the latter (*see* note 2). Birket-Smith and de Laguna likewise heard it from the Eyak, who once lived in Yakutat and who maintained close ties with the later Tlingit population there (Swanton 1909: 126, 252; Krause 1956: 185-186; Birket-Smith and de Laguna 1938: 276-279; de Laguna and McClellan field notes 1952, 1954, 1958). It is also a favourite of the southern Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and their immediate neighours of the interior.

The story thus seems to be centred in an area of matriliny. So far as I know, it is not told by Mackenzie drainage Athabascans nor by the northeastern Algonkians. I would hazard the guess that if this is so, it is largely because these Indians are bilateral or patrilineal in their social structure, and they simply cannot appreciate the kind of social conflict which is at the heart of the tale. However, the real distribution of the story remains to be worked out.

Another problem is the one that first caught my attention—does the story correlate with true bear ceremonialism in the sense that Hallowell conceived of it? As I explain in the introductions to some of the differing versions (Versions 3, 7, 10), several informants volunteered the story because I had been asking about the treatment of bears, and they and others put into their stories express statements that the story explains their ritual (Versions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10).

Throughout the area there are circumlocutions for the bear's name; special phrases to be said if one meets a bear; secret means for informing a brother-in-law or other hunting partner that one has located a den, and certainly, rules for proper disposal of the head and other parts of the body. Grizzly flesh is almost always tabu to women, and sometimes to everybody. On the other hand, many of these same things can be said about other animals, such as the wolf (about whom the Inland Tlingit tell an almost identical story), or the beaver (although the latter is eaten by all). I am uncertain to what degree the coastal Tlingit share all the interior usages, since it is only tribes such as the Chilkat who do much land hunting. Although Hallowell thought that bear ceremonialism probably originated among caribou-hunting people, he did recognize its presence on the Northwest Coast. Was this because so many of the coastal people undoubtedly made their way down the great rivers from the interior (McClellan n.d.

b: Chapter 1)? In any event, like the problem of the distribution of the story itself, the question of its correlation with a distinctive bear ceremonialism complex remains the subject of another paper (Hallowell 1926; Barbeau 1945).

To reiterate, my chief interest here has been to suggest how understanding something of the cultural context of the story helps us to sense something of its emotional and intellectual impact on the Yukon Indians and to appreciate its value as a piece of oral literature. Conversely, the story beautifully illumines some special points of interest and tension within the societies who tell it.

My comments on the differing versions of the story will be even more sketchy than those in the previous section. All I want to do is to show in a few instances just how I think the life circumstances of a given narrator may have influenced his handling of the story. As noted earlier, I am dealing with variations in the choice and treatment of both whole incidents and certain details, not with formal stylistic variations that can only be fully handled in a native linguistic context. Furthermore, I am operating on the most overt cultural and psychological levels. As examples, I shall mention only Versions 3, 7, 9, and 11. However each story in the appendix has a brief introductory section summarizing the most salient facts of the narrator's life and social status. The reader may go on to speculate further, on his own, what the correlations may be between the way the story was told and the particular circumstances of the person who told it.

As has been explained, Version 3 was told in Tlingit by old Maria Johns and translated by her married daughter, Dora. Maria was probably in her eighties when she told the story, for she had been a young woman when she first saw a white man at Dyea in the last decades of the 19th century. She had suffered from eye trouble much of her life and had been blind for many years. She enjoyed telling stories and had often entertained Dora with them in the long winter evenings when the two of them had been alone on the trapline (McClellan n.d.*b*: Chapter 3). Both she and her daughter had associated rather closely with whites, and they had been extremely hospitable to me. On this occasion, they feared that I might miss my transportation if they took too long in telling the story, but they did not regard it as a chore, and the pair evidently felt complete confidence in

their ability to convey the finer points of the story in English.

Of all the versions, their story elaborates most fully the way in which the girl had come to love her bear husband, yet showed her most complete devotion to her children and her brothers. The development of the theme may be partly due to Dora's command of English, but I also think it may reflect the women's special interest both in conjugal love and in their children. Certainly none of the stories told by men make quite so much of the cubs as do those told by women. In fact some of the men omit this detail altogether, or seem embarrassed by it, and mention the cubs only as a kind of afterthought (contrast Versions 9, 10, and 11, told by women, with 2 and 4, which do not mention the children, and 5, 6, 7, and 8, which mention them briefly—all told by men. The interest in the cubs in Version 1 is primarily in the gestation period and in the hairiness, which parallel bearlike qualities.)

Maria's story is the only one in which the girl kills her mother as well as her brothers, but I have no explanation for this. The detailing of sibling avoidance is of interest since one of the most traumatic events of Maria's whole life was an occasion when she had to speak directly to her older brother.

Another point in which Maria shows relatively great interest is the clothing that the mother must make for her daughter and grandchildren. Again, this may be simply an aspect of the female point of view, since all the stories told by women (Versions 9, 10, and 11) specify the clothing and add a detail or two about it. By contrast, Version 1, told by an Inland Tlingit man, substitutes a request for snowshoes rather than clothing; Version 2, also by an Inland Tlingit man, omits any requests. Versions 4, 5, 6, and 7, which do include the request for clothing, are all by Southern Tutchone men who, as Athabascans, may share with the women the cultural interest in clothing mentioned in the previous section, but only Version 7 specifies much about the nature of the clothing.

In many other ways Version 7, told by an elderly Southern Tutchone man, Charley Stevens, contrasts rather sharply with Version 3. Some of the contrast surely stems from Charley's severely limited control of English. In fact I could not even follow the beginning of the story well enough to get it down, and, as with some of the other versions, I have sometimes had to guess what Charley meant when I tried to put his fractured English into basic English. But language alone does not account for all the differences in emphasis between Versions 3 and 7.

In the first place, Charley apparently said nothing about the girl insulting the bear excrement. I do not think I missed this at the beginning of his story, whatever he was trying to say. Perhaps this omission was because he was talking to a white female whom he did not know particularly well at that point and was simply displaying an expectable reticence about a delicate subject. On the other hand, all other narrators but one man (Version 5) and an elderly woman (Version 9) do include the episode, and I did not actually get the beginning of Version 5 either.

But what Charley does make a great point of, is the fact that the girl's brothers killed their own brother-in-law. I do not think that it was a mere coincidence that Charley was at the time deeply at odds with the two brothers-in-law who lived in the settlement with him, although he was nevertheless quite dependent upon them for his livelihood. He felt that they were not living up to their obligations to him,

and the matter was much on his mind, as his various other comments during the winter made clear.

Another thing that was much on his mind was the relationship between humans and animals. Charley was in poor health, crippled by rheumatism and almost unable to see. In his early life, he had been a formidable bear hunter, and he firmly believed that his rheumatism was the result of having killed too many bears and wolves and of having failed to carry out all the prescribed ritual observances. In a number of other ways he gave evidence that he was suffering from guilt over his past relationships with the animal world. It seems quite likely that this was the reason that he, more than any other narrator, developed the point that the brothers-in-law had to make peace with the bear.

Version 9 was told by Maggy Jim, an elderly Southern Tutchone woman who often claimed she could not speak any English at all, and I think that the sparseness of the story is definitely related to the fact that she really was unsure of her command of English. Like some of the other old people, she can remember the arrival of the first whites in the area, but she has not had quite so much to do with them, and in many ways she is less acculturated than some of her contemporaries. Also, she was just beginning to know me well. She told me the story as a kind of present, I believe, and interspersed the English with a good deal of native phrasing. In so far as she tried to elaborate any one point, it is the part about the clothing of the girl and the children.

Version 11 was likewise told at my request, on my third visit to a middle-aged Indian woman, Lily, who is married to a white man. Her mother was a Southern Tutchone, and her father was a Copper River Atna who had come into the Burwash Landing country of the Southern Tutchone and stayed to marry. Unfortunately I asked for the story rather late in the day, and I think that Lily cut it somewhat short because she was afraid that her husband would soon come home and find no supper ready. Still, she told it with a verve and detail that contrast with Maggy's efforts. Unlike Maggy, she made quite a point of the opening episode in which the girl insults the bear excrement, perhaps because she felt able to handle the English and also was less inhibited by the presence of a white woman.

Although it may seem a small detail, in her version the girl has three rather than two children. I believe that this is because she learned the story from her father. Among the Atna, 3 and 6 are the ritual numbers rather than 2, 4, or 8 of the Tlingit and Tlingit-influenced Southern Tutchone. The only other version in which there are three children (Version 10) was told by a woman whose father was from the upper Tanana area adjacent to the Atna.

Conclusions

Even if the limited comments above suggest that some of the varying versions of a story can be linked rather specifically to the particular circumstances of the story-tellers—what of it? One cannot ever hope to have all the life histories of all the people in a society who tell stories. There is a limit to the mountain of details which one can pile up and examine, and there never will be unanimous agreement on how to interpret them. On the other hand if no effort is made to collect at least five or six versions of a given tale, and if no attempt is made to try to explain why they vary, I do not know how some of the fundamental patternings of a given body of literature will ever be obtained. Even now I am unable to state with absolute confidence that Yukon narrators are allowed considerable freedom in the literary treatment of the stories they tell, although I strongly suspect this to be the case.

I do however feel sure that the way in which this particular story structures some key concerns of the Yukon Indians places it among their literary masterpieces. Just as the Sumerians made an enduring tale of the humanizing of Enkidu, the "Wild Man," so have the Yukon Indians and their neighbours made a moving story of the dehumanizing of the girl who married a bear.