

**Men  
and Bears:  
Morphology  
of the Wild**

**edited by  
Enrico Comba  
and  
Daniele Ormezzano**

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The time of Carnival represents a “wild” time at the end of winter and pointing to the beginning of a new season. It is characterized by the irruption of border figures, animal masks, characters which recall the world of the dead and which bring within themselves the germ of a vital force, of the energy that produces the reawakening of nature and announces the growth and fertility of the new crops. This wild domain shows itself under the shapes of a contiguity between human and animal: the costumes, the masks, refer to a world in which the characteristics of the human and those of the animal are fused and intertwined. Among these figures, in particular, emerge those of the Wild Man, the human being who takes on animal-like attributes and aspects, and of the Bear, the animal that, more than all the others, gets as close as possible to the human and seems to reflect a deformed image of it. Such symbolic images come from far off times and places to tell a story that belongs to our common origins. The bear assumes attributes and functions alike in very different cultural contexts, such as the Sámi of Finland or North-American hunter-gatherers, and represents a boundary between the world of nature and the human world, between the domain of animals and the difficult construction of humanity: a process continued for centuries, perhaps millennia, and which cannot still be said complete.

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## Introduction

Enrico Comba and Daniele Ormezzano

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The texts collected in this volume draw inspiration from the International Congress which was held on February 7, 2012 at the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences in Turin, with the title: “Liberiamo l’orso: i carnevali europei tra addomesticamento e selvaticità (Let’s the bear free: European Carnivals between domestication and wildness)”.

In that occasion, the Museum showed in its rooms the third edition of the exhibition “Dèi selvatici: i Carnevali tradizionali del Piemonte (Wild Gods: the traditional Carnivals in Piedmont)”, edited by Piercarlo Grimaldi and Luciano Nattino. This exhibition had the purpose to highlight the landscape of mythical figures which animate the traditional Carnivals, among which there are many animal or semi-animal figures: bears, wolves, wild men. Such manifestations of folk culture have been subjected in the course of time to innumerable transformations: some have disappeared, others have been modified, still others have been brought back to life after several years. This is the case with the Carnival of Lajetto, a little village near Condove in the Susa Valley, where the Carnival feast has been resumed and re-activated after a long interruption of more than fifty years, and has been documented in detail in the exhibition in Turin.

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The time of Carnival represents the “wild” moment of the end of winter and the beginning of a new season. It is a moment characterized by the irruption of figures of the margin, animal-masks, characters which recall the world of the dead and which bring with them the germ of vital force, the energy which produces the awakening of nature and foretells the growth and fertility of the harvest. Their breaking in the ordained world of the village determines the temporary abolition of the norms, of the boundaries, and of the customs that characterize the course of the everyday life. They leave free space to transgression, reversal, laughing and to the rediscovering of an otherness that takes the form of ancient mythic figures situated on the borders of the human. Such a wild world presents itself in a way that reveals a contiguity between man and animal: the disguises, the masks, allude to a world in which the properties of the human and of the animal get confused and intertwined. Among these figures, in particular, stand out those of the Wild Man, a human being who assumes attributes and aspects of the animal domain, and of the Bear, the animal that above all others resembles man and seems to reflect a transformed human image. These figures are so similar that in many traditional Carnivals it is difficult to distinguish whether the masked personage is a humanlike Bear or a Wild Man with feral features.

The peasant communities throughout Europe share the manifestation of folk ceremonials that take place during the “feasts” marking and emphasizing the fundamental steps in the flowing of the seasons and establishing a correlation between rhythms of nature and the time of individual and social existence. Such fundamental moments allow to rediscover familiar roots, to rebuild communities, produce social relationships, reconnecting threads of forgotten traditions, bringing to the surface a sense of membership, of participation, the desire of an unconditioned commitment, the drive to escape from the rigid rationality of everyday life. The rebirth of the feast which is happening in the last decades, in the classic places of its former flowering (the countryside and the mountains) as well as in the urban areas themselves, allows contemporaneous humankind to partially escape to the effects of globalization, nearly extended to all latitudes, and to regain elements of the past made by affective and

communitarian relationships, novel rhythms and spaces, by this time foreign to contemporary life.

The February meeting has undertaken to put in dialogue the “bears” and “wild men” of the Finnish folk culture (where it is yet possible to meet actually a bear in nature) with those of Piedmont (where their record is preserved in the feasts of a number of places). They are symbolic figures which come from far away times and places to recount something that belongs to a common origin, figures which represent the boundary between the natural world and the world of humans, between animals and the tiresome building of humankind. This latter construction is a process that persisted for centuries, perhaps for millennia, and which cannot be still considered accomplished.

From a naturalistic point of view the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), an animal whose scientific name which was ascribed to it by Linnaeus recovers both its Greek and its Latin denominations, is the result of the evolution of a group of carnivores of the Fissipedia suborder that during the Miocene, about 20 million years ago, gave birth to several forms which lived in Europe. This animal has had a preeminent position in European nature, because it was the biggest terrestrial mammal and its teeth, if not its very food habits, make it the biggest of the carnivores. Some of the characteristics of its plantigrade stance and above all its capacity to stand erect on its hind legs, using the front paws to take food or as defense weapons, has determined that the peoples that could observe bears with more frequency developed a peculiar consideration of this animal, which is frequently conceived as a sort of transition between man and animal. The contribution by Daniele Ormezzano to this volume helps to better understanding the bear in its naturalistic and behavioral features, as well as the connection which links it to its immediate predecessor, the cave bear, once common inhabitant of the Alpine countries.

The importance of the bear in European Carnival traditions, with particular focus on Western Piedmont, is widely documented in the contribution by Caterina Agus, from which the peculiar vitality of these feasts emerges. They have been able not only to survive, but to regenerate themselves and to reappear in contemporaneous times, continu-

ing to solicit the interest and the commitment of new generations of the inhabitants of the Alpine valleys.

In an ample work, which combines the results of many preceding researches, Rosalyn M. Frank explores the relationship between the bear feasts, appearing in several Carnivals and folk traditions all through Europe, and some specific figures of curers. Significantly, the term attributed to these personages is the same which designates the person, half-human and half-animal, that appears in the Carnival ceremonies and that oftentimes is the protagonist of a pantomime which alludes to death and rebirth. The same term (Hamalau in the Basque Country) reappears in the popular tales, where it designates the subject of a widespread tale in which a child, born from the intercourse between a woman and a bear, shows hybrid features, both human and animal. The Author's hypothesis is that these traditions belong to a very ancient cultural substratum and testify the persistence of a conception according to which the bears are the ancestors of the human beings.

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Juha Pentikäinen adds an important documentation about the bear cult among the Sámi, the last hunting people of Northern Europe. Among them, the bear hunt was not significant in terms of food economy, but to hunt the bear and to consume its meat had a particular ritual and cultic meaning. The bear feast fortified the hunters, renewed the value system linked to hunting and strengthened the community spirit. They believed that the killed bear, once come to the spirit land, told to the other animals how a great honor would be to be killed and feasted by humans. Thus, the bears' will to continue to be born again on earth was confirmed, so that they could offer themselves to humans and to be hunted by them. The cult of the bear constituted a crucial phase in the continuous cycle of death and rebirth, of alternation between the human world and the world of the spirits, in which the bear played a symbolic and ritual role of central importance.

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Analogously, for the peoples of Finland and Carelia, the bear hunt, described and analyzed by Vesa-Matteei Piludu, took on the characteristics of a voyage in Another World, at the same time mysterious and dangerous, of which many traces remain in the folk songs and traditions. The bear, again, was regarded as an outstanding being, with semi-



human features and supernatural qualities, associated with the guardian spirits of the forest, who were represented in female form, as the guardians and mothers of the bear.

Among the Native peoples of America, too, as discussed by Enrico Comba, the bear assumed a particularly meaningful function, as the main animal which was associated with the shaman. The bear was regarded as the instructor of the future shaman and transmitted his knowledge to him or her. Its winter hibernation was interpreted as analogous to the experience of death and rebirth which the initiate had to suffer. In a world characterized by continued metamorphosis and change, as was the cosmos according to the Native cultures, the shaman was a person able to cross the different plans of reality and to assume several shapes, taking advantage of the power owned by non-human beings. That is why the shaman took often the aspect of a bear, an animal which, from various points of view, was situated at the boundary between humankind and animal kind.

Finally, the work by Margherita Amateis puts into a strict connection the three main mythical figures of the European imaginary: the Bear, the Wild Man and the Fool. Though apparently diverse, these mythic personages reveal several analogies and overlaps, showing the representation of the different declinations of the same element. What is at the margins of the human world shows a contiguity between man and animals, between living and dead, between inhabited places and wilderness, between the human world and the world of trees. These relationships are particularly evident through a iconographic analysis which permits to outline a series of correlations between the attributes and characteristics with which these figures are represented, from the Middle Ages until the thresholds of the Modern Age. A comparative analysis shows the presence of various analogies between these characters of the European imaginary and other figures belonging to the cultural universe of the Native Americans, thus suggesting a cross-cultural view of themes and images that goes beyond the habitual circumscribed contexts into which historical and ethnographical research is usually confined.

In conclusion, the present volume collects a number of reflections, investigations and theoretical proposals that include a wide spectrum of themes, thus permitting to de-

sign a number of perspectives that pass through different geographical areas and separated historical moments. This could be regarded as the confirmation of the persistent capacity of the bear to suggest the possibility of crossing the borders, upsetting the usual categories and offering to men the opportunity to observe themselves in the reflected image of a worrying similarity and at the same time an undeniable otherness.

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## Brown bears and cave bears, ancient inhabitants of the Alps

Daniele Ormezzano

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This chapter is based on a talk presented at the seminar entitled “Freeing the Bear. The Tame and the Wild in European Carnivals” held on February 7, 2013 at the Regional Museum of Natural History in Torino. It thus retains the same title and general structure.

The fact that most of the presentations at the seminar were anthropological suggested taking a naturalistic approach to the two types of bear – the brown bear and the cave bear – that once lived in our section of the Alpine region, emphasizing the physical and behavioral traits that may have given rise to some of the themes discussed by the other speakers.

A few words are also in order regarding the title, and to its reference to “ancient inhabitants” in particular. Such a designation is obviously appropriate for the cave bear, but though the brown bear lives on, today’s bears have been very recently reintroduced, and unless we count a very few disputed sightings, none have yet made it to the Western Alps. We must thus look to the historical data for evidence of a presence that has had such a profound influence on the human populations and their beliefs about the bear that the anthropologists described to us in the seminar.

## Defining bears

We will now take a closer look at this large mammal with thick brown fur, long muzzle, round ears, bulky body and “clumsy” gait.

### The name

It was 1758 when Karl von Linné, or *Carolus Linnaeus*, entered the brown bear under the heading *Ferae* in the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae*, thus creating the current scientific name *Ursus arctos*.

In so doing, Linnaeus chose to join the Latin and Greek terms, almost as if to emphasize that he was dealing here with the true, quintessential bear.

A few years later, in 1794, the German student Johann Christian Rosenmüller took his degree in Leipzig with a dissertation prolixly entitled *Quaedam de ossibus fossilibus animalis cuiusdam, historiam eius et cognitionem accuratorem illustrantia. Amplissimi philosophorum ordinis auctoritate A.D. 22 Octobris. H.L.Q.C. 1794. Ad disputandum proposuit Ioannes Christianus Rosenmueller Hessberga-Francus, LL. AA. M. in Theatro anatomico Lipsiensi Prosector assumpto socio Ioanne Christiano Augusto Heinroth Lips. Med. Stud.*, which in English would be: Some information about the fossil bones of an animal, illustrating the history and rather accurate knowledge of the same. With the authorization of the Most Illustrious Order of Philosophers, proposed for discussion on the appointed day of October 22, 1794 at the habitual time and place by John Christian Rosenmueller of Frankish Hessberg, prosecutor in the anatomical theater of Leipzig, with the assistance of John Christian Augustus Heinroth, medical student in Leipzig. In this dissertation, Rosenmüller used the binomial Linnaean system to name his subject: *Ursus spelaeus*, the cave bear.

These were the fundamental steps, the birth of the terms that the scientific world still uses today to designate these two bears.

For a better understanding of what they mean, we must go far back into the past, to the time when the “ancestors” of today’s languages were spoken. The Indo-European root *rks* of the Sanskrit *ṛkṣa* would appear to be the word from which both of the names used by Linnaeus stem.

The common names, on the other hand, vary more

widely, and in addition to those derived from *arctos* and *ursus*, the Germanic and Northern European world gives us *bear*, *bär*, *björn*, *björn*, all of which carry the meaning of “bright” as well as “brown”. Clearly, these are both correlated with the characteristics of the bear’s coat. We also find “non-names” being used to denote the bear. The language of our Finnish friends often employs phrases without naming the bear directly. One such is the “golden king of the forest” taken from an incantation and used by Juha Pentikäinen as the title of one of his books. The Slavic world does likewise, referring to the bear’s fondness for honey. Such forms presumably arise because of a taboo against naming the animal directly.

### Appearance and dimensions

Though the bear’s appearance is so familiar that it would hardly seem necessary to describe it, a few figures will help us quantify the fact that it is Europe’s largest land carnivore, and thus a symbol of strength that was once known as the king of beasts.

The brown bear shows a marked sexual dimorphism, with the males being much larger than the females. According to data provided by the Adamello–Brenta Park, sizes range from 130 to 250 centimeters in length, with a shoulder height of 75–120 cm and a weight of 50 to 150 kilograms for females and 70 to 300 for males. As we go further north or east, the dimensions increase, and the bears of the Eastern Alps weigh 350 to 400 kilograms and stand 2.5 meters tall on their hind legs. Size drops as we move south, and the Marsican brown bear, considered a subspecies (*Ursus arctos marsicanus* Altobello, 1921), is decidedly smaller, with males weighing 100–150 kilograms and reaching a height on the hind legs of 150–180 centimeters.

The largest forms of *Ursus arctos* are those of Kodiak Island, in the Alaskan Gulf archipelago of the same name (USA), which stand up 3 meters tall on their hind legs. Some Kodiak brown bears in captivity weigh over 1000 kilograms.

Cave bears also showed the same pronounced sexual dimorphism but were much larger than most *Ursus arctos*, as they were comparable in size to the Kodiak giants.

## Systematics

As we know, bears are mammals, but some details should be given concerning their position within this large class.

Brown bears are Carnivores, though plants figure largely in their diet. Though their skeletons and teeth are not very close to those of what we regard as typical carnivores like lions or ordinary house cats, there are certain telling details: the large upper and lower canines, for example, or the powerful claws.

Taxonomically, bears belong to:

order **Carnivora**,  
    infraorder **Ursoidea**,  
        superfamily **Ursoidea**,  
            family **Ursidae**,  
                subfamily **Ursinae**  
                    genus *Ursus*  
                        species *spelaeus* and *arctos*

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Some forms of Carnivora have adapted to diets that are less reliant on meat, or even completely herbivorous. In this case, the animals are heavier, plantigrade and have a dentition that is better suited to crushing. However, even these forms have two typical teeth – the fourth maxillary premolar and the first mandibular molar – that perform a shearing function and are thus called carnassial teeth, though they differ significantly from similar structures in the Felidae. In general, the premolars and molars are bunodont, or in other words, the crowns have flat occlusal or masticatory surfaces with rounded cusps and are better adapted to crushing than to shearing.

### *Ursidae*

The first true ursids appear in the Upper Eocene, around 35 million years ago. They are medium-sized animals that have not yet reached the dimensions typical of bears, and the fact that they are ancestors of this group can be seen from the teeth, where the form described above begins to predominate. The molars have a broader masticatory surface with smaller cusps, along with accessory cuspids and,

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at the rear, a wide talonid that becomes the largest part of the tooth.

### *Ursus*

In the Pleistocene, two and a half million years ago, Eurasian bears evolve in two directions, two phyletic lines.

One is the Asian line that leads to *U. arctos*, maintains an omnivorous diet, and entered Europe in the late Pleistocene; the other, with *U. deningeri*, increases in size and becomes ever more strictly herbivorous, culminating in *U. spelaeus*.

In Italy, the first signs of the brown bear are in the Galerian, dated to around 458,000 years ago. This was a colder, drier period, and *U. arctos* lived alongside *U. deningeri*.

A little clarification is also in order concerning the characteristics of these animals' skeletons. As our knowledge of fossil forms comes entirely from the parts that are preserved, we cannot make comparisons on the basis of genetic studies of the DNA extracted from the skin and other soft tissues such as the muscles, all of which decay. Hence the importance of non-decaying skeletal parts, and the teeth in particular, as their crowns are coated with one of the hardest and most wear-resistant materials in nature: enamel. Much of the systematics of fossil forms thus hinges on tooth morphology. For both bears, this is expressed by the dental formula I 3/3, C 1/1, P 4/4, M 2/3, where the letters designate incisors, canines, premolars and molars respectively, and the numbers indicate the quantity in the maxillary and mandibular arches. Where the two species differ is in the size: the cave bear's molars are decidedly larger. There is a diastema between I 3 and C and another between C and P1 and between the upper premolars.

### *Ursus spelaeus*

As we have seen, the fossil forms are differentiated on the basis of tooth morphology, and the number of cusps on the premolars' masticatory surface in particular. In general, we can say that there is a gradual transformation, with the masticatory surface increasing in size and becoming flatter. Over time, the "spelaeus" group has alternated between being considered as a single species, as different species, or as several species with distinct subspecies. The latter tendency has predominated in recent years. Scholars, Gernot Rabe-

der in particular, have identified new taxa in the Eastern Alps after the discovery of fossil forms in the Conturines cave in Alta Badia.

### *Ursus arctos*

Though recent studies of genetic material indicate that different groups are more or less distantly related, the forms of the Alpine region – as imports from the Slavic world – would appear to belong to a genetically homogeneous group.

### **Color**

Despite its name, in reality the brown bear's color varies widely, and even more so if we compare the different forms distributed around the world. This variability has led scholars, particularly in the past, to assign a whole series of alternative names to the bear: *albus*, *candescens*, *isabellinus*, *cinereus*, ..., *niger*.

Only a few specimens can be truly regarded as brown, and finding a single term that would cover the bears' entire range from jet black to off-white or yellowish is far from easy. Moreover, adult bears' coloring varies not only in the course of the year, but also from place to place on the animal: in general, the paws are the darkest part of the body and the back is the lightest. Entirely black forms are rather rare, and some early scholars such as Buffon and Cuvier distinguished between black and brown bears. Considering differences in size as well as in color, they believed them to be two distinct forms, two varieties: the black variety being larger and gentler in disposition, the other smaller and very ferocious. The former was also called the grass or ant bear, the latter the honey or horse bear

Brown bears are often pictured with fairly light fur tipped with grey. This is not the European brown bear, but the American grizzly, whose name – a garbling of the French *gris* for grey – derives from this coloring, bringing us back to the time when the influence of the French crown and language was widespread in North America. The fact that the North American black bear (*Ursus americanus*) can also be a very light honey color in some parts of its range is also a source of confusion.

## Past and present distribution

*Ursus deningeri* and the cave bear, *Ursus spelaeus*, were the first bears to inhabit the Alps. Many caves, from Liguria to the Karst plateau above Trieste, have provided a wealth of their fossil remains. The cave bear was the more numerous of the two species, and was significantly larger than the modern brown bear.

The caves of the Alpine region show signs of human use, but by contrast with France, no cave paintings have been found. Among the stupendous works that adorn the French caves, from Lascaux to the Chauvet-Pont d'Arc Cave in the Ardèche, depictions of bears are as numerous as they are stunning. The oldest paintings at Chauvet have been dated to around 36,000 years ago.

The cave bear, as its name suggests, is associated with the phenomenon that produced these and similar caves over the millennia, and which requires carbonate rocks such as limestone. Karstification, as the phenomenon is known, occurs when carbonates are dissolved and redeposited. In Piemonte, karstic areas are found in the Val Sesia and Monfenera, Sambughetto in the Valle Strona, and in the province of Cuneo with the sequence that starts from the Rio Martino cave on the slopes of Monviso, drops towards Liguria and its Grotte del Bandito caves, and then continues in the area surrounding Mondovì.

From the nineteenth century onwards, these caves have yielded large quantities of fossilized bear bones that are now housed in many of Piemonte's museums – including the one hosting the seminar where this presentation was first delivered – thanks in no small measure to the efforts of such noteworthy scholars from the University of Torino as Luigi Bellardi, Giorgio Spezia and Federico Sacco.

The cave bear remains from the Grotta del Bandito have been dated to a period between 61,000 and 29,000 years ago.

The oldest brown bear remains in Piemonte, on the other hand, date to around 9,500 years ago and were found in a cave located in the Briga Alta area of the Valle Tanaro; the Abisso Armaduk.

Today, we associate the brown bear with mountainous areas, isolated valleys far from inhabited areas, but in the past the animal lived in the lowlands and hills. The broad

forests that covered the Po valley until the late Middle Ages were ideal habitat for bears.

Studies have indicated that the Langhe, Monferrato, Canavese and Torino areas, as well as those around Cuneo and Asti, were heavily forested and that, as Francesco Panero tells us “at least nine forests stretched across the plains and the hills that run from the Canavese to the Novarese, and extend from the Po as far as the Biella hills”. Over time, the need for firewood and timber for construction and manufacturing, as well as the acreage cleared for farmland and pasture, drastically reduced the region’s forests, and today only a few areas of the Po Valley retain their former appearance. It should also be noted that the spread of invasive non-native trees, principally the black locust or *Robinia pseudoacacia*, has further disrupted the woodland panorama, forever altering what little remains of the lowland forest that once covered the plain.

For the modern traveler in the Alps, finding a bear on one’s path is still rare, despite efforts at repopulation. The Alps, in fact, have a level of human activity that is far different from that familiar to our Finnish friends, for whom running into a bear is still quite likely. At the edge of the Asian bear’s range, Finland abounds with bears, whose population is estimated at around 30,000.

In Italy, in addition to a relatively stable population of around 60 Marsican bears, approximately 45 to 50 brown bears currently live in the Adamello-Brenta Park. For the most part, they are recent or very recent transplants from the Balkans. The valley areas around Adamello were the home of the last native Italian bears in the Alps.

In many ways, the rather small number of brown bears in Italy is at odds with the testimony offered by the other speakers at the seminar. We must not forget, however, that bears were plentiful in the Alpine region for much of its history, and records from the eighteenth century or even later often mention the killing of the last bear in a given area.

Place names also provide evidence of the bear’s former range.

The bear’s presence in here in Piemonte is well documented. Bears still lived in the Lanzo valleys, for instance, in comparatively recent times, as it would appear that the last one was killed in 1703. The curtain thus fell on a scene

that had once been much livelier, if we consider that hunters killed 42 bears in the years from 1367 to 1370. In these areas, it was customary to give part of the slain animal to the feudal lord of the place or his representative, the castellan for example. In Mezzenile and Ceres, the head was given, in Usseglio the shoulder, in Quassolo six ribs, and in Lemie a half quarter. The historian Cibrario writes of the hunts of the Dukes of Savoia, Emanuele Filiberto and Carlo Emanuele II. This information is given in the records of the Castellany of Lanzo and of other townships, especially in the Viù valleys and in Val d'Ala. Here too, several place names remind us that bears were once found in the region: Vallone dell'Orsiera, for example.

In the Biella area, records specify the parts of the bear to be given to the bishop of Vercelli, while the bear's presence is also reflected in the coats of arms of a number of towns, including Biella itself, Andorno and the old township of Mosso, as well as that of the Province of Biella.

The Val Susa and the valleys around Pinerolo also have many place names that are reminiscent of bears, starting with Orsiera, the mountain watershed between the two areas.

The Cuneo and Mondovì areas also have records indicating which parts of the bears killed in hunts are to be given to feudal lords like the Marchese di Saluzzo or bishops such as that of Asti, as well as many place names memorializing bears.

As we move eastwards, the traces left by bears' historical presence increase, and many studies – including recent ones conducted during reintroduction efforts, provide a good understanding of the animals' former range.

### **The upright posture**

One of the characteristics that have contributed most to the view of the bear as human-like is its ability to stand on its hind legs. Nevertheless, many students of bears' behavior say that this is something they do quite rarely, though bear attacks can involve an upright stage. In general, though, standing tends to indicate curiosity rather than aggressiveness, at least among wild bears. For the tamed animals used by bear trainers, it is very common.

Among carnivores, there are two forms of locomotion

(and thus two types of limb morphology: plantigrade and digitigrade. Plantigrade locomotion is found in raccoons and in some mustelids and viverrids. With this form of locomotion, the long bones – humerus, femur, radius, ulna and the tibia and fibula – are more robust than their counterparts in plantigrades. This characteristic is often very pronounced, and the distal portion of these bones is generally very thick and heavy compared to the central portion, or diaphysis.

A more detailed examination paying particular attention to the plantar cushions, however, shows that only the bear's hind limbs are well adapted for plantigrade locomotion, while the forelimb exhibits somewhat plantigrade features.

The morphology of the hind leg, with the heel that rests squarely on the ground, enables the animal to assume a fairly stable upright position. Looking carefully at the images of the hind leg, we can see that the femur is never fully vertical as in humans, but always remains at an angle with respect to the ground.

### **Licking the bear into shape**

Another theme that has made a profound impression on man's imagination is that of the bear's birth and the characteristics of the newborn bear. From Aristotle to the medieval bestiaries, for instance, the belief was handed down that bear cubs are born as formless lumps, and their mother then licks them into shape. This belief is reflected in the Italian and French folk expression “a badly licked bear” to indicate an awkward or uncouth person.

In all likelihood this “legend” has its roots in the extremely small size of the cubs at the time of birth, which usually takes place in January/February, during the hibernation period. Eyes closed and completely hairless, the cubs weigh no more than two or three hundred grams. The mother bear's habit of licking her cubs frequently may also have contributed. That this was known was due to the old – and rather bloodthirsty – practice of hunting bears during hibernation, finding the den with dogs, and then digging and dragging the animal out.

### **Hungry as a bear**

The period just before hibernation is crucial for bears. The need to build up the fat reserves that will enable them to

make it through to spring still in good health means that they must find massive amounts of nourishing food. They thus gorge on everything they can find, in a process called hyperphagia that increases their body weight by 30 to 40%.

Around 60% of the brown bear's diet consists of vegetable matter: hazelnuts and various fruits, including apples, cherries, plums, grapes, rosehips and blueberries. A further 6% of the bear's intake consists of insects, chiefly ants, and other sources of animal protein.

This diet varies in the course of the year, with meat consumption peaking in the spring, upon awakening from hibernation, and in summer. This is also true of honey.

### **The raging bear**

The bear's unpredictable character and sudden furies, especially at the approach of a human, have made it a byword for rage. Thus, depictions of the seven deadly sins – in Piemonte, for example, sometimes show wrath mounted on a bear.

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### **Breaking wind**

The bear, supposedly, breaks wind at the advent of spring. During hibernation, in fact, the bear's intestinal tract is blocked by a plug consisting of epithelial cells sloughed off the intestinal lining, mucus, hair and feces. The bears' forceful expelling of this plug on waking from hibernation is at the basis of many of the themes that have been taken up by folklore, such as seasonal rebirth from the world of the dead, the wind and many more.

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### **Bears and dragons**

If, as we have seen, the idea of the bear is ancient, that of the cave bear is fairly recent. The first studies comparing the skeletal remains found in caves with modern bears appeared only in the mid-eighteenth century. Before then, these finds had fueled beliefs in fantastic beings, dragons in particular. Traces of this interpretation can be seen in many of the place names given to caves: Buco or Tana del Drago on the Italian side of the Alps, Drachenhöhle bei Mixnitz in Austria, or the Swiss Drachenloch – famous as the site of the skull findings described by Emil Bächler, who interpreted them as evidence of a bear cult – as well as other caves in

the Germanic linguistic area. In considering this connection between bears and dragons, we must also consider what the first explorers must have felt as they saw these chalky white bones spread across the brick red silt of the cave floor, illuminated only by their guttering torches. Clearly, only one explanation was possible. All these signs of ferocity must have been left by some fearsome beast: the dragon.

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## Time of the bear, the bear in time

Caterina Agus

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### The bear: lunar, wild, mythical

Animal masquerades are a major feature of carnival time, as their public appearance in the community predicts the course the new agrarian year will take, and suggests the strategy that the peasant should adopt in the fields. From time immemorial, the calendar of rural Piemonte has been marked with a complex series of ceremonial customs associated with the earth's reawakening. In this world, the moon was the most important arbiter of traditional rhythms, as it made it possible to tell well in advance what the coming year would be like, and plan farm work accordingly.

Every year, the carnival bear went into hibernation on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November – Martinmas – an event that brought on the approach of winter. The bear's reawakening was associated with the appearance of the winter moon heralding Easter: on this night, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, the bear emerged from his den to check the heavenly body's position. And depending on the phase of the moon, he decided whether to go back to sleep or come out of his den for good.

According to a proverb common to many areas, if the bear wakes to a dark sky – a new moon – he will leave his

den and spring will be quick to start, but if the sky is lit by a full moon, he will go back to sleep for another forty days and spring will have to wait. Year by year, the peasant was thus reminded of how to interpret the moon's position, and thus know whether a late Easter would bode well for the crops, or an early Easter would mean a lean year.

The reason the bear has risen to be the predictor of spring is to be sought in his habit of passing the winter underground. According to the ethno-folklorist Claude Gaignebet (1974), all animals whose reappearance or emergence from hibernation is linked to the coming of spring have been seen as psychopomps, conductors of souls in their journey. The bear is thus privy to the world of the dead and the chthonic powers, and his hibernation can be interpreted as seasonal state of near-death from which the animal is reborn, a vanquisher of death.

This moment of the year when the forces of chaos burst through into the everyday, poised between the death and the rebirth of nature, was viewed with apprehension by the rural communities of the past, who believed that the hosts of the dead would return and mix with the living: the custom of masquerading as these hordes of souls reflects a familiar idea, viz., that to communicate with the dead, one must become – at least temporarily – one of them.

In the words of Alfredo Cattabiani: “the masked figures [...] represent the epiphany of the dead who rise from the netherworld and blend with the living in the general crush: terrifying and vital, they attack, they frighten, groping and pawing, snaring, seizing and carrying away, they caper like madmen and buffoons while the deafening clangor suggests the explosion of the old cosmos, the old year. These figures are in reality the epiphany of all-renewing Death [...]” (2003, p. 147).

Indisputably, there is a link between the festival of the bear and Candlemas: the animal awakening from his winter sleep represents the rebirth of nature, defeating winter's chill.

The bear festivals we will discuss in the following pages would appear to number among the rites that, by overturning the established order of things, symbolize the periodic upwelling of primordial chaos, followed by a cosmic regen-

eration in the shape of the exorcizing and expulsion of the community's animal figure, as the personification of winter.

### **The Church, the saints and the bear**

Since the Middle Ages, the Church's attitude towards the bear has been complex and contradictory. At times, the bear appears as God's chosen instrument for protecting His servants: certain saints, including Bernard of Mentone, who expelled the Devil from the two Alpine hills from which he takes his name, are depicted together with a bear carrying a club.

Nevertheless, the cases where the bear meekly serves a saint, far from reflecting a favorable view of the animal, seem to refer to the idea of a victory of Good (in the person of the saint) that has reduced Evil (the bear/devil) to subservience. From the Middle Ages onwards, in fact, the Church worked to demonize the bear and thus appropriate one of pre-Christian folklore's most significant and unwieldy figures.

From the fourteenth century, the bear appears in Christian iconography as a symbol of some of the gravest capital sins, and his image is used to represent Vice opposing the Virtues, or is included – and demonized – in certain forms of liturgical theater, as is the case of the Passion Play of Sordevolo (BI) which “until 1934 featured a man disguised as a bear to symbolize the chief of the devils” (Carénini, 2003).

In examining hagiographic sources, it is impossible not to notice the bear's important links with a number of saints, in a lavish array of episodes of evident symbolic meaning. The animal's symbology is often used to express moral or philosophical qualities, or to illustrate the vices and the deadly sins.

In this connection, it seems that during the periods in which the main ursine ceremonies were held – festivities announcing the bear's wakening from hibernation as a metaphor for the coming of spring – the Church chose to establish a large number of Christian holy days, and feast days of saints associated in some way with bears in particular.

To list a few examples: Saint Remaculus (September 3), Magnus of Füssen (September 6), Corbinian (September 8), Euphemia (September 16), Lambert (September 17), Richardis (September 18), Florentius (September 22), Thecla of

Iconium (September 23), Ghislain (October 9), Gallus (October 16), Martin (November 11), Columban (November 23), Eligius (December 1), Columba of Sens (December 31), Vincentian of Tulle (January 2), Romedius (January 15), Valerius (January 29), Blaise (February 3), and Valentine (February 14).

In many parts of Europe, it was believed that the bear came out of hibernation on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, and the days were marked by bear masquerades, dances and games celebrating the end of winter.

The Church attempted to bolster its position by co-opting February 1<sup>st</sup> as the feast of Saint Brigid, patroness of Ireland and Christianized image of the Celtic Mother Goddess, and February 2<sup>nd</sup> as the feast of Presentation of Christ in the Temple and later as the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This, however, was not enough: the bear's emergence from hibernation was also when the sun and the light returned. For that reason, the festivities were often accompanied by bonfires to ensure good fortune and ritual processions of men carrying flaming torches. In the fifth century, seeking to channel these practices in a Christian direction, Pope Gelasius I instituted the feast of the candles. In France, however, where the memory of the bear festival was still very much alive, the *fešta candellarum* was often called "Candelorsa" from the twelve to the eighteenth century.

### **The bear and the carnival tradition in Piemonte**

Starting in the 1970s and 80s, Piemonte saw a resumption and reinvention of the traditional ceremonies that had been shelved or abandoned as a result of the socioeconomic and cultural changes that industrialization and urban sprawl had brought to the region's countryside. Field studies carried out in the Nineties<sup>1</sup> found that local citizens' groups have given new life to popular traditions that were believed

1. The first extensive study of the distribution of bear masquerades in Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta was conducted by Piercarlo Grimaldi (1996), who identified 37 bear figures, of which 11 were still in use and 16 were not. Further studies carried out by Franco Castelli found other bear figures that were formerly in use in the Monferrato hills and the Alessandria area, while a 2007 survey of the festival scene in Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta conducted by a research group coordinated by Gian Luigi Bravo counted around fifty bear figures, of which 20 were in current use.

lost. Over the years, practices associated with the figure of the bear have been revived in a number of localities, thanks in no small measure to the research promoted by the Piemonte regional administration's protected area planning and ecomuseum department, which works closely with the Casa degli Alfieri popular theater cooperative.

This research has led to several important offshoots, the first being the *Rinselvaticizzare il Piemonte*, (Rewilding Piemonte) project, a collaborative effort involving three ecomuseums, one in Valdieri dedicated to rye cultivation, one in Cortemilia dealing with terraced vineyards, and one showcasing the portion of Monferrato located in the province of Asti. Additionally, the exhibition entitled *Bestie, Santi, Divinità. Maschere animali dell'Europa tradizionale* (Beasts, Saints, Gods: Zoomorphic Masks of Traditional Europe) held at the Museo Nazionale della Montagna "Duca degli Abruzzi" of Torino in 2003, was followed up by a traveling exhibition, *Dei selvatici. Orsi, lupi, uomini selvatici nei carnevali del Piemonte* (Wild Gods. Bears, Wolves and Wild Men in the Carnivals of Piemonte), curated by Piercarlo Grimaldi and Luciano Nattino. From January to April 2007, the exhibition was presented at the *Maison d'Italie* in Paris, the Museum of Natural Sciences in Torino and in the areas of the Cortemilia, Valdieri and Cunico ecomuseums, all of which are involved in reviving bear masquerades.

Years of study in Piemonte were brought together in the seminar entitled *Liberiamo l'orso. I carnevali europei tra addomesticamento e selvaticità* (Freeing the Bear. The Tame and the Wild in European Carnivals) held on February 7, 2013 at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Torino. The "bears" and "wild men" of popular culture in Finland – where it is still possible to admire the real bear in his habitat – met and dialoged with their counterparts in Piemonte, where their memory lives on in several communities' festivals.

Studies of the Bear and Wild Man characters, guidebeings of traditional carnivals, have brought many fascinating seasonal customs (back) to life.

In Piemonte, the bear's carnival parade through the village streets translated (and often continues to do so today) into a recurrent narrative structure in which the actor dressed as bear goes from house to house and stable to stable, collecting offerings of food and wine. In most

of the costumed parades, the bear is captured by hunters or escorted through the streets in chains by one or more bear-leaders.

The ethnologist Jean Dominique Lajoux (2003, p. 74) notes the difficulty of determining whether the bear or the bear-leader is the most ancient character in the masquerades, and hypothesizes that these figures are, at bottom, one and the same. Especially in Eastern Europe, according to Lajoux, the bear-leader represents the final metamorphosis of the shamans who in the Slavic countries, and among many groups native to Siberia, were believed to have the bear's power.

In Piemonte, the ritual concludes in most cases with the bear's taming,<sup>2</sup> escape, or a process that ensures its rehabilitation. What changes, and makes the iconography of the various bears very different, is the material used for the mask or costume: skins and hides (once goat or sheep, now often synthetic), feathers (goose or chicken) smeared with tar, tomato sauce or mustard, woven wheat straw, rye straw or corn husks, or even moss and chestnut burrs.

### **Straw bears, husk bears and other plant materials**

At Valdieri, in Valle Gesso, the bear masquerade was reintroduced by the Ecomuseum of Rye Cultivation on February 15, 2004, after a hiatus of some forty years. The rye straw bear costume calls for lengthy preparation. The person chosen to act the part of the mythical bear figure must be completely enveloped in a long coil of plaited rye straw. A headpiece and tail, also made of rye straw, complete the costume. The actor's face and hands are blackened with burnt cork. Once dressed, the bear emerges from the secret place where he changed, and is paraded in chains through the village streets by a bear-leader.

The bear is accompanied in the procession by other figures who were part of the carnival tradition at Valdieri: the *perolier*, tinsmiths of sorts, covered in soot and dressed in rags; the *fra* (friars) reciting a series of *Pistole* – satirical verses about the villagers and surrounding communi-

2. Taming consists of various ceremonial practices, such as giving the bear wine or spirits, or a dance with one or more women at the gathering.

ties, often extemporized; and *Quaresima*, or Lent, a young woman whose face is hidden by a white mask.

During the procession, the bear attempts to break free from his chains and assault the women on his path. The festivities end when the bear runs off after dancing with Lent, while a rye straw effigy symbolizing him is burnt in the public square.

A similar ceremony was held in None, where the bear: “Was all covered in straw. They’d put a thing on him that was all straw, with a tail, like a bear. They had attached him to a chain and led him around” Dell’Acqua, 2004, p. 309).

The ceremonial practice was the same at Demonte, in the Valle Stura: “The chosen individual was transformed into a bear thanks to a very long string (*n’ elyàm*) of twisted straw, like the one that was used to tie up the stocks of rye, except that the straw was joined to another and then to another again (*juntaven sémpe juntaven sémpe*). An unending ‘rope’ of straw (also like the one used to weave chair seats) was thus wound around (*fazièn virà*) the actor, clockwise, to bulk him up and turn him into an enormous dummy (*payasu*)...And the tail was also modeled with a straw rope. Only the legs and head were partly free, but the head had to be covered with skins to make him look like an animal” (Ottonelli, 2003, p. 30).

The community of Bellino was also visited by a bear dressed in skins and rye straw at Carnival time (Grimaldi, Carénini, 2004).

Among the bears whose costume was made of plant materials, mention should be made of the one at Cunico, in the Asti hills. Here the Carnival bear was dressed in corn husks, dampened and then curled “with the tines of a fork”, as Giuseppina Germano (born 1912) recalled in an interview recorded by the Casa degli Alfieri popular theater group, where she explained that “the fringe came out well for you, and the movement like the way you make gnocchi, it made them look like ringlets”.

The corn husks were then sewn onto a cloth that was made into the bear costume. The actor’s head was concealed in a headpiece made using the same technique. Here again, the bear was chained and paraded through the streets by a bear-leader.

The last time the bear set foot in the village streets was

towards the end of the Sixties, but in the autumn of 2006 the daughter of the elderly peasant woman who had made the bear suit for her husband in her youth reconstructed the *sfojass* (husk) costume. The rite was revived with a few reinventions the following year, thanks in particular to the efforts of the local community association and the La Ci-uenda, Faber Teatrer and Casa degli Alfieri theater groups. The bear and the bear-leader were accompanied in their procession through the village streets by a number of characters who did not appear in the past: the figure of the Mayor (tasked with judging the bear during the mock trial and sentencing the animal to renounce his savage ways) and the *Quaresime* (several impersonations of Lent, in this case acted by men in women's dress). The bear's trial and penance are not part of the Cunico tradition, but have been attested to in other parts of Piemonte.

The chestnut burr and moss bear of Balmuccia completes our picture of costumes woven or braided from plant material. The costume of this particular bear was reproduced from a photograph published in a volume describing the carnivals of Valsesia (Barbano, 1983, p. 209). In the photo, the bear is flanked by a Harlequin carrying a drum, who probably beat time for the bear's dance. The costume also suggests the hedgehog, another hibernating animal who is symbolically reborn after the rigors of the long winter. What is so original about this bear, however, is the wildness of his costume, indicating that he is to be approached only with extreme caution. Nor was the bear a threat only to onlookers: preparing this costume and, to an even greater extent, wearing it meant being willing to accept suffering, as the chestnut spines penetrated the costumer's hands and the wearer's body.

One final plant costume is not a bear, but has the same functions and habits: the Tree Man of Murazzano, reconstructed from the recollections of Teresa Galliano (born 1921). This costume is now displayed in the Museo della Maschera of Rocca Grimalda (Barroero, 2003, pp. 233-236).

Among the wild men that still inhabit the Alps, we should mention two that appear in the carnival of Champlas du Col, near Sestriere. Discontinued in 1947, this carnival was reintroduced in 2005 along with the two "vecchi", or elders



(as the wild men are called), who share a wife and in the past were the protagonists of the symbolic plowing of the snow.

### **Feather bears**

Another bear figure recorded in the Langhe and Roero areas is the feather bear. The Ecomuseum of the Terraced Landscape and Vineyards in Cortemilia reconstructed the anthropomorphic bear figure in 2005 thanks to the description of the traditional carnival of Monesiglio provided by Augusto Monti: “It was the year Scarpone, the shoemaker in the square, smeared himself with pitch and, ripping apart that big feather duster – how the wife shrieked! – he rolled in the feathers and, turning himself into an ostrich, ran through the town in turmoil for three days and at the end was picked up sozzled with wine and all his feathers gone by then, bawling like a calf at having to go back to being a man” (Monti, 1963, p. 185). The memory – and the practice – of the feather bear is still alive in Magliano Alfieri, where the local citizens’ group keeps the tradition going, dressing the bear in sackcloth overalls to which the chicken feathers stick.

The tradition has never been interrupted, but in the past the bear’s appearance was not announced beforehand. The memory of the feather bear also persists in Montà d’Alba. Cesare Taliano (born 1938) remembers that the bear would come out on the Thursday before Lent and wore animal skins and chicken feathers: “Honey or mustard was brushed on the face so that the feathers would stick” (Adriano, 2003, p. 233-36).

### **Bears of skins and hides**

The hills covered by the Basso Monferrato Astigiano Ecomuseum are home to other types of bear, costumed in skins or hides.

At Camerano and Chiusano, mentions of such traditions date to the Thirties (Garesio Pellissero, 2003, pp. 230-33). This type of bear was also found in Valleandona near Asti (Grimaldi, 1996, p. 72), as well as in San Matteo di Cisterna and San Damiano (Mo, 2005, pp. 129-30).

In the Cuneo area, the bear was one of the most importance characters in the carnival at Villaro, a hamlet in the township of Acceglio in the upper Val Maira: pursued and

caught by the hunter, the bear was led in chains through the streets until, at the end of the day, he was finished off with a few blasts of a shotgun and then loaded onto a sled and dragged away. On the last occasions that the carnival was held (after decades of disuse and an abortive attempt to reinstate it in 1979, the carnival was reinstated in 1989, but only for three years), the actor playing the bear wore fake fur, but Maria Luisa Ponza recalls that marmot skins were used in the past (Bonato, 2003, pp. 242-43).

Moving towards the Torino, we find another hide-covered bear at Volvera. In this village, the bear procession was interrupted after World War Two and resumed only in 1995. As a result, the newly proposed bear is a far cry from the popular iconography, more like a teddy-bear. In addition to the bear character, the goat also contributed to the spirit of transgression at the Volvera carnival. Traditionally, the rite of the goat took place on Fridays in this period. The performance was organized by the young people of the village, and consisted of going the rounds of the families gathered together in the warmth of the stables to pass the long winter nights. Currently, the goat comes out on Shrove Tuesday and parades through the streets together with the bear (Porporato, 2003, pp. 246-48).

A further bear image is found in the old carnival of Lajetto, up-valley from Condove in the Valle di Susa. In the past, the festivity was held during “fat” Sunday, the last Sunday of carnival, and in the last century was organized by the members of the Lajetto Philharmonic Society: the young men of the town assigned the roles to be played in the representation and made the costumes. The carnival characters fell into two groups: the “brutti” and the “belli”, ugly brutes and beauties.

The “brutti” include:

- The *Pajasso*: dressed in skins, this is a fierce, savage animal, more bear-like than bear. Horns sprout from the long hair of the head, the feet are shod in wooden clogs, and a goat’s bell is tied to one leg. He carries a long staff with a rooster dangling from it.
- The *Vecchi* and *Vecchie*: Old Men and Old Women dressed in torn, filthy rags to look as repellant – and frightening – as possible. The more reckless couples roll in the

mud and snow and then play tricks of all kinds on the spectators.

The “belli”, on the other hand, are:

- The *Dottore*: the doctor wears a bowler hat, jacket and tie, overcoat, trousers and elegant shoes, and carries a walking stick with curved handle. His medical attentions to the *Barbuire* – the other mummers – end by administering “medicine” (actually wine or grappa).
- The *Soldato*: dressed in a cavalryman’s uniform, with a helmet atop a dark kerchief that covers his hair and neck, and is tucked into the collar of his tunic. The soldier carries an officer’s sabre and escorts the doctor, bearing the latter’s medical bag.
- The *Arlecchini*: two harlequins wearing tall conical caps adorned with many colored ribbons. Their blouses and pantaloons are white, with a blue or red sash worn diagonally across the chest and back.
- The *Monsù* and the *Tòta*: the former is an elegantly dressed gentleman with a hat and overcoat, while the latter is a modish young lady in an overcoat and tights (not exactly sheer, the better to hide “her” legs); a head scarf covers the hair and conceals the actor’s true identity.

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The two groups also differ in their conduct: the “belli” are more sober and sedate, while the “brutti” are very rowdy. Here, as elsewhere, the identity of the *Barbuire* remains secret. Today, the parade of *Barbuire*, accompanied by a band, winds through the streets and alleys of Lajetto among the tricks and escapades of the *Vecchi* and *Vecchie*, until they reach a broad meadow where the public, now as in bygone days, can watch the *Arlecchini*, the *Monsù* and the *Tòta* dance to the band, while *Pajasso* and the pairs of *Vecchi* continue their merry pranks. Exhausted by the dance, the *Barbuire* fall to the ground, feigning death, and the *Dottore* rushes to their aid. Flanked by the *Soldato*, the *Dottore* revives them with his “medicine”. And then the culminating moment of the show: the *Pajasso* lops off the head of a rooster (which in the meantime has been hung from a tree in the middle of the meadow) and in doing so wounds himself mortally. He

dies, proclaiming the death of Carnival, the end of winter and the coming of spring.

The “Dance of the Bear” at Urbiano, a little township further up the Valle di Susa, is another example of the rich Alpine folklore tradition. The festival is held in the Candlemas period, the first weekend of February, and coincides with the Christian feast of St. Brigid, for whom the village church is named. The festival follows the rather stereotyped pattern for this kind of tradition, with a mock hunt that culminates in the capture of the bear, who is then paraded through the community, and the epilogue where the bear is killed or exiled. The festival takes place over several days: in the evenings preceding the ritual dance, the children run from door to door in the hamlet, knocking and crying “*Fòra l’Ors!*”, Out with the Bear!

The last evening is the moment of the *mingia e beiva* (eat and drink) ritual, so that the hunters, bellies full, can depart for the bear hunt (a tradition that has replaced the torchlit procession led by the hunters, their faces darkened with lampblack). On Sunday morning, after mass and the distribution of blessed bread, the community assembles at the stable where the bear, captured during the night, is held prisoner. This character, sewn into a goat skin costume, is escorted in chains through the village by the hunters. The latter’s faces are smeared with lampblack, and they wear pelts on their shoulders and carry a shepherd’s crook, while fire tongs hang from their belts.

During the procession, the actor dressed as the bear roars mightily, his cries amplified by a funnel that also serves another purpose: it is used to pour wine down the bear’s throat and thus weaken him. At the end, humbled by the hunters’ blows and fuddled by the wine, the bear is now tame enough to select the prettiest girl in the village and dance with her, before being let loose again to return to the mountains. The real identity of the person dressed as the bear is a closely guarded secret: only the hunters know who it is, and who the bear might be is a recurrent topic of discussion among the villagers at the festival. The Urbiano “bear hunt” is linked to a local proverb that runs: “*Se l’ouers fai secha soun ni, per caranto giouern a sort papi*”, i.e., “If the bear dries his bedding (if the weather that day is good, in other words), he won’t come out for another forty days (and

winter will continue)". This proverb is similar to others in the departments of Isère, Savoie and Hautes-Alpes.

**The bear in the Alpine tradition: analyses and gleanings from Savoie, the Dauphiné and the Valle di Susa**

The archival and field studies carried out by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1933) found a number of proverbs common to the Valle di Susa and the areas across the border in France, particularly in the department of Isère. In a recent investigation, I found that almost all of these proverbs and folk sayings were still current:

Chirens: If the sun comes out on that day, it is to allow the bear to dry his bedding, so there will be 40 more days of winter.

Gières: At Candlemas, if it is rainy or cloudy, the winter will go away after 40 days. But if the weather is fair, the bear will go disappointedly back to his den.

Grenoble (and surroundings): If the sun appears that day, the bear emerges from the den, hops two or three times, and goes back in to stay. But if the weather is bad, he thinks winter is over.

Huez: When the weather is bad, the bear hides for 40 days, while if it's sunny he dries his bedding.

Mens: At midnight on the night between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, the bear comes out of his cave to look at the sky. If the sky is clear and the stars are shining bright, he licks his paw and returns to the den, saying: "Winter isn't over; we will have 40 more days of bad weather". But if the sky is cloudy, if it's raining or snowing, he does not return to his den because, he says, "Winter is over, good weather is coming".

Moirans: At Candlemas, if the sun comes out and then disappears, winter will last 40 days longer than expected. On that day, the "bear" locks himself up in his house: in this case, the bear is an old man who is known for his bad temper.

La Morte: In this village, an old tale is told about Candlemas. On that day, they say the snow almost always falls in large flakes, either by chance or by coincidence. Now, it seems that the Virgin, carried by a gigantic bear, passes early in the morning through a clearing in a wood at some distance from the village. It is said that a rather simple-

minded youth was once sent to that clearing by some village crones to see what happened there and tell the villagers about it. But the mantle of snow was so deep that he sunk to his armpits and had to abandon the attempt.

Porcieu-Amblagnieu: At Candlemas, if the bear (the sun, in this case) sticks his paw out of the den in the morning and then draws it back in, there will be 40 more days of winter, but if he sticks out his paw and leaves it out, 40 days of winter will go away.

Prébois: The bear comes out of his den at midnight, checks the weather and says: “*Si ploou vou si nivouôro – Dè l’hiver sian dèfouôro – Serrè vou clâ – Quaranta joû n’avin incâ*” (*If it’s rainy or cloudy we’re out of winter, if the sky is clear, we’ve got 40 days more*).

St. Aupre: If the sun appears that day, the bear goes back in the den and stays for 40 days without coming out.

St. Pierre-de-Mésage: At Candlemas, if the sky is overcast the bear comes out of the cave and “marks the trail” (in the snow) for the Virgin on her way to purification, and the winter is over. If the sky is clear, he licks his paw and goes back into the cave, and winter will last another 40 days.

Vaujany: If the bear sees the sun at Candlemas, there will be another 40 days of winter.

Vienne: When it freezes at Candlemas, the bear goes back into his den for 40 days.

Voreppe: When the sun comes out at Candlemas, the bear goes back into his den for 40 days.

In two places, Fontaine and St. Jean-d’Avelanne<sup>3</sup>, the wolf takes the bear’s place in the proverb about Candlemas, but according to Van Gennep, this could be due to a simple mispronunciation, given that the bear is associated with Candlemas throughout the Alps.<sup>4</sup>

As was also the case in Savoie, the ancient belief was Christianized, associating the bear with the Virgin Mary

3. Fontaine: At Candlemas, the wolf comes out of his den in the morning; if the sky is overcast, the winter is over, but if it is clear, winter will last 40 days more, and the wolf returns to the den licking his paw.

St. Jean-d’Avelanne: If the wolf puts his paw in the sunlight at Candlemas, there will be another 40 days of winter

4. Since the seventeenth century, the French proverb has been: “*Si fait beau et lui Chandelours-Six semaines se cache l’ours*”, so bear and wolf could have been conflated because of the similarity of sound in patois (Chandelours=loup).

and the forty days of her Purification with an *ad hoc* legend. Throughout the Alps, moreover, there are legends that relate the folk saying about the bear to a journey by the Virgin, but this appears to be simply an attempt at Christianization, given that February 2 has become one of the principal days dedicated to Mary, with the rite of the Our Lady's Purification, derived from Hebrew tradition. In primitive times, the bear was independent both of the Virgin and of the candles of Candlemas, which is itself doubtless an adaptation of the Hebrew torches.

The fact that the bear personifies the sun at Porcieu-Amblaigneu is also interesting, as it could suggest a link between the cult of the bear with that of the *Sol Invictus* or with Appollonian or Mithraic mystery cults. Though there is not sufficient evidence to support such a hypothesis at the current state of scholarship, it nevertheless raises an intriguing mythological question.

In addition to offering two of the most original Alpine carnivals, the Valle di Susa can also boast its own saint with a bear, in common with Dauphiné. According to a local legend of some considerable antiquity, sometime around the year 600 Arey (or Aredius), Bishop of Gap and later canonized, was crossing Monginevro (the mountain marking the border between Italy and France in the Ripa valley) on his way back from a meeting with the Pope in Rome. St. Aredius was traveling with a few servants in a modest cart drawn by a pair of oxen. Without warning, right at the pass, the little group was attacked by a ferocious bear that mauled one of the oxen. At that point, the cleric ordered the bear to take the place of the slain ox and pull the cart, a task the bear accepted meekly, as if he had been tamed.

There are various versions of this legend, and one that has gained most currency recounts that the saint and his companions were forced to stop at Crottes because of a violent flood that had swept through the village of Boscodon and its abbey. While the bishop passed the time in prayer, the bear roamed through the surrounding forests, until he discovered a spring of cool, crystal clear water.

In the coming years, the spring became the favored destination of the saint's walks, always accompanied by the bear. And the bear was also befriended by the citizens of Gap, who presented him with a gold and silver chain.

When St. Aredius was nearing death, he revealed a secret to the bear, who then vanished. There are those who maintain that the bear continued to wander near the spring for many years, alone and racked by grief. Many years later, a few monks of the abbey of Boscodon happened by chance on the spring, hidden under a heap of stones, and, nearby, a grotto with the skeleton of Goodman Bruin, the gold and silver chain still around his neck. The bear was given a merciful burial and the abbey of Boscodon, which had been in decline, began to flourish anew and became the most important in the area. It is also said that the secret Aredius had imparted to the bear was found inscribed on an old parchment, but whatever it may have been has not been vouchsafed to us.

### Jean de l'Ours

In the Occitan countries, to which the upper Valle di Susa has belonged since 1713, year of the Treaty of Utrecht, the story was told in centuries past of a “hero of the people”, one Jean de l'Ours: a hybrid creature, born of a woman and a bear, savage in appearance and endowed with extraordinary strength<sup>5</sup>.

The parallels between this figure and the bear of Urbiano are clear, as there is a common denominator in all the various versions of the legend: the love that Jean de l'Ours, the wild creature, has for a beautiful maiden, a love that in some versions redeems him and leads him to live a normal life in the bosom of the community.

Not that there is always a “happy ending”: in some variants, the bear-man goes to live in the “dark lands”, like his father. In Book V of *Pantagruel* (according to Walter, 2005, p. 82), François Rabelais mentions recognizing “*entre le rochers, le bon vieulx chemin de la Ferrière sus le Mont Cenis, créature de roy Artuis, accompagné d'un grand ours...*” (“among the rocks, the good old way to La Ferrière, beneath Mont Cenis, a creature of King Arthur, accompanied by a huge bear ...”).

The figure evoked by Rabelais is reminiscent of Jean

5. Jean de l'Ours is one of the most widespread themes in folklore, found in Europe, Asia, Russia, India, China, North Africa and even among the native North Americans. In Occitania, the subject enjoyed considerable literary success even in comparatively recent times (the nineteenth and twentieth centuries).



de l'Ours, as this legendary hero of French folklore offers many analogies with Arthur, whose nature is both bear-like and manly and whose courageous deeds are fraught with danger. Mon Cenis and Ferrière would appear to refer to Moncenisio and Ferriera in the Valle di Susa, near the French border. These are places that Rabelais must have known well, given his lengthy stay in Lyon and his numerous trips to Italy, and in particular his 1539 journey to Torino in the suite of Guillaume du Bellay, seigneur de Langey and governor of Piemonte.

In the course of his many travels, it is possible that the writer came to know of a local legend and tradition, incorporating it into one of his best-known works. This, then, testifies to a topos that spanned both sides of the Alps, and undoubtedly inspired the bear festivals of the Valle di Susa and/or drew inspiration from them.

Today, the bear festivals of Urbiano and Condove are the only survivors of this tradition, but oral memory refers to similar carnival rituals in Sauze d'Oulx and other parts of the upper Valle di Susa in not-too-distant times, certainly as late as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### Concluding remarks

As archeological evidence shows, the bear has made its home in the Alps since prehistoric times, and it would appear that one of the last, a nearly tame specimen who would peacefully approach the villages, was killed around 1820 by a hunter near Exilles, in Valle di Susa.

Today, then, the Dance of the Bear at Urbiano and the carnival of Lajetto (Condove) are all that remain to defend the memory of a fallen king of the forest, reborn at the turn of the twentieth century: a mysterious animal, venerated and feared, abused and demonized.

And yet, the bear cult had roots that were far deeper than might appear: François Scepeaux de Vielleville (Pétiot, 1882) tells us that in 1548, to celebrate the passage of Henri II through Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, the sovereign was welcomed by a troop of one hundred peasants dressed as bears “*so cleverly disguised that they might have been taken for real bears*”, who escorted him behind an unfurled banner to the doors of the cathedral. Here they began to dance, frightening the horses and causing a number of injuries

among the townspeople. Henri II, pleasantly surprised, ordered that they be rewarded with a considerable sum of money. Might these bear-men have been part of a group (an abbey, perhaps) whose role was to mark certain phases of the season or certain collective events?

According to the scholars Gaignebet and Lajoux (1986, p. 157), such bear-men were indeed part of a group tasked with providing a framework for certain important happenings in the community, in this case the entry of the French king: a group that, by acting the part of bears, accepts for a moment to return to the savage origins of the Indo-European warrior. In the episode we have just described, we see a return to the scene of the *berserker* and the symbolism of animal skin disguise.

The bear is clearly one of the most frequent figures in the zoomorphic masquerades of European folklore. This is true throughout the Alps and especially in Piemonte, where thanks to the revival of many local customs the bear now takes center stage in a number of the performances held at carnival time. And not only at carnival: in the Sordevolo Passion Play, for example, a man dressed as a bear played the chief of the devils in full theatrical liturgy until the Thirties and Forties<sup>6</sup>.

This is not the only instance of a “demonized” bear: in the fifteenth century witch trials held in the Valle Leventina in Switzerland’s Canton Ticino, the devil is called Ber and is described as having the features of a bear.

As the centuries passed, the relationship between man and bear gradually changed, not least because of the social, economic and environmental transformations that drew mankind away from nature worship and caused the meaning of the ancient bear symbols to be almost wholly forgotten: the passage from paganism, from the wild nature of Celtic-Germanic culture’s totemic animals to the tamer nature of tilled fields and agricultural innovation – where direct contact with the land became ever less likely – was slow, but steady and inexorable.

6. Evidence of the bear figure’s presence in the Passion Play is provided by Delfino Orsi (2000, original edition 1892) and by photographs and films of the bear in the 1935 play. Censored in the subsequent years’ performances, the figure returned to the scene in 2005.

But it was a passage that brought losses: loss of the meaning of the archaic rituals, of the ceremonies for the fertility of the fields, of the experience of symbols.

Today, the festivals that evoke the ancient ritual ceremonies are a precious heritage, as they enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of community identity and the survival of a past that has left few traces. In most cases, in fact, there is no record in the official documents, and the memory of the past is kept alive only through reenactments, where the scholar must be able to distinguish the old from the “new”, and interpret it in order to identify the original stock on which later rituals were grafted.

We have come to the end of this journey through the bear festivals. Despite the pressures of industrialization and depopulation in the Alps, which have broken up the old rural communities and swept away an entire way of life, the communities we have discussed here are still strongly attached to archaic rites inherited from past generations, and in some cases have fueled a “demand” for community initiatives that has revived a corpus of beliefs and symbolic policies which serve to link man and the unseen.

Observing the traditional festivals of Piemonte, which encase an entire symbolic complex of ritual action and objects, sheds light on a set of ancient practices rooted in the survival of pre-Christian rituals intended to ensure that fertility continued from one seasonal cycle to the next.

In studying today’s festivals, we must not fail to consider the two mentalities that met – and continue to meet – in these moments of popular religiosity: the “high” mentality of the Church, and the “low” mentality of the populace, steeped in folklore and believers in magic. A critical survey of the encounter between these two intermingled world-views was called for, as they have given rise to a system that, though evolving, has continued to reproduce its basic traits.

The festival takes intense cultural commitment, and its constituent parts can assume many different aspects: tension, suffering, pain, orgiastic elements. It is a rite that the community performs in common, eliminating linear time in favor of a cyclic time where decay and rebirth coexist, following each other ritually in an unending, eternal sequence to ensure the continual regeneration of human energies.

There is the festival where the masks become the pro-

tagonists: we wear a mask not only on the face, but inside ourselves as well. Voluntarily, we change our personality and allow the drives that are normally kept well-hidden to emerge: our “double” rises to the surface, the Jungian “shadow”. But because it is channeled in a sacred ritual, this perilous “id” is supervised, and its energy goes to renewing the cosmos.

And then there is the festival that celebrates the coming of spring, of rebirth: its emblems are flowers and wine. But flowers and wine are also the funeral offerings given to the dead, whose spirits could be met in the streets.

Life and death are woven tightly together in each festival: the old year dies, and nothing can ensure its rebirth.

It must thus be renewed, but to do so, it must be prised free from the primordial chaos, free to destroy itself and re-form: the forces of disarray must thus be instrumental to society in order to fulfill their assigned role.

These are the forces that live in society and are a danger to it, but through the rigorous use of the rite can be unchained and then bound anew.

The web of connections woven by the practices we have explored in this chapter replicates the elements that were fundamental to the culture of past generations only in part, leaving an opening for new relationships dictated by the changing spirit of the times: we are dealing here with a set of varying cultural content which has changed form while leaving the substance virtually unchanged.

It is a complex of relationships that linked to other moments of popular culture, where there is also room for opposition to the dominant culture.

In the course of this study, I traveled the length and breadth of Piemonte in order to analyze its festivals, from the most important to the lesser-known: while it is true that they spring from a simple tradition, it is one that has its roots and growth in centuries of history, and continues even now to withstand the attacks of time.

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Time of the bear,  
the bear  
in time



Fig. 1  
The *Pajasso* in the  
ancient Carnival in Lajetto  
(Condove, Susa Valley)

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Fig. 2  
The *Barbuire* of the Lajetto Carnival





Fig. 3  
The Skin-Bear at  
Urbiano



Fig. 4  
The Skin-Bear  
dances with the most  
beautiful maiden of  
the village (Urbiano)





Fig. 5  
The Rye-Bear dances with Lent (Valdieri)

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Fig. 6  
The Rye-Bear at Valdieri



Fig. 7  
The twinning between  
the Lajetto and Urbiano  
Skin-Bear and the Valdieri  
Rye-Bear



Fig. 8  
The Skin-Bear at Volvera (Turin)

## Bear Ceremonialism in relation to three ritual healers: The Basque *salutariyua*, the French *marcou* and the Italian *maramao*

Roslyn M. Frank

If there are seven boys or seven girls in one family, then one of them will be a night-mare, but will know nothing about it. (Kuhn & Schwartz, [1848] 1972: 16)

In Cornwall, the peasants and the miners entertain this notion; they believe that a seventh son can cure the king's evil by the touch. (Chambers, 1869)

[...] the word does not forget where it has been and can never wholly free itself from the dominion of the contexts of which it has been part. (Bakhtin, 1973: 167)

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aA

### 1. *Introduction*

Throughout all of Europe we find examples of folk-belief assigning special qualities to the seventh-born son or daughter of a family. At times these attributes were positive, at times negative. However, they always had a magical aura about them (Bloch, [1924] 1983).<sup>1</sup> For the most part, these beliefs have been written off as superstitious residue from times past and as a result little attention has been paid to documenting the concrete social practices associated with them. An exception to this tendency is the work of Marc Bloch, who in 1924, called attention to the supernatural powers attributed to the seventh son and at times, to the

1. Writing in 1924, Bloch observed that “La croyance sous cette forme a été et est sans doute encore très largement répandue dans l’Europe occidentale et centrale: on l’a signalée en Allemagne, en Biscaye, en Catalogne, dans presque toute la France, dans les Pays-Bas, en Angleterre, en Ecosse, en Irlande [...]” (Bloch, [1924] 1983).

seventh daughter, born after an uninterrupted series of children of the same sex, remarking that seventh-born children were credited with a “particular supernatural power” (Bloch, [1924] 1983: 293, 296).

Specifically, Bloch noted that from at least the 16th century onwards, children born into a seventh position in their family supposedly had the power to heal by touch. Such extraordinary people, often deemed sorcerers, even devils, were also referred to by a variety of expressions such as *mahr* (German) or *murawa* (Polish) and consequently they had the ambivalent privilege of tapping into powers that were inaccessible to normal humans. Specifically, they were viewed as having healing and divinatory powers, which could entail shape-shifting (Vaz da Silva, 2003). That is, those individuals were endowed with the ability to take the form of an animal. From the point of view of modern Western thought this belief causes the dividing line between humans and animals to become blurred. Nonetheless, that blurring or fusion of two natures would be in accordance with the cosmology of native peoples in other parts of the world, especially contemporary hunter-gatherers, where such animistic beliefs also prevail (Bird-David, 1999; Brightman, 2002; Ingold, 2000; Willerslev, 2007).

It is quite clear that the qualities assigned to the seventh-son or daughter harken back to an earlier animistic mindset, notions of nonhuman personhood and social practices that in turn connect back to shamanic modes of healing.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, as noted in the earlier chapters of this study (Frank, 2008a, 2008c, 2009a),<sup>3</sup> the fused nature of the Bear Son, the half-human, half-bear being known as Hamalau “Fourteen” in Basque,<sup>4</sup> reflects a similar blurring of the Western human-animal divide and related cultural conceptualizations. And as Bertolotti has demonstrated in his detailed and extraordinarily well researched study *Carnevale di Massa 1950* (1992), European versions of the Bear

2. For a positive evaluation and hence more nuanced contemporary discussions of “animism”, ones that do not suffer from the conceptual defects imposed by earlier anthropological biases, cf. Howell (1996).

3. An Italian translation of chapters 2 and 3 of this study, published in *Insula* in 2008 and 2009, is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/Hamalau-in-Italian>.

4. The expression *hamalau* is a compound, composed of two elements: *hamar* “ten” and *lau* “four”.

Son folktales, e.g., Giovanni l'Orso, may well reproduce much earlier beliefs, more in consonance with the cosmopolitan vision of hunter-gatherers who inhabited these zones in times past.

More concretely, the fact that the figure of Hamalau is grounded in the belief that humans descended from bears allows us to consider the significance and symbolism of this character's own genesis: he is born of a human female, but his father is a bear. In this sense, he is a double-natured intermediary occupying the ontological ground between humans and bears. Speaking of the set of pan-European narratives categorized under the rubric of Bear Son tales, Bertolotti offers this pertinent reflection:

L'orso può infine nascere dall'unione di un uomo o di una donna con una divinità, come racconta un mito Ainu, oppure con uno spirito della foresta, secondo varianti registrate presso Samoiedi, Voguli e Ostiachi. Attraverso la forma immediata della metamorfosi o quella mediata del matrimonio, ciò che si viene a stabilire è in ogni caso un legame di parentela tra l'orso e l'uomo. Grazie a questo legame, un ponte è gettato dal mondo degli uomini verso l'altro mondo, ove si trovano le fonti della prosperità. Ora gli uomini dispongono di un alleato che può penetrare nell'altro mondo e attingere a quelle fonti per renderle loro disponibili. (Bertolotti, 1992: 186)<sup>5</sup>

I should mention that when Bertolotti (1992: 174-200) describes the house visits and related performance art found across Europe in which a bear and its retinue of actors take part and whose purpose is to bring good fortune, health and well-being to those who are on the receiving end, the Italian researcher does not refer to them generically utilizing the term Good-Luck Visits as I have done (Frank, 2008a, 2008c). However, both of us are talking about the same phenomenon. At the same time, it should be empha-

5. "The bear may ultimately be born from the union of a man or a woman with a deity, as is told in an Ainu myth, or with a forest spirit, in variations recorded among Samoieds, Voguli and Ostiachi. Through the immediate form of metamorphosis, or mediated by the wedding, what comes to be established is, in any case, a bond of kinship between bears and humans. Through this link, a bridge is established connecting the world of men to the other world, where the sources of prosperity are. Now people have an ally that can penetrate into the other world and tap into those sources to make them available" (Bertolotti, 1992: 186).

sized that the Italian ethnographer asserts that in European performance art *l'Uomo selvatico* is a stand-in or counterpart for the bear and is linked to the half-human, half-bear character of the folktales. For instance, Bertolotti writes: “Nel Vallese e a Tesero (Trento) l'Uomo selvatico cui si dava la caccia per carnevale era vestito di pelli di capra, anziché di foglie. In Asia egli era detto *orso*. A Eger, in Boemia, la caccia all'Uomo selvatico era chiamata *l'uccisione dell'orso*. Esistono inoltre somiglianze molto forti tra le cerimonie con l'Uomo selvatico che sono state appena descritte e le rappresentazioni della caccia all'orso [...]” (Bertolotti, 1992: 171).

Bertolotti finds additional evidence for his hypothesis in Pyrenean folk beliefs and related performance art, the well-known *Fêtes de l'Ours*, as well as the wide-spread practice of Good-Luck Visits where an actor dressed as a bear dances, dies and is resurrected by another actor. Special emphasis is also placed on the role of *s'Urzu* in Sardinian performances, past and present. While Bertolotti draws striking analogies to similar ursine linked ritual practices attested among hunters and gatherers of other parts of the world, in doing so he is unaware of the Pyrenean belief, retained by the Basques into the 20th century, that humans descended from bears. However, this ursine genealogy only serves to strengthen the hypothesis put forward by the Italian ethnographer.

In the previous three chapters of this investigation various aspects of this cultural complex were explored with special emphasis being placed on what I argue are regional phonological variants of the term Hamalau (Frank, 2008a, 2008c, 2009a). This expression which taken literally means ‘fourteen’, is also the name given to the half-bear, half-human figure who acts, in turn, as an intermediary being whose dual nature serves to link humans to their bear ancestors. Moreover, the figure of Hamalau and the cosmovision associated with it appears to constitute a key component in a set of archaic pan-European beliefs that held that humans descended from bears, a belief that survived among Basques well into the 20th century. In addition, quite significantly, Hamalau is also the name of the Bear Son, the off-spring of a human female and a great bear, whose adventures show up in a vast cycle of European folktales (Frank & Ridderstad, 2013; Frank & Silva, 2012).

In the present chapter, the analysis of semantic data will play a major role in establishing linkages between regional manifestations of a group of individuals endowed with supernatural healing powers and the fearful ability to shape-shift (Bloch 1983, 293- 4). Furthermore, we shall discover the multiplicity of ways in which the avatars of the shaman-healer, known in Basque as Hamalau, manifest themselves in European folk belief. At the same time we shall see how, until only a few centuries ago, seventh-sons and daughters continued to perform their duties under the protection of ecclesiastical authorities, while at the same time their pagan counterpart survived as the central character in European ursine-informed performance art, where the actor's miraculous shamanic "healing" abilities continued to be put on display before the public.

In the current study three examples of healers with supernatural powers will be analyzed. The first section will concentrate on documenting the figure of the Basque *salutariyua* as well as the Catalan and Valencian counterparts, the *saludadors*. The second section is dedicated to another type of seventh-born healers, the French *marcoux*, including their counterparts across the channel in Great Britain. Then our attention will turn to documenting the role of another representative shaman-healer, a character found in European performance art. Our approach will concentrate specifically on the scene from the Good-Luck Visits where an actor intervenes to bring the "bear" (or its structural homologue) back to life. At that juncture, we will be ready to examine the enigmatic etymology of the Italian term *maramao* by bringing together linguistic and ethnographic evidence in support of the hypothesis that this expression is a key element when it comes to gaining a better understanding of the earlier and much more archaic cosmology that held humans descended from bears. Finally, when reading the present study, the reader should keep in mind that it represents the fourth part of a series of articles which have been dedicated to the exploration of pan-European phenomena associated with Good- Luck Visits. Consequently the current discussion builds on the information presented and analyzed in the previous chapters of the investigation.

2. *Seventh-sons and daughters among the Basques:  
the salutariyua healer*

Among the Basques the belief in the special status of the seventh-son or seventh-daughter born to a family was commonplace among rural populations into the 18th century, if not even later (López de Guereñu, 1966). Moreover, in contrast to some other zones of Europe, the supernatural endowments assigned to these individuals translated into them actually being required to exercise a specific profession. The name of this individual was *saludador*, “healer”, which is the term used in Spanish to describe the Basque health practitioners. According to modern texts, the term that continued to be employed in Basque was *salutariyua*, clearly cognate with the Spanish expression (Ataño, 1979). Since the entries in municipal records which speak in detail about this profession were written in Spanish, the exact terminology used by Basque speakers to refer to these popular healers cannot be determined.

With respect to the special attributes assigned to those exercising this birth-right profession, we find that the special “gift” of curing (or preventing) rabies in animals and people was the exclusive duty of the seventh-son born to a family. Yet this profession was not the exclusive domain of seventh-born males. Rather the municipal records often refer to the healer using the Spanish term *saludadora*, the female form of *saludador*. So it is clear that both seventh-sons and seventh-daughters were included in this category of healers. The lack of specific gender assignment (in favor of males or females) for this role is confirmed explicitly in other cases where the healer is said to have been born with other special attributes.<sup>6</sup> For instance, according to a source cited by López de Guereñu (1966: 164): “Saludadores pueden serlo los que nacen a las doce de la noche de Navidad que por ello tienen una cruz impresa debajo de la lengua y esta gracia particular es común en ambos sexos.”<sup>7</sup>

6. I would note that the Basque language has no grammatical gender or other indications of “natural” gender, that is, endings that in other languages serve to distinguish females from males.

7. [“Healers can be those who are born at midnight on Christmas Eve and who for that reason have [the sign of] a cross imprinted under their tongues, and this grace is common in both sexes.”]



The earliest written record identified for this practice dates from 1463 while similar records have been found extending through the 18th century when, at least officially, the obligatory payments that were made to the *saludador(a)* were no longer recorded in the municipal account books, at least not in those that have been examined to this point. As a caveat, I would remind the reader that until now the only published study dedicated to these seventh-born healers is that of López de Guereñu (1966).<sup>8</sup> In other words, to date there has been no systematic effort to gather evidence for the presence of this particular social-medical phenomenon in the municipal records and archives of the Basque Country.

Yet the disappearance of entries concerning these healers from the official record does not necessarily imply that the seventh-sons or daughters no longer performed their duties. Indeed, other documents from the end of the 18th century suggest that such figures may still have been quite active. Moreover, old belief systems tend to retain their force long after the actual practices originally informing them have fallen into disuse. At the same time it is possible that certain responsibilities assigned earlier to the seventh-born healers were reallocated to others. For example, some of the functions and responsibilities were probably taken over by the Christian priest, his female assistant called a *serora* and/or her helpers,<sup>9</sup> while other functions were eventually reassigned to members of the emerging medical professions.

In the case of the seventh-born healer, according to the archival records, the individual along his/her horse and

8. Guereñu's study was limited to the records of the Basque province of Araba. That similar records could be found in the municipal archives of the other Basque towns seems highly likely, even though in recent years detailed archival research has not been carried out on this topic.

9. In this respect of particular interest are the names given to a class of Basque women "healers" who assisted the Basque *serora* and which give us another method for identifying socio-medical practices and traditions linked to female folk healers. Specifically, the terms rendered in French as *braguine*, *brayine* and *braine* in the archival records of the Cathedral of Bayonne derive from the Basque compound *belhargin*, 'herb-worker' (*belhar* "herb" and (*e*)gin "worker"). Another popular variant of this Basque expression is *belhargile*, from *belhar* "herb" and (*e*)gile "worker". The latter expression has, on occasion, acquired the referential meaning of "witch". For a detailed account of this etymology and its socio-cultural entailments, as well as its connections to the Beguines and their movement in Europe, cf. Frank (2001a).

helper traveled about the local region, often being paid in wheat collected by the members of the judicial district or municipality in question. At times the records speaks of the *saludador(a)* being accompanied by a parent, e.g., “by his father”, which would suggest that the healer was still quite young when he began his practice. In one instance the child was only fourteen when we find him already engaged in his trade, accompanied by his father. Although there is evidence among the Basques that the age at which a youth entered into adulthood was fourteen, for example, when the person’s testimony was considered valid, there is not enough information to determine the age at which the healer practitioners were expected to begin their duties. Other entries speak of payments for the female *saludadora*, her husband and helper as well as for their horses. However, there is no information concerning how these individuals were trained to perform their duties, e.g., how they acquired their knowledge of the spells as well as the medicinal plants and herbs which they must have utilized. How this knowledge was transmitted from one generation to the next has not been documented.

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The archives contain frequent references to the obligations that fell to such an individual. The duties of the seventh-son or daughter included conducting ritual healings of people, cattle, and crops. Although the precise formulas used in such healing rituals are not recorded, it is clear that the services of this person were called upon when there was danger of an outbreak of rabies. The healer’s task appears to have been preventative, at least in part, and in that sense, not far different from his Christian counterparts who in other places (and times) performed public ceremonies intended to protect the crops from insects and other plagues, as well as to insure that domestic animals were safe from harm and remained healthy.<sup>10</sup> Christian priests were also in charge of storm conjuration and special locations were set aside for the performance of these duties, i.e., warding off hailstorms, sites that suggest the substantial continuity between pre-Christian and Christian practices (Frank, 1977, 2001a, 2001b).

10. For example, as Zamora Zamora (1997) has noted, in Murcia, *saludadores* were contracted by the municipalities to get rid of a plague of locusts.

From an analysis of details found in the accounting entries we can conclude that in the zone under study seventh-born traditional healers enjoyed at least the same level of social acceptance and prestige as schoolteachers and priests; and that the local municipality contracted formally for their services. More specifically, the social status of these healers can be deduced by comparing the salary of one of them with that of a friar from the nearby abbey of Piédrola who was also hired by the same municipality to provide similar services. Concretely, in the village of Atauri we find that the salary of the second individual was only half of that of the traditional healer (López de Guereñu, 1966: 167).<sup>11</sup> A closer examination of the documents reveals that at the beginning of the 18th century, the annual salary paid to the individual by a given municipality amounted to *una fanega de trigo*, i.e., the amount of wheat needed to plant a *fanega* of land.<sup>12</sup> When calibrated in the coinage of the times, a *fanega* of wheat was equivalent to approximately 16 *reales*. This was the standard annual salary for the healer. It was based on a minimum of two obligatory visits per year and required the individual to be on call throughout the rest of the year; additional visits were paid for at the rate of 6 *reales* per visit, plus remuneration for the expenses incurred, food and housing in the village, stabling the livery along with compensation for the expenses of those who accompanied the healer, his/her assistants and/or family members. In short, the annual salary with the obligatory two visits included, was supplemented by fees the healer received for additional visits. In the case of the latter, the costs of room and board for the healer, his/her helper and horses were also covered.

Assuming that the services of the healer would have been required on numerous occasions throughout the year, between the base salary and the compensation received for

11. The healer received one *fanega* of wheat while the friar got only half a *fanega*. The above description is based on: “Tenían asalariado un saludador, pero al mismo tiempo venía un fraile del vecino convento de Piédrola, en Santa Cruz de Campezo, que bendecía el ganado, aunque el saludador tenía más importancia para los vecinos de Atauri, ya que cobraba una fanega de trigo, mientras al religioso le daban tan solo media fanega” (López de Guereñu, 1966: 167).

12. The dry measure as well as the size of the land planted varied significantly. For the region in question the *fanega* dry measure probably was in the order of 55.5 liters (1.6 bushels) of wheat. Cf. <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanega>.

additional unscheduled visits, say, two visits per month, the person easily could have obtained the equivalent of 150 *reales* or more per year, for a total of only 26 trips to the same village, including the two obligatory ones. This is the payment the healer would have received from only one village, whereas there are indications that the person might have been under contract to several municipalities at the same time. We can contrast this level of remuneration with the annual salary of the local schoolteacher who carried out his duties without any additional perks for food or housing. Indeed, besides teaching the village children, he was required to take charge of the town clock and function as bell-ringer. For all this work, much of it full-time, he received 30 *fanegas* per year, the equivalent of 500 *reales*.<sup>13</sup>

More concretely, the contractual duties of these seventh-sons and daughters obligated them to come on a regular schedule, twice a year, on the first of May and on Saint Michael's day (Michaelmas, September 29th). In addition, the agreements imply that the healer was contractually "on call" to the municipality in question throughout the entire year and was required, contractually, to come when notified. As for the two obligatory visits we notice that one of them coincides with the first of May which might be explained in part by the fact that it was on the first of May when the shepherds began taking their flocks up to the high pastures and the animals needed to be blessed before they left. As for St. Michael's day being the date assigned for the second obligatory visit, that custom probably was linked, at least in some fashion, to the fact that in the Basque region, as

13. "Haremos resaltar los emolumentos asignados al saludador, treinta rs. por un par de visitas, más gastos pagados en el desempeño de su misión, no sólo personales si que también de criado y caballerías, comparándolos con los atribuidos al maestro de escuela, que en este mismo año de 1711 cobraba treinta fanegas de trigo anuales (poco más de quinientos reales a los precios de aquellos tiempos) sin ninguna gratificación extraordinaria, aunque sí con la exigencia suplementaria de tener que cuidar del reloj y ejercer de campanero." ["We will point out the fee schedule contracted with the healer, thirty *reales* for a pair of visits, plus payment for the expenses associated with carrying out his/her duties, not only personal expenses, but also those of his/her servant and livery, compared to the salary paid to the [local] school teacher, who in that same year of 1711 earned thirty *fanegas* of wheat annually (slightly more than five hundred *reales* in those times) without any extra remuneration, although, yes, with the supplemental duty of having to take care of the clock and function as bell-ringer."] (López de Guereñu, 1966: 169).

in many other Catholic countries of Europe, St. Michael's Day was one of the quarter days when rents and bills would come due each year. Finally, when viewed objectively, the two annual visits conducted by the healers are quite reminiscent of similar ceremonies carried out by priests and other members of the Church hierarchy to insure the well-being of their parishioners as well as guarantee the health of the animals and crops under their jurisdiction and subject, therefore, to their "blessing". In this respect, the ritual activities carried out by the two classes of individuals must have overlapped to a significant degree.

In conclusion, the figure of the seventh-son and daughter healers casts a long shadow where belief in the special powers conferred by the concept "seven" are clearly in evidence. Since the social practices associated with this belief continued into modern times we might assume that they were viewed with approval by the communities in question: that the practitioners were not marginalized or otherwise stigmatized by the members of the local populace. Rather they were recognized as important and productive members of society, providing important services. Indeed, the persistence of these practices might be explained by the continuing strength of much earlier cultural conceptualizations associated with the number "seven". Still the exact nature of the sociocultural matrix in which this belief was once embedded is unclear. Should we assume that Hamalau "Fourteen" was part of the same network? Certainly, the shamanically-coded aspects of the plot structure of the Bear Son tales have been noted by other researchers (Lajoux, 1996; Panzer, 1910; Sarmela, 2006; Stitt, 1995).

### 2.1. *The saludadors of Catalunya and Valencia*

In Catalunya evidence for seventh-son and daughters functioning as *saludadors* is also abundant. Indeed, descriptions of them are quite similar to the ones we find in the Basque Country. For instance, in Catalunya they were regularly hired in an official capacity by local authorities. Writing in 1909, De Copons, citing F. Maspons, states that *saludadors* "son los que han nascut en la nit de Nadal, losquals tenen una creu en la llengua y tenen la facultat de curar la rabia." He goes on to state that they are called *Setès* and that their healing powers derive from them being seventh-sons: "Le

septième enfant d'une famille qui n'a eu que des garçons jouit aussi de ce don: on l'appelle Setè" (De Copons, 1909: 140). As Bloch ([1924] 1983: 303-304) points out, drawing on the earlier writings of Sirven dating from 1864, the specialty of the Catalan *Sets*, in addition to curing rabies, was in their ability to prevent animals and humans, in advance, from getting the disease.

In her investigation of extra-academic medical practitioners in Valencia, López Terrada (2009) brings forward the following fact about the role of *saludadors* in this zone of the Iberian Peninsula, namely, that the healers had been relatively successful in distancing themselves and their activities from accusations of witchcraft and black magic.

This fact also allows us to see that over time the practitioners themselves along with those who sought their services had been able to negotiate a middle ground where they were relatively safe from the Inquisitorial arm of the Catholic Church.

The *saludadors* were considered "charismatic" and hence quite different from *curanderos*. They were individuals "who possessed a supposedly superhuman ability to cure certain illnesses, principally rabies (*rabia*). This power did *not* result from a pact with the devil, but was a sign of divine grace. Despite being faith healers, they were not bothered by the authorities in the least; neither did they encroach upon the professional terrain of academically trained practitioners, nor were their practices considered heretical" (López Terrada, 2009: 15). Another factor contributing to their acceptance by the Church has to do with the way that at some time in the past they had acquired the protection of a particular Christian saint, namely, Saint Quitèrie, a legendary 5th century virgin martyr whose origins might well be more pagan than Christian and who, not surprisingly, was known for her efficacy in curing rabies.

Although the popular healers were renowned for their ability to deal with a specific disease, it appears that they also practiced a kind of preventative medicine that involved blessing humans, animals and crops, the latter against predation by insects. Moreover, in line with the conceptual structures undergirding the cult of saints, the nature of the "gift" which such healers supposedly possessed was somewhat ambiguous. Having a patron saint, allowed the indi-

vidual healer to draw upon the “excess grace” attributed to the latter. Thus, the natural-born “gift” of the *saludadores* was Christianized. On the other hand, the populace continued to believe in the efficacy of the special “gift” of the practitioner. This created a situation where both parties benefitted, those in charge of the religious sites dedicated to the saint in question and the seventh-born healers themselves. As the fame of individual healers increased, so did the belief in the curative powers of their patron saint. Miraculous cures attributed to the particular saint by those going on pilgrimages to her sanctuary (or by those in charge of the site) would feed quite naturally into the same belief system, reinforcing, in turn, the popularity of the healers operating under the auspices of the same saint. Consequently, the cures, incantations and other healing rituals performed by the *saludadores* were sanctioned by the excess “grace” of this saint, and as we shall see, a similar mechanism for gaining approval operated in the case of the seventh-son and daughter healers of France.

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Even though López Terrada (2009) asserts that *saludadores* were not persecuted and enjoyed the approval of the Church, and, indeed, this might well have been the case in certain locations and time periods, there are indications that the relationship between the Holy Office and the popular practitioners was not always so amicable. For example, by the early 16th century we encounter a treatise written by Pedro Ciruelo called *Reprobación de las supersticiones y hechicerías* (1538) in which he denounces superstitious practices. In this work Ciruelo casts *saludadores* in a negative light, defining them as follows: “[...] dicen que sanan con su saliva de la boca y con su aliento, diciendo ciertas palabras: y vemos que mucha gente se va tras ellos a se saludar ... El hecho de los saludadores principalmente se emplea en querer sanar, o preservar a los hombres, y bestias, y ganados del mal de la ravia.”<sup>14</sup>

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Valencian folk healers were able to portray themselves in a positive light to ecclesiastical and civil authorities as

14. [“it is said that they heal with the saliva from their mouths or with their breath, saying certain words: and we see that many people seek them out for healing [...] The *saludadores*’ principal task is to heal or preserve people, animals, and livestock from rabies.”] Cf. Ciruelo (1538) cited in Campagne (2000: 433) and also López Terrada (2009: 16).

having “on the one hand ‘grace’, a gift from God, and on the other, a charismatic ability to cure, a power he is able to transmit to any substance he wishes, in this case, oil and water” (López Terrada, 2009: 17). This, however, did not mean that in the Iberian Peninsula they did not have not run-ins with the Holy Office, particularly as the activities of these popular healers started to compete with those of the emerging class of medical practitioners, who on the one hand consisted of physicians and surgeons directly affiliated with the Inquisition and on the other there were non-affiliated members of that profession whose clientele occasionally overlapped with that of the *saludadores* (Walker, 2004).

In contrast to what appears to have been the case in the Basque Country, in 17th-century Valencia *saludadores* exercised their profession not only with the approval of the local authorities, but also the enthusiastic support of higher echelons of the Church hierarchy:

*Saludadores* were highly esteemed and were contracted by local governments large and small, in Valencia and in the other realms of the peninsula. Enguera, a small community in the interior of the kingdom of Valencia, had its own *saludador* to whom the municipality paid four pounds yearly in exchange for his curing any person or animal bitten by a rabid dog. This position was occupied in 1631 by a woman named Josefa Medina, who had previously been given a licence confirming her powers by the Archbishop of Valencia. In the city of Valencia, the situation was somewhat different. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was an “examiner of charismatic healers” (*examinador de saludadores*), that is, a public functionary hired by the government after he had passed an examination, whose job it was to determine the ability of those who desired to work as *saludadores* within the city. (López Terrada, 2009: 16)<sup>15</sup>

15. According to López Terrada (2009: 16), the examinations were conducted “in the same way that examiners of physicians and surgeons did: they were open to all applicants and were held in the presence of the municipal authorities. The test consisted of curing rabid dogs using only the applicant’s own saliva. In addition, those being examined would have to extinguish a red-hot bar of metal and a piece of glowing silver by placing their tongues upon them. If they were able to pass these tests, and after taking an oath, the city granted them a legal licence to practise.” And, indeed, López Terrada cites examples where the *saludador* passed the exam and obtained the corresponding license to practice.



Investigations of *salvadores* in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula suggests that by the late 17th and 18th centuries they were coming under increasing attack from ecclesiastical authorities and being subjected more frequently to ridicule by laymen. In short, even though they continued to enjoy significant acceptance among the popular classes, pressures were being brought to bear on these charismatic healers. Their actions and clients increasingly became subject to criticism, although as a whole the services of healers continued to constitute an alternative to the medicine practiced by physicians and surgeons, certainly in part because people of low income were unable to pay the relatively high fees charged by physicians and surgeons (López Terrada, 2009; Walker, 2004).

### 3. *The seventh-born in the rest of Europe*

Our examination of the Basque, Catalan and Valencian data has shown that the belief in the supernatural attributes of seventh-born sons and daughters was not merely a superstition, but rather translated into a set of concrete socially-sanctioned healing practices which by the 19th century in other more urbanized parts of Europe would have been viewed as “quackery” at best and in other circles as “witchcraft”. In this respect the data suggests that we could be looking at a network of cultural practices that existed in other parts of Europe outside the Iberian Peninsula. In other words, what were collected and reported as merely superstitions in the 19th and 20th centuries were grounded in actual social practice, folk memories of the earlier veneration of the seventh-born of a family who then, in turn, regularly went about the community carrying out ritual healings.

Naturally the powers attributed to such a person would have set the individual apart from the rest and because of the person’s alleged supernatural abilities, that person could have been feared. As is well known, in other parts of Europe being a seventh-born son or daughter could be dangerous for it could confer unwelcome shape-shifting powers on the individual as well as the ability to visit others in their sleep. For example, in Germany, 19th century folklorists record the belief that “[i]f there are seven boys or seven girls in one family, then one of them will be a night-

mare, but will know nothing about it” (Kuhn & Schwartz, [1848] 1972: 418-420). While we see that the person is assigned special powers, these are represented as harmful and therefore viewed in a negative light.

Specifically, such a person was destined to be a *mare*, a *murawa*, etc., that is, a “night- mare”, a topic discussed at length in the previous chapters of this study (Frank, 2008a, 2008c, 2009a). Such an individual, according to popular belief, was double-skinned, capable of appearing to be asleep, yet at the same time going out and about, and when doing so, often taking the shape of some other creature.<sup>16</sup> In this fashion the “night-mare” could appear to others who were sleeping, in the form of a menacing “night-visitor”.

Stated differently, folk belief, particularly among German and Polish-speaking populations, reveals that, in addition to having supernatural powers of healing, seventh- born sons and daughters were attributed another remarkable ability: they were viewed as shape-shifters and had the ability to appear, often in a sinister fashion, to others while the latter were sleeping. More concretely, the second element of the English expression “night-mare”, i.e., *-mare*, is the English equivalent of the German word *mahr* found in *nacht-mahr* and meaning “goblin, demon, spirit” (Grimm & Grimm, 1854: 1166).<sup>17</sup> The same semantic element is found in the French compound *cauchemar*. The German reflexes, as well as other etymologically linked terms encountered in Slavic languages, such as the Wendish expression *Murraue* (Ashli- man, 1998-2005; Kuhn & Schwartz, [1848] 1972: 418-420), all refer to this supernatural being: a disturbing night visitor, often described as an ominous “presence” or “intruder” (Cheyne, 2001, 2003; Cheyne, Newby-Clark, & Rueffer, 1999; Hufford, 2005). According to Thorpe: “Under all these denominations is designated that spectral being which places itself on the breast of the sleeping, depriving them of the powers of motion and utterance” (Thorpe, 1851-1852, Vol. 3: 154).

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16. This wide-spread belief system resonates strongly with the stories of the so-called *benandanti*, recounted by Carl Ginzburg (1966). Dialectal variants also include *mare* (Germany), *mahrte* (Pommerania) and *mahrte* (North Germany).

17. Dialectal variants also include *mare* (Germany), *mahrte* (Pommerania) and *mahrte* (North Germany).

Furthermore, attributing to seventh-born children not only shape-shifting powers but specifically those of the “night-mare” brings us back to Basque variants, such as *mamu*, *mahuma* and *marrau*, commonly used to refer to this ‘night-visitor’ and which are, simultaneously, phonologically eroded variants of *hamalau*, “fourteen”, which is also the Basque name of the half-bear half-human, shaman-like healer. These terms also refer to a more sinister being who, according to Basque belief, was said to appear to people when they were asleep. Concrete testimonies of such nocturnal visits continued to be recorded into the late 20th century (Satrústegi, 1981, 1987). The attested dialectal variants of the word *hamalau* appear to include *mamalo*, *mamarrao*, *mamarro*, *mamarrua*, *marrau*, *mamu*, *mahumahu* and *mahuma* among others (Azkue, [1905-1906] 1969: II, 11-12, 19; Euskaltzaindia, 1987, XII, 52, 57-60). The fearsome night visitor was also the creature called upon by parents to make their children behave. In the case of Sardù, this particular being is known as *marragau*, *marragotti* and *mammoti*.<sup>18</sup>

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Although I am not aware of Sardinian folk beliefs alleging that seventh-born children were destined to become a “night-mare”, a closer examination of the lexical field in Sardù demonstrates that the stem of the terms has three variants. The roots appear in the shape of *mamu-*, *momo-/mommo-*, *momma-* and *marra-*.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the root form *mamu-*, we find *mamuntomo* “spauracchio”; *mamuntone* “fantoccio”; *mamuttinu*: “strepito”; *mamudinu* “Belzebù, demonio, diavolo, strepito, zurlo” *mamuttone* “spauracchio, spaventapasseri”; *mamuttones* “maschere carnevalesche con campanacci”; *mamutzone* “spauracchio” as well as *mamus* “esseri fantastici che abitano nelle caverne”. In the instance of the root stem of *momo-/mommo-/momma-*, we find: *momotti* “babau, befana, spauracchio”; *mommoi* “babau, befana, fantasma, licantropo, orco, pidocchio, spauracchio, spettro”; *mommai* “befana”; and from the stem *marra-* there is: *marragau* “orco, gruccione”, *marrangoi* “babau, mostro, spauracchio”; and

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18. For a more detailed account of this aspect of the data, cf. Frank (2008c:106-118).

19. I would note that it was Graziano Fois (2002b) who first brought to my attention the similarities between the Sardinian and Basque data sets, particularly items having the root of *mamu-* and consequently the relationship between the *mamuttones* / *mamutzones* and their Basque counterparts (cf. Frank, 2008c).

*marragotti* “befana, biliora, bilioso, fantasma, mangiabambini, mannaro, orco, ragno, spauracchio, spettro” (Fois, 2002b; Rubattu, 2006). In these examples we find different personifications of the figure of the night-visitor, as a *spettro* alongside a shape-shifted human, the *mannaro*. Also found among the variants of this cross-linguistic morpho-semantic field are terms such as *mamau* / *babau* and *marrau* / *barbau* (Sainéan, 1905: 70). These items appear to be cognates, differentiated primarily by the exchange of the bilabials: *m* → *b*, as discussed earlier (Frank, 2009a: 122-124).

In summary, it appears that regional variants of the word *hamalau* may have given rise to expressions used in various European languages to refer to seventh-sons and daughters in their manifestation as shape-shifters. It therefore follows that the shamanic characteristics attributed to the Bear Son, the half-human, half-bear protagonist, his vision quest and adventures that allow him to acquire his spirit animal helpers and later shape-shift into them may have been transferred in some symbolic fashion to these seventh-born healers (Frank, 2008a, 2008c, 2009a).

Despite this rather negative portrayal of seventh-sons and daughters, that is, equating them with disturbing otherworldly shape-shifting “night-visitors”, we need to keep in mind that, as López Guereñu discovered in his study of the records of Basque municipal councils from the 16th to the 18th centuries, these members of society—even at this late date—were still held in high esteem, as much or more so than Christian priests and medical practitioners of the time. In the eyes of those serving on the municipal councils whose duty it was to set forth the conditions and terms of the contracts and vote in favor of hiring the healers, the seventh-sons and daughters were viewed as legitimate health providers, even though we can identify admonitions by authorities of the Catholic Church inveighing against the *saludadores*. Nonetheless, even members of the Catholic clergy were often fully complicit in the hirings. For example, in one case, specifically in the village of Lagrán, the individual that the city council wanted to hire as a *saludador* was illiterate and hence wasn’t capable of signing the contract they had prepared for him. So the healer asked his local priest to sign for him which the latter did (López de

Guereñu, 1966: 169).<sup>20</sup> In other words, the priest was fully in agreement with the hire.

However, the approval that the Basque healers seemed to have enjoyed at the local level was not necessarily reflective of the opinions held by the Catholic hierarchy. The latter repeatedly sent out inquisitors (“visitadores”) to the local parishes in what turned out to be vain attempts to stamp out practices which they deemed dangerous, if not heretical. The villagers were told that they should not hire such individuals. Yet, as López de Guereñu himself laments, these implorations fell on deaf ears. In short, there is evidence that for several centuries the admonitions of these authorities went relatively unheeded by the local populace and the healers continued to be contracted as before. For example, López de Guereñu indicates that decrees, similar to the following one from 1550, were sent out repeatedly by various bishops to the villages of Alaba:

Ytem por quanto los saludadores y conjuradores alquilados comunmente son personas sospechosas y banas y de mal ejemplo, mandó el señor Visitador a los vecinos del pueblo no alquilen ni tengan saludadores ny conjuradores ny hechiceros ny adebinos ny ensalmadores ny personas que cortan letra ny curan la rosa ni haran [sic] cosas banas ni con subpercisiones ni echen nomynas ni agan otras cosas banas reagradables del dro. dibino y humano ... (López de Guereñu, 1966: 164)<sup>21</sup>

20. The following comment is also relevant: “[...] pero estimamos que con lo reseñado es más que suficiente para hacernos cargo de lo extendida que estuvo esta plaga en los siglos XVI al XVIII, poniendo de relieve que los saludadores gozaban, aparte del sueldo, de una categoría social tan respetable, o más, que la de maestros o médicos, celebrando con los Concejos contratos como servidores del municipio, algunos de cuyos documentos copiamos a continuación como muestra de la importancia que llegaron a tener en pasados tiempos estos personajes desaprensivos, que tan bien sabían aprovecharse de la credulidad humana” “[...] but we consider that what has been reviewed is more than sufficient to makes us aware of how extended this plague [of healers] was from the XVI to the XVIII centuries, emphasizing that the healers enjoyed, in addition to their salary, a level of social acceptance as respectable, or more so, than that of teachers and doctors, signing contracts with the councils as employees of the municipality, some of which we reproduce below as an example of the importance that these unscrupulous characters came to have, who well knew how to take advantage of human gullibility”] (López de Guereñu, 1966: 168).

21. [“And since the healers and conjurers regularly hired are suspicious and immoral people and of bad example, the Inquisitor ordered that the inhabitants of the village not hire or have healers, conjurers, wizards, diviners, quacks or persons who cut letters, cure

In later sections of this essay we will see that the high status afforded to the Basque seventh-sons and daughters in the 18th century may well be reflected in social practices found in other parts of Europe where, nonetheless, over time the belief in these healers was eroded until they were viewed as nothing more than charlatans preying on the sick and gullible. In the case of the Basque *salutariyua* there is no indication that the practitioners sought to justify their official duties and legitimize their status by plying their trade under the protection of a Christian saint. Rather they seem to have maintained their autonomy. As we have seen, this contrasts with what occurred in the case of Cataluyna and Valencia where the healers were taken under the wing of the Catholic Church and allowed to continue to carry out their duties with a kind of Christian dispensation.

#### 4. *The French marcou: Another seventh-son healer*

In France, the seventh son (or daughter) was called a *marcou*. He was said to have a magic sign (birthmark) on his body, sometimes identified as a *fleur-de-lis*, and that he had the power to cure certain maladies.<sup>22</sup> Although great effort has been exerted to pin down the etymology of the expression *marcou*, its ultimate origin is still rather obscure. Nonetheless, given the significance of these French healers, we need to examine the French data more closely. First, we find that French dictionaries give the following definition of the word: “*Marcou*: Homme portant un marque magique sur le corps et qui possédait, croyait-on, le pouvoir de guérir certaines maladies” (*Dictionnaire Encyclopédique pour Tous: Petit Larousse*, 1963: 432). It is noteworthy that this 20th century definition of the term makes no mention of the need for the healer to be the seventh-son. However, other evidence points to the fact that the “magic mark” was only one sign that revealed these seventh-sons and daughters had curative powers. Moreover, the notion that the seventh-

the rose [a rash caused by herpes], do immoral things, with superstitions, nor do other immoral things unbecoming to divine and human law”]

22. Bloch ([1924] 1983: 303) comments on the survival of this belief: “[...] on lit dans la *Revue des Traditions populaires*, IV (1894), p. 555, no 4: dans le Bocage Normand: ‘quand il y a sept filles dans une famille, la septième porte sur une parties quelconque du corps un *fleur de lis* et *touche du carreau*, c’est-à- dire qu’elle guérit les inflammations d’intestin chez les enfants’.”

son or daughter healer was endowed with some kind of special physical sign fits into the wider pan-European matrix of belief in the supernatural powers of the seventh-born. Opie and Tatem (1989: 246-247) cite one British mid-13th-century source relating to the healing powers of seventh sons while they present sources dating from the 16th century forward that explicitly attribute to such children the ability to heal the so-called King's Evil which consequently links them to the figure of the *marcou* (cf. also Bloch, 1973, [1924] 1983; Vaz da Silva, 2003).

Additional important information on the *marcou*s is brought forward in a brief note by Honoré de Mareville which includes an abridged translation of an 1854 article from *Le Journal du Loiret*. In Mareville's discussion he mentions specifically that the *marcou* has special healing powers: that of curing the King's Evil. The latter expression was used to refer to a malady called Scrofula (Scrophula or Struma), composed of a variety of skin diseases; in particular, a form of tuberculosis, affecting the lymph nodes of the neck. Mareville's summary of the article from *Le Journal du Loiret* is as follows:

We have more than once had occasion to make our readers acquainted with the superstitious practices of the *Marcou*s. The Orléanais is the classic land of *marcou*s, and in the Gâtinais every parish at all above the common is sure to have its *marcou*. If a man is the seventh son of his father, without any female intervening, he is a *marcou*; he has on some part of the body the mark of a *fleur-de-lis*, and, like the kings of France, he has the power of curing the king's evil. All that is necessary to effect a cure is, that the *marcou* should breathe upon the part affected, or that the sufferer should touch the mark of the *fleur-de-lis*. Of all the *marcou*s of the Orléanais, he of Ormes is the best known and most celebrated. Every year, from twenty, thirty, forty leagues around, crowds of patients come to visit him; but it is particularly in Holy Week that his power is most efficacious; and on the night of Good Friday, from midnight to sunrise, the cure is certain. Accordingly, at this season, from four to five hundred persons press round his dwelling to take advantage of his wonderful powers. (Mareville, 1859: 59)

From the text of the article in *Le Journal du Loiret* we see that this is not the first report that the newspaper has dedicated

to the topic of the activities of the *marcou*. Moreover, from the way that the article begins, i.e., “The Orléanais is the classic land of *marcou*, and in the Gâtinais every parish at all above the common is sure to have its *marcou*”, there is reason to believe that the *marcou* were once found throughout this geographical region, if not in all of France, although by the middle of the 19th century they were perhaps less common in other districts. This conclusion is reinforced by the wording of phrase: that the Orléanais is “the classic land of *marcou*”. There is also a strong indication that each parish had its own *marcou*. Whether that individual was paid out of the municipal coffers cannot be determined, at least not on the basis of the scant data afforded by this newspaper article.

Mareville (1859: 59) then says that “[t]he paper then goes on to describe a disturbance among the crowds assembled this year, in consequence of the officers of justice having attempted to put a stop to the imposture.” The article concludes thus:

The *marcou* of Ormes is a cooper in easy circumstances, being the possessor of a horse and carriage. His name is Foulon, and in the country he is known by the appellation of *Le beau marcou*. He has the *fleur-de-lis* on his left side, and in this respect is more fortunate than the generality of *marcou*s, with whom the mysterious sign is apt to hide itself in some part of the body quite inaccessible to the eyes of the curious. (Mareville, 1859: 59)

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Then there is a rendition of the same news item, from 1854, written by Robert Chambers whose negative attitude toward the *marcou* is quite obvious. In fact, the same attitude, laced with sarcasm and disbelief, is detected on the part of the writer of the original French news report as well as in Chambers’ reflections upon it. By their choice of phrasing both writers reveal their strong disapproval of what they view as superstitious practices. Yet at the same time we can see that at this point in time the healers were still attracting large crowds in this region of France. Here is Chambers’ commentary on the 1854 article:

France, as well as our own country, has a belief in the Seventh Son mystery. The *Journal du Loiret*, a French provincial newspaper, in 1854 stated that, in Orleans, if a family



has seven sons and no daughter, the seventh is called a Marcou, is branded with a fleur-de-lis, and is believed to possess the power of curing the king's evil. The Marcou breathes on the part affected, or else the patient touches the Marcou's fleur-de-lis. In the year above-named, there was a famous Marcou in Orleans named Foulon; he was a cooper by trade, and was known as 'le beau Marcou.' Simple peasants used to come to visit him from many leagues in all directions, particularly in Passion week, when his ministrations were believed to be most efficacious. On the night of Good Friday, from midnight to sunrise, the chance of cure was supposed to be especially good, and on this account four or five hundred persons would assemble. Great disturbances hence arose; and as there was evidence, to all except the silly dupes themselves, that Foulon made use of their superstition to enrich himself, the police succeeded, but not without much opposition, in preventing these assemblages. (Chambers, 1869)

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Since we do not have access to the original French, there are several aspects of the account by Mareville (1859) and Chambers (1869) that catch our attention. The first is that the belief in the special powers of the seventh-son continued to be quite widespread at this juncture in time in both France and England. In both locations the healing ability of the individuals had come to be focused narrowly on a particular disease, namely, a form of tuberculosis which afflicted significant numbers of the population (Barlow, 1980). Then, although there is substantial repetition in terms of the basic facts, the reason that Chambers found this item of special interest lies elsewhere, namely, in his concern with the survival of the belief in the special powers of the seventh-son, a belief he would define as "a superstition".

Chambers' attitude contrasts with that of Mareville whose gloss is more respectful. Nonetheless, it would appear that the original author of the news item shared the opinion of Chambers, namely, that this was a superstition that needed to be rooted out and that those who believed in the curative powers of the *marcou*s were being deceived. In short, he held that the *marcou* of Orleans was a fraud and should be seen as nothing more than a "quack doctor", one who was intent on lining his pockets with ill-gotten goods obtained from "the silly dupes" who flocked to him in droves for cures. Both authors openly express their contempt for these popular

practitioners, portrayed by them as imposters who thrive upon the gullibility of their overly credulous patients. In this respect, we should recall that even the newer, officially sanctioned members of the medical community with their blood-sucking leeches and vacuum tubes were not necessarily immune from criticism. They, too, were often viewed by the public with suspicion and mistrust. In summary, by the 19th century there are indications that the shamanic trappings and charismatic aura that had enveloped the *marcou*s in times past were beginning to fall away.

However, also evident in the 19th century news account is the fact that far from being social outcasts, among the popular classes, the activities of these *marcou*s formed part of a revered tradition of curative practices which appear to have been even more widespread in centuries past. In other words, if Orléanais is defined as “the classic land of *marcou*s”, we can intuit that *marcou*s were formerly found in other regions, although perhaps by the mid-19th century they were not as common in other parts of France.

In order to better understand Chambers interest in the French *marcou*, we can turn to the section in which he discusses this social phenomenon in reference to the magical powers attributed to the number “seven”, namely, a brief essay entitled “Seventh Sons and their Seventh Sons.”

There has been a strong favour for the number Seven, from a remote period in the world’s history. It is, of course, easy to see in what way the Mosaic narrative gave sanctity to this number in connection with the days of the week, and led to usages which influence the social life of all the countries of Europe. But a sort of mystical goodness or power has attached itself to the number in many other ways. Seven wise men, seven champions of Christendom, seven sleepers, seven-league boots, seven churches, seven ages of man, seven hills, seven senses, seven planets, seven metals, seven sisters, seven stars, seven wonders of the world,—all have had their day of favour; albeit that the number has been awkwardly interfered with by modern discoveries concerning metals, planets, stars, and wonders of the world.

Added to the above list is the group of Seven Sons, especially in relation to the youngest or seventh of the seven; and more especially still if this person happen to be the seventh son of a seventh son. It is now, perhaps, impossible

to discover in what country, or at what time, the notion originated; but a notion there certainly is, chiefly in provincial districts, that a seventh son has something peculiar about him. For the most part, the imputed peculiarity is a healing power, a faculty of curing diseases by the touch, or by some other means. (Chambers, 1869)

The English author then provides a series of examples for this belief:

The instances of this belief are numerous enough. There is a rare pamphlet called the *Quack Doctor's Speech*, published in the time of Charles II. The reckless Earl of Rochester delivered this speech on one occasion, when dressed in character, and mounted on a stage as a charlatan. The speech, amid much that suited that licentious age, but would be frowned down by modern society, contained an enumeration of the doctor's wonderful qualities, among which was that of being a 'seventh son of a seventh son,' and therefore clever as a curer of bodily ills. The matter is only mentioned as affording a sort of proof of the existence of a certain popular belief. In Cornwall, the peasants and the miners entertain this notion; they believe that a seventh son can cure the king's evil by the touch. The mode of proceeding usually is to stroke the part affected thrice gently, to blow upon it thrice, to repeat a form of words, and to give a perforated coin or some other object to be worn as an amulet. (Chambers, 1869)

Then we find that in Bristol,

about forty years ago, there was a man who was always called 'Doctor,' simply because he was the seventh son of a seventh son. The family of the Joneses of Muddfi, in Wales, is said to have presented seven sons to each of many successive generations, of whom the seventh son always became a doctor—apparently from a conviction that he had an inherited qualification to start with. In Ireland, the seventh son of a seventh son is believed to possess prophetic as well as healing power. A few years ago, a Dublin shopkeeper, finding his errand-boy to be generally very dilatory in his duties, inquired into the cause, and found that, the boy being a seventh son of a seventh son, his services were often in requisition among the poorer neighbours, in a way that brought in a good many pieces of silver. (Chambers, 1869)

Chambers adds this other example:

Early in the present century, there was a man in Hampshire, the seventh son of a seventh son, who was consulted by the villagers as a doctor, and who carried about with him a collection of crutches and sticks, purporting to have once belonged to persons whom he had cured of lameness. Cases are not wanting, also, in which the seventh daughter is placed upon a similar pinnacle of greatness. In Scotland, the spae wife, or fortune-teller, frequently announces herself as the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, to enhance her claims to prophetic power. Even so late as 1851, an inscription was seen on a window in Plymouth, denoting that a certain doctress was 'the third seventh daughter,'—which the world was probably intended to interpret as the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. (Chambers, 1869)<sup>23</sup>

In summary, the curative abilities ascribed to seventh sons and daughters in the Basque Country, Catalunya and Valencia coincide with the miraculous powers attributed to the *marcoux* in France while the underpinnings of the continental datasets converge even further when they are compared with Chambers' review of folk beliefs concerning the seventh-sons and daughters in England, Scotland and Wales. In fact, the various datasets we have examined so far lead to the following conclusion concerning the continuity of belief and to the strong possibility that the English Quack Doctor, the stock character found in the abbreviated plays of English mumming tradition, the so-called St. George Plays, belong to this same tradition, albeit their comic counterpart. Moreover, there is reason to believe that the popular belief in the curative powers of the seventh son of a seventh son was alive and well even into the late 19th century, to such a point that members of the medical profession were obliged to berate those who lent public support to it. They were outraged by the continuing support given in the daily and weekly press, both secular and religious, to "the travel-

23. Belief in the supernatural powers of the seventh son of seventh son gained a new lease on life in 1988 with release of an album entitled *Seventh Son of a Seventh Son* by the heavy metal band Iron Maiden, renowned for its gothic dark sound and predilection for the occult. The widespread popularity of the musical group insured that the eerie, quite ominous sounding words intoned at the beginning of the song were heard by millions of young people: "Today is born the seventh one; born of woman, the seventh son, and he in turn of a seventh son, he has the power to heal; he has the gift of a second sight, he is the chosen one [...]."

ing medical quack” whose license to practice consisted only in the claim that he was a seventh son of seventh son (n.a., 1884).

#### 4.1. *Competing healing traditions: Royal and popular representations*

As has been noted earlier, the King’s Evil was the term used to refer to a skin disease called Scrofula (Scrophula or Struma), in particular, a variant form of tuberculosis, affecting the lymph nodes of the neck. The medical term itself was *morbus regius* in Latin which in “the Middle Ages was translated into the vernacular: into French as *le mal le roy* and into Anglo-Saxon as *cynelic adl*. In Middle English it became the king’s evil– ‘evil’ as in the Lord’s Prayer, where translating *malum*–and in this context simply meaning illness or malady” (Barlow, 1980: 4). In the late Middle Ages monastic writers were applying it not only to leprosy and other wasting and scabious diseases but also to swellings, such as carbuncles and other eruptions, wherever they might occur on the body.

aA



Fig. 1  
Scrofula in the neck  
Source: Wikipedia (2007)

While there is a great deal of confusion concerning what is fact and what is fiction with respect to the point in time in which the kings of France and England began practicing this type of ritual healing, there is little doubt that by 1272 there were those among the populace who thought that both the kings of France and England were curing the so-called king’s disease by their touch, and, moreover, that the disease was called royal because kings cured it. The logic

was circular: kings cured scrofula because it was the royal disease and scrofula was called the royal disease because kings cured it (Barlow, 1980: 13). Moreover, as we shall see, by the close of the Middle Ages the cult of a particular saint had come to be involved in granting the gift of the “royal touch” to the sovereigns of France, the same saint, it should be noted, that was linked to the curative powers attributed to the popular healers called *marcou*s.

Across the channel we find evidence of the same healing tradition being attached to the members of the royal family. For instance, it was the practice of Charles II to give sufferers his healing touch every Friday in the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall. Samuel Pepys records that Charles conducted the ceremony with the utmost reverence and gravity while James I, in contrast, was said to touch unwillingly, and refuse to make the sign of the cross on the ulcers of those who were paraded before him. The custom reached its zenith during the Restoration. For example, Charles II is said to have touched more than 90,000 victims between 1660 and 1682. In 1712, we find Queen Anne touching 200 victims, among them a young boy who was to become Dr. Samuel Johnson. But King George I put an end to the practice considering it to be too Catholic.

In the case of France, according to popular tradition, by the late Middle Ages the miraculous healing powers of kings to cure the King’s Evil were being explained by their devotion to a particular saint, St. Marcoul (or Marculphus). In fact, this saint has played a major role in explanations that have been put forward to elucidate the origins of the name given to the popular healers themselves. And in France, too, truly miraculous feats of healing were attributed to the rulers. For example, it is said that Henry IV of France often touched and healed as many as 1,500 individuals at a time. On this side of the channel the custom persisted until Louis XV stopped it in the 1700s, although it was briefly revived by Charles X between 1824 and 1830 (Barlow, 1980; Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011; Hitchings, 2005: 11).

#### 4.2. *Observations concerning the etymology of marcou*

The etymology of the term *marcou* has been subjected to considerable scrutiny over the years (Bloch, [1924] 1983: 261-267, 308). Some have theorized that its origins go back

to St. Marcoul, the name of an otherwise legendary abbot from Nanteu, in Normandy. According to the pious legend that grew up around him, he lived in the 6th century and was famous for his miracles. Indeed, there is a possibility that the site chosen for the monastery founded in his honor was a pre-Christian one and that veneration for the tomb of the saint on display there goes back to earlier religious practices. In any case, the name of this saint does not surface until some three hundred years after his alleged death, in a 9th century document where the life of the saint is recounted. Bloch characterizes the document in these terms: “[...] n’offre rien que les fables hagiographiques les plus banales. [...] En somme il faut nous résigner à ignorer tout, ou presque tout, du saint homme de Nant. A en juger par les *Vies*, on ne devait pas, dès le IXe siècle, être sur son compte beaucoup mieux informé que nous” (Bloch, [1924] 1983: 262-263).

By the time that the name of the abbot first appears in print he has become Saint Marcoul (or Marculphus) and in the following centuries his relics would come to be revered for their healing properties. Indeed, conflicts over who would possess his bones would become a major source of controversy and competition. Initially, his powers were of a general nature and only later, in the 13th century, began to be focused on a single disease, namely, scrofula. By the 15th century, his tomb was the object of pilgrimages and the monks attached to it were selling prophylactic amulets with an image of the saint on them.

Although tradition held that once they were crowned the kings of France, starting with St. Louis, made an obligatory pilgrimage to obtain the saint’s blessing, it is more likely that this ceremony did not come to be observed until the beginning of the 16th century. For example, Bloch suggests that it was not until the 16th century that members of the royal families of France began to openly seek to attribute their power to heal the King’s Evil to this saint, while at the same time it was in this period that the monks in charge of the holy site of St. Marcoul started to reach out to the popular healers, asking them to report back to them when they had performed a “miracle” so that the monks could record it and in doing so further enhance the reputation of their saint. Thus, a custom of ambiguous significance,

maintained by popular pressure and connived at, even encouraged, by monastic and ecclesiastical elements produced a situation in which both groups profited. In other words, it would seem that at some point the popular healers had come under the protection of this saint and, consequently, by their actions ended up promoting the efficacy of his cult (Bloch, [1924] 1983: 260-308). What initially motivated this association is less clear.

Finally there is the problem of the specialization itself for although many shrines gained a reputation for being exceptionally efficacious in some field or other, some of these associations were verbal and based on puns or legends (Barlow, 1980: 16). Thus, we might ask whether the French *marcou*s came to be associated with the shrine of St. Marcoul simply because the name of the saint happened to sound like the name that had been given already to the popular healers. In any case, by the 16th century, both the popular healers and the kings of France and England were conducting their healing ceremonies under the auspices of a particular Christian saint, although in England that saint was St. Remigius. More specifically, the English kings were thought to have received this power because of their descent from Edward the Confessor, who, in turn, according to some legends, had received it from St. Remigius.

In conclusion, while there is a clear historical connection between the popular healers known as *marcou*s and the figure of St. Marcoul, the etymology of the term *marcou* can be subjected to a very different interpretation, as we shall see shortly. For now let it suffice to say that special healing powers were attributed to two different types of individuals: those who came to the profession because as their birthright as seventh-sons or daughters and then those who were said to have the same powers but only because they were transmitted through the royal lineage and reconfirmed through the intercession of a Christian saint. With these facts in mind, the morphology and functions of the lower- class *marcou*s are far more in keeping with those of the Basque, Catalan and Valencian seventh-son and daughter healers even though by the 19th century the duties assigned to the *marcou*s appear to have been more limited and less structured.



### 5. *Weaving together the threads of evidence*

So far in this analysis little attention has been paid to cognitive import of the semantic artifacts carrying numerical connotations related to the number “seven”. The points made in this section will serve to shed further light on the complexity of the problem under analysis. Specifically, it lays out additional lines of converging evidence for the explanatory model being proposed. As stated earlier, the research model argues that the wide-spread European belief in the magical powers of the number “seven” with respect to the special endowments of a seventh son or daughter (as well as those of the seventh-son of a seventh-son or daughter) is closely linked to a broader cognitive framework of belief encountered in the same geographical zone that revolves around the complex psycho-social embodiment of a “sensed presence”, that is, the “night-mare”.

Assigning magical qualities to the number seven is a wide-spread belief, found in many parts of the world, and even the belief that a seventh son or daughter has special powers is not uncommon elsewhere. However, here we are talking about a dataset that has an additional characteristic, namely, linguistic clues that confer other characteristics to the same individual. Concretely, a cross-linguistic analysis of the meanings of the names used to refer to the seventh son or daughter suggests that their supernatural abilities extended to them taking on the qualities of the “sensed presence” and hence becoming “night-mares” with the ability to shape-shift and go out and about at night while their physical body remained at home in bed and apparently asleep.

And, even more striking is the fact that, as has been discussed previously, in many European languages names used to refer to the “night-mare” appear to derive from a common root, terms that I allege represents phonological variants of a pre-Indo-European etymon, *hamalau* “fourteen”. We should recall that Hamalau is also the name of the half-bear, half-human protagonist of the Bear Son tales who acts as the intermediary between the world of humans and the world of bears; the being who, as a young shaman apprentice, undertakes a “vision quest” (Frank, 1997, 2007, 2010).

Although phonological variants of *hamalau* have been treated in detail elsewhere, at this juncture we still cannot

state with certainty whether the French term *marcou* belongs to the same set of regional variants discussed earlier which, viewed cross-linguistically, is a morpho-semantic field with stems in *mamu-*, *momo-*, *mar-*, *mara-*, *marra-*, *mora-*, *mura-*, *maro-* and contains as well as Basque variants of the term: *mamalo*, *mamarrao*, *mamarro*, *mamarrua*, *marrau*, *mamu*, *mahu*, *mahumahu*, *mahuma*, and even *inguma*.<sup>24</sup>

Terms that refer to the ‘night-mare’, as mentioned earlier, include the Germanic variants in *Mare*, *Mähr*; Polish variants spelled as *mórawa*, *myrawa*, *mürawa*, *murawa* and *morawa* and the Bulgarian variant in *Maroc*, among others. The etymology of the French term *marcou* is more obscure, since none of the other regional variants studied to date do show the development of a stem with a consonant cluster in /rc-/. On the other hand, the process of phonological erosion that took place could be reconstructed as: *hamalau* > \**mamalau* > \**mamarlau* > \**marlau* > *marcou*. With this sequence the cluster /rl/ would have produced /rc/. In this respect, it should be noted that in French there are four other variants that refer to “night-mares” or *croquemitaines*, namely, *mamau* / *babaou* alongside *marmau* / *barbau*, the latter with consonant clusters in /rm/ and /rb/. The meanings of the terms are essentially identical to those of the Sardu words *mommoi*, *mommai*, *marragoi* and *marragau*.

Sainéan, citing Jaubert, explains the meaning of the word this way: “*Marcou*, le septième garçon d’une mère, sans fille interposée... le *marcou* passe pour sorcier” (1905: 79). The variants Sainéan lists for *marcou* include *marlou*, *maraud* and *macaud*.

The variants suggest that the term was an expression without a fixed pronunciation and that the variations rep-

24. With the exception of *inguma* which evolved from *mahuma*, all these variants show “nasal spread”, that is, the word ends up having two /m/ sounds. In order to understand what has taken place with the phonological shape of the expression *hamalau*, we need to keep in mind that in many Basque dialects the letter /h/ is silent. Therefore, in these dialects *hamalau* would have been pronounced as *amalau* (as it is today in Batua, the Basque unified standard). This means that because of the phenomenon of nasal spread, the word ended up with two /m/ sounds, the /m/ which starts the second syllable spread to the beginning of the word: *amalau* > \**mamalau*. Also, I would remind the reader that since Basque has no gender, a variant form such as *mamalo* should not be interpreted through the grammatical lens of a speaker of a Romance language. In other words, while the -o ending on these variants might appear (to some Romance speakers) to be indicative of masculine gender, in Basque this is certainly not the case.

resent repeated attempts on the part of speakers to hit upon the “correct” pronunciation. As long as the term was known only orally, there was a certain level of uncertainty as to how it was supposed to be pronounced and even more so in terms of how it was to be written down. Over time, a written canonical form would emerge and be agreed upon, that is, *marcou*, the one regularly used in textual references to describe this seventh-born sorcerer. However, as Sainéan noted, quite curiously, the four variants cited above are used to refer to a “tom-cat” as well as to the miraculous seventh-son or daughter.

In addition, Sainéan attempts to explain *marcou* as a variant of French words meaning “night-mare”: “Il est donc contemporain de *cauchemar* (XVe s.: *quauquemare* et *cauquemarre*, Nicot: *cauchemar* et *chaucemare*), dont le terme final paraît remonter à la même notion de chat-sorcier (cf. plus haut *maraud*). [...] et le wall. *marc*, *cauchemar* (Liège *chotte-marque* = *chauquemarc*), à côté de *mar* [...]” (Sainéan, 1905: 80). He compares the stem *mar-* found in *marcou* and as well in the second element of the compound *cauchemar* to “Sic. *mazzamarro* (*mazzamareddu*), *cauchemar*, et Napl. *mazzamauriello*, lutin, est le chat (démon ou sorcier) [...]” (Sainéan, 1905: 80). Finally, he cites a curious belief associated with these sorcerer-cats, a superstition which links their activities to a specific day, concretely, Martedì Grasso: “Le soir du mardi gras, les chats-sorciers allaient faire le sabbat à un certain endroit [...]”. Jaubert, quoted by Sainéan, states the superstition in a slightly different fashion and with a slightly different spelling for the items under examination: “On prétend que le jour de mardi gras, les *macaouds* ou *marauds* vont faire bombance avec le diable” (Sainéan, 1905: 79-80).

In summary, although the etymology of *marcou* is still unclear, if one examines the content of the French morpho-semantic field more carefully, a pattern emerges. The set of meanings contained in it organize themselves around concepts we have seen before in the case of the Sardu terms: shaman-healer, sorcerer, bogey-man, night-mare. And the variants of night-mare cited by Sainéan, namely, *marc* and *chauquemarc*, suggest that a variant in *marc-* was in use with similar meanings. Then, just as one of the components of the field of meanings found in Sardu includes the *mamuthones* / *mamutzones*, we might ask whether the reference to the

belief in *marcouds* going out the night of Mardi Gras is a reminiscence of actual past ritual practices celebrated on that day.

While recognizing that until now the etymology of *marcou* has often been traced back sounds made by tom-cats, there is another approach. Even though the senses found in the semantic field the term *marcou* and its phonological variants coincide closely with the meanings contained in the morpho-semantic field of terms referring to the “night-mare”, we are left with the question of why this semantic field also contains the notion of a “cat”. Sainéan explains that terms such as *marcou* and *margou* are imitations of the sounds made by a cat (or a pig).

MARC ou MARG, particulier au Centre et au Midi de la France.

*marc*, matou, H.-Saône; Vosges *marcâ*, H.-Bret. *marcaou* (Creuse *margaou*); *marco*, Nièvre, etc. (Corrèze *margo*), et *marcou*, Loire-Inf., *margou*, Tarn, Aveyron (les deux derniers aussi en anc. Fr.); *marco* (= marco), matou, Char, Nièvre [...]. Ce dernier type exprime la notion de ‘gronder’, commune au chat et au cochon: *marcou* ou *margou*, chat mâle, signifie simplement ‘grondeur’ [...]. (Sainéan, 1905: 19)

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He then argues for a semantic pathway constituted by a sequence involving the following two cognitive steps: 1) the sounds made by a tom-cat became a way of naming the animal that emitted them, then; 2) since cats were viewed as familiars of witches and used in rituals, the name of the familiar was transferred to the witch or sorcerer. Although there is a certain logic in this sequence, it does not explain why the same semantic stem produces words meaning specifically “night-mare”. An alternative approach would be one that accepts, on the one hand, that the sequence of sounds in *marcou* and *margou* was the basis for referring to a “tom-cat” using these and similar sounding terms, but which then argues that the meanings of “sorcerer”, “bogeyman” and “night-mare” derive from a different source, the knowledge of which was lost over time by speakers of the language.

## 6. *Quack doctors and Mummers' Plays in England, Scotland and Wales*

The scene in which the Bear character is killed and then resurrected is a standard component of the Good-Luck performances all across Europe. In Mummers' Plays, the central incident is the killing and restoring to life of one of the characters. The characters may be introduced in a series of short speeches (usually in rhyming couplets) or they may introduce themselves in the course of the play's action. The principal characters of the plays, presented in a wide variety of manner and style, are a Hero, his chief opponent, the Fool and a Quack Doctor. As mentioned earlier, a defining feature of mumming plays is the Doctor, and the main purpose of the fight is to provide him with a patient to cure. The hero sometimes kills and sometimes is killed by his opponent; in either case, the Doctor comes to restore the dead man to life. The reenactments are found throughout much of England, Scotland and Wales.

In the English tradition the "hero" is most commonly Saint George, King George, or Prince George. His principal opponents are the Turkish Knight (in southern England), or a valiant soldier named Slasher (elsewhere). In English Mummers' plays featuring St. George (St. Nicholas and/or Father Christmas), the cast of actors has been modified so that the performer who is killed and resurrected is no longer a "bear", but rather a fully anthropomorphic being in a plot that speaks of the hero being killed by a villain or vice-versa, while the ploy used to bring about the character's death is often a combat that pits the defender of Christian values, e.g., St. George, against his pagan enemy, e.g., a Turkish knight and/or a dragon.

The following is a typical description of the performance piece:

Each Mummers' play was different, with different scripts and characters. What remains central to all the plays is the death and resurrection theme. So a doctor always appears, Saint George is usually present, as is his nemesis, the Turkish Knight or the dragon. [...] At the heart of the piece is the central (most humorous and most archaic) moment of the play: the bringing back to life of the slain hero by the quack doctor. (BBC, [n.d.])

The salience of this scene is such that Peter Millington, one of the leading authorities on Mummer's Plays, has argued that "the common linking factor [of the plays] is the presence of a quack doctor. Indeed it would not be out of place to call them Quack Doctor plays to distinguish them from other English folk plays [...]. There were earlier quack doctors in plays, the Doctor having been a stock character in stage drama for a long time. Perhaps the most important is the Doctor in early English Pantomimes, which owes its origins to the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*." In fact, Millington goes so far as to propose a new term for such plays: "To define the textual scope of this study I have introduced the new term 'Quack Doctor Play' to replace the traditional terminology of 'Mummers' Play' or 'Mumming Play'" (Millington, 1989).

In the Mummers' Plays the portrayal of the healer is clearly comedic. For example, there is not a hint of the respect that was paid to the popular healers of times past, the seventh-sons and daughters that we have discussed. In these performances, the character has become a kind of parody of his profession, reduced to nothing more than a boastful charlatan, even though in the Doctor's speeches there are echoes of the supernatural healing powers attributed to the seventh-son or seventh-son of a seventh-son. In this way the figure of the Quack Doctor has survived and continues to be an integral part of these highly abbreviated yet ritualized performances in which his miraculous powers, albeit comedic ones, are highlighted and used to bring the dead back to life.

In the performance art of other parts of Europe, it is relatively clear that over time the role of the shaman-healer in resurrecting the Bear character was taken over by a Quack Doctor, although, quite remarkably, in some locations both characters appear to have survived, right alongside each other, concretely in Bagnères-de-Bigorre in the south-western Hautes-Pyrénées. In other locations, in representations of the scene of the Death and Resurrection of the Bear, the shaman-healer and the Bear have disappeared entirely from the stage. The scene has been restructured so that the audience witnesses a fight between two historically situated and fully anthropomorphic characters with recognizable names whose identities are, therefore, no longer ambiguous

(e.g., the Turkish Knight and St. George) to the members of the audience. That encounter in turn produces the death of one of the actors which in turn justifies the intervention of the Quack Doctor who revives the victim. Whereas the outer trappings of the scene have changed, the basic script has remained the same: one of the characters falls down, dies and is attended to by a healer who miraculously brings him back to life. Indeed, according to Millington, this scene is not peripheral to the dramatic actions carried out during the performances, but rather a fundamentally essential component of them (Millington, 1989).

### *7. Resurrecting the Bear*

As was discussed in Frank (2008c), one of the central scenes in the Good-Luck Visits has been the scene of the Death and Resurrection of the Bear. In the case of the Sardinian performances, similar terms have been employed to describe this aspect of the performance piece (Fois, 2002a). In the picture (Fig. 2) showing the Mamutzones of Samugheo in a performance at Gavoi, we see the *domadore* who is the “owner of the bear”, next to the dead Bear. However, he does not intervene to revive the Bear. In contrast, in Mamoiade the bear mask itself had disappeared by the end of the 19th century. As will be discussed shortly, it appears that in most archaic versions of the performance the act of resurrecting the Bear was the responsibility of the Bear Leader,

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Fig. 2  
Scene of the “Death  
before Resurrection”  
of *s’Urtzu* as performed  
by the Mamutzones  
of Samugheo  
Source: Fois (2002a)

that is, the *domadore*. In the case of the performance of the Mamutzones of Samugheo there is no longer any Quack Doctor among the members of the cast. Yet the Bear and the scene of Death before Resurrection continue to be an integral part of the play. In reference to this scene and the visual narrative embedded in it, Fois obtained this report from an elderly gentleman from Samugheo, referring to the period just after World War II. The informant's description of the dramatic action included these details: that the man dressed as the Bear was tired and fell down dead. Then the others gathered around the animal, that is, there were four or five *domadores* who spoke about who had killed the Bear, who was responsible for its death. And everyone pointed the blame at someone else (Fois, 2002a). Bertolotti (1992) also speaks of this aspect of the performance referring to it as 'la commedia dell'innocenza' and comparing it to similar scenes acted out, often quite comedically, in Siberian Bear Festivals which celebrate the death of a real bear which the hunters have killed.

At this juncture we can begin to explore in more detail the way that the scene of Death and Resurrection is performed in other venues and more importantly why an instrument such as a *chalumeau*, bellows or syringe might play a major role in the events represented visually in this particular scene. In Bagnères de Bigorre, Hautes-Pyrénées, France, a slightly different version of this scene of the play is encountered, as witnessed and photographed by Jean-Dominique Lajoux in 1975. His description of this aspect of "la sortie de l'ours en Bigorre" is as follows: "Une troupe de masques va de maison en maison, présenter un ours savant conduit par un oursaire. Lors de la représentation, l'ours est tué par méprise. Le médecin de la troupe ne saura ramener l'animal à la vie, mais l'oursaire réussira dans cette entreprise en utilisant son grand bâton comme un *chalumeau* pour souffler au cul de l'ours mort et le ramener à la vie" (Lajoux, 1996: 91).

In this instance, after the Bear is killed, the Quack Doctor comes to revive him, but is unsuccessful and it is the Bear Leader who brings the creature back to life, by blowing into his anus, using his long staff as if it were a *chalumeau*, a kind of counterpart of a bellows. The slight discrepancy in the distribution of roles is probably explained by the fact



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**Fig. 3**  
Resurrecting the bear in Bigorre,  
Haute Pyrénées  
*Source: Lajoux (1996: 90)*



that previously the Bear Leader was the actor in charge of resurrecting the animal: his role was still shamanic and therefore it included him being assigned the role of healer. Over time recognition of the shamanic nature of this character was lost, and this aspect of his role was taken over by a Quack Doctor who arrived with his portmanteaux filled with special instruments and set about bringing the deceased Bear back to life. In the particular case of the performance in Bagnères-de-Bigorre, the transition is not complete for while the Quack Doctor appears on the scene, the duty of resurrecting the animal ends up falling back on the Bear Leader who was, in all probability, the actor originally in charge of this aspect of the drama.

In other locations, such as Barèges, a very scruffy Quack Doctor appears carrying his instruments in a black leather satchel. But in addition he is outfitted with a large wooden

phallus and matching pair of wooden testicles, not exactly what one would expect a member of the medical profession to be wearing in the 20th century, much less displaying in front of the public (Dendaletche, 1982: 83-84). Chronologically speaking, this combination of accessories evokes two different interpretative frames, one more archaic than the other, one more in accordance with modern sensibilities and the other less so.

Before continuing with this discussion of the actions of the shaman doctor, we need to explore the symbolism behind the scene itself. To do so requires us to reflect a bit on the hibernation cycle of bears and consider the symbolic projections of the bear's apparent supernatural ability to hibernate in the first place. Paul Shepard has suggested that it was the bear's remarkable capacity to go underground, so to speak, go into a rather death-like state and be resurrected months later that caught the attention of humans early on. In other words, this aspect of the bear's life cycle was what humans fixated on while at the same time recognizing the striking anatomical similarities holding between the two species: humans and bears. They both walked upright; the foot print left by a bear was much like that left by a bare-foot human, albeit much larger; they ate the same things, craved honey, sought out the same luscious berry patches and fruit trees. Salmon and even trout fishing were passions held in common (Shepard, 1999).

Witnessing the apparent death and resurrection of the bear year after year, must have left a deep impression on the humans who shared the same habitat, living off the same resources, but unable to pass the winter months of scarcity in the same way: comfortably snuggled into a bed of spruce boughs and moss without needing to eat or drink. And the same was true of the young cubs who during their first two or three years of life would den with their mother while there was no concern on her part with laying up a supply of winter food for them or herself. In short, humans would have noticed that bears never bothered to fill their pantry for winter as chipmunks, ground squirrels and some other hibernating mammals seem to do.<sup>25</sup>

25. Certain small mammals, called true hibernators, spend most of the winter in a state similar to death, their body temperature approximating that of the environment. In

Equally amazing must have been the fact that bears not only did not eat or drink for the duration of their dormancy, they never urinated or defecated. Rather than finding a den filled with bear scat once the bear abandoned it in the Spring, the most that was found would be a single relatively small “fecal plug”, the size of which depended on the length of the animal’s hibernation and species of bear, ranging from one inch up to 7 ½ inches. The latter is usually found near the entrance of the den or nearby. Shortly after awakening the creature voids this anal plug, an act accompanied by a prolonged and odoriferous bear fart. Then after the fecal plug is discharged, the bear’s digestive system slowly returns to normal. Attention must have been paid by hunters to this bear fart for it signaled that the bear was waking up: sluggishly coming back to life. It indicated both a juncture in time when the bear was more vulnerable to hunters and at the same time, a signal that Spring was on its way.

Interpreting the meaning of a ritual resurrection by means of blowing into the anus of the creature is somewhat more complicated. However, it does appear to have something to do with archaic beliefs concerning the bear fart which occurs just as the animal awakens from its long winter sleep. Because of the animistic cosmology of times past, this action appears to have been linked symbolically to the releasing of the souls of plants and animals: fecundating nature. Also there are the other beliefs that linked letting air to the release or escape of a soul-like substance: one’s breath being expelled in a sneeze or breaking wind in farting. Hence, involuntary emissions of air, such as sneezing, were considered dangerous and verbal ritual protection was required when they took place.

Even today, when a person sneezes it evokes a particular kind of verbal response from the other person present, a reaction grounded in what is now a totally out-dated belief.

contrast, the bear’s body temperature decreases by only 5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit, approximately 2-5 degrees Celsius. So relatively speaking, bears don’t hibernate that deeply and are therefore still aware of their surroundings. Nonetheless, a bear rarely emerges from its den in the middle of the winter. Rather during its winter dormancy period, the bear’s life processes go into economy mode. Its heart rate drops from 55 to less than ten beats per minute, and the metabolic rate declines. Yet if disturbed, as hunters well knew, a bear would wake up.

The person needs to be blessed or otherwise protected with ritual sayings, such as “Bless you,” “God bless you” or “Gesundheit”. Other acceptable blessings to ward off the evil forces are “Long may you live,” or “May you enjoy good health” and the even older saying, “The Devil get behind you!” The latter traditional saying is clearly motivated by the notion that when one sneezed, the devil or some evil spirit was trying to steal the person’s soul. In short, drawing an analogy from Native-American beliefs we could argue that the magical reinsertion of “breath” or “wind” into the Bear by the shaman-healer was equivalent to reinserting the “soul” into the body (Brown, 1990, 1993). Upon death, it is this “spirit” that leaves us, this magical wind that we otherwise draw in and out of our bodies, quite unconsciously. Thus, in the scene of Death and Resurrection, the shaman-healer can be seen reinserting this vital force into the animal’s body.<sup>26</sup>

Also, we should remember that in the case of real bears, in the spring hunters were often able to locate the “tute” of the bear, that is, its snowy winter den, by following the very pungent smell of the bear’s fart, a prolonged fart that, as we have discussed, coincided with the bear’s awakening and the reactivation of its digestive track. Today the reasons why bears neither urinate nor defecate are understood, although they still do not cease to amaze 21st century researchers. But there is more to this story because in the Pyrenees popular tradition also holds that when the bear goes into hibernation it takes up the souls of all creatures into its belly. In the spring, these souls are released. Although it is not explicitly stated that the expulsion of these spirits coincides with the monumental bear fart that accompanies the bear’s awakening from its profound winter sleep, that assumption would seem to be logical. Moreover, in their discussion of this Pyrenean myth, Gaignebet and Floretin fuse together two different but closely related types of actors under the rubric of psychopomp: the figure of

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26. There is a reference to farting in *Gargantua et Pantagruel* and we find that souls “depart by the back passage” (Bakhtin, 1981: 189). Indeed, there is an entire chapter dedicated to letting wind and where at one point Pantagruel farts little men. Also, there has been speculation that the book itself was inspired in some fashion by French folktales concerning the character Jean l’Ours, portrayed in those tales as a half-human, half-bear figure of gigantic proportions and great appetite.

*l'homme sauvage* on the one hand and on the other, bears. Concretely, they state that:

Carnaval marque la dernière nouvelle lune d'hiver, correspondant au Mardi Gras-Chandeleur (variable et clef antérieure). On célèbre essentiellement à cette date la déshibernation de l'ours.

Cet animal porteur dans son ventre des âmes des morts (le pet de déshibernation de l'ours es connu d'Aristote), les libère alors. Il est accompagné de son fils, mi-homme, mi-ours, homme sauvage. Les récits médiévaux de l'homme sauvage (Merlin) et de Jean de l'Ours [...] sont les mythes qui se rapportent à cette date. (Gaignebet & Florentin, 1974: 10-11)

In their discussion of the performance art associated with February 2nd, known as Candelmas in the Christian calendar and as Bear Day in the earlier one, Gaignebet and Florentin remind us that it is at the Chandeleur-Carnival period “that for the first time we see the rise of the psychopomp, the wild man or the bear that emerges from hibernation, bringing from the underworld in his belly or his bladder, in the form of farts or urine, the souls of the departed” (Gaignebet & Florentin, 1974: 123).

Nous retrouvons ici en jeu dans les coutumes et les fêtes ce que nous pourrions appeler la loi d'alternance quarantenaire. C'est à la Chandeleur-Carnaval que peut surgir une première fois l'être psychopompe, homme sauvage ou bien ours qui déshiberne, ramenant du monde souterrain, dans son ventre ou dans une vessie, sous forme de pets ou de vesses, les âmes de l'au-delà. (Gaignebet & Florentin, 1974: 123)

At this juncture we can take up once again our analysis of the scene from the performance in Bagnères-de-Bigorre in which the Bear Leader shaman-healer is putting his *chalumeau* to use. In it we seem to be witnessing a ritual replenishing the dead bear's soul though the use of a device that simulates a fart. This in turn enlivens the body of the animal at this juncture in the performance. Thus, the action may well be related in some fashion to the sacred bear fart that commemorates the end of bear's hibernation and acts to “liberate [the souls] at this moment” (Gaignebet & Florentin, 1974: 11). In this case, it would be the Bear

Leader shaman doctor who expels the fart into the body of the other, re-awakening in this way the bear character who then jumps up, alive and healthy once more. Moreover, when this scene was reenacted during Carnival, we might assume that the audience would have identified in it the theme of Death and Resurrection.

Although a detailed study of the Italian variants of this scene is outside the scope of this introductory essay, I would like to cite Bertolotti's summary of what are relatively contemporary renditions of the scene. As can be seen, in some instances there appears to have been an effort to make explicit to the audience the cause of death:

L'usanza di sottoporre Carnevale, rappresentato da un uomo in carne e ossa o da un fantoccio, a un intervento chirurgico è attestata in varie regioni d'Italia, dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri. In una mascherata calabrese della fine del secolo scorso, il poveretto moriva prima che i due chirurghi, armati di spiedo, padella e altri arnesi da cucina e da macello, potessero mettergli le mani addosso. Nella maggior parte di casi che ci sono noti, la morte di Carnevale risulta invece come diretta conseguenza dell'operazione. A Staffolo (Ancona) ove s'usava operare Carnevale ancor pochi decenni fa, il chirurgo concludeva l'intervento con le rituali parole: "L'operazione è andata bene, ma l'ammalato è morto". (Bertolotti, 1992: 73-74)<sup>27</sup>

According to Bertolotti, there are three characters who can play the role of the deceased: a bear, a stuffed figure or a gypsy woman: "[...] Nelle rappresentazioni carnevalesche del Reatino, le vittime, oltre al pupazzo di San Carnevale, potevano essere la maschera dell'orso oppure la *pucca* (una grossa bambola di pezza) o la *zingara* incinta, che il medico aiutava a partoire squarciandone il ventre a coltellate e sbudellandole; ma sia le partorienti che l'orso erano

27. "The custom of subjecting Carnival, represented by a man of flesh and bones or a puppet, to a surgical intervention is attested in various regions of Italy, from the nineteenth century to the present day. In a Calabrian masquerade from the end of the last century, the poor man died before the two physicians, armed with skewers, a pan and other tools for cooking and butchering, could lay hands on him. In most of cases that are known to us, the death of Carnival is [portrayed] rather as a direct consequence of the operation. At Staffolo (Ancona) where, even a few decades ago, there existed the custom of operating on Carnival, the Surgeon concluded his speech with the ritual words: "The operation went well, but the patient died"' (Bertolotti 1992: 73-74).

talora riportati in vita da un nuovo intervento dello stesso dottore”<sup>28</sup> (Bertolotti, 1992: 74).<sup>29</sup>

As has been noted, the scene in which an actor dressed as a bear falls down dead and is subsequently revived by another actor is a key component of the Good-Luck Visits, where the retinue visits individual houses or goes about the streets of the village and at the same time it is a scene that is reenacted during Carnival. In this respect the role played by the Bear in Sardinian performance art is quite significant, as documented by Moretti in the 1960s and further elaborated upon by Bertolotti in his remarkable study of the Italian Carnival (Bertolotti, 1992; Moretti, 1963, 1967). Moreover, in the next section, the survival of the Bear in Sardinian ritual performances will become a significant piece of ethnographic evidence as we move forward in search of the etymology of Maramao.

#### 8. *In search of Maramao: Semantic and ethnographic evidence*

The task of pinning down the etymology of Maramao has occupied Italian ethnographers and linguists for many years. Over a century ago, Sainéan composed an exhaustive study called *La création métaphorique en français et en roman: Le chat* (1905), in which he argued for the polysemic rather than homonymic nature of expressions such as *maramao*. His work started from the assumption that onomatopoeic expressions evoking the sounds of a cat gave rise to the other meanings documented for the terms he examines, such as those associated with a “night-mare”. For example, he lists the meanings of “scarecrow” and “bugbear” among the senses that derive logically from a sound characteristic of a domestic feline. The deductive logic he employs in reaching this conclusion is based on the assumption that the association between cats and witchcraft—their role as familiars— or their use in other pagan rituals was what established the

28. “[...] In Carnival performances from Reatino, the victims, in addition to the puppet of Saint Carnival, could be the bear masker [the masked figure representing the bear] or the *pucca* (a big rag doll) or a pregnant gypsy [*zingara*] who the doctor helped to give birth ripping open her belly with a knife and disemboweling it, but whether [the victims were represented by] pregnant women or at times by the bear they were sometimes brought to life by a new intervention by the same doctor” (Bertolotti 1992: 74).

29. In the case of the latter character, in Basque performances, she seemed to have had a rather different role.

semantic linkage. While there is no doubt that cats occupy a special place among animals associated with witchcraft and sympathetic magic, in this section I shall argue that in the case of the etymology of the terms listed by Sainéan as cognates, we are dealing with two separate sets of meaning that fell together over time.

Speaking of terms referring to *êtres imaginaires* which Sainéan views as generated by the sound made by a cat, he lists the following expressions as sharing both meanings. On the one hand, according to Sainéan, the words refer to the *croquemitaine*, a mythical being roughly equivalent to the “bugbear, bogeyman” in the rest of Europe.<sup>30</sup> That is, on the one hand, the terms enumerated here by Sainéan cover the same semantic ground as *spauracchio*, *mangiabambini*, and *fantasma* in Italian and, when viewed more closely, correspond closely to *l’Uomo del sacco*, the frightening creature with a sack who carries off misbehaving children, also known as *l’Uomo nero* or the *Babau / Babou* (Bracchi, 2009; Canobbio, 1998: 74-75; 2006: 140; Frank, 2009a: 116-124). Then there is the second meaning of the terms listed by Sainéan which refers to “caterwauling” or “meowing”.

More specifically, his examples are the following: “épouvantail: It. *mao* (Bergame); [Occ.] Prov. *mamiau*; (Sic.) *mamau*, *mamiu*” (Sainéan, 1905: 67, 70). Once again the words are said to refer to a type of “goblin” or “bugbear”: “espèce de lutin: [Occ.] Prov. *marmau* (barbau), ogre (= chat qui miaule); Venise *marmutone*, *mamutone*, bête noire, répondant au [Occ.] Lang. *marmoutin*, chat” (Sainéan, 1905: 70). Again we see reference made to the variants for “ogre” in *mamau / babau* and *marmau / barbau* discussed earlier. While examining these linguistic examples, we need to keep in mind the dialectal variants found in Sardu, mentioned ear-

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30. The compound term *croquemitaine*, written also as *croquet-mitaine* and *croquemitain*, when translated literally, means “mitten-biter”. This excerpt from Wikipedia recounts the legend that seems to have motivated the term: “Dans les régions où l’hiver peut être rigoureux, un croque-mitaine (Jan del Gel, en Val d’Aran) mange le nez et les doigts de l’enfant (les parties du corps les plus exposées aux gelures). La crainte provoquée par la menace de tels personnages crée une peur qui n’a plus besoin d’être motivée: le croque-mitaine se cacherait sous le lit ou dans le placard et attendrait qu’un pied ou une main dépasse du lit pour tirer dessus, l’enfant serait alors aspiré sous le lit et disparaîtrait pour toujours” (Wikipedia, 2011). Cf. Loddo and Peten (1998) and Betemps (1998) for examples of various types of these “bogeymen”, such as the *babao / babou*, known today collectively as *croquemitaines*.



lier in section 3.0 of the current study, and their definitions as supernatural beings such as *spauracchio*, *mangiabambini*, *monstro*, *babau*, *mannaro*, and *spettro*. At the same time, as discussed previously, in Sardu we find three stem types in *mamu*-, *momo*- and *marra*- which carry similar meanings alongside Sardinian terms such as *mamuttone* and *mamutzone* which today refer to a specific set of masked performers connected to Carnival.

Sainéan also gives these examples, again assuming all the meanings (“scarecrow, bugbear, devil, etc.”) derive from the meowing of cats: “épouvantail: Côme *mamao* (maramao), Sic. *marramao* (marramamao, mirrimimiu), propr. miaulement (It. *morimeo* “voici di dolare”, Fanfani); Sic. *maumma*, diable (cf. Gênes *mduma* ‘fatto straordinario compiuto a caso’), propr. chat qui miaule (Sic. *mamao*)” (Sainéan, 1905: 71). With respect to the Italian examples of *maumma* and *mduma*, we might compare them to the set of Basque phonological variants discussed earlier, used to describe the fearsome “night-visitor” or “night-mare”. These include the following: *mamu*, *mahu*, *mahumahu*, *mahuma* and *inguma*. In Basque it is also known by the far less phonologically eroded compound expression *hamalau-zango* (*hamalau-zaingo*) which still reveals the original shape of the etymon *hamalau* (Frank, 2009a: 121-129). In comparing these and other examples, one needs to keep in mind that the lexical representations of words—their spellings—are always approximations of what the speaker has heard, not exact phonetic transcriptions of the sounds themselves.

More recently Masson (2008) speculated, much as did Sainéan before him, that meanings associated with terms such as *maramao* are polysemous and derive etymologically from the onomatopoeic source: that the etymology of expression the goes back to the sounds made by the cat but that later a secondary meaning arose through the association of felines with witchcraft and other types of rituals associated with the *charivari* performances celebrated at Carnival time (Masson, 2008).<sup>31</sup> In short, Masson is in full agreement with Sainéan. On the other hand, I would argue that the two sets of meanings attached today to the word *maramao* have totally separate

31. For more details on the use of ‘black cats’ for such rituals in the Basque region, cf. Frank (1989, 2005).

origins and that the resulting semantic confusion is nothing more than the consequence of a fortuitous phonological convergence and the resultant semantic bleaching of the original meaning of *maramao*, i.e., as a shaman-healer, as a kind of Spirit of Carnival; and furthermore that the etymology of the Sardinian carnival characters—the *Mamutzones* along with *s'Urzu*, their bear—belong to the same cultural and linguistic complex and harken back to the much more archaic pan-European belief in an ursine ancestry.

Another odd member of the group of frightening otherworldly beings is the terrific Gatto Mammone whose characteristics dove-tail with those of other *mangibambini* such as the Sardinian *marragau* and *mommoti* who were also regularly called upon by parents (Fois, 2008; Frank, 2008a: 108-111; Paulis, 1997: 173). However, while the *marragau* and *mommoti* continue to be scary, they are quite undefined, rather amorphous creatures that over time did not fully morph into cats. The Gatto Mammone was described to me recently as “an invented mythological creature, called upon by the parents of very little children in order to make them behave well and keep quiet: ‘Fai il bravo bambino, altrimenti chiamo il Gatto Mammone!’ ‘Sta’ attento, altrimenti viene il Gatto Mammone e ti mangia!’” (Grosskopf, 2011).<sup>32</sup> Leaving aside the feline characteristics of the creature, the rest of the adjectives used to describe it could be applied quite easily to the Sardinian *marragau* and *mommoti*.

As far as I have been able to determine, the activities of the Gatto Mammone are limited to being a *mangiabambini* who goes out at night. That is, the creature doesn’t take an active part in Carnival or show up on Shrove Tuesday. On the other hand, in Sardinia, specifically in Ogliastra, we find another cat-like creature called Maimone, rather than Mammone, who does. Represented as a *fantoccio di stracci*, topped off with a cat-like head, Maimone is said to be the personification of Carnival. Paulis states that in Ierzu and Ulassai it is called *su maimùlu* while in Neoneli the *fantoccio di stracci* is referred to also as *su maumòne*.<sup>33</sup>

32. According to Grosskopf, these sayings were still commonplace in the 1950s, but today are no longer employed by parents.

33. As for the etymology of *maimone*, Paulis (1991) prefers to derive the term from similar sounding words meaning “baboon”.

Paulis also discusses house-visits carried by children in this zone. When a drought would occur, the elderly women of the town would implore the children to carry out a particular ritual which had them going about the village, door to door, carrying an image of Maimone. Stopping at each house, the children would sing a song, a kind of prayer, an invocation directed to Maimone whose intervention was being solicited to bring down rain. While Paulis records several variants of the song, there are two that stand out. In the first, the Christian deity is not mentioned and it is only Maimone who is supplicated and praised, whereas in the second variant, we find two different figures being petitioned simultaneously: 1) “*Maimòne, Maimòne / Ábba gère su laòre / Ábba gère su sikkáu, / Maimone laudáu*” (‘Maimòne, Maimòne, i seminati vogliono acqua, la terra arida vuole acqua, Maimòne [sia] lodato’); and 2) *Maimòne, Maimòne, / Ábba gère su laòre / Ábba gère su sikkáu, / Déu sia laudau* (Maimòne, Maimòne . . . Dio sia lodato’; così a Tadasuni)” (Paulis, 1991: 53-54). We might speculate that earlier this ritual was in the hands of adults and that over time a kind of generational down-grading occurred, as often happens in the case of rituals that for one reason or another are abandoned by the adult members of a community (Frank, 2009a: 110-111).

Finally, in terms of an interpretation that would equate Maimone with a pre-Christian divinity, a supernatural being with the power to bring rain, we might keep in mind the words of the Basque ethnologist and linguist Patziku Perurena who in a radio interview, dating from 2000, stated that perhaps the best interpretation of the figure of Hamalau would be to compare him to the Christian notion of God. In short, Perurena suggested that Hamalau might be understood best in following way: that for Basques this creature was their pre-Christian deity (*Hamalaua, gure Jaingo* “Fourteen, our god”) (Perurena, 1993: 265; 2000).

In the same location in Sardinia, namely, in the zone of Ogliastro, we find another menacing cat-like figure who is out and about on a specific day, namely, Mardi Gras, a behavior reminiscent of the alleged activities of the French *marouids* and *marcouids* who were said to go out on the same day. Moretti describes the creature and its activities on this day as follows:

Lo stesso nome che nel paese distingue il martedì di Carnevale '*marti perra*' (*perra* = metà) ci riporta l'eco di un'altra antichissima convinzione: il popolo personificava il martedì grasso in un gatto che assaliva, squartandoli addirittura, coloro che si recavano a lavorare nei campi disertando la mascherata.

In altri centri come Ulassai (Nu) '*martis berri*' (*berri* = dolore) elargiva invece improvvisi, quanto violenti, dolori fisici agli incauti intenti ad un lavoro, qualunque esso fosse. Contemporaneamente il dolore era accompagnato da una voce tonante che diceva: '*deu soi martis berri, beniu po ti ferri*'. (Moretti, 1963)<sup>34</sup>

Moretti continues describing the retinue that accompanies the figure of *Martisberri* which includes the *maimulus*: "Ma fermiamo l'attenzione sul corteggio così come lo ricordano i paesani non più giovanissimi. Un araldo, '*su cuadderi*', a cavalcioni di un bastone sulla cui sommità era conficcato un cranio equino, annunciava con rime allusive il passaggio delle maschere '*is maimulus*'" (Moretti, 1963).<sup>35</sup>

The figure known as *Martiperra* or *Martisberri* has a particular role: that of acting as a kind of guardian of Carnival and insuring that everyone takes part in it. In describing the performance in Gairo, celebrated in 1961, Moretti adds these comments: "Per tutto quel giorno vigeva nel villaggio l'obbligo di astenersi da qualunque attività, specie agricola. Alla rigorosa osservanza di questo tabù del lavoro, era preposto secondo la convinzione popolare, un grosso gatto (spirito della vegetazione) che puniva spietatamente gli aggressori" (Moretti, 1967).<sup>36</sup> And once again, there

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34. "The same name that stands out in the country on Tuesday of Carnival '*marti perra*' (*perra* = half) brings us back the echo of another ancient belief: people personified Shrove Tuesday in [the form of] a cat who attacked, dismembering right away, those who went to work in the fields abandoning the masquerade.

In other centers such as Ulassai (Nu) '*martis berri*' (*berri* = pain) lavished rather sudden, as well as violent, physical pain on those who recklessly attempted to work [rather than take part in Carnival], no matter what kind of work it was. At the same time the pain was accompanied by a booming voice that said, '*I am Martis berri, I came to hit you*'" (Moretti 1963).

35. "But let us pay attention to the procession as villagers recall it who are no longer very young. A herald, '*su cuadderi*' (= the horseman), astride a stick on top of which was stuck a horse skull, announced allusive rhymes with the passage of the masks '*is maimulus*'" (Moretti 1963).

36. "Throughout that entire day in the village there existed the obligation to refrain from any activity, especially related to agriculture. According to popular belief, a large

seems to be something going on off- stage in terms of how this creature—the personification of Carnival—came to acquire its cat-like features. Could these feline features derive from a name that sounded to speakers like the meowing of a cat but that was at the same time was viewed by members of the same community of speakers as the personification of Carnival and identified with the effigy that they carried about? An otherwise opaque expression similar to *Maramao* whose original meaning had been lost?

Finally, in her review of the *croquemitaines* that inhabited the Piedmont region, Canobbio describes a number of horrific creatures, among them two that go by the names of *Maramaou* and *Marmòu*. They are *spauracchio* or *mangia-bambini*, that is, “night- mares” but seem not to have any association with cats.<sup>37</sup> Then there is another “night-mare” which does have a feline form, called the *Gatta Marella*. In her work Canobbio (1998: 70-71, 80) suggests that the etymology of all these terms, that is, all these expressions displaying the stem *mar-*, belong to a larger translingual semantic field to which the second element of the English compound “night-mare” also belongs.<sup>38</sup>

While I am in basic agreement with her hypothesis, I would argue that at this stage the Basque data, complemented by the Sardu linguistic and ethnographic data, allow us to take further step backwards and move to an even deeper level of analysis. This approach takes us back

cat (the spirit of vegetation) was in charge of the strict observance of this taboo against working and mercilessly punished the aggressors [those who violated the norm]” (Moretti 1967).

37. Recognizing that the sounds *m*, *b* and *p* are often confused, we find in addition to the more commonplace *Babau* / *Barbau*, the following names of the “night-mare” recorded in Occitania, all of which appear to belong to the same translingual word field: *Babarau*, *Baranhau*, *Maranhau*, *Marònha*, *Barònha*, *Maragònhas*, *Baragònha*, *Paparònha*; *Piparaunha*, *Pataranhau*, *Babòta* and *Pòpòu* (Loddo & Pelen, 1998: 83).

38. Canobbio explains that her theory is based on the following hypothesis: «[...] celle de l'existence d'une famille nombreuse et composite de croquemitaines, répandus sur une zone très vaste et diversifiée du point de vue ambiant et culturel, qui peuvent tous être ramenés à une commune racine MAR-. Racine que nous savons, par ailleurs, être étonnamment productive [...] pour former des mots qui renvoient à l'idée de «cauchemar», «angoisse», «fantôme», «sorcière», etc. [...] à partir de la *Gatta Marella* piémontaise jusqu'à la *Marabecca* sicilienne, du *S'attu Marruda* de Sardaigne à la *Galamora* du Frioul [...] qui pourraient représenter une re-étymologisation de formes nées, justement, sur la base de MAR- «cauchemar», devenues par la suite complètement opaques» (Canobbio, 1998: 71). Cf. also Canobbio (1996, 2006).

in time and opens up the possibility of recuperating the tenets of a much earlier cosmology typical of hunters and gatherers, more concretely, speakers who held that humans descended from bears. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Bertolotti (1992) argues that the ritual drama of Carnival revolves around the figure of the *l'orso ucciso* and therefore should be traced back to a much earlier European conceptual template, one that would parallel in many ways the belief system undergirding Bear Ceremonialism in other parts of the world, the intimate human-animal relations, the veneration and respect for bears, and the animistic world view that characterizes the worldview of many native peoples still today.<sup>39</sup>

### 8.1. *Maramao / Marameo, perché sei morto?*

Apparently, over time in an effort to assign meaning to the name *Maramao*, speakers developed a folk etymology, turning *Maramao* into a “cat”, that is, because the sounds composing the name *Maramao* evoked, by analogy, the sounds made by a cat. Later, this conceptual blend would gain a wide audience across Italy when what had by then degenerated into a mere children’s song was popularized by the Trio Lescano, in 1939. The popularity of their song further reinforced what had already become the semantic convergence of two different meanings, on the one hand, an onomatopoeic expression mimicking the meowing of a cat and, on the other, a carnival character called *Maramao*. Thus, in composing their tune, the song-writers Mario Panzeri and Mario Consiglio took advantage of what had survived as a carnival lament, an expression of mourning sung by children that spoke of the death of a creature—or being—called *Maramao* (Bertolotti, 1992: 106) The rhyme seems to have been recited on Shrove Tuesday, during the funeral of Carnival, while the figure was being carried in its coffin to be burnt. The first stanza of the song begins with the words: “*Maramao, perché sei morto?*” However, as it is sung today the song continues and we discover *Maramao* being mourned by a group of love-sick cats. At the end of each stanza, the syllables of the word *Maramao* are

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39. Cf. Pauvert (2012, 2014) for two recent publications that explore a similar hypothesis in considerable depth.

repeatedly broken down in such a way that they comically represent the forlorn meowing of the felines, as in the following examples.

Maramao perché sei morto?  
pane e vin non ti mancava,  
l'insalata era nell'orto,  
e una casa avevi tu.  
Maramao maramo  
mao mao mao mao mao  
Le micine innamorate  
fanno ancor per te le fusa  
ma la porta è sempre chiusa  
e tu non ritorni più.  
Maramao, Maramao,  
fanno i mici in coro,  
Maramao, maramao  
mao mao mao mao mao.<sup>40</sup>

In part as a result of the tremendous popularity of this tune, there is little question that Maramao is imagined by many today exclusively as a kind of feline cartoon character.<sup>41</sup> Maramao became a conceptual blend, taking on the characteristics of a cat, and yet at the same time, because of the socio-political context of the song sung by the Trio Lescano, it came to be identified with the anti-fascist move-

40. Maramao why did you die?  
bread and wine you do not lack,  
the salad was in the garden,  
and you possessed a house.  
maramao maramo,  
mao mao mao mao mao

The enamoured pussy cats  
for you are still purring  
but the door is always closed  
and you do not come back.  
Maramao, Maramao,  
do cats in chorus,  
Maramao, Maramao  
mao mao mao mao mao.

41. For examples of popularity of the cat cartoon character, cf. videos such as the following ones:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_CILqsIMbg&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_CILqsIMbg&feature=related);  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78Qkd0JMQ9w&feature=related>;  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5JlcJvT3gs&feature=related>  
and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GOkZrrpicw&feature=related>.

ment of the time. In some contemporary contexts the figure of Maramao seems to be applied generically to despots, a cognitive process of meaning-making that perhaps draws on the judgment and condemnation of the central figure of Carnival. As is well documented, all across Europe, Carnival was an occasion in which the populace regularly held up a real person or entity to ridicule by subtly (or not so subtly) conflating the act of judging and punishing the main character or straw effigy with the flesh and blood human being or authority that was the real target of their social critique and the object of their veiled threats of violence. Thus, the Carnival period afforded the populace a means of expressing their disapproval structurally in a way similar to the popular judgments dramatized when a *charivari* was acted out. In this sense, Maramao could be viewed as a placeholder for the object of parodic derision by the social collective, just as appears to have been in the case in 1939 and even earlier.<sup>42</sup> If viewed from this perspective, Maramao

42. In all fairness, we also need to mention what is perhaps one of the most popular theories concerning the origin of the phrase “Maramao, perché sei morto?”, reproduced on the web site of the Ministero della Difesa: “Nel 1939 ebbe grande successo una canzonetta (di Panzeri e Consiglio) dal titolo apparentemente innocentissimo: Maramao perché sei morto? I versi erano allegri e accattivanti: «Pane e vin non ti mancava, / l'insalata era nell'orto». Ma non erano affatto originali. Più o meno identici, erano contenuti in un sonetto di Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli, scritto nella prima metà dell'Ottocento. E Belli metteva Maramao in relazione con il papa. Qualcun altro sostenne che il morto non fosse un gatto, ma lo spirito del Carnevale. Ma l'ipotesi più suggestiva è che l'espressione fosse, all'origine, una parafrasi del più noto «Maramao, tu uccidi un uomo morto». Maramaldo infatti veniva anche indicato con il nome di Maramao (o Maramaus, come nella Storia di Guicciardini). La ferocia usata contro Ferrucci a Gavinana pare fosse da addebitare a un precedente incontro fra i due sotto le mura di Volterra, dove Ferrucci fece uccidere un araldo del nemico e poi lo dileggiò chiamandolo Maramao. Quando morì, poco tempo dopo, ricco e con la possibilità di soddisfare ogni desiderio, qualcuno avrebbe intonato per la prima volta quel ritornello. Avevi tutto, non ti mancava nulla; «Maramao, perché sei morto?».” [“In 1939 a song had great success (Panzeri and Consiglio) with the apparently very innocent title: Maramao, why did you die? The verses were cheerful and engaging: “Bread and wine you do not lack, /the salad was in the garden.” But they were not original. More or less identical verses were contained in a sonnet of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli, written in the first half of the nineteenth century. And Belli associated Maramao with the pope. Someone else claimed that the deceased was not a cat, but rather the spirit of Carnival. But the more interesting hypothesis is that the expression was, originally, a paraphrase of the famous “Maramao, you kill a dead man.” In fact Maramaldo was also referred to by the name of Maramao (or Maramaus, as in the Historia of Guicciardini). The ferocity used against Ferrucci at Gavinana appears to have been motivated by a previous meeting between the two under the walls of Volterra, where Ferrucci killed a herald of the enemy and then mocked him by calling him Maramao. When he died shortly afterwards, rich and with the possibility of



would have been a double-voiced being, generating a polyphonous symbolic discourse pointing several directions, simultaneously, and filled with Bakhtinian heteroglossic *inuendo* (Bakhtin, 1981; Danow, 1984).

In order to comprehend the way that the word *Maramao* came to be associated with a cat, more specifically, with the meowing sound made by a cat, we need to formulate a hypothesis concerning the cognitive path that led speakers to bring about the convergence of two quite distinctive meanings: one of which refers to a frightening otherworldly semi-human-like being while the other refers to the sound characteristic of an innocuous domesticated feline. The evidence suggests that this fusion or confusion is not recent; that it took place many centuries ago. To do this, first let us assume that the term *maramao* forms part of the larger and conceptually much more archaic morpho-semantic field discussed previously which resonates strongly with archaic beliefs in an ursine genealogy. Stated differently, we could consider that the term *maramao* is a phonological variant of other terms found in other European languages and furthermore, that it can be traced back to the etymon *hamalau*. Viewed from this perspective, the resulting translingual morpho-semantic field becomes a repository containing substantial evidence for past cultural practices and hence a means of establishing the evolutionary path taken by the etymon over time and across different regions of Europe. Based on this interpretive framework, in each region dialectal variants of the term and social practices associated with it were developed and over time left their distinctive mark on the semantic artifacts themselves and the distinctive performance art of each zone.

In the case of the Italy, the particular cognitive pathway taken by the semantic artifact *maramao* led to a kind of phonological convergence that brought two conceptual frames into contact with each other. On the one hand there were the onomatopoeic expressions associated with the meowing of a domestic feline and on the other there was a similar sounding expression with an increasingly opaque meaning

satisfying any desire, anyone would have intoned for the first time the refrain. You had everything, you did not lack anything, "Maramao, why did you die? """] Cf. <http://www.carabinieri.it/Internet/Editoria/Carabinieri/2004/05-Maggio/Storia/>.

associated with it. That is, this process of phonological and conceptual convergence was accompanied by the bleaching of the semantic content and referentiality of the term *maramao* itself. Over time this resulted in an expression that had two etymologically unrelated meanings.<sup>43</sup> *Maramao* was supposedly the sound made by a cat but at the same time we find it connected to the character mourned on Shrove Tuesday of Carnival. Moreover, there is a semantic fusion of two concepts: the Death of Carnival is made equivalent to the Death of Maramao. Certainly, the tremendous popularity enjoyed by Panzeri and Consiglio's composition from 1939 onwards, acted as powerful mechanism for the diffusion of what has now become an iconic cultural artifact in Italy. At the same time the song contributed to the belief that Maramao was merely a cat, for it promoted a plot-line in which a bunch of felines comically mourn the death of their beloved.

Before concluding this section, it is worthwhile examining in more detail the nature of the hypothesis that has been put forward. Until now, investigators have assumed that *maramao* has two meanings; that the word is polysemous. Simply put, polysemy is a term referring to a word that has two or more related meanings. The various senses have a central origin, that is, the various meanings making up the semantic network have developed from the same source: they share the same etymology. Thus, the inner or earlier meaning of the term allows one a better understanding of the outer or later senses attributed to the expression. If a word is considered to be polysemic, then the next step is to attempt to order its senses so that they can be viewed as representing points along the evolutionary cognitive pathway that allowed the expression to develop over time (Frank, 2008b, 2009b, 2011, 2013, 2014, in prep.; Frank & Gontier, 2010), for example, as Sainéan and Masson attempted to do.

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43. We find that something similar occurred in the case of the English term “nightmare”, as Caprini (1984) clearly demonstrates in her detailed longitudinal study of the semantic trajectory of the English term. Once the original meaning of the Germanic term *mahr* “goblin, spectre, night-mare” was lost in English, a folk etymology emerged, based on an erroneous reading of *-mare* as if it referred to a female horse. In other words, whereas originally there were two homonymic terms, eventually only the meaning of one of them ended up being accessible to speakers of the language.

In contrast, there are words that have several meanings. However, the explanation for their meanings lies not in a single etymology, not in a single etymon, but rather in the fact that the meanings evolved from two different and distinct sources. Such words are classed as homonyms: they sound the same but do not share the same origin. Thus, the hypothesis put forward here is that *maramao* has two unrelated meanings, one meaning being related to the sound made by a cat and the other meaning encompassing a creature or character related to Carnival. So we are talking about two words that are homonyms; they sound the same but do not share the same etymology.

The conclusions, albeit tentative, that can be drawn from the data discussed above could be summarized briefly as follows. At some point in the past the etymology of the expression *maramao* became obscured. In an effort to assign meaning to the term speakers attempted to link it to the sounds made by a cat, a logical step, although if the etymology proposed here is correct, ultimately a misguided one. If we assume that the feline etymology contributed to a reformulation—a re-etymologization—of the “Spirit of Carnival”, then the cognitive process itself should have left behind ethnographic and linguistic residue, such that the developmental pathway leading to the fusion of the two meanings can still be charted and the earlier cultural complex reconstructed at least to some extent. An indication that this semantic fusion affected the nature of the main character of Carnival is found in the case of one of the names attributed to Shrove Tuesday and consequently to the creature ruled, so to speak, that day.<sup>44</sup> This example also

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44. The ethnomusicologist Giovanni Grosskopf (2011) has suggested that a study of the geographical distribution of the last names Marramao and Maramao could give further clues concerning where the traditions described here have been better preserved, using this online resource: <http://www.gens.labo.net/it/cognomi/>. In the instance of Marramao it is a surname found today especially in the regions Campania, Calabria and is present also in Liguria, Piedmont, but rare in Lombardy and Lazio. The highest concentration is found in Calabria, from the town of Pizzo Calabro. However, there is no way to know if the statistical distribution encountered today necessarily responds to the distribution of the cognom in times past. Indeed, when one looks at the much more wide-spread distribution of Marramao in comparison to the highly concentrated distribution of Maramao, which is primarily in the area of Rome, obviously the most densely populated zone, it is much harder to reach any definitive conclusion, other than the fact that the surnames have survived. However, one might also ask how and why these two terms

underscores the possibility that in this zone Maramao was once associated with Shrove Tuesday, but with connotations far more in line with those of the frightful supernatural beings discussed by Sainéan.

In his work, published in 1905, Sainéan lists a number of interjections that apparently were in use at that time and which seem to incorporate *maramao* as an exhortation. Clearly, by that stage it had become a frozen, relatively opaque expression but which nonetheless suggests that earlier a being named *Maramao* was being invoked. “Interjections: Milan *Marmao!* (*Maramao! Mamao!*), Jamais! Propr. chat; Parme *maraméo!* Peste! Naples *Marramau!* (Sic. *Marramau!*), Jamais! Allons donc! [...] Que Dieu nous en preserve!” (Sainéan, 1905: 71). In order to shed further light on the discursive implications of the exclamations collected by Sainéan I contacted the Italian ethnomusicologist Giovanni Grosskopf and asked him to comment on them. He responded, saying: “This is interesting. The word ‘Maramao’ is still used (at least here in Milan, especially by aged people) as a merry exclamation of mockery, of teasing. It means something like: ‘You see, I managed to play a trick to you, and you can do nothing about that, ha-ha...’. Usually it is accompanied by a hand gesture, known as *fare maramao*, made by putting one’s thumb on the tip of one’s nose, and, at the same time, wiggling all the other fingers of the same hand (one after the other)” (Grosskopf, 2011). Grosskopf gives the following glosses of the expression. It may also convey meanings such as: “Forget it!” “Not in your life!” However, these glosses do not tell the whole story.

At this stage we have the term *Maramao* contextualized by linguistic data and complemented by a specific corporal gesture. The combination of the two elements allows us to further explore the meaning of the phrase and elucidate the socio-cultural situations and contexts which, in the past, could have evoked this response and, hence, to speculate on the earlier social practices that might have given rise to it. In order to further illustrate the meaning of the exclamations, Grosskopf provides several contextualized, albeit invented, examples of when someone would employ the saying and

ended up being patronymics. Did they start out as nick-names? Or did they refer to some special (spiritual) quality that the individual displayed?

the gesture associated with it. The first example he gives is the following one: “A local well-known politician meets a group of people in a public square, expounding his views. But, as soon as he turns away and is not looking, one person makes the gesture and says ‘Marameo!’, meaning: ‘You can forget having my vote!’” (Grosskopf, 2011). In his second example the underlying theme of trickery is more apparent: “Two children are eating slices of cake. Each one has his own slice. Suddenly, one child steals the other’s piece of cake and runs away. ‘Give me back my cake slice!’, shouts the other. But the first child, laughing, says ‘Yes... sure... Marameo!’ and runs away with his plunder. (Meaning: ‘I’m smarter, you’re a fool, the next time be careful and watch your cake slice!’). It seems to me that one of the meanings of this exclamation is ‘Yes, I know, I am behaving like a bad boy, but, now, for once, I HAVE THE RIGHT to be a bad boy!’” [emphasis in the original] (Grosskopf, 2011).

Another informant, the Italian linguist Marianna Bolognesi, recalls that in the mid- 1980s, as a child living in Milan, her grandmother (b. 1924) who was in her late 60s at the time, would play with her saying “Marameo” and “thumb her nose” at her: “When I was young I remember my grandma playing with me saying ‘marameo’ with her thumb on her nose and her hand spread flat, and making a fanning motion with the fingers, and then running away, so that I had to catch her. Then it was my turn to run after her saying ‘marameo’” (Bolognesi, 2011). Curiously, the same quite distinctive gesture is well known in other parts of Europe. For example, in English it has been converted into the idiomatic expression “to thumb one’s nose” which refers to precisely the same non-verbal act, but is understood figuratively as acting disrespectfully, especially by flouting the object of disrespect. The significant difference is that in English the speaker who does the action, does not complement it verbally by saying “maramao”.

In Basque there are similar expressions in which the name Hamalau appears. While they are not accompanied by the hand gesture, as occurs in Italian, they are used to criticize someone who is judged to be acting improperly, trying to get away with things, and more specifically, attempting to impose his will or desires on others when he does not have the right–permission or authority–to do

so. In such a situation, the following comment would be typical: “Who does he think he is, Hamalau?” Such sayings should not be interpreted as a criticism of Hamalau himself, but rather are best understood as directed at the individual who tries to act like Hamalau, emulating the prerogatives once ascribed to the latter (Frank, 2008c: 72-76).

In summary, the specific type of discursive and gestural information attached to the word *maramao* reflects its previous socio-cultural situatedness and at the same time reaffirms Bakhtin’s observation about the force of tradition in language: “[...] the word does not forget where it has been and can never wholly free itself from the dominion of the contexts of which it has been part” (Bakhtin, 1973: 167). The invocation of the name Maramao in the exclamations discussed here could well be a case in point. The interjection is elicited as a reaction to a complex socially-situated scene that the speaker participates in or otherwise comments upon. Grosskopf concludes his discussion of the topic with a question: “So would it be possible to connect this exclamation (“Maramao”) with a former Carnival custom? Maybe. We know the Carnival is traditionally a season for playing tricks to people. Perhaps to say ‘Maramao’ was a declaration that the trick had been played in the name of the King of Carnival?” (Grosskopf, 2011). Keeping in mind the ritually authorized transgression of social norms that reigns during the Carnival period as well as the fact that violations and criticisms of authorities were not punished, the mocking attitude communicated by these expressions along with the associated hand gesture could harken back to much earlier but equally socially approved customs. Certainly in times past Carnival was a time of revelry in which ordinary life, its rules and regulations were temporarily suspended, reversed and virtually turned upside down.

Bakhtin stressed the multi-layered nature of language, which he called heteroglossia. Words and expressions are nuanced with socio-ideological contradictions carried forward from various periods and levels in the past. He emphasized that “Language is not a neutral medium that can be simply appropriated by a speaker, but something that comes to us populated with the intentions of others. Every word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially-charged life.” (Holcombe, 2007). This seems to be the case

of expressions involving Maramao: the word itself is multi-layered and its various meanings are replete with the intentions of past speakers.

For those living in orality, there was no centralizing authority that set language norms, determined how a word was to be pronounced, much less written down. Rather what operated was a loose network of alliances, speakers with overlapping and shifting frames of reference which were constantly being modified—by chance, ignorance, personal experience and conversations with others, particularly elders whose memory of events and the meaning of words could help the younger generation better fix their meaning and pronunciation. This situation undoubtedly gave rise to phonological variants as speakers attempted to articulate an expression, such as Maramao, whose meaning was increasingly opaque and whose proper pronunciation they could not quite capture.

## 8.2. *Maramao and Carnival lamentations*

Among the theories put forward to explain the etymology of the word *maramao*, the theory with the most currency today is probably the one that derives the name from an expression found in a lament, or more concretely from the phrase *mara m'ajje*, recorded in lamentations in the dialect of the region Abruzzo, in Southern Italy: “Molti canti funebri, specialmente abruzzesi, cominciano con [l’invocazione lamentosa] *mara mè* o *maramao*” (Bracchi, 2009: 181).<sup>45</sup> This theory alleges that the dialectal variant *mara mè*, that is, *amara me*, understood as equivalent to “trista me” or “you make me sad”, was misinterpreted by speakers and that the resulting phrase spread across central Italy where it was eventually adopted as the first part of a Carnival lament (Toschi, 1976: 319). Di Nola has summarized this position:

Una versione registrata ad Amatrice da C. De Bernardinis rappresenta un tipo particolare che contiene una prima parte iniziale con *Mara mè! Mara mè! Pi'cche si mortu?*, ed elenca tutti i beni materiali di cui il difunto marito poteva liberamente godere e cui ha insensatamente rinunciato; e una seconda parte recitata dai parenti, nella quale si la-

45. “Many funeral songs, especially from Abruzzo, begin with [the plaintive cry] *mara mè* or *maramao*” (Bracchi 2009: 181).

menta il morto ma si ricorda che egli ha raggiunto i suoi antenati nel regno della luce [...]. Un secondo modello è quello indicato come lamento della vedova di Vasto [...]. *Mare majje, scura majje* ‘amara me, oscura me’, che probabilmente sono la vera genesi del termine *maramao* utilizzato nei laghi dell’Italia centrale. [...] A questi fondamentali esempi bisogna aggiungere che nel territorio di Milano appariva un canto infantile ‘*Maramao*, perché sei morto’ e *Maramao* nel linguaggio infantile era un gatto fiabesco<sup>46</sup>. (Di Nola, 1987: 109)<sup>47</sup>

This interpretation of the etymology of the expression *maramao* is repeated in many works. For example, Bracchi refers to it not as a theory, but as a proven fact. And we have writings Paolo Toschi, dating back to the 1950s, who after citing the Abruzzo variant that begins “Carnivale, perché sei morte?” (De Nino, 1881: 200), and mentioning that the quatrain in question has “numerosi varianti è diffuso per tutta l’Italia centrale fino alla Romagna [...]”, reached the following very categorical conclusion about the etymology of *Maramao*: “In molti paesi ove il significato della parola *maramao* non viene compreso, si dice anche *maramao* quasi come sberleffo di Carnevale, o genericamente a qualcuno: ma non v’è dubbio che *maramao* o *maramao*, è la parola iniziale dei canti funebri dell’Italia centrale e vuole dire

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46. “A version collected at Amatrice by C. De Bernardinis demonstrates a distinctive characteristic in that it contains an initial first part beginning with *Mara mè! Mara mè! Why did you die?*, and lists all the tangible goods that the deceased husband was free to enjoy and which he has foolishly given up, and a second part recited by relatives, in which the deceased is lamented, but it is recalled that he has reached his ancestors in the kingdom of light [...]. A second model is referred to as the lament of the widow of Vasto [...]. *Mare majje, scura majje* ‘amara me, oscura me’, which probably is the true genesis of the term *maramao* used in the complaint of central Italy. [...] To these basic examples it should be added that in the territory of Milan there was a children’s song ‘*Maramao*, perché sei morto’ and that *Maramao* in the language used by children was a fairy-tale cat” (Di Nola 1987: 109).

47. With respect to this etymology, in his 1995 work Di Nola presents the theory less as a possibility and more as a matter of fact: “D’altra parte il lamento per la morte del Carnevale imitava quello comunemente usato per il cordoglio normale (*maramao* o *maramao*, con significato di ‘amara me’)” [“On the other hand, the lament for the death of the Carnival mimicked the one that was commonly used for normal mourning (*maramao* or *maramao* with the meaning of ‘bitter me’)”] (Di Nola, 1995: 276). Di Nola’s source is Lupinetti (1955) who, in turn, is citing the work of De Bernardinis and Montanaro (1924). The song, collected by Montanaro with the line “*Màra màjje, màra màjje, scura màjje*” can be heard here: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001OFOYAM/ref=dm\\_dp\\_trk45?ie=UTF8&qid=1303526818&sr=8-3](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001OFOYAM/ref=dm_dp_trk45?ie=UTF8&qid=1303526818&sr=8-3).



amara me, povera me” (Toschi, 1976: 319).<sup>48</sup> And given the authority of Toschi as a researcher, it is not surprising that his theory has been picked up and repeated by other investigators.

Bertolotti, in turn, cites the ditty “Maramao, perché sei morto?”, affirming that the initial word “*Maramao* è fusione di un originario *amara me*”, and was based on a widely circulating lament dating back to antiquity (Bertolotti, 1992: 106). However, at the same time investigators also recognize that the song of lamentation invoking the name of *Maramao* / *Maramao* and sung by children “per la morte del carnevale imitava curiosamente il compianto funebre: ‘Carnevale, perché sei morto? / Pane e vino non ti mancava. / L’insalata tenevi nell’orto’ [...]. Il confluire da più parti versi un unico nodo denuncia intrecci operanti in tempi molto lunghi e ramificati fino alle latitudini più disparate” (Bracchi, 2009: 181).<sup>49</sup>

While Bertolotti appears to agree with Toschi that the expression *maramao* / *maramao* in the children’s funeral lament comes from the phrase *amara me*, his discussion of the significance of the funeral lament used at Carnival is more nuanced. He interprets the variant in “Carnavale, perché scì morto?” as if it reflected deeper layers of meaning that take us back to the propitiation of the *orso ucciso*. In his analysis, Bertolotti brings into focus symbolic convergences between three types of ritual lamentations: those expressions of sorrow and grief intoned by Altaic hunters to gain forgiveness from the animal they have killed, medieval laments addressed to the dead ass and the plaint addressed to Carnival itself.

Anche a proposito del pianto che spesso i cacciatori levano sulle spoglie dell’orso ucciso verrebbe spontaneo parlare di ipocrisia o di contraddizione, se non fosse evidente che

48. “In many villages where the meaning of the word *maramao* is not understood, *maramao* is also said almost like a Carnival jest, or generically to anyone, but there is no doubt that *maramao* or *maramao*, is the first word of the dirges of central Italy and means ‘bitter [sad] me, poor me’ (Toschi 1976: 319).

49. “For the death of the carnival curiously mimicked the late funeral complaint: ‘Carnival, why have you died? / Bread and wine you were not lacking. / The salad you had in the garden’ [...]. The confluence from several parts into a single node reveals networks operating over a very long time period and branching at the most diverse latitudes” (Bracchi 2009: 181).

esso fa parte integrante della commedia dell'innocenza, convalidando, per così dire, la sinceretà di quelle dichiarazioni di discolpa cui si accompagna. "Nonno, Nonna, / Perché sei morto(a)?", chiedevano piangendo all'orso i cacciatori altaici: la domanda che abbiamo già incontrato nella lamentazione medievale del contadino per l'asino morto ("Oimé, perché sei morto, asino?"), e che ricorre anche nei pianti rituali per Carnevale ("Carnivale, pecché scí morto? / Pane e vino non te mancava ecc."), si rivela qui inequivocabilmente un tentativo di mistificazione rivolto a carpire la benevolenza dell'orso. (Bertolotti, 1992: 140)<sup>50</sup>

Consequently, by taking Bertolotti's interpretation one step further, it would be quite logical to assume that the slot filled by the name of bear in the case of the Altaic lamentation, would be filled in the Italian versions by the old name of the bear figure whose death is being mourned and whose forgiveness is being sought. Viewed in this fashion, the position occupied by the word "Carnivale" in the song that begins "Carnivale, pecché scí morto?" would have been filled previously by "Maramao" or one of its phonological variants. Thus, the two versions become equivalent, one where Maramao is being addressed explicitly and another in which the abstraction "Carnevale" is addressed instead. In both instances, as Bertolotti has intuited, we have a lament directed, simultaneously, to the dead bear and to the main protagonist of Carnival itself. Moreover, we might keep in mind that the animistic cosmology that underpins Bear Ceremonialism and which is discussed at length by Bertolotti (1992), is one in which mortuary rites held for the bears were performed in part to help them regenerate, but also as a means of showing the bears respect and preventing their retaliation against the living (Losey et al., 2013; Sarmela, 2006; Zachrisson & Iregren, 1974).

50. "Also in reference to the complaint that hunters are often make over the remains of the bear that they have killed, naturally it would speak about hypocrisy or contradiction, were it not evident that it is an integral part of the comedy of innocence, validating, so to speak, the sincerity of those declarations of innocence that accompany it. "Grandfather, Grandmother, / Why are you dead?" The Altaic bear hunters ask, weeping: the question we have already met in the medieval peasant's lament for the dead donkey ("Alas, why are you dead, donkey? "), and which also occurs in ritual [also 'customary'] plaints for Carnival ("Carnivale, pecché scí morto? / Pane e vino non te mancava etc."), is revealed here clearly as an attempt at deception intended to finagle the goodwill of the bear" (Bertolotti 1992: 140).

In conclusion, the expression *mare majje / mara mè* which begins the lamentations recorded in Abruzzo may or may not have been based originally on *amara me* and may or may not have given rise to a new lament beginning with the expression Maramao / Marameo. The exact nature of the process is shrouded in the mists of time. What we can say with some degree of certainty is that these Abruzzian formulaic complaints must have played some role in lending legitimacy to the expression “Maramao / Marameo perché sei morto” and to its adoption as a funeral lamentation intoned during Carnival in honor of the main character of that event.

### 8.3. *Maramao as a healer: the Quack Doctor*

Until now we have not seen the figure of Maramao portrayed explicitly as a healer. Instead, references to this aspect of his supernatural powers have been indirect, e.g. the invocation of his name in certain circumstances as well as the possibility that he might be identified with the Bear Leader who resurrects the Bear. In this section an additional piece of socioculturally situated linguistic evidence will be brought forward, one that supports the hypothesis that Maramao should be identified structurally not only with the central figure of Carnival, but also with the shaman-healer in charge of resurrecting the bear character. In this instance, Maramao is represented in the form of a Quack Doctor, concretely in the guise of a lesser known character from the *Commedia dell'Arte*, whose first recorded appearance on stage is connected to southern Italy, probably Naples.<sup>51</sup> To my knowledge, until now the name of this character has not attracted a great deal of attention from researchers who have investigated the etymology of Maramao. A 1622 etching by Jacques Callot (1592-1635) has immortalized this performer.

Furthermore, if Maramao were viewed here as the counterpart of the shaman-healer or Quack Doctor who resurrects the bear, would this make the Capitan somehow the

51. For instance Donald Posner in his highly respected investigation of Callot's prints does not discuss Maramao. Rather he states that “Callot's prints do not convey, and evidently were not intended to convey, much useful information about *Commedia dell'arte* characters. Furthermore, [...] one must even doubt whether all the names inscribed under the figures have historical validity” (Posner, 1977: 204).



Fig. 4  
Capt. Cardoni and  
Maramao. An etching  
by Jacques Callot  
Source: [http://sged.bm-lyon.fr/Edjp.BML/Publiimg/images/ESTA/00/00/09/61/GED\\_00000000.JPG](http://sged.bm-lyon.fr/Edjp.BML/Publiimg/images/ESTA/00/00/09/61/GED_00000000.JPG)

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surrogate of the bear character? In other words, should we imagine that in much earlier renditions of the scene the character who is on the receiving end was recognized as the counterpart of the Bear? Or is Maramao's use of the

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Fig. 5  
Cap. Babeo and Cucuba.  
An etching by Jacques  
Callot  
Source: [http://sged.bm-lyon.fr/Edjp.BML/Publiimg/images/ESTA/00/00/09/57/GED\\_00000000.JPG](http://sged.bm-lyon.fr/Edjp.BML/Publiimg/images/ESTA/00/00/09/57/GED_00000000.JPG)

anal penetrating instrument merely fortuitous? Only a way to identify Maramao as a Quack Doctor but without any archaic allusion to the earlier ursine identity of Captain Cardoni?

In another etching of what appears to be the same scene, the figure of Maramao shows up as Captain Babeo while Captain Cardoni becomes Cucurucu. Whether there is a relationship between the name *Babeo* and the entity known as *Babau* is unclear. Assuming Captain Babeo is the counterpart of Maramao, the latter is no longer portrayed holding a syringe in his hand. However, in the background we see the iconic charivari figure of *l'asino* with it backwards-seated rider, being pursued by another character with a set of bellows in his hands, as if the rather phallic looking instrument Captain Babeo / Maramao holds in his hand, is being commented upon visually by the action seen in the background frame of the etching.<sup>52</sup> However it is interpreted, the scene leaves little doubt that Captain Cardoni / Cucurucu is the “victim”. In summary, whatever symbolism was once associated with this scene, whatever its relationship to Good-Luck Visit performances and to the itinerant troupes of performers and popular street theater antedating the *Commedia dell'Arte*, the scene's structure parallels in many respects elements found in the scene of the Death and Resurrection of the Bear, and these structural parallels are even more suggestive if the other ethnographic and linguistic data discussed in this study are kept in mind.

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### 9. *Reframing the plot*

In his remarkable investigation of Carnival Bertolotti brings to bear a wealth of information concerning Bear Ceremonialism among hunting and gathering peoples in support of his thesis that the central figure of Carnival was originally a bear; that the cognitive template for understanding European Carnival requires one to move back in time, to a different plane and acquire a non-dualistic interpretative framework more in consonance with the cosmovision of native peoples where the animal-human divide was no longer present. More succinctly put, Bertolotti argues for the

52. Cf. Bertolotti (1992: 98-112) for further discussion of the charivari aspects of Carnival and comparisons relating to laments for the dead ass and the bear.

conflation of the abstract notion of Carnival with the Bear. Thus, when mourning the Death of Carnival, the lament was directed in times past to the Bear, as a way of honoring the being who had been hunted and killed and thus had given its life to succor those who would feast on its flesh and blood. And in return the hunters would hold a celebration in the animal's honor to which the animal itself was invited.

As Bertolotti describes the evolution of *la morte di Carnevale*, the latter entity, that is, Carnevale itself, has come to be viewed as an abstraction. He argues that as one strips away the intervening layers and moves back in time, what is revealed in a hunting ritual, a celebration centered on honoring and finally propitiating the soul of the bear that has been killed in order to guarantee the well-being of the social collective and Nature itself. He views the process as having gone through three stages. Starting with the most recent layer in which Carnevale is understood, in general, as an abstract concept: "1) Una cerimonia corrispondente nella struttura generale oltre che nei dettagli a quella morte di Carnevale, ma che comincia una battuta di caccia come i riti venatori dell'orso; il protagonista [...] è un personaggio umano come Carnevale; 2) un gruppo di cerimonie analoghe [...] in cui il protagonista è un personaggio umano che vive tuttavia nelle selve, l'Uomo selvatico; 3) un gruppo di cerimonie analoghe a quelle dell'Uomo selvatico, in cui il protagonista è un animale, e precisamente un orso" (Bertolotti, 1992: 173).<sup>53</sup>

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Bertolotti's stripping away of the interpretive layers is remarkably insightful. However, it does not take into account how the belief in an ursine genealogy could act to readjust the lens we employ to understand the performance art under study. Keeping in mind the double-nature of Hamalau himself, his role as an intermediary between the world of humans and bears, we can see that his appearance as Bear Leader shaman-healer would form only one half of the

53. "1) A ceremony corresponding in its overall structure as well as in its details to the death of Carnival, but which begins with a hunting expedition [battuta di caccia = hunting] like the hunting [or 'venatorial'] rituals of bear hunters, the main character [...] is a human character as Carnival is, 2) a group of analogous ceremonies [...] in which the protagonist is a human being who anyhow [or 'nevertheless'] lives in the woods, the Wild Man, 3) a group of ceremonies similar to those of the Wild Man, in which the hero is an animal, namely a bear" (Bertolotti, 1992: 173).

equation, his “human” half, while his other half would be symbolized by the “bear” itself. Indeed, there is reason to believe that we should conceptualize Hamalau as incarnate in both natures. As a shaman, he simultaneously “personifies” the Bear Leader and the Bear. In the form of the latter, he carries away the illness, disease and bad luck of the social collective or households who receive the Good- Luck Visits. And in the guise of the former, among other things, he brings the dead back to life.

In order to comprehend the cosmology that undergirds the fused nature of Hamalau, we need to turn back to our earlier discussion of animism, recognizing the fact that the set of cultural understandings upon which the drama is grounded is an unfamiliar one, quite alien to Western thought with its deeply engrained dualisms separating humans from animals, and Nature from Culture (Betts, Hardenberg, & Stirling, 2015; Frank, 2005; Hallowell, 1963; Losey et al., 2013; Willerslev, 2007). Hallowell (1966), for example, “describes a world in which agency was potentially found in any number of objects and phenomena, and one in which personhood was not limited to humans. Bears and other animals were clearly among these ‘other-than-human’ persons, and in Hallowell’s account were ontologically equivalent to humans, having souls and social relations” (cf. Losey et al., 2013: 88). Hallowell concludes that animism projects a cosmology in which, “man and animals instead of being separate categories of being are deeply rooted in a world of nature that is unified” (Hallowell, 1966: 12). Indeed, it is difficult for us to appreciate the profound implications of a cosmology that is rooted in the non- anthropocentric belief that humans descended from bears and in which shape-shifting would have been viewed as normal, grounded in the associated yet equally unfamiliar animistic belief that outward appearance is only an incidental attribute of being.

The cultural conceptualizations discussed so far this investigation have had conceptual existence as well as linguistic encoding. In this sense, language becomes a central aspect of cultural cognition in that it serves as a “collective memory bank” (Frank, 2003, 2005; wa Thiong’o, 1986) for cultural conceptualizations, past and present. Cultural conceptualizations that prevailed at different stages in the

history of a speech community can leave recognizable traces in the linguistic practice and non-verbal behaviors of the group (Sharifian, 2008, 2009). In this sense we can argue that language can be viewed as one of the primary mechanisms for storing and communicating cultural conceptualizations. It acts as both a memory bank and a fluid vehicle for the retransmission of these socioculturally embodied cultural conceptualizations, particularly when the latter are linked to ethnographically identifiable practices which in turn are invested with value as symbols of group identity and consequently characterized by their status as cultural icons, a situation that tends to make them more resistant to change.

Yet cultural cognitions are dynamic in that they are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated from one generation to the next and passed on in a slightly modified form to the other members of the cultural group. Throughout this process the cultural conceptualizations are slowly being reshaped and updated, so to speak, to bring them more into harmony with the emergent societal norms. As part of this process, understandings that once were part of the interpretative grid of the collective can become eroded, partially forgotten or disappear entirely, e.g., the belief that humans descended from bears, that an animal needs to be asked for forgiveness by the hunter or that humans and animals are equals, in short, understandings that were once commonplace and integral to a complex animistic cosmology. In summary, the cognitive phenomena discussed in this study might be viewed as reflecting as well as embodying characteristics of historically bound sociocultural relations while the linguistic data along with the ethnographic materials themselves become a means of reconstituting these preterit relations and reconstructing the cognitive phenomena that informed them (Lucy, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978).

## 10. *Conclusions*

This investigation began with an analysis of the evidence for the embeddedness of the social practices relating to the seventh-son or daughter in Basque-speaking zone and across much of Europe. Then we continued following along this same evidential path. When we did so, the converging paths of evidence, most especially the semantic data, led us to con-



clude that the cultural complex in question formed a single highly reticulated network. There was a type of tripartite linkage connecting together the various components: the status conferred by being the seventh born son or daughter gave rise to a human with supernatural powers, e.g., second sight and healing abilities, who was viewed as a “healer” and then there was the fact that such an individual was also portrayed as a ‘night-mare’. Moreover, in other parts of Europe additional linguistic and ethnographic clues can be detected which reinforce this interpretation and which seem to fit together to form what is a much larger translingual cultural matrix. These clues seem to be deeply entrenched in a similar psycho-social framework, one that gives rise to shared beliefs and social practices that are grounded in an animistic cosmology.

Next, when all the linguistic and ethnographic datasets were compared and contrasted they provided us with a basis for zeroing in on the original name of the healer in question. Although the British materials relating to the Quack Doctor did not offer any linguistic clues concerning the older name of the character, the French, Italian and Sardu linguistic materials certainly did.<sup>54</sup> And names such as *marcou* and *maramao*, along with other cognates, when examined alongside the ample documentation of the miraculous qualities attributed to the seventh-born led us to the conclusion that there are several strands of archaic belief embedded in the performances where Bear Leaders and Quack Doctors make their appearance.

Then, attached to this traditional belief we found substantial linguistic evidence which indicated that at some point in time the expression *hamalau* and/or one of its phonological variants was the term used to refer with such healers. Furthermore, that linguistic evidence when combined with the ethnographic data and cultural conceptualizations linked to this figure allowed for a tentative mapping of the geographical diffusion of the belief system across Europe.

The evidence now available, both linguistic and ethnographic, suggests that the figure of Maramao should be identified with the same cultural matrix: the same highly

54. Although outside the scope of this paper, a Google search reveals a significant number of people with the surname of Marcou.

networked set of beliefs that led us back to the figure of a shaman-healer whose supernatural powers were exteriorized in one of the central scenes of the performances that took place in conjunction with the Good-Luck Visits.<sup>55</sup> As noted earlier, whereas previously Good-Luck Visits appear to have taken place whenever there was a need perceived that would require the performance of a cleansing ritual at a given location, the Good-Luck Visits were also performed during specific ritually-sanctioned periods, most particularly during Carnival (Frank, 2008a, 2008c, 2009a). Today dates for the performances vary from country to country and region to region with Candlemas Bear Day (Feb. 2) and the Monday before Shrove Tuesday ('Fat Tuesday' or Mardi Gras) or even Shrove Tuesday itself being among the favorites.

Indeed, the example of Maramao represents one of the most significant pieces of evidence identified so far in support of the theory that the figure of Hamalau "Fourteen" was incarnate in the shaman-healer who brought the bear character back to life. Moreover, the fact that in Italian the origin of the name of this carnival character can be derived with such ease from the much earlier etymon is quite remarkable. The developmental pathway is quite clear, as long as one assumes that at some stage an exchange of liquids, i.e., *l* > *rr*, took place: *hamalau* > *\*mamalau* > *\*mamarrao* > *marramao* as well as the more canonical Italian spelling of *maramao*. The exchange of /*m*/ and /*rr*/ produces the final change needed to produce: *mamarrao* → *marramao*.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the ethnographic data is equally revealing. In Callot's rendition of the character, we find Maramao taking part in a scene that appears to correspond closely to the traditional one found, not only in performances associated with Good-Luck Visits, but also in the Carnival performances themselves, as is well documented in vari-

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55. Of particular note is the recent work by Fréger (2012) which documents the European 'wildman' by means of a remarkable collection of photographic images. Cf. also Frank & Silva (2012) and Frank & Ridderstad (2013).

56. For additional commentary on the relationship of meanings associated with the Basque expression *marramao* and similar Aragonese expressions, cf. Nebot Calpe (1983: 66). It should be noted that the Basque term *marramao* appears to be nothing more than a semantically narrowed phonological variant of *mamarro* which in turn is derived from *hamalau*.

ous parts of Europe. For instance in his study of European Carnival with particular emphasis on Italy, Bertolotti—who is well aware of the central importance of the bear—recounts this scene from the Carnival in the Balkans:

Il personaggio principale, chiamato per lo più *Kuker*, indossava un vestito e un alto copricapo de pelliccia (è un esemplare del tipo del *peloso*), aveva il viso annerito con fuliggine e portava dei campanelli appesi alla cintura e un fallo o un bastone in mano. [...] insieme a numerose altre maschere (tra cui spesso anche quella dell'orso), formavano un corteo e facevano una questua. La mascherate principale era quella dell'uccisione del Kuker. [...] La Baba [la Vecchia], talvolta insieme a tutti gli altri personaggi, l'uccisore compreso, piangeva sul suo cadavere. Ma spesso interveniva poi un medico che lo faceva risuscitare. (Bertolotti, 1992: 87)<sup>57</sup>

While these observations still leave us with a number of unanswered questions, if we combine the linguistic and ethnographic data, the figure of Maramao takes on increased importance. In the Basque materials, it is clear that Hamalau is the half-human, half-bear shaman apprentice whose adventures are narrated in the folktales. Furthermore, it is relatively obvious that in this capacity he acts as the intermediary between two worlds. At the same time, as detailed previously, when analyzing the performance art associated with the same cultural complex, that is, the Good-Luck Visits, a key scene in the healing rituals involves a shaman-healer, portrayed later as a Quack Doctor, who resurrects the Bear. In the more archaic versions of the play, this is the same character who functions as the Bear Leader in charge of taking the bear from place to place and making sure it performed the healing ritual properly.

In summary, there is an aspect to the Italian and Sardu data that facilitates the unraveling of the hermeneutics sur-

57. "The main character, called mainly *Kuker*, wearing a garment and a tall hat made of fur (it is an example of the type known as "hairy ones" [*peloso* is singular]), had his face blackened with soot and wore little bells hanging from his belt and a phallus or a stick in his hand. [...] Along with numerous other masks (often including also the bear), they formed a procession and went about begging. The main masquerade was the killing of Kuker. [...] The Baba [Old Woman], sometimes together with all the other characters, including the killer, wept over his corpse. But then often a doctor intervened who revived him" (Bertolotti, 1992: 87).

rounding the main character: the fact that Maramao seems to be identified with the figure of Carnival who carries off the negative influences and therefore acts to protect the social collective from evil, so to speak. In some instances, the cleansing effect is achieved by burning a straw figure, a *fantoccio di paglia*. Viewed from this perspective, the dual-nature of Hamalau is expressed in the following way: he is a being endowed with the power to reanimate the Bear and at the same time, because of his own ursine nature he is equated with the character representing the animal itself whose death and resurrection we witness. Hermeneutically, the linguistic and ethnographic materials relating to Maramao allow us to contemplate the quite remarkable possibility that the old name of the central figure of Carnival was Maramao (Hamalau) as well as the possibility that the Mamuthones and other Bear Leaders who interact with the Bear should also be identified with Maramao (Hamalau) in their role of shaman-healers. In short, the Italian and Sardu materials have opened a window on the past. And in doing so, they have allowed us to formulate a series of hypotheses about the nature of this much earlier animistic cosmology which appears to have left a deep imprint on the ritual performances that have continued to be celebrated across Europe into the 21st century.

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## The Bear Rituals among the Sámi

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### 1. *Introduction*

The Sámi proved more interesting than the Finns to seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe; the interests of the Swedish College of Antiquities founded in 1666 by Magnus de la Gardie were directed principally towards the Sámi. In order to achieve a unity of language and belief throughout the realm in the manner decided by the Vasa royal family it was necessary to found Swedish towns and establish Lutheran churches in different parts of the country and gather information about minorities whose languages, beliefs or customs differed from those of the state. The focus was upon the north and the east. The eastern boundary was to be made into a border between the Lutheran Swedish and the Orthodox Russian faiths. Witch persecutions were also a feature of the times. Even though the Lutheran pastors of Sweden-Finland and Denmark-Norway had the task of recording the magic and idolatry of the Sámi with the promise that the shamans would not be persecuted, in seventeenth-century Lapland the time arrived 'to burn drums or hide them in the ground'. The fascination with the Sámi stemmed from their being such close neighbours to civilised Europeans, yet so culturally remote. In the sev-

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enteenth century they still largely adhered to their traditional, pre-Christian beliefs, and shamanism (*noaidi*, *luohta*) and bear rituals were central parts of their culture.

One of the most characteristic material features of Sámi shamanism was the highly decorated drums, some seventy of which have survived the ravages of time (including a number of great fires in Copenhagen, the then capital of Denmark-Norway, where hundreds of drums had been collected). Olaus Magnus and other writers on Lapland's shamans (*noaidi*) led continental Europeans to think that the victorious Swedish army made use of *noaidi* tricks in their battles. The Swedish crown invited the German scholar Johannes Scheffer to Uppsala to write 'a new and reliable description' of Lapland and the Lapps, on the basis of the regional reports written by clergymen. As his *Lapponia* (1673) was soon translated into the main European languages, the Sámi bear ritual became more widely known in Europe than it was at that time in the Nordic countries, where it still took place.

## 2. *The Sámi bear feast*

The bear hunt among the Finns, Karelians and Sámi was a cultic series of events. A correctly performed ritual would ensure that the bear was reborn in the world beyond, where it was expected to tell its fellow bears about how great an honour it had wrested from human beings. The specific knowledge about bear rituals comes from south Scandinavian Sámi. According to Randulf, writing in 1723 on the basis of information relating to the southern Sámi, 'the Sámi consider all animals holy', and he continues: 'but the bear they consider the most holy of all'. Though the relations of the Sámi with animals were many-sided, the bear held a special place in the culture, derived from totemistic concepts. There was a sort of unspoken agreement about what responsibilities pertained to each side: the bear had to refrain from killing people, its descendants; people had to honour the bear, and could kill it, but only within a framework derived from rules established in myth, and with leave granted in myth by the bear itself. The ritual slaying of a bear strengthened men: the powers of the mighty animal and its characteristics came into the victors' possession. The

bear hunt was through and through a series of ritual and cult events.

The hunt held no essential significance in terms of the food economy, but the hunt and the consumption of the bear flesh were of intrinsic value in themselves. The bear festival fortified the hunters, and renewed the community's system of hunting values and strengthened the community spirit. Carried out correctly, the bear ritual also guaranteed that the bear would be born anew in *sáiva*, the Sámi other-world under the ground or water, where the souls of other *sacrificial animals also ended up and where similarly departed shamans, noaidi*, took up residence. It was expected to relate in *sáiva* to the other bears what a great honour it was to be slain by men and feasted upon. Thus it was confirmed that bears would continue to be willing to be born from *sáiva* on earth and would give themselves up to be slain by men. The bear cult was a critical part of the bear's endless cycle alternating between this world and the other. At all stages of the hunting and rite of the bear, the Sámi are known to have used a secret language specific to the bear hunters, which contained circumlocutions for all the words needed in this connection, such as the bear's body parts. This valuable information becomes manifest in the texts quoted below.

Bear graves associated with the cult have been found over a broad area of Norwegian and Swedish Lapland. The oldest grave from the Norwegian area is dated to the third century ad, and the most recent to the eighteenth (Zachrisson and Iregren 1974: 37; Myrstad 1996: 46). The most important source for the Sámi bear cult from the time while it was still living is the description from 1755 by the Swede Pehr Fjellström, the rector of the Skytteanske Skolar, a seminar founded in Lycksele for the training of Sámi boys to serve their communities as ministers, entitled *Kort berättelse om Lapparnas Björne-fänge*, which is based on the customs of Ume, Pite and Lule Lappmark; the overall bear-hunting rite consisted of the following stages:

1. Encircling the bear, after the first snowfall, often with the help of an oracle from a shaman drum.
2. The formation of a hunting party. In Scandinavia the hunt appears to have been a noticeably social event; the encircler held a party, whose participants were obliged to

take part in the hunt. According to information from Finnish Lapland the hunt and ritual were small in form, and more family-based (Itkonen 1946: 365–6).

3. The slaying itself in early spring. Again a prognostication of the success of the hunt was sought by means of the shaman drum. A few days of celibacy preceded the hunt day, along with washing and fasting, and each of the hunters left his own home through the sacred back entrance, the *boaššu*. The bear's den was approached in a festal procession. In Scandinavia the order was encircler, drum-player, slayer and other hunters in order of rank. Before the slaying, the bear was woken, so that its soul, possibly straying outside its body, could return. If this did not happen, the bear's soul would be left to wander, as an enraged and dangerous soul without abode, and the very purpose of the bear ritual, the return of the bear to *sáiva*, would be unfulfilled. The actual slaying was effected with a special bear spear. The bear was left in its place until the following day, 'facing death'. The meaning of this may have been the same as that of the bear's awakening.

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4. The move back to the village. The reindeer which drew the bear had a brass ring as a protection against the bear's dangerous otherworldly power, its *väiki* (like the Polynesian *mana*). This reindeer was then tabu for women for a year. During the ceremony the women could also not cross the return path of the hunting company. During the journey the first bear song was sung. Unfortunately no complete western Sámi bear song has been recorded; only Gabriel Tuderus's record of a song from Kemi Lapland, translated into Finnish, is preserved. In the village the women came to meet the hunters by looking at them through a brass ring and sprinkling them with red alder sap. The former was again aimed at neutralising the bear's *väiki*, the latter relates to the name of the divine guardian of the bear, *Leaibeolmai*, 'alder man'. The red, blood-like alder sap forged a connection with this hunting god. Songs were sung again, and in these the bear was called by the name *saivo olmaior saivo neit*, 'man/girl of *sáiva*', with its otherworld associations.

5. The cooking and eating of the bear's flesh: the bear feast proper. The bear was skinned and cooked by men, at least



in Scandinavia, in a house specially erected for the bear feast; women were not allowed in. In Finland, the women appear to have been present. While the bear was being skinned, it was sung to, and assured that its death was not caused by the hunters. It was explained that the animal itself had accidentally slipped down a slippery hillside or that some foreigner or stranger had killed it: 'A man came from Sweden, Poland, England, France'. This may be considered a shadowy reminiscence of the bear myth, in which the bear forbade his own son to kill him, but where he nonetheless gave himself up to be slain by his wife's brothers. In dividing up the meat special care was taken that no bone was broken, and the bones were carefully taken into safekeeping. The bear's flesh had to be cooked without salt; this rule may point to the bear rite's great antiquity, to a time when the inland Sámi did not use salt. The cooking was a critical event in which the pot could not boil over, but where cold water could also not be added to prevent it. This again contains a reminiscence of the bear myth, in which the bear's son threatens to rouse his father and the pot begins the boil furiously over. In Scandinavia the men brought prepared meat to their homes and the women could eat it too, though only flesh from the front or the rear (accounts vary) of the animal. Again, as a precaution they had to eat the meat through a brass ring.

6. The purification rites and carnival. The men present at the slaying of the bear were purified with strong birch-ash lye, which in Scandinavian tradition appears to have been followed by erotic group games. This indicates how erotic concepts with a totemistic background surround the bear.

7. The bear's funeral. The bear's bones, kept intact, and the skull were buried in strict anatomical order. According to the Sámi concept, both human and animal could receive a new body in the otherworld, as long as the skeleton was kept intact. This also enabled the bear to be reincarnated on earth. A bear which had attacked men and had therefore behaved in an unbecoming fashion did not receive a funeral, but its right paw was cut off and thrown away; thus its skeleton was no longer intact and the bear's cycle came to an end then and there (Itkonen 1946: 365). According to some information a pair of skis could be placed in the

grave, or a flute, a knife, a piece of brass etc. This reaffirms the strong connection between bear and man.

8. The shooting of the pelt (in Scandinavia). The bear's pelt was stretched on a frame and the women of the village could shoot it, eyes closed. The husband of the woman who first struck the pelt with her arrow was to be the next bear slayer, or if the woman was unmarried, her hitting the pelt presaged her gaining of a great bear hunter as husband. This was again a carnival stage.

9. The final stage in the ritual assemblage was a three to four-day period of celibacy for the men. After this the bear's väkiwas viewed as neutralised, and it could no longer pass from the hunter to his wife through sexual intercourse. In all stages of the bear ritual the relationship between the bear and the village women was critical. There were two dimensions to this: the sexual threat of the bear to women and the threat caused by women to luck in the hunt and the equipment. The latter was a general Sámi concept, but among the Scandinavian Sámi the sexual dimension appears to have been more emphasised than among Finnish or eastern Sámi. The conclusion cannot, however, be drawn from this that the bear's totemistic status was more shadowy among them, for certain other facts indicate the closeness of the relationship between bear and man among the eastern Sámi, for example bears were a typical east Sámi tradition. The fundamental notion behind the bear ritual may, however, be this: the bear was the most powerful beast of the natural world, with whom men wished to be in a good relationship, but whose powers they at the same time wished to share; in ritual, this power of the bear became part of the Sámi's own power. The ritual realisation of the Sámi bear celebration may be compared to Ob Ugric animal ceremonialism; it was a comprehensive ritual drama in which the whole Sámi community took part in different roles. The avoiding of the bear, the skiing and the slaughter at its den were particularly sensitive matters fenced round with tabu rules and florid expressions, in which the bear was asked for forgiveness for the events. However, it had to take place, within an eternal cycle of birth, death and return between the earth and heaven. The bear was spoken of with reverence as a god and as a member of the human race. A shared

characteristic of Finno-Ugric cultures, and one that distinguishes them from the habits in the rest of Scandinavia, was the careful interment in anatomical order, which enabled the bear to rise again and be reborn. In Swedish Lapland the bones of the bear with its head and teeth were buried in a special bear's grave. The Finnish-Karelian bear ritual took place in a forest milieu reached its climax in the raising of the skull into a pine, reflecting the map of the northern night sky with its headless great Bear, which explained why the head had to remain on earth, as part of the annual cycle and ritual life of the community. The Sámi have continued to respect the bear up until recent times. Olavi Korhonen, Professor Emeritus of Sámi Language at Umeå University and my field work companion since 1965, has in his linguistic and ethnographic recordings recognised the abundance of esoteric bear names in various Sámi languages, as well as the reminiscences of a special secret language of the bear hunters. His archival studies have revealed that the rights to hunting the bear were shared between *siidas* (communities) engaged in killing deer and breeding reindeer. The bear cult existed as part of the Sámi justice system relating to fell land and waters occupied by the *siidas*. The clan and family units organised the encircling and killing of the bear, and took care of the proper measures and manners to be used. Men were purified before and after the killing; women were kept away from the main ceremonies, but were invited to take part in some prophesying and other activities related to the hunt and good fortune.

### 3. *Lars Levi Laestadius: bear ethnography in XIX Century*

This paragraph presents the ethnographic accounts of Sámi bear customs as recorded by a Lutheran minister working in Swedish Lapland, Lars Levi Laestadius of Karesuando, as assembled and commented on by Laestadius itself in his *Fragments of Lappish Mythology* (1842, translated by Börje Vähämäki):

§53. Lappish customs relating to killing a bear are closely related to the sacrificial customs, and therefore it may be reasonable to introduce them here. In addition to other writers, Pehr Fjellström has provided a thorough description. This respected and industrious teacher was the pastor of lycksele, which is a part of Ume Lappmark. He has translated many Christian books into the

Lappish language, and his research on bear hunting was printed in Stockholm in 1755. I will include some parts of it here in addition to material by other writers on the same topic. First of all the writer gives us information about the bear from the naturalist's point of view. He also tells us about ways of hunting it prevalent in Lapland. Among these is the rather important piece of information (p. 8) that 'nobody has killed a female bear which has living cubs because as soon as it smells a human it will abandon the cubs – whether they are big or small – and eat them'. Then he repeats Samuel Rhen's information which appears in Schefferus, according to which a Lapp who has made a circuit around a bear will invite his closest relatives and friends to a kind of party as the moment for the kill approaches. There they beat the drum in order [to get the bear]. But the writer, Fjellström, observes that drumming the bear was no longer the custom in his time. This does not, however, mean that drumming of the bear could not have been a custom 50–60 years earlier when Schefferus wrote his book. The writer considers the drumming to be pointless once the bear has been circled. 'Because if the purpose of the drumming was to inform others about the location of the bear, it could take place only when the bear had not yet been circled.' – But this is not quite accurate; even though the bear had been circled, there was much to be done before the bear's den could be found inside the circle. The Lapp might be asking the divination drum to give him an answer to that. Note: For the benefit of those readers who have no idea how a bear is hunted in the Scandinavian North, it may be best to explain what is meant by circling a bear. It is well known that a bear is an animal that does not need any nourishment in the winter; it merely lies in its den and sucks its paws. In the fall, old and cautious bears habitually go to their dens before the first snowfall. Occasionally it happens that the snow surprises the bear before it has had time to crawl into its winter den, and therefore the Nordic hunters usually look for its tracks. When they see the tracks, they will know that the bear is not going to go very far before it will lie down to sleep, and they will not follow the tracks any farther, but make a circle around the mountain or area where they think that the bear will make its den. If the hunter, after walking around the circle, notices that the bear has not gone outside the circle, he will make another circle around it. The diameter of the inner circle is much smaller than that of the earlier one. For example, if the diameter of the first one is half a league and that of the inner one fourth of a league, the hunter can make a circle around the same area up to the point where the presumed bear den will be at the centre of a small circle, the diameter of which may be  $\frac{3}{8}$ ,  $\frac{2}{8}$ , or  $\frac{1}{8}$  of a league.

This is called circling the bear. The hunter makes a careful note of the location and leaves the bear in peace until the time when there will be more snow. Then he can get the bear on skis when the snow is hard enough to carry its weight even in the event of the bear's escaping from his den before it is killed.

§54. Fjellström further observes that Lapps do not refer to a bear by its proper name while they are getting ready for a bear hunt. They use special, secret words for the bear itself and everything associated with it: 'They show great respect for the bear, they consider it as the most sacred of animals, and therefore it is called *passe vaisje* "sacred game", *puoldekats* "little man of the hill", *puolda-pådnje* "hill-man", *puold-aja* "old man of the hill", *puoldosse*, or rather *puoldusse* "mountain-scab, or rather hill-scab", or the same as *puold-tsuobbo* "mountain toad", or rather hill-toad, *ruemsek*, properly *rumsek*.' This is one of the mystical names of the bear which Fjellström was not able to translate, and those words are not found in the Lappish language dictionary: it may be related to the Finnish word *runsu*, *slarfvor* 'a rag; pl.', *trosor* 'a piece of fabric; pl.', *bass* 'straw bedding', which refers to the bear's habit of making himself a bed out of all kinds of forest debris and *tarfok* 'moss gatherer', which comes from the fact that a bear gathers bear moss (*Polytrichum commune* Lin.) out of which it makes for itself a soft bed, etc. Leem adds, 'they never call the bear by its own name, *quowtja*, so that it will not harm their cattle but they call it by the name *muodd-aja*, "fur-coat Grandpa" (Leem, p. 502). In Lule Lappmark the bear is called *muoddakis* "the furry one". The hunters' term for an old male bear is *änak*, a female bear is called *estev*, a young bear which its mother no longer allows to nurse is called *tsabmek* "the whipped one", because a bear weans the cubs by hitting and whipping them.

§55. Not only the bear itself was honored with various kinds of respectful names; there was also a special language, formulated for bear-hunting, which was used and understood only by experienced bear-hunters. Fjellström remarks, for example, that the bear song, which ordinarily is *juoikem*, was *siggemin* bear-hunting. In ordinary language 'ear' is *pelje*, but in hunting language it is *auros*. Eye, *tjalmeis* *nastein* hunting language. Skin, *nakke*, correspondingly was *låtek*; heart, *vaimo*, was *jalos*, etc. Bear-hunting language was like Arabic to the uninitiated, and as well versed as Fjellström was in the Lappish language, he was not able to translate many of the words in the hunting language. This kind of new language, which lacks both etymology and grammar, is very difficult to translate, which in itself is proof of its creators'

inventiveness. Leem, like Fjellström, says that Lapps used a special language incomprehensible to others when they hunted bear. For instance the word ‘to cook’ was in ordinary Lappish language *vuossjetbut* in hunting language *guordestam*. As we see, the language of Lappish bear hunters was really ‘abracadabra’, and was probably understood only by old and experienced bear-hunters.

§56. According to what Lapps have told us, this bear-hunters’ language and all the strange and clownish bear-hunting activities are based on the following story (Lycksele Lapps told it to Fjellström, p. 13): ‘Three brothers had an only sister whom they hated so much that she had to flee to the wilderness. Totally exhausted she finally arrived at a bear’s den and crawled into it to rest. A bear also came to the den, and after they became better acquainted, he took her as his wife and had a son by her. When after some time the bear had grown old and the son had grown up, the bear said to his wife that, because of his advanced old age, he did not want to live any longer and that he wanted to make tracks on the new-fallen snow this fall so that his wife’s three brothers could see his tracks, circle him, and kill him. Even though the wife did everything she could to stop him, the bear was not to be persuaded. He did as he had said so that the three brothers could circle him using his tracks. In addition, the bear ordered that a piece of brass be placed on his forehead. This was to be a sign to distinguish him from other bears, but also to prevent his son, who was off somewhere, from killing him. ‘When a deep snow had fallen, the three brothers started off to kill the bear, which they had circled earlier. Then the bear asked his wife if all the brothers had been equally nasty to her. The wife answered that the two older ones had been worse, but that the youngest one had been somewhat kinder. ‘When the brothers arrived at the bear’s den, the bear sprang out and attacked the oldest brother, biting and wounding him very badly. The bear himself was not wounded, and he went back to his den. When the second brother came, the bear attacked him too, injuring him in the same way as the previous one, and went rus, p. 233; Fjellström, p. 15; Högström, Ch. 11 §32.) ‘After the bear is killed, the bear-hunters strike up a song. He who has the branch in his hand is the conductor (leads the music). The song begins with these words: *Kitulis puorré i skada (tackamiss) såbbi jala saiti*, ‘Thank you very much! You did not damage a ski pole or a spear.’” (Schefferus’s Anonymous.)

Note. It often happens that a bear knocks a ski pole from a hunter’s hand with its paw, which is disastrous because the hunter is then rendered defenceless. That is the reason why the bear song started with the words cited above. The custom of hitting the bear

with a twig originates, in Fjellström's opinion, in the above story in which 'the bear's son hit the bearskin with a twig'.

§58. 'When the bear has fallen, all who have been involved put their skis over the animal as proof that they have defeated it, and also because – if this is not done – a bear might become so arrogant as to run over their skis. Then they twist a willow branch and put it as a ring in the bear's lower jaw. The best of the bear-hunters then ties a belt to it, at which he jerks three times, and in a strange voice sings an oddly worded song declaring that he is the winner. Some take a spear and shake it three times at the bear for the same purpose, singing the same song. Then the bear is covered with spruce branches, and left to lie there until the following day. This is done even when the place where the bear is killed is so close to their dwelling that it could be dragged home the same day and skinned.' (Fjellström, pp. 16–17.) 'As they come to within hearing distance of their homes they start a song dedicated to this event, which lets those at home understand that a bear has been killed. Then all the women put on their festive clothes and silver decorations, after which they join the men in singing, welcoming both the men and the dead bear. That song is called the sides song. The man who acted as leader of the hunt will twist a soft branch, forming a loop at the end of it. This branch is *söive risse*. With it he will strike the outside of the dwelling three times and say: *söive álma* ("söive's man") if a male bear has been killed. If they have killed a female bear, he will say *söive neit* ("söive's daughter"). Some also give these names to the bear slayer and his wife.' (Fjellström, p. 17).

Note. Neither *sidenor* *söivecan* be found in any dictionary but I would assume that *side* is a southern Swedish way of pronouncing *seide*; *söivein* turn may be the same as *saiva*. Thus the sides-song would mean a song in honor of the *seita* god. *Söive álma* and *söive neit* would refer to the bear's sacred nature as an animal originating from *saivo*; *söive álma* is 'saivo's man' and *söive neit* 'saivo's daughter' or 'saivo's maid', that is underworld man and underworld maid. It was also believed that a bear would be resurrected and would get a new life in *saivo*. For that reason, in the bear-hunters' flowery language, a bear was referred to as *saivo álma* or *saivo neit*.

§59. After these preliminary ceremonies – Fjellström tells us – 'all bear hunters will step into a *kota*, not, however through the usual entrance but through a *påssjo raige*. Also all the dogs that have participated in the hunt are let in through the same entrance. The women, who are now wearing their silver decorations and

festive garments, cover their faces, all at the same time, with a broadcloth or linen covering. When they look at the bear slayers, they do not, however, have their heads covered, but every one of them takes a brass ring, holds it to one eye, and looks through it. At the same time they spit chewed alder bark at the faces of the hunters. The dogs which have participated in the hunt are also dyed reddish with juice from the alder tree bark. In ancient times the women had also used colored dyes and made signs of the cross on themselves with the alder-bark solution. 'After this sprinkling the women decorate all the men with brass rings tied in strings and chains, which they tie to their neck and one hand and foot. All this is called kaltek. Kaltekis a bear-hunters' term, which is not in the dictionary. I don't know the meaning of the word either unless it has to do with what will be related later concerning the prohibition forbidding the bear hunters from having intercourse with their wives for four or five days. In that case kaltek means "gelded". The decorating of bear-hunters with brass rings is in many ways reminiscent of what was told earlier about those who performed sacrifices. 'The twisted branch mentioned above is now left in the care of the söive neit "the wife of the best bear-hunter", and she will keep it inside a linen cloth until the bear has been cooked. After all this has been done, favorite foods are carried in. The bear-hunters eat together, and the women eat together. Nothing more is done that day, but everybody goes to sleep, each wearing the decorations that he has got. They do not, however, sleep with their wives but each one separately; this will be done for three nights. Schefferus says that no Lapp can come to his wife for three days, and the one who has the branch and the ring (the one who circled the bear) is not allowed to approach his wife for five days and nights.' (Fjellström, pp. 18–19.)

§60. 'On the second day they make preparations for bringing the bear home. some of the bear hunters remain at home and build a new shed out of split planks which are then covered with spruce tree branches. This hut is called quartek. The other hunters bring the bear home. Also, the reindeer that is to haul the bear is decorated with strings of brass rings and chains fastened around its neck. When the men come home, the women sing: "Blessed are you who bear such decorations." Schefferus tells us that the men sing along the way as they bring the bear home: i paha talkev ädtjo, i paha talkev faronis, that is "he will not have bad weather, he will not bring bad weather with him". (Fjellström, p. 19.) Samuel Rhen has another piece of information about the song they sang when they brought the bear home. He has not given us the Lappish words, but merely included the



following translation: ‘Then they begin joyfully singing the bear song, which reads thus in translation: they thank God who has created this animal for their profit and granted them the courage and might to prevail over such a cruel and powerful creature.’ It is a pity that the writer [Schefferus] did not learn the words of the bear song. Only Tuderus has written them down, and his version is said to be the Kemi Lapps’ bear song. However, it is written in broken Finnish and it looks more Finnish than Lappish. In addition, Tuderus’s publisher has not known either Finnish or Lappish, and, therefore, has not been able to correct the gross mistakes in the original Finnish text. It is thus difficult to make out the song. [Here Laestadius cites Tuderus’s poem and comments on it. However, given the poor state of the text available to him, the poem is discussed in the next chapter.]

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§64. When the slain bear has been brought with song and rejoicing to the Lapps’ dwelling place, ‘it is brought into a hut or wooden shed that is decorated with rings woven out of Lappish shoe grass (*Carex Vesicaria* Lin.). The bear is placed lying there supine with a birch-bark box or cone containing chewed alder-tree bark under its nose. Before the bear is cut open its back is also sprinkled with chewed alder bark. Knives, axes, cups and all the dishes that are used on this occasion are decorated with brass (rings, plates, or discs). Also the bear’s head is decorated with brass rings and chains.’ (Fjellström, p. 20.) ‘There is no silence during the skinning; people sing about many things, such as where the bear has come from. Then they will sing poems about near or faraway places, lands, mountains, lakes, etc. Schefferus says (according to information provided by Samuel Rheen) that they sing *Ålmai påti Sverjis landest, Polandest, Englandist, Frankrikist*, i.e., “The man came from Sweden, Poland, England, France, etc.” Schefferus says that such things are also sung when the bear meat has been boiled and two men carry it to the women. Then also the women answer by singing: *Ålmai påti Sverges landest, Polandest, Englandist, Frankrikist*.’ (Ibid.) these words have undoubtedly been created at a later time because Poland, England, or France cannot have been known to the Lapps before the arrival of Christianity. Fjellström says further: ‘They sing of the respect they are now demonstrating to the bear, and they ask that he tell other bears about it so that they, too, will surrender willingly. They sing of what they guess those in their everyday homes are doing. A correct guess is regarded as a good omen. The children tell of their activities – they are allowed to run between the bear hunters and the homefolk – but the women are not allowed to come close, not even to see what they are doing;

only children, and girls not yet of marriageable age, are allowed to.’ ‘No woman can, for one year, drive the reindeer that hauled the bear home nor can it be transported along a road along which a woman has walked. No woman is allowed to walk across the bear hunter’s tracks nor along them as long as this ceremony lasts.’ (Fjellström, p. 19.)

§65. ‘When the bear has been skinned, to the accompaniment of singing, and its meat has been chopped and cut away from the bones – in such a way, however, that no vein or sinew, as they understand them, is cut – all the meat is boiled at the same time, if the pot they have is big enough to hold it. Otherwise the bear is skinned only enough to get as much meat as will fit into the pot, and skinning will be continued only after this meat has been cooked. The blood, which is drained from the bear as soon as a cut large enough for the purpose has been made, is cooked first of all; then a small amount of suet is added to it. When that is ready, it is eaten before anything else is cooked. The head is skinned last. The windpipe and all the innards are allowed to dangle from the head until the rest of the meat is done. When the head is skinned, the thin, hairless skin of the snout is peeled off. The person who skins the head will tie this skin on his face. Then the head and all the innards, which have been mostly cleaned, are lifted into the pot to be cooked, with the inner organs still dangling from the head, not having been cut loose.’ (Fjellström, p. 22.) Schefferus writes: ‘As the bear meat boils, the bear hunters sit on two sides of the fire in a set order: no one is allowed to sit in another’s place. First of all sits the one who circled the bear, next the one who beat the drum, and next to him the one who first shot the bear; on the left sit the woodchopper and the water carrier.’ (Samuel Rheen, on Schefferus, p. 236.) Fjellström says that he does not know if this really happens in Southern Lappmark. ‘Bear hunters must be careful to check that the pot won’t boil over and that no liquid will spill into the fire because this is considered a bad omen. The contents of the pot must not, however, be diluted with cold water nor must it be taken off the fire. The man in charge will send somebody to find out if something inappropriate is going on in the kotawhere the women are assembled during this solemn occasion. If no fault is found in the women which could have been the cause for the rapid boiling of the pot, the leader strikes up a song especially composed for this eventuality, and the seething pot begins to boil properly.’ (Fjellström, p. 23.)

§66. ‘The front part of the bear was boiled in a separate pot and the back in another pot, for a woman was not allowed to eat any

of the front part, and of the back part roughly only from the spot her hands would reach if she hugged the bear.' Schefferus's assertion that 'a woman is not given any part of the bear's back but only its front' is in Fjellström's opinion either a misprint or a misunderstanding; 'It seems to contradict the primary cause for the superstitions associated with the Lapps' bear hunting.' (Fjellström, p. 24.)

Note. The idea above seems to be based on an error in writing by Rhen, or else he has actually misunderstood the Lappish narration. Samuel Rhen has correctly observed that men ate the front part of the sacrificed reindeer and the home folk ate the rest; thus, since the bear was also considered a sacrifice, the same should apply to it. 'After the meat is cooked, it is divided between the men and the women. The Lapp who has the branch and the ring, as well as the drum beater, are allowed to do the dividing.' (Anonymous and Samuel Rhen; Schefferus, p. 236.) 'Two representatives of the bear-hunters are sent to take the women's share to the women's tent. They announce their approach by singing: Olmai pāti Sverjis landest Polandest, etc., and the women answer in the same way. The bear grease is strained; all the dishes in which the grease is strained have to be fitted with brass. If only one bear has been killed, the container has to be fitted with one piece of brass, if more bears have been killed, the grease cup also has to be fitted with several pieces of brass.' (Samuel Rhen, Schefferus, p. 237.) As the representatives of the bear hunters enter the everyday kotawith the women's share, 'the women look at them through a brass ring and sprinkle chewed alder-tree bark on them and on the bear meat' (Fjellström, p. 25). Schefferus's Anonymous adds that women receive the representatives with this song: Ålbmai, (mi) pāti Svergis Landest, Polandest, Englandist, Frankrikist, kalka ruopsis laigit ruoidi tjatnat, which means 'A red woolen cloth is placed round the thigh of the man who came from Sweden, Poland, England, France', and the women proceed to do that. 'They also look through the brass ring at the children who have been in the bear-hunters' hut and say: sjalest mo! i.e., "decorate me!" (or rather "purify me"), because the brass ring is the symbol of purity' (Fjellström, p. 25). 'The woman either has to drop the first piece of bear meat through a brass ring or hold the brass ring in front of her mouth and put the first piece into her mouth through it.' (Ibid.)

§67. 'Last of all a bear's stubby tail which has been boiled in its grease without skinning is carried to the women. Söiwe neidor the wife of the best bear-hunter, who has had the above-mentioned birch-tree loop wrapped up in a piece of cloth, now takes it out.

All the women and children present put a brass ring or a chain on it. After eating what there was to eat, and after sucking off all the grease stuck to the bear's tail fur, they tie the tail onto the same branch loop, which is now decorated with brass rings. This they hand over to the bear-hunters, who preserve it together with all the bear bones.' After this all the women cover their faces. Then their husbands kiss them and thank them for allowing them to honor the bear undisturbed. Nothing more is recited at the table either when they sit down to eat the bear meat or when they leave the table, and no salt is used. When all this has been done, the men go to the place where the bear was cooked. They rest there until they get the permission to come to their wives, which cannot take place without purification. The purification is performed in this manner. 'All the men who have been participants in the killing of the bear wash themselves with a strong lye made from birch ash. Then they run three times around the iron chains to which the pots of bear meat had been attached, through the rear door to the everyday hut, and immediately out through the *påssjoor* back door. While they run, they imitate the sounds a bear makes (a noise that sounds like muttering and growling; one can still hear that sound from some old bear-hunters). Then the wife of the man who shot the bear has to catch them with mittens on her hands and ask: "How long", i.e., how long is it going to take before the next bear is killed? They answer: "Until next spring". If the wife now says: "It is too long", they will then say: "Let it happen this spring then." (Fjellström, p. 27.)

§68. 'The others run around the everyday hut. First, however, it has to be decorated with spruce branches (inside and out). Then they go inside the hut and run (three times) around the fireplace. Those who do not run around the hut go through the *påssjo*, run over the fireplace in the center, and out through the regular door, then roll over three times on the ground. Then they have to be caught in the manner described above.' (Fjellström, *ibid.*) Samuel Rheen says: 'When after three days the Lapps are again permitted to go to their wives, one after another they take hold of the chain on which cooking pots are hung, then run three times over the fire and out of the kotadoor in single file. The women then sing: *tådna kalkah kunav ådjot*, that is, "You'll get ashes." Thus the men become purified in a way before they are allowed to go to their wives.' (Schefferus, p. 242.) Schefferus remarks that this ceremony means atonement for killing the bear: Because they believe that the bear's wife is sad and mournful over the bear's death, the Lappish women also pretend to participate in this sorrow and the bear hunters have to purify themselves with ashes.

§69. Just as none of the bear's bones can be broken or cut, so are they not to be thrown away like the bones of other animals; they are collected carefully so that not even the smallest bone is lost. Then a bear-sized hole is dug in the spot where the bear was cooked. At the bottom of the hole they put very soft and fine birch twigs as a kind of bed. All the bones are placed in the hole, in the same arrangement as in a living bear. The piece of skin that was cut or skinned off the bear's nose and worn by the one who skinned the bear's head is now put in its correct place over the snout where it had been. The above-mentioned stubby tail is also set in its proper place in the skeleton. The brass rings and chain links that the women had attached to the branch loop when they received the bear's tail are, however, taken away. These brass ornaments are preserved to become implements and decorations of the divination drum. The birch-bark cone that had been filled with alder-tree bark is also placed down in the grave beside the skeleton. Lastly the grave is covered with split logs the same length as the grave, over which they spread spruce branches so that no predator can disturb the bones. Some do not dig the grave horizontally but vertically as deep as the height of the bear. Then they place the bones (or the skeleton in a vertical position) in order, starting from the bottom and continuing upwards (proceeding little by little) to the head and snout so that the alder-tree cone is topmost. If some Swedish settlers, to whom the Lapps' ceremonies do not matter, have taken part in the hunt, the Lapps take just the bones that are their share and bury them properly, leaving empty spaces for the missing bones. When all the bones are in place, they address the bear, asking him to tell other bears about the great honors that have been accorded him so that they will not resist capture.' (Fjellström, pp. 28–9. Cf. Samuel Rheen, in Schefferus, p. 240; Leem, p. 502; and Högström, Ch. 11 §32.)

§70. Almost all writers tell of the ceremonial burial of the bear, which leads us to conclude that Lapps in general believe that the bear, like other animals, will be resurrected in *saivo*. Högström remarks: 'If a dog happens to get hold of or takes away one of the bear's bones, the dog's bone is taken instead. In some places it was customary to bury also, in addition to the bear's skull and skeleton, a pair of skis, a plane, a knife, a piece of brass, etc., with which it would no doubt manage well in the other world. It is lamentable that these people – who are very doubtful about their own resurrection – nevertheless believe that the bear will be resurrected and will live in another world.' The entire ceremony is concluded with target shooting at the bear skin of which Fjellström writes: 'Up to now (while the other ceremonies were tak-

ing place) the skin has been in its place, covered with spruce tree branches, and with brass rings and brass chains on its head and neck. None of the women has been allowed, nor will be allowed, to see it until the next ceremony has been performed. 'The skin is nailed onto a long pole and stretched to the sides with small sticks. It is then sprinkled with alder bark and placed on a snow bank, or leaning against a block of wood a short distance from the hut. Then all the women must blindfold themselves, and when they come out, a bow and arrow or an alder stick is placed in their hands. With these they must shoot (or throw the stick) at the skin as the target; they do not see it but are told in what direction it is. The woman who hits the bearskin is considered the worthiest, and it is surmised on these grounds that her husband will be the one to kill the next bear. If the woman who hits the bearskin is unmarried, this is considered an even greater honor for her; it is assumed that she will marry a great bear-hunter. Then the cloth is taken from their eyes and all are allowed to see the bear through a brass ring. Only then are the mandatory ceremonies considered complete. The rings attached to the skin are not taken away until the skin has dried.' (Fjellström, p. 30.) Samuel Rheen has added the following: 'The woman who first hits the bearskin has to sew onto a cloth as many tin crosses as there were bears killed at that time; these crosses must be hung round the necks of all those who participated in the bear hunt. The Lappish bear-hunters must wear these crosses until the sunset of the third day. In the same way they hang a sewn cross round the neck of the reindeer that has hauled the bear home, where it will have to stay until it wears off.' (Samuel Rheen, in Schefferus, p. 241.)

§71. Finally, Fjellström remarks that the superstitious ceremonies associated with bear-hunting were beginning to be rare in his day, and that if a few followed the old ceremonies it was out of habit rather than superstitious belief. The last ceremony of this kind that I have heard mentioned took place in Dunkjock in the 1780s. A minister's wife who was present took part in the game because her husband had participated in the bear-hunt. Otherwise, all such ceremonies have ceased nowadays. I do not know of anything derived from the old superstitions if we don't consider the belief cherished by old bear-hunters that the bear understands human speech. Some Lappish women believe that a bear is angrier towards a woman who is pregnant with a girl baby. If a bear should ever bother a woman, she can remedy the matter by lifting her skirt and displaying her organ to the bear. The animal will feel ashamed and go away.

Note. Leem comments on a matter related to what was mentioned earlier, which I overlooked as I was writing. I am adding it here so it can be compared with what Fjellström reports. Leem says (p. 502): ‘The dead bear is triumphantly carried home. The bear hunters spend three days in a tent especially made for this purpose. No woman is allowed to visit them during that time. After the bear meat is cooked, the women are handed some of it through the påssjodoor, but nothing from its hind quarters. After the meal the bones were buried in the ground.’ This information of Leem’s agrees with what Fellström says, except for the detail that women were not allowed to eat the back, as samuel rhen has also told us. It is very strange that the writers’ information is contradictory in this regard, and one is led to think that customs and beliefs are different in southern and northern parts of Lappmark. It is impossible for me to decide which information is correct because most Lapps have forgotten the customs of their ancestors. ‘The killer of the bear usually drives a brass nail into his gun or hangs around his neck some such token as a badge of honor either for having done such a deed or because of some superstitious notion.’ (Högström, Ch. 11 §32.) ‘One who had killed a bear never allowed anyone to walk behind him.’ (Leem, p. 502.) People still have a respectful attitude towards the bear. Its teeth are hung as decorations, or perhaps amulets, in belts and spoon bags. In northern Lapland people (not women, however) generally wear bearskin neckbands with bear claws, which are considered more valuable than those without claws. When a bear sleeps too long in the spring it can be awakened with the following verse: Puold ajam! tjuodjele, tjuodjele; lasta lä stuores ko snjeratja pelje, which means ‘Grandpa in the hill! Wake up, wake up; the leaves are already as big as little rats’ ears.’

#### 4. *‘Metzän dyris voitettu’ – the breaking of the Sámi bear cult*

The missionary of Finnish Lappmark, Gabriel Tuderus – Tuderus, tuo Herran pappi, jota pelkäs Lanta ja Lappi (‘Tuderus, that pastor of the Lord, feared alike on Farm and Fell’) – sent a text for inclusion in Scheffer’s Lapponia (1673) on the bear hunt, composed in Finnish, which he had previously recorded. It arrived too late, but was later published by Petrus Bång in 1675 (in Priscorum Sveo-Gothorum Ecclesia, Åbo), whence it was copied by Gabriel Arctopolitanus (i.e. of Pori) in his thesis published in Uppsala in 1728, De Origine ac Religione Fennorum; the text also appeared in the published writings of Tuderus, which appeared in 1773 as Två berättelser om Lapparnas

omvändelse ifrån deras fordna vidskapelse och afguderi (Stockholm), whence it was copied by Laestadius. The text is corrupt in both published lines, but particularly in the latter. Fortunately, Tuderus's writings were edited anew in 1905 in the Svenska landsmålen series; even so, it appears that tuderus himself was unable to understand what he heard sufficiently well to produce a flawless text, and many ambiguities remain. In this edition it runs:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Medzän dyris voitettu      | Defeated darling of the forest,                |
| Tuo meil täyttä Terweyttä, | bring us perfect well-being,                   |
| Aitta wistan salihita.     | bring a catch to the storehouse.               |
| Tuo tuhatta tullesassa     | Bring a thousand when you come,                |
| Saata sata salihixi.       | a hundred as prey.                             |
| Julki tulin Jumalista      | Openly I came from the gods,                   |
| Cansa saalin iloisesta,    | with prey from the delighted one, <sup>1</sup> |
| Joka ilman ihmet, waiwat   | who without wonder, without                    |
|                            | [trouble,                                      |

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Annon andoi, rahan andoi.      | gave a gift, money he gave.                |
| Coska tulen cotihijn.          | When I come home                           |
| Colme yötä Jlon pidän.         | I'll celebrate for three nights.           |
| Jlos tulin, ilos lähdin In joy | I came, in joy I set off                   |
| läxi laxot, wuoret, waarat,    | over valleys, hills, mountains,            |
| Aia Paha edellänsä.            | he drives evil before him.                 |
| Pertos tuli Päiwän tulo        | Charmingly <sup>2</sup> came the coming of |
|                                | [the sun,                                  |

|                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Päiwä tule wielä pertos       | come, sun, charmingly again.      |
| Cunnioitan suu iälistänstä    | I will honour you hereafter       |
| Wuosi wuodeld Saalihixi.      | year upon year as prey.           |
| Etten unhoidz Ochthon wirren. | Lest I forget Ohto's (the bear's) |
|                               | [verse,                           |

|                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Sitä wast wiel toisti tulen. | I will come yet again. |
|------------------------------|------------------------|

Hautala (1954: 40) was of the opinion that this song was not genuine; this is certainly true from a linguistic point of view, but it was nonetheless probably genuine in that it was gathered from the indigenous people of Kemi and Sodankylä among whom Tuderus worked, who were already bilingual. The poem is a curiosity which illustrates the collapse of the bear cult from many different angles. Kemi Lapland had

1. Or, reading iloisesti, 'gladly'.

2. Not, as sometimes taken, 'like a torch' (following Itkonen's interpretation: see below).



been settled by inroads of Finns even before Karl XI gave them official permission to do so in 1673. The same process as that which later on, a little to the north, brought about the mixed Finnish-Sámi culture of Sompio (in Sodankylä) may lie behind this linguistically rather mixed offspring of a Kalevala-metre bear poem. Although Tuderus himself intended the poem as an example of Sámi bear worship, for some reason he wished to publish the poem in Finnish; however, it contains words of Sámi origin (such as *pertos*, cf. Inari Sámi *peártus*, noted by Itkonen 1946: 214). Another possibility is that someone recomposed a Sámi joik in Finnish. Supporting the first suggestion, however, is the fact that the poem contains many forms characteristic of tuderus's own variety of south-western Finnish (as pointed out by Itkonen 1944). Haavio did not believe the poem to be a genuine folk product, but rather an imitation of a folk poem (1967: 155). His opinion, expressed in his guise as the poet Mustapää (his assumed pseudonym), holds true: the path of the poem from the mouth of a folk singer to the pages of a published book is without doubt a powerful witness of the time when both Sámi and Finnish-Karelian bear culture was breaking up, both as a result of missionary efforts and of dialogue between different peoples. In the same process the hunting culture of Lapland changed as a result of the new settlement and agriculture to one based on farming. Just as Lapland was divided up among the ruling powers, so the land was divided up into landed estates. The forest became a common possession, and the concept of the Wilderness, the sacred 'land apart' (*erämaa*), shifted to one of ownership. When the bear's Lebensraum dwindled away, 'the forest's darling was defeated'.

### 5. *The bear on the shaman's drum*

Sámi drums form a cognitive map symbolising the cyclic shamanic world view. Bear images were painted with alder sap in the circles of heaven and earth on the drum. The heavenly bear appears in the upper region of tripartite drums. In relative size it is painted larger than the realistic bear appearing in the realms of man on the rim of the drum. The Sámi drum in the Pigorini Museum in Rome is a seventeenth-century specimen from the province of Väster Norrbotten in Sweden. Its cosmic system is based

on the three-level concept of the world. The sun (*beaivi*) and the holy hearth (*boaššu*) of the Sámi home act as a symbolic centre symbolising the shaman's holy position; both take shape out of the pillar which supports the firmament. In the upper section of the drum above the images of the heavenly gods a whole celestial hunting drama is depicted. The hunter (cf. Orion), with the hat of the four winds on his head, points his bow at the bear (*Ursa Maior*), with an immense antlered beast (cf. Perseus) above him. In the human section hunting is represented by a bow and arrows. The four-pointed hat worn by the hunter on the drum was for centuries forbidden as a pagan symbol; it may have indicated a *noaidi* (shaman) hunting as master of the four corners of the world, travelling in the celestial fields of the Milky Way, the path of the shaman in Sámi and Siberian myth. According to Siberian shamans the drum has two sides, a public outer membrane and an inner, hidden side, which the shaman looks at as he performs. The inside of the drum is the heart of Siberian shamanhood. On the inner surface of the drum belonging to Khanty shaman Ivan Stepanovich Sopochin were the features of a bear, which he looked at as he drummed. It appears that the Sámi also painted the inside of their drums, for animal images are to be seen there on the Pigorini drum, as was revealed for the first time in the author's picture taken in 2004. The oval form of the drum represents a cyclical world view. On many Sámi drums the yearly cycle of the seasons is painted around the rim. The bear's spring outing back to its den is indicated by dots, which may indicate its route and way of hunting, or its power, its *väiki*. The southern drums are the richest in their bear imagery; as many as four bear figures may appear on them. On the rim of the drum illustrated appears a bear's den and a lure for bears and elk. The design, with the bear surrounded in dots and the elk with a man below, may represent the celestial hunting drama, a theme which this sun-centred drum otherwise lacks. Similar signs, indicating the bear's trail to and from its den are found in the petroglyphs both in Alta, Norway, and on Lake Onega.

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## Bear hunt rituals in Finland and Karelia: beliefs, songs, incantations and magic rites

Vesa Matteo Piludu

### 1. *Finnish bear hunt rituals: from transcribing runes to research*

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In his classic monograph on bear rites in the Northern hemisphere, Hallowell (1926) divides them into two categories:

- a. Bear hunt rites followed by ritual feasts and funeral rites
- b. Rites connected with the slaying of a bear captured as a cub, raised in the village and killed in a complex ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

The Finnish and Sámi rites undoubtedly belong to the first category, which encompasses the Finno-Ugric, Siberian and Native American (Cree) bear rites. Hallowell advances the theory that the widespread bear ceremonials in the Eurasian and North America sub-Arctic area share a common origin. The idea is an intriguing one, and has more recently been returned to by Campbell (1983), who explored the links between the ethnographic and prehistoric evidence.

If we compare the different bear ceremonials, we see a common structure whose broad outlines can be summarized as follows:

1. This is the case of the Ainu rite in Japan.

1. The careful preparation of the hunt, which included magic procedures
2. The rites for approaching the den or the prey
3. The rituals connected with the moment of the kill
4. The rites for the hunters' return with the slain bear
5. The feast and the bear "festival" in the village
6. The rite of the skull or the burial of the bones in the forest

This is reminiscent of the more general Siberian hunting rites studied by Lot-Falk (1961). But the bear hunting rites usually involve a more complex and elaborate ceremonialism.<sup>2</sup> Despite certain structural analogies, the bear hunting rites performed by different ethnic groups also show major dissimilarities: there is an enormous number of variations on related themes. The information collected in the field can vary in quality. For example, the sources on the Sámi rites<sup>3</sup> include a fairly precise description of the stages, but do not provide the text of the ritual songs.

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By contrast, the Finnish ethnographers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries collected an impressive quantity of ritual songs for the bear hunt, later published in the collection *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* ("Ancient Poems of the Finnish People", generally known by its acronym SKVR).<sup>4</sup> In addition to the songs, there is a vast number of manuscripts describing hunting rituals which, as they are for the most part still unpublished<sup>5</sup>, must be searched for patiently in the immense Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society.<sup>6</sup>

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Such abundance is due to the fact that the Finnish ritual songs were sung in the same meter as the epic songs – the

2. It should be borne in mind, however, that in other cultures, hunting certain marine mammals (whales) or cervids (moose) can involve equally complex ceremonies.

3. On the Sámi rites, see Pentikäinen, in this book.

4. The 33 volumes of the SKVR collection were published in Helsinki by the *Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura* (Finnish Literature Society) from 1908 to 1948. All of the songs can now be read in the original dialects online on the SKVR website ([google.skvr.fi](http://google.skvr.fi))

5. An interesting selection of descriptions of magical hunting rites was edited and published by Varonen (1891).

6. The Folklore Archives are located on the ground floor of the Finnish Literature Society building in Helsinki. Website in English: <http://neba.finlit.fi/english/kra/>.

*runot*<sup>7</sup> studied by Domenico Comparetti (1891)<sup>8</sup> – and were thus included in the epic poem *Kalevala* (1849)<sup>9</sup> by Elias Lönnrot, a singular poet-ethnographer who pieced together thousands of epic and ritual songs in composing his work. Some of the texts of the songs included in the *Kalevala* were transcribed in the field by Lönnrot himself, others by his assistants. The final text of the poem, which aspired to be a *summa* of Finnish folklore, features significant changes to the original material<sup>10</sup>. For example, in *Rune 46*, the bear hunting songs, originally sung by hunters from different villages, are put in the mouth of Väinämöinen, one of the poem's heroes.<sup>11</sup> The entire hunt becomes part of the epic struggle between the mythical lands of Kalevala and Pohjola. Although the *Kalevala* is essentially a literary work, many non-Finnish scholars, including Hallowell and Campbell, have failed to grasp this fact, and quote the verses of the *Kalevala* as if they were the original ritual bear songs<sup>12</sup>.

In Finland, after the *Kalevala* was published, many ethnographers and folklorists assisted by a sizable number of students and enthusiastic amateurs transcribed an enormous corpus of variants to the epic and ritual songs in the field<sup>13</sup>: after the international success enjoyed by Lönnrot's work, collecting folklore became something of a national duty, an irresistible call heeded by several generations. To-

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7. A traditional song featuring a pentatonic melody and, from a poetic standpoint, making use of alliteration and parallelism.

8. On Comparetti's studies, see Comparetti (1891 and 1989) and Piludu (2015 and 2014).

9. The *Kalevala* has been translated into English several times, in both prose and verse. A translation of selections by John A. Porter in 1868 was followed by the first complete version by John Martin Crawford in 1888, which retained the *Kalevala*'s trochaic tetrameter but was not based on the original Finnish. Versions retaining the meter and based on the original Finnish were produced in 1907 by William Forsell Kirby and in 1969 by Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. More recent translations include those by Eino Friberg (1988) and Keith Bosley (1989). Both the Crawford and Kirby translations are available in their entirety online, the latter also as an audiobook at: <https://librivox.org/kalevala-the-land-of-the-heroes-kirby-translation-by-elias-loennrot/>

10. For an extensive analysis of the process involved in compiling and writing the *Kalevala*, see Pentikäinen (2013 and 2014a).

11. On the bear songs in the *Kalevala*, see Pentikäinen (2015 and 2014b).

12. It should also be borne in mind that the *Kalevala* has been translated into more than seventy languages, whereas in the overwhelming majority of cases the ritual songs have never been translated into languages accessible to foreign scholars.

13. Later published in the SKVR collection; see note 4.

day, the rite of the bear hunt has disappeared in both Finland and Karelia<sup>14</sup>, but the wealth of material transcribed between 1820 and 1940 permits a surprisingly accurate reconstruction of nearly every stage of the ceremonial.

Unfortunately, the scientific literature on Finnish bear rites is not as abundant as the transcribed ritual verses and archival material. The ethnographers of the nineteenth century were much more committed to transcribing and saving the songs “from oblivion” than they were to analyzing them. Later, anthropologists of religion or folklore have often written short sections on the bear hunt as part of more general discussions of Finnish mythology or ritual songs (see, for example, Krohn 1915). Monographs in Finnish are rare, and they frequently do not deal with the entire ceremonial, but only with specific songs, as is the case of Karhu’s work (1947) on the *Births of the Bear*. In 1991, Sarmela published a paper in Finnish with a reconstruction of the ceremonial’s historical evolution that sparked a certain amount of debate in Finland. In 1998, Tarkka published a long and very interesting paper in English on the bear songs and rites in White Sea Karelia<sup>15</sup>, which contains quite good translations of certain verses of the original songs. The paper was then expanded for her doctoral dissertation in Finnish, which has recently been translated into English with some changes to the original Finnish text (2013). In 2007, Pentikäinen published *Golden King of the Forest*, a comparative text in English presenting the Sámi, Finnish, Khanty and Mansi bear traditions, as well as those of Ancient Greece.

14. Karelia is a vast border region, divided into many areas: only a small portion is still in Finnish territory, while most of the region now belongs to Russia. The Karelian languages are very close to Finnish. From the religious standpoint, Karelia is Orthodox, whereas Finland was Catholic and later became Lutheran. In both Finland and Karelia, pre-Christian beliefs survived for a long period alongside the official religions. Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden until 1812. From that year until 1917, it was an Autonomous Grand Duchy – but nevertheless an integral part – of the Russian Empire, from which it gained its independence in 1917. Part of Finnish Karelia was conquered by the Soviet Union during World War Two, and later remained in the Russian Federation.

15. White Sea Karelia or Viena Karelia is a large region of what is now the Republic of Karelia in the Russian Federation. In Lönnrot’s day, Finland was an Autonomous Grand Duchy of the czarist empire, and the border between Finland and White Sea Karelia was thus open. This was the area where Lönnrot and his assistants collected the epic songs of greatest importance for the *Kalevala*, and one of the areas richest in ritual bear hunting songs.

Nevertheless, there is as yet no extensive analysis of the entire Finnish ritual and the abundant material provided by the songs and archives. This is a gap I have attempted to fill with a doctoral dissertation in English on the subject. Research is still under way, and in this chapter I will present some of the major issues I am currently addressing.

## 2. *The bear: human and superhuman*

As the ethnographic information and the tales in the Folklore Archives indicate, in Finland and Karelia the bear was considered to have human characteristics for a number of reasons: his paws were similar in structure to our hands; once skinned, his anatomy looks human, and it was believed that he might also be a man who had been “bewitched” and turned into a bear. Hunters also reported that they had heard of people who had found a “belt” or some other object under the pelt of a skinned bear. Another belief was that some Russians were able to turn themselves into bears after death. Likewise, certain Finns or Russians with magic powers could turn into bears at will by doing a somersault. According to another legend, there were once three brothers: one went into the forest and became a bear, the second went to the lake and turned into a frog, and the third stayed home and became a human. Other sources even say that men, bears and woodpeckers belong “to the same family”. As is often the case in oral cultures, there are any number of variations, and similar beliefs are found in many other northern cultures. The fact that the bear was considered an essentially “human” animal or an “other” similar to us called for a complex ritual combining elements of hunting, funeral, wedding and feasting rites.

In Finland and Karelia, the bear and other wild animals were even regarded as superior – in physical or magical terms – to human beings: the bear had the same “mind” or “intelligence” (*mieli*) as humans or even twice as much, and was “nine times stronger” than humans. The wolf, on the other hand, was as strong as humans, but nine times cleverer.

The bear had supernatural hearing and eyesight, and could hear what the hunters were saying and follow their actions from inside his den. He did not like being called by his “real” name (*karhu* or *kontio*), and if a hunter let it



slip he would wake up, furious. The “king of the forest” preferred to be called by “honorable names” such as “honey-paw” (*mesikämmen*). He was even considered a *tietäjä*, a magician who could “enchant” the hunters’ rifles.

### 3. The bears: the “children” or the “cattle” of the guardian spirits of the forest

Bears’ most important characteristic, however, was to be found elsewhere, viz., in their close connection with the *metsänhaltiat*<sup>16</sup>, the guardian spirits of the forest. The bear was referred to by the same circumlocution used for Tapio, the “Master” of the forest: *metsän kultainen kuningas* (golden king of the forest). The *metsänhaltiat* were shape-shifters and could turn themselves into various wild animals, including bears. Several female forest spirits (Mielikki, Hongotar or the grimmer Pohjan akka) were thought to be one of the possible “mothers” of the bear or the “mistresses” of a “flock” of bears and wolves. Alternatively, the bear is called their “dog”. People believed that these “mistresses” of the bear fed him during hibernation, as demonstrated by this belief transcribed in the village of Pärnämäki, in Southern Savonia’s Mäntyharju parish<sup>17</sup>:

When I was young, I heard it said that someone had found a bear’s den and fell into it. He stayed there for quite a while. Every night he saw the *haltia* give the bear a kind of white drink (SKS KRA Karhu J. 1936, 3271).<sup>18</sup>

Some variations indicate that the bear was fed honey, and that the day he was killed by hunters the *metsänhaltia* brought a red drink. As the bear has such a close link with the woodland spirits, the hunters had to perform a ritual to prevent both the bear and the *metsänhaltiat* from taking revenge.

16. In this chapter, the original Finnish names are given either in the singular (e.g., *metsänhaltia*) or in the plural (*metsänhaltiat*).

17. A region of east-central Finland.

18. The Finnish archive codes include the name of the archives (SKS KRA means “Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives”), the name of the person who recorded the entry (e.g., Karhu J.), the year field work was carried out (1936) and, lastly, the number of the text and the manuscript (3271). Here, the original Finnish is as follows: *Kuuli nuorena ollessaan, että kerran mies kiertäessään karhun makuupaikkaa, putosikin karhun pesään. Mies jäi pesään pitemmäksi. Mies näki, että haltia toi karhulle joka yö valkoista juotavaa.*

The ritual (which included songs, prayers, sacrifices of molten silver, a great drinking party and “feast” offered to the bear<sup>19</sup> and the rite of the skull) was the “compensation” given to the bear and to the *metsänhaltiat* for having killed one of “their cattle”. The revenge that this rite warded off could take the form of an illness (called *metsän nenä*, “the hatred of the forest”), a bear or wolf attack on the village cattle, bad luck in the hunt, misfiring weapons or even in the women begetting strange “children”. Without the ritual, it was believed that the *metsänhaltiat* would never “grant” the bear to the hunters.

As he was protected by the guardian spirits, the bear took part in the forest’s sacredness, which had both positive and negative aspects. The bear was considered to be “full” of *metsän väki* (the force of the forest), a dynamic magical power that could attack humans in various ways. A scratch by the bear’s claws could cause an illness as a result of this magical force. The bear was so strongly identified with the forest that he was often called *metsä* (forest), *iso metsä* (great forest), *metsän omena* (forest apple), *metsän onni* (forest luck).

In more general terms, the entire forest was seen as another world: at once different, terrible and fascinating. And yet, it was an otherness that was close to man. One the one hand, the forest started right where the tiny villages ended. On the other, the “world” of the forest was modelled after human society: it has its “kings”, “masters” and “mistresses” with “sons and daughters”, “castles”, “granaries” and “cattle” (wild game and the bears). And it was also inhabited by the *metsän piiat* or *metsän tytöt* (servant girls or maidens of the woods), sylvan spirits who often looked after the wild “cattle”. The bear, too, has a “house” with “doors” and a “bed”: all roundabout ways of referring to the den.

The fact that there is a “society” of the woods that “works” more or less like its human counterpart, made communication (through the ritual songs, the *runolaulut*) and ritual exchange possible with both the *metsänhaltiat* and the bear. Finland’s tradition is particularly interesting because the archaic beliefs about the “guardian spirits” were fused with distinctly European elements: the shared references, for

19. In reality, the “feast” consisted of the slain bear’s meat, but in the rite the bear (the skin and skull) was invited to participate and to sit in the “place of honor”.

example, to the kings and castles of the forest, as well as to the farming and grazing economy.

This syncretism also applies to Christian figures, though they appear to have been absorbed by the world of pre-Christian hunting beliefs: Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, was called Annikki in the songs, and became the “daughter of Tapio”. The Virgin herself could be called upon instead of Mielikki or another *metsänhaltia* to keep a firm hold on “her dog” (the bear).

Though the society of the forest was similar to human society, it seemed richer and more idealized: the *metsänhaltia* wore “silk” or were “gilded” or “silvery”. Nor was there a lack of folktale or fable-like elements that were vaguely reminiscent of the tradition of other northern fairies. Though the masters of the forest could be pitiless in their revenge, they followed a moral code that the hunters were also expected to obey.

“Social” though it was, the forest was nevertheless “otherworldly”: the hunter who entered it believed he was making an epic journey in another world.

#### 4. *Innocent bears and treacherous sorcerers*

As they were “sacred” (*pyhä*), bears and the forest were also considered “pure, clean” (*puhdas*), or in other words innocent. It was believed that a normal bear was always innocent, incapable of harming people. A bear who attacked or killed cattle or people had, necessarily, been “bewitched” (*nostettu*). But the bear himself was innocent, the real guilty party, the wrong-doer acting in the shadows, was another human being: a foul sorcerer (*noita*), consumed with envy and probably concealed in the nearest village. Anterus Kousa of Pärnämäki clearly stated that “the bear can do no wrong, unless he is bewitched”<sup>20</sup> (SKS KRA Karhu J. 1936, 3254). The hunter G. V. Karhu of Outila, near Mäntyharju, was even more specific:

“People usually believed that the bear was just a big, playful forest creature, if sorcerers or other evil men didn’t enrage him. Bears had been seen grazing on the same hill, together with the cattle ... Tinkling the cowbells with their paws,

20. Karhu ei tehnyt pahaa muuten kuin, että se oli nostettava.

without hurting them. But if some sorcerer or grudge-bearer was angry with his neighbors, he could bewitch the bear and send it to do harm, and even kill all the cattle in the village”<sup>21</sup> (SKS. Karhu J. 1936, 3254).

Stark (2002) notes that this kind of moral idealization of the forest (which in Karelia was also called the “pure Creation of God”) could also be influenced by the belief that the figures of the Christian tradition or the Orthodox saints “lived” alongside the *metsänhaltia*. The idea of the negativity of human society, often considered “sinful” and liable to manipulation through black magic, could have been influenced by forms of popular Christianity, grafted onto earlier beliefs. One of the oldest magic formulas (*loitsu*) used to bewitch bears was probably recorded in Savonia in the eighteenth century:

*Karhun nostaminen*

Nouse karhu kankahasta,  
hiedasta hevoisen syöjä,  
viiasta vihainen kissa,  
korvesta kovero-koura,  
karvahassu halmehista,  
mullikoita murtamahan,  
vasikoita vainomahan,  
hevosia haastamahan,  
karjan laumaa kaatamahan!  
(SKVR VI 2.5414)<sup>22</sup>

*To bewitch the bear*

Arise bear, from the woods  
of sand, avid for horsemeat,  
furious cat, from the forest,  
crooked hand, from the dark wood,  
furry buffoon, from the fields,  
to tear the bullocks to pieces,  
to terrify the calves,  
to assault the horses,  
to kill the livestock!

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This formula calls the bear by his real name, *karhu*. Evidently, the prohibited name was used to infuriate the bear and provoke him to attack the livestock. The other euphemisms for the bear (“furious cat” and “furry buffoon”) appearing in the other verses were decidedly offensive: it is clear that the sorcerer wished to irritate the bear.

The people of Finland and Karelia were thus convinced that if a bear attacked the cattle, it was to be blamed on

21. Kansassa oli yleensä se käsitys, että karhu on leikkisä metsäneläin, ellei sitä noidat ja pahan-suovat ihmiset saa villiintymään. Karhujenhan oli nähty lehmän kanssa syövän samasta mättäystä heinää, sekä soittavan kämmäkällään lehmän kaulassa olevaa kelloa y.m. tekemättä pahaa lehmälle. Mutta jos joku noita tahi kadehtija vihastui naapuriinsa, niin se sai karhun tekemään tuhoa, jopa niinkin paljon, että se voi tuhota koko kylän karjan.

22. References to the songs in the SKVR collection include the volume code (VI 2) and the song number (5414).

envious neighbors or sorcerers who uttered such formulas. Any contrast between the human community and the forest world could be traced to a conflict between two human villages. The bear's innocence, and the forest's, were still unscathed.

5. *The "births of the bear" and "women's force"*

To protect the livestock during the grazing season, an incantation was intoned to calm bewitched bears. In 1894, Ukko Timonen of Kitee<sup>23</sup> revealed such an incantation to the ethnographer Lönnbohm:

Missä ohto synnytelty,  
mesikämmen kiännätelty?  
Tuolla ohto synnytelty,  
mesikämmen kiännätelty:  
yylähällä taivosessa,  
otavaisen olkapäillä.

Where was Ohto<sup>24</sup> born,  
where was honey-paw weaned?  
Up there Ohto was born,  
honey-paw was weaned:  
high up in the sky,  
On the shoulders of the Big  
[Dipper.

missä se alas laskettiin?  
Hihnassa alas laskettiin,  
hihnassa hopiisessa,  
kultaisessa kätkyssä,  
sitte läks saloja samuumaan,  
pohjanmoata poloylakemaan.

How was he let down?  
With a thread he was let down,  
with a silver thread,  
In a golden cradle,  
to roam through the woods,  
to wander through the North.

Elä sorra sontareittä,  
koa maion kantajoa,  
enemp' on emoilla työtä,

Don't crush the dung-shank<sup>25</sup>  
don't kill the milk-bearer<sup>26</sup>  
There will be more work for the  
[mothers,

suur(i) vaiva vanhemmalla,  
jos poikonen pahan teköö.  
(SKVR VII 5, loitsu 3932)

much effort for the parents,  
If the little boy is naughty.

This incantation starts with the legend of the bear's heavenly origins, a legend that also appears in the traditional bear hunting songs of other Finno-Ugric peoples such as the Mansy and the Khanty. In the Finnish tradition, how-

23. A village in Finnish North Karelia.

24. Ohto is an "honorable" name for the bear.

25. The cow.

26. The cow.

ever, there are many other variants of the *Births of the Bear* (*karhun syntä*)<sup>27</sup>.

According to the unwritten rules of the Finnish magical canon, by singing of the mythical origins of an animal or object, the singer gained magical control over it. It is no coincidence that these *Births of the Bear* were followed by a command ordering the bear to leave the cattle alone.

In its complex style, this protective incantation was markedly different from the rough formula used to bewitch the bear. The bear is called by names that indicate respect and sweetness (honey-paw) and the bear's innocence is emphasized by terms that recall the purity of childhood (little boy): he is an innocent "big baby" who should not make trouble for the mothers. The song has a maternal tone, and not by accident: these verses were chiefly sung by women, who looked after the cattle both in the barns and in the pasture. The song was steeped in a conciliatory ideology which was also found in many hunting poems.

Not all of the variants are so acquiescent. At times, the song maintains that the bear was born in Lapland or in another, darker world (*Pohjola*) and orders him to go back, in no uncertain terms. At others, the bear is told to sink his teeth into a tree trunk instead of a cow. Knowledge of the magical origins gave a coercive power to whoever sang or uttered the verses. In some cases, the *Birth of the Bear* incantation is followed by a plea to the *metsän emäntä* (mistress of the forest) or Mielikki, Annikki or Maria, to muzzle "her dog" and hold him in check. As most of these songs were sung by women, we have a sort of faceoff between two "mistresses": the mistress of the livestock and the mistress of the "forest cattle".

Hunters could use more or less the same verses to ask the female spirit to keep the bears from attacking or mauling them: cases of intertextuality are by no means rare in the Finnish tradition. Verses from the livestock raising tradition can be found among those from the hunting tradition, and vice versa.

The women who looked after the livestock were also considered to have a dynamic magic energy: the *naisten*

27. On the complex concept of *synty*, see Stepanova 2014 and 2015.

*väki* (women's force, or in other words the force of female sexuality), in opposition to the *metsän väki*, the force of the forest. In the spring, when the cattle were put out to graze for the first time, they were led below the legs of a woman, whose sexuality filled the herd with *naisten väki*, protecting it from bears and wolves. Likewise, if a woman encountered a bear in the woods, she could make him flee by lifting her skirts and exposing her privates.

#### 6. *The reasons underlying the hunting ritual*

If the incantations or rites for protecting the livestock from the bear failed to work, and the bear continued to wreak havoc among the herds, the only remedy was to organize a bear hunt, with all the complex ritual that this involved.

In a poor village economy, cattle were essential providers of butter and cheese, though naturally there could be other reasons – or a series of reasons – for killing a bear.

The oldest sources, such as the sermon given in 1640 by Bishop Isaacus Rothovius<sup>28</sup>, hint at more strictly ritual motives. It appears that the rite ensured good luck in the hunt in some way:

“When they catch a bear, a party is held in the dark, and they drink a toast for the bear out of its skull, and groan just as the bear does. Thus they would gain a greater good fortune!”<sup>29</sup>

Material from the following centuries also indicates that social prestige was an important consideration: killing a bear made a hunter highly respected as a “strong” man, not just physically, but also surrounded by a magical aura. For the villagers, slaying a bear was also a rare opportunity to eat their fill of meat, and to join together in drinking and enjoying themselves. It should come as no surprise that the bear feast was called the bear’s “wedding”, “funeral” or “drinking party”, as they and the feast were all socially important rites that forge a tight-knit community and involve banqueting.

28. The sermon was given for the inauguration of the *Academia Aboensis*, the first university in Finland. The bishop railed against the bear rites, seeing them as proof that paganism had not been wiped out in Finland.

29. See Rothovius 1990 (1641), quoted in Pentikäinen (2015 and 2014b).

Later on, other economic motives came into play, some – such as the sale of the pelt – connected with the market economy. Signs of this can be seen in one of the ritual names given to the bear: *rahakarva* (money-fur). In addition, killing the bear provided a series of amulets or substances that were considered magical (the teeth, fat, bile and paws) and were used in many other rituals: healing, wedding and sexual rituals, rituals for protecting the livestock and treating their illnesses, and even farming rituals. In all likelihood, there was always more than one reason for going out to hunt a bear.

It should be emphasized that there is nothing remotely resembling an etiological or foundational myth: there is no explanation of how or why the bear hunting ceremonial arose. Many other cultures, including that of the Sámi, maintained that long long ago, in the dim and distant past, a bear had taken a woman as his wife and had taught their son the correct ritual for killing him. However, the Finnish tradition is particularly sparing with such information: the mythical origins of phenomena, objects or animals are important (as witnessed by the *Births of the Bear* discussed above), but the origins of the rites are never explained.

In any case, slaying an animal filled with the magical power of the forest, belonging to the cattle of the *metsänhaltiat* and regarded as “innocent” even when it killed livestock, was always an extremely risky business. Consequently, it had to be ritually justified.

The rationale for the ceremonial is very clear: the rites and the songs had to please both the bear and the *metsänhaltiat*, who had to feel sufficiently honored. Only thus could their future revenge be averted.

The ceremonial consisted of a number of stages which will be described in the following pages.

### 7. Preparatory rituals

Before the rite of the hunt itself, there were many preparatory rituals. If the hunt took place in the winter or the late autumn after the first snowfall, the den the bear had entered to hibernate was first found. The hunters then walked around the den in an incomplete circle, occasionally marking trees or rocks with symbols. This also served a practical purpose, in establishing coordinates so that the



position of the den could be remembered. After every snow-fall, the hunters would return and walk around the den in a smaller circle, taking care not to be noticed by the bear. If they were, there was a danger that the bear would run away and look for another den (Varonen 1891: 69). At the same time, however, this “bear circling” (*karhun kierronta*) entailed an infinite number of magic rituals to prevent the bear from fleeing. On the one hand, we have practices and beliefs that are typically Finnish and probably archaic: the hunters sang the *Birth of the Bear* and, when walking, did not “close the circle”. In other words, they avoided returning to the exact spot where they had started, and left a sort of imaginary “door” open. In this way, they prevented the forest master or mistress – the *metsänhaltia* – from realizing what they were doing and rushing to warn the bear (see SKS KRA Meriläinen II 632, quoted in Varonen 1891: 70). The ritual songs called on the bear to remain in the den and not to “go out and gambol about”, to stay in his “coniferous castle”, “beside the daughters of nature” (the *metsänhaltiat*). In Orthodox Karelia, Pyhä Kusmoi Jimjana (probably a local and syncretic version of Saints Cosmas and Damian, who assumed the traditional role of the *metsänhaltia*) was asked to “keep watch” over the circle” (SKVR VII5 3364). There were also several rituals that seem more “European”, though it is difficult to advance hypotheses about their actual origins. When the hunters were walking in a circle, for instance, and found the first three paw prints in the snow, they turned them upside down and, with a sword that had been “used in war”, drew pentacles on them<sup>30</sup>. There are rules about how many times the hunters are to walk clockwise and how many counterclockwise, or about the objects to be brought on the hunting trip. Some of the rules may seem rather bizarre, but they have a logic of their own: the hunters had to circle with the heads of three woodpeckers, as the woodpecker was believed to be the bear’s pet. Seeing the woodpecker heads, the bear would feel safe. Once they had finished circling, the hunters made a small offering of molten silver (generally from a few small coins) in the “door” and then left the

30. The pentacle “closes” a space magically, preventing the bear from leaving it. The symbol is very frequent in Finnish tradition. Pentacles were also drawn on the ground when a bear approached the hunters.

path with their eyes shut, without looking at their footprints: this was the only way of ensuring that other hunters could not find the circle, and other animals would not disturb the bear's sleep (SKVR I4 1198). These are only a few examples, but they give an idea of the complexity and the quantity of the available ethnographic information.

Equal care was taken in preparing the weapons and the dogs: all weapons and dogs were rubbed with bear grease, probably to cover their scent magically. The forged spears were sharpened from the tip downwards, to ensure that they would pierce the bear's flesh better. Afterwards, the spear was "empowered" by sticking it in an anthill to absorb the "venom". As it was believed that the bear could bewitch the rifles and bullets, these too were "empowered" with meticulous rites: the hunters scratched a pentacle on the bullets, taking care to load them so that the tip of the pentacle pointed towards the rifle muzzle.

### 8. *Leaving the village: liminality and rites of passage*

The departure from the village was a particularly delicate moment. When passing from the profane space of the village to the sacred space of the forest<sup>31</sup>, the liminal territory was literally full of all sorts of magical danger. Crossing the border put dynamic forces in motion that could be both aggressive and invasive. Consequently, the hunters sang protective songs like the following:

|                            |                                 |                                      |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Jospa mies mettähän lähen, | If I depart, as a man, into the |                                      |
| nurokorvella kovemmin,     | niin varsin varottelem          | wood, into the forest,               |
| oven suussa, ala orren,    | pirtin pihti puolisissa.        | I will certainly sing an incantation |
| (SKVR I4. 1231)            |                                 | at the doorway, below the beam,      |
|                            |                                 | on the threshold of the cabin door.  |

|                           |                                 |                                    |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Velhoj[a] on joka veräjä, | kat[eita] on k[aikki] p[aikat]. | There are bewitchers at every gate |
| kun noita noitunoo,       | itse noita noivukoon            | Envious ones are everywhere.       |
|                           |                                 | if the sorcerer casts a spell,     |
|                           |                                 | let the sorcerer be ensorcelled    |
| (SKVR I4 1085)            |                                 | [himself.                          |

31. For a definition of sacred (*pyhä*) in the Finnish tradition, see Anttonen 1994.

The hunter proceeded slowly, singing incantations at every step until the forest was reached. The verses clearly indicate that the hunters were expert in magic: they recall those of the *loitsut*, or healing spells, where the *tietäjä* (seer, sage, healer) prepared to do battle with the sorcerer (*noita*) who sent the disease. Several sources emphasize that there had to be a *tietäjä* in the group of hunters “to make sure that everything was done in the right way”, while others state that, if possible, there should even be two good *laulajat* (*runot* singers, experts in magic songs).

The hunters feared the envy of sorcerers, the neighbors or other hunters. By casting the evil eye, the envious could “ruin” the rifles or confuse the dogs so that they would get lost. The hunters also had to “purify” or mask their scent with smoke, and gain the acceptance of the spirits of the forest. They greased themselves with bear fat or bile, wore specific clothes, or held their clothing over the smoke. As they left the village, they brought many objects imbued with magic power opposite to that of the forest. There was a wide range of such objects, from old flints to brooches used at a wedding. The situation was ambivalent: on the one hand, the hunter sought to become part of the forest by masking his scent, while on the other hand, he carried objects that would defend him from the powers of the forest and the bear. A variety of strategies were thus used to prepare oneself for the hunt.

This liminal stage was lengthy. The rituals were like rites of passage, with a fundamental difference: the hunters’ status changed during the hunt, but the change was not permanent. When the hunters returned to the village after the hunt, it was necessary for them to resume their normal status by performing other liminal rites.

Women’s role was especially ambivalent. As Karelian hunters left the village, they also sang incantations to prevent the wives from having “clay babies” or “strange brats” (SKVR I4 1206). There is the impression that if the hunter were to enter the forest inappropriately, like an invader, the forest would have exacted a cruel revenge, invading the wombs of the village women. Pregnant women were thus considered to be particularly vulnerable. But for the women who were not pregnant, the power of their sexuality

could also be used to protect the hunters. A usage in North Karelia is particularly interesting in this respect:

If someone goes to kill a bear, it won't bite him if he passes between his wife's legs. (SKS SKRA Krohn 10531)

The rite was called *harakoiminen* and was also performed to protect the cattle put out to graze in the spring, though in this case the "women's force" protected the husband. Stark (1998: 45) notes that the rifles or trapping gear could also be drawn between women's legs.

**9. Entering the forest: wonder, eroticism, falling in love and humility**

When the hunters left the village, the style of the songs changed radically. They often began with introductory verses:

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Mitä siitä lauletaan,    | What are we going to sing                 |
| kuim männäh ohon ovilla, | when we go towards the doors of           |
|                          | [ <i>ohto</i> <sup>32</sup> ,             |
| sini-piiparin pihoilla?  | the yards of a blue piper <sup>33</sup> ? |
| (SKVR I4 1207)           |   |

aA

Suddenly, the tone is more joyful, but extremely metaphorical. The bear, called by honorific or poetic names that change frequently, had a "house" with "yards" and "doors": this, obviously was the den. Evidently, there is a desire to give the impression of making a friendly visit. The hunters rarely said what their real intentions were. If they did, they used euphemisms:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Nyt on Ohto otettavana, | It is time to get Ohto                      |
| rahakarva kaattavana    | to shoot down the money-fur <sup>34</sup> , |
| mielusassa Metsolassa,  | in the pleasant Metsola,                    |
| tarkassa Tapiolassa.    | in the rigorous Tapiola.                    |
| (SKVR XII 6467)         |   |

The last two verses clearly indicate that the hunt occurred in another world, a mythical place: the "pleasant" Metsola, the charming realm of the mistress of the forest, and Tapiola, the kingdom of Tapio, master of the forest. Tapiola was

32. Typical name for the bear in hunting songs.

33. The piper could be the bear or a *metsänhaltia* who protects the bear.

34. The bear.

probably referred to as “rigorous” because precise rules had to be observed while advancing through it. Other verses in which the hunter indicated metaphorically what he was really looking for ran as follows:

|                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Mieleni minun tekevi,     | Desires wakes in me,           |
| aivoni ajattelevi         | the craving, in the mind,      |
| lihoa lehen alaista,      | for meat under the leaves,     |
| kuuta kuusen juurellista, | fat among the spruce roots,    |
| talven maannutta talia.   | fur that sleeps in the winter. |

(SKVR XII 6470)

The last three verses indicate the prey, the bear. The tone is both “gastronomic” and sensual, and becomes even more erotic in the singular variation sung by the renowned Karelian rune singer Arhippa Perttunen<sup>35</sup> and transcribed by Elias Lönnrot:

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Mieleni minun tekisi     | My mind is set,                                  |
| mieli käyä Metsolassa    | set on visiting Metsola                          |
| metsän neittä naiakseni, | to make love to the forest maidens <sup>36</sup> |
| metsän mettä juoakseni,  | to drink the forest honey,                       |
| lihoa lehen alaista,     | flesh from under the leaves,                     |
| kuuta kuusen juureihista | grease from the birch roots                      |
| [. . .]                  | [. . .]  |
| Ota, metsä, mieheksesi,  | Take me, forest, as your husband,                |
| urohiksesi, Tapijo,      | As your virile hero, Tapijo,                     |
| korpi kolkkipoijkesi!    | As your young bowman, wild wood.                 |
| Metsä haisuo havulta,    | The forest smells of pine,                       |
| Mies haisee meen maulta. | But the man smells of the taste of               |
|                          | [honey.  |

(SKVR I 4.1095)

In these verses, the hunter not only declares his readiness for an erotic adventure with the “forest maidens”, but even asks for the forest’s hand in marriage. Though the hunting songs often emphasize the hunter’s virile spirit, Tarkka (1998) see these verses as the most erotic in the Finnish tradition. Hunting songs with such an intense sexual charge

35. On the social and national importance of the Karelian singers, see Pentikäinen 2013 and 2014a.

36. The *metsänhaltiat* or their “maids”.

are in fact rare, though the themes of sexuality and seduction are recurrent. We must not forget that Arhippa was a particularly skilled rune singer. On the whole, it is difficult to find anything similar in the traditions of other peoples. In Ancient Greece, flirting with the nymphs meant certain death. Willerslev (2007) observes that according to the Yukaghir hunters of Eastern Siberia, if the female spirit of the forest fell in love with the hunter, she would kill him so that he would always be by her side in the other world. But the Finnish hunter seems not to have run this risk. Using an oft-repeated formula, the hunter asked to be accepted by the forest in romantic verses that speak of falling in love:

Mielly, metšä, miehihini,    Become fond of my men, you forest,  
Kostu, korpi, koirihini!    fall in love, you wild wood, with my  
[dogs  
(SKVR I4 1193)

As Tarkka (1998) pointed out, the entire forest is seen as a female being. The reference to marriage with the forest in Perttunen's song is also important. Many scholars (Sarmela 1994; Pentikäinen 2007; Tarkka 1998; Ilomäki 1998, 2014) have noted that the bear hunting verses have parallels in the wedding songs.

The analogy between the prey and the bride is found in a number of traditions. Ilomäki (1998: 151) notes that in Viena Karelia, the images presented in the wedding rituals were as masculine as those of the hunting rites: the man "goes hunting" for the bride in another world (that of the bride's family) just as the hunter seeks his prey in the wood. It is not by chance that the weddings songs of Viena Karelia call the bride by the names of game animals: "great hare" or "summer fox".

An unusual point that has rarely been noted is that in this seduction, the hunter did not woo the prey (the bear), but the female spirits of the forest or the forest itself. Again, this no coincidence: Arhippa's verses were followed by a series of requests to the *metsänhaltia*. The relationship is one of exchange: the hunter offers sexuality and marriage, asking for the prey, and protection from the prey, in return. After the forest "falls in love", it is "enchanted" and turns into a place of marvelous sights and sounds:

Tuolla korpi kuumottaapi, There the wild wood shines,  
mehtä siintääpi sininen. the blue forest looms<sup>37</sup>.  
(SKVR VI 4.4886)

Soita, metsä, kanteloj(a), Play, forest, the *kantele*<sup>38</sup>  
lähtiessäni metsälle! When I leave for the wilds!  
(SKVR I 4.1211)

When the forest “played”, it granted a prey. Once the group of hunters had been accepted, the forest was “enchanted” and became a world of harmony and wonder, a pleasant, feminine place that the hunters found truly entrancing. The love between the hunters and the forest was thus mutually requited. The hunting songs express a sincere “joy” in traveling through the forest, seen as a manly, virile activity. The hunter declared that he wanted to go:

nuijen miesten mehtimaille, into the forest of other men  
urosten urisalolle, into the deep woods of the male  
[heros<sup>39</sup>  
jossä kuusen oksat kuuna where the spruce boughs shine like  
[paistaa, [the moon  
honganoksat hopiana, the pine boughs like silver,  
mehtä haisoo havullek, the woods smell of conifers,  
katajoille katkuuaa smell of juniper  
(SKVR XII 6475)

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When singing of himself or his hunting party, the hunter often employed two opposing strategies. On the one hand, he extolled his masculinity, on the other he belittled himself, and in particular denied that the hunt was dangerous:

miehet nuoret, koirat pennut, the men are young, the dogs are  
[puppies  
suvikuntaset urohot. males are fit only in the summer.<sup>40</sup>  
(SKVR I4 1098).

37. In the ritual songs, blue often indicates the presence of magical power. At certain times of day in the winter, however, the snow-covered forest does indeed seem blue.

38. A traditional five-stringed zither. In the epic songs, the *kantele* is the instrument of the hero Väinämöinen, whose playing enchanted nature and its spirits.

39. References to the other hunters.

40. Clearly, the hunt takes place in the winter.

The extolling served to fascinate the forest or its female spirits, or to boost the hunters' magical force. Belittling the group served other purposes: to ensure that the bear did not take fright, or that the *metsänhaltia* did not consider the hunter too arrogant or cocky. To obtain his prey, the hunter had to demonstrate his humility. The self-pitying verses often introduce one of the many formulas with which the hunters made requests or pleas to the *metsänhaltiat*.

At times, the self-congratulatory verses are followed by self-pitying ones or, conversely, the hunter declared that he skis too slowly or clumsily, and then immediately added that his skis were smoking, so great was his speed. Or he may have sung:

Mie oun mies vähä väkinen    I am not a strong man,  
uros olen hieno haltiani        I am male, my *haltia*<sup>41</sup> is excellent  
(SKVR VII 5. 3666)

With verses of this kind, it appears that the hunter sought to confuse the bear or the *metsänhaltiat*, who would thus not have a clear idea of who they were dealing with.

The idealization of the forest, the eroticism of certain verses and the declarations of humility point to a conciliatory ideology, where the hunter tried everything in order to avoid conflict with the denizens of the forest. He employed many rhetorical devices to convince the *metsänhaltiat* to help him.

### 10. Requests to the forest spirits

Requests and pleas addressed to the various spirits that governed the forest were essential in order to obtain the prey. If the spirits were moved by the songs' beauty or sentiments, they would offer the bear to the hunter. In these verses, the hunter presented himself as a humble "supplicant" or a desperate beggar looking for the bear: submission and respect were the keys to moving the *metsänhaltiat*. A typical request took the following form:

41. The second verse is intended to charge the *haltia*, i.e., the hunter's personal spirit, with magical energy.



|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Metän kultainen kuningas, | Golden king of the forest <sup>42</sup> ,         |
| metän ehtoinen emäntä,    | generous mistress of the wood <sup>43</sup> ,     |
| saata sille soarekselle,  | take me to that hill,                             |
| kuleta sille kunnarelle,  | guide me to that place,                           |
| josta soalis soatasihin,  | where I could get the prey,                       |
| metän vilja vietäsihin,   | and bring away the grain of the forest            |
| aina akoille iloksi,      | that always makes wives happy                     |
| kotiväelle kaunoseksi!    | makes the people at home beautiful! <sup>44</sup> |

(SKVR XII 6473)

The use of the circumlocution “grain of the forest” for the bear is interesting. The expression indicates that the *metsänhaltiat* live in a parallel dimension, but one that is human in its economy. Thus, bears were referred to as products of the farming economy: grain (*vilja*). In the magical song, the “grain” could also be the cattle, called *emännän vilja*: the grain of the mistress of the house. These circumlocutions adhered to a precise logic. The abundance of grain was a symbol of wealth, as the grain produced by smallholders in many parts of Finland and Karelia was not enough to feed the household, and a certain amount had to be bought. Not surprisingly, the *sampo*, the miraculous object of the epic<sup>45</sup> and of the songs of the Finnish farming tradition, produced “grain”<sup>46</sup> among various other types of wealth. In his plea, the hunter paid homage to the *metsänhaltiat*, emphasizing that they were rich in “grain” (wild game), “golden”, and “generous”. Not infrequently, he asked them to open “the granary of the forest” (SKVR VII5 3293), or in other words to grant him a bear. There was an enormous number of variations on these “requests” to the *metsänhaltiat*: for example, the hunter could ask them to carve signs on the trees so that he could find the prey (SKVR XII 2 6464), or to be led by the sleeve or the ski pole (SKVR I4 1193), or by a mysterious “golden thread” that a *metsänhaltia* would unwind from her hair. In other cases, he pled with them to send the prey’s scent towards the dogs’ nostrils (SKVR 14 1095)

42. The supreme male *metsänhaltia*, sometimes called Tapio.

43. The supreme female *metsänhaltia*, sometimes called Mieliki.

44. The last two verses refer to the joy that the bear festival brought to the villages.

45. The *sampo* cycle is also the fulcrum of the complex plot of Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*.

46. On the symbology of grain and the *sampo*, see Tarkka 2014 and 2015.

or to make the dogs run so fast that they would roll (SKVR VII 3372). The name of the spirit to whom the pleas were addressed often changed: it might be Tapio, Mielikki or a more specific sylvan spirit, such as Tuometar (the mistress of the bird cherry or hackberry) or Kuitio (the mistress of the bear). The *metsänhaltia* were frequently asked to keep their dog (the bear) under control, often with a “bite” or two. The sky-god Ukko was asked to make fresh snow fall so the hunters could ski. At times, the invocation is directed to a figure in the Christian pantheon (the Virgin Mary or St. Anne) who fulfilled the same role as the *metsänhaltia*, to the point of being conflated with them: St. Anne is called “daughter of Tapio” or “mistress of the forest”. Not infrequently, the hunter presented himself as a poor orphan in need of a “guide” (SKVR XII 2 6553, I4 1193). In many cases, the pleas were made to female beings, though some requests could be addressed to a “couple” of forest deities, to Tapio alone, or to the “king of the forest”. In the longer songs, the hunter might ask for several things from different forest spirits. The pleas were often accompanied by small sacrifices: usually a few drops of molten silver from a coin.

### 11. *Singing to the bruin: Births of the Bear and commands*

Other runes were sung to the bear, who was thought be always listening. In many stages of the hunting ritual, the hunters sang one of the *Births of the Bear* (*karhun synty*). As in the case of the songs to protect the livestock, the purpose of this incantation was to gain magical control over the bear. Unsurprisingly, such verses were almost invariably followed by orders to the bear. Here again, the *Births of the Bear* varied from village to village or from singer to singer. In the hunting songs, references to the bear’s heavenly origins are quite rare (SKVR XII 6464). Very often, the bear was said to have been born:

|                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Pimeässä Pohjolassa | in the dark Pohjola,    |
| Tarkassa Tapiolassa | in the rigorous Tapiola |
| (SKVR XII2 6479)    |                         |

These are more or less the same mythical places where the hunt took place, according to the verses sung as the hunter

advanced into the forest. More rarely, the “mother” of the bear is indicated, while the father is never mentioned. In some versions, the mother is Mielikki, the mistress of the forest (SKVR XII 6479), others refer to Hongotar (the Pine Lady, in SKVR VII5 3385). The longest version of the *Birth of the Bear* sung during the hunt was transcribed in 1888 and sung by the famous Karelian singer Iivana Malinen, who had heard it from his grandfather Ontrei<sup>47</sup>. In this version, *Pohjan akka* (the Crone of Pohja, a variation of *Pohjolan emäntä*, the Mistress of Pohjola) gave birth to a lynx, a wolf and a bear under a pine tree and “baptized” them with these names (SKVR I4 1191). The grim mother is impregnated in Pohjola, a hellish place near the “Hill of Pain” and the “fiery rapids”, “in the deep woods of Lapland”<sup>48</sup>. Pohja or Pohjola (the Northland) is a mythical land that appears frequently in the epic and ritual verses: among other things, it is the birthplace of diseases and ice, and illnesses could be banished to it after they were expelled from the patient’s body. In Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*, Pohjola and its Mistress stand in opposition to *Kalevala*, the land of “positive” heroes. In the ritual verses, *Pohjan akka* appears to be a darker, negative version of the more “generous” Mielikki, the Mistress of the Forest. But the underlying idea is the same: the bear always has a mythical origin. Iivana’s verses go on to provide interesting details: the bear is born without claws and the mother makes them out of various parts of different trees in the forest. The most dangerous parts of the bear were thus imbued with the trees’ magical power, which Iivana neutralizes by singing of the birth of the bear and his claws, followed by verses in which he ordered the bear to make himself harmless:

|                         |                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Kytke kynnet karvohisi, | Hide your claws in your fur, |
| hampahat ikenihisi      | your teeth in your gums      |
| (SKVR I4 1191)          |                              |

To make the order more convincing, Iivana emphasized that his magical knowledge was secret:

47. On these Karelian singers, see Pentikäinen 2014a.

48. For a translation of the entire *runo*, see Pentikäinen 2014b.

|                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Siinä on syvin synty,             | There is the deepest origin, |
| sitä ei tiijä poiijat puoletkaan, | half the lads do not know it |
| arvoa yheksät urohot.             | Nine heroes cannot guess it  |

(SKVR I4 1191)

## 12. *Waking the bear: Rise now, sooty maiden*

When the hunters had sung enough to satisfy the mistresses of the forest and control the bear, they approached the den. In the winter, killing the bear while he was sleeping was forbidden. In Viena Karelia, the bear had to be woken by singing the following verses:

|                                   |                               |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Nousep' pois, nokine(n) neit'[i], | Rise now, sooty maiden.       |
| nokiselta nuotiolta.              | From the sooty fireplace,     |
| Havuselta vuotielta,              | from the pine needle bed,     |
| Hakoselta peäanalalta;            | from the pillow of twigs;     |
| Jo olet viikon moassa moannun',   | you have long slept           |
|                                   | [underground,                 |
| Kauvon lehtossa levännyñ',        | you have long rested in the   |
|                                   | [forest,                      |
| Viikon kuuluit, kauvon viivyit    | a week has passed, some time  |
|                                   | [ago                          |
| Viron moata käyessäsi.            | you are traveling in Estonia. |

(SKVR I 4.1206)

aA

The hunter woke the bear by singing gentle, courteous verses. He was careful to choose sweet, loving words: the bear was treated like a young girl who had overslept. Similar verses were used in the wedding songs to wake the future bride before she was taken to the home of the groom's family. In the bear songs, the variation "sooty lad" also appears, but the tone changes very little. The verses were intended to bring images of youth and romantic love to mind. The reference to traveling in Estonia was probably meant to confuse the bear, misleading him about the location of his slaying.

## 13. *Explaining the bear's death as "an accident"*

After the bear was killed, the conflict caused by the slaying was denied, as the hunters explained that they were entirely innocent. With a poetic stratagem, the hunters claimed that they had not shot the bear. It had all been an accident:

|                               |                                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Empe mine ole sinua pañut,    | I did not shoot you,                |
| eike toinen toveri,           | and neither did my friend,          |
| ite pa harjaiti havolta,      | you yourself slipped from the pine, |
| ite vierit vempeltä,          | you crashed from the curving tree,  |
| kuavut koivun konkeloita      | fell from the bent birch,           |
| halko marjaisen mahais,       | the berry-filled belly is torn      |
| halko kultaisen kupuis.       | the golden belly is broken.         |
| kätke kynet karvoihis!        | Hide your claws in your fur,        |
| villa on suus, villa on piäs, | your mouth is wool, your head is    |
|                               | [wool,                              |
| villa on visi hamastais.      | your five fangs are wool.           |
| (SKVR VI 4.4885)              |                                     |

In these verses, the bear's status changed once again: from being a young bride or groom who had overslept, he became a species of inattentive child who had hurt himself by falling out of a tree. The song, however, avoided admitting that the bear was dead: just that the belly was torn. The main verses are very delicate, but they are followed by a command similar to those sung after the *Birth of the Bear*.

aA

#### 14. *Skinning as an exchange benefiting the bear*

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In the ritual verses, even skinning<sup>49</sup> the bear was portrayed as “an exchange entirely to the bruin's advantage”:

|                            |                                       |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Anna kättä, käyrän poika,  | Reach out your hand, hunched boy,     |
| hongan oksalla ojenna,     | stretch it out from the pine bough,   |
| vaihtakaamme paitojamme,   | let's trade our shirts,               |
| nurikaamme nuttujamme,     | take off our jackets,                 |
| anna mulle villa paita,    | give me the wool shirt,               |
| ota multa rauta paita,     | take from me an iron shirt,           |
| rautanen risuissa lujempi, | the iron one is firmer in the         |
|                            | [underbrush,                          |
| kuusikossa kestävämpi.     | It lasts longer in the spruce forest. |
| (SKVR I4/1244)             |                                       |

The “iron shirt” was probably an oblique reference to the knife used to skin the bear. If the bear was somewhat unconvinced, the singer added that the knife had not been forged by the hunter, but came from far away. If the bear wanted revenge, he would have to look for it in another country:

49. The bear could be skinned in the forest, after it was killed, or later, in the village.

|                            |                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Ei ole veitsi minun tekema | The knife isn't a work of mine,  |
| eikä toisi kumppailini,    | nor of the other fellow,         |
| Virossa on veitsi tehty,   | The blade was forged in Estonia, |
| saatu Saksan kaupungissa   | made in a German city            |

(SKVR I 4.1244)

**15. *Returning to the village: the bear as guest of honor***

In the next stages of the ritual, the hunters carried the bear's carcass slung on a pole borne by two men or dragged it on a sledge, continuing to sing as if the animal were still alive. Again, the bear's status changed: now, the songs celebrated him as the village's guest of honor, invited to take part in a staged wedding (mentioned almost exclusively in a few of the older sources) or in a feast with plentiful drink. He was no longer an awakening bride, a reckless little boy slipping off a branch, but a respectable grown man. In Vienna Karelia, the bear was officially invited to join the human company with these words:

|                           |                                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Lähe nyt, ohto, kulkomah, | Leave now, <i>ohito</i> , to roam |
| Hopie, vajeltamah,        | silver, to wander,                |
| Rahakarva, koalamah       | money-fur, to ramble,             |
| Uroisehe väkeh,           | to the heroic people,             |
| Miehisehe joukijoh        | to the manly company,             |
| Kullaista kujoa myöti,    | along a golden path,              |
| Hopijeista tietä myöti    | along a silver way.               |

(SKVR I4.1203)

aA

The return to the village resembled the outward trip in many ways. On his way into the forest, the hunter was concerned with being accepted by its spirits; now he strove to ensure that the bear felt welcome among the group of hunters and in the village, and thus accepted the invitation. Here again, the scene had mythical features (golden and silver paths), and the hunter asked the forest spirits to make marks on the trees and rocks so that he could find his way home.

The bear's entry in the village had many aspects in common with the hunter's departure from it. The situation was liminal, and extremely delicate. Once again, the hunter's song described the events of the journey "step by step": the bear had to enter following a specific route. Bringing one of the "forest people" into the village entailed a high risk of

a “magical contagion” of some kind. The hunters also had to purify themselves and remove any traces of the “forest force” that they might be carrying with them.

**15.** *The role of the women at the bear’s arrival in the village*

Women played a complex role when the bear arrived, as they had at the beginning of the hunting ritual. Those who were pregnant had to hide, because if the bear scented that they were expecting a boy, or in other words a future hunter, he might attack them. Beliefs of this kind show that the bear’s spirit was still considered dangerous and, in a certain sense, alive.

Some of the women who were not pregnant acted as the “mistress of the house” (*emäntä*) and welcomed the bear and the returning hunters with the following verses:

|                             |   |     |
|-----------------------------|---|-----|
| Mipä lienñou miehillänñi,   | What is happening to my men,                    |     |
| ku kumma urohillanñi,       | what strange thing are my heroes,               |     |
| kuin on lauloan tuletta     | who sing as they walk,                          |     |
| hyreksien tänne šoatta,     | bringing as they hum?                           |     |
| metisenköš anto mettšä,     | The honeyed one <sup>50</sup> has been given by | 173 |
|                             | [the forest?                                    |     |
| kultasñenköš moan           | The golden one <sup>51</sup> , by the king of   |     |
| [kunñinkaš?                 | [the earth <sup>52</sup> ?                      |     |
| jopa teäl’ on penkit pesty, | The benches are already clean,                  |     |
| jō on l(attiet) l(akaistu)  | and the floor, swept                            |     |
| tul(ovalla vierahalla),     | for the guest who is coming <sup>53</sup> ,     |     |
| šoav(alla käkievällä).      | dear guest in arrival.                          |     |
| Jopa vuotin vierastani      | I have waited for my guest <sup>54</sup> ,      |     |
| jalkanñi šulah om mo(a)ha.  | until the dirt melted under my feet,            |     |
| šulat moat somerikoikse.    | the dirt melted into sand. <sup>55</sup>        |     |
| (SKVR I4 1223)              |   |     |

In this case, the “mistress of the house” welcomed the bear to the village. Femininity appears to have been essential in the liminal stages. We have seen how the departing hunt-

50. The bear.

51. The bear.

52. The spirit master of the forest or of the earth.

53. The bear.

54. The bear.

55. The bear.

ers passed under the women's legs, and how a "mistress of the forest" or the forest itself as a female being, accepted the hunters as the hunt began. The final three verses of this last rune recall the wedding poems: they are similar to those in which the bride spoke of the long wait for the groom. This "matrimonial" atmosphere is clear in another of these songs:

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Tuota toivoin tuon ikäni,     | I waited for him <sup>56</sup> all my life, |
| niinkuin neiti nuorna miestä, | like a maiden waits for a youth,            |
| kapo kaunis sulhasia.         | A pretty girl her suitors.                  |

(SKVR XII 2 6531)

The situation is interesting because the bear, as we saw earlier, could be frightened by the "women's power" and by their sexuality. Perhaps the presence of a woman at the edge of the village served to unnerve the bear enough to prevent him from being aggressive. In any case, the words of the "mistress" are very warm: her song is intended to make the bear feel he is an honored guest, expected by the community.

As they arrived, the hunters urged the bear not to be alarmed by the women, and not to frighten the livestock they protected. The women were told to look after the "grain of the mistress" (*emännän vilja*), i.e., the cattle:

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Varokaatte nyt, raukat vaimot, | Beware now, poor wives,                      |
| ett'ei karja kaipastuisi,      | that the cattle won't vanish                 |
| viipastuisi emännän viljat     | that the grain of the mistress <sup>57</sup> |
|                                | [won't disappear,                            |
| ohon tullessa tupahan          | when <i>ohito</i> is coming into the         |
|                                | [cabin.                                      |

(SKVR I4 1219b)

In a curious variation of this song, noted by Tarkka (1998), the wives are told to defend the mistress's hair or wool (i.e., her genitals) from the strange sexual attentions of the bear:

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Varokate vaimot raukat,     | Beware, you poor wives                    |
| kuin ma kultanni kuletan,   | when I move my golden one <sup>58</sup> , |
| jott' ei karva kaipastuise, | so that the hair won't vanish             |

56. This can be interpreted as meaning "I have waited so long that I have ground the dirt under my feet into sand".

57. The cattle.

58. So that the bea does not scatter the cattle, in other words.



|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| epeä emännän vil'l'a    | the mistress's wool won't fail                |
| ohon tullessa tulilla,  | when <i>oh</i> to is coming to the fireplaces |
| kartanoh kalun met'isen | the honeyed dick <sup>59</sup> to the estate. |

(SKVR I4 1206)

This is the only example of this distinctly erotic variant, which hinges on the similarity between *karja* (cattle) and *karva* (hairs); *vilja* (grain) and *villa* (wool). More frequently, the bear fears the women. But this type of variant could also demonstrate the ambivalence of certain relationships between bear and woman: if there are signs that a certain attraction may be possible, it is felt by the mistress, who for her part declares that she has long awaited the bear. The hunters, far from encouraging such embarrassing situations to continue, urged the other women to protect the mistress. Another possible interpretation is that the distinction between the wives in the first verse and the mistress in those that follow is merely poetic, and that the wives were told to protect their cattle and their own sex.

In the verses following the mistress's "welcome", the hunters tell the "maids"<sup>60</sup> to move aside when the bear enters the house:

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Poispa poiat por[s]tvesta,   | Go away, boys, from the porch                 |
| piiat pihtipuoliselta,       | maids, from the doorjambs                     |
| urohon tultua tupahan,       | when the male <sup>61</sup> is entering the   |
|                              | [room   |
| miesten mäntyä mäjelle!      | when the men <sup>62</sup> go into the cabin! |
| Tupa on tehty miesten tulla, | The room is made for men to come              |
|                              | [in,  |
| talli seisoa hevosten.       | the stable for horses to stand in.            |

(SKVR XII 2 6544).

This, too, is not easy to interpret. The bear was considered an honored guest, and thus a "man" of high social standing: the humbler villagers, i.e., the servant girls and the chil-

59. The bear's penis.

60. The "maids" were not "slaves" in the worst sense of the term, but were probably dependent on the master or mistress of the house: farmhands and skivvies working for room and board or some other form of compensation.

61. The bear.

62. The hunters together with the bear.

dren, were told to make way for him. On the other hand, despite the rather harsh and peremptory tone, the verses might also have had a protective purpose: “doorjambs” and “porches” are liminal spaces, and as such are very risky from a magical standpoint<sup>63</sup>. The reference to the fact that the horses should stay in the stable reflects the fear that the bear could revenge himself on them.

The women’s role appears to have depended on their status: the “mistresses” welcome the bear; the “wives” must guard the cattle; the “maids” must move out of the way when the bear enters the house; the pregnant women must defend themselves and the child in their womb, and must thus stay far from the bear. However, how strong the social distinctions could have been between mistress and servant in these remote and rather poor villages is by no means clear. One possibility is that these terms were applied to women in general, depending on their role: when the role was important, they were given the honorable name “mistress”, while the more dismissive term “maid” was used when they had to stay away for some reason. In reading these verses, we often have the impression that the ritual sought to draw attention to certain affinities between human society and the society of the forest. Since the *metsänhaltiat* had their hierarchies of wealth (they were divided into kings, masters and a variety of servants or maidens), the village also had to show that it had its own hierarchies, at least in the songs addressed to the bear, so that he would feel “at home”.

aA

**15. The problematic “wedding of the bear” in the Viitasaari Text**  
A fairly complete description of the bear ceremonial is given in the so-called “Viitasaari Text” of around 1750, one of the oldest documents on the Finnish bear ceremonial:

When the bear had been successfully killed and flayed in the forest, and the flesh with skin was brought back home to the settlement, a day was settled upon when the so-called *Cowvon paaliset* or *hää*<sup>64</sup> would be celebrated. For this important celebration, some barley was gathered to brew beer and spirits. When the arranged day arrived, people gathered in

63. See the protective incantations in Section 8.

64. “The supper of *kouvo* or the wedding of *kouvo*”. *Kouvo* is the bear.

church clothes<sup>65</sup> at some house. Here a boy was chosen in honor of the bear as a bridegroom and following the custom of the land a girl clad in bridal costume was chosen as bride. When the food was brought in, the cooked dishes included, among other things, the own flesh of the deceased<sup>66</sup> served with pea soup<sup>67</sup>. First to be brought in was the head<sup>68</sup> and then the rest of the meat, which had to be carried from the cooking hut in a special order. (...) The dish with the head was placed at the head of the table, and the other meat in order, below the head. The people then sat down, and the bridal pair at the end of the table. After the meal the bridal company dined on special dishes. Note: nothing was to be thrown away, not even a bone, everything had to be collected in the dish. (SKVR IX4 1096)

Though the ritual has many similarities with the bear ceremonies found among other peoples, it is not without its problematic aspects. First, the bear is called *kouvo*, which can mean a deceased person, a ghost or an ancestor. Second, the relationship between the young bridal couple and the bear is not very clear. Some scholars, Sarmela and Pentikäinen in particular, are convinced that this document demonstrates that the bear was considered in more ancient times to be a totem or ancestor who had to be “married” periodically to a young man or woman of the village, after the pattern of the ancestral marriage between a bear and a woman narrated by other Finno-Ugric peoples (Sámi, Khanty and Mandy). Other scholars such as Tarkka (1998) are very skeptical of this theory, and point out that the bear is treated as the “guest of honor” at a staged wedding between two young people. Tarkka notes that the Finnish origin myths indicated that the bear had human origins, or was born to a supernatural female being. But there was no archaic myth about the coupling of a bear and a woman, from which a clan of bear hunters had sprung.<sup>69</sup>

65. In their best clothes, as for holidays or Sunday service.

66. The deceased is the bear.

67. Pea soup was also eaten during ordinary funerals.

68. All parts of the head had to be eaten (including eyes, ears and tongue) in order to magically transfer the bear's powerful senses (sight, hearing) or his magical power (the tongue is associated with the magical song) to the village community.

69. For a comparative analysis of different versions of this myth among native North Americans and Eurasian peoples, see Spagna 1998.

To make matters more complex, there are few if any references to the “wedding of *kouvo*” in the nineteenth and twentieth century sources: no songs sung by the bridal pair, no songs indicating the presence of the bride and groom. Scholars transcribed the runes, but very few had personally attended the ritual. In his rare eyewitness account of 1899, Heikki Meriläinen makes no mention of either the wedding or the bridal pair. In many regions, the bear ceremonial was called *karhun peijaiset* or *hautajaiset*: the funeral of the bear. There are also versions where the feast is called *vakat*, or the bear’s “drinking party”. Many feast songs stress the importance of “the bear’s” vodka and beer. To the Finnish mind, drinking parties were essentially male gatherings, and the songs emphasize the masculinity of the situation.

It is possible that the ritual of the bear’s wedding existed only in certain local variants. It may also be that it gradually disappeared, probably because it was incompatible with the ideal of the Christian family and the conception of “women’s force” as something opposing the power of the bear. Given the paucity of sources, the question remains open.

One thing that is clear, however, is that the verses in which the bear is woken in the den and the mistress’s welcoming songs continued to refer to weddings. But these verses are metaphorical and poetic, and are never very direct. Also of interest are the rare verses where the hunter signs of his “desire” to marry the forest or have a sexual adventure with the *metsänhaltia*. Note the mirroring that takes place in this situation: first, the hunter is accepted by the forest with a species of wedding, seduction or falling in love; later, the bear is accepted in the village as a species of bridegroom, or at least as the guest of honor at a wedding with a mock bridal pair. The two young people undoubtedly served a practical purpose: to convince the bear that he had been invited to a “real” wedding, not to his funeral. But the hunter’s main concern was to move the women as far as possible from the bear, as soon as possible. The relationship between women and bears was best kept within bounds.

It should also be noted that, even though the bridal pair disappeared, the ritual worked perfectly well without them: the essential point was that the bear be convinced that he was the special guest at a socially important occasion, be it

a feast, a wedding or a drinking party in his honor. The Finnish songs are full of variations on such themes.

### 16. *The feast*

The festivity – regardless of the form it took – doubtless served to strengthen the bond between the bear, the “forest people”, and the villagers. The desire to merge together is represented in very physical, concrete terms. As the hunters ate the meat and the organs of the bear’s head, they sang:

|                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Korvampa otan Oholta    | I take the ear from <i>Ohlo</i> , |
| Itse korvin kuullakseni | myself, to hear with ears,        |
| Silmänpä otan oh(olta)  | I take the eye from <i>Ohlo</i> , |
| Itse silmin nähäkseni   | myself, to see with eyes.         |

(SKVR I 4.1242)

In this case, the hunter sought to transfer the bear’s powerful “supernatural senses” to himself: as we have seen, the bear had extraordinary eyesight and hearing. By eating the bear’s flesh, the hunter also “absorbed” the creature’s strength, courage and “spiritual power”. Some sources indicate that there was music and dancing during the feast, at times imitating the bear’s movements. There was also a dietary prohibition: the bear’s meat could not be eaten together with butter or cheese. The power of the forest was not to be brought into contact with that of the cattle, as otherwise the bear could have attacked or killed the livestock. As for the women, some sources indicate that they ate the bear meat, others report that they refused to touch it, as the skinned bear resembled the body of a woman.

### 17. *Rituals for the skull and bones*

In the last part of the bear ceremonial, the hunters and villagers bore the bear’s skull and bones in procession into a pinewood. Here, a pine was selected and the bones were buried beneath its roots, while the skull was tied to one of its branches with a red string. At the end of the ritual, the hunters of Ilomansi (Finnish Karelia) usually sang a dialog. One asked the other where he had taken the “prey”, and the latter answered:

|                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| En oo jälle jättänynnä, | I haven’t left it on the ice, |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|

|                             |                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| uhkukhun upottanunna,       | I haven't sunk it in the slushy snow, |
| enk' oo tiehen tellännynnä; | I haven't chucked it on the road;     |
| panin puuhun puhtahasen,    | I hung it up on a pure tree           |
| petäjähän pienimmähän[!],   | on the smallest of the pines,         |
| honkahan havusatahan,       | on an old pine of a hundred sprigs,   |
| panin kuuta kahtomahan,     | I set it up to watch the moon,        |
| otavia oppimahan,           | to learn the stars of the Big Dipper, |
| päiveä tähystämähän.        | To observe the sun.                   |

(SKVR VII 5.3396)

Clearly, the bear had to be brought back to the land of its birth so that it could be reborn. In the Khanty ritual, the bear relates the events in the first person, and describes how he was taken back to his birthplace in the sky, raising himself up on a chain. But the Finnish hunters did not refer to this in such precise terms, and above all never mentioned the bear's resurrection. We must not forget that for the entire second part of the ritual, they firmly denied the bear's death and treated him as if he were still alive. Singing of his rebirth would have meant admitting his death. In some variations, the hunters point out that the pine was near a gulf full of fish: a paradise for the bear, from which he would never have to move.

The skull ritual also had its festive elements, some quite dramatic. The drinking party continued at the pine tree: bear was poured into the skull, and the hunters drank it from the nostrils. The Vittasaari Text tells us that the bridal couple also participated in the skull ritual, as if to emphasize once again that this was a wedding procession, not a funeral.

### 18. *Conclusions: a killing masquerading as a festivity*

The Finnish bear ceremonial is remarkable in many ways: archaic elements have survived through the ages and adapted to a mixed economy and the remnants of a highly syncretic popular Christianity. The wealth of ethnographic details about each stage of the ritual makes it of interest to students of hunting rituals in general, even those who are not specialists in Finno-Ugric cultures. The abundant material regarding the liminal stages is particularly intriguing. Some of the anthropological and ethnographic consider-

ations that emerge from an analysis of the ceremonial are summarized below:

1. The bear had human characteristics, but was at the same time closely linked to the “forest people” and in particular to a *metsänhaltia* that protected him.
2. For this reason, the bear was endowed with the power of the magical forest.
3. The forest was another world, but its organization reflected the economy, the hierarchies and the structure of human society. It was richer, and had a magical power that inspired fear. However, the forest people abided by moral principles and rules.
4. A number of protective rites and songs were necessary when crossing the border separating village and forest.
5. The resemblance between the forest and human society made it possible for the hunters to communicate with the forest through the *runot*, or ritual songs.
6. The forest “granted” a bear after various requests and pleas by the hunter, who had to demonstrate that he had a good knowledge of the forest people’s rules and of a sizable number of magic rites and songs.
7. Some hunters had to be true *tietäjä* (experts in magic) and *runolija* (skilled singers of *runot*);
8. The ceremonial is an integral part of the exchange: the hunters offer the entire ceremonial, respectful songs, the bear feast and the skull ritual in exchange for the bear.
9. The bear’s status changed during the ceremonial.
10. The roles of the village women were complex.
11. The ceremonial as a whole forestalled revenge on the part of the bears and the *metsänhaltiat*.
12. Masks were not used during the ceremonial, but it was all a masquerade, where everything was often turned upside down: the bear who killed livestock was innocent; the hunters who killed the bear were innocent and incapable of doing harm; though they slayed the bear, the hunters acted as “seducers” of the “forest maidens” who protected him; the bear had not been killed, but had fallen “on his own” from a branch; the knife that

skinned him was an iron shirt that could prove useful in the woods; the slain bear was not really dead, but became an honored guest; the occasion on which the bear's meat was eaten was presented as "the wedding" of the bear or a "festivity", a "feast" and a "drinking party" in his honor; when the skull and bones were taken to the pine tree, the bear continued his life in an enchanting place, admiring the stars.

Thus, the entire ceremonial hinged on erasing the memory of the bear's slaying, which was deliberately transformed into a series of songs and rites that celebrate the life and the union of the forest and the village community through social rituals of conciliation and communication.

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**1. *Men and animals***

Stretching southwards and westwards from the Great Lakes, through forests and clearings and prairie down to the grassy expanses of the Plains and up again to the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, a vast area once teemed with wildlife, animals in untold numbers, with whom the native peoples of the New World lived for millennia. The native cultures' lengthy intimacy with the animal world produced a series of cultural representations regarding the characteristics attributed to human beings and other animal species that proved to differ profoundly from those harbored by the explorers and colonists who have seized control of the continent over the past four centuries.

When the Jesuit missionaries in what was called New France in the seventeenth century penetrated into the interior in their attempts to contact the native tribes, they were astonished by the sheer numbers of animals around them: "there are found, throughout almost its entire course [of the St. Lawrence River], many beautiful islands, some large and others small, but all covered with fine forests. These islands are full of deer, bears and wild cows [bison], which furnish in abundance the provisions necessary for

travelers, who find everywhere such game, and, occasionally, whole herds of animals of the deer species" (Le Mercier [1665] 1858: 11 [engl.tr. vol. XLIX: 261]). Nevertheless, the missionaries' pens are as likely to drip with disdain for the hunters' life as they are to praise nature's bounty: "The Poverty of the Savages is so great, and their provisions are so wretched, except on some days when they kill animals in abundance – and, even then, they eat the meat of these without bread, without salt, and without other sauce than the appetite (Lalemant [1646] 1858: 20 [engl.tr. vol. XXIX: 75]). Indeed, in the Jesuits' interpretation, the Indians' life was so hardscrabble, subsistence so marginal, that they were regularly obliged to return to the great forests "to make war on the fish and the beasts" (Id.: 33 [engl.tr. vol. XXIX: 139]).

Among this wealth of wildlife, the bear stood out from the rest, in size and majesty. Two species in particular roam these latitudes, the black bear (*Ursus americanus*) and the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), the latter being larger and more ferocious, so much so that the North American variant has been given the subspecies name *horribilis*: this is what is commonly known as the grizzly bear. The British and American hunters and explorers who ventured into the remoter backwoods dreaded encounters with the grizzly, as even firearms were often no match for the bear's strength and aggression. During their expedition along the Missouri in 1805, the explorers Lewis and Clark described meetings with a number of "white" bears (the grizzly can be light brown or yellowish, a color even the natives often referred to as "white") and the dreadful accounts that the Indians had given them of the difficulty of hunting this animal, given its formidable strength and ferocity. "He rather attacks than avoids a man, and such is the terror which he has inspired, that the Indians who go in quest of him paint themselves and perform all the superstitious rites customary when they make war on a neighboring nation" (Coues 1893 [1965, vol. 1: 288]).

Here again, an analogy is drawn between hunting wild animals and waging war. In the report of the Jesuit missionary, the similarity stems from the tremendous effort required to wrest the means of subsistence from a hostile nature, while in the case of the bear, it is the animal's fear-

some combativeness that makes an enemy of him. But there is something incongruous about this overlapping of the human and animal spheres: war is a clash between human beings, and thus likening the hunt to a war tends to narrow the gap separating the human species from the others and make the hunter's prey akin to a human enemy, an adversary to be fought and defeated, but nevertheless nearly on the same level as his opponent.

The idea thus begins to gain ground that, for the native peoples of America, the gulf between the human and the animal was not nearly as wide as it was for the European newcomers, who saw the animals as nothing more than walking steaks or skins to be traded and sold for sizable profits. Naturally, missionaries and travelers had a ready-made explanation to account for the strange attitude displayed by the natives: they were simply "superstitious" and ignorant, steeped in bizarre beliefs and irrational fears that clouded any rational capacity they might have had. In the nineteenth century, this explanation would be brought under the heading of "primitive thought" and would seek to justify the abundant information that was beginning to accumulate about how many groups in non-European lands perceived the relationship between man and animal, and represented it to themselves.

According to Edward B. Tylor, one of fledgling anthropology's founders, this aspect was the direct consequence of the rise of what he called "animism": in this interpretation, the "savage" peoples considered that animals had souls like their own, and were thus ready to accept that the idea of a man's soul transmigrating into a beast's body was at least possible (Tylor 1871, vol. 2: 17). This was nothing other than the effect of a gradual extension of the concept of soul – which originally applied to human beings – to all living beings, animals and plants, and even to what once were considered inanimate objects. On the other hand, in Tylor's view, this extension was justified by the fact that "primitive" peoples tend to emphasize the similarities between animals and humans. "The half-human features and actions and characters of animals are watched with wondering sympathy by the savage, as by the child. The beast is the very incarnation of familiar qualities of man" (Id.: 17).

As the idea of the crude and childlike "primitive" was

gradually abandoned in the early years of anthropology, there was a corresponding increase in the difficulty of understanding how peoples, who were now known to be capable of developing extremely effective forms of adaptation to their environment and systems of knowledge about natural phenomena that had nothing to envy the natural sciences, could possibly have used a yardstick differing so radically from that applied by Western scientific culture in interpreting the characteristics that set the animal and human worlds apart.

Today, we realize that the relationships between man and prey, over thousands of years, have been built up through observation, adaptation, mutual influence and shared spaces. The native American hunters had complex systems of interaction with their ecosystems, which included distinctive approaches to understanding the natural world and its denizens. One historian summarized the worldview of the hunters of pre-colonial America in the following words:

Hunting peoples lived with as well as on animals. They existed in such close relation that the lines between animals and human often became blurred. In traditional narratives, animals figured prominently in bringing the world into being as well as marrying and becoming kin with humans. People inscribed animal figures on drums, shields and tipi covers, wore animal masks and parts in ceremony, mimicked animal movements in dance, sang songs that connected them to the animals and their ancestors, and sought contact with animals in dreams and visions. Animals imparted their powers, their wisdom, and their characteristics and spoke to humans. Stories were told of hunters who had sexual intercourse with animals and of humans who had animal wives and husbands [...] Animals could transform themselves into human shape, humans into animal shape. Native American hunting peoples imagined and inhabited a world that few Europeans could see or understand (Calloway 2003: 37).

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## 2. *Seeing the world through the animal's eyes*

Among the first to inquire into this question was the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, whose doctoral dissertation dealt with bear symbolism from a broad cross-cultural perspective (Hallowell 1926). He noted that hunting peoples assigned specifically human traits to animals: "Animals

are believed to have essentially the same sort of animating agency which man possesses. They have a language of their own, can understand what human beings say and do, have forms of social or tribal organization, and live a life which is parallel in other respects to that of human societies" (Id.: 7). If we want to understand these forms of thought, Hallowell argued, we must abandon our claim to judge "nature" on the basis of what *we* think to exist or to be real, and seek to clarify the categories used in indigenous peoples' thinking: "we must rebuild the specific content of these categories upon the foundation of *their* beliefs, not ours. The truth or falsity of the categories is not at issue but simply the inapplicability of our concepts of them as a point of departure for a comprehension of primitive thought" (Id.: 9-10).

Indeed, one of the crucial points of this discussion is that it forces us to reflect on how we look at the reality of the world surrounding us and on the premises on which we base our interpretations of experience. When we speak of animals, for instance, what do we think an animal is? When we refer to man's relationship with nature, what do we mean by nature? And what are the fundamental characteristics that distinguish man from other forms of life? These questions are often thought of as simply referring to what we know about the nature of things; about what science tells us is "true". In fact, the answers that human societies have offered at different times and in different parts of the world show an enormous variety, depending on how human cultures have represented themselves and their relationship with the reality around them (Descola 2005).

One thing we should make immediately clear is that this is not simply a matter of distinguishing between *knowing* and *believing*: strange or absurd things are believed in the farthest-flung corners of the globe, but *we* know how things in fact stand. Hunting peoples have survived for millennia thanks to their ability to amass a thorough knowledge of the natural world, of animals' characteristics and behavior, of plant life, the climate and their territory, down to the smallest particulars. Undoubtedly, each and every individual in these societies was able, from the earliest age, to live off the land in circumstances where most members of our contemporary societies, despite all their presumptions, could not survive for even a handful of days. The fact is, that all of

man's forms of understanding and interacting with reality are mediated by cultural categories, *even* those that constitute scientific and ostensibly autonomous knowledge.

As Tim Ingold has rightly noted, attributing cultural beliefs to human societies has become a convention of anthropology, which draws a very sharp line between nature "out there" (as studied by the natural sciences) and nature as culturally perceived and constructed (and studied by anthropology); between "real" animals (which the naturalist knows perfectly) and "animals of the mind" (as identified and interpreted by anthropologists). Covertly, however, this distinction tends to suggest that the natural sciences investigate reality as it is, whereas anthropology deals with cultural creations that mankind has arrived at by taking this reality as the starting point, but that have very little to do with it and, above all, can provide no relevant information about what this reality really and truly is. "Thus the animal world is said to be culturally constructed in the image of human society. By this device, the challenge that the non-Western claim presents to Western ontology is conveniently neutralized: it can be treated as 'just another' cultural construction of reality" (Ingold 1994: xxiii). The point here is that these representations of the non-human world help shed light not only on the cultural premises underlying other interpretations of reality, but also on the categories and the premises on the basis of which we, in our contemporary society, attempt to come to grips with non-human otherness. "What happens", Ingold asks slyly, "if, on the contrary, we treat this claim with the seriousness it deserves, by starting out from the ontological premise that non-human animals do indeed participate in the same world as ourselves?" (Id.: xxiii).

This perspective was introduced by Hallowell, who had stressed that the notion of the "person" found among many indigenous peoples, and in particular among the Great Lakes Ojibwa, the population that was the focus of his field work for many years, cast doubt on the usual assumptions behind the term's use in the everyday language of modern industrial society. In the Ojibwa ontology, the notion of "person" extends well beyond the sphere of human beings, including many "other-than-human beings": animals, plants, spirits, and also "natural" phenomena such as the



sun or thunder (Hallowell 1960 [1976: 357-372]). Considering the bear as a “person” is thus part of a much wider set of cultural representations, even though their physical and behavioral traits lend themselves to anthromorphization, as has also been noted by Western observers (Hallowell 1926: 148).

The implications of this view are very important: if the other-than-human beings, and animals foremost among them, are “persons”, this means that human beings are not alone in having different ways of conceiving of reality on the basis of their different traditions and cultural assumptions, and that this same reality can appear in different ways according to the characteristics of the individual who observes it and the species to which he belongs. According to the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, while the Western perspective leans towards multiculturalism (the unity of nature, but a plurality of cultural visions of it), the Amerindian cultures have developed a system of thought that can be described as multi-naturalistic, where the unity of the spiritual principle (the subjectivity or personhood of each individual being) is accompanied by a plurality of corporeal characteristics that lead to a different way of coming to know external reality (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 470). In this view of the world, each species thus has its own covering or envelope – the body – that is a kind of clothing that conceals an internal essence, the “person”, which is substantially similar in all beings and which can be described as a human form, a being similar in all respects to humans. This is why the concept of the “person” (as a center of intentionality and subjectivity) is to be considered anterior and logically superior to the concept of the “human” (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 23-24).

In the Thirties, an elderly Carrier had this to say to the anthropologist Diamond Jenness:

We know what the animals do, what are the needs of the beaver, the bear, the salmon, and other creatures, because long ago men married them and acquired this knowledge from their animal wives. Today the [Christian] priests say that we lie, but we know better. The white man has been only a short time in this country and knows very little about the animals; we have lived here thousands of years and were taught long ago by the animals themselves. The white

man writes everything down in a book so that it will not be forgotten; but our ancestors married the animals, learned all their ways, and passed on the knowledge from one generation to another (Jenness 1943: 540).

A recurrent theme in native American mythologies is that of an original state in which there was no differentiation between humans and other living beings, and where the essential characteristics of primordial beings were substantially human. From this standpoint, then, the original common condition of living beings is not animality (as scientific evolutionism would have it), but humanity. The great mythical separation consisted not so much in the creation of culture, which would have distinguished between human beings and animals once and for all, but in the process whereby animals lost the specifically cultural qualities they had in their original state (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 472).

It follows from the idea that what differentiates living beings is their covering, the clothing they wear, that by changing this clothing they can change the very way they perceive reality. This is why wearing a costume or a mask does not mean simply adding an ornament or exterior element, but brings about a true transformation in the wearer. Clothing is thus a particular expression of the principle of metamorphosis, whereby it is possible to change one's place in the world and hence one's perception of reality.

To illustrate this notion by example, we can take the myth told to the anthropologist Adrian Tanner by Matthew Rich, a Cree from Northwest River, Labrador. The myth is about a young man of the tribe who marries a caribou girl. The young man goes hunting one day, and the story begins by describing the encounter between the hunters and the caribou from a normal human perspective. Suddenly, however, the young man gains the ability to see the events from a different perspective: that of the hunted animals. At this point, the caribou no longer appear as animals, but as human beings; the caribou reality is transformed into human terms. For instance, what the other hunters see as an ordinary female caribou appears to the young man's astonished eyes as a beautiful young woman. The boy marries the caribou girl and goes to live with her family, who appear to him as Indians, living with the others in a small tribal group

of which the girl's father is the leader. The group has tents, utensils and all the other characteristics of human cultural life. When, without warning, human hunters appear, they see the usual scenes of the chase: the caribou run from the hunters and, when shot, fall dead to the ground. But the young man, viewing the same events from the caribou's perspective, sees people wearing white capes and running. When one of them is shot, he throws off his cape, which the hunters then pick up and carry away as the animal's carcass (Tanner 1979: 136-137).

Clearly, such a conception of reality can be disconcerting for peoples who depend on killing other living beings for their survival. Hunting is not simply – as the Western vision would have it – a means of gaining the resources (the “things”) to be found in nature, but a form of killing beings whose essence is entirely similar to human's, and who differ from humans only in the kind of bodily envelope that covers them like clothing. We thus see the fundamental dilemma that appears time and time again in the thinking of hunting peoples, particularly in North America.

Among those groups that represented animals as having characteristics analogous to or even identical with those of humans, how were humans to understand what it meant to kill animals and consume their flesh? On the face of it, the tensions were severe: one was eating the flesh of a being like one's self, a person with a kinship network, perhaps a wife and children, a being for whom relatives would grieve. Beliefs that individual animals possessed ‘souls’ that were not destroyed when their bodies were taken for food helped soften the conflicts embodied in this dilemma; even so, the ambiguities were not completely resolved (Harrod 2000: 46).

This dilemma could be resolved to some extent only through an ideology whereby humans' appropriation of animals can take place only in a moral setting, of mutual respect and exchange (Comba 2005: 97-100). Slaying animals could not be seen as merely utilitarian, or as an expression of man's superiority over other living creatures. Animals were represented as being willing to allow men to use some of their species, as victims of the hunt, in order to allay mankind's poverty and need, in exchange for a series of duties to the animal world that man was required

to observe. It was thus the animals who offered themselves so that the hunters could survive on their flesh, under the terms of an age-old agreement between hunters and the hunted (Schlesier 1986: 79-80). In Siberia too, among the Evenki, it was believed that wild animals offer themselves to the hunter by “putting their tracks in the path of humans”, according to their own will or that of their master-spirits (Lavrillier 2012: 120).

### 3. *The powers of the bear*

From what we have seen in the foregoing pages, it may be easier to understand how such thing as putting on ornaments made of bear teeth or claws, wearing bearskin clothing, or keeping the bear's skull or paws were not dictated solely by a desire for adornment, but reflected a profound knowledge of the animal's nature and proximity to the world of mankind. Grizzly claw necklaces, for instance, were common throughout the entire area from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains. For the most part, they were worn by individuals who had distinguished themselves for acts of courage, held positions of authority and prestige, or had had visionary experiences that had put them in direct communication with the animal, or rather, with that interior principle that animates it and is its most intimate essence, the “person of the bear”.

In fact, man's gaze, in its blinkered human perspective, normally cannot see beyond the outer trappings of the bear, its envelope or clothing. In certain situations, however, man can take temporary leave of his corporeal limits and cast his gaze at the reality above and beyond outward appearances. In the Amerindian cultures of North America, this could be accomplished through the complex procedure known as the “vision quest”. From the indigenous cultures' standpoint, the power of dreaming makes it possible to be in communication with all of the beings that inhabit reality in all of its many different dimensions. By freeing perception from the bonds of the ordinary human condition, it enables the dreamer to see the other beings, those that are “other-than-human”, as they see themselves, in human form. In visions, animals normally appear as human beings, recognizable as animals only in certain details or because of certain aspects of their clothing. They lead the dreamer to a

place where a dwelling stands, with all the accouterments of human habitation, and teach him songs, incantations, rituals or ways of painting the body or producing certain objects. He who has a vision or a dream is thus able to move from one region of the cosmos to another, surmounting the normal barriers to perception and perhaps gaining special knowledge or powers (Irwin 1994: 31).

Among many American peoples, the bear's appearance to a dreamer was believed to give him the knowledge of medicinal herbs that only this animal possessed. "We consider the bear", said Śiyáka, an early twentieth century Lakota, "as chief of all animals in regard to herb medicine, and therefore it is understood that if a man dreams of a bear he will be expert in the use of herbs for curing illness. The bear is regarded as an animal well acquainted with herbs because no other animal has such good claws for digging roots" (Densmore 1918: 195).

Though experiencing a vision or a dream could give anyone a view of what lies beyond outward appearances, grasping how other-than-human beings perceived their own world was another matter. Most indigenous cultures believed that only certain persons were able to shuttle between one dimension and the other, one world and another. These are the figures that the anthropological literature has conventionally called "shamans". The native cultures that adopt the model of interpreting reality and the relationships between humans and non-humans we have described above tend to see the world as a place of continual metamorphosis, as a "highly transformational world" (Rivière 1994; Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471). Shamanism can be seen as certain individuals' capacity to cross the corporeal borders that separate one species from another, and see the world through the eyes of other beings: animals, spirits, divinities, the dead. In this sense, shamans are *conmutadores de perspectivas*, transformers and "shape-shifters" who can adopt the perspective of other beings (Praet 2009: 739).

Significantly, the bear often appears as the most appropriate instructor and spirit helper for those who have set out on the path that will lead them to become shamans. Many hunting peoples thought of bears as the shamans of the animal world (Rockwell 1991: 63-64). In addition, the bear's autumn descent into the bowels of the earth,

where he would pass the winter hibernating, was a sort of paradigmatic image of the symbolic death and rebirth that constituted every novice shaman's initiation rite (Id.: 22-23). According to the Lakota, for example, it is the bear that teaches the knowledge of medicines, the healing techniques and the songs that shamans can sign in their curing rituals. "He is a spirit that comes to the shaman when the shaman seeks a vision. When a man sees the Bear in a vision, that man must become a medicine man" (Short Feather, in Walker 1980: 116).

Likewise, Black Elk, the famous Lakota shaman whose autobiography became one of the world's most widely read works of literature, said that he received the power to cure from the bear spirit (Rockwell 1991: 78). In 1832, the painter George Catlin had the opportunity to witness the performance of a Blackfoot medicine man at the deathbed of a warrior who had been mortally wounded that same day in a skirmish with a group of enemies. Catlin describes the medicine man's costume in great detail: "his body and head were entirely covered with the skin of a yellow bear, the head of which (his own head being inside of it) served as a mask; the huge claws of which also, were dangling on his wrists and ancles [sic]; in one hand he shook a frightful rattle, and in the other brandished his medicine-spear or magic wand" (Catlin 1844 [1973, vol. 1: 40]), while adding "horrid and appalling" grunts and snarls and growls in imitation of the bear. What for Catlin was an instance of the grotesque and childish behavior typical of a primitive people concealed the conviction that the shaman was able to cross the boundaries between species and turn himself into an actual bear. This is clear from Black Elk's dramatic description of a healing ritual in which he took part as a small boy, invited to assist the medicine man, who was called Hairy Chin. A group of boys had to play the role of bears, painting their bodies yellow or red and either wearing bear skins or tying their hair to look like bear's ears.

This bear medicine man came forward and pulled me toward him. He began to chew an herb and blew it into my mouth and then he threw me down and before I knew it I was standing up on my four haunches like a bear. I made a cry and it was a genuine bear sound and I felt like a bear and wanted to grab someone. We all went out of the tipi

acting like bears. After this the medicine men came out and he looked like a real bear to me – a big bear – and he was fierce too (De Mallie 1984: 178-179).

This testimony speaks to the fact that an essential part of shamanic practice in Amerindian cultures consisted in the shaman's transformation, which enabled him to cast off his human shape and enter into another species' being. The core of the curing ceremony did not lie so much in invoking or communicating with "other-than-human" beings, but in the shaman's ability to transform himself into one of them and, as such, treat the patient (Praet 2009: 744). Accordingly, the bear dances – which were very common in North America and often numbered medicine men or other individuals with special powers among their participants – were considered ways of gaining the qualities of the bear. They were not simply imitations of the bear's behavior, but allowed the dancers to feel that they had really been transformed into the animals they portrayed. And the spectators often had the impression that what they were seeing were not men dressed as animals, but men who had turned into real flesh and blood bears (Rockwell 1991: 151; Kohn 1986).

These aspects remind us of the transformative nature of the visionary experience: the borders between the spheres of reality become blurred and unclear, the world is seen as fluid and shifting, in a process of continuing transformation where any object can be manifested as itself, or as its potential to be something "other" (Irwin 1994: 72). Hallowell mentions a remarkable story told to him by an Ojibwa, who in a dream met a benevolent spirit (*ógimā*), whom he found to be an eagle, after which he himself turned into an eagle, spread his wings and flew away (Hallowell 1934 [2010: 375]).

An essential condition for having a vision is isolation: the candidate must leave his community for a secluded place where he can immerse himself fully in the enfolded realm of the mythic and visionary. Abandoning home means leaving the familiar, orderly world of human society behind, and entering, not the "savage" wilderness of nature, but an open horizon of possibilities and opportunities where the ordinary norms and classifications of the social world are

abolished or held in abeyance, and where other, unusual or unpredictable, forms of experience may await (Irwin 1994: 83-84). Here we have another fundamental characteristic of Amerindian thinking: the notion of human nature's incompleteness, its feebleness and lack of resources and power by comparison with the other beings in the cosmos.

Generally, Indians held that humans were spiritually less powerful than animals. Humans, in fact, were the only creatures born essentially powerless. To live well in the world, that is, to hunt or gather well enough to feed one's family, to avoid being killed in battle, to contribute to the tribe, one had to gain power. This power usually originated from an animal or a mythological being (Rockwell 1991: 95).

The bear was considered to be a particularly wise and powerful animal: consequently, whoever was able to obtain the bear's power would gain exceptional strength and knowledge of the most arcane mysteries, along with all of the shaman's powers: the ability to cure the sick, to see into the future, to lay bare the hiddenmost aspects of reality. This was a notion that was by no means embraced only by the native Americans, but, as Hallowell demonstrated in his doctoral dissertation (Hallowell 1926), was found throughout the northern hemisphere.

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#### *4. Around the Pole Star*

Among the Canadian Dakota, a boy who wished to be initiated into manhood could submit to a ritual called "Making a Bear", in which he played the part of the animal. A hole representing the bear's den was dug, with four paths leading out from it towards each of the cardinal points. Here the candidate passed a certain amount of time in meditation. He was then made to come out of the den in a mock bear hunt, during which he was symbolically killed (Wallis 1947: 64-65). Here again, to the indigenous mind, the candidate did not simply imitate the animal, but was thought to have in fact turned into a bear, whose slaying represented the moment of his re-transformation into a human being. In a pattern which is also found in other North American cultures (Comba 1992), this ritual reflects the idea that the human being, in order to complete his intrinsically inchoate



and unfinished nature, must go through a process in which he temporarily identifies with an “other” being, coming to know otherness and the nearness of the non-human. From this experience of transformation, the individual gains an invigorating power, increased energy and new qualities that usher him into adulthood and bring social recognition for this metamorphosis. In this sense, the transformational experience is the core of the process whereby the personality is formed, and is a mechanism of “autopoiesis”, of “self-construction” (Irwin 1994: 120, 263), that parallels the process of “anthropopoiesis”, or the social construction of the human being, that each society engages in to create its own model of humanity (Remotti 2013).

Similarly, among the Ojibwa, a girl who had not yet reached puberty was called *wemukowe*, or “she is going to be a bear”. When she started to menstruate, she lived isolated in a hut away from her family for several days, and during this period was called *mukowe*, “she is a bear” (Rockwell 1991: 185). These traditions are remarkably similar to what we know took place in antiquity at the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, near Athens. A group of Athenian girls lived for a certain period of their lives at the sanctuary, where they participated in the *arkteia*, a ritual performance in which the girls were required to imitate bears, or rather, to become *arktoi*, or she-bears (Brelich 1969: 229 ff.). According to the foundation legend for the ritual, one of the girls at Brauron was scratched by a she-bear, who was then killed by the girl’s brother(s). As a result, the oracle at Delphi ordered that the girls of Athens would thenceforth act the she-bear during the *arkteia* bear ritual. It is highly unlikely that this ceremony involved all of the girls of Athens in classical times; more probably, certain girls were chosen, using criteria of which we are not told, to represent all of their contemporaries (Dowden 1989: 33-34). It is also possible that the priestesses who conducted the rites were called “she-bears”, like their young acolytes.

Another surprising analogy can be seen in the traditions concerning the constellations revolving around the Pole Star which, in European as well as American cultures, are thought to resemble a bear, and a she-bear in particular. In the Greek tradition, the goddess Artemis was particularly close to the world of the forest and of wild animals;

accordingly, the bear was one of the creatures linked to her symbolically. Ovid (*Metamorphosis*, II, 409-531) tells us of Callisto, a nymph and huntress of Arcadia, vowed to chastity like all of the companions of Artemis. However, she was seduced by Zeus, who appeared to her disguised as Artemis (or perhaps as a bear, the animal sacred to the goddess). Pregnant with Zeus's child, and her condition discovered by an enraged Artemis, Callisto was turned into a bear and wandered through the woods for a number of years, until one day she came face to face with Arcos, the son she had borne. Arcos, who obviously knew nothing of the true identity of the beast he found before him, aimed an arrow at her with deadly intent. Zeus, however, at last took pity on her and, to prevent the son from killing his mother, carried them both into the sky: Callisto became the constellation *Arkto*s, the Great Bear, and Arcas the star Arcturus, the "bear-guardian" (March 1998: 179-181).

A number of variations on a legend about a young woman who turns into a bear are also found among the Plains Indians.

In the most widespread version, a young woman rejects all proposals of marriage, and each day leaves the village and disappears into the forest, where she meets her secret lover, a bear. When the tribesmen discover her story, they are urged by the girl's little sister to destroy the bear, whom they kill in an ambush. Sometime later, while playing with her little sister, the young woman begins to mimic a bear in jest. Soon, however, she is transformed into a real bear, who attacks and kills many people in the camp. The woman's sister and six brothers attempt to escape, but are pursued by the enraged bear. They take refuge atop a tree, where they at last manage to kill their pursuer. At this point, they decide to ascend to the skies, where they become the seven stars of the Great Bear (Comba 2005; see Comba 1996 for references).

Such similarities are not easy to explain. Falling back on the cliché that similar ideas can come to different peoples living in similar geographical and ecological settings tells us nothing, and tends to take symbolic links for granted when in fact they are by no means obvious: the link between bear and woman, for example, or the transformation triggered by a sexual transgression or a *mésalliance*, the theme of

death as prelude to rebirth, and the more or less implicit connection with rituals of initiation or transformation. A century or so ago, Hallowell noted the spread from one continent to another of a whole series of ceremonial customs connected with the bear, which he felt could be traced to an “ancient Boreal culture, Old World in origin, and closely associated with the pursuit of the reindeer”, adding that it seemed to him “not impossible” that this culture may even have derived from Paleolithic hunters (Hallowell 1926: 161). Today, after the discovery of the Chauvet Cave in the Ardèche (France), which has given us splendid paintings of bears by the Paleolithic hunters of over 30,000 years ago (Clottes 2008: 32-33), this possibility seems all the more likely. Indeed, it was exactly in that period that the first vanguards of the hunting peoples of northern Asia, whose culture had many points in common with all of the inhabitants of the Euro-Asiatic plains, were approaching the Pacific coast, poised to explore the American continent. Indemonstrable though it may be, it is fascinating to think that these ancient pioneers brought with them a cultural baggage developed among the Paleolithic hunters over the long millennia, and which was to be the core of the Amerindian cultural systems that flourished so vibrantly until the traumatic coming of the European invaders.

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**Bear Traditions  
in Native  
North America**



**Fig. 1**  
Grizzly bears, *Ursus arctos horribilis*, lithography by John Woodhouse Audubon (1848)  
Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas ([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org))

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**Fig. 2**  
Black bears, *Ursus americanus*, lithography by John Woodhouse Audubon (1848)  
Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas ([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org))



Fig. 3  
Portrait of the Missouri  
headman He-Who-Kills-the-  
Osages, by George Catlin  
(1832).

This personage shows a  
big bear-claws necklace, an  
ornament that distinguishes  
an individual of great  
prestige and authority. On  
the bowl of the pipe which  
the chief holds in his hand  
one can see the sculpture  
of an animal that could be a  
bear ([www.outpost-art.org](http://www.outpost-art.org))

*Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Washington, D.C.*

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Fig. 4  
Lakota Bear Dance, observed and painted by George Catlin on the Upper Missouri in 1833  
*Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. ([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org))*



**Bear Traditions  
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**Fig. 5**  
Arikara shaman in bear costume  
praying in front of a cedar tree  
*Photo by Edward Sheriff Curtis, 1908*  
(edwardcurtisphotographer.com)



**Fig. 6**  
Blackfoot shaman in bear  
costume, painting by George  
Catlin (1832)  
*Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Washington, D.C. (commons.wikimedia.  
org)*





**Fig. 7**  
Arikara shamans  
performing a bear  
ritual

*Photo by Edward Sheriff  
Curtis, 1908  
(edwardcurtisphotographer.  
com)*



**Fig. 8**  
Old Bear, a Mandan shaman holding in his  
hands two sacred pipes, portrait by George  
Catlin (1832)

*Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.  
(commons.wikimedia.org)*

**Bear Traditions  
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**Fig. 9**  
Bear Butte, a hill in South Dakota, was regarded as a sacred place by most of the Native peoples of the northern Plains. The name was attributed to the butte because its outline recalled the back of a crouching bear

## Bordering on Human: Wild Men, Bears and Fools. Amerindian and Medieval European Traditions

Margherita Amateis

Though the cultural universes of the native Americans of the Pacific Northwest and medieval European man are far apart in time and space, a comparative analysis of their myths shows profound similarities between certain figures that cut across both cultural systems: mythical beings such as the Wild Man, the Fool and the Bear. All three figures, moreover, show a degree of overlapping and cross-fertilization that often blurs the functional and semantic boundaries between them.

The Wild Man stands at the center of a set of beliefs and rituals that permeated Europe throughout the Middle Ages. There are innumerable signs, tangible and visible, of his presence in the European imagination: as the protagonist of tales and legends of the oral tradition, or portrayed in a host of woodcuts and engravings, miniatures and tapestries, frescos and paintings and carvings in the Continent's churches and cathedrals.

The study presented in this chapter is based chiefly on iconographic sources, where "family resemblances" help reveal the attributes and functions of these legendary beings. The results have been posted in multimedia form on the Italian-language website *La maschera del selvaggio: Indiani*

*d'America e Tradizioni europee* (Amateis, 2012), where iconographic routes can be selected to compare these figures and gain a better understanding of their common features.

Wild Men, Fools and Bears all border on the human, sharing anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and phytomorphic traits. In the settings where knowledge is produced, channeled and perpetuated through mythical thought, they are thus beings that go beyond the human: the more they are associated with the wilderness, with the world of the wild beasts, the more they partake of the primordial forces of nature.

## 1. *The Wild Man*

### 1.1. *Zoomorphic features: man shading into animal*

Medieval iconography emphasizes the Wild Man's animal-like appearance. Tangled hair and beard that have never known a comb, hirsute body (Figures 1 and 2), and super-human size and strength, such are his physical features. In an early sixteenth century drawing, he is portrayed as extremely powerful, twice as tall as an ordinary mortal, brandishing his knotty club and attacking a fully armed knight, whose fate would seem to be sealed (Figure 3). These characteristics enable the Wild Man to hold his own against the beasts, as shown in the scene depicted in a circa fifteenth century tapestry, where men covered in a thick coat of fur fight lions and fantastic monsters (Figure 4). In most cases, the Wild Man is pictured with his attribute, the knotty club with which he fights and defends himself.

In the world of the Pacific Northwest Kwakiutl tribe, we find a parallel in Dzonokwa, the wild woman of the forest, whom Boas describes thus:

The *Dzō'noq!wa* have black bodies [...]. They are twice the size of a man. They are described as giants, and as stout. Their hands are hairy. Generally the *Dzō'noq!wa* who appears in the tales is a female. She has large hanging breasts (Boas, 1935, p. 144).

Likewise, the Wild Man of medieval European folklore is sometimes depicted brandishing a tree trunk. A drawing of one of the costumed figures at the Nuremburg *Schembartlauf* or Shrovetide Carnival held between 1449 and 1530 shows a Wild Man with beard, moustache and flowing locks, his

body covered with pine needles, and carrying an entire uprooted tree, to which a tiny – by comparison with the Wild Man – human figure clings (Figure 5). The Dzonokwa, for her part, has black hair, bushy eyebrows and, often, abundant facial hair, and indeed is often personified by masks that also feature a beard and moustache (Figures 6 and 7). Almost invariably, Dzonokwa is shown open-mouthed, lips protruding trumpet-like, as if in the midst of her characteristic guttural shriek (Figure 8). A shriek almost more bestial than human, the words virtually incomprehensible:

When speaking they pronounce the words in such a way that every syllable of ordinary speech is repeated with initial “h” substituted for the consonantal beginning of the syllable, or with “h” introduced before the initial vowel. Their voice is so loud it makes the roof boards shake (Boas, 1935, p. 145).

### 1.2. *Phytomorphic features: man shading into plant*

While some anthropomorphic figures have animal features grafted onto them, in other cases plant-like elements can practically take over. This is true, for example, of the two wild men garnished with radishes and garlic and “armored” with leaf forms in Figure 9, where they are jousting with each other on rearing steeds. Their lances are knotty saplings, ripped roots and all from the earth, while the figures as a whole are anthropo-phytomorphic.

Their counterpart in the Kwakiutl universe is Bekhu’s, the woodman, small, green as befits his partly vegetal nature, his torso covered with fronds (Figure 10). Phytomorphic features are also evident in the Bekhu’s mask (Figure 11), where the beard consists of foliage, and the headdress of plaited leaves and twigs.

But the Kwakiutl also have another important legendary creature, the Hamatsa, who draws his power directly from the Cannibal spirit. Through an initiation ritual, chosen members of the tribe enter into contact with the spirit of *Baxbaxwalanuksiwe*, “the cannibal at the north edge of the world”. During the ritual, these novices do not wear the animal masks (Figure 12) which are the prerogative of long-standing initiates, but simple ornaments of hemlock branches, symbolizing wildness. At the end of the initiation, the hemlock branches are replaced with cedar bark

ornaments, regarded as sacred. Figure 13 shows a novice belonging to the prestigious Hamatsa or Cannibal Society, with a headdress and skirt of hemlock branches, while in Figure 14, a novice who has been possessed by the spirit wears a headdress, bracelets and belt of hemlock branches. During the initiation, the forces of the wilderness enter the novice, as the future Hamatsa leave the village and live in the forest for three or four months, becoming cannibal-like and uttering fearsome cries whenever they approach a settlement.

### 1.3. *Where the Wild Man lives: village shading into forest*

The medieval Wild Man lives away from the towns, but not in inaccessible places. His home is in the woods and forests, in places bordering on the villages, bordering on civilization, where he takes refuge in a cave or the trunk of a hollow tree. Thus, a sixteenth century illustration in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris shows a Wild Man standing in the hollow of a tree (Figure 15), while a miniature, also dating to the sixteenth century, shows the Wild Man and his family at the entrance to a cave. The head of the family stands guard with his club, while the woman nurses their child (Figure 16). In both cases, these are not merely dwellings, but magical doors onto another world, the netherworld of ancestors, who in oral cultures belong to the sphere of origins, and hence of the sacred. Caves, caverns and hollows can be interpreted as openings leading into – and out of – the netherworld. Like all figures living on the thresholds and margins, the Wild Man was considered capable of migrating between the underworld and the sublunary world, of shuttling between one sphere of reality and another. The notion was one of *longue durée*: still in the sixteenth century Bruegel the Elder, in his drawing of the temptations of St. Anthony, shows the anchorite resisting the allures of anthropo-zoomorphic demons issuing from a hollow tree and the cavities of a monstrous human head (Figure 17), while a 1701 print shows us Harlequin of the Commedia dell'Arte, morphed from the Hellekin of the infernal *Wilde Jagd* or Wild Horde, as the guardian of a hollow elm (Figure 18).

The wild figures of North America also live away from

human habitation. The Dzonokwa, the wild women of the woods, choose dwellings far from the settlements:

The *Dzō'noqlwa* are a people who dwell inland or live on mountains. Their houses are far in the woods. One of them lives in a deep lake on top of a mountain. A trail leads back from the human village to a pound near which their houses stand (Boas, 1935, p. 144).

Likewise, the woodman Bekhu's never approaches humans unless they venture into his territory. He himself never leaves his forest home except on the rare occasions when he goes to the seashore. To enter into contact with the great Cannibal Spirit, the Kwakiutl Hamatsa devotee must enter the forest for a period in which he is possessed by the spirit of *Baxbaxwalanuksiwe*, who shows himself only in such places, as he has chosen to dwell at the northern edge of the world. And according to the myth, Nuhlmahl, the Fool Dancer with anthropo-zoomorphic features (Figure 19) who assists the Hamatsa during the winter ceremonies, takes his powers from mysterious beings called A'lasimk who live on an island floating on a lake on the depth of the forest.

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1.4. *Shuttling between the two worlds, journeying to and from the netherworld: on the borders between the living and the dead*

Returning to medieval mythology, we find that the ability to shuttle between two worlds suggested by the Wild Man's dwelling places is associated with lameness, limping and an uneven gait. On the threshold of modernity, the *Commedia dell'Arte* gives us a Harlequin/Hellekin astride a peg-legged devil (Figure 20) and a Harlequin perched on stilts while paying court to a young woman (Figure 21). The power to move between two worlds, moreover, involves contact and contamination with the denizens of the underworld – the ancestral dead, as primordial forces of nature. These are forces imbued with the power of all of the elements – vegetal, anthropomorphic and animal – and permeate the figures they touch.

Among the Kwakiutl, traveling to the underworld is a prerogative of another figure who walks with a swaying gait that puts her at risk of falling, as she is ritually depicted as half asleep. This is Dzonoqwa, the wild woman of the forest who, like the Wild Man, can move between two worlds:



“The *Dzō’noq!wa* can travel underground” (Boas, 1935, p. 145).

Ritual and mythical lameness in the West is discussed by Carlo Ginzburg in *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* (Ginzburg, 1990) where, with particular reference to Greek and Roman mythology and European and Asian popular culture, he demonstrates that the lame hero or the wearer of a single shoe or sandal is an archetype expressing the mediation between the world of human beings and that of the spirits and gods: in many traditional cultures, what Ginzburg calls “asymmetrical deambulation” is interpreted as denoting an ability to move in the world of the dead.

In Greek mythology, lameness is attributed to many divine or heroic figures: Hephaestus, Oedipus, Jason, to name but a few. Appearing at the sacrifice offered by Pelias, king of Iolcus, Jason arrived wearing a single sandal, having lost the other while crossing a river: this was interpreted by the onlookers as ominous. In the ancient world, in fact, the *monosandalos*, the “man with one shoe”, was believed to come from another world, probably the underworld, and had left the other shoe there as a token and pledge that he still had one foot in the world of the dead (Kerényi, 1959, p. 248).

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Proximity with the world of the dead needed no proof in the case of another representative of wildness among the Kwakiutl: Bekhu’s, the woodman. His otherness, and his belonging to another world was abundantly clear from his ice-cold body and the fact that anyone (hunters or warriors, by preference) who accepted the salmon he offered could never leave the forest and return home. Boas describes him in the following terms:

The woodman is a person who takes away drowned people. His body is cold as ice. Whoever accepts the food offered by him cannot go back [...] The woodman appears as chief of a small group of myth people (Boas, 1935, p. 146).

#### 1.5. *Mythic hunger and cannibalism: the borders between the human and the beastly*

Hunger is characteristic of the European wild man, and indeed, Bertrand Hell in *Le sang noir. Chasse e mythe du Sauvage en Europe* calls it his most notable feature. A peerless hunter, the lord of the forest (Figure 22) feasts on raw meat, though

in some cases is content to raid the larder, devouring whatever he can lay his hands on with feral avidity (Figure 23).

Hunger is also the mark of the Kwakiutl novice initiated into the Cannibal Society, who when possessed by the Cannibal Spirit (Figure 24) is overcome by a voracious appetite for human flesh, which alone can sate his hunger. It is precisely this behavior, which puts him at the level of the wild beasts, that prevents him from returning to the community. Only after a ritual which makes him once again able to follow the rules will he return to his group, enriched by the powers he has gained.

But there is also another character, the Wild Woman of the forest, who as a number of legends tell us (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 56-81), would like to feed on human flesh, and specifically that of the children she kidnaps, but is never actually able to do so.

#### 1.6. *The Wild Man's fecundity*

During the Middle Ages, the Wild Man is often depicted while assaulting or abducting young women. His proximity to the power of the forest and the netherworld gives him an enormous sexual energy, deriving from his contact with the ancestral spirits, or in other words with all the original forces of nature. The Wild Man is himself one of the personifications of this energy and is thus propitious for lovers and fleshy pursuits, as witnessed by a stained glass roundel dating to around 1470-1480, where the arms of Assmannshausen (Germany) are surrounded by two pairs of lovers and two wild men (Figure 25). An engraving by Albrecht Dürer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York depicts a very savage looking wild man about to ravish a woman (Figure 26). The Wild Man, in any case, acts instinctively, irrationally, with no control whatsoever over his sexual energy. In another engraving by Dürer, we see a young woman in bridal dress next to a wild man who is whispering seductively in her ear. With his staff, the wild man is supporting a winged helmet and an escutcheon displaying a human skull (Figure 27). Here again, there is a link between the Wild Man and fecundity, as is clear from the young woman's role as a future bride.

Well versed in the myths embedded in medieval culture, Dürer thus alludes to their conception of death. The dead,

the forerunners, are the origins of humanity, blending with the elements of nature and, at certain periods of the year – at Carnival time, for example – they are personified by the masked figures. The masks, then, are effective signs of underworldly beings suffused with generative power. This is why fertility figures are those, like the Wild Man, that bring together anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and, at times, vegetal features.

Their mythical parallel among the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, the wild woman Dzonokwa, has the power to bring the dead back to life or to grant beauty and vigor. In a myth of the Tenaktak group, the wild woman draws magic water from a basin and throws it on the hero of the tale, turning him into a handsome young man, who then uses the water given to him by Dzonokwa to revive his parents (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 73).

Dzonokwa's enormous concealed wealth is another symbol of fecundity and prosperity, as whoever is able to seize it rises to important social roles and can consider themselves as the wild woman's descendants. In an Awaitlala myth, heaps of accumulated riches were found in Dzonokwa's lair: meat, bear and wild goat skins, dried berries and all the salmon that had been stolen from the hero. The father of the young man who found all this loot took Dzonokwa as his ceremonial name and invited "all the tribes" to a great banquet, where he distributed skins and furs. Returning home, he set up four statues of Dzonokwa to commemorate his deeds (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 71).

Killing the wild woman of the forest gave the hero the opportunity to gain her great wealth and distribute it during specific ceremonies, while his clan thus gained respect and social status. But in addition to bringing riches and prestige, Dzonokwa is also a channel whereby pubescent girls acquire power, and physical strength in particular. A Tsawatenok myth, for example, deals with a rite of passage for the village girls. In the myth, a princess who had recently reached puberty met "Dzonokwa of the forest" in the woods, who invited her to her home. The princess promised to make the giantess just as beautiful as herself, and in exchange received the ogress' magical garments, which were in fact her puberty clothes. The princess took Dzonokwa to the village where, pretending to put her in

the care of a barber, she called a warrior to kill her with a hammer and a stone chisel. When the villagers arrived at the ogress' house, they found such riches as skins, furs, dried meat and grease. Dzonokwa's provisions were distributed, and the clan responsible for this bounty acquired first rank. Since then, pubescent girls wear dresses made of woven goat's hair in imitation of Dzonokwa's ritual clothes (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 75).

### 1.7. *The Wild Man as mythical ancestor*

Many of the coats-of-arms of Europe's aristocratic families feature Wild Men as heraldic supporters. Medieval nobility claimed descent from legendary figures, mythical progenitors with much of the savage beast about them. In contact with the power of the forest and the netherworld, emblem of fertility, fecundity and prosperity, who better than the Wild Man to assist at the founding of a major dynasty? The medieval noble, moreover, is a warrior, and one who takes pride in his barbaric origins. Courage, strength and skill at war are all essential in fulfilling the functions of the ruling class. As the *bellatores* sought out ways of representing their origins, the choice fell to decidedly zoomorphic figures, like the bear, or to anthropo-zoomorphic creatures who best subsume these values and can thus transfer them to the noble house. That the Wild Man is a warrior is often expressed by the iconography that shows him in combat, bearing knightly arms. A carving on the choir stalls of Winchester Cathedral depicts a wild man armed with sword and buckler, disgorging elaborate foliage. Ferocious in expression and stance, the figure is consumed with warlike fury (Figure 28). At times, the Wild Man is pictured on horseback brandishing a club, or on foot, carrying a shield (Figures 29 and 30). In any case, the Wild Man is a worthy foe, as in the early fourteenth century manuscript illustration of a skirmish pitting Alexander the Great and his soldiers against Wild Men armed with clubs and stones (Figure 31).

With such characteristics, the Wild Man is thus well-suited to being a mythical ancestor: hence his appearance in the arms of noble families and towns. In a fifteenth century engraving by Martin Schongauer, made as a heraldic study, the Wild Man is shown holding a knotty club in one hand and an emblazoned shield in the other (Figure 32). An ar-

morial tapestry from the Netherlands dating from around 1470 shows a wild man and a wild woman holding a large escutcheon topped by a helmet with winged crest (Figure 33). The arms of the Swiss county of Grafschaft Kyburg also show a wild couple supporting a heraldic shield (Figure 34).

That the Wild Man does not belong only to the culture of *pauperes* and *aratores*, but is a sign of a noble family's mythical origins is shown by the French house of Lusignan's emblematic choice of a woman-serpent as the foundress of their line. Here we have an anthropo-zoomorphic creature as the house's foundational myth: Mélusine or Melusina.

Around 1390, the duke Jean de Berry, heir to the Lusignan's castle, asked the writer Jean d'Arras to compose a romance celebrating the "supernatural" origins of his ancestral line. The work appeared in 1392 under the title *Le Roman de Mélusine*.

The story tells of Raimondin, who inadvertently kills his uncle during a hunt in the forest of Colombiers. Distraught, he wanders into a wood where he meets three women at a fountain. One of them, whose name is Melusina, tell him she knows of the accident and can help him if he marries her, on condition, however, that he never try to see her on Saturday. Raimondin is enamored of the beautiful young woman and is only too happy to accept. The marriage proves to be happy and productive: Melusina bears Raimondin many children and the couple becomes very prosperous. Much land is cleared for farming, and new castles are built (Figure 35). Raimondin's brother, however, raises doubts about the young woman's mysterious absences, and the husband, consumed with jealousy, breaks his promise (Figure 36) and finds Melusina bathing in the shape of a serpent. Her secret discovered, the young woman disappears forever. Every night, however, she returns furtively to tuck her little children in bed, and the offspring of her marriage to Raimondin will bring great honor to the line she founded.

*Le Roman de Mélusine*, as Le Goff argues in "Melusina: Mother and Tiller", published in the collection "Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages", codifies a set of popular beliefs about the union of fairies and humans that began to enter literary culture in the twelfth century.

In his *De nugis curialium* written between 1181 and 1193, Walter Map, a cleric living at the English royal court, tells us of the marriage of a young man, “Large-toothed Henno” (which is also the title of the story) and a strange creature encountered, weeping, in a forest near the beaches of Normandy. The beautiful stranger, who is dressed in royal garb, tells Henno that she has survived the wreck of the ship that was carrying the king of France, her betrothed. Henno falls in love with the girl, marries her, and gives her many handsome children. But Henno’s mother notices that her daughter-in-law avoids the beginning and end of mass and does not let holy water be sprinkled on her. She thus decides to spy on the young woman through a hole cut in her bedroom wall and surprises her while bathing in the form of a dragon, after which she resumes her human form. Henno, informed by his mother, decides to sprinkle holy water on his wife, but she jumps away and disappears into thin air with a terrible scream. In Walter Map’s time, many offspring of Henno and his dragon-wife were said to be still alive.

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The story of large-toothed Henno has been likened to that of the “Lady of Esperver Castle” as told by Gervase of Tilbury, also an old protégé of Henry II of England, in the *Otia Imperialia* (III, 57) written between 1209 and 1214, when Gervase was the Emperor Otto’s marshal for the kingdom of Arles: the kingdom where Esperver Castle is located. The lady of Esperver also does not take part in the sacrament of the host and comes late to mass, and when her husband and his servants forcibly keep her in the church one day, she takes flight and disappears at the moment the host was held up.

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As Le Goff notes, this story shows a clear similarity with that of large-toothed Henno and his wife, and even more with another story recounted by Gervase of Tilbury in the *Otia Imperialia* (I, 15), viz., that of “Raymond of Château-Rousset”. This is the tale of the lord of the castle of Rousset, who near the river Arc encounters a beautiful woman who agrees to marry him provided that he will never attempt to see her naked, because if he does he will lose whatever material prosperity she has brought him. The couple enjoy complete happiness, with wealth, power, health and many fine children. But here again, Raymond’s curiosity proves

to be his undoing: when he pulls back the curtain behind which his wife is bathing, she turns into a serpent and disappears into the bathwater. She returns invisibly every night to see her children, heard only by the governess. The story is not dated and no name is given to the woman-serpent, but Gervase says that her descendants were still living in his time.

As can be seen from these legends, the function of the women-dragons or women-serpents is to bring fecundity and prosperity, and it is precisely because of these powers arising from her hybrid roots in the animal world that Melusina is claimed as the mythical ancestress of a noble French house.

France has also given us the romance of Valentin (or Valentine) and Orson, twin sons of Bellissante, sister of the king of France and wife of the Emperor of Constantinople. Unjustly accused of adultery by her husband, the noblewoman is forced to flee. As she nears her brother's castle, she gives birth to twin sons in the forest. The two boys were to have very different destinies. Orson is stolen by a she-bear (Figure 37), and while his mother is trying to save him, Valentine is found by King Pepin of France who, unaware that he is his nephew, takes him to court. The bear raises Orson lovingly together with her cubs (Figure 38), and he grows as strong and vigorous as his adopted mother. And as an adult, he is almost as hairy, and is armed with a club at all times: a true Wild Man, legendarily fierce and with such a reputation for being unbeatable that Valentine decides to challenge him. The battle between the two men, who still do not know they are brothers, ends with Valentine capturing Orson (Figure 39) and taking him to court. Once again, the popular tradition mentions the presence of a wild man in a great aristocratic family, in this case that of Pepin, king of France and the father of no less a personage than the emperor Charlemagne.

In Canada, totem poles at the burial ground of Alert Bay, British Columbia, represent the ancestry of particular families and clans. One of the figures so depicted is Dzonokwa, the Kwakiutl Indians' wild woman of the forest. In one pole, she is portrayed as the bringer of wealth, surmounted by the Thunder Bird (Figure 40). According to an Awaitlala myth, the heroes who were able to steal or receive

Dzonokwa's enormous riches took the wild woman as their mythical ancestress (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 71).

## 2. *The Fool*

The Fool belongs to the same mythical lineage as the Wild Man, sharing some of the latter's attributes and functions. Powers embodied in the medieval Wild Man are found among the Fools that inhabit the mythical and ritual universe of the native North Americans, where Wild Men and fools often overlap and blend, just as they do in medieval European culture.

### 2.1. *The marotte and the ritual club*

How close the Fool and the Wild Man are to each other can be seen from several of the attributes appearing in the iconography. A carving at the church of St. Jean in Caen, Normandy, for example, shows a buffoon holding the Wild Man's typical knotty club (Figure 41). In parallel, a carving on the façade of the sixteenth century Handwerkerhaus in Thiers shows a Wild Man, his body covered in thick hair, holding a *marotte*, the jester's typical bauble or scepter ornamented at the end with a carved fool's head (Figure 42). Similarly, one of the characteristics of the Amerindian Fools is their ceremonial staff, often decorated with animal parts such as hooves or spurs, as we see in the depiction of a ceremonial chief of the Assiniboine Clown Society (Figure 43). Among the Mandans, one of the three supernatural beings who in the tribe's origin myth participate in creation is the "Foolish One" (Figure 44), who carries a staff ending in a ball of buffalo hair which, according to the anthropologist Bowers, was symbolic of a human head (Bowers, 1950).

### 2.2. *Animal and plant attributes: fertility*

In medieval portrayals, the Fool, like the Wild Man, has animal traits. In this case, these traits are reflected in the clothing: a cloak with a hood or cap terminating in a cock's comb (or an actual cock's head in many cases) and, at the sides of the cap, a pair of ass's ears (Figures 45 and 46). There is no lack of medieval buffoons with plant elements, as we see in the Abbey of Saint-Wandrille in Notre-Dame de Fontenelle, where a sixteenth century decoration shows the Fool wearing a cape and cap made of leaves, or at the Cathedral of St. Pierre and St. Paul in Troyes, where fifteenth century Fools



are wrapped in leafy branches (Figures 47 and 48). Fools and Wild Men thus stem from the same mythical bloodline, embody all the elements of nature, and have characteristics that set them apart from, and at times above, the merely human. For both, straddling the border between animal and human is a sign of fertility and fecundity. During the great Feast of Fools in Dijon, a fifteenth century wooden statue was carried through the streets which represented Mother Fools in the act of hatching or giving birth to a brood of little Fools, all wearing capes and caps with ass's ears (Figures 49 and 50). Depictions of the Fool's nest (Figure 51), while also emphasizing the sexual indeterminacy of these figures, also liken them to a chicken. An engraving by Peter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525-1569), who often gives versions of mythical elements from medieval folklore, shows a Fool trying to hatch an enormous empty egg, with a small fool's head (possibly a marotte) barely visible through the hole in the egg (Figure 52).

The iconography is rich in representations of Fools attempting to seduce young women. A sixteenth century print in *The Illustrated Bartsch* shows an old woman trying to put a stop to such an attempt, beating the Fool with a pitchfork and siccing a dog on him. The scene takes place beneath a tree bearing four huge roses, also a symbol of erotic and vital energy (Figure 53). The Fool's role as a fertility figure is particularly clear in an emblematic woodcut, also from the *The Illustrated Bartsch*, in which a Fool wearing the typical hat with ass's ears spouts water into the Fountain of Youth through his sexual organ in the form of a cock's head (Figure 54).

The cock, moreover, stands at the top of Yggdrasil, the great ash tree of the ancient Northern European traditions that joins all aspects of Nordic life: the underworld, the world of men, and the world of the gods. The cock's function, like that of the eagle and the hawk, is precisely that of communicating with the heavens. And by announcing the dawn, the cock is closely connected with the sun, the star on which life and the growth of crops on the earth depends (Figure 55).

But it is in the Okipa ceremony, in which the Mandan of the Great Plains represented the creation of the world, that the Fool's connection with fertility is acted out in a

precise ritual. One of the participants in the ceremony is a mythical being called, according to Bowers, the “Foolish One” and who George Catlin called the “Evil Spirit”. Resembling the Wild Man in strength, size, and hairiness, this character mates with the buffalo (another mythical creature figuring largely in the rite) and has highly developed and prominently displayed sexual attributes. And indeed, after castrating him, the women of the village wrap the Fool’s sexual organ in branches and carry it in procession, as a symbol of the fecundity he has bestowed on the community. The stages of the ceremony were painted by George Catlin (Figures 56 and 57) in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Moore, 1997),

Another feature of the Fool shared by both of the cultural universes we consider here is his enormous nose. Though this characteristic is not easy to decode, a comparison will enable us to shed light on a few points. The Fool of medieval Europe is sometimes represented with a hooked nose like a bird’s beak, evoking his avian affinities (Figure 58). But it is in a ceremony held in Germany, the Dance of Fools or the Dance of the Noses at Gimpelsbrunn, illustrated for us in a sixteenth century woodcut reproduced in *The illustrated Bartsch*, that we have the clearest picture of the nose’s symbolic, i.e., phallic, role. In the print, dancers cavort around poles – similar to maypoles – topped with a cap with ass’s ears, a flower wreath, a cock and a large nose (Figure 59). Across the ocean, the large nose is the most distinctive feature of the Fool Dancer in the Kwakiutl Indians’ winter ceremonies (Figure 60). Crying loudly, the Nuhlmahl flings the mucus from his dripping nose on everyone participating in the rite. This may be linked to fertility, if we consider that several Amerindian legends mention children born from the mucus of the mother’s nose, crying as she mourned the loss of her son (Thompson, 1929, p. 352). Among the Nootka, Boas records a myth in which several children are abducted by the Wild Woman of the forest. Among them were two children of the chief, whose wife, upon hearing the news, blew her nose and threw the mucus on the ground. Immediately, she saw a small boy stretched out on the floor. The boy born from the mucus became a strong and courageous young man who later kills the kidnapper and returns to the sky (Boas, 1916, p. 904).

### 2.3. *The divine gifts of madness: The art of divination and healing*

The Fool, like the Wild Man, is marked by otherness. The Wild Man, as we saw, lives in another world, and does not follow the rules dictated by reason and common sense. He is thus irrational, mad. But the Fool knows that which reason cannot know. He has the “divine gifts of madness”. According to Plato, “the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods” (Phaedrus, 244A), and again, “madness, which comes from god, is superior to sanity, which is of human origin” (Phaedrus, 244D).

The Fool knows the art of divination, as can be seen from an extensive medieval iconography. In an illuminated manuscript psalter from the fifteenth century, the initial D (Dixit) contains King David conversing with his Fool (Figure 61). Another psalter from the thirteenth century shows an historiated letter ‘O’ representing a man holding a crystal ball and the *marotte*, the jester’s typical staff carved with the fool’s head (Figure 62). Another historiated initial D from a psalter also shows King David conversing with his Fool, but in this case the latter is carrying a Wild Man’s knotty club and wears only a short cloak that leaves his genitals bare: yet another confirmation of the Fool’s closeness to the Wild Man (Figure 63).

Often, the medieval iconography or the culture that permeates what historians have called “the Long Middle Ages” depicts Fools talking to animals, chiefly birds, who seem to have come with the express purpose of speaking with them. A 1507 woodcut by Albrecht Dürer shows a Fool in a cap with ass’s ears and cock’s comb riding a crayfish while talking to a bird flying towards him (Figure 64). Also emblematic is the Fool in the Tarot deck shown in *The Illustrated Bartsch: Early Italian Masters, Vol. 24 Part 4*. The letters MA appear at the upper left hand side of the playing card, while letters TO are at the upper left, spelling MATO, i.e., Matto, the Fool. Playing the bagpipes and looking at a crow perched on his shoulder, the Fool wears a short tunic and a cap covered with foliage and bells (Figure 65). Bells are also a feature of medieval wild man costumes, as if to recall the unearthly hubbub attending the arrival of beings from another world, the underworld, the world of

the ancestral spirits – anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and plant-like – that burst onto the scene bringing vital energy and fertility. The masks and costumes of Fools and Savages were not just a representation of these mythical beings: they were their “presentification”, to use Vernant’s happy coinage (Vernant, 2001), making them present in all their original force. This gives an idea of the power of these figures and their role in medieval man’s imagination. In a *Schembartbuch*, a manuscript with drawings of the costumes and floats at the Nuremberg *Schembart* Carnivals held between 1449 and 1530, we find a Wild Man costumed in fir boughs, with mirrors all over his body and bells hanging from his belt (Figure 66).

In ancient Rome, the ability to communicate with birds was the prerogative of certain priests, the *Augurs*, members of a religious college whose task was to interpret the signs sent by the gods, and Jupiter in particular: divination consisted of observing the flight of birds (*auspicia*), regarded as the main means of discovering the will of the gods (Figure 67). Similarly, Odin (*Wotan* in Old German), the chief god of Germanic mythology, has two ravens, Huginn (“Thought”) and Muninn (“Memory”), who fly through the world and bring him news of what has taken place every morning. Odin’s name appears to derive from the Old Norse *óðr* (“inspired mental activity”, “intelligence”) and thus means the “inspired one”, “he who knows” or the “intoxicated one”. Through the Indoeuropean root *\*-wat*, the word has cognates in the Latin *vates* and the Old Irish *fàith*, both meaning “seer” (Rowe, 2005). Birds are thus beings in contact with the divine, and those who are able to understand them are often divinities themselves, or figures like the Fool who are endowed with special powers.

The power to heal also seems to be another of the gifts bestowed on those who are possessed by divine madness. An early 1511 woodcut by Albrecht Dürer shows a Fool wearing the typical cap with ass’s ears and a sumptuous furred robe standing by the death bed of a desperately ill man, rather theatrically raising a flask. The dying man is also attended by a man with long hair and beard, characteristic features of the Wild Man (Figure 68).

In the mythical universe of the Pacific Northwest tribes, Dzonokwa, the wild woman of the forest can not only re-

vive the dead, but is also able to transmit great strength to the weak. A widespread myth among both the Tenaktak and the Awaitlala maintains that a bath in the dead Dzonokwa's skull, used as a basin, confers exceptional vigor (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 73).

### 3. *The Bear*

#### 3.1. *Man's relative*

Medieval Europe saw the bear as man's nearest relation: while the Wild Man and the Fool are human beings with distinctly animal traits, the bear is the animal that has been most markedly anthropomorphized.

The bear's ability to stand erect on its hind legs, its way of eating with its front paws, and of feeding on honey, fruit and roots as well as meat, and thus being omnivorous, make it human-like in its postures and habits. Bears and men share common activities: they play, fight and live together in the forest, and even, as we will see, engage in love affairs. A relief on the façade of the Cathedral of St. Étienne in Sens depicts a man wrestling a standing bear (Figure 69), while a boxwood coffret decorated with scenes of wild folk dating to around 1460-70 circa shows a standing bear, apparently being fought over by a wild man and a wild woman (Figure 70). The bear is often portrayed while eating like a human: on the armrest of a fifteenth century choir stall in the church of St. Mariä Geburt in Kempen (Rhineland), a bear eats honey out of a woven straw beehive, licking it off his paw (Figure 71).

The bear's resemblance to man also extends to its sexual habits. Medieval bestiaries note that bears do not mate like other quadruped, but lie down and embrace each other, exchanging looks like men and women. Here is what an anonymous Southern English author writing in Latin at the beginning of the thirteen century has to say:

Bears do not mate like other animals, but do so looking at each other, embracing and kissing like men and women. Their pleasure lasts longer than any other species, and is accompanied by caresses and games like those of two lovers (Pastoureau, 2008, p. 79).

A late fourteenth century miniature (Figure 72) from the *Livre de la Chasse* by Gaston Phébus, Avignon, shows

a pair of bears coupling *more hominum* (Pastoreau, 2008). The oldest reference to the bear's sexual practices is in Pliny's *Natural History*, which to the medieval way of thinking was an indisputable authority.

Bears couple in the beginning of winter, and not after the fashion of other quadrupeds; for both animals lie down and embrace each other. The female then retires by herself to a separate den, and there brings forth on the thirtieth day, mostly five young ones (Pastoreau, 2008, p. 79).

This belief was refuted in the zoological treatises of the seventeenth centuries. But even late in the century, the celebrated naturalist Buffon stopped short of a complete denial, limiting himself to saying that "it is much more likely that they [bears] copulate like other quadrupeds" (Pastoreau, 2008, p. 78).

But is the bear a person? The Amerindians often think so. In the language of the Lakota shamans, for example, the bear is called *Hunompa*, a term which generally applies to humans and literally means "two-legged being", or "biped" (Comba, 1999, p. 227). In medieval Europe, the idea that the bear can be accorded human status, though far from Catholic orthodoxy, was advanced by a theologian: the Bishop of Paris, no less. In *De universo creaturarum* written around 1240, the subtle intellectual William of Auvergne, starting from the problem of determining what is and what is not an animal, concludes that since the bear can distinguish good from evil, the faculty that sets men apart from the beasts, he is no common animal. Indeed, the Bear has feelings, is affected by original sin, and will participate in the resurrection of the body: ergo, he is a person (cited in Pastoreau, 2008, p. 91).

### 3.2. *Fertility: Couplings between women and bears*

Medieval culture also warns of the dangerous aspects of bears' sexuality: their ardent temperament and the fact that these animals are obsessed by amorous passion and are unable to curb their desires leads them to attack and abduct women. Untrammelled or ill-controlled sexual energy is also found in the Fool and the Wild Man, another facet of their fertility.

Numerous medieval legends deal with love or intercourse between bears and maidens. These tales originate

in more ancient beliefs. The Celtic and Germanic mythologies have clear references to bears raping young women, while Greek mythology, though less explicit, tells us of Paris who, without being bear-like himself, was abandoned in a wood as an infant and was suckled by a she-bear. And it was the bear's milk that gave him the ursine characteristics that led him to abduct the most beautiful woman in the world. A taste for abduction, in fact, was believed to be one of the bear's peculiarities (Pastoureau, 2008, p. 91). In the oldest versions of the Tristan legend, the hero knows nothing of who his father might be, but only that he has a maternal uncle, King Mark of Cornwall. But a text of uncertain date assigns his paternity to a giant called, tellingly, Urgan the Hairy (Pastoureau, 2008, p. 87). Only from 1225/30 will the first versions of the *Tristan en prose* will say that Tristan is the "son of Meliadus, king of Lyonesse" (Pastoureau, 2006, pp. 192 ff and 227-30). The beloved medieval hero would thus have been born from the union of a woman and a man with ursine traits, possibly an actual bear. And indeed, William of Auvergne addresses the question of the union between a human and an animal in *De universo creaturarum*, where he acknowledges that the sperm of a bear, being similar to a man's, can generate offspring who should be baptized and brought up like other children. The Bishop of Paris believes that the rape of woman by a bear is not a true crime against nature, given that the male bear is sexually similar to a man. But a man coupling with a she-bear would be another matter entirely, as a she-bear is not at all like a woman (Pastoureau, 2008, p. 91). In medieval tales, in any case, a she-bear never appears as the protagonist of an amorous relationship, but often raises abandoned children to whom she gives exceptional physical vigor.

Among the Amerindian cultures, it is also believed that amorous passions can arise between young girls and bears, but generally speaking a girl who has a relationship with a bear, or even a vision of a bear, will end by being transformed into a bear herself and run wild. The Crow, the Blackfeet and the Assiniboin all have versions of a tale about a young woman who rejects all suitors and goes every day into the forest to meet her secret lover: a bear. The tribesmen decide to kill the rival. But from the moment they do so, the girl is no longer the same. A short time later, while

playing with her little sister, the young woman begins to mimic a bear and then turns into a real bear who attacks and kills many people in the camp. The little sister and the six brothers escape up a tree, and are pursued by the bear, which they manage to kill. They then ascend to the skies, becoming the seven stars of the Great Bear (Comba, 1999: 224-225). The Amerindians also believed that tanning bear skins was a critical moment for menstruating women, as there was a risk of turning into a bear, perhaps permanently.

### 3.3. *The mythical ancestor*

According to medieval belief, the children born of unions between bears and women were endowed with the bear's strength and courage. The bear thus appears in the coats of arms of numerous royal and noble families, denoting their descent from the animal. This was not just a popular belief: even such erudite scholars as the Scandinavian Saxo Grammaticus writes that the great-grandfather of the Danish king Svend II Estridsen (1047-74) was the son of a bear (Figure 73) who had kidnapped and married a young woman. The prestige that such an origin conferred on the Danish dynasty roused the envy of the Norwegian and Swedish monarchies, though they traced their kinship with the Danish aristocracy.

Ursine characteristics can also result from being raised by a she-bear. And the legend of Valentine and Orson, nephews of the king of France, shows us how a man nursed and raised by a she-bear can become as fierce, strong and unbeatable as a bear. Belissante, sister of the king of France and wife of the Emperor of Constantinople, is traveling to her brother's court when she gives birth in a nearby forest to twin sons: Valentine and Orson. Valentine is found by King Pepin and raised at court, while Orson is lovingly suckled by a she-bear. He grows to be as hairy as a wild animal, attacking and eating the beasts of forest and field, and his amazing strength is legendary throughout the realm. The only one who is able to capture him is his brother Valentine, who takes him to court (Figure 74). In Italy, at the end of the thirteenth century, a legend arose around a family that produced the popes and a number of high prelates: the Orsini. It was said, in fact, that one of this prestigious



family's forebears and a she-bear had had a close relationship: some said that the ancestor in question had mated with the animal, which would have been monstrous; others maintained that he had been suckled by the she-bear, this being a source of rank and power. The latter version was preferred by the Orsini, especially as it also brought them closer to the Kings of Rome. A bear can thus be seen in a miniature from a Parisian book of hours dating to around 1440 showing the emblem of the Giovenale Orsini family (Figure 75).

Like the medieval aristocracy, the clans of the Pacific Northwest prized qualities in the bear that led them to regard him as a mythical ancestor. Totem poles and memorial poles often depict bears among the family's ancestral creatures. The totem poles exhibited at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa stand in front of the house, indicating its owner's origin. The pole nearest the house depicts a bear towards the top and, apparently, bears in the lower section of the carving (Figure 76). The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver displays a monument sculpture that was probably a nineteenth century house post representing the owner's totem animal: the bear, which in this case holds a head which may represent a human ancestor who enjoyed the animal's protection (Figure 77).

Many representations show shamans and chiefs who were descended from bears. One such image now in the collection of the Smithsonian in Washington shows the body of the Tlingit head chief, Shakes, lying in state wearing ceremonial attire decorated with the bear, the totem animal from which he traced his descent. A bear mask is at his right and a stuffed bear is at his left (Figure 78). Another image in the same collection depicts an enactment of a legend tracing the chief's descent from the bear (Figure 79)

### 3.4. *Healing powers*

The bear's healing powers are well exemplified in the legend of Saint Richardis's bear. In the past, the lame would flock on Candlemas to the abbey of Andlau founded by Richardis, the sainted wife of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Fat, successor to Charlemagne. As oral tradition would have it, the abbey's site was indicated by a she-bear

that the saint encountered in a wood, grieving because she had lost her cub. Richardis found the cub, and the bear scratched a hole in the ground to mark where the abbey should be built. In later years, this hole was where the pilgrims would place their feet after the procession, hoping for a rapid cure (Figure 80). And the fact that the bear sleeps through the winter and wakes in the spring, when nature is reborn, is also a source of healing powers, as he is thus a creature straddling the confines between the worlds of the living and the dead. Even the bear's cubs seem moribund at birth, and the mother warms and restores them to life by licking them at length (Figure 81). The bear's tongue, as the means of the cubs' resurrection, was often regarded as a source of life and organ of understanding.

Among the native North Americans, the bear's habit of digging for roots made it an expert in the medicinal properties of plants. The most prestigious Lakota healers belonged to the Bear Society. In a precise ritual, gravely injured men were treated by medicine men wearing bear skins and imitating the animal's movements to invoke all of its power.

In a famous painting, George Catlin portrayed the medicine man White Buffalo as he attempts to revive one of the chiefs of the Blackfoot who had been mortally wounded at Fort Union. The spectators, Catlin among them, formed a ring around ten meters in diameter around the dying man, and complete silence fell at the medicine man's arrival. As Catlin tells us:

... nothing was to be heard, save the light and casual tinkling of the rattles on his dress, which was scarcely perceptible to the ear, as he cautiously and slowly moved through the avenue left for him...he approached the ring with his body in a crouching position, with a slow and tilting step – his body and head were entirely covered with the skin of a yellow bear, the head of which (his own head being inside of it) served as a mask; the huge claws of which also, were dangling on his wrists and ancles [sic]; in one hand he shook a frightful rattle, and in the other brandished his medicine-spear or magic wand (Moore, 1997), (Figure 82).

### 3.5. *The invincible warrior*

A man who acquired the bear's courage, aggressiveness and ferocity would become an invincible warrior. The Assini-

boins also had a Bear Society whose members, in addition to being healers, were particularly fearless in battle. To partake of the bear's power, these fighters tied their hair into two small clumps to look like bear's ears and painted bears on their war shields.

Other Plains Indian warriors also used shields painted with bear decorations or wore bear claw necklaces. One of the most famous war shields with motifs referring to the bear's power comes from the US War Department Museum Collection and is now housed at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington. How this magnificent object was collected is not documented, nor can it be attributed with any certainty to a specific tribe. A bear paw appears at the center of the shield, with a series of smaller bear paws to the side (Figure 83). An extensive collection of shields with bear motifs is presented in Riku Hämäläinen, *Bear Shields of Plains Indians: Motifs and Meanings* (Hämäläinen, 2011).

In the European mythical tradition, the bear confers exceptional courage and strength. As in the case of the images on the Torslunda plates (Figure 84), the bear is linked to the Germanic warriors' tradition of wearing animal costumes or masks that were intended to bring about a ritual transformation into animals during ecstatic war ceremonies. Thus, the berserkers, from *berserkr* or "bear-shirt", i.e., a bearskin costume, became truly bear-like in war (Figure 85). The twelfth century Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson described how the warriors fighting alongside Odin:

...rushed forwards without armour, were as mad as dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or wild bulls, and killed people [enemies] at a blow, but neither fire nor iron told upon themselves. These were called Berserker (*Ynglinga Saga*, 6).

The terrifying effect of such warriors among the Germanic peoples had been described earlier by Tacitus:

As for the Harii, not only are they superior in strength to the other peoples I have just mentioned, but they minister to their savage instincts by trickery and clever timing. They black their shields and dye their bodies, and choose pitch dark nights for their battles. The shadowy, awe-inspiring appearance of such a ghoulish army inspires mortal panic;

for no enemy can endure a sight so strange and hellish  
(*Germania*, 43).

#### 4. *The Wild Man's lineage in medieval myth*

Wild Men, Fools and Bears are all beings with semidivine status, as they have powers, characteristics or attributes that bespeak their profound participation in the primordial forces of nature. With the close connections between them, all three figures belong to the same mythical stock, that of the Wild Man.

The Wild Man lives away from settled areas, a denizen of the forests, knowledgeable in the secrets of animals and plants, subsuming and himself subsumed by the force and the power of nature. Mighty in stature, and often covered with a thick pelt, as well as by a long beard and unkempt hair, he is akin to the wild beasts who share his daily haunts. He may also have plant-like features, ensuring that no part of the nature is foreign to him. He not only is a creature who lives on the edges and in the borderlands, but is himself on the border between man and nature. It is precisely this liminality that brings him into contact with the netherworld, the world of the ancestral dead who belong to the sphere of origins, and hence of the sacred. The Wild Man also prefers dwellings on the edges, such as hollow trees or caves, "magical doors" that offer a physical passageway between the two worlds. In the rituals where the Wild Man is represented and presentified, the masks and costumes have animal, human and even plant-like features, indicating that he embodies nature's primordial and fecundifying forces.

According to a well-established literature, the mythical lineage through which the Wild Man has come down to us from the Middle Ages can be traced in a series of *mirabilia*, or tales of marvels, and iconographic documents.

##### 4.1. *The army of the dead*

At the end of the twelfth century, in his *De nugis curialium* or "Courtiers' Trifles", Walter Map, a Welsh cleric at the Plantagenet court of Henry II, wrote of a number of popular tales dealing with the repeated apparitions of spectral horsemen, some of whom were known to have died. The protagonists of these tales of marvels are a true army of returned spirits, *revenant*, referred to in the text as *Her-*

*lethingi familia* or Herlethingus's household, and who are reminiscent of similar beliefs about furious hordes of hunter-warriors led by mythical Germanic or Celtic commanders such as Wotan/Odin or King Arthur. These apparitions take place at night, or at times at noon (because, as Roger Caillouis notes, in the rural world work stops when the sun is at its zenith [Caillouis, 1988]), almost always in border areas, near a crossroads, a forest or a river.

In one of his tales, Walter Map tells the story of Herla, king of the ancient Britons, which Jean-Claude Schmitt believes may be at the root of the myth of Hellequin's Hunt. King Herla concludes a pact with the king of the dwarves (the "Pygmies", as Walter Map writes), or in other words, the dead. The dwarf king invites himself to Herla's wedding, lavishing him with gifts, and one year later Herla joins the dwarf for the latter's wedding in a magnificent palace deep in a cave. When Herla leaves, the dwarf king loads him with gifts: "horses, dogs, hawks, and every appliance of the best for hunting or fowling", as well as a "*canis sanguinarius*" – a small bloodhound – that Herla is to carry with him on his horse at all times. The king and his suite, moreover, must never dismount before the dog does, because if they do, they will turn to dust. Under a spell cast by the dwarf king, Herla is thus condemned to wander forever, "*sine quiete vel residencia*", without stop or stay at the head of his ghostly troop (Schmitt, 1998, p. 152).

But the earliest mention of the popular beliefs surrounding the figure of Hellequin is in the mid-twelfth century. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic Vitalis tells of an apparition witnessed by a young priest named Walchelin during the night of January 1, 1091. At the head of a great army, Walchelin saw a man of huge stature armed with a mace who ordered him to remain where he was and watch the procession of the *exercitus*. The first wave to pass by was "a great crowd on foot", followed by a band of bearers carrying, two by two, biers on which sat dwarves with huge heads shaped like barrels. There was also a large number of women on horseback, undergoing atrocious tortures as punishment for licentiousness. The second group was "a great troop of clergy and monks". But the next group was the most terrifying: the "army of knights" (*exercitus militum*), spitting fire and dressed all in black. They carried all manner of

weapons and rode huge horses, seemingly heading off to battle. After seeing several thousand knights, Walchelin realized that what he was witnessing was the *familia Herlechini*: Herlequin's rabble (Schmitt, 1998, pp. 129-130).

In the broader context of European traditions, we find various figures whose names, as noted by Alessandro Weselofsky in the late nineteenth century, link them to a single mythical line, that of the *Wilde Jagd*: the Wild Hunt or Horde (Figure 86). The belief in the army of the dead, in mythical kings leading a spectral host of their valorous warriors, indicates a consolidated popular *religio* which held that at certain times and places the world of the living and the world of the dead were in actual contact. In Orderic Vitalis's tale, however, we see the signs of a Christianization of the dead, as they appear as tortured souls who appeal to their living witness to intercede on their behalf so that they could redeem themselves and thus put a stop to their penitential wanderings.

#### 4.2. *The birth of Purgatory and the demonization of Hellequin and the 'revenant'*

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Towards the end of the twelfth century, however, the time came when the world of the living and the world of the dead were walled off from each other. The doctrine of Purgatory, as a place apart where there can be no contact with men on earth, established that any spirits encountered by the living could only be damned souls, tempters and diabolic beings. Figures who had hitherto been feared and mythicized were thus thoroughly demonized. Nevertheless, they continued to have a hold on popular culture, as essential links to the world of the dead and the ancestral spirits, and thus to the forces that bestir and regenerate nature.

#### 4.3. *The armies of the dead go wild*

With the demonization of the army of the *revenant*, the specters of the dead lose some of their knightly and warrior-like traits and, as witnessed by a significant iconography, are hybridized with other figures of ancient mythical ancestry, who like them are dwellers in the wastelands and woods. These were the archaic Roman divinities who ruled over the borderlands: Faunus and Silvanus, kin to the Wild Man in their attributes and habits.

#### 4.4. *Faunus and Silvanus*

The ancient Romans divided the land they lived on into two great contiguous regions: one where they felt themselves to be masters, and one where they did not feel at home. The first was the domain of the Lares; the second, that of various gods, including Faunus. Both of these regions had nothing to do with the *terrae incognitae* that held no interest for the Romans. They were thus readily accessible, though not entirely domesticated. Such territories included the countryside and woodlands beyond the cultivated farms, where the wild gods like Faunus lived who could fertilize the fields, multiply the livestock, and provide pasturage in the forest (Dumézil, 1970). Faunus was thus *agrestis* (Ovid, *Fasti* 2, 193; 3, 315), in total opposition to the city. But by offering sacrifices and taking certain precautions, the countryfolk knew how to benefit from his gifts.

Silvanus can be considered one of the aspects of Faunus, *silvicola Faunus* (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 10, 551), but when the uncultivated woodland is transformed by colonization, he becomes the god of the villa, of farming, he who provides the woodland pastures. He is bearded, and carries a young uprooted cypress as a staff (Figure 87). These are elements that also appear in medieval depictions of the Wild Man. At times, his duties encroach on those of Terminus, the tutelary god of boundaries, or *tutor finium*.

But once a year, the ordered, compartmented world and the savage, untamed world came into contact, and Faunus was everywhere. At the end of winter and the approach of spring, an unsettling connection was thus established between two other worlds, that of the living and that of the dead (Dumézil, 1970). Thus, both Faunus and Silvanus inhabit and preside over the borderlands, and like the medieval Wild Man can be the link between man and nature, and between the living and the dead.

#### 4.5. *Pan*

The physical appearance of Faunus, woodland god of ancient origin, is that of the Greek god Pan, as the Romans did not usually depict the gods in painting or sculpture. A blend of human and animal features, he has a goat's legs and hoofs, a hairy body, and a human head with goat's horns. Pan is the god of shepherds and flocks, and appears

to have been native to Arcadia. Incredibly agile, he can run up and down the rocky mountain slopes at great speed, all the better to guard the flock. He also has an unquenchable sexual energy, and is thus always in pursuit of the nymphs with whom he shares his daily resting places: springs and caves. Hunters, though chiefly worshipping Artemis, also made offerings to Pan, hoping for success in the hunt. But the pastoral god was also warlike, capable of instilling overwhelming terror in the enemy; the panic fear that drives men mad. Panic, which the Greeks associated with warfare, went hand in hand with imagining the worst, a delusion that could lead armies to fall into utter confusion. This is what happened to the Gauls after the defeat at Delphi:

At first it was a mere handful who lost their heads, fancying they heard the trampling of charging horses and the attack of advancing enemies; but soon the delusion spread to the whole army. So they snatched up their arms, and, taking sides, dealt death and received it, unable to understand their own language, incapable of recognizing each other's faces or shields ... The madness sent down by the god brought about a terrible mutual carnage among the Gauls (Pausanias, X, 23, 6-8; Bonnefoy, 1991, s.v. "Pan").

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Pan's fecundity as expressed through his sexual power, his prowess as a hunter, his warlike nature and the madness associated with him are all characteristics that are frequently found in the portrayals and descriptions of the medieval Wild Man.

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Fig. 1  
Wild Man. Stall detail, Church  
of Saint Martin, 15<sup>th</sup> century,  
Ambierle  
*commons.wikimedia.org*

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Fig. 2  
Wild Man brandishing  
an uprooted tree trunk.  
Hans Holbein the Younger,  
1528 ca.  
*British Museum, London, United  
Kingdom. Collection Art, Archaeology  
and Architecture (Erich Lessing  
Culture and Fine Arts Archives)*  
*(commons.wikimedia.org).*





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Fig. 3  
Wild Man fighting against a knight. Engraving by Hans Burgkmair, 1503 ca.  
*National Gallery of Art, Washington. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Found (commons.wikimedia.org)*

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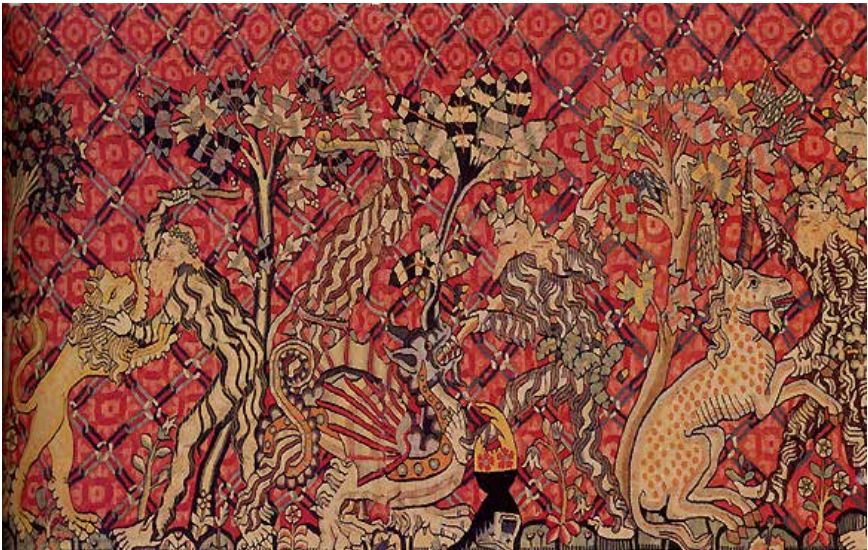


Fig. 4  
Wild Man fighting against lions and fantastic animals. Tapestry detail, 1400 ca., Alsace, France  
*Museum of Fine Art, Boston (commons.wikimedia.org)*



Bordering on  
Human: Wild Men,  
Bears and Fools

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Fig. 5  
Wild Man Mask.  
*Schembartsbuch*. This  
manuscript with drawings  
records the costumes  
and floats parade during  
the Nuremberg Carnival  
(*Schembarts Carnival*)  
which were held between 1449  
and 1530

Germanisches Nationalmuseum,  
Nuremberg ([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/).)

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Fig. 6  
Dzonokwa Mask

G. Hunt & F. Boas Collection, 1897,  
American Museum of Natural History,  
New York. ([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/).)



Fig. 7  
Dzonokwa Mask  
*British Museum, London,  
19<sup>th</sup> century*  
([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/).)



Fig. 8  
Dzonokwa Mask  
*University of British Columbia, Museum  
of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada*  
([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/).)



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Fig. 9  
Battle between Wild Men and Knights  
*Art Institute of Chicago (commons.wikimedia.org)*



Fig. 10  
Bekhu's, the Wild Man of the Woods  
*Photo by Edward S. Curtis (commons.wikimedia.org)*



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Fig. 11  
Bekhu's Mask

*U'mista Cultural Centre, British  
Columbia, Canada (commons.  
wikimedia.org)*



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Fig. 12

Hamatsa Mask, Kwakiutl Indians. Multiple mask with birds' heads. Cannibal animals were the helpers of *Baxbaxwalanuksiwe*, the Cannibal Spirit. The mask shows the combination of two kinds of spirit-birds: the *Crooked Beak of Heaven* on the right and the *Supernatural Raven* on the left

*University of California, San Diego (commons.wikimedia.org)*



**Fig. 13**  
**Hamatsa novice**  
*Photo by Edward S. Curtis,*  
*1914 (commons.wikimedia.*  
*org)*

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**Fig. 14**  
**Novice of the  
prestigious Hamatsa  
Society, or Cannibal  
Society**  
*Photo by Edward S. Curtis,*  
*1914 (commons.wikimedia.*  
*org)*



Fig. 15  
Wild Man in front of a  
hollow tree. 16<sup>th</sup> century  
*Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris*

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Fig. 16  
Wild man with family, living  
into a cave outside the  
settlement  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



Fig. 17  
Saint Anthony endures the temptations coming from the under world. P. Bruegel,  
*The temptations of Saint Anthony*, (detail) 1557  
*Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (commons.wikimedia.org)*

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Fig. 18  
Harlequin as guardian of the elm  
tree. A lady who is inside the  
hollow of the tree is accompanied  
by Harlequin, the guardian of the  
"gate"

*Drawing by E. Ghepardi in Le théâtre italien,  
1701, Paris*



Fig. 19  
Noohlmahl or Fool  
Mask, Kwakiutl  
Indians  
*University of California,  
San Diego (commons.  
wikimedia.org)*



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Fig. 20  
Harlequin rides a limping devil. 18<sup>th</sup>  
century.  
*Private collection*







Fig. 21  
Harlequin on a stilt or crutch.  
*Recueil Fossard*, 16<sup>th</sup> century  
Drottningholms Teatermuseum,  
Stockholm



Fig. 22  
A hunting Wild Man. *The Illustrated Bartsch*. Vol. 14,  
Early German Masters:  
Albrecht Altdorfer  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 23

The Zanni's kitchen. Zanni is one of the most ancient masks of the Commedia dell'Arte, and shares many characteristics and functions with the Wild Man. The rich kitchen showing sausages, chickens and cheese is an index of the importance food had in the life of these legendary figures.

Biblioteca e Raccolta teatrale del Burcardo, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Rome

[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 24

A rare mask of *Baxbaxwalanuksiwe* "the Cannibal at the North end of the World" of the Kwakiutl Indians, the Spirit that enters in contact with the Hamatsa, the Cannibal Dancer

<http://www.native-dance.ca/index.php/masks>



Fig. 25  
Two Wild Men and  
two couple of lovers  
holding a coat-of-  
arms  
*commons.wikimedia.org*

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Fig. 26  
Wild Man harassing  
women. Engraving by  
Albrecht Dürer, 1495  
ca., Germany  
*The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, New York (commons.  
wikimedia.org)*



Fig. 27  
Wild Man holding a shield  
with a skull near a lady in  
nuptial dress. Engraving  
by Albrecht Dürer, 1503,  
Nuremberg  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



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Fig. 28  
Wild Man permeated by  
warrior rage, decoration  
of the Choir stalls in the  
Winchester Cathedral, 14<sup>th</sup>  
century  
*commons.wikimedia.org*





Fig. 29  
Wild Man riding on a horse, brandishing his typical knotty club as a sword. Drawing  
by Ludwig Schongauer, 1470-1490 ca., Germany  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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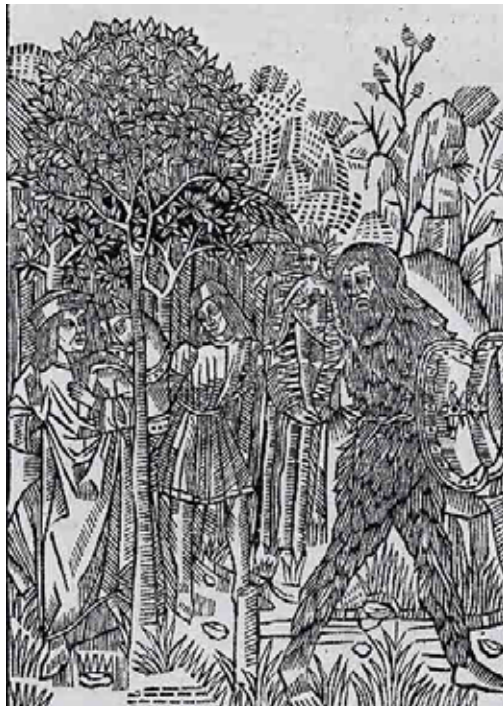


Fig. 30  
Wild Man with thick hair  
covering his entire body,  
holding a shield. "Càrcel  
de Amor" by Diego de  
San Pedro published at  
Burgos, Spain, in 1496.  
Paper incunabulum,  
British Library, London  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

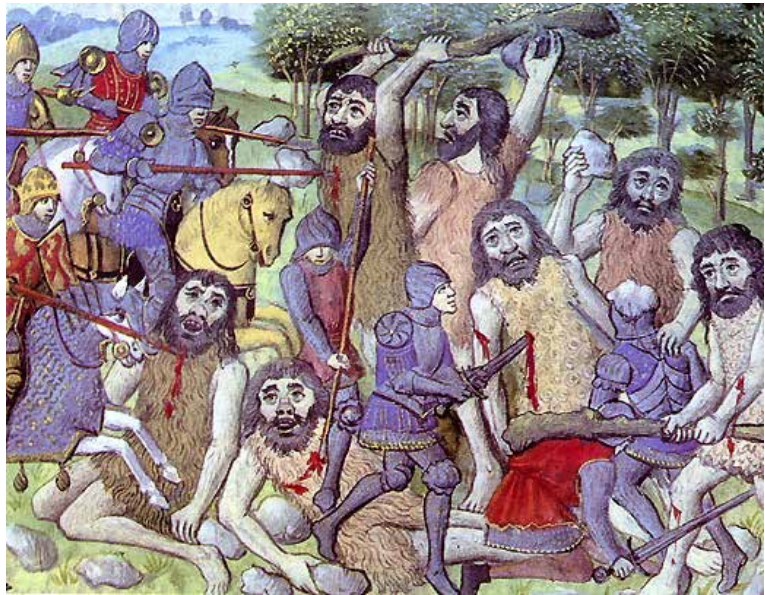


Fig. 31  
Wild Men fighting against Alexander the Great's army. Manuscript, *Romance of Alexander*, 14<sup>th</sup> century, Paris  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 32  
Wild Man with a club holding a  
blazoned shield. Engraving by  
Martin Schongauer. 15<sup>th</sup> century,  
*The Illustrated Bartsch*, Vol. 8, Early  
German Artists  
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**Bordering on  
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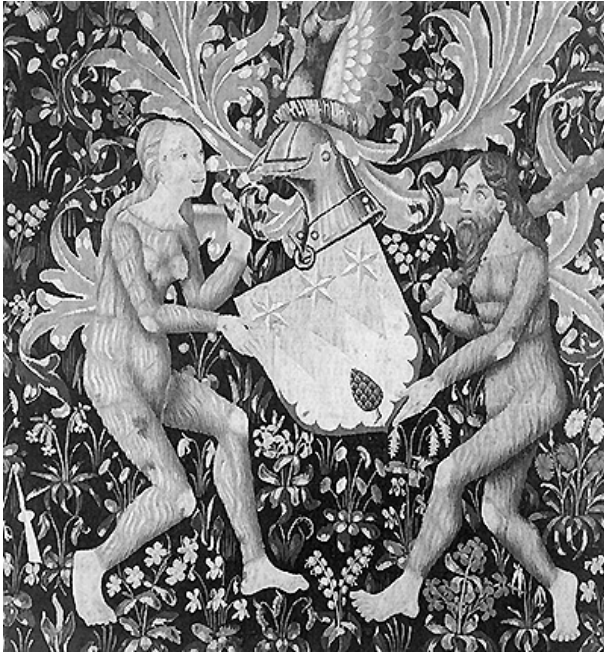


Fig. 33  
Wild Man and  
Woman holding a  
big heraldic shield,  
year 1470, *South  
Netherlands*  
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Fig. 34  
Couple of Wild  
Men holding the  
heraldic coat-of-  
arms of Grafschaft  
Kyburg, Canton of  
Switzerland  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

Fig. 35  
Melusine  
accompanied  
by a little dragon  
supervises the  
construction of the  
Lusignan fortress,  
*La Noble Histoire de  
Lusegnan*, Manuscript  
of the 15<sup>th</sup> century,  
folio 22 v.  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



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Fig. 36  
Melusine bathing,  
while Raymond is  
spying her during  
Saturday and her  
departure in the  
shape of a snake-  
woman through the  
window of the Castle  
of Mervent, *La Noble  
Histoire de Lusegnan*  
or *Le Roman de  
Melusine en prose*.  
Wooden engraving  
from a 15<sup>th</sup> century  
edition  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)







Fig. 37  
Pepin, King of France,  
discovers Valentine while  
a she-bear is kidnapping  
his twin brother, Orson,  
*Valentin and Orson*,  
published in London, 1682  
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Fig. 38  
Orson, nephew of the  
King of France, Pepin, is  
abandoned in the woods,  
is suckled by a bear like  
its own cubs, *Valentin  
and Orson*, published in  
London, 1682  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

**C**ômēt valentin apries q̄l eut conq̄s  
on en la forest il lamena deuers le roy  
ouin q̄ estoit dedās orleans. xii.c.



Fig. 39  
Orson is captured by  
Valentine. Both are  
unaware to be twin  
brothers and nephews of  
the King of France, Pepin,  
the father of the future  
emperor Karl the Great.  
Romance of Valentine and  
Orson, published in Lyon,  
1605

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Fig. 40  
Totem pole showing  
a Dzonokwa image.  
Graveyard at Alert Bay,  
British Columbia, Canada

*Photo by Enrico Comba*



Fig. 41  
Buffoon with the knotty club of  
the Wild Man. Date uncertain,  
Church of Saint John, Caen  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



Fig. 42  
Wild Man with the club of the  
Fool, 16<sup>th</sup> century, front of the  
House of Artisans, Thiers  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



Fig. 43  
Ceremonial leader  
of the Fool Society,  
Assiniboine Indians  
<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>



Fig. 44  
The "Foolish One",  
with his stick, Mandan  
Indians. Painting by  
George Catlin, 1832  
<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>





Fig. 45  
Fool with a headdress in the shape of a cock, date uncertain. Courtyard of the  
Episcopal Palace, Liège  
<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>

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Fig. 46  
Fool playing flute  
and drum  
and  
wearing a typical  
hood with donkey  
ears, stall armrest,  
Collegiate Church of  
Saint Catherine, 16<sup>th</sup>  
century, Hoogstraeten  
<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>



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Fig. 47  
Fool with plant traits, Cloister lintel, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Abbey of Notre-Dame de  
Fontenelle, Saint-Wandrille, France  
*commons.wikimedia.org*

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Fig. 48  
Fools with donkey ears and plant traits. Troyes, Cathedral of Saint Peter, 15<sup>th</sup> century, corbel of the South tower  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



Fig. 49  
The Mother of the Fools, wooden  
processional statue that was brought in  
parade during the great Feast of Fools at  
Dijon. 15<sup>th</sup> century

*Musée de la Vie Bourguignonne Perrin de Puycousin,  
Dijon ([http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.  
htm](http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm))*



Fig. 50  
The Mother of Fools and her  
brood, from *Memoires pour servir  
a l'Histoire de la Fête des Fous* by  
Jean-Bénigne Lucotte Tilliot (1668-  
1750), Lausanne et Genève, 1751

Fig. 51  
The Buffoon  
brooding, J. Cats,  
1632

<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>



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Fig. 52  
The Buffoon  
brooding, by P.  
Brueghel. British  
Museum Dept. of  
Prints and Drawings,  
1569

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Fig. 53  
Fool trying to seduce  
a woman, *The  
Illustrated Bartsch*.  
Vol. 13, commentary,  
German Masters of  
the Sixteenth Century:  
Erhard Schoen, Niklas  
Stoer

[marinni.dreamwidth.org](http://marinni.dreamwidth.org)

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Fig. 54  
Fool pours water of  
the Fountain of Youth,  
*The Illustrated Bartsch*.  
Vol. 13, Author Erhard  
Schoen, 16<sup>th</sup> century

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Fig. 55  
The great tree Yggdrasil

<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>



Fig. 56  
The intercourse between the Fool and the buffalo, during the Okipa ritual, the reproduction of the origin of the world. Painting by Georges Catlin, 1832

<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>



Fig. 57  
The women bring in triumph the sexual organ of the Fool, symbol of fertility,  
Mandan Indians. Painting by Georges Catlin, 1832  
<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>

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Fig. 58  
Allegory of Folly.  
Q. Metsys. 1510 ca.  
[marinni.dreamwidth.org](http://marinni.dreamwidth.org)



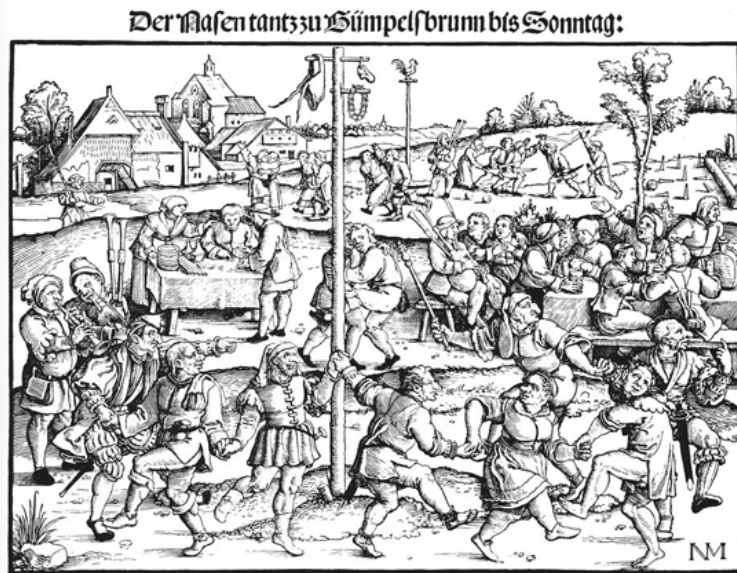


Fig. 59  
The Dance of the Fools or of the Noses at Gimpelsbrunn. *The Illustrated Bartsch*,  
Vol. 13, 16<sup>th</sup> century artists  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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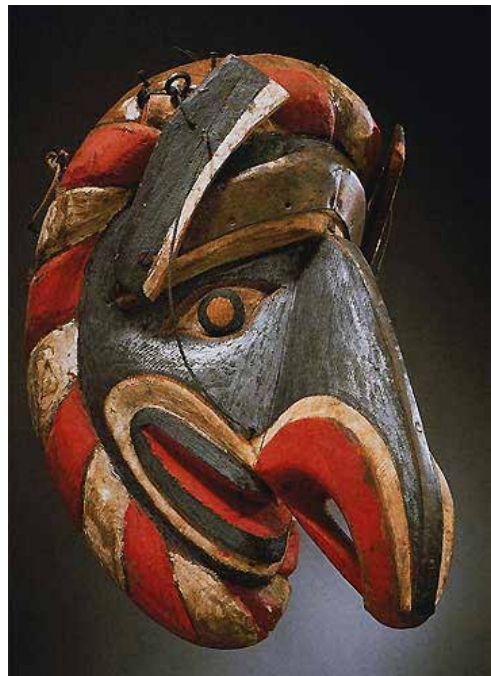


Fig. 60  
Noohlmahl, or Fool Mask,  
Kwakiutl Indians. University  
of California, San Diego  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 61  
The fool talks with the king. Missal, manuscript of English school with D capital (Dixit). Inside, the king David and his Fool are represented while talking together, 15<sup>th</sup> century  
*Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (marinni.dreamwidth.org)*

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Fig. 62  
Psalter, decorated Letter 'O' with the representation of a Fool with a crystal ball and the "marotte", the typical stick of the jester with a sculptured face that reflects the Fool's own face, 13<sup>th</sup> century  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



Fig. 63  
King David talking with his Fool, Psalter, decorated Letter 'D'. Princeton, University  
Library, Garrett Collection  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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Fig. 64  
Fool talking with a bird. Albrecht Dürer,  
Germany, 1507. Fine  
Arts Museums, San  
Francisco, California  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)





Fig. 65  
Playing card with the Madman in the  
series of the Tarots, *The Illustrated  
Bartsch*, Vol. 24, pt. 3, commentary,  
early Italian masters of the 15<sup>th</sup> century  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 66  
Wild Man mask, *Shrovetide  
Carnival*, Nuremberg, Germany.  
*Schernbartsbuch*, the manuscript with  
many drawings records the costumes  
and float parade of the Nuremberg  
Carnival during the period from 1449 to  
1530. The *Schernbartsbuch* is actually  
in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum,  
Nuremberg  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 67

The illustration describes the event at the origin of the foundation of Rome, when the two twin brothers, Remus and Romulus, went on a hill for the observation of the flight of birds, to decide who of them should give his name to the new city and exercise his power over it.

Engraving by Giovanni Battista Fontana (1524-1587) from *The Illustrated Bartsch*, Vol. 32

Warburg Institute, University of London ([commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org))



Fig. 68

Fool as healer. Albrecht  
Dürer, Germany, 1511.  
Fine Arts Museum of San  
Francisco, California, USA

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Fig. 69  
A man and a bear  
wrestling in upright  
position. Cathedral  
of Saint Stephen,  
Sens, France, bas-  
relief on the façade,  
14<sup>th</sup> century  
*commons.wikimedia.org*

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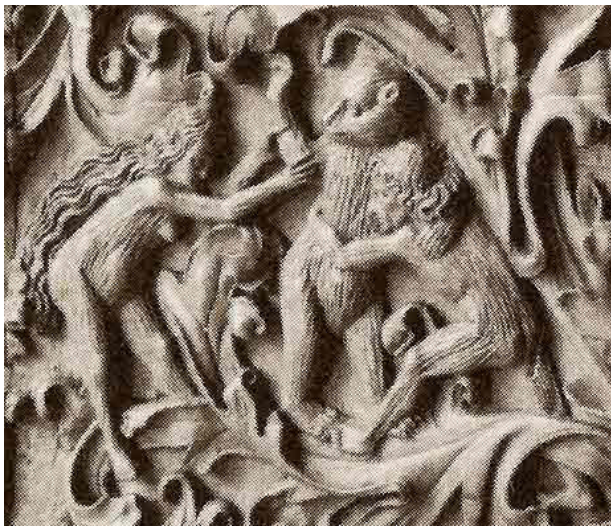


Fig. 70  
A bear in upright  
position seems  
to be disputed  
between a Wild  
Man and a  
Wild Woman.  
Container with  
scenes of savage  
life, Rhineland,  
Germany,  
1460-70 ca.  
*commons.wikimedia.org*



Fig. 71  
A bear eats the honey from a  
hive in twisted straw. The food  
is taken with the front paws.  
Stall armrest, 15<sup>th</sup> century,  
Kempen, Germany, Church of  
the Nativity of Mary  
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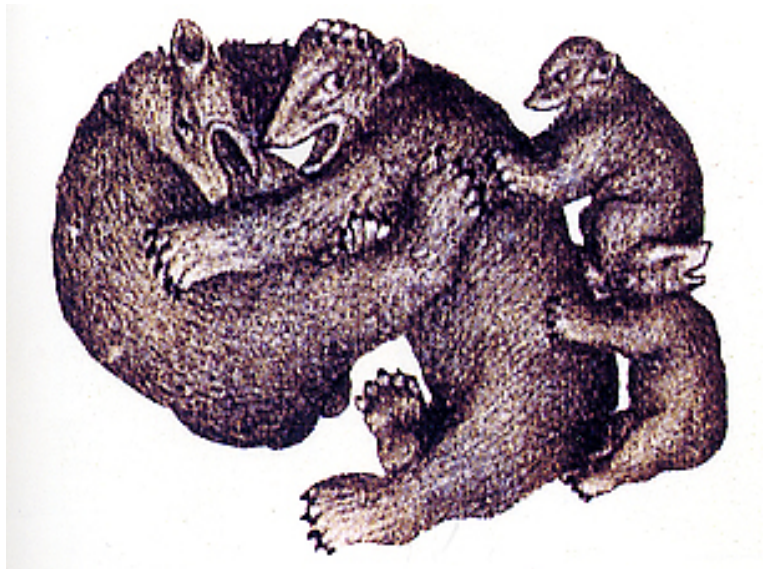


Fig. 72  
A couple of bears have intercourse *more hominum*. Miniature from the *Livre de la Chasse* by Gastone Febo, Avignon, France, end of 14<sup>th</sup> century  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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Fig. 73  
 The bear as mythic ancestor.  
 Portrait of King Svend II Estrdsøn  
 of Denmark (1047-74)  
<http://www.denstoredanske.dk>

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Fig. 74  
 The fighting between Valentine  
 and Orson. *The Romance of  
 Valentine and Orson*, published in  
 Lyon, 1605  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)





Fig. 75  
Family emblem of Giovenale  
Orsini. Miniature from a Book of  
Hours, Paris, 1440 ca.  
*commons.wikimedia.org*

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Fig. 76  
Totem pole showing a bear.  
Canadian Museum of Civilization,  
Ottawa. Photo by E. Comba



Fig. 77  
Sculpture of a bear, probably  
the totem animal of the ancient  
owner  
*University of British Columbia, Museum  
of Anthropology, Vancouver*  
(photo by E. Comba)

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Fig. 78  
The bear's descent. The corpse of the Tlingit chief Shakes, exposed after death  
*National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington* (<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>)



Fig. 79  
Ritual scene representing  
the mythical descent of  
the chief, who draws his  
origin from the bear  
*National Museum of Natural  
History, Smithsonian Institution,  
Washington ([http://www.  
selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/  
index.htm](http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm))*

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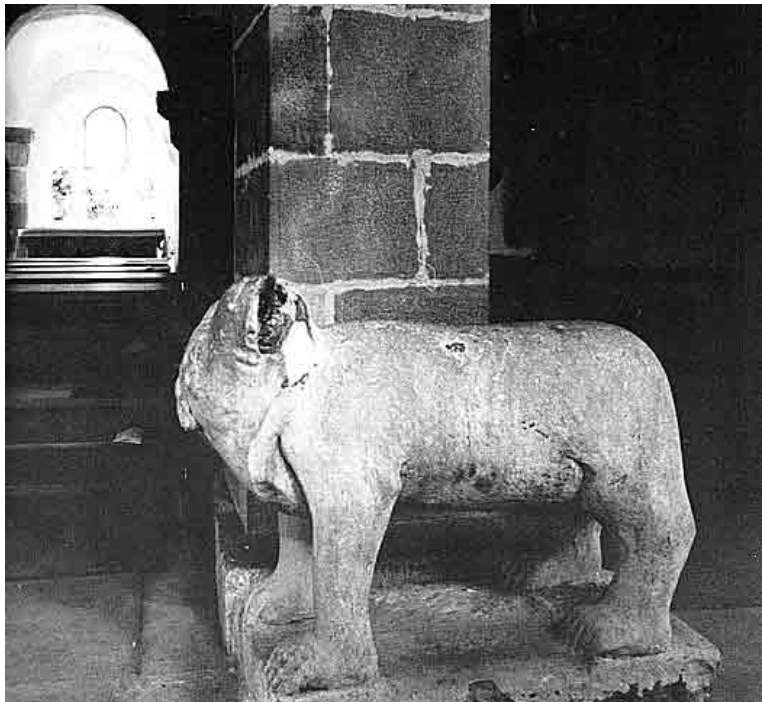


Fig. 80  
The bear of Saint  
Richarde, Andlau Abbey,  
Alsace, France, Church of  
Saints Peter and Paul  
*[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)*





Fig. 81  
A she-bear licks its cubs. Miniature from an English bestiary, 1190 ca.  
*Saint Petersburg (commons.wikimedia.org)*

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Fig. 82  
Painting by George Catlin showing the shaman White Buffalo, Blackfoot Indians  
<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm>



Fig. 83  
One of the more well-known shield  
paintings with bear-related motifs.  
Great Plains Indians

[http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/  
index.htm](http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm)

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Fig. 84  
Warrior fighting against two bears.  
Bronze plate (perhaps part of an  
helmet) of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, from  
Torslunda, Öland Island, Sweden

[http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/  
index.htm](http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it/index.htm)



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Fig. 85  
*Berserkr* wearing a "bear shirt" and  
biting the upper part of his shield, in  
the throes of the warrior rage. Chess  
piece in walrus ivory, Trondheim,  
1160-70 ca.  
[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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Fig. 86  
Painting "Åsgårdsreien" by Norwegian painter Peter Nicolai Arbo, representing the  
Wild Hunt, 1872  
[Oslo National Gallery \(commons.wikimedia.org\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



Fig. 87  
Statue of the god  
Sylvanus  
*Museo Nazionale Romano,  
Rome (commons.wikimedia.org)*

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**Caterina Agus** holds an MA in Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology from the University of Turin with a thesis on the Bear Mask in the Carnivals of the Western Alps. Her actual research activity includes the traditional Alpine feasts and the folk theatre. She has published several articles and papers, among which: “La danza macabra tra affreschi e sacre rappresentazioni nelle Alpi occidentali”, in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale Memento mori: il genere macabro in Europa dal Medioevo a oggi* (Torino, 16-18 ottobre 2014). She has participated in various National and International Congresses. During the year 2013-2014 she has received a grant from the Fondazione Giovanni Gorla with a dissertation on: “Presenze cristiane pre-novalicensi nell’arco alpino occidentale”. She is actually contributing to the realization of the layout of the Museo-Castello in Susa (TO), which has been included in the “Corona di Delizie delle Regge Sabaude” (Crown of Delights of the Savoyard Royal Palaces”).

**Margherita Amateis** is technical research coordinator in the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin. She is interested in comparative iconographical research on specific themes: in particular the masks and the mythical figures of the medieval and folkloristic tradition. She has produced multimedia programs such as *La Maschera del Selvaggio*.

*Indiani d'America e Tradizioni europee*, 2012 (<http://www.selvaggi-america-europa.unito.it>) and *The Gates of the Year*, 2014 (<http://www.leportedellanno.unito.it/eng>).

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He has published several volumes, among which: *Introduzione a Lévi-Strauss* (Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2000), *Testi religiosi degli Indiani del Nord America*, (UTET, Torino, 2001), *Antropologia delle religioni* (Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2008), *La Danza del Sole* (Novalogos, Aprilia, 2012).

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Among her publications: the volume *Cognitive Models in Language and Thought: Ideology, Metaphors and Meanings*, edited with other authors, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2003.

**Daniele Ormezzano** is Curator of the Paleontological Section of the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences in Turin. After the MA in Natural Sciences, from the University of Turin, with a study on the reconstruction of a skeleton of *Ursus spelaeus*, he has continued to study the bears, the fossil as well as the living exemplars, from both a naturalistic and a cultural point of view, participating to the realization of exhibitions, congresses and lectures.

**Juha Pentikäinen** is Professor of Northern Ethnography at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland. He is one of the founders of the Department of Comparative Religion at the University of Helsinki, where he is Emeritus Professor. His approach to religious traditions has been based on field work and his main interests are oral history, Native linguistics, religions

and cultures. His research – for the most part developed with an interdisciplinary team of scholars and with the involvement of Native peoples, minorities and Finnish migrant groups – has covered all the continents, with lectures held in more than 100 Universities. He has won many awards, among which in 1999 the Third Honorary Medal of the International Research Society for his career in the study of shamanism. Since 1960 his publications include 20 books, 250 scientific articles and 15 films. He has been Professor in Europe and America, has participated in innumerable Congresses and Lectures and in 1995 has been appointed member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters. Among his many publications: *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1996; *Shamanism and Culture*, Helsinki, Etnika, 2006; *Golden King of the Forest: The Lore of the Northern Bear*, Helsinki, Etnika, 2007.

**Vesa Matteo Piludu** holds a PhD degree from the University of Helsinki. Since 2006 he teaches at the University of Helsinki on Comparative Religion, Culture and Art Semiotics, and Cultural Studies in Musicology. In Italy he has held intensive courses and guest lectures at the Universities of Turin, Rome, and others. He has edited with Frog the anthology *Kalevala: Epica, Magia, Arte, Musica / Epic, Magic, Art and Music*, Viterbo, VociFuoriScena, 2015. He has contributed with the CeSMAP of Pinerolo and the University of Turin to the realization of the Exhibition *Miti e riti dell'orso nel grande nord. Sciamani e animali sacri nell'Eurasia (Bear Myths and Rituals in the Great North: Shamans and Sacred Animals in Eurasia)*. He is Vice-President of the Society for Northern Ethnography and is working for a publication of a monographic study on the bear hunt rituals in Finland and Karelia and a critical edition of the *Kalevala* (1849) by Elias Lönnrot.

Contributions by: Caterina Agus,  
Margherita Amateis, Enrico Comba,  
Roslyn M. Frank, Daniele Ormezza-  
no, Juha Pentikäinen, Vesa Matteo  
Piludu.

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