"The Miracle Is To Make It Solid": An Analysis of Transformation in Bella Coola Myth and Ritual
by
Joanne Richardson
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1971

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Department of **Anthropology**

The University of British Columbia
2075 Westbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date **Oct. 18, 1982**
ABSTRACT

Boas and McIlwraith, who have written the major works on the Bella Coola, maintain that the thought and mythology of this particular culture is inconsistent, contradictory and illogical. This thesis argues that an analysis of the Bella Coola attitude toward transformation nullifies these contentions and provides a basis for a more insightful and certainly more respectful accounting of this North West Coast people.

Within the Bella Coola universe anything which is not human is supernatural. The supernatural may be defined as uncontrolled transformational activity, as chaos, as the as yet unstructured force of life. In Bella Coola mythology the human comes into being when the supernatural first ancestors cease their earthly wandering and give up their transformational ability -- i.e. when they superimpose order upon chaos or structure upon the unstructured. Thus the human condition consists of constantly maintaining a balance between the supernatural (which, taken to its extreme constitutes chaos and the consequent loss of the human) and order (which, taken to its extreme constitutes stasis and the consequent loss of the human). It follows that the supernatural may present itself either as dangerous (e.g. the kusiut ceremonial, wherein the emphasis is on fear and the need to exorcise the alien force which has taken possession of the dancer) or as revitalizing (e.g. the sisaok ceremonial, wherein the emphasis is on pride and the resuscitation of the dancer's bond with her/his first ancestor(s)), or as both (e.g. shamanism, wherein the shaman's ability to enter the realm of the non-human may or may not succeed in redressing a dangerous imbalance which has occur-
red between an individual or individuals and the supernatural).

This thesis contends that the Bella Coola attitude regarding transformation is the key to an understanding of all their major cultural institutions.
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She has no difficulty seeing the visible world as a transparent veil or a whirlwind. The miracle is to make it solid.

Margaret Atwood
INTRODUCTION

History.

The Bella Coola, a small branch of the Salishan linguistic group, dwelt between the Dean and Burke Channels on the central coast of British Columbia. Their neighbours to the north east were the Carrier, to the south east the Chilcotin, to the south west the Owikeno and the Southern Kwakiutl and to the north west the Bella Bella and the Haisla. As was typical of native North West Coast groups, their mode of subsistence consisted of fishing (especially salmon and olachen), hunting (which was of considerably less importance than fishing) and gathering. The focal point of Bella Coola social organization was the village community, the size of which ranged from two to forty houses, each house containing anywhere from two to ten families. The people who occupied these forty-five to fifty village communities were thought to be direct descendants of the various ancestral families (minmints) which came down from Nusmat'a (the house of myths) in the beginning of time, and the strong tendency to intra-village endogamy may be attributed to the Bella Coola desire to maintain the purity of these ancestral groupings. Descent was ambilaterial with a discernable preference for patrilocality and there was a marked sexual division of labour with the women being responsible for the preparation of food and clothing, gathering and basket-making and the men being responsible for most of the fishing, hunting and canoe and house building. The Bella Coola did not have pronounced hereditary class distinctions -- the measure for societal esteem being a
person's ability to give ceremonial feasts. The only group of people who were denied this avenue to social success were slaves who, not being Bella Coola, were totally without status within the culture.

It is estimated that the pre-contact population of the Bella Coola "...must have been in the thousands." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p.5). In 1922, when McIlwraith did his field-work, the population was just over three hundred.

The first two groups of white people to have contact with the Bella Coola converged upon the locality within eight weeks of each other: the first was a branch of the Vancouver expedition (led by Johnstone) on June 3rd 1793 and the second was the Mackenzie expedition on July 29th 1793. Both these groups were seeking a North West Passage in the hope of expediting the fur trade. For a number of years the Bella Coola were left pretty much to themselves, the primary European interest being manifested in the occasional appearance of trading ships. However, by 1858 the discovery of gold led to a large influx of Europeans. Directly linked to this was the major smallpox epidemic of 1862 which swept up the coast from Victoria. Nor was smallpox by any means the only imported disease with which the Bella Coola and other North West Coast peoples had to contend. There were also influenza, measles, tuberculosis and venereal disease, and to none of these did the native people have any immunity. Add to this the problem of alcohol (which was a regular trade item) and the startling decline in native population between pre and post contact times becomes understandable. The first mission in
Bella Coola was established in 1883 by the Methodist church. By this time the forty-five village communities had been reduced to three and, considering the demoralized and destitute state of the remaining Bella Coola, it is not surprising that the process of Christianization met with little resistance.

Problem.

Having provided the preceding historical background, I shall henceforth refer to the Bella Coola in the ethnographic present. Like any other people, the Bella Coola must first and foremost come to terms with the problem, or, if you will, the fact, of life and death. This is the splash at the centre, to which all cultural forms and complexities are radiating ripples. It is in a person's accounting (verbal or otherwise) of what they take to be the essential meaning or significance of life and death that one comes as close as one ever does to comprehending their world as they experience it. Thus it is not surprising that many anthropologists have used the notion of the dialectic as the pivot of their theoretical work for, as Wallace Stevens says, "...a law of inherent opposites, of essential unity, is as pleasant as port."\(^1\) Clifford Geertz, for example, draws a distinction between Ethos and World View, maintaining that the former is "...the tone, character, and quality of a people's life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects", while the latter is "...their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concepts of nature, of self, of society."
(Geertz, 1973, p. 127). According to Geertz, it is the resolution of the tension between Ethos and World View that is embodied in sacred symbols and it is clusters of such symbols that constitute what is known as religion. In discussing what he calls the 'dialectic of the developmental cycle' Victor Turner contends that,

...for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experiences of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness. In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable....In other words, each individual's life experiences contain alternating exposure to structure and communitas, and to states and transitions.

(Turner, 1969, p.97)

Both Geertz and Turner have a number of interesting things to say, and their working oppositions are well taken. Nevertheless, insofar as choosing a dialectical starting point is concerned, it is difficult to argue with Lévi-Strauss when he maintains that:

The fundamental opposition...is precisely the one stated by Hamlet, although in the form of a still over-optimistic choice between two alternatives. Man is not free to choose whether to be or not to be. A mental effort, consubstantial with his history and which will cease only with his disappearance from the stage of the universe, compels him to accept the two self-evident and contradictory truths which, through their clash, set his thought in motion, and, to neutralize their opposition, generate an unlimited series of other binary distinctions which, while never resolving the primary contradiction, echo and perpetuate it on an ever smaller scale: one is the reality of being...the other is the reality of non-being....

(Lévi-Strauss, 1981, p.694)

One may utilize the dialectic in any one of a myriad number of
ways but, as I have said, the primary and fundamental opposition is that of life and death. All others, while by no means irrelevant, may be seen as emanations of this primal and insurmountable paradox. And if one is doomed to multiply variety in a wilderness of dialectical mirrors, then one may as well be clear about the opposition which constitutes the central shadow of that wilderness. It is my contention that, for the Bella Coola, it is the concept of transformation that lies at the basis of their understanding of life and death, and hence it is this concept that provides the key to an understanding of their culture.

Bella Coola mythology is rife with instances of transformation and indeed, the beings that make up the Bella Coola universe may be divided into two major categories according to those who are defined by uncontrolled transformational activity, i.e. the supernatural, and those who are defined by controlled transformational activity, i.e. human beings. The first category may be further broken down according to usual place of domicile: denizens of Nusmät’a (land above); first ancestors before they became fully human (earth); non-human earthly phenomena (earth); and ghosts (land below). In practice, transformational ability consists of being able to alter one’s own form as well as that of others; being able to travel between the land above, the earth, and the land below at will; and power over life and death.

Although there emerges a clear distinction of power between the supernatural and the human once, by whatever means, a human being activates her/his transformational potential, that dis-
tinction ceases to exist. Thus a number of myths record how a human being who has activated her/his transformational potential is able to enter Nusmät·a and overcome the supernatural being, Äłguntäm. The significance of this is that it places emphasis not so much on who or what exercises and/or transmits transformational ability as on the concept of transformation itself. It is the purpose of this thesis to suggest that, to paraphrase Keats, for the Bella Coola transformation is power, power transformation -- that is all they know of life, and all they need to know. Transformation is that which renders boundaries and classifications meaningless: as such it is inimical to culture -- as such it must be controlled. For the Bella Coola transformational activity is not so much a desideratum (although it may be actively sought) as an existential fact. If it is not controlled it will control -- and if it controls it will destroy. A Winter Ceremonial performer who is not adequately exorcised will inevitably die.

Transformation is the knowledge and power of the supernatural beings and hence the origin and basis of human life. And although according to McIlwraith the Bella Coola see themselves as having degenerated from the golden age of the first ancestors, when shape-changing and sojourns to Nusmät·a were undertaken at will, they by no means hold the supernatural beings in unmitigated awe. True, there is a profound respect for the supernatural beings, but there is also the means by which to make use of them for human ends. It is commonly held that the first ancestors lost their transformational ability
when they ceased their wandering and/or built their first house -- that is, when they became human. From that point on, the relationship between supernatural beings and Bella Coola took on, for the latter, the desperate intensity of the perennially threatened. For the Bella Coola, what differentiates a human being from a supernatural being is, quite simply, their relationship to uncontrolled transformational activity -- the latter embodies it, the former must control it. And in order to control it one must have access to it. As has been said, some Bella Coola purposely set out to activate their transformational potential; however, an equal number just have it happen to them. This is a crucial, if rather complex point, and deserves some elaboration.

To begin with, the supernatural beings are known to exercise unlimited transformational ability -- they may appear in any form in any place, they may bring life to death and death to life. What they represent is the boundless power and potential of chaos. And what is chaos but the raw energy of life before it has solidified into a specific form? And what is that but ceaseless orderless and random transformation? Thus we have an infinite, pulsating potential. With the settling of the first ancestors this potential becomes an actuality. That is to say, the defining aspect of the Bella Coola, that which brings about their humanness, came into being at the point when the first ancestors relinquished their transformational activity and acquired in its stead a sense of order and boundedness. It is interesting to note that most of the myths show that the first ancestors
freely dispensed with their transformational ability; those few who did not became evil and dangerous and were banished from the now human community. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.306-307). However, the giving up of transformational ability is not and cannot be absolute for, as will be made clear in a later portion of this thesis when the xixmänoäs (spirit) is discussed, it is the source and force of life. What occurs is the attempt to control and channel a heretofore uncontrollable force. And here we have the basis for the Bella Coola love/hate relationship with the supernatural beings -- as Margaret Atwood writes: "Few will seek [their] help/ with love, none without fear." For the supernatural beings are the font of all transformational ability and in order to control the latter the Bella Coola must be able to manipulate the former.

It must be understood that the Bella Coola live in a world which is forever vibrating with the supernatural -- that stump may be Äłquntäm; that young stranger may be the north wind. Whether a Bella Coola purposely sets out to activate her/his transformational potential or not, she/he is constantly subject to having to contend with it in any case. What this comes down to is a rather straight-forward choice -- either control or be destroyed. And if a little transformation is a dangerous thing, a lot is down right lethal. The point is, transformational ability is supernatural; as such it is unbounded and therefore non-human. Once a Bella Coola has, in whatever manner, activated her/his transformational potential, she/he becomes a supernatural being. That is, she/he becomes non-human. Hence the
importance of exorcism. In order to re-enter the human community, in order for the knowledge gained through a transformational experience to be of benefit to humanity, the person or persons who have undergone that experience must be brought back and cleansed of all but the memory of their journeying. But it is precisely this memory, this recollected passion, that is of use to the Bella Coola, for it provides them with the knowledge of how to successfully control the uncontrolled transformational activity of the supernatural beings. In other words, the ability to 'humanize' the supernatural is dependent upon 'supernaturalizing' the human. Just as a controlled intake of water is essential to human life (drinking) while an uncontrolled intake is fatal (drowning), so it is with controlled and uncontrolled transformation. The constant presence of transformational ability is as essential to human life as the constant presence of the capacity to control it.

The Bella Coola material upon which I rely almost exclusively are the ethnographies of Franz Boas and Thomas McIlwraith. This is done through necessity rather than choice, for the simple fact of the matter is that almost all of the existing Bella Coola material does the same. With the exception of the very occasional comment in an explorer's or missionary's journal, and three brief untranslated articles by Adrian and Fillip Jacobsen, Boas and McIlwraith are the only people to have gathered information on the Bella Coola while the culture was still somewhat intact (and even these two complained bitterly at the fragmentary nature of what they were able to gather). By
the time Boas reached Bella Coola (1894) the native population had already been decimated between the symplegades of smallpox and missionization. The situation, in terms of determining pre-contact conditions was that much worse in 1922 when McIlwraith began his field work. However, in spite of this, there is enough collected data to make interpretation both possible and worthwhile.

The theoretical works which are most relevant to this thesis are Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, which maintains that power and danger inhere in that which is unclassifiable, and Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process*, which maintains that liminal states provide the creative energy which reinforces and legitimizes existing social structures. I agree with Douglas's contention that:

[in order to] plot a map of the powers and dangers in a primitive universe, we need to underline the interplay of ideas of form and formlessness. So many ideas about power are based on an ideal of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding non-form.  

(Douglas, 1966, p.98)

However, she goes on to delineate:

first, formal powers wielded by persons representing the formal structure and exercised on behalf of the formal structure: second, formless powers wielded by interstitial persons: third, powers not wielded by any person, but inhering in the structure, which strike against any infraction of form.  

(Douglas, 1966, p.104)

Douglas maintains that formal powers are conscious and controlled (e.g. Nyakusa chiefs), that formless powers are unconscious and uncontrolled (e.g. Azande witches), and that the "...powers not wielded by any person, but inhering in the structure" are
"...pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punishes a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate." (Douglas, 1966, p.113). It seems to me clearly evident from the Bella Coola material that such a typology of power is misleading for it entails what amounts to a false segmentation of what is in fact the same power. What Douglas calls pollution powers I call uncontrolled transformational activity or unstructured energy -- it is that which transgresses against order but it is also that which provides life. And it is this power which, depending upon the degree of human control to which it is subjected, constitutes the various areas of Bella Coola culture and cosmology. If one maintains, as Douglas does, that a particular power "inheres in the structure of ideas itself", then it would seem to follow that that power is by definition ubiquitous and that quite likely all manifestations of power within the culture under examination would vary in degree rather than in kind. In other words whether one is discussing 'formal powers' or 'formless powers' they are all extensions of that which is expressed as power within the structure of ideas itself and hence should not be depicted as categorically different.

Although Victor Turner's work regarding communitas, the betwixt and between state which is a feature of liminal situations and which is characterized by a heightened awareness of the generic bond of humanity (Turner, 1969, p.97), is extremely interesting, his emphasis on "the sentiment of humankindness" (Turner, 1969, p.105) seems inappropriate within the Bella Coola
context. Bella Coola liminal situations have to do with a loss or slackening of human control and a consequent intensified awareness of the power and danger of chaos. Insofar as it is well known that humanity emerged from chaos when the first ancestors relinquished their transformational activity and brought order and control into the world, and that a slackening of this control threatens to plunge any given person back into the pre or prehistoric state, it is reasonable to assume that liminal situations inspire a recognition of a generic human bond. However, I can find no evidence that "the sentiment of human kindness" is in any way concomitant with such a recognition. Bella Coola liminal situations are first and foremost symbolic representations or re-enactments of the resolution of chaos and order, and whereas this enterprise may indeed be emotionally loaded, it is not particularly concerned with "the sentiment of human kindness". The emphasis is definitely on sense-making, and sense-making is primarily an intellectual endeavour. This includes rather than excludes the emotions for, as Levi-Strauss so cogently argues, "Emotions not deriving from intellectual operations would be strictly unknowable as mental phenomena." (Levi-Strauss, 1981, p.667). Thus whereas Turner chooses to stress the emotional component of liminal situations, I choose to stress the intellectual component.

My thesis consists of four parts: an analysis of the supernatural, an analysis of the kusiut society, an analysis of shamanism, and an analysis of the sisaok society. The dominant theme is that of transformation, and it is hoped that the reader
will agree that this theme is not so much a torturing of the extant Bella Coola material on the procrustean bed of yet another theory, as a means of gaining at least a modicum of insight into the workings of a fascinating and sadly neglected culture.
INTRODUCTION: FOOTNOTES


2. See chapter one, pp. 25-26.

I. THE SUPERNATURAL

Siut is a Bella Coola word which is glossed as 'the supernatural' or 'the learned'. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II,p.1). The term siut may be applied to anything that is supernatural -- that is, it may refer to the manifestation of a specific being or a general state. Any and all supernatural beings may be termed siut. Each supernatural being may also be known by another designation or designations depending upon what particular function is usually associated with it or what its acknowledged relationship with other siut or human beings happens to be. Boas maintains that among the Bella Coola "a system has been evolved which justifies our terming the supernatural beings 'deities'." (Boas, 1898, p.27). He goes on to say that there are two upper worlds, a middle world, and two lower worlds. In the first upper world dwells Qamā'its (a female warrior and the supreme deity) and the sisiutť, a fish or snake that, upon being looked at, attains enormous size; in the second upper world dwell both major and minor deities; in the middle world dwell human beings; in the first lower world dwell the dead (who may return to the second upper world from which they were originally sent down to earth); and in the second lower world dwell the dead who have died a second death and for whom there is no return. He further maintains that the two major deities are Senx (the sun) and Äkguntâm and that they, along with a number of minor deities who act as their servants, dwell in Nusmät-a (the house of myths) which is located in the second upper world. Interestingly enough, when McIlwraith visited the Bella Coola, it would appear that
Qamá'its had become a minor deity who resided rather inconsequentially on earth, Senx was simply one of Âłquntâm's many appellations, and the concepts of an upper upper world and a lower lower world were so vague as to be practically non-existent. Further to this, Âłquntâm had taken over the position of supreme deity and the sisuit² had acquired two heads rather than one and was considered to be the transformed scales of one of the first ancestor's canoes which had itself transformed into a salmon. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, pp. 347 & 529). These discrepancies appear to be so glaring that a theory of advanced cultural degeneration over the twenty-four years separating Boas's and McIlwraith's visits does not sufficiently account for them. Nor, it seems to me, may one merely invoke sloppy fieldwork and intone j'accuse at either ethnographer.

The fact is, both Boas and McIlwraith were considerably irritated by what they saw as the lack of consistency in the material that they were able to gather. Thus Boas: "[Three years before] I had the impression that these [specific] deities were particularly concerned with the sisau-k ceremonial, but this impression has not been substantiated by the information I received during the past year. These deities appear much rather as deities of the ku/siut. (Boas, 1898, p. 34). Further, "although a considerable amount of contradiction is inherent in all the mythologies of the North Pacific coast, they nowhere reach such a degree as among the Bella Coola." (Boas, 1898, pp. 125-126). Similarly, McIlwraith states that "...Bella Coola... philosophy abounds in contradictions...." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. 1, pp. 347 & 529).
On many points of mythology there is a striking difference of opinion, which the Bella Coola explain by saying that their information is derived from ancient stories, which are personal possessions, and that no-one knows the beliefs of his fellows. A co-ordinated theology, as Boas points out, has not evolved among the Bella Coola. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.24)

At times McIlwraith goes so far as to accuse the Bella Coola of being naive as well as severely wanting in logic: "...logical accuracy is not a Bella Coola characteristic" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I,p.24).

Both Boas and McIlwraith attempt to account for what they see as 'inconsistencies' and 'striking differences of opinion' in Bella Coola mythology by acknowledging what the people themselves have to say (when all else fails, listen to your informant), which is that each ancestral family, upon descending from Nusmät·a at the beginning of time, became inseparably associated with certain stories, experiences, prerogatives, etc. that were and are specific to that family. It would appear that within the context of each ancestral family the mythologies are perfectly consistent. The problem arises when through intermarriage, warfare or whatever, certain ancestral family prerogatives become mixed up with those of other ancestral families and, more importantly, when an ethnographer assumes that a 'co-ordinated theology' is dependent upon a uniform acceptance of one and only one correct or authentic version of the occurrence of all significant supernatural acts. Thus there should be one authentic version of
creation, one authentic version of how salmon were made available to humankind, one authentic version of how raven released daylight, etc... What Boas, and particularly McIlwraith, have excessive difficulty with is that when a Bella Coola is presented with an origin myth which to all intents and purposes appears to contradict that of her or his own ancestral family, she/he has no difficulty whatsoever in accepting both myths as equally authentic. Thus an exasperated McIlwraith:

After collecting a few myths, in each of which it was stated that the first settlers at village X were A, B, and C, with their sisters, P and Q, it seemed as if it would have been possible, before the culture of the Bella Coola had fallen into its present decay, to make a census of whom they believe to have been first settlers of the earth, and that such a list would have had few contradictions. This was soon found to be false. Two myths may give different people as the first occupants of a certain village, nor does such contradiction trouble the Bella Coola. Each man, (sic) convinced of the authenticity of his own family account, is quite willing to believe that the one belonging to someone else is equally correct. This characteristic lack of logical consistency has already been mentioned in other connections....In view of their lack of systematization in other matters, it would have been surprising if they had evolved a census of their first ancestors, accepted by all as accurate.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p.294)

And Boas:

The jealousy with which the traditions are guarded has had the effect of making each family try to prevent other families from knowing its own clan (sic) tradition. For this reason the clan traditions of the whole tribe (sic) are remarkably inconsistent....Thus it happens that among the Bella Coola we find the most contradictory myths in regard to important events in the world's history.

(Boas, 1898, p.125)

It would seem that if one continually runs into what one
takes to be logical inconsistencies within the culture that one is studying, then rather than merely concluding that one is dealing with a logically inconsistent culture, one would do well to search for an underlying rather than a superficial consistency. In other words, what is crucial to the ethnographer's cultural notion of consistency may not be crucial to the Bella Coola's cultural notion of consistency. To give Boas his due, he at least sees an over-all consistency in Bella Coola mythology. It is my contention that both Boas and McIlwraith come to grief in their failure to grasp the significance of the Bella Coola concept of transformation. Once this concept is understood, the seemingly contradictory nature of the origin myths, so far from posing an insurmountable problem, becomes a logically consistent component of a specific cosmological system.

As has been stated in the Introduction, to the Bella Coola transformation is synonymous with supernatural. The distinguishing feature of all siut is transformational ability -- with siut it is active and uncontrolled while with human beings it is latent and controlled. The entire Bella Coola culture hinges on the knowledge that the uncontrolled transformational activity of siut must be both embraced and controlled in order for human existence to endure. The fact that siut appear to different ancestral families in different guises and at different times is only to be expected; as is the fact of multiple origin myths. Siut continually transform and re-transform; that they do this in different ways with different individuals and/or ancestral groupings is only logically consistent with the concept of trans-
formation. This concept will become clearer as the nature of SIT becomes clearer.

However, before getting down to an analysis of the nature of SIT and their relationship to the Bella Coola, it is important to come to terms with some confusion over Alquantam, the supposed 'supreme deity'. To begin with, McIlwraith states that the Bella Coola hold that all human life was created in Nusmät-á at the wish of Àłquntám. According to McIlwraith:

Bella Coola mythology contains no account of the origin or birth of Àłquntám himself, nor of the making of this world; in the beginning of time no living creature, either animal or vegetable, existed with the exception of Àłquntám. He, therefore, decided to alter and populate the world and accordingly created four supernatural 'Carpenters Mqsmśalanix. They in turn made a number of workers, alquatltinlutl nunuqomaxmilx. These beings, endowed with enormous power by Àłquntám chiselled from wood a number of human beings....The Carpenters did not confine their attention to men and women. Supernatural beings, animals, birds, trees, flowers, fish, mountains, rivers, perhaps even moon and stars, all were created almost simultaneously by them under the direction of Àłquntám in Nusmät-á.


Boas maintains that:

Senx is the creator of man, but his work is supplemented by that of the god K.éx.ék.nē'm. When Senx creates a new born child, K.éx.ék.nē'm gives the child its individual features. Before children are born, the goddess named Nuéx.pmalsai'x; or Sēmséméltstas Senxalá'olela places them in a cradle and rocks them. After she ceases rocking them, the children are sent down to our world. She also rocks the young of all animals; and when she stops, Senx sends them down to our world to be born.

(Boas, 1898; p. 31)

Boas does not mention the Supernatural Carpenters with respect to the actual creation of humankind but instead relegates them to a follow-up position:
These four brothers...are engaged in carving and painting. It is said that they gave man his arts. They taught him to build canoes, to make boxes, to build houses and to carve in wood and to paint. They taught him the methods of hunting, and, according to some, they made the fish. The Bella Coola say, when carving a design, that Masmasalâ'ni gives them the idea which they are working out. (Boas 1898, pp.32-33)

Boas contends that Senx and Ałquntâm are separate deities and that they are of 'equal importance'. I am inclined to concur with McIlwraith in supporting the view that they are merely different names for the same being, as a number of the myths recorded by Boas correspond precisely to those recorded by McIlwraith with the single exception of Senx being replaced by Ałquntâm. Interestingly, McIlwraith points out that:

Evidence collected in the field does not make clear whether the beliefs of the Bella Coola illustrate an incomplete transformation of a single deity into a number of minor ones, or whether they represent the almost complete fusion of a number of beings into one. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.33)

He then goes on to say that "[following] the practice of the great majority of the Bella Coola, the supreme deity will be referred to as Ałquntâm". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.33).

At this point it is important to remember that when McIlwraith did his fieldwork the forty-five to fifty former Bella Coola village communities had been reduced to one, and that that one had undergone a thorough process of missionization. Hence it is not surprising that the remaining Bella Coola would adopt the notion of a supreme deity and that that notion would be incorporated in their myths. One indication that this may
indeed be the case is noted by McIlwraith with respect to the gaining of shamanic power directly from Ḡquntām:

In view of the manner in which biblical tales, introduced by Europeans, have spread from tribe to tribe in distorted form, it is not improbable that all such examples of the direct appearance of the supreme being can be traced to this source. Having heard from the white man of cases where the deity has appeared to men, the Indian would be only too ready and willing to accept and transmit such a tale, since it belongs to their general culture pattern. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.588)

Both Boas and McIlwraith point out that with the exception of Senx/Ḡquntām, there is no sort of hierarchy among siut. Thus Boas: "Senx and Ḡquntām might be called the rulers of mankind....A number of inferior deities live in the House of Myths. They might be called the assistants of the principal deities". (Boas, 1898, p.30). And McIlwraith: "Compared with Ḡquntām, other supernatural beings are insignificant. The Bella Coola do not regard them as a hierarchy with definitely graded rank and power; accordingly, the order in which they are described is immaterial". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.39).

Now the most careful analysis of the extant Bella Coola myths does not indicate that Ḡquntām is in any way superior to any other siut. Even McIlwraith must admit that "Ḡquntām, in spite of his strength, shares the limitations of any other chief, and is not invariably successful. The Bella Coola delight in telling stories of how supernatural beings, especially the Raven, outwitted and defeated him. Even human beings, in the beginning of time when they were semi-supernatural, sometimes prevailed against him". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.38-39).
The point is that given that the myths do not attribute to Aḵquntām any specific powers that are not also attributed to all other siut, and given that Aḵquntām exhibits no more control over other siut than do they over him, I think it reasonable to conclude that the designating of Aḵquntām as a supreme deity is quite likely attributable to Christian influence and in any case does not truly reflect the nature of Aḵquntām as he functions within Bella Coola mythology. And even though, as McIlwraith notes, "...the word Aḵquntām is said to be derived from ixquntam, 'foreman', or 'chief'" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.32), it must be remembered that hyperbole is a standard and accepted convention within Bella Coola culture and is by no means necessarily meant to be taken literally. Hence Raven, whose many bunglings are well known, may nonetheless be referred to as Kitaḵxamxius 'The Wise One'; a first ancestor gives his grandchild the name stältimx 'chief', yet no-one takes the child for a chief; the eldest supernatural carver is named Yulātimut 'He Who Completes Any Task With A Single Smoothing Motion' and yet it takes him four days to make a wooden whale for Raven. These examples may be extended ad infinitum, and thus one should be wary of making a too literal reading of what amounts to a poetic convention. The myths themselves attest to the fact that Aḵquntām bequeaths neither more nor less power than any other siut and should therefore not be considered as inherently superior to them. Having established this, it is now convenient to turn to the relationship between siut and the Bella Coola themselves.

It is important to realize that the Bella Coola do not
regard siut as being all-powerful. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.31). Siut differ from Bella Coola in that they constitute uncontrolled transformational activity -- but uncontrolled transformational activity is not synonymous with intelligence, and it is through intelligence, a matching of wits, that the Bella Coola strive with siut. When the first ancestors descended from Nusmät.a they brought with them all that they needed to know with regard to dealing with siut. As Eve commented to Adam while being expelled from Eden upon having eaten of the tree of knowledge, "If we keep on using this knowledge, I think we'll be back'. so the Bella Coola, through the carefully transmitted knowledge of their first ancestors, are, under certain circumstances, able to return briefly to Nusmät.a. Siut are neither categorically good nor categorically evil. Like the weather (which indeed, is itself merely one of the innumerable manifestations of siut), they are simply there; unpredictable but ever-present. And like the weather, depending on how they are dealt with, siut may be either beneficial or harmful to humankind.

The Bella Coola may well often feel themselves to be strangers in a strange land for they are the only living creatures who are not actively siut. And herein lies their humanity -- they are human because they are not siut. In order to remain human, in order not to be destroyed as human beings, the Bella Coola must take care not to be re-absorbed into the realm of siut. This would seem clear enough, however it is seriously complicated when one considers that, while holding themselves at a distance from siut, the Bella Coola must at the same time ac
knowledge their kinship to them. The Bella Coola originally descended from Nusmät·a in the varied forms of the first ancestors. That is to say, in the beginning the Bella Coola were themselves siut. Upon death the spirit (xixmânoás) travels back through its ancestors to the place where the first ancestor descended, whereupon it takes the form of that ancestor and re-ascends to Nusmät·a. So it is universally acknowledged that both the beginning and the ending of the Bella Coola is in the realm of siut. Further to this, each Bella Coola contains within her/himself the supernatural element known as xixmânoás or spirit throughout her/his entire period of earthly existence. According to McIlwraith:

The most important part of the human body is the xixmânoás, spirit. This is small, but of great power, since it belongs to the world of the supernatural; in fact, the spirit of man is not mortal, but siut. Everyone, man or woman, rich or poor, chief or slave, has one; without it life would be impossible. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.94)

Thus the Bella Coola would seem to exist in a classic double-bind: that which gives them life (and so must be nurtured) is also that which threatens their humanness (and so must be controlled). Hence it is not simply a matter of the clash of two mutually exclusive realms, the siut and the human, but rather of a clash between unlimited and uncontrolled siut (supernatural beings) and limited and controlled siut (human beings). The uncontrolled transformational activity of the former, with its disregard of boundaries and classifications, is contrary and inimical to the sense of order and classification that is crucial to the latter. Whatever else human beings may be
they are cultural, and whatever else culture may be it is a bounded system of classifications. Given that the Bella Coola themselves possess a supernatural element, and that it is this supernatural element which is the source of life, it is readily understandable that even if they wished to metaphorically barricade themselves away from the supernatural they would be unable to do so, for that from which they would be fleeing is, in a very basic sense, the fear of their own transformational potential, and that potential is within them as well as without. The only feasible way for the Bella Coola to come to terms with their own transformational potential (which, taken to extremes results in the death of the human and total re-absorption into the supernatural), is not only to confront, but to immerse themselves in the supernatural and, armed with the knowledge handed down to them from their first ancestors, through affirmation rather than denial, control the force of chaos (uncontrolled transformational activity) and hence ensure that it is conducive rather than detrimental to the human.

There are a number of myths that record how a supernatural being, annoyed at being avoided or otherwise inappropriately dealt with, not only does not favour the individual with supernatural power, but causes the person's destruction or near destruction. One story tells how two men came upon the nest of a mätsqus, an enormous toad-like creature with a blazing glow in its throat, but hesitated overly long before approaching it, and as they procrastinated the nest disappeared. The two men,
...continued their journey, each chiding the other for his failure to take advantage of the opportunity put in his path. Before long they saw a footprint where no man had been and knew that it must be that of Twakatlilt, the supernatural hunter of mountain goats. In spite of remonstrances, the comrade scraped up a little dirt from the track into his handkerchief. In this he did wrong, especially as he had failed to take advantage of the opportunity presented to him by the nest of the monster toad. That night as the two were encamped a slide came thundering down beside them, and they barely escaped with their lives. Not long afterwards the erring man died, insane, a calamity unquestionably due to his recklessness in handling the earth where a supernatural one had trod.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, pp. 528-529)

Conversely a number of myths record how a supernatural being responds favourably to being confronted and appropriately dealt with. For example, when four brothers who had been swimming clambered aboard a large log and fell asleep, the log drifted into the salmon-weir of Nuskiaxek, the supernatural lord of the land of ashes. Previous to this, the youngest brother had been drowned, and his body was seen hanging in the house of Nuskiaxek, where the remaining three brothers were conducted upon their capture. An old woman cautioned the brothers that if their noses sweated Nuskiaxek and his companions would say 'what fine salmon' and proceed to devour them. She provided the eldest brother with a piece of jadeite and told him that if, when the fire in the house became so hot that they began to sweat, he pulled this object out from his arm-pit, he and his brothers would cease to feel the heat. This the boy did, with the result that, "[When] Nuskiaxek realized that he had no power over his guests he became friendly. At their request he restored to life the youngest brother whom, moreover, he

The fact that the Bella Coola know how to deal with siut and know the consequences of not doing so appropriately, lends credence to the view that siut are not regarded so much as the Other (for if they were completely Other they would be imperceptible and hence unknowable) as the unformed (non-human) source and force of life. It may be argued that if siut are in fact viewed as life before it has solidified into the human, how is it that, even though they may alter their form at will, many siut are nonetheless thought to have a form which is specific to them alone? For example, Ḥkitc̱pɪlɪtən-a is thought to have a snout-like mouth and long, pendant breasts; Sxaiaxwas is thought to be black-faced and repulsive. I would suggest that, as with any culture, the Bella Coola pantheon of supernatural beings constitutes the concretization of abstract philosophical concepts. The fact that in Greek mythology Chaos is personified as the progenitor of Earth does not make it any the less chaotic. The Bella Coola approach their most profound concepts as all cultures do -- by way of metaphor and symbol, for one of the qualities of the profound is that it must be approached obliquely. And this is by no means surprising, for a culture's most profound concepts, serving as they do as an explanation of the essentially unexplainable, the meaning of life and death and the true nature of reality, always entail a large degree of mystery. And mystery, to remain mysterious, can only be approached with eyes averted. Thus within the Bella Coola universe siut, representing the
non-human and the force of life, are thought capable of taking on a limitless array of forms and are at all times approached with due care and ceremony. The fact that certain siut are thought to have forms that are specific to themselves alone simply makes them more readily discussable -- it in no way detracts from what they symbolize.

Leaving aside the xixmânoâs, the first ancestors are the Bella Coola's most direct link to the supernatural and as such deserve considerable attention. As has been said, the first ancestors descended from Nusmât-a in the beginning of time. These beings came down in various forms at various places and they brought with them knowledge of the denizens of Nusmât-a, a knowledge which is most graphically displayed in the Winter Ceremonial. Before these first ancestors became fully human they engaged in uncontrolled transformational activity -- they returned to Nusmât-a at will and they altered their own form and that of others at will. They were, in fact, supernatural. Thus in an origin myth of Stuix, one of the Bella Coola village-communities: "By means of their supernatural power, for they were not yet mortal, the first ancestors reduced the firmament to such small compass that it was really a house to them, with the star-illuminated sky as roof". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.310). And in an origin myth of Snutâli the first ancestor Kaliakis assumes raven form and returns to Nusmât-a to release the sunlight. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.301).

Before proceeding any farther it is necessary to clear
up some confusion over origin or ancestral myths (which are the exclusive property of the ancestral family to which they apply) and myths which are available to and may be told by anyone. According to Boas:

A clan legend which is illustrated in the sisauk ceremonial is called by the Bella Coola ‘Semsma’ or ‘Smayusta’. These traditions are the exclusive property of each clan. (Boas, 1898, p.116)

McIlwraith, on the other hand, has this to say:

Boas (p.116) states that the terms smaiusta and simmsma are synonymous. The writer feels certain that this is an error. It was discussed repeatedly with various Bella Coola, all of whom agreed that a simmsma is a mere story which can be told by anyone, whereas a smaiusta is a myth possessed by the individual or individuals, whose prerogatives are derived from it. To the Bella Coola the two are utterly different. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.293)

On the surface this does not seem like a serious problem. After all, both ethnographers agree that there is a clear difference between myths that are ancestral family specific and those which are common property. Having established this it should be a relatively simple matter to dismiss the smaiusta/simmsma entanglement as a mere problem of terminology. However, the crux of the problem is that Boas tends to record certain traditions as ancestral family specific origin myths when they are clearly a combination of what McIlwraith would term smaiusta and simmsma. According to McIlwraith:

...there is no doubt that records of the past change from one category to the other. A wealthy chief, eager to give a potlatch, but lacking the mythical authorization, must frequently have used a simmsma, claiming the hero as an ancestor....The two versions of the myth given (Vol.I, pp.313-19)
is a case in point. The first was told as a smaiusta by a woman who claimed to be a descendant of the people figuring in it; the second, as a story, simsma, by a man. In view of the reliability of both informants, it seems highly probable that this is a story, partly converted to a myth. 


The constituent elements of an origin or ancestral myth (smaiusta) are quite distinct from those of an ordinary myth (simsma). The former tells of the coming down from Nusmat'a of the first ancestors, the prerogatives which they brought with them, their wanderings and their final place of settlement whereas the latter tells of the gaining of supernatural power by later Bella Coola and/or the adventures of non-human earthly phenomena (usually, but not always, animals). The fact that a simsma has crept into a smaiusta accounts for a number of supposed origin myths recorded by Boas (and one or two by McIlwraith) wherein the first ancestors gain supernatural power through contact with a bear, sniniq or whatever. It is my contention that it would be impossible for the first ancestors to gain supernatural power because they already have it -- it is something which they relinquish, not which they gain. If one is aware that any myth which records the gaining of supernatural power by a first ancestor is clearly a blending of smaiusta and simsma then the occurrence of such myths need occasion no problem.

Unfortunately, for the most part smaiusta are available in only extremely fragmented form. This is no doubt due to a combination of the secret nature of these myths and the cultural
decimation which the Bella Coola suffered before they were recorded. In any case what we are left with is "[an] abbreviated and often pointless series of anecdotes...which can be no more than a small part of the rich field which must once have existed among the Bella Coola". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.292). Be this as it may, it is nonetheless possible to isolate certain features which are specific and integral to smaiusta per se. As has been said, these features are: the coming down from Nusmat.a of the first ancestors, the prerogatives which they brought with them, their wanderings, and their final settling.

The first ancestors descended to earth from the House of Myths in a bewildering variety of forms ranging from frog to wolf and Killer Whale to eagle. Some of them even descended in human form (here it is important to realize that the key word is form -- these ancestors were no more 'human' than were those who descended as wasps or king-fishers). These first ancestors were supernatural, and as such were actively transformational:

...Ninisamlaix [a first ancestor] plucked a number of twigs from the branches of a spruce tree near the ocean. These twigs became the people over whom he was chief. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.326)

Or again: "Sometimes as [Smaoan] travelled he assumed the form of the sun, for he was so powerful that nothing was impossible to him". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.333). It is only when the ancestors find a place of final settlement that they relinquish their transformational activities and become fully human.
It is crucial to understand that the relinquishing of transformational activity is done willingly. In fact, a first ancestor showing some reticence toward becoming human is cause for great consternation and is usually accounted for by the ancestor in question not yet being assured that the environment is suitable for human habitation. Thus,

[Smaoan, in the form of an eagle] perched on a tree near his brother's almost completed salmon-weir. "Why don't you change yourself to a human being?" Omgomkilika inquired. "I am waiting for our food to be more plentiful," Smaoan replied.


And in a myth recorded by Boas when, after the passage of some time, Isyu uot sees his brother still in eagle form he asks him to account for his not becoming human. Xē' mtsiwa's reply is, "...I could not do so, because this place is too dangerous". (Boas, 1898, p.6). However, both Smaoan and Xē'mtsiwa become human when they are finally satisfied that their chosen location is habitable. In instances wherein a first ancestor obstinately refuses to become human she or he is considered to be evil and is to be scrupulously avoided. Thus in an origin myth of Nutleax:

A number of first ancestors came to earth as golden eagles....The youngest sister refused to change her form, and wandered around in a semi-human condition, becoming frenzied at the slightest excuse. At length her disgruntled brothers and sisters united to get rid of her; she became petrified in the valley which still bears her name, and which still has an evil reputation as the coldest place in the vicinity of Bella Coola. Thence come the cold winds.

And in a smaiusta obtained through marriage with the Bella Bella, a first ancestor who retains the form of a grizzly bear disrupts a ceremonial and kills many of the participants. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p.347).

Thus the process of humanization, of accepting boundaries (place of final settlement) and controlling transformational activity (accepting human form as permanent), is a process in which the first ancestors actively and willingly engage. The human condition is something which is sought from the beginning, not, as in the gentle teachings of Christianity, something that comes into being as a punishment for an original sin. Of course whereas it is true that humanness is dependent upon an acceptance of order which precludes the acting out of uncontrolled transformational ability, it is also true that it is dependent upon continual access to this ability. This access is provided not only by the xixmánoas, but by the prerogatives which were brought down from Nusmát.a by the first ancestors. Among these prerogatives (which included such things as tools, provender, etc.) was, in the form of sisaok and kusiut ceremonials, knowledge of the realm of the supernatural. The sisaok ceremonial will be dealt with in chapter four and the kusiut ceremonial in chapter two, but, very briefly, the former embodies knowledge of the first ancestors whereas the latter embodies knowledge of the denizens of Nusmát.a. It is this knowledge that enables the Bella Coola to control their transformational potential and hence to maintain their humanness, and it is this knowledge which is the subject of the following chapters.
CHAPTER ONE: FOOTNOTES

II. THE KUSIUT SOCIETY

The Winter Ceremonial season begins four days after the September moon is full and lasts until sometime in March. During this period the normal social organization of the Bella Coola is suspended and village-community life becomes subject to the absolute jurisdiction of the members of the kusiut society.

According to McIlwraith:

The word kusiut is connected etymologically, according to native belief, with siut, the term for a supernatural being. Thus the meaning of the society's designation is 'The Supernatural', or 'The Learned', for siut has both these significations. A member of the society is likewise called a kusiut, plural, kukusiut.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.1)

Active participation in all areas of this society is open to both women and men, to chief, commoner and slave alike. Membership is determined by whether or not a person has one or more kusiut prerogatives embedded in their ancestral myths. Besides having the requisite ancestral prerogative a person must have enough wealth with which to validate it. However, the wealth required is minimal and even a poor person is not barred from becoming a kusiut. The necessary ancestral prerogatives may be bequeathed to whomsoever the possessors choose, with the result that even slaves need not necessarily be excluded from membership in the society. In actual practice (at least in pre-contact times) there appears to have been an approximately equal balance between kusiut members and non-members in any given village-community:

...formerly no-one was admitted until he or
she had reached an age of discretion. Some informants went so far as to say that the hair of an initiate must have begun to turn grey, and all agreed that no-one was ever admitted until at least twenty or more often, twenty-five years of age. Initiates were frequently still older; one woman, for example, stated that her mother was past the age of child-bearing before admission.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.2)

Thus although at any given time only certain Bella Coola are kukusiut, and even fewer are under the active and direct influence of a supernatural being or beings, all are at all times imbued in an atmosphere that bespeaks of the ever-present possibility of such influence becoming a personal reality. In other words, the Winter Ceremonial season, with its attendant secret society (kusiut)dances, is a graphic manifestation of the Bella Coola attitude toward transformation.

I will briefly outline the main features of a typical kusiut ceremony and then go on to discuss the implications of specific rites and individual dances. The reader should bear in mind that during the Winter Ceremonial season various kusiut dances may occur simultaneously in all of the Bella Coola village-communities and that it is at this time that the always ubiquitous awareness of the supernatural is heightened to its most intense pitch.

The usual kusiut ceremony consists of four main stages which occur on a corresponding number of days (although there may or may not be a time lapse between these days depending on which particular dance is being performed). The first day is termed tsixtämen and it is at this time that the prospective
dancer receives her/his yeix or 'call'. This call is in fact the possession of the individual by a particular supernatural being. Upon receipt of the yeix the person "...utters a low call, sometimes begins to walk in circles with bent head, or to act in some other peculiar manner, while a whistle sounds repeatedly". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.25). If this occurs within a house (and it appears that it usually does) the non-kusiut members are at once ejected and the kukusiut attempt to calm the possessed one with a four-times repeated frenetic but regular beating of sticks upon the ground. When this has been concluded certain kukusiut begin to sing of the House of Myths and/or the supernatural being that has come upon the individual in question. Eventually the person dances to this song whereupon tsixtamem comes to an end.

The second day is termed nusiutalsap and a number of kukusiut go into the forest to cut wood for masks. In the evening all the kukusiut gather in the house where the dancer received her/his call and proceed to practice singing that individual's songs. Mask-making is allotted to certain kukusiut and nusiut-sap draws to a close.

The third day is termed qotkim and most of this day is devoted to the carving of masks and the building of a platform with raised sides which is situated behind the central fire and wherein the dancer may conceal her/himself. Towards evening all the kukusiut assemble in this house whereupon the non-kusiut members are invited to witness the proceedings. At this time the dancer performs to the accompaniment of her/his
song(s). Once this has been done the singers beat out the songs of all the kukusiut who have received calls during the ceremonial season and, upon hearing her/his particular tune, each person dances. The non-kusiut members are then expelled from the house and qotlim concludes with the dancer who has most recently received a call once again dancing to her/his song.

The fourth and final day is termed nbusam and during the morning and afternoon the making of the masks is completed. During the evening the non-kusiut members are summoned to the dance house and are enjoined to witness a masked performance which features the supernatural being(s) encountered by the person who received her/his call on tsixtamem. Upon the completion of this performance the non-kusiut members are expelled and the masks are burned. At this time the possessed individual is exorcised and her/his call is sent back to the House of Myths. According to McIlwraith, "[frequently] another kusiut now receives a call, so that the nbusam of one dancer is likewise the tsixtamem for another". (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.27). And thus the cycle repeats itself.

From the foregoing skeletal outline it can be seen that the kusiut dances serve to promulgate the idea that the uncontrolled transformational activity which constitutes the realm of the supernatural is both essential for, and dangerous to, the continuance of the human community. Remembering that each kusiut prerogative is embedded in an ancestral myth, hence possessing the status of being essential to the maintenance of
that particular ancestral family's well-being, and that each kusiut under the influence of a call must be surrounded and purged by her/his human cohorts, hence demonstrating the danger of acquiescing to the supernatural, one may appreciate the importance of the kusiut society to the Bella Coola -- it provides them with a forum wherein they may objectify and thus resolve (at least temporarily) the dilemma of life and death through the acting out of a concept of transformation which by definition embodies both horns of that dilemma. In order to clarify and confirm this crucial point it is necessary to turn to a somewhat detailed examination of specific kusiut dances.

According to McIlwraith:

Of all kusiut dances, the one of which the uninitiated are most afraid...is the Cannibal dance. It is believed that the performer is exposed to greater dangers than in any other rite, and observers have the most spectacular ocular demonstrations of [her/his] powers.... The Bella Coola consider that a person is equally a Cannibal whether [she/he] has the prerogative of eating corpses, biting the living, eating dogs or raw salmon, or biting [her/himself].

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.71)

Although I will provide an account of a Cannibal who has the prerogative of biting the living it should be kept in mind that the essentials of this account are applicable to all Bella Coola cannibals. Furthermore, even though in this particular account the Cannibal is male and hence the use of the male pronoun, it must be remembered that women were also Cannibal dancers.

The call is presaged by continuous whistling which appears to come from the surrounding mountains. A kusiut herald goes
throughout the village-community announcing that 'something strange' has come upon the individual in question and all the kukusiut proceed to gather in his house wherein he "...is acting as if demented, biting any of [his] associates except other Cannibals, Scratchers, Breakers or those whose patrons are ghosts." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.73). Throughout the day the Cannibal visits all the houses in the village-community acting as though crazed with the desire for human blood and terrorizing the non-kukusiut. Upon returning to his house the Cannibal is surrounded by kukusiut members who attempt to soothe him with the beating of sticks, droning and calls of 'hoip'. Eventually the kukusiut attempt to restrain the dancer by means of a rope. However, the power of the Cannibal is too strong and, in front of the house, in full view of the non-kukusiut, the dancer escapes and begins his journey to the House of Myths. Kukusiut who have been positioned in the mountains begin to growl and the non-kukusiut know that this is the sound of the Cannibal going aloft. At this point a kusiut calls out, "'Go aloft on the right road. Your power will enable you to escape the dangers. But do not stray from the narrow trail'." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.74).

The Cannibal may remain above for "...a week to two months or more." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.76). In any case, during this time the kukusiut periodically express their fear and concern for the dancer's well being. The Cannibal's return is heralded by whistling, a thump on the roof (which always occurs during the nbusam of some kusiut dance) and a cry of 'Xwa',
xwa', xwa', which indicates a desire for human flesh. The kukusiut rush onto the roof to capture the Cannibal but he once again escapes to Nusmāt'a. The following morning whistles are heard from the mountains and soon the Cannibal, clad in a grizzly-bear skin, is seen dashing about in the forest. A number of kukusiut, also clad in grizzly-bear skins, periodically appear at various points in the forest and along the river, thus giving the impression that the Cannibal is covering vast amounts of territory in a remarkably short space of time. After much chasing and struggling the kukusiut finally manage to capture the Cannibal and bring him to the village, whereupon:

The Cannibal acts like a demoniac animal, struggling, kicking, and biting as if his adventures had entirely destroyed his reason. He drags his captors, a number of strong kukusiut, to the various houses, and they are barely able to restrain him within the doorways and to force him out, biting and raving at them. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.78)

After visiting all the houses in the village the Cannibal is returned to his own house and, under the watchful eyes of the non-kusiut members who crowd around the doorway, the kukusiut proceed to cure him. This is done by beating time on two long, thin sounding boards as well as on the floor of the house. This continual beating calms the Cannibal and at length, after four rounds of beating, the head of an eagle, wolf or bear appears from under the Cannibal's blanket and vomits what appears to be human flesh into a prepared container. This head is thought to be one manifestation of the supernatural being that has entered the Cannibal. After this being has finished vomiting,
...all the kukusiut present stand up and call out 'ye..." four times. After the fourth shout the animal's head is concealed, the uninitiated believe that it has returned to the land above whence it came to enter X. The Cannibal is now tolerably sane; his guardians no longer press so closely about him and non-members and many of the kukusiut leave the house.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.79)

On the evening of this day both uninitiated and kukusiut return to the Cannibal's house at which time the singers sing of how the wolf's head has returned to Nusmat-a. The dancer then appears to talk to the singers of his experiences in Nusmat-a and the singers proceed to reiterate this information in the form of two songs. After these songs have been performed the non-kusiut members are expelled and the kukusiut leave shortly thereafter. About an hour before dawn on the following day the cry 'xwa-, xwa-, xwa-', is heard and the Cannibal, accompanied by twenty or so kukusiut, runs back and forth between two spots behind the village and provides the singers with his third song. Once this has been done he is again returned to his own house. However:

For four days the uninitiated remain in a constant state of terror. Although the expulsion of the cannibalistic incubus has tended to restore X's sanity, he is still wild, unable either to eat or sleep. Twice every night the madness conquers him, and he dashes from his house, barely restrained by his faithful kukusiut attendants. Eager for the flesh of human beings, he rushes at the doors, knocks them down if they should be closed, growling furiously, but his guardians always succeed in dragging him out before he does any real damage. This is repeated at every house of the village. During the day he remains within his own house, concealed, on a platform built for him between the fire and back room.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p. 82)
On the fourth evening the *kukusiut* gather to cure the Cannibal with the beating of sticks. After this he remains hidden in his enclosure for the ensuing four days and nights. At the conclusion of this time the *kukusiut* go about the village gathering human urine and grease from the heads of sock-eye salmon. The Cannibal is doused in this liquid and is then taken and four times submerged in the river. That evening the Cannibal, surrounded by beating, singing and calls of *hoip*¹, dances before the non-*kusiut* members. After the Cannibal completes his dance a *kusiut* shaman approaches him and, amid cries of *hoip*, induces him to both eat and drink. Remembering that the Cannibal has supposedly eaten nothing but human flesh since his return from Nusmat,a, it may be understood that his partaking of 'normal' food is taken as a sign of his returning humanness. At this point the Cannibal rushes out of the house, whistles sound loudly, "...and all the *kukusiut* crowd close about him on the sidewalk without. As many as possible press upwards against his body with their hands, while they shout, *Ye...*, trying to expel the call upwards. On the fourth repetition it is supposed to have been driven forth, and in answer to the tumultuous shout of the *kukusiut*, there is heard the sound of a whistle from above." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.88). After the completion of this ritual it is thought that the Cannibal is manageably 'normal', but throughout the remainder of the ceremonial season he is subject to fits of frenzy which may be brought on by such things as the arrival of strangers or a contravention of ceremonial decorum.
Something that may strike the reader as peculiar about the foregoing account is that the Cannibal appears to be twice exorcised — once when the sā·t̓e'sta (wolf's head incubus) is sent back to Nusmät·a and once when the yeix or call is similarly returned. McIlwraith defines sā·t̓e'sta as "...the power in form of an animal which, having entered a man, compels him to eat strange foods" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.78) whereas the yeix is that which is sent down to a given individual by a supernatural omatuts (McIlwraith glosses this as 'patron') and is defined as both "...something physical within the dancer's body" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.62) and as "...the power necessary to perform [a kusiut ceremony]..." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.6). Unfortunately McIlwraith is rather vague and almost off-handed in providing what would seem to be crucial definitions. However, a careful reading of the Bella Coola material leads one to the conclusion that the call is in fact the power or essence of a supernatural being or beings and given that, as I have argued in Chapter One, This power is uncontrolled transformational activity, it follows that the sā·t̓e'sta (in this particular case a wolf) is merely one of the transformations of the supernatural power that is thought to be in possession of the dancer. Thus the preliminary exorcism is in fact unsuccessful — one particular manifestation of the call disappears but the call itself remains. Further to this, even once the call has been 'successfully' sent back to Nusmät·a the effects of that call remain, for the Cannibal dancer is still subject to occasional frenzy. This would coincide with my contention that once an
individual gives vent to her/his own transformational potential through receipt of a call from the supernatural, then that individual leaves the realm of the human and in point of fact becomes supernatural. McIlwraith himself acknowledges this when speaking of a Fungas dancer who,

...through lying quiet for four days communing with the supernatural beings, has really become one, as is indeed the case with all kukusiut who ascend to the land above or experience other peculiar incidents in the course of their performances. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p. 165)(emphasis mine)

This being the case, it is not surprising that the Cannibal dancer would remain subject to frenzy, for he has experienced the full range of his transformational potential and it is only to be expected that, even though under the watchful care of his human companions he is able to re-enter the human community, the knowledge he has gained will mark him for life. ("After such knowledge, what forgiveness?")

Once the Cannibal dancer receives his call his immediate reaction is one of uncontrollable raving and overtly destructive behaviour. He has become non-human and hence his attitude and actions are correspondingly seen to be non or anti-human. The kukusiut attempt to soothe him, to re-humanize him, through such various forms of ritualized behaviour as the beating of sticks and cries of 'hoip'. When this appears to fail they resort to an attempt at physically restraining him, but this, too, is in vain. It is interesting that once the Cannibal has escaped to Nusmät.a the attitude of the kukusiut (and indeed, of the non-kukusiut) is one of fear and concern regarding the
dangers to which he will be exposed. It is understood that the Cannibal has entered the realm of the supernatural and that he will survive as a human-being only if he 'does not stray from the narrow trail'. That is, if he retains sufficient presence of mind to avoid complete re-absorption into the supernatural. It is assumed that if a Cannibal does not return from Nusmat-a it is because he has become so possessed by the supernatural that he loses his humanness altogether. This is, of course, experienced by the human community as the death of one of its members. Because the Cannibal actualizes his hitherto merely potential transformational ability, he crosses the line that separates humanity from siut and in so doing serves to illustrate what can happen to any Bella Coola. If this experience is to be beneficial rather than detrimental to the human community the Cannibal must return and be properly tamed. He must bring to the human community first hand knowledge of Nusmat-a -- of the supernatural. In other words he must successfully undergo death (entry into the supernatural) and rebirth (re-entry into the human community) and through this process both reinforce the uncontrolled transformational activity which is the source of life and yet see that it is made palatable to humanity through the superimposition of order and control.

When the Cannibal returns from Nusmat-a he provides the Bella Coola with songs which tell of "...the land above and the dangers which [he] has survived." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.81). According to McIlwraith:
The singers add new facts and information to vary the monotony, but the subjects usually described are:
The flat land above with its many trails and the river that flows through it. The gale constantly raging there which has blown the hair from his head and the dirt from his body. The trail across a yawning chasm over which his supernatural strength enabled him to leap. If a Cannibal dies when in concealment, the kukusiut bury the corpse secretly and tell the uninitiated that his power failed him on the other side of the abyss so that he was unable to return. Äkguntâm under his various names.

How his patron helped him to escape the Ätskm, "They of the Huge Jaws", evil beings who tried to kill [him] by sucking him into their gaping mouths. The tide flats which are found at the edge of the flat land above. The kindly being Sinunukârîm, who gave him the necessary power to recross the chasm. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.81)

First of all I would contend that McIlwraith misinterprets what occurs when a Cannibal does not re-cross the chasm. This would be due not to a failure of supernatural power but to an excess of that power. It must be remembered that the Cannibal is possessed by the supernatural and that it is this possession that compels his to journey to Nusma'tâ in the first place. What compels him to return to earth is the recollection of his humanity, and this is human rather than supernatural power. The kukusiut have warned him to 'stay on the narrow path' -- to be wary of giving full vent to the supernatural lest he be forever lost to the human. Thus when a Cannibal fails to recross the chasm it is due to his total reabsorption into the realm of siut.

Furthermore, the mention of the 'evil' supernatural being
with the gaping jaws along with the 'good' supernatural being who provides a way back to earth serves to reinforce the point that *siut* are neither categorically evil nor categorically good -- they may be either or both or neither. What they are is dependent upon how any given human deals with them. If they are dealt with appropriately, through the accepted ritualized acts (in this case metaphorically expressed through the admonition not to stray from the narrow trail) then they may be controlled and hence beneficial; if they are inappropriately dealt with they are uncontrollable and hence detrimental. In any event, the fact that the Cannibal returns from above with songs that depict his experiences in *Nusmät·a*, and that he teaches these songs to the Bella Coola, demonstrates the importance of gaining and preserving knowledge of the supernatural. This knowledge is gained through first-hand experience and is rendered understandable through the superimposition of human control. It is after the Cannibal has been soothed by the beating of sticks and the expulsion of one manifestation of the supernatural power that has possessed him that he is able to relate his songs. These songs are rendered at every *gotlim* throughout the ceremonial season so that the information which they contain is firmly impressed upon all Bella Coola.

The preliminaries to the Cannibal's final exorcism consist of being doused in human urine as well as the grease from the heads of sock-eye salmon and then being immersed in the river. It is to be expected that supernatural beings abhor anything that is steeped in human essence (the quintessentially human
being as unacceptable to siut as the quintessentially supernatURAL is to humans) and that human urine would be used to enjoin the departure of a particularly tenacious supernatural hold. The dousing in the river is a typical act of purification and is performed on those occasions when human beings wish to present themselves to the supernatural in a particularly pleasing light. It may at first appear contradictory that the Cannibal would be both doused in urine and grease (displeasing to the supernatural) and then cleansed in water (pleasing to the supernatural) but in fact this serves to strike a metaphoric balance between the supernatural and the human which is greatly to be desired. As I have said before, these two realms are not and cannot be mutually exclusive -- the human must both embrace and distance the supernatural in order to remain both alive (embrace) and human (distance).

After the foregoing ablutions the Cannibal's songs are sung and his dance is danced. After this his consumption of acceptable human food indicates his returning humanness. The final expulsion of the call augurs his re-entry into the human community and his remaining propensity to bouts of frenzy serves to reinforce the notion that the human and the supernatural, like life and death, are inseparable, and that it is only through acts of controlled transformation that one is able to achieve a viable balance between them.

I would now like to look at the Kusiotum or Self-Destroying dances. In these dances it is thought that the dancer is possessed by the supernatural being Kutstkäkmidjut, who performs
these dances in Nusmat'a. According to McIlwraith:

In these the dancer undergoes mutilation and death, but his (sic) supernatural power enables him to return to life....
The five dances known as Kusiotfm are:
The Stomach-Cutting Dance;
The Beheading Dance;
The Drowning Dance;
The Burning Dance; and
The Swallowing of Hot Stones Dance.
Each of these comprises a distinct ceremonial of great complexity, but only one prerogative is required.
That is, a man who has the Kusiotfm right may allow his stomach to be cut one year, and when he next performs will choose to display his ability to swallow hot stones.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.128)

Again, the reader should be cautioned that although the male pronoun is used these dances were performed by women as well as men. I will provide an account of the Stomach-Cutting Dance and then go on to present my analysis.

Whistling is heard from the mountains during the nfbusam of some other dancer, the non-kusiut members are expelled, and the Kusiotfm dancer (for whom this is tsixtamem) responds with a low hooting whistle and eventually jerks back abruptly as the call enters him. There is a frenzied beating of sticks after which the Kusiotfm, amid a crowd of kukusiut, goes to every house in the village crying, "Please say what you want; I will do it." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.131). The circuit of the village is repeated four times and on the fourth occasion the Kusiotfm is holding a knife, thus making it clear that he is to be disembowelled, "...and the kukusiut show signs of grief at the danger to which their fellow is about to be exposed." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.131). The Kusiotfm then returns
to his house and the kukusiut spend the rest of tsixtämem composing a song for the dancer, the theme of which is always of Nusmat'a and its denizens.

On nusiutälsap (the following day) a second song is composed and wood is cut for the making of masks and puppets.9 Certain kukusiut are also allotted the task of preparing a wooden frame over which is stretched a dog or deer skin and which will fit over the Kusiot'm's stomach. Four women are selected to sing four mourning songs and the rest of nusiutälsap is spent in the composition and rehearsal of these tunes.

On the morning of got'im a two foot long band of dyed and undyed cedar bark is hung outside the dancer's house above the doorway. This serves as a warning to the non-kusiut members that the kukusiut are working within and that under no circumstances are they to be disturbed. The central fire is moved forward and two mat enclosures are built in each rear corner of the house. During the evening the two songs of the Kusiot'm and the four songs of the women mourners are practiced and then "...all sit silent as if in grief, while the women occasionally utter mournful ejaculations, dreading the danger to which [the dancer] will be exposed." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.134). At this point the non-kusiut members arrive and, as all wait in intense silence, an anuyêx (a kusiut who has the ability to summon the appearance of a 'puppet-patron' or 'patrons') suddenly calls forth her/his 'puppet-patron'10 while the kukusiut commence to drone and to loudly and rapidly beat their sticks. One by one a number of anuyêx call forth their respective
puppet-patrons while the heralds comment on the proceedings. When this has been concluded the non-kusiut members are expelled and the kukusiut depart shortly thereafter.

Here it should be mentioned that "[the] Kusiotf m ceremony resembles a double kusiut rite since it comprises two sets of four days and nights." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.141). Thus, in keeping with the general pattern of kusiut performances, the next day is both n̓busam (the final day in the first set of days) and t̓sixt̓amem (the first day in the final set of days). On this day behind the central fire of the dance house a hole is dug which will accommodate both the Kusiotf m dancer and his assistant. The Kusiotf m stands waist-deep in this hole while his assistant situates himself with his head at the dancer's feet and his outspread legs protruding in such a way that it appears as though only one man is sitting on the floor. At this point the non-kusiut members are called in and the Kusiotf m arises and circles the fire four times before returning and once again taking up his position in the hole. Now an anuyɛx calls forth her/his puppet-patron and,

[a] whistle sounds, the kukusiut women drone and the uninitiated see one of the puppet figurines move across the back of the house, though they do not see the concealed ropes by which this is managed. The figure disappears as if it had entered its owner who goes to [the Kusiotf m] and makes the motion of passing something into him. The other anuyɛx do likewise.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.136)

When this has been completed a number of non-kusiut members are induced to come forward and examine the Kusiotf m. As these
people approach the Kusiotfm a kusiut "...kneads with [her/his] fingers against the back of the neck of each to strengthen [her/his] spirit\textsuperscript{12} so that it will not be drawn from him with fatal results." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.138). A non-kusiut member is then chosen to slit the Kusiotfm's stomach by drawing a copper or obsidian knife from just below the left lower rib to just below the right lower rib. The intestines of dogs (which have been placed in the protective covering over the Kusiotfm's stomach) spill onto the floor and the dancer falls back as though dead. According to McIlwraith:

As soon as [the Kusiotfm] has fallen, pandemonium breaks out in the house. The kukusiut women weep and wail, whistles sound at intervals, and the effect is like bedlam. Presently two or three of the uninitiated move to the door and harangue the kukusiut in this fashion:

"You have gone too far, you powerful people. We know you are powerful and in league with the supernatural ones, but now you have slain a man. Your power is too great, it is dangerous. Unless he is returned to life before dawn we will slay you." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, pp.137-138)

The non-kusiut members who speak the foregoing words are actually kukusiut spies\textsuperscript{13} and their supposed confreres are duly astounded at their daring. As the commotion dies down a number of non-kusiut members are allowed to circle the fire sun-wise and observe the Kusiotfm's corpse. McIlwraith states that:

At this juncture, the old women selected for the purpose sing the mourning song, of which the words and tune never vary; they are believed to have been handed down from time immemorial. The theme is of Snitsmän-a, a kindly supernatural woman who restores to life kukusiut killed in the performance of their rites. The singer in the upper, eastern corner of the house sings the following words:
Perhaps you saw correctly hence you did so;

After a short interval, she is answered by the singer in the lower, western, rear corner of the house as follows:

Let there come to each the voice of Snitsman·a

to revive the one who has so injured himself

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, pp.138-139)

Once the singing has been completed there falls a silence which is eventually broken by whistling. A kusiut herald informs the non-kusiut members that this is the sound of one of the puppet-patrons which had been previously inserted into the Kusiotfm now leaving him to journey to Nusmät·a. Once all the puppet-patrons have left the dancer they begin to return. The return of each of these ceremonial objects is signalled by a thud on the roof and the commencement of whistling. Again referring to McIlwraith's account:

Sometimes the puppet-patrons return to the Kusiotfm but more often to the invoker, and the transference previously enacted is repeated over the body of the dancer who continues to lie as if lifeless. Now and then the uninitted are invited forward to look at him and they notice that the gaping wound is slowly closing, an easy matter to arrange in the dim light of the house. At intervals the puppet-patrons go and return from the land above, and the proceedings are sometimes enlivened by the owners telling a herald, who in turn informs the audience, what the puppet patron saw on its journey aloft. Usually each goes and returns four times in the course of the night. Each of the women selected to sing the mourning songs performs once, standing in a corner of the house and waving a wand wound with alternate bands of dyed and undyed cedar bark. So the long night passes.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, pp.139)
At dawn sustained whistling is taken to be the voice of Snitsman’a. The Kusiotém begins to move and eventually, in a very weak voice, he starts to sing. The kukusiut singers appear to listen carefully to the words of this song and then they too begin to sing it. There is general rejoicing and the anuyfx, pressing cupped hands onto the Kusiotém and calling 'hoip', extract their puppet-patrons and send them back to Nusmat’a. The non-kusiut are now ejected from the house after which the kukusiut themselves retire.

The following day is the second nusiutälsap and a number of kukusiut are sent to gather wood for the making of masks. By stick beating and cries of 'hoip' the power of the Kusiotém (who is considered to be too weakened by his experiences to attend in person) is transferred to a kusiut who is going on the wood-cutting expedition and is re-transferred by the same method upon the individual's return. The mask-making duties are now given out and as the Kusiotém (like most kusiut performers) "...is entitled to show as many of the beings in the Bella Coola pantheon as he desires" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.141) their duties are numerous. Once this has been completed,

...the kukusiut practice a number of songs composed by the singers. One, or sometimes two, prepared for the Kusiotém is couched as if he himself were telling what he had seen in the upper regions. They describe Ağquntám, his messanger Oqołiks...and, especially Kulslkakmidjut, the supernatural being whose stomach is periodically cut in the land above.... The singers have also composed a song for each of the anuyfx and these too must be practiced....The words of each of these songs is (sic) of the manner in which the patron helped [the Kusiotém] to survive his ordeal.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, pp.141-142)
When the kukusiut decide that they have sufficiently rehearsed they disperse for the evening and nusiutâlsap comes to a close.

Due to the number of masks which must be made ("the principal supernatural beings are always shown, and any animals, since all are supernatural, can likewise be displayed" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.142)) the next day, qotfim, often expands into at least two days. At any rate, in the evening of the day upon which the mask-making is completed the non-kusiut members are summoned into the dance house. First the female mourners dance individually to their songs, then the anuyâx perform in like manner and finally the Kusiotâx himself dances to the accompaniment of his songs. The latter dances feebly, as though not yet fully recovered from grievous wounds. Once this has been completed all the kukusiut who have received calls during the ceremonial season dance to their specific songs. This being done, the evening's events are concluded.

The next and final day is níbusam and towards evening a dancer representing Ogôrikts (the supernatural messenger) visits each house in the village-community four times, announcing the coming performance in the dance house. This being's tour of the houses is always presaged by "...the frantic, but measured, beating of sticks that always accompanies a curing ceremony." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.144). After Ogôrikts's fourth visit throughout the village the non-kusiut members are called into the dance house. Once within the dance house the non-kusiut members witness a dazzling array of masked performers whom they know to be supernatural beings. In his account
McIlwraith lists the following beings (although it should be
kept in mind that there is no fixed limit to the number that
may appear):

Oqo'ikts...stands at one side of the space behind
the fire while the inevitable An'likwotsaix moves
to and fro, keeping up a constant flow of conversa­
tion. Sometimes Kulskakmidjut stands behind the
fire; on other occasions he has been known to walk
through the house, accompanied by two assistants
blowing eagle down over him. He moves his face as
if in pain, and then lies down behind the fire; where
the uninitiated can see his stomach contracting and
expanding as if it had been ripped to expose the
entrails....Oqo'ikts sits down behind the fire and
another supernatural being comes from one of the
closures. As far as could be learnt, the order
of their appearance on the occasion when [this
particular dancer] performed was as follows, though
there is no ceremonial significance attached thereto:

Oqo'Ikt... 
Atquntam... 
Snusilkais appears and stands near Atquntam, his
nose and forehead wrinkled in deep thought.
Sjsxskalaix joins the group....
Anumintsknim. Three or four masked figures appear
together to portray these beings. Their function
is to remind Atquntam of those whom he should invite
to his ceremonials above.

Sninig. As this dreaded monster appears, the un­
initiated cower convulsively and the kukusiut women
drone. Several masked figures accompany the Sninig
around the fire, blowing eagle down over the creature,
and An'likwotsaix explains to the uninitiated that
this is to protect them from the monster. The heralds
as usual echo her remarks....Haohao. This super­
natural, mythological denizen of the mountains, is
in the form of an enormous bird with long beak and
bony wings....
Alxwolatinim. This is the supernatural herald for
Thunder, the leading kusiut among supernatural beings...
Thunder. The mask representing this creature is
large and of fearsome appearance with hooked beak
and overhanging forehead....
Synxnsaxs. Twelve of these beings appear together,
disguised behind masks representing young girls.
They are the pre-adolescent children of various
supernatural beings in the land above who play toget­
her outside Nusmat^a....
The Hermaphrodite. This being wears a mask repre­
senting a cast of countenance midway between "a man
and a woman", and speaks in a nasal tone difficult to describe....
Sxaiaxwax wears a mask representing an ugly and licentious man and carries beneath his bear-skin robe a partly concealed stick....
As before stated, the number of supernatural beings shown depends on the wishes of [the Kusiot'lm dancer]. On the occasion now being described, the informants agreed that more had been used, but which they were had been forgotten.


Once these performances have been completed the non-kusiut members are ejected from the dance house and the kukusiut burn the masks. During the remainder of the ceremonial season the Kusiot'l'm is expected to conduct himself as one who has gained dignity and knowledge through personal experience with the supernatural.

In order to avoid needless repetition I shall discuss only those features of the Kusiot'lm dance which have not been discussed with regard to the Cannibal dance. As with all kusiut dances, the coming of the call is heralded by whistling and it is only when one of their number begins to act in a ritually anti-social manner that the Bella Coola know who the recipient will be. Further to this, the possessed one then goes to each house in the village crying, "Please say what you want; I will do it." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.131), and it is only on his fourth and final circuit that the presence of the knife clarifies which ceremony will soon occur. What is of interest here is the fluid nature of the supernatural. I have argued that what distinguishes the supernatural from the human is uncontrolled transformational activity and I have further argued
that although uncontrolled transformational activity is the force of life, being a state of ceaseless orderless flux (chaos/unstructured energy), it is by definition non-human. It follows that the Bella Coola regard the supernatural beings as non-hierarchical -- what is of ultimate significance is not that a specific supernatural being possesses a given individual, but that the supernatural does. In other words, the form in which the supernatural manifests itself is incidental -- it is capable of all forms. What is respected and honoured is the power behind the form. Thus at first the Kusiotrm dancer only knows that he has been possessed by the supernatural. He asks for specific instructions because, just as the concept of specific supernatural beings enables the Bella Coola to objectify and hence deal with their universe, so specific instructions enable the dancer to objectify and hence deal with his possession. A particular manifestation of the supernatural is dealt with in a particular way. This is in keeping with the knowledge that the supernatural may display itself in endless forms. The fact that each supernatural form incurs human behaviour which sets it apart from other supernatural forms enables the Bella Coola to both collectivize and differentiate, to embrace and distance the supernatural at one and the same time (consequently allowing them to acknowledge the force of life without forfeiting their humanity). Thus whistling, stick-beating and possession are common to all kusiut performances (collectivize/embrace) while certain features are exclusive to specific kusiut performances (differentiate/distance).
An interesting feature of the Kusiotm ceremony is that the anuyrx (who possess ancestral myths which contain this particular prerogative) call forth the supernatural in the form of 'puppet-patrons' which they are able to insert into the dancer. This provides an explicit instance of the supernatural origins of the Bella Coola for it is the only occasion on which human beings attempt to control the supernatural through supernatural rather than human agencies. On all other occasions the Bella Coola attempt to cajole, beseech or plain out-wit the supernatural but in the case of the anuyrx they blatantly pit the supernatural against itself. This is clearly a throw-back to the time before the first ancestors became human, to the time when they could transform others as well as themselves at will. The fact that the anuyrx can call forth their puppet-patrons at will, without going through specific forms of ritualized behaviour, graphically reaffirms the Bella Coola link with the supernatural. Upon the death of the Kusiotm dancer the puppet-patrons journey to Nusmat-a and then return, usually to the anuyrx, who re-inserts them into the dancer. It is at this time that the dancer returns to life and, having done so, the anuyrx withdraw their 'puppet-patrons' and send them back to the land above. The anuyrx and their puppet-patrons function as a vehicle whereby the Bella Coola may re-experience the world of their first ancestors -- a world where life and death had not yet become distinct entities ("After all the pretty contrast of life and death / Proves that these opposite things [partook] of one"),20 and where uncontrolled transforma-
tional activity ruled supreme. In that world the appearance of life is not life as it is humanly known and the appearance of death is not death as it is humanly known. In order for things to be humanly known they must be classifiable and hence at least reasonably predictable. Of course the idea of classification implies the idea of order and indeed, the Bella Coola recognize that humanity and order came into being concomitantly. Before that time everything was chaos — a seething, indistinguishable tumult of pure energy, neither life nor death but partaking of both. In other words, everything existed in a state of uncontrolled transformational activity. The anuyix's use of the puppet-patron, being an isolated instance of human ability to call into being and direct supernatural phenomena at will, harks back to the pre-human. But the fact that the anuyix is human, and that her/his activities take place within a wider human ceremonial (the Kusiotc ceremony), ensures that her/his exhibition of pre-human transformational activity is strictly controlled and hence beneficial rather than detrimental to the human. Nonetheless, to the Bella Coola the phenomenon of the anuyix and their puppet-patrons is clearly symbolic of past power.

Another feature which is peculiar to the Kusiotc ceremony is that it presents the only occasion on which the non-kukusiut openly oppose the kukusiut. With the words, "You have gone too far, you powerful people....Your power is too great, it is dangerous. Unless he is returned to life before dawn we will slay you" (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, pp.137-138), the non-kusiut members reaffirm the value of the human amidst an atmosphere
of the supernatural. What is note-worthy is that the most fundamentally human, the average uninitiated Bella Coola, is shown to have the final word as to how the kukusiut, the feared and respected intermediaries between the human and the supernatural, should conduct themselves. The outspokenness of these non-kukusiut serves as a reminder to all Bella Coola that, impressive as the powers of the kukusiut might be, they are not sufficient compensation for the loss of a human life. The kukusiut are expected to utilize their intimacy with the supernatural in order to strengthen the human community. If, due to being carried away with the power of their position ("you have gone too far"), the kukusiut threaten more harm than good to the human community, they are severely punished ("..we will slay you"). The Bella Coola are, above all else, anthropocentric.

With respect to the appearance of various supernatural beings on ng.busam, there are two things which it is crucial to keep in mind. Firstly, there is no ceremonial significance attached to the order of their appearance, and secondly, there is no fixed limit to the number of beings that may appear. Both these facts underscore the fluid nature of uncontrolled transformational activity. Thus both the beginning and the ending of the Kusiotem ceremony reinforce the notion that the supernatural, as opposed to the human, is inimical to concepts of hierarchy and concrete classification. With regard to kusiut masks McIlwraith points out that although a few representations are reasonably standardized (i.e. An-likwotsaix, Echo, Thunder, the Hermaphrodite, the haohao and the Laugher),
...so much variation occurs in others that even a kusiut of much experience cannot always tell what being is represented. The masks are painted, and sometimes the designs indicate the being, even though the carving fails to do so; verisimilitude is not considered necessary. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. II, pp. 27-28) (emphasis mine)

This tends to confirm my contention regarding the Bella Coola attitude and thought toward the supernatural. Given the endless number of supernatural phenomena which make up the Bella Coola universe, it is of obvious significance that so few are even remotely standardized. Of those that are, let me point out that An'likwotsaix functions primarily as an interpreter of other supernatural phenomena and consequently her standardization tends to prove rather than disprove the fluid nature of the supernatural; Echo and Thunder together represent the gamut of sound from the faintest whisper to the most ear-splitting crash and thus underscore multitude rather than singularity; the Hermaphrodite, embodying both female and male, may be seen to emphasize fluidity rather than classification; and finally, the haohao, unlike other supernatural phenomena, was still remoured to have been seen by many Bella Coola at the time McIlwraith collected his material (1922). This being the case, its standardization is quite likely a recent development.

Further to this, the fact that not the form of the mask itself, but an abstract design along with an explanation from both the heralds and the individual representing An'likwotsaix serve to designate which supernatural phenomenon is being manifested, strongly supports the idea that what is of crucial
importance to the Bella Coola is not the notion of concrete individual supernatural beings, but the notion that with respect to the supernatural (uncontrolled transformational activity) the form of the manifestation is always incidental to the manifestation itself.

Finally, the Self-Destroying dance stands as an explicit comment on the nature of life and death. Bella Coola mythology is rife with instances of the mutilation and subsequent restoration of supernatural beings. This is not, as McIlwraith would have us believe, due to inconsistency or lack of logic, but to the fundamental Bella Coola concept of transformation. Life and death, like all other classifications, are human rather than supernatural phenomena. In the realm of the actively transformational such distinctions are meaningless. Through the idea that Kulslkâkmidjut is periodically mutilated and restored in Nusmat'a, the Bella Coola are able to objectify their thoughts concerning the supernatural. Being human, the Kusiotčm dancer, once possessed by Kulslkâkmidjut, experiences an actual human death. As with the Cannibal dancer, it is only through the superimposition of human control that the Kusiotčm dancer is able to return to life and to re-enter the realm of distinctions. And, as with the Cannibal, once the Kusiotčm has survived his experiences with siut he is able to provide the Bella Coola with the knowledge that acts of controlled transformation make it possible to gain strength from the supernatural while reaffirming the human.

Although analyzing more dances would serve to further emphasize my contentions regarding the kusiut ceremonies I
believe that my main points are more than adequately demonstrated in my discussion of the Cannibal and Kusiut ceremonies and that dwelling on other dances may be more repetitive than informative -- to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, a person who sets out to exhaust her topic invariably ends up exhausting her audience. Therefore I will now conclude this chapter with some general observations concerning the kusiut society.

The essence of the kusiut society is that it embodies both the ability of and the necessity for the Bella Coola to mediate between the realms of the supernatural and the human. In other words, it presents a forum wherein the Bella Coola may both witness and participate in acts of controlled transformation, thus reaffirming their link with the supernatural (transformation) while emphasizing their humanity (control). Given that the supernatural, being uncontrolled transformational activity, is the source of life (creation being one face of transformation) and yet non-human (orderless transformation being chaos), it follows that, in order to survive, the human community must acknowledge its supernatural source through the superimposition of human control, thus recognizing and celebrating both realms of power. For indeed, as far as the Bella Coola are concerned, these realms are inseparable.
CHAPTER TWO: FOOTNOTES

1 An untranslatable word which is supposed to exercise a calming effect.

2 Actually the dancer is hidden within a box-drum and carried back into the house.

3 In actuality the cannibal remains hidden in the woods for this period of time.

4 The cry 'ye...' is thought to expedite the journey of any being who travels to Nusmät'a.

5 Although these songs have in fact been previously composed, the idea is that they are the spontaneous rendering of the Cannibal's account of Nusmät'a.


7 The entire question of human as opposed to supernatural power is dealt with in chapter three, where I discuss the concept of sxetsta or ceremonial chastity. Very briefly, the opposition between the supernatural and the human is the opposition between chaos and order. Just as the definitively supernatural (chaos) is abhorrent to humans, so the definitively human (order) is abhorrent to the supernatural.

8 The use of grease from the heads of sock-eye salmon is not quite so clear. It is possible that salmon are viewed as metaphorically human (as in the case of the Cannibal who eats raw salmon and the birth of twins being due to a salmon entering the human mother) and therefore their grease being somehow equivalent to human urine.

9 These puppets appear to be unique to the Kusiot'em dances and are thought to be the manifestations of various supernatural phenomena having the form of anything from snake and toad to human being and hummingbird. These beings may be summoned by certain kukusiut known as anuyrx and may be injected into the Kusiot'em dancer at will.

10 I suspect that this is an extremely poor gloss on the part of McIlwraith as the word 'puppet' has a trivializing effect. I use it grudgingly.

11 See pp. 39-40 of this chapter.
It will be remembered that the Bella Coola thought a person's xixmâncâs to be situated at the back of the neck.

Certain kukusiut serve solely as spies among the non-kukusiut. It is their responsibility to ensure that no non-member gain too much knowledge regarding the functioning of the kusiut society.

McIlwraith's further gloss reads: "You performed your dance in accordance with what you saw....You have received power that is too great and too dangerous." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p. 138).

An'likwotsaix travels only during the ceremonial season when she is present at every kusiut dance in the form of a woman with a long, thin face and pointed chin..., who 'explains' the significance of the figures to the uninitiated in a peculiar high-pitched voice." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.9).

Snusilkâls is known as the 'Wise One' or 'He of Whom Questions are Asked'. This being is thought to decide "...points of ritual in the dances in the land above." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.143).

Sëxsâxkâlaix is thought to have the form of a Grizzly Bear and to advise A'quntâm on any kusiut matters.

The Hermaphrodite is thought to be the guardian of the Sxnxn-ësâxs.

The sight of Sxaiaxwax often causes a human being to bleed profusely from all bodily orifices and to die shortly thereafter.


The fact that these supposed non-kukusiut are in reality kukusiut spies is immaterial. The idea is that the non-kukusiut oppose the kukusiut and it is the Idea with which I am concerned.

These powers, of course, derive from the kukusiut association with the supernatural.
As I have been unable to find anything other than a passing mention of the Laugher in the extant Bella Coola material it is not possible for me to comment of the significance of its standardization.

For example, the Mystery Dance, wherein an individual is possessed by three particular supernatural manifestations, all of which must be identified by some member of the human community before the dancer may be exorcised, emphasizes both the fluidity of the supernatural and the necessity of human control; the Ghost Dance, wherein the four main days of a kusiut ceremony are reversed and the performers terrify the non-kusiut members, emphasizes both the unpredictability of the supernatural and the fear which it inspires, and so on.
III. SHAMANISM

In discussing shamanism I would like first to deal with its occurrence in myth and then go on to examine its occurrence in the daily life of the Bella Coola.\(^1\) Like every other aspect of Bella Coola culture shamanism has its expression in myth, and therefore an analysis of the latter is an essential prerequisite to the understanding of the former.

According to McIlwraith,

> The Bella Coola believe that long ago men (sic) were so much more powerful than at present, and so close to the supernatural, that all were virtually shamans. The prowess and adventures of these demi-gods are favourite themes for stories. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.539-540)

As the reader will recall, in chapter one I argue that the first ancestors, before they become human, are supernatural, and that it follows that smaiusta (origin/ancestral myths) deal with the relinquishing rather than the gaining of supernatural power. It is in simsma, myths which deal with post first ancestor Bella Coola and which are not ancestral-family specific, that one encounters instances of the gaining of shamanic power. As most of the myths are relatively short, I will provide synopses of a number of them before going on to offer my analysis.

"The Fortunes of Qwun·a"\(^2\) tells of a man who had been a highly successful hunter before he lost his sight.\(^3\) One day Qwun·a sits beside his wife as she busies herself gaffing sockeye salmon from a shallow creek. The wife tells Qwun·a that she sees a black bear on the other side of the water. Qwun·a asks her to bring him his bow and arrow and then further instructs
her to point his hands in the right direction, whereupon he
fires the arrow and kills the bear. However, his wife tells
him that he has missed and she surreptitiously skins and cuts
up the bear, intending to consume all the meat herself. At
this point, "...a Supernatural being, who had seen Qwun·a's
misfortunes, took pity on him and rubbed his hands over his
Qwun·a sees his wife boiling the bear meat and is so angry that he,

[tears] her clothing, her flesh, even her bones
into small fragments which he scatters to the
winds in all directions.
"From this time forth", he said, "you will appear
to humans only as Lynx."
Owing to the power which Qwun·a had obtained his
words came true; each fragment became a lynx and the
animals so created were the progenitors of all lynxes.

In another adventure Qwun·a is abandoned upon a small
island by two brothers who are jealous of his hunting ability.
Lost and alone,

[he] was very disconsolate. All night he wept,
so miserable that he could not sleep. The next
night as he lay sobbing with eyes closed he felt
someone kick his foot, and heard a woman's voice.
"Come, get up," it said. "Come to our chief's
house, he wants to see you."
(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.662)

Qwun·a does not open his eyes in time to see his visitor and
he cries himself to sleep. Again he is aroused in the same
manner and this time he catches sight of the woman:

"I see you," he called out from beneath his cape,
"don't run away."
The girl did not vanish, but repeated her invitation.
Qwun·a got up and followed his strange guide, who
pushed against the stone which he had been using as
a support for his back and head. It reversed, revealing a house, with a chief sitting behind the fire. It was the home of the sea-lions. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p.663)

The sea-lion chief provides Qwun.a with his canoe, a sea-lion's stomach. In this vehicle Qwun.a reaches his home where he kills the two men who had abandoned him. He "...was able to make the strange voyage because Sea-Lion had made him a shaman." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p.663).

In "The Lad Who Was Made A Shaman By the Salmon", Anutsit-lä́m is playing a game with some other boys which consists of hopping from one chunk of floating ice to another. Eventually he goes too far and finds himself being carried out to sea. Unable to return to shore Anutsitlä́m drifts aimlessly about until he finds himself in the land of the salmon, where the fish appear in human form. Here he lands and,

...being hungry, made his way to the house of the chief who told him to take a young boy and a young girl and throw them into the water....As soon as the boy touched the water he changed to a salmon, jumped above the surface four times, and swam back as a fish to the shore so that the thrower could lift him from the water with his hands. When he threw in the little girl exactly the same thing happened. Following the instructions of the salmon chief, Anutsitlä́m cooked the male salmon without cutting off either the head or the tail. After eating the flesh he threw all of the bones back into the water, where they at once assembled to form a live salmon which jumped four times, then became a boy once more and swam back to the beach. In like manner he cooked the female salmon, ate as much as he desired and threw the bones into the water, where they formed a salmon which jumped four times and swam back to shore as a girl; but when she landed Anutsitlä́m discovered that she was blind in one eye. He searched where he had been eating and found a morsel of the white of the salmon's eye which had fallen to the ground and been overlooked with the
other debris. He took this and threw it back with the girl into the water. Then she returned to the shore with both eyes normal.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.664)

At this point Anutsitə'am transforms himself into a fish and decides to accompany the salmon on their journey to his home village. Anutsitə'am's father, Ximpdimut, sees a large, beautiful spring salmon and, not knowing that it is his son, he greatly desires to capture it. The next day Anutsitə'am allows his father to capture him whereupon Ximpdimut,

...called out to his eldest son: "I have caught the salmon I spoke about yesterday, it is a beauty."

His son went out to see the wonderful catch and cried out in wonder: "Why, it is my younger brother."

Anutsitə'am had again assumed human form.... He carried a stick with which he had only to go through the motion of casting it at anything, and the creature at which it was pointed fell dead. Accompanied by his brother, the shaman set out to hunt mergansers. He killed so many by means of his supernatural power that the shelter in which they were staying was soon filled with feathers. Then Anutsitə'am, saying that he desired to go aloft, told his brother to beat with a stick upon the feathers and continue doing so until he, the shaman, had disappeared from sight. As the lad started beating, Anutsitə'am became lighter and lighter and finally he drifted up above.


Anutsitə'am tells his brother that he will return in one day, but as a day is a year in the land of the supernatural, he does not come back for some time. His eventual return is heralded by a thud on the roof after which he dances and sings of his experiences in the land above. Anutsitə'am's fame soon spreads throughout the area for "...[hunting] was so easy for [him] that he killed and gave meat to anyone who asked him to
do so, and in due course he became a wealthy chief." (McIlwraith, Ilwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.665).

In "The Lad Who Was Helped By A Salmon" a number of chiefs' sons throw a destitute orphan over a waterfall. A coho salmon rescues the boy and tells him to,

...gather splinters from firewood and touch with one of them the big toe of each of the youths who had thrown him in. He further told his guest to take his own name, Wai's, Cohoe Salmon, and with it the prerogative of a kusiut dance. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.666)

With his newly acquired shaman's power the boy returns to his home and kills his previous tormentors. According to the myth, "[in] later years he received visions and became a noted shaman." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.666).

In "The Man Who Was Helped By A Raven",

...a certain man was very sick and ready to die. Weary of life he went off and lay down in the forest on the south side of North Bentick Arm, not far from its head.

A raven came to him and picked out one of his eyes, saying as he did so:

"Get up! Get up! You are all right now, take the name Qwaxqwax-wanim."

This means, "Restored to Life through the Raven." The man returned to his village a successful shaman, and gave a shaman's dance in the usual manner, but thenceforth he had only one eye. His benefactor was Tlicáplitán'a, who had thus helped him, appearing in the guise of a raven. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, pp.666-667)

"The Four Brothers" tells of four siblings who set out on a journey and come upon a solitary house in the forest. The occupant of the house, an old woman,

...gave them food and help.

"There is great danger where you are going," she said, "but if you are brave you will come to no
harm." Turning to the youngest brother she
continued: "Take these two mountain goat bladders.
One will give you heat when you need it; the other
cold. You are now a shaman."
The woman was a supernatural being.
(McIlwraith, 1948,
Vol.I, p.669)

As the brothers continue their wandering they come upon Great
Blue Heron, who is fishing along the bank of a river. The
shaman transforms himself into a salmon and tempts Great Blue
Heron to transfix him with his harpoon. When Great Blue Heron
does so, the shaman cuts loose the harpoon head, rejoins his
brothers and reassumes human form, leaving the former to bemoan
the loss of his precious fishing gear. Later on, the brothers
visit Great Blue Heron and offer to trade the harpoon-head for
his 'rainbow eye', which enables him to see salmon at any depth,
however murky the water. Great Blue Heron, who does not realize
that the harpoon head is in fact his own, reluctantly agrees
to the trade, whereupon the brothers continue on their way.

Soon they meet the son of ixt£xwan-i whom they bury up
to his neck in sand. Amused by their prank they continue on
until they meet ixt£xwan-i, who suspects that they have harmed
her child. They continually deny that they have met the boy
until,

...becoming still more angry, [ixt£xwan-i] used
her supernatural power to chill the house. It
became colder and colder until everything was
coated with ice, while a whirlwind carried the
brothers up into the four corners of the house.
At this the shaman used his heat-giving bladder
to drive away the cold and the four dropped to
earth, none the worse for their experience. Then
they told the truth to the angry mother.
(McIlwraith, 1948,
Vol.I, p.671)
ixtłxwan·i was so pleased that her son had not been harmed that she forgave the brothers and "...they all had a pleasant time together." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.671).

The next and final portion of this myth is very interesting and deserves to be quoted in full:

The brothers now continued their journey until they came to a house with a man sitting inside. They did not realize that they had been ascending and that this was Ałquntám's abode. He invited them to enter and gave them his daughter as a joint wife. Soon the house began to grow unbearably hot. Ałquntám was conspiring to roast the mortals, and would have succeeded had not the shaman used the cold-producing bladder to lower the temperature. That night the four stayed with their joint wife. Ałquntám did not realize that his guests were too strong for him. In the morning he set them what he considered impossible tasks, such as hunting large numbers of goats on the mountains; thanks to the shaman's power, however, the four young men were able to accomplish them all. Their wife tried to injure her husbands by transforming herself into a ferocious'bear, which attacked them, but before the arrows of the youngest brother, it fell dead. Again she changed herself into a goat and succeeded in butting the shaman over the edge of a precipice, but he merely assumed the form of eagle down and floated up again. They brought back to Ałquntám's house a vast amount of goat flesh. The shaman announced that he was proof against all Ałquntám's wiles, but the latter, not convinced, tried once more to roast the brothers by building a fire beneath the house; this time, as before, the heat was powerless against the cold-giving power of the bladder.

Next day Ałquntám asked the shaman, whom he rightly judged to be the cause of his failure to slay the four, to accompany him to cut firewood. The two went off in a canoe, while the three other brothers stayed in the house with their wife. Ałquntám guided the canoe to the very centre of the ocean, where he asked the shaman to drive in a post he had brought with him. He did this easily with a sledge-hammer such as is used for driving stakes for olachen-nets, but at almost the last stroke it slipped from his grasp to the bottom of the sea. Then Ałquntám burst out angrily:

"I have had that hammer for a very long time. It is a favourite of mine. I hate to lose it."
"I am very sorry, but it was an accident," replied his son-in-law.

"Can you not recover it?" asked Ärguntäm.

"I will try," answered the young man. Accordingly he dived into the sea. Ärguntäm, who had been hoping for this, caused a thick coating of ice to form over the whole surface of the ocean, and went home, thinking he had seen the last of the troublesome young man. Such was not the case, for the shaman merely changed himself into a salmon, picked up the hammer in his mouth and swam away, looking for a crack in the ice. Finding one at last he crawled up on top, where he became human again and returned to his father-in-law's house very angry. Ärguntäm was sitting warming himself before the fire, but when the shaman threw the hammer on the ground before him he disintegrated into dust, dead. Thus the four brothers returned home, leaving their evil wife behind them.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.671-672)

"The Woman Who Married A Bear" tells of a young woman who, while wandering alone in the forest, inadvertently steps in some bear's dung. A little while later she meets a bear in human form who takes her to his home and marries her. Many months later the woman tells her mate that she would like her eldest brother to come and visit her. However, the bear will only consent to a visit by the youngest, as he is the one who has taken the most care to be ceremonially pure. The youngest brother appears, kills the woman's mate, and all the villagers come to skin the bear and cut up the meat. The woman instructs the villagers as follows:

"Go ahead with the flesh; I will follow with the skin."

This she draped over herself and began to imitate a bear so successfully that the dogs barked at her, startling the people who had gone ahead. At the village she told them to dry and stretch the pelt carefully; when these instructions had been carried out, the woman took the teeth and leg-bones, clothed herself in the skin and forthwith became a bear. In
this shape she slew all the villagers except a younger sister and the youngest of her brothers, who was out hunting at the time. Through her marriage with the bear she had obtained such power that all were helpless before her except the younger sister, who was immune owing to being secluded on reaching puberty; her menstrual blood was her protection.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p. 681)

The younger sister tells the shaman that she knows that except for one part of her body she, (the shaman), is invulnerable. On the pretext of protecting her the younger sister convinces the shaman to disclose that her weakness is located in the palm of one hand. The young girl informs her brother of this weak spot and then persuades the shaman to hold her palms up to warm them at the fire. The brother, who is watching through a knot-hole, fires an arrow into the palm of the shaman's hand and thus kills her.

"The Lads Who Visited The Home Of The Dead" tells of two brothers who, despised and neglected by their parents, set off into the mountains. A porcupine leads them to a cave which they enter and, "...finally [emerge] into daylight, to find themselves in a new world, a land in which there [is] a large river and a sky resembling that above earth, but different."

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p. 582). The two brothers see a number of people on the opposite side of the river, but no matter how loudly they shout, they are unable to elicit any kind of response. Finally one of the brothers yawns, with the result that the people immediately send over a canoe to fetch them. As it appears that this canoe has no bottom, the elder
brother refuses to board it, but the younger brother, whose name is Kipitxs, leaps in and heads off to what he now realizes is the land of the dead. The elder brother wanders on and eventually comes to the home of the wolves where he is eaten, regurgitated and given the power to distinguish the different colours of smoke that arise from the homes of the various animals. He then returns to where he had left Kipitxs, ...

...and began to weep bitterly, thinking that he must be dead. But presently he heard the sound of footsteps inside the cave through which the porcupine had guided them; they drew nearer until the younger boy emerged. The elder was overjoyed, but his delight soon turned to dismay when he saw that his brother's face was green and haggard, with a strange expression; that he had lost all the flesh from his body, and that his clothes, the same that he had worn when they parted company, were torn to tatters. His brother's appearance affected him so much that he fell down dead. The younger lad, however, had been made a shaman by the dead, so he quickly restored his brother.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p. 584)

The two brothers return to their parents' home and sneak into their beds. Since the boys had disappeared the parents had had a change of heart and mourned their missing children so excessively that many of the village people were contemptuous of them. It is the boys' younger sister who first notices that they have returned and she finally convinces her parents to come and look for themselves. The elder brother maintains that he does not know what happened to his younger brother, but in their joy at the reappearance of at least one of their sons, the parents become revitalized. Although the brothers remain concealed, it is finally generally known that both have returned
and that the younger has been made a shaman of the dead. However,

[a] malicious chief made the statement that he did not believe this and cast insinuations as to why a shaman should conceal himself. Kipitxs used his power to inject sickness into the man and after a few days he died, though no-one knew the cause.


Just before the man is to be buried Kipitxs appears and revives him. A little while later, yet another person expresses doubt and he, too, is killed and restored by the young shaman. After this proof of his power there is universal consent that Kipitxs is a true shaman of the dead.

Again it must be kept in mind that like smaiusta, the available simsma are extremely fragmentary and are but the remnants of a once extensive and complex mythology. Nonetheless, from the foregoing myths, which may be taken as a representative sampling of the extant material, one is able to isolate the following features: first, the main character(s) is always in a liminal position with respect to the human community (e.g. orphaned, abandoned, sick, alone on the sea or in the woods); second, the main character(s) always enters the realm of the supernatural (e.g. Nusmat-a, land of the salmon, land of the dead, encounter with a supernatural being) and always returns to the human community; and third, the acquired power of the main character(s) is always of a transformational nature (e.g. the ability to transform her/himself into a bear, salmon, eagle down or whatever, the ability to transform heat to cold or cold to heat, the ability to transform a human being into a lynx)
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and must always be of benefit to the human community (e.g. restoring its members to life, ridding the community of evil influences, supplying the community with food and prestige). If the character who has acquired power is not of benefit to the human community (as in the case of the bear-woman) then she/he must be destroyed. I will now go on to analyse each of these points separately.

In "The Fortunes of Qwun'a" the main character is first of all blind, and then abandoned on an island. In "The Lad Who Was Made A Shaman By the Salmon", Anutsitlám is adrift on a block of ice. In "The Lad Who Was Helped By A Salmon" and "The Lads Who Visited The Home Of The Dead" the main characters are either orphaned and hence destitute or unappreciated by their parents and hence destitute. In "The Man Who Was Helped By A Raven" the main character is sick and dying, while in "The Four Brothers" and "The Woman Who Married A Bear" the main character is alone in the forest. All of these situations may be seen as liminal with respect to the human community. The main characters are all, by reason of geographical location, social position or state of health, set apart from the mainstream of humanity. Remembering that to the Bella Coola anything that is not human is supernatural, it is not surprising that the characters in these myths, being in various ways set apart from the human community, find themselves particularly susceptible to supernatural experiences. Just as the human is defined by classification and order, so the supernatural is defined by absence of classification and order. In presenting instances
wherein the main characters are neither fully a part of the human world nor fully a part of the supernatural world, where they are, in fact, 'betwixt and between' both realms, the myths provide a recognizable transitional phase straddling two modes of being. In a culture which emphasizes the community over the individual it follows that to be isolated either physically or psychologically is seen as dehumanizing in its most literal sense. And since to relinquish the human is to embrace the supernatural it is only logical that mythic shamanic experiences are preceded by the depiction of a pronounced gap between the main characters and their respective village-communities.

Moving on to the entry into the realm of the supernatural and re-entry into the human community, in "The Fortunes of Qwun-a" the main character enters the supernatural firstly via the appearance of a being who restores his sight and secondly when he is led to the land of the sea-lions. In "The Lad Who Was Made A Shaman By The Salmon" and "The Lad Who Was Helped By A Salmon" the main characters both enter the realm of the supernatural when they arrive in the land of the salmon. In "The Four Brothers" the main characters enter the realm of the supernatural through their encounter with a being in the form of an old woman, their encounter with ixt\\x27xwani, and their stay in Nusmat-a. In "The Man Who Was Helped By A Raven" the main character enters the supernatural through his encounter with ściicaplitän-a in the form of a raven. In "The Lads Who Visited The Home Of The Dead" the elder brother enters the realm of the supernatural when he visits the home of the wolves
while his younger brother does so when he visits the land of the dead. And finally, in "The Woman Who Married A Bear" the main character enters the realm of the supernatural when she enters the home of the bear. This sampling of supernatural encounters serves to emphasize the ubiquity of siut for it includes the earth, the land above, the land below and the sea -- in other words it encompasses the entire Bella Coola universe. This is extremely important for it underscores the fact that one may encounter a pointed manifestation of the supernatural in any form, at any place and at any time.

As I have indicated in chapter one, the Bella Coola must continually be on their guard lest they be reabsorbed into the realm of siut; that is, lest they be unable to control the activating of their latent transformational potential which may be caused by an open encounter with the supernatural and hence, being unable to maintain the balance between the supernatural and the human, slip totally into the former. Due to the appropriateness of their behaviour in carefully following any instructions which they receive, all of the characters in these myths are able to control their transformational activity and to re-enter the human community. What their humanity gives them is a sense of order and control; what their supernatural experience gives them is access to uncontrolled transformational activity; what the two together result in is controlled transformational activity which celebrates both the distinctively supernatural (uncontrolled transformational activity) and the distinctively human (control) and thus epitomizes the desired
balance which the Bella Coola must strike between these two opposing and yet complementary realms in order to attain the ideal human condition. It now remains to examine these particular mythic transformations in more detail.

As I have said, the power which the main characters acquire is always of a transformational nature and must always be of practical benefit to the human community. Further, it will be remembered that uncontrolled transformational activity includes the ability to transform the shape of oneself as well as others (this encompasses transforming such phenomena as the weather and supposedly inanimate objects); the ability to both kill and bring to life; and the ability to travel back and forth between the sphere of the supernatural and the sphere of the human. In other words, it is a state of unboundedness — of chaos. Although, given the fragmentary nature of the obtainable myths, it is unrealistic to expect to find specific instances of all forms of transformational activity in each fragment, it is nonetheless significant that when these myths are looked at as a whole, all forms are strikingly present. Thus it is clear that the varied forms of transformational activity are not mutually exclusive — just as a supernatural being is capable of all forms of transformational activity (indeed, that is precisely what constitutes the supernatural), so a human being who, through a supernatural experience temporarily becomes her/himself supernatural, is capable of all forms of transformational activity as well. It is only upon re-entry into the sphere of the human that this transformational activity becomes tempered
so that it may prove to be beneficial rather than detrimental to the human community.

Thus in "The Fortunes of Qwun-a" the main character transforms his wife into lynx and then proceeds to travel from the realm of the supernatural (home of the sea-lions) to the realm of the human and to benefit the human community by killing the two evil brothers. In "The Lad Who Was Made A Shaman By The Salmon" the main character transforms himself into both a spring salmon and a ball of duck's down, travels from the human community to the land of the salmon and back again, is able to kill anything by pointing a stick at it and hence benefits the human community through his superior hunting ability. In "The Lad Who Was Helped By A Salmon" the main character enters the land of the salmon and then returns to and benefits the human community by killing the people who had thrown him over the waterfall. The main character in "The Man Who Was Helped By A Raven" enters the supernatural through his encounter with Tlicaplitän-a and returns to his village-community "a successful shaman" (the implication obviously being that the human community benefits through this man's power). The main character in "The Four Brothers" transforms himself into a salmon and a ball of eagle down, transforms cold to heat and heat to cold, is able to kill both Äkguntäm and his daughter, and travels from the human sphere to Nusmat-a and back again. This myth serves as a good example of the non-hierarchical nature of uncontrolled transformation activity for it shows that once a human being activates her/his supernatural power she/he is on a par with Äkguntäm.
Also, it should be noted that in another version of "The Four Brothers",

awed by their experiences, the four brothers returned to Bella Coola. Owing to the successful conflict with Á̱x̱guntám, the frost and cold of winter annually return to vanquish the heat of summer, which otherwise would destroy all life.


Thus the benefit to the human community is abundantly clear. With respect to "The Lads Who Visited The Home Of The Dead" the elder brother enters the home of the wolves and returns to the human community with supernatural hunting prowess while the younger brother enters the land of the dead and returns to the human community with the ability to both kill and restore life. "The Woman Who Married A Bear" is interesting because although the main character is able to enter the sphere of the supernatural and return to the sphere of the human, and is able to transform herself into a bear and to kill with seeming impunity, she nonetheless comes to grief due to her adverse effect on the human community. It is her younger sister who, made powerful through her association with that most human of all essences, menstrual blood, is able to set the scene for her (the shaman's) demise. This demonstrates the inestimable importance of controlling transformational activity for, as I argue throughout this thesis, uncontrolled transformational activity, being without order or boundaries, is non-human, and unless it is controlled it can only lead to the utter negation of the human community. Just as the majority of myths show that controlled transformational activity serves to revitalize
the human community, so "The Woman Who Married A Bear" shows that uncontrolled transformational activity brings only destruction.

Taken as a whole, the myths pertaining to shamanism portray the necessity of balancing the distinctively supernatural with the distinctively human. The human being who enters the realm of the supernatural, if she/he is to maintain her/his humanness, must not only return to the human community but must be of active benefit to that community. That is, a person cannot enter and return from the sphere of the supernatural and remain unchanged -- either their transformational activity is too strong (i.e. uncontrolled) and must result in their death, or their transformational activity is tempered by the superimposition of human control and results in the mutual strengthening of both individual and community.

It is now time to look at shamanism as it is practiced by the Bella Coola themselves. According to McIlwraith,

More important to the Bella Coola than any other manifestation of the supernatural is that power which makes an individual either an ālukwala or an āskankots. The former is a person who, owing to ability granted her/him by a supernatural being, is able to perform miraculous feats, especially in curing the sick; the latter is one with similar powers obtained from a ghost. It is impossible to translate either of these terms accurately; the designation "shaman" is accordingly used in this monograph to describe both types of supernaturally endowed individuals. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.539)

Bearing in mind that the only difference between an ālukwala and an āskankots is that the latter obtains her/his power from ghosts (and is therefore considered to be an expert regarding
the land of the dead) the reader may assume that the following information and analyses apply equally to both.

McIlwraith maintains that:

Although the powers ascribed to modern shamans are less than those attributed to their fellows of old, yet a shaman is a person endowed with mysterious ability and wonderful knowledge, due to personal contact with supernatural beings. Hence, she/he is regarded as somewhat uncanny and, though respected, is likewise feared. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.547)

The specific manifestations of a Bella Coola shaman's abilities may indeed be less spectacular than those recorded in myths, but the crucial point is that they are similar in kind -- that is, they are both manifestations of transformational ability. With respect to this, the transformation of water to blood is every bit as impressive as the transformation of a human being to lynx. A miracle is a miracle -- just as one should not deride Moses for parting the Red Sea rather than the Atlantic Ocean, so one should not deride a Bella Coola shaman for transforming water to blood rather than people to lynx. What is important is that the power of the shaman is the power of the supernatural, and that power is transformational activity -- the difference being that with respect to the former it is controlled whereas with the latter it is uncontrolled.

Shamanic power is not inheritable and "...anyone, man or woman, rich or poor, young or old, slave or member of an ancient family, may become a shaman." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.547). Once again this underscores the fact that all Bella Coola are equally subject to encounters with the supernatural.
As the reader will recall, this is in keeping with the idea that human beings and the supernatural are inextricably bound together -- the life-giving xixmánoás (spirit) is supernatural, and given that all human beings possess a xixmánoás it follows that all human beings must be susceptible to the supernatural. As I indicated in chapter one, being susceptible to the supernatural is no guarantee that a person may actually encounter a specific supernatural manifestation. The point is not that one always will, but that one always might -- whether one wants to or not.

For the moment I will deal with the person who actively seeks shamanic ability. To begin with, this person will conscientiously practice sxetsta, which McIlwraith glosses as Ceremonial Chastity, and the basis of which is,

...that a person must not hold intercourse except after certain periods of continence. To understand this, it is necessary to understand the attitude of the Bella Coola to the sexual act itself. Although it is a normal part of life...yet the union of man and woman does not lack import, since its very humanness distinguishes those who practice it in the eyes of supernatural beings....Those who indulge excessively become so over-charged with this characteristic that their undertakings are certain to fail, whereas those who remain continent for a considerable period are so freed from the contagion of mankind that they become almost supernatural themselves and always succeed in their ventures. If, after a period of restraint, a person holds intercourse, their essentially human act adds typical human strength to that accumulated by chastity. Chastity alone gives power; but chastity consummated by intercourse at the proper period increases that power enormously.11 (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.110-111)

Further to this a person will spend an inordinate amount of time
in secluded spots in the forest where,

[ she/he ] lies down sometimes for several days, with evergreen boughs spread beneath and above [ her/him ]. These are clean and nullify the mortal odour so objectionable to supernatural beings, so that [ her/his ] chance of obtaining a visitation is increased.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.548)

There are numerous means of purification, the most common of which are ritual bathing, scrubbing the body with Devil's Club, hemlock branches and/or smooth stones found in creek beds, eating false hellebore root and thus inducing vomiting, and so on. It must be remembered that none of these methods, including sxetstsa, necessarily ensure the practitioner of a supernatural experience. It is thought that they make such an experience more likely, but the Bella Coola hold that the supernatural may also manifest itself to one who has observed none of the prescribed methods of purification and who has no desire whatsoever to get involved with such powers.

For example, it is generally agreed that,

[ the ] most common method of becoming a shaman is through the appearance of Ḵ̱ič̓əp̓litən a when a person is ill....She, or some other supernatural being, may appear to a sick person irrespective of sex, whether or not ceremonial chastity has been observed.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.1, p.550)

When a supernatural being appears to one who is sick it first cures that person¹² and then provides her/him with both a name and a song or songs. No matter what the circumstances under which a person receives shamanic power the usual procedure is for the singers¹³ to be called in and for the person who has
undergone the supernatural experience to teach them the songs which she/he has been given. Similarly, all recipients of shamanic power must wear a collar woven of alternating strands of dyed and undyed cedar-bark and must give a public ceremonial wherein they perform their songs, give their dance, offer a display of their power, and distribute gifts, thus officially validating their status as shaman. Once this has been done, because

[there] is thought to be actually within the new shaman's body, some peculiar power which is too potent to allow him (sic) to mix with others he accordingly wears the distinctive collar, which serves as a warning to menstruating women and others who are unclean to remain at a distance, and he spends much of his time alone in the forest.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.558)

Thus it can be seen that, as in the myths, the person who receives shamanic power is in a liminal position with respect to the human community, be it through the use of various rites of purification or through the vulnerability of sickness. Further to this, once the person has undergone a supernatural experience she/he is immediately hedged around with ceremony. That is, through the public display of singing and dancing, etc., the shaman is subjected to the superimposition of human control with the result that the supernatural is rendered beneficial to the human. Hence rather than constituting a threat due to being too supernatural and consequently anti-human, the shaman is able to straddle the realm of siut and the realm of human beings and so function to help maintain the essential balance.
between both spheres.

I will now describe and analyse various methods of shamanic curing. According to McIlwraith:

When a person is ill one of [her/his] relatives comes to request a shaman to cure [her/him]. "I will help the mortal," answers the shaman, as though [she/he] were [her/himself] a supernatural being.

Indeed [she/he] considers [her/himself] to be removed from the ranks of ordinary mortals and refers to the being from whom [she/he] has received [her/his] power as "comrade".

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.559)

Illness is thought to be caused either by the intrusion of a foreign object into the body or the loss of the individual's 

xixmänoäš (spirit). Both of these occurrences may be due to the actions of a supernatural being or the machinations of a sorcerer. It is important to realize that even if the cause of illness is not precisely known the Bella Coola always attribute it to some kind of supernatural agency. In the case of spirit loss,

...a shaman takes off his (sic) cape, hangs it like a pouch on his stick, and points it in all directions as he sings his shaman's song. Finally he locates what is missing, and traps it in his cloak, which he places around the sick person. This restores the spirit and the sufferer recovers immediately. Another method is for the shaman to press the back of the patient's neck, and by blowing and spitting cause the wandering spirit to return. Either cure must be performed by a shaman because of the supernatural power required.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.96)

In the case of the intrusion of a foreign object into the body the shaman may,
[by] ejecting a flow of saliva over the sick person...[insert] his (sic) own power into the sufferer, who at once begins to imitate the chattering and to shake his (sic) hands. Then the shaman proceeds to recall the power to himself by scooping it up with half-cupped hands. Endowed as he is, the sickness is harmless to him.  

(Mcllwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.559)

A method which is often used when a person seems seriously ill consists of the shaman both kneading the patient with her/his fingers and occasionally sprinkling them with water from a washbasin. While the shaman is thus occupied,

...another shaman, or someone accustomed to lead the singers, ranges the bystanders into two rows, facing each other between the door and the central fire. Each is provided with a beating stick such as the singers use, and a sounding board is placed before each row. The person who...leads the...stick-beating stands near the door and the musicians take their time from his (sic) movements. First he slowly raises both arms and all-beat time softly, then,...he sways from side to side as if carried away by the music; as he does so the people toward whom he leans intensify their beating, while those on the other side decrease. Back and forth he sways followed by the beating; nearing the climax he treads mincingly, whereat the noise rises to thunder-pitch, then jumps twice, and as he strikes the ground the drums beat and all the sticks come down with a final ear-splitting crash.... This elaborate beating of time is repeated four times, on each occasion concluding with the double jump which calls forth the double thunder of drums and sticks.  


Intermingled with the drum and stick-beating are calls of 'hoip' and the overall effect is one of the greatest din possible. Finally the shaman, with cupped hands, leaves the sick person and moves to either the door or the smoke-hole. At this point there is utter silence, and as the shaman's hands slowly open
he calls out 'hoip' and blows the sickness back whence it came.

There are a number of variations with respect to methods of curing patients who have a non-human substance lodged within their bodies but all of them have as their basic element the attempt of the shaman to somehow extract and dispose of this foreign presence. I will cite only one more instance of this particular genre:

After throwing himself (sic) on top of the patient the shaman sucks violently, and produces such an object as a toad, a snail, or a stick of wood, which he claims to have been the cause of the malady.... In such cases he works with his fingers to force the substance near the surface. It is believed that some shamans are so powerful they can draw forth foreign substances by the mere application of their stick to the part afflicted. In such a case the object, a toad for example, becomes visible at the end of the staff....It is said that when two rival shamans once disputed about their prowess, one of them cast his stick on the ground and it became a snake, whereupon the other did likewise; and his became a toad which hopped after the snake.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.563-564)

From the foregoing accounts it is evident that due to her/his knowledge of the supernatural the shaman is thought to be able to maintain the health of the individual members of the human community. With respect to spirit loss, the singing of the shaman's song (which has been vouchsafed to her/him via a supernatural experience) emphasizes the shaman's intimacy with and hence knowledge of the supernatural, while the pointing of the stick in all directions indicates the vastness of the non-human realm. Remembering that the defining feature of uncontrolled transformational activity is that it is not amenable to boundaries or classification and that supernatural
beings, unlike human beings, are thus able to travel between
the spheres of the supernatural and the human at will, one can
see that the shaman's ability to enter the sphere of the super­
natural in order to retrieve a wayward spirit is in fact a super­
natural act. In other words, when a shaman enters the domain
of the supernatural she/he undergoes a transformation from
human being to supernatural being. However, unlike supernatural
beings per se, the shaman always remains rooted in the human,
for her/his curing activities are always public and specific
rituals are always followed. This is particularly evident in
the removal of a non-human substance from a victim's body.
The presence of members of the human community plus the ritual
dancing and stick-beating adds a distinctly human aspect to
shamanic proceedings.

As with Winter Ceremonial performances, this human aspect
provides shamanic endeavours with an element of control which
ensures that the shaman, along with her/his patient, will not
slip completely into the supernatural and hence be lost to the
human community. Also reminiscent of the Winter Ceremonial
performances is the return of the non-human substance to the
realm of the supernatural. These similarities are not at all
surprising for in both cases a shaman is ridding an individual
of a supernatural presence that is threatening to engulf that
individual entirely. Of course in doing this the shaman
places her/himself in a very dangerous position, for in order
to expel the threatening supernatural presence she/he must her/
himself enter the supernatural sphere, hence entailing the
risk that she/he may not be able to return to the human. Just as in the myths the successful acquisition of shamanic power is often dependent upon the shaman's exact observance of specific instructions, so in the Bella Coola community per se a successful shamanic endeavour is dependent upon the exact application of specific techniques. Both the mythic instructions and the shamanic techniques serve to underscore specific dos and don'ts -- that is boundaries. Given that what distinguishes the supernatural from the human is the latter's observance of boundaries and classifications it can be seen that the instructions and techniques provide the human element of control which enables the shaman to enter the supernatural without losing touch with the human. In other words, the shaman is able to mediate between the supernatural and the human precisely because, unlike the average Bella Coola (whose transformational abilities are latent), she/he is actively involved in both realms.

At this point I would like to discuss shamanic ceremonies that are not specifically concerned with curing, but first it should be mentioned that there is some haziness in McIlwraith's account. McIlwraith maintains that:

...many shamans lack the power to cure; but they may have seen some feat during a dream, or during a visitation from Tlicaplitän'a. It enhances a man's (sic) social prestige if he can graphically display whatever he has observed. It follows that the rites about to be described are often, perhaps usually, performed by a person unable to cure the sick, but it must be remembered that to the Bella Coola there is no social difference between a shaman who can cure...and one who lacks this power. Each has merely received a different gift from his supernatural benefactor.

As this is stated it seems to me that one could interpret McIlwraith to mean that shamans who are able to cure the sick do not perform the rites which he is about to describe. I am certain that such an interpretation would be erroneous and that what is actually meant is that because there are more shamans who do not effect cures than there are those who do, it follows that the rites he is about to describe are more often performed by the former than the latter. With this in mind, since I must present some rather intricate descriptions of shamanic performances before proceeding to analyse them, it is most convenient and probably less susceptible to confusion to simply transcribe McIlwraith:

On one occasion Ninitsamlaix [the shaman] prepared two boxes, apparently the ordinary wooden sort used for cooking; across each he arranged a diagonal cross-piece so that the receptacle contained two water-tight compartments. Previous to the performance, Ninitsamlaix poured water, dyed red with the bark of the alder, into one section of one of the boxes, and put eagle down in one compartment of the other. When the time came to carry out the rite he asked an accomplice, another shaman, to bring some water and pour it into his box. This was done, the assistant taking care to put it into the empty half, not into that which contained the dyed water. Ninitsamlaix shook the box and poured out some of the liquid to prove that it really was water, and then drank. The spectators, unaware of the cross-piece, did not notice that he did so from the corner opposite to that from which he had poured the water. He had, of course, drunk the dyed fluid. Ninitsamlaix cried out that what he had swallowed was paining him, and proceeded to vomit the red water, much to the surprise of the uninitiated, who readily believed his claim that what he had drunk had turned to blood. Again the performer asked his assistant to bring in some water which he poured into the empty section of the other box, of which the other half contained eagle down. Ninitsamlaix moved to and fro, shaking the box to spill some of the liquid, and then announced that there was so much he could not drink it all, but would pour some on the fire. As before, he tilted
the opposite side of the box, so that, instead of water, the eagle down came floating forth. The uninitiated, firmly convinced that the performer was endowed with supernatural power, never suspected that they were being deceived.

For her performance a...shaman once split a long, green stick, and gouged out the centre, so that it formed a narrow tube-like receptacle in which she laid a piece of undyed cedar bark covered with eagle down. With wooden pegs she fastened the stick together so that it appeared to be an ordinary branch. When ready to perform, the woman asked some people to pile more wood on the fire and, among others, an accomplice threw on the prepared stick with its butt protruding at the edge of the flames. As the fire blazed fiercely the...shaman danced; then the assistant announced that she wished to draw something from the flames, whereupon the woman seized the end of the cedar-bark from its enclosure in the projecting butt of the stick, and drew it forth. The uninitiated, ignorant of the prepared stick, were greatly impressed and puzzled as to how such an inflammable material could have been in a fire without being consumed.

Ninitsamlaix used his skill as a carpenter to carry out elaborate tricks. On one occasion he sawed the boards surrounding the smoke-vent of his house, and fixed them with skin hinges so that they could be raised by ropes from outside the building. To show his supernatural power he threw several large baskets up towards the roof. As he did so his assistants outside pulled the ropes so that the opening was enlarged and allowed the baskets to pass through. In the gloom of the house the spectators could not see the manner in which the hole was increased in size. It had been too small to permit the passage of the baskets at the time they were thrown, and it was still the same size after the feat was accomplished; hence supernatural means must have been used to force them through the roof. Thus ran the logic of the uninitiated.

An informant, when acting as a kusiut spy... once assisted four accomplices of a shaman who had obtained a stone from one of the lakes above Nutleax. Many landslides fall into this, bringing down stones which are full of holes and float in water. Unless closely examined, the riddling is not evident, so that an ordinary river stone of the same size and colouring can easily be confused with it.

Previous to dancing, the shaman had placed a few embers in the recesses of his stone, covered them with pounded cedar-bark, and concealed the object near the fire. When all was ready, he asked the informant, whom the uninitiated did not know to be
an accomplice, to fetch him a stone. This he did, bringing one previously chosen as closely resembling the prepared one from the lake. This ordinary stone was passed around among the spectators and then given to the shaman who, unobserved, palmed it off for the other as he began to dance. At intervals he blew on the stone until the embers ignited the dry bark; first smoke appeared, then sparks, and finally a mass of flame. The shaman dropped it as if it had become too hot, choosing the spot where lay the river pebble; and again passed the latter from hand to hand through the audience, who could not understand how flames had been made to appear from an ordinary river stone.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.567-569)

With respect to the foregoing shamanic ceremonies it is evident that all four examples serve to demonstrate the fact that the power of the shaman is the power of transformation. In one case Ninitsamlaix transforms water to blood and water to eagle down and in another case he overcomes physical boundaries by passing large baskets through the roof of a house; for their part the other two shamans both defy natural boundaries by on the one hand producing a combustible substance from flames and on the other producing flames from an incom­ bustible substance. The reader will recall that the ability to disregard boundaries is quintessentially transformational. The very essence of uncontrolled transformational activity is that it is not subject to boundaries or classification and is hence non-human. By exercising her/his ability to disregard humanly accepted boundaries the shaman manifests uncontrolled transformational activity; by doing so within a public ceremon­ monial framework the shaman tacitly acknowledges the human and thus manifests controlled transformational activity. As with the curing ceremonies the shaman mediates the supernatural (un-
controlled transformational activity) and the human and thus serves to ensure that the Bella Coola are able to maintain the necessary balance between both spheres.

In dealing with shamanism among the Bella Coola it is important to recognize its intimate relationship with the kusiut society. Consider the following quotations:

When a person is initiated into the kusiut society during the non-winter ceremonial season, the uninitiated are told that [she/he] has had a shaman's experience. With the aid of the older kukusiut [she/he] then performs a dance and conjuring feat (sic) of the type already described (I, p.564), and is secluded until the next autumn, meanwhile wearing the distinctive collar of a shaman. When winter comes [she/he] is formally initiated into the society. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.11)

When a person has been initiated into the kusiut society, either in the proper manner during the winter ceremonial season or as a "shaman" during the summer, [she/he] is known as a tsix, a novice, until the kusiut dances of the following winter. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.II, p.23)

Until [she/he] gives [her/his] first dance a newly created shaman is known as a tsix, the same word that is used for a kusiut initiate, and during this period [she/he] wears the shaman's collar of intertwined dyed and undyed cedar-bark. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.581)

[A person who has just validated her/his shamanic status through a public ceremony will wear the collar of intertwined dyed and undyed cedar bark] until the next kusiut dance season when the coming to [her/him] of a yeix (II, p.6) frees [her/him] from restraint, since the one supernatural power drives out the other. If the shaman [her/himself] is unwilling to have a yeix, it is sufficient if one comes to a...near relative. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.558)
A shaman is a person who has come in contact with the supernatural; hence [she/he] is akin to the members of the kusiut society who, therefore, support [her/him] during [her/his] rite. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.565)

And finally, "...a shaman is often termed a kusiut, 'A Learned One'." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.547).

Further to the above quotations it is interesting to note that when a kusiut gives a performance it is thought that she/he is possessed to the point of being out of control (the entire kusiut ceremony consists of the attempts of the non-possessed kukusiut to exorcise or re-humanize their ecstatic companion) whereas when a shaman engages in a public ceremony she/he is not thought of as being out of control. In fact the performing shaman appears to operate in the same capacity as the non-possessed kusiut -- that is to say, just as the latter attempts to cure the dancer of her/his supernatural possession, so the former attempts to cure the sick person of her/his sickness (which, it will be remembered, is always of a supernatural nature).

It has already been stated that the Winter Ceremonial may be seen as a graphic symbolic demonstration of the quintessential Bella Coola dilemma and its resolution. The dilemma is that the human must acknowledge its kinship with the supernatural (uncontrolled transformational activity/chaos) while maintaining the definitively human element of order. This metaphysical contradiction resolves itself in what I have called controlled transformational activity. Thus the possessed dancer represents uncontrolled transformational activity, the kukusiut
represent order, and the exorcised dancer represents controlled transformational activity, which is to say the successful resolution of chaos and order. Whereas the Winter Ceremonial is a grandiose display of the philosophical underpinnings of Bella Coola culture, shamanism is one form of the practical application of those underpinnings. And herein lies the root of the inter-relationship between shamanism and the kusiat society: the Winter Ceremonial is the theory, shamanism is the practice. Shamans do, in the everyday life of the Bella Coola, what the kukusiat do during the Winter Ceremonial -- they resolve the tension between chaos and order and in so doing maintain the well-being of the human. When a person is sick it is due either to the intrusion of a non-human substance into the body (excess of the supernatural) or spirit loss (absence of the supernatural). In either case there is a marked imbalance which threatens the death of the individual in question, for the human is defined neither solely by uncontrolled transformational activity (spirit/chaos/supernatural) nor solely by order, but by both. The supernatural without order is chaos; order without the supernatural would be stasis; either state taken separately constitutes the non-human; both states taken together constitute the human. Both the shaman and the kusiat are people who, due to specific encounters with the supernatural, are more knowledgeable of the realm of the non-human than the average Bella Coola and are thus more able to redress recurring imbalances within the human community that may be caused by too much or too little supernatural presence. In other words the kusiat and the shaman
are the Bella Coola experts regarding the supernatural -- they are indeed the 'Learned Ones'.

For some time I was puzzled by McIlwraith's contention that the newly validated shaman's period of restraint concludes when she/he receives a *yeix* ('call' or supernatural possession) during the next Winter Ceremonial season "since the one supernatural power drives out the other." The reason I had such difficulty understanding this was that I could not see how if, as I have argued, the shaman and the *kusiut* have similar supernatural power (as indeed they must, for all supernatural power is by definition transformational), the supernatural power of the one could drive out the supernatural power of the other because it is the same power. It now seems to me quite evident that what occurs is not the driving out of one supernatural power by another but the fact that having once experienced a specific supernatural encounter the individual concerned is, due to a heightened sensitivity, simply more likely to experience other supernatural encounters. As McIlwraith himself says, "...a shaman need not be a *kusiut*, but visitations usually come only to those of religious and imaginative temperaments, who are in the majority of cases already members of the society." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.65). Thus the *kusiut* and the shaman complement and reinforce each other.

Finally I would like to take a brief look at the relationship between shamanism and sorcery. According to McIlwraith,

Shamans frequently use magical means in curing the sick and are highly regarded by the community, but medicines of the same kind may be used to kill
and those who have knowledge of them are sorcerers. Even a person of this kind is not outside the pale of society unless [she/he] practises indiscriminantly; members of the kusiut society, for example, frequently employ one to kill an individual who has offended against their regulations (I, p.740). A person is regarded as a sorcerer not on account of the ends to which [she/he] applies it. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.694-695)

Further to this,

Sorcerers display considerable ingenuity in arranging that their skills shall bring them pecuniary benefits as well as the gratification of killing their enemies. To achieve this end, a member of the family claims to be a shaman and [her/his] relatives loudly proclaim [her/him]. It is not difficult for a person with skill in conjuring to perform some simple dramatic act, probably one carried out by an ancient shaman, which [she/he] announces has been shown to [her/him] by a supernatural being who has given [her/him] power to cure the sick. Then the sorcerer selects a suitable victim and causes [her/him] to become ill by placing something taken from [her/him] in contact with [her/his] medicine. If the malefactor is fortunate, the victim will consult the "shaman" who will effect a cure and be paid for it, ignorant of the fact that [her/his] recovery is due to the removal of the article by the practitioner's accomplice. This deception is especially difficult to expose if the sorcerer has a box containing grease boiled from human bodies, since the sickness increases or diminishes according to the depth to which the article is sunk. This is one of the ways in which some shamans have built up great reputations as curers. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, pp.743-744)

It must be pointed out that there is a definite distinction between the shaman and the sorcerer -- they are not, as is sometimes thought, simply the obverse of each other. The shaman's power is gained through a specific supernatural encounter whereas the sorcerer's power is gained through the acquisition of a
secret method or methods of killing -- there is no supernatural encounter. It follows that shamanism is non-hereditary and that sorcery is "...transmitted from generation to generation, sometimes without the slightest inkling of it becoming known." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.743). The fact that a sorcerer may pose as a shaman does not make her/him a shaman any more than the fact that a shaman may happen to be a sorcerer necessitates the contention that the two are inseparable.

It is interesting to note that the Bella Coola word for sorcer/sorcerer is scak (sc - bad; ak - hand) or bad-handing whereas the Bella Coola word for shamanism/shaman is kusiut (siut - supernatural) or 'learned ones'. Thus the etymology of these words tends to confirm the view that shamanism has to do with knowledge of the supernatural whereas sorcery has to do with the acquisition and application of specific techniques which are available without the need for direct access to the supernatural. Thus it is not surprising that McIlwraith discusses shamanism in a chapter entitled "Relations With the Supernatural" and relegates sorcery to a chapter entitled "Medicine, Magic, Taboo". The shaman is in the position of having gained power through intimate contact with the supernatural; the sorcerer is in the position of having gained power through the verbal transmission of known techniques.
CHAPTER THREE: FOOTNOTES

1 It will be remembered that I am using the ethnographic present.

2 In the interest of clarity I will use McIlwraith's titles throughout this section.

3 The myth does not indicate how this came about.

4 ixtexwan·i is a first ancestor who refused to assume human form and who was consequently banished to a remote part of the Bella Coola valley, where she was thought to be responsible for the bitter cold winds.

5 In Boas's version of this myth the bear first asks the woman to defecate, insisting that his faeces are superior to hers. The woman surreptitiously substitutes mountain goat grease for her excrement and, impressed by this, the bear takes her home.

6 "To understand this the reader must remember the firm Bella Coola belief that all animals can assume different forms.... An individual who is able to see the smoke of their fires will have no difficulty in finding the homes of the animals and hence will have great success in hunting." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.584).

7 See chapter one, pp. 25-27.

8 See chapter one, pp. 27-28.

9 It is interesting that in Boas's version of this myth the bear-woman is killed once by having an arrow shot through her hands but revives and pursues her brother and sister. She is then killed by being tricked into falling into a chasm but she again revives and continues her pursuit. It is only when she is tricked into boarding a log to cross a river and is eaten by barnacles and sea-worms that she does not return.

10 See p.100 of this chapter.

11 Thus sxetsta may be seen to be yet another instance of the Bella Coola need to balance the supernatural and the human. Excessive sexual intimacy is too human and leads to failure; excessive sexual abstinence is too supernatural and leads to only limited success; however sexual abstinence capped by
sexual intimicy combines both the power of the supernatural and the power of the human and hence leads to the greatest success of all. It should be noted that sxeetsta is practiced by anyone who wishes to gain supernatural favour, be it for successful hunting, successful journeying, the attainment of shamanic power or whatever.

12 Sometimes the person feels her/himself being shaken by the supernatural one and is able to feel the sickness falling from the body; sometimes the person hears the supernatural one singing and finds that the sickness vanishes; but apparently the most usual occurrence is that the person feels the supernatural one inject power into her/his body and that this power expels the sickness.

13 These are the same singers who perform in kusiut ceremonies.

14 See pp. 108-110 of this chapter.

15 Shamans who cure the sick frequently possess their own personal wash-basin. Bella Coola thought holds that there is a large wash basin (nusk€lusta) in the land above and that each Bella Coola is somehow inextricably connected to a part of that basin and that this connection directly influences the course of the individual's life. Thus "...as long as [the basin] remains in motion the owner continues in good health and prosperity, but if it becomes sluggish [she/he] falls ill. Long ago, shamans knew how to reanimate a wash-basin..." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.103). This no doubt accounts for the shaman's wash basin.

16 It will be remembered that the kusiut shaman is said to 'cure' the Winter Ceremonial performer. See chapter two.

17 McIlwraith himself later speaks of shamans "...who have had marked success in both curing the sick and in giving conjuring exhibitions." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.572).

18 See chapter two.

19 See this chapter, pp. 100-102.

20 See chapter two.

21 Personal correspondence with Margaret Siwallace and Grant Edwards.
IV. THE SISAOK SOCIETY

The literature on the potlatch is extraordinarily extensive and varied. It includes economics (e.g. Boas's idea that "the underlying principle of the potlatch is that of the interest bearing investment of property"),\(^1\) ecology (e.g. Piddocke's contention that the potlatch is a way of dealing with resource inequities),\(^2\) exchange theory (e.g. Rosman and Rubel's idea that the potlatch is a way of maintaining a balance between different clans and/or communities through exchange of goods and titles),\(^3\) warfare (e.g. Helen Codere's idea that the basic element of the potlatch is 'fighting with property' and hence gaining status and prestige through economic warfare),\(^4\) religion (e.g. Goldman's contention that the Kwakiutl are a fundamentally religious people and that therefore "..."potlatches", even as they deal in "property", even as they bind outsiders into formal exchanges, even as they reflect on the prestige of chiefs, are basically and decidedly religious actions."\(^5\)) and psychology (e.g. Dundes's idea that the Kwakuitl are anal-compulsive, that they equate wealth with faeces, and that consequently the potlatch constitutes the symbolic wiping of the anus),\(^6\) to name but a few.

Of course one of the problems is that the term 'potlatch' (which is Chinook jargon for "to give") is so vague that it provides a veritable paradise for everyone and their favourite theory or theories. It seems that the only point upon which the extant material on the potlatch is likely to agree is that the extant material on the potlatch is both vast and diverse.
Rather than enter this mire of theoretical debate (which would entail numerous asides and draw this thesis out to an unconscionable length) I shall restrict myself to some general comments regarding the Bella Coola potlatch and devote the main portion of this final chapter to an analysis of the sisaok society.

According to McIlwraith,

In scientific and popular writings alike, the term "potlatch" has been applied both to the public giving of presents, and to the rites at which this occurs. But among the Bella Coola, such distribution of gifts is necessary at every ceremonial; accordingly, each is essentially a potlatch. There is one, however, which the inhabitants regard as the most important of all, the goal which every ambitious person aims to reach, the rite in which [her/his] ancestral myth can be displayed. [This rite is referred to as] the ōm.


Here it is necessary to emphasize that among the Bella Coola social prestige is determined solely by the ability to give potlatches. McIlwraith points out that,

[chieftainship] depends on the number and value of presents distributed at any kind of ceremonial. To the Bella Coola, every rite, whether it be a marriage, the bestowal of a name, a dance, a type of funeral, or admission into a secret society, is a prerogative intimately associated with the myth by which the performance is authorized. Accordingly the host is really displaying the glories of [her/his] ancestors before the eyes of the guests present at the ceremony. To the Bella Coola it is unthinkable for such to be performed without the giving of presents to all; failure to do so would destroy the value of the prerogative. The ōm is the ceremonial at which the most lavish generosity is displayed....In consequence, the aim of every ambitious person is to hold a ōm, since [her/his] status in the community virtually rests on [her/his] ability in this respect.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.163)
Although in practice, due to their inability to accumulate the necessary wealth, relatively few Bella Coola actually attain positions of chieftainship, what is interesting is that in theory anyone may do so. For the essential requisites, possession of an ancestral myth and supernatural assistance, are a part of every Bella Coola's very being. This is a crucial point for it demonstrates that Bella Coola thought regarding the extreme fluidity of the realm of the supernatural is clearly reflected in their social organization. Just as no particular supernatural phenomenon is potentially more powerful than any other supernatural phenomenon, so no Bella Coola is potentially more powerful than any other Bella Coola. The fact that at one time a particular person(s) occupies a position of chieftainship and at another time someone else does is consistent with the idea that different supernatural phenomena manifest themselves in different places and at different times -- the potential is constant; it is only the manifestation that varies. Thus potlatching is a means of actualizing innate potential and this potential is nothing more nor less than the awareness and celebration of mythic power which is, of course, the awareness and celebration of transformational activity.

In keeping with the foregoing McIlwraith maintains that, "the fundamental concept of [a ḥim] is the inviting of guests from abroad to witness rites in connection with an ancestral myth...." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p. 184). Through an analysis of one of these rites, the ceremony performed by the sisaok society, I hope to illuminate the sacred nature of the potlatch
by demonstrating the way in which these performances complement the kusiut performances of the Winter Ceremonial.

The sisaok society is open to both women and men who are able to afford the considerable distribution of wealth which their performances invariably entail. These ceremonies may occur at any kind of potlatch but are noticeably absent during the Winter Ceremonial season. The basic theme of all sisaok performances is the celebration of specific ancestral myths through the earthly manifestation of one or more of the performers' ancestors.\(^1\) Bearing this in mind I will now go on to present a description of a sisaok initiation and performance and then proceed to provide my analysis.

The donor of a \(\ddot{\text{pim}}\) \(^2\) holds a preliminary ceremony whereat a number of people are initiated into the sisaok society and for which she/he provides the necessary wealth. According to McIlwraith, "X's first choice will be [her/his] own children, failing those the sons and daughters of a brother or sister, or of [her/his spouse's] relatives, or if none of these are available, those of a friend." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.198). From the parents of those about to be initiated X receives a sisaok name which she/he will subsequently bestow upon the initiate. The people chosen are "...always members of old-established families." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.198). A few nights after this has been done X sends a herald to invite all the sisaok members to her/his house whereupon, in the presence of the singers as well as the sisaok, the relatives of those who are about to be initiated recount the general features of the
ancestral myth which contains the sisaok name that is to be conferred. Once this has been done for all the initiates\(^\text{13}\) the singers spend the next few days composing two songs for each of them.\(^\text{14}\) Once the songs are ready X decides which of the initiates will be first to be confined to the back-room of her/his house and duly warns this individual of what is about to take place.\(^\text{15}\) During the early part of the evening on which Y is to be confined in the back-room of X's house a sisaok whistle sounds from the nearby woods. At this point a number of sisaok members surround Y and conduct her/him to her/his place of confinement. This event occurs in full view of non-sisaok members who are free to enter X's house and watch the proceedings. Once Y has been confined sisaok whistles again sound from the woods and this time it is clear to the uninitiated that the whistling is rapidly approaching X's house. When the whistling is right outside the door a senior sisaok\(^\text{16}\) rushes out and,

...returns in a moment, followed, amid the breathless excitement of the uninitiated, by a figure masked as a bird or animal. The design represents Y's crest...A member of the society has carved the mask, another wears it, but this the uninitiated do not know. "It is a tutwinam," they gasp.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.200)

The figure approaches the singers and appears to whisper something to them. Soon the singers perform the song that has apparently just been taught them.\(^\text{18}\) The tutwinam, accompanied by a number of senior sisaok, dances to this song and, upon the completion of this performance, enters the back-room un-
accompanied. After a brief period the tutwinam reappears and leaves the house amidst a flurry of whistling.

According to McIlwraith:

In some cases the [tutwinam] does not appear until after the singing of the first song, and the uninitiated are told that it has been attracted by the music. In this case it passes into the back-room, later to reappear and leave by the front door. An announcement is made that it has brought a strange power, that Y has become peculiar, and that her/his name is now, for example, Qwaqwasila. A herald bears this name through the village. A second song is then sung in due course.

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.201)

In any case, after the disappearance of the tutwinam the songs concerning Y's ancestry are always sung. After the singing of the final song,

...some chief or chiefs may make a laudatory speech concerning Y's family history. Then the singers again sing the first song, and sisaok members of the audience join in. Similarly, the second song is practiced....When the singers consider that [the songs have been properly mastered], they tell X, who communicates with the sisaok member outside who has the whistle, and again its eerie notes are heard....some of the sisaok conduct to the back-room the second initiate whose songs are to be sung that night. The procedure in [her/his] case is identical with that described for Y. Usually it is considered sufficient to seclude two on one night, though three may be attempted. When the songs of the last have been sung, food is distributed and the people disperse.


The initiate must stay in the back-room anywhere from two weeks to four months depending on when the kims is to be held.

McIlwraith points out that before white-contact kims were relatively rare occurrences as it took considerable time and
energy to amass the wealth which was necessary for their performance. Consequently _sisaok_ neophytes often had their first performance validated at smaller potlatches where there were few, if any, foreign guests. However, given that it was always preferable to hold _sisaok_ performances at a *xim*, it is to be understood that the following account conforms to the Bella Coola ideal.

On the final evening of the *xim*, the _sisaok_ initiates make their appearance. The singers beat out the time to a particular initiate's song and that person emerges from the back-room and proceeds to dance. During this dance a speaker directs X's spouse (or other near relative) to, "...bring forward goods as 'cedar-bark mats for [her/him] to stand upon', or 'cedar-bark mats to make soft [her/his] seat'." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.237). Upon the conclusion of her/his dance the initiate returns to the back-room accompanied by a senior _sisaok_. This _sisaok_ soon emerges announcing that the initiate has now assumed the form of one of her/his ancestral crests. According to McIlwraith:

There now emerges a figure masked to represent an eagle, or whatever bird or animal it may be, with a long blanket covering all but the feet.... The 'eagle' bends down beside the singers as if whispering a song to them, though in reality they have themselves composed it. They sing this as the masked figure moves around the fire, imitating the gait of an eagle with considerable dramatic skill, while an assistant blows a whistle, sounding like an eagle. When the figure has disappeared into the back-room, the heralds discuss with one another in a loud tone of voice how that was the form in which the initiate's ancestor appeared long ago.  

(McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.238)
At this point a sisaok member instructs X to "...bring forward goods, 'to shield our eyes from the supernatural being'." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.238). These goods are piled beside those which have been brought forward by X's spouse.

Now the singers begin the initiate's second song and she/he once again emerges to dance before once more returning to the back-room. At this time:

The two assortments of goods are...distributed. First those provided by X are presented to the singers who composed the songs for the initiates, to the carpenters who made the masks, the heralds, and announcers, and any others who have assisted; if any remain they are presented to the stranger-guests. Then the goods which are "mats for the dancer's feet" are distributed, entirely to the guests, and are said to have "become nothing" or to have "flowed away" in the transaction. Neither set of goods is returnable. These presents validate in the eyes of the guests, the right of the initiate to membership in the sisaok society. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.238)

Once all the initiates have gone through the foregoing process the sisaok members join them in the back-room whereupon the ancestral crest is returned to Nusmät·a "without any elaborate ceremony."²¹ (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.239).

With respect to analyzing the foregoing material the first thing one notices is that the sisaok society, unlike the kusiut society, is entirely ancestral family oriented. Remembering that any given Bella Coola may trace her/his ancestral family back to the time when the supernatural first ancestors came down from Nusmät·a and began their earthly wanderings it is evident that the sisaok society is a link to and celebration of the supernatural (transformational) potential that lies with-
in each person. With respect to having as their core concern the celebration of transformational potential the kusiut and sisaok societies are similar. The essential difference between them is that the kusiut society is primarily concerned with the dangerous and destructive aspect of transformational ability, whereas the sisaok society is primarily concerned with the strengthening and creative aspect of transformational ability. The reader will recall that the Bella Coola must resolve the tension between uncontrolled transformational activity (the supernatural/that which is unbounded) and the necessary acceptance of and regard for boundaries (order/the concrete). Taken separately each of these states is non-human, but taken together they create the human condition. As has been shown in chapters two and three, the tension brought about by the necessary clash of these two states is resolved through controlled transformational activity -- through myths and ceremonies that have as their basis the coming together of the supernatural and the human, which is to say the symbolic coming together of chaos and boundedness. The result of this coming together is a recognition of the fundamental need to both constantly recognize and yet constantly control the transformational potential that lies within each Bella Coola.

A consideration of the kusiut society provides an instance wherein the supernatural clearly presents itself in its dangerous and destructive aspect. Possession is always unexpected and is always of a violent, traumatic nature. The emphasis which is placed on elaborate ceremonies of public exorcism under-
scores the fact that the supernatural is seen as alien and as ultimately destructive. Further to this the supernatural manifestations that occur during the Winter Ceremonial are not ancestral family specific and hence their alien nature is again emphasized, as is the vulnerability of all human beings, Bella Coola and slaves alike.

With respect to the sisaok society the individual who is to be initiated into the society is known to be aware of her/his impending possession and when it finally does occur it is non-violent. In fact the word possession seems inappropriate in this context as it appears that what is actually experienced is more an aggravated or exaggerated remembering than an alien possession, for the individual in question is intimately familiar with her/his ancestral myth -- indeed it is sections of this myth that the individual's relatives relate to the singers and the sisaok society at large. The initiate and everyone else within the Bella Coola community know that they exist as extensions of their ancestors and that as such a celebration of the ancestral bond serves as a reaffirmation of each person's original and still extant (albeit latent) power. Because the ancestral bond is perceived as highly personal it does not carry with it the threat that is implicit within other manifestations of the supernatural. Since it is well known that the first ancestors chose to give up their uncontrolled transformational activity (symbolized by the return of their animal/bird or whatever forms to Nusmät-a), to embrace boundedness and thus create the human condition, and since they did this
without undue conflict or struggle, they represent the ideal of harmony for which the Bella Coola constantly strive. Through celebrating the first ancestors the Bella Coola are celebrating their own potential for an ideal resolution of the conflict between chaos and stasis.

Consider the phenomenon of the *tutwinam*. It is known that the *tutwinam* is the manifestation of the initiate's ancestor in non-human form. This being is seen to sepak to the singers and to enter the back-room to visit the initiate. After this visit the *tutwinam* leaves of its own accord. There is no frenzy of exorcism, and although a healthy respect is exacted from the uninitiated, undue terror is not. One can see that the general atmosphere of fear and urgency which pervades the Winter Ceremonial is quite absent during the *sisaok* performances. Unlike the various manifestations of the supernatural that occur during the Winter Ceremonial the *tutwinam* is an object of pride rather than fear. It assures the Bella Coola of the strength and power of their ancestors and hence of their own inner potential. It is noteworthy that *tutwinam* are often purposely summoned by the singing of songs. Again this emphasizes the positive rapport between the first ancestors and the Bella Coola. To purposely summon supernatural possession at a *kusiut* ceremony is unheard of -- the emphasis is definitely an exorcism.

At the actual *kim* the *sisaok* initiate, to the accompaniment of her/his particular ancestral songs, dances before the assemblage of foreign guests. She/he dances in both human and animal/bird form and goods are distributed to all present. This is a
clear demonstration of the initiate's social as well as supernatural status. The metaphoric referral to goods as cedar-bark mats denotes societal prestige (cedar-bark mats being universally acknowledged items of social exchange) while the metaphoric referral to goods as shielding the eyes from the supernatural being denotes the prestige associated with the supernatural. Unlike the kusiu t society, which deliberately underplays the societal positions of its participants (the reader will recall that members of the society come from all walks of life and that a bare minimum of wealth is required), the sisaok society deliberately underscores the societal positions of its participants (members of the society are necessarily socially affluent as an enormous amount of wealth is required). In fact whereas the kusiu t society is often thought of as 'the society of shamans' the sisaok society is often thought of as 'the society of chiefs'. (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.181).

Further to this, while the songs of the kusiu t society are all concerned with non-ancestral family specific supernatural occurrences the songs of the sisaok society are all concerned with the actions of its members' first ancestors. Again one sees that the sisaok society contains a strong personal element that is entirely lacking in the kusiu t society. It is the ability to act as their first ancestors did, to combine the power of chaos with the power of the concrete and thus create the ideal human condition, that the Bella Coola celebrate and demonstrate to foreign guests through the institution of the sisaok society. The kusiu t society, having nothing to do with social prestige,
does not perform in the presence of foreign guests. Why should it? The Bella Coola know that all people everywhere are indiscriminately subject to the same supernatural forces, whatever manifestations they may take. What they are not subject to is a similar relationship to an ancestral family. And hence it is the ancestral family, the point of differentiation between the Bella Coola and all other people, and of course differentiation is the beginning of classification, of social prestige, or order, that is appropriately presented to foreign guests. The generous distribution of gifts (an essential ingredient of Bella Coola social prestige) which occurs at the conclusion of the sisaok masked performance, blends the quintessentially social with the quintessentially supernatural (the transformation of the initiate into the animal/bird form of a first ancestor) and so presents the audience with a graphic demonstration of the harmonious balance that constitutes the ideal human condition.

It is in regard to exorcism that the distinction between the atmosphere of the kusiut and sisaok societies is perhaps most evident. Kusiut exorcisms are lengthy, tension-ridden, public exhibitions. Everyone is aware that this is an extremely dangerous time, for unless the supernatural manifestation is expelled from the dancer she/he will die. On the other hand, sisaok expulsions take place in private with very little ceremony and with no fear of danger. The first ancestor who comes to re-unite with the initiate is clearly seen as an extension of the initiate her/himself and therefore as non-threaten-
ing. As I argue in chapter two, the public nature of *kusiut* exorcism serves to reinforce the notion of the necessity of human order and control. With respect to *sisaok* expulsions this is not necessary for it is known that it was the first ancestors who initially brought about a state or order -- consequently their manifestation within their descendants reinforces rather than threatens this notion. In fact I suspect that *sisaok* expulsions are actually symbolic gestures of good will -- that is to say their human descendants, who willingly receive them, merely support the first ancestors in their return to *Nusmát-a*.

The table at the end of this chapter provides a summation of the distinction between the *sisaok* and *kusiut* societies. However it is extremely important to realize that ultimately the *kusiut* and *sisaok* ceremonies, like the Winter Ceremonial and the potlatch, do not oppose so much as complement one another. They are both concerned with transformational potential, the difference being that the *kusiut* society and Winter Ceremonial stress the destructive aspect of that potential whereas the *sisaok* society and the potlatch stress the creative aspect. Given the nature of the supernatural, of uncontrolled transformational activity (i.e. that it contains the potential for human life and yet at the same time smothers it in chaos), it is to be expected that the two major Bella Coola secret societies, with their separate ceremonial seasons, reflect both the destructive (dissolution of the human) and creative (revitalizing of the human) aspects of transformational potential respectively.
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<th><strong>KUSIUT SOCIETY</strong></th>
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<td>referred to as 'society of shamans'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deals exclusively with first ancestors</td>
<td>deals exclusively with supernatural beings who are not first ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreign guests usually present at performances</td>
<td>foreign guests usually not present at performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasis is placed on the creative: the link (kinship) between the supernatural and the human is stressed</td>
<td>emphasis is placed on the destructive: the gap between the supernatural and the human is stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masked dances (masks always depict first ancestors)</td>
<td>masked dances (masks always depict supernatural beings who are not first ancestors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>songs and dances ancestral family specific</td>
<td>songs and dances not ancestral family specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possession is sometimes sought and is never of a violent, traumatic nature</td>
<td>possession is always unsought and is always of a violent, traumatic nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expulsion takes place in private and is accompanied by very little ceremony</td>
<td>exorcism takes place in public and is accompanied by elaborate ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excessive wealth needed to validate sisaok prerogatives (Confirmation of social status)</td>
<td>minimal wealth needed to validate kusiut prerogatives (Dissolution of social status)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: FOOTNOTES


7 Thus the 3rim is merely a large potlatch at which the doners' ancestral myths are displayed before foreign guests.

8 The Bella Coola indicate that "...the Bella Bella consider the Bella Coola practice of each one endeavouring to make [her/himself] a chief to be foolish in the extreme." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.176).

9 Indeed at one point McIlwraith comments, "...without question these myths...have...a great influence on the lives of the people. In fact the social structure of the [Bella Coola tends] to conform to the myths." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol.I, p.176).

10 It should be noted that even once a person acquires a position of chieftainship the maintenance of that position is dependent upon her/his continued ability to give potlatches. Thus Bella Coola chieftanship is in a constant state of flux.

11 Being without recognized ancestry slaves are never admitted to the sisaok society.
I am using the context of the *kirm* rather than another type of potlatch because it is this event for which McIlwraith provides the greatest amount of data. Following McIlwraith's usage I will henceforth refer to the *kirm* donor as X. However it should be noted that one person is never solely responsible for the giving of a *kirm* -- it is always a joint effort and the prestige of a successful *kirm* reflects on all who have contributed towards it.

Usually around seven people will be initiated.

The content of these songs is of course taken from the previously recounted ancestral myths.

Again following McIlwraith's usage the initiate will henceforth be referred to as Y.

McIlwraith calls this person a siki, "the one who cures". However, as the position of siki was adopted from the Bella Bella in the late 19th century it is more in keeping with traditional Bella Coola practices to refer to a senior sisaok. Thus McIlwraith: "In this account of a potlatch it is assumed that a siki is functioning on all occasions, but in many cases any senior sisaok is considered sufficiently close to the supernatural beings to act satisfactorily. Until about 1870 it is clear that any sisaok was regarded as capable of doing so." (McIlwraith, 1948, Vol. I, p.197)(emphasis mine).


This song is, of course, one that they have previously learned and which concerns Y's ancestral myth.

Preparations for a *kirm* may take months or even years but when all is finally in readiness the actual performances are usually concluded in three days.

From all indications this person is always a chief and a sisaok member.

At the time McIlwraith collected his material there was a public ceremony of expulsion. However given that, as McIlwraith himself emphasizes, this was clearly a recent addition to the sisaok ceremony, I have disregarded it.

Exorcism, with its connotation of evil and danger, is not an appropriate word in this context.
CONCLUSION
What this thesis attempts to do is to analyse how a specific group of people, the Bella Coola, make sense of their lives. A thorough examination of the extant Bella Coola material has led me to the conclusion that the concept of transformation is the thread that enables one to navigate what may appear to be a labyrinth of contradictions and dead-ends. The Bella Coola universe, like all human universes, is fraught with the constant need to come to terms with life and death. Into this basic dichotomy the Bella Coola introduce a third term, the concept of transformation, which resolves the life/death opposition by rendering it philosophically manageable. Uncontrolled transformational activity, the supernatural, is a state of chaos -- a state of unrealized potential. It is the superimposition of order, of control, upon transformational activity that brings about the creation of the human. Thus the human condition may be seen as one of controlled or ordered transformational activity, of constantly balancing two states, that of chaos (absolute transformation) and that of stasis (absolute order), either of which taken separately entails the obliteration of the human. Death is seen as a giving over to the supernatural -- as being reabsorbed into chaos. However because chaos, being unstructured force, is a state of unlimited but unrealized potential, it is possible, by observing prescribed ritual actions (i.e. by superimposing order upon the supernatural) to bring about a birth. In other words, although the dead are indeed lost to the human, it is possible to consider the loss as temporary. Thus by observing certain ritual actions
such as taking a stone from a cemetery and placing it under her bed (i.e. providing the element of order) a woman who has recently lost her child may again conceive. That is to say, reabsorption into the supernatural (destruction/death) may be redressed by the superimposition of order and again result in the human (creation/birth).

It would be interesting to compare this analysis of Bella Coola cosmology with other North West Coast groups. Such a comparison would undoubtedly pose many questions and provide numerous avenues to further research. For example, is transformation as central a concept to the Tlingit or Haida as it is to the Bella Coola? And if not, what roles does it play and why? What does this tell us about the cultures under scrutiny?

In any case, my research has led me to the conclusion that the power of transformation is at the centre of every Bella Coola institution -- sometimes (as in the kusiut society) the emphasis is on the destructive aspect of that power; sometimes (as in the sisaok society) it is on the creative aspect. But always the endeavour is to establish a harmonious balance within the whirlwind of transformation. Truly, "the miracle is to make it solid."
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