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Autor: Rusconi, Giuseppe
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Berne, a golden section between city and canton.

(Photo: Alice Baumann)

good-tempered teacher Baloo, both droll and wise. And incidentally bears use the same educational methods as humans: a loud voice combined with a blow from the paw.

Bear's ear and bear's foot

Bears have also crept into our languages, especially German. English has the bearberry, as well as bear's ear for auricula and bear's foot for hellebore. But in the Bernese dialect many quaint and curious plants like heraculum, ramson, milk vetch and spignel are named after the bear because it likes their taste. And people like to eat biscuits in the shape of a bear's paw - it is supposed to be lucky. Christian names like Björn and Bernhard, Urs and Ursula, remind us of Master Bear. It looks down upon us in two of the night sky's constellations, the Great Bear and the Little Bear. Brown bears sell well as the trusted teddy bear or as tasty chewing gum. Bears are supposed to love with a singular passion. There is a silly German ditty that goes: "Love sticks like liquorice (bear dirt) - you can't get it out of your heart".

As an allegory of wildness and courage, the bear embodies man's longing to go back to nature. Mystics speak of the bear tracks in the soul, referring to our inner wilderness. In dreams and trances, in ceremonies and songs, in

A Ticinese in Berne

What does Berne mean for a Ticinese like me, who came here almost seven years ago, after spending a decade in Rome? Certainly Berne gave me the chance to take on an interesting and stimulating job (although hard work) as a parliamentary correspondent. But over and above this what kind of relationship do I have with the city?

When I was a little boy Berne played a very positive part in my mind. How I loved the bears and - of course - the yellow and black of the Young Boys soccer team. Later when I got a little bigger I thought of Berne as the capital of my country; I valued it politically and saw it as a sort of multi-lingual federal city, which was home to Italian-speaking Swiss as well.

And today? Berne is very beautiful with its well-kept old quarter, its pleasant arcades, its fountains, its innumerable leafy walks, and the great door to the cathedral which turns our thoughts to the mysteries of life after death. One should admire Berne from high up, descending slowly from the Rose Garden, gazing at the geometry of the roofs which conjure up images of life around the domestic hearth.

The climate of the city makes one lethargic. How difficult I find it (much more so than in Rome) to get up in the morning. For the sky is often grey, and we are in a trough of low pressure...

And the Bernese? Contact with them is rare, the odd "good-morning", a few sentences, no more. My social life centres mainly around parliament, which I see as an extra-territorial and multi-lingual enclave. There you can make yourself understood in high German, French and Italian. And there I am not faced with the problem of understanding the local dialect and having to speak it. I consider over-use of this language to be a great obstacle to better understanding within the country. Perhaps it is also because of this, or precisely because of this, that my contacts with the Bernese are limited - although otherwise friendly. If I insist on this, it is because I do not want to lose any part of my identity as an Italian-speaking Swiss because of pressure to speak Swiss-German.

Berne is beautiful. I am fond of its people. But do not ask me to describe the Bernese any more precisely. I would not be able to do it.

Giuseppe Rusconi

fairly-tales and legends, we come across the bear over and over again. It is associated with strength and wisdom. Someone who has the strength of a bear is courageous and dexterous as well as strong - to the point of being overpowering. The famous abbess and mystic, Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), recommended covering the breast with bear-skin as a cure for anxiety, since it is the warmest and softest cover anyone can think of. The teddy bear has the same purpose.

King of the forest

What was it that made Berne identify itself with the bear? Every city and every canton has an emblem. On the arms of Berlin and Appenzell the bear commands respect as a fighter. It is rampant, extends long red claws and flashes its tongue. The Bernese bear, which looks no less dangerous, strides upwards along a diagonal golden beam. Identifying oneself with an animal of such strength boosts one's own self-confi-

dence and may intimidate an enemy. When the sovereign of a state adopts the escutcheon of a bear he is playing on its significance as king of the forest. In our latitudes it is not in fact the lion which is king: the greatest, strongest and most intelligent wild animal of our forests is the bear.

The first Bernese bear

Legend has it that the founder of the city of Berne, Duke Berchtold V of Zähringen, put paid to a bear on a hunt in 1191 and named his city after it. Legend always contains a grain of truth. Some of the characteristics of the bear appear to fit the Bernese mentality: good-naturedness and friendliness have remained features of the city and its inhabitants throughout its turbulent 800-year history. Berne's ponderousness is also proverbial. Old-established Bernese do not like to be clapped on the back too easily; a little reserve is expected.