

sens quand les auteurs parlent de la pudeur dans notre culture. Les conclusions sont illogiques, le raisonnement fautif. Les auteurs mélangent théologie, politique, sociologie. Le méli-mélo est pathétique. Certaines phrases sont totalement incompréhensibles. Ainsi que veut dire cette phrase? “Le vieux dicton populaire ‘l’habit ne fait pas le moine’, renforce la comparaison des humains aux glaciers” (page 39). Le lecteur reste perplexe: faire un rapport entre le voyeurisme et Coco Chanel est ridicule. Affirmer — avec quelles preuves? — que Coco Chanel “a probablement réfléchi sur les primitifs” est une affirmation vide.

Le chapitre quatre présente le prestige qu’apporte le vêtement. Ici encore le raisonnement est simplet. Les notions de besoin et de désir sont mal analysées. Des erreurs de langue se glissent. La page dédiée au jeans ne parle ni de l’inventeur des jeans, ni de son origine. “Levis-Strauss,” “denim,” l’étymologie du terme “jeans” sont lamentablement ignorés.

Le chapitre cinq mentionne le vêtement comme parure. Ce chapitre aurait pu aisément se combiner au précédent. Le manque de suite logique, de rapports entre certaines affirmations, est pitoyable. Ce chapitre est particulièrement incomplet. Bien des accessoires vestimentaires sont ignorés tels les froufrous, les volants, les rubans, les fermetures (épingles, agrafes, boucles, boutons, fermeture-éclair), les ceintures, etc. En plus, la conclusion est mal faite, totalement hors contexte et inutile.

Les chapitres six et sept concernent la consommation, la confection et l’entretien du vêtement. Ce sont les seuls chapitres valables de l’ouvrage. Nulle originalité ici, mais au moins le style est clair, la présentation structurée. Les notions sont exposées d’une façon pratique et méthodique.

Les illustrations de l’ouvrage sont très bien faites. C’est le rare facteur positif de ce livre qui ne devrait servir de texte scolaire que s’il est fortement révisé, amélioré, restructuré et corrigé.

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## WEST COAST PREHISTORIC

*The whale people*, Roderick Haig-Brown. Illus. Mary Weiler. Totem Books, 1962, reprinted 1982. 184 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-222197-7.

*The whale people* was published in London in 1962, in New York in 1963, and in 1964 it was selected as Children’s Book of the Year by the Canadian Association of Children’s Librarians. In *The republic of childhood*, Sheila Egoff describes it as “an outstanding historical novel for children,”<sup>1</sup> and in 1980 Joan

McGrath, elementary school libraries' consultant for the Toronto Board of Education, listed it first in her series of "Reviews in Retrospect," discussing out of print Canadian children's books in *In Review*.<sup>2</sup> Hence the current Toten reprint should be warmly welcomed by those who select and promote children's books, as well as by readers between the ages of ten and fourteen.

Two decades do not constitute a vast time span in the realm of literature and one would expect a book so well received twenty years ago to stand up well today. As an adventure story, *The Whale People* is exciting and eloquent. Haig-Brown's vivid descriptions of pre-technological whaling and his sympathetic account of the physical training and spiritual preparation of a Nootka youth as he is initiated into manhood still ring lively and sincere. In the first few pages, this novel threatens to belong to that class of informative children's literature in which every object is followed by a description of its material and manner of construction. But the narrative's basic delineation of pre-contact life among the Hotsath Indians of the west coast of Vancouver Island soon modulates into a paean to what the fisherman Roderick Haig-Brown must have seen as the ultimate fishing experience: the successful pursuit of the largest sea creatures with the simplest of mechanical aids.

The story follows several years in the life of Atlin, adolescent son of a whale chief. As Haig-Brown describes the education of the boy, who must attain both physical prowess and spiritual power in order to take over from his father when the latter dies while hunting a sperm whale, he reveals his detailed research into prehistoric Nootka fishing techniques and his appreciation of the Indians' intimate relationship with nature. Atlin must do more than learn the habit of whaling and acquire the stamina to pursue them: he must enter into symbolic communion with their spirits, so that his hunting and the survival of his people will be part of the unity of nature rather than a struggle against it. And he must learn to operate out of a psychological wholeness which will give him the self-confidence and wisdom to work in harmony with the other men of his tribe and the diplomatic generosity needed to pacify his people's irritable neighbours.

In the details of Atlin's fasts and trials, moments of doubt and triumph, Haig-Brown certainly succeeds in presenting to modern day adolescents a realistic portrait of a youth living in a culture which expected children to grow up quickly and often painfully. Many episodes, such as Atlin's first trip with the whalers, his visit to the Shark Pool, and the potlatch and Shaman's Dance, are written with a masterful control of tension and suspense. However, I personally found the total picture of Atlin's life to be rather sparse. Details of fishing equipment and dramatic accounts of whaling excursions abound, yet we learn almost nothing of Atlin's family life, or his food, clothing, or shelter. While I am in no way suggesting that the author should have produced an anthropological tract, I do feel that his intention to have his reader enter Atlin's skin is somewhat undercut when the reader has to guess what is covering or nourishing that skin.

I have already said that this book has worn well. However, its reprinting in an age of great sensitivity to sexual and racial discrimination gives rise to questions engendered by its new context. In a 1975 interview, Haig-Brown clearly indicated that he knew he had approached his subject from the outside:

I have no idea how close I have come to getting inside the mind of a young, high-class Indian boy in pre-contact times. I suspect not very close because there is a vast difference in conditioning between us. George Clutesi read the book and said: "I can tell you are a very sincere man." I take that to mean, "you have tried honestly, but you have really not got inside our thinking."<sup>3</sup>

However, one would be hard-pressed to find particular instances of condescension or detraction. The characters speak simply, without the symbols and metaphors that well-meaning white writers often put into Indian mouths, but also without contractions (in contrast to the colloquial, slangy speech which enlivens Haig-Brown's *Starbuck Valley winter* and *Saltwater summer*). Haig-Brown may be guilty of idealizing the spiritual side of Hotsath life, but his romantic tendencies are somewhat balanced by his descriptions of physical and psychological distress. More pertinent, I think, is the matter of sexual bias. This is very much a boys' book, which presents an almost exclusively male society. Atlin's mother makes several fleeting appearances near the beginning, and at the end, Atlin will ensure future peace by marrying the daughter of his enemy. Not only are women excluded from the rituals and work of whaling, but in this novel their activities remain utterly unrecorded — although their day-to-day presence could scarcely have touched Atlin's life as little as the author indicates. I don't particularly approve of faulting a writer for simply reflecting the biases of his age; perhaps in this decade someone will produce the story of Atlin's sister or wife, so that Canadian children will be able to read about Whale People of both sexes.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Sheila Egoff, *The republic of childhood* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Joan McGrath, "Reviews in retrospect," *In Review*, 14 (Aug. 1980), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Glenys Stow, "A conversation with Roderick Haig-Brown," *Canadian Children's Literature*, No. 2 (1975), p. 21.

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