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The Raven Steals the Light: Native American Tales. By Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1996. 152 pages. \$10.00 Paper.

Measuring just 4 1/4" wide by 5" tall, *The Raven Steals the Light* epitomizes a true pocket book. The wandering folklorist could easily carry this little gem in a backpack for those times when a good Haida folk tale would suit the mood of the weather or the woods. Inside covers as jet black and shiny as Raven's feathers, readers find 11 tales of the Haida, Native Americans from western Canada's Queen Charlotte Islands. Reid heard longer versions of these tales from the late Haida storyteller Henry Young of Skidegate. Consequently, research folklorists would not categorize these as "authentic" tales that they might use for research. Rather, Reid's interpretations represent only the core of Haida story ideas.

The tales, which poet Robert Bringhurst assisted in penning from Reid's memory, may conjure for some readers a potpourri of Biblical creation myths combined with Grimm's Brothers or Russian fairy tales. The title myth provides a good example. Raven, through the eternal darkness at the beginning of time, overhears the patriarch who holds the light captive muttering about his treasure and his refusal to share it with anyone. This reminds readers of how the queen in "Rumpelstiltskin" outfoxed this feisty elf by overhearing him sing his name. Her discovery saved her child. In the Haida story, Raven devises a magical way to impregnate the patriarch's daughter by transforming himself into a hemlock needle which she swallows while gathering water. Hers is a virgin birth in the Biblical sense. Raven, impersonating her human baby son, uses tantrums to make the patriarch remove the light from a set of nested plain wooden boxes. Here readers are struck by the lack of traditional carving detail on the boxes until they realize that artists require light for wood carving. The moment the patriarch gives Raven-boy the light to play with, he transforms back into Raven, escapes through the smoke hole, but drops half the light when an eagle attacks him. This light splatters

when it hits earth and then becomes the moon and stars of the night. After he tires of flying, Raven lays the remaining half at the horizon to form the sun.

Indeed, the first three myths in Reid and Bringhurst's book resemble Old Testament creation stories. "The Raven Steals the Light" parallels the creation of light and darkness in Genesis 1:1-5 and 1:14-19. "The Raven Steals the Salmon from the Beaver House" resembles the creation of water, the seas, and the teeming life in them in Genesis 1:6-10 and 1:20-23. "The Raven and the First Men" corresponds to the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:26-28. Raven worked on developing people because he was bored; similarly, the Biblical God created people in part because he was lonely. The essential difference between the Haida Raven and the Biblical God occurs at the level of creation. Raven steals light and fish, and finds pre-human men, which someone or something else already created. The Bible actually credits God with creating these phenomena. This little book, combined with many other books about Raven and trickster myths in other Native American cultures, could form a basis for further research into this topic.

The eleven tales in Reid & Bringhurst's book inspire and underlie an equal number of Haida sculptor Bill Reid's most fabulous artworks. After retiring as a champion athlete, Reid undertook learning Haida language and mythology to help him understand the spirit that drives Haida ethos. He felt that only with that basis could he truly express the Haida mythic world in his wood carving. His effort epitomizes the interconnectedness of Haida life, the arts, language, and legend.

Poets and art lovers alike can enjoy this book's prints of Reid's sculptures in wood, which illustrate each tale, on two levels. First, the prints display in two dimensions the admirable intricacy and complexity of the folk tales. Second, when appreciated and interpreted within the context of their accompanying tales, Reid's sculptures literally come alive with a richness lacking in a mere visual appraisal of the sculptures alone. For example, Reid's beakless Raven sculpture can neither be truly understood nor appreciated for the humor evident in its "Oh my!" expression unless viewers are privy to how very funny Raven thoundth lithping after loothing half hith beak in a fithing acthident,

The book's illustrations also assist readers in picturing unfamiliar mythical characters such as the Wasgo, or Seawolf. In the tale "The Wasgo and Three Killer Whales" a brow-beaten son-in-law

finds peace and contentment after his querulous mother-in-law faints and dies upon realizing that he has become the spirit of the dreaded Seawolf. Sculpted as a dog-like animal with an orca-style dorsal fin and paddle-like extensions at his elbows instead of hair, the Seawolf eats salmon and cavorts with killer whales as his companions in his water world. After his wife's mother's death, the tale says, Seawolf dutifully provides an abundance of food for his wife for the rest of her life.

Like a snapshot, each art piece brings into sharp focus only a small snippet of the whole scenario or story it illustrates. Bill Reid's giant raven, on display at the Museum of Anthropology on the University of British Columbia campus in Vancouver, illustrates this point admirably. Raven, standing over 20 times larger than life atop an equally gigantic clamshell, seems godlike in proportion to the shell's humanoid population he is releasing. To enhance the mythic effect of the piece, Reid reduced 20 times over the size of the tiny seed-like pre-human males squirming in fear inside the sculpture's yawning shell. Though Reid used the traditional ovoids and eyes to animate and give double meaning to Raven's shoulder joints and the clam's top shell, nonetheless, he could not incorporate other crucial details from the whole story into a single sculpture. Missing from this sculpture, the second scenario of this origin myth informs audiences about how Raven used sea urchins to supply the pre-human males of the shell with reproductive organs. Further, it explains to readers and listeners how that special physical change imparted the pubescent uncertainties and emotions of adolescence to these pre-humans, who then disappear after magically engendering a race of modern humans with actively reproductive males and females. More entertaining than an archeologist's treatise on human evolution, this tale provided the people with a kind of Biblical Adam and Eve story that at once satisfied their curiosity about the origins of civilization and provided a psychological insight into the hormonal confusion of the newly adult.

In sum, scholars may find this small book useful as an adjunct to understanding Haida art and sculpture, as part of a basis for cross-cultural comparisons of myths and legends, or simply as an entertaining anthology of Haida tales.

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