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**Interpreting and Transforming Haida Cultural Heritage:
The Life and Times of Bill Reid**

Interpretace kulturního dědictví kmene Haida:
život a doba Billa Reida

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Abstract

In my Diploma Thesis I will focus on the work and influence of the well-known Canadian artist Bill Reid (1920-1998) and his contribution to the revival of the Northwest Coast Native art in Canada. Because his work is closely inspired by the Haida, the Native group inhabiting the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia, the first sections are concerned with the land and the people who used to create the art which later formed the basis for Reid's work. In the following parts I will comment on Reid's development as an artist as well as the most significant pieces of art he had produced during his career. The aim of the Diploma Thesis is to examine the impact of Reid's works in the context of growing awareness of Native arts and cultures both in Canada and the world at large.

Anotace

Ve své diplomové práci se zaměřuji na dílo známého kanadského umělce Billa Reida (1920-1998) a jeho přínos v rámci obrody umění původních obyvatel severozápadního pobřeží Kanady. Reidova umělecká tvorba úzce souvisí s kmenem Haida, obývajícím Ostrovy královny Charlotty v Britské Kolumbii, a proto se první dvě kapitoly věnují popisu přírodního prostředí oblasti a důležitým informacím ohledně domorodého obyvatelstva. Následující části se zabývají Reidovým uměleckým vývojem a tvorbou, která se inspirovala odkazem jeho indiánských předků. Cílem této diplomové práce je posoudit vliv Reidových děl na vzrůstající zájem o umění a kulturu původního obyvatelstva Severní Ameriky, který byl zaznamenán v Kanadě a dalších zemích světa.

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Introduction

I have chosen the topic of my thesis two years ago, when I became fascinated by the story of an ancient culture surviving till these days despite all the adversities it has encountered. Bill Reid (1920-1998) was the person who through his art had largely contributed to the general acknowledgement of Haida people and their culture. Being a half-Haida himself, he was attracted by the heritage of his own people and used it as the main source for his work.

In the first part of my thesis I want to describe the natural environment of the Queen Charlotte Islands, which have been home to the Haida for thousands of years. Therefore the relationship between the people and nature developed into an inseparable connection. The natural surroundings had shaped their view of the world and therefore influenced their artistic expression. The second chapter points out the important characteristics of the Nation itself, certain aspects of their social life and gives explanations about some of the fundamental events from their history, such as the arrival of Europeans in Western Canada.

The third section focuses fully on Bill Reid's life and his artistic career. As he did not become a craftsman straight away, I followed the path which led him, step by step, to his beloved profession. His approach to transforming Haida cultural patterns and ideas into contemporary pieces of art is also the subject of this part, together with a couple of specific examples of his varied works. The last chapter concentrates on Reid's influence on promoting and increasing the awareness of the Haida and other Northwest Coast cultures. Was he really the only one who participated in their rebirth? What made him the central figure of Canadian Native art? In one of the subsections I also dealt with Reid's complicated position in the middle of two distinct worlds, Native and non-Native.

I considered it essential to include a section with illustrations to my thesis. The topic deserves visual support greatly and therefore I chose a few pictures of the natural environment as well as the photographs of Reid's various works to accompany the text.

1 Haida Gwaii

The westernmost place found in Canada, islands of wild rocky shores, rugged mountains, deep rain forests, inland lakes and sandy beaches, all being overwhelmed by mist and damp most of the time. Islands where contradictions seem to settle down and be at home. A complicated story of a place where the controversy starts within the name of the place itself.

1.1 Haida Gwaii or the Queen Charlotte Islands?

In Haida language, “*Haida Gwaii*” stands for “*the Islands of the People*”. This original name Haida people had used to call their islands was replaced by the name of *Queen Charlotte Islands* at the time of the first contacts with Europeans. In 1787 Captain George Dixon, trading for King George’s Sound Company, named this archipelago after his vessel the *Queen Charlotte*. Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III, never visited the Islands “*named not for the Haida, who have always lived there, nor for the Raven, who somewhat inadvertently put them there, but for a woman who never saw them.*” (Reid, Bringhurst 1996: 15)

Although the English name still remains the official geographical term, people today tend to go back to the history of this special place and the term *Haida Gwaii* is used widely.

1.2 Geographical location

Queen Charlotte Islands is an archipelago situated approximately one hundred kilometres off the western coast of British Columbia. Surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, Canada’s most western lands represent a unique territory with many characteristics which differentiate it from the rest of the province, British Columbia.

The archipelago consists of two main islands: Graham Island in the north and Moresby Island in the south (see Attachments: picture no. 1). Together with more than 150 smaller islands, they cover the area of approximately 9700 square kilometres.

Today, about 5,000 Canadians (both Native and non-Native) live on Haida Gwaii and only eight main settlements remain permanently inhabited. They include Skidegate, Skidegate Landing, Old Massett, Masset, Port Clemens, Tlell and the Village of Queen Charlotte on Graham Island, and Sandspit located on the northern tip of Moresby Island. Masset, the biggest community of all, is situated 3 kilometres south from Old Massett - the Haida original village. The rest of Haida Gwaii, apart from a few logging camps and archaeological sites, is largely deserted.

1.3 Climate

Mild and wet climate influenced by the North Pacific Current characterises the North-west Pacific coastal weather. Summer and winter day temperatures do not vary much, averaging 22°C in summer and 6°C in winter. There is no other place in Canada with higher mean temperature than the Queen Charlotte Islands.

The west coast of the Islands gets most of the annual precipitation (168 inches), leaving the east coast with only 52 inches. This is caused by the Queen Charlotte mountain range that lines the western coast, running from north to south.

Although precipitation occurs throughout the year, winter months are dominated by heavy rainfall, storms and strong winds. Generally speaking, mid May to mid September is recommended as the best time to visit.

1.4 Natural environment

The Haida have always emphasised their connection to nature and their land. As other North American Native peoples, they have developed a deep relationship to their natural surroundings. Nature influenced largely their everyday life, as well as their understanding of the world around them. In the following section I would like to introduce the main points concerning Haida Gwaii's natural environment.

1.4.1 Natural Heritage

During the last glacial period, most of the North American continent was covered with ice. Haida Gwaii is believed not to have been part of the ice sheet entirely and so it became a refuge for animals searching for a new territory to settle in. (Suzuki 2006; Gill 1997)

Today, Haida Gwaii is home to about 40 species and sub-species of plants and animals which can be found neither on the mainland nor in any other place in the world except the Islands. That's why Queen Charlotte Islands are sometimes referred to as "*Canada's Galapagos.*" (Gill 1997: 9)

The endemic animal species include the Sitka black-tailed deer, the ermine, the pine marten, the deer mouse or the black bear, who happens to be the largest black bear of North America. Various plants, moss and lichens are unique to the area as well as certain kinds of fish (e.g. the stickleback fish) of islands' numerous rivers, lakes or sea waters.

Different kinds of trees thrive in the Islands' cool and wet weather conditions: Western Red cedar, Sitka Spruce, Shore Pine, Western Hemlock, Mountain Hemlock or Yellow Cypress constitute temperate rain forests and represent one of the oldest trees on Earth. (Gill 1997)

1.4.2 Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve

Established in 1987, National Park Reserve protects about 15% of the Queen Charlotte Islands' land mass, stretching from Tasu Sound and Laskeek Bay down to the very south of the St. James Island. Gwaii Haanas, the "Place of Wonder", a wilderness park totalling 138 islands, was designated by the Canadian government to preserve the special fauna and flora of the region as well as the relics of 400 cultural sites. One the most important historical sites is Ninstints (SḠang Gwaay Ilnagaay) located on Anthony Island (SḠang Gwaay) in the south of Gwaii Haanas. In 1981 SḠang Gwaay World Heritage Site was thus inscribed into the UNESCO World Heritage List:

Remains of houses, together with carved mortuary and memorial poles, illustrate the Haida people's art and way of life. The site commemorates the living culture of the Haida people and their relationship to the land and sea, and offers a visual key to their oral traditions.¹

The park is the breeding grounds for different kinds of seabirds as well as a stopover for migrating birds. The shores enjoy the highest density of Bald Eagles' nests in the whole country. Many birdwatchers are attracted to observe islands' numerous and rare bird species.

A marine conservation area has been proposed to save a wide range of sea mammals as seals, whales, porpoises and sea lions which constitute more than a half of British Columbia's sea lion population. Cod, tuna and halibut are found in the seas together with salmon, herring and crab.

1.4.3 Other protected areas

The north-eastern part of Graham Island is known as Naikoon Provincial Park. Conservationists had started their efforts to protect this flat section of the island in 1973. The name of the park originates in the Haida expression for "long nose" - Nai-Kun. It describes an unusually shaped land spit running 3 kilometres out to sea, creating a dividing line between Hecate Strait and Dixon Entrance in the north-eastern tip of the island. Today, this symbol of Naikoon park is known by its English name, Rose Spit. Its immense importance for Haida people and mythology originates in the Haida creation myth which tells a story of a Raven coaxing First Humans out of a clamshell. This event is thought to have taken place here, on the Rose Spit beach. This explains the endeavour of local inhabitants to protect almost 100-kilometre-long strips of beaches, lakes and forests.

Tow Hill, a strange-looking basalt formation, has become another icon of the park (see Attachments: picture no. 17). This 109-metre-high landmark of the North Beach arose from solidified volcanic rock

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/157>

about 2 million years ago. The last Ice Age glaciers smoothed the southern side of the rock, whereas sea waves worked on the northern section. Tow Hill used to serve the Haida as an important orientation point when crossing Dixon Entrance. (Gill 1997)

1.4.4 Forest Industry Controversy

Logging plans for South Moresby Island were introduced in 1974: a logging company made an attempt to move some of their activity from Talunkwan Island to Burnaby Island which lies within the southern part of the Islands. Five hundred people of Haida origin as well as a number of non-Native residents signed a petition which proposed the South Moresby area become a wilderness reserve. The Provincial government decided not to log Burnaby Island but offered the logging company another option: Lyell Island.

David Suzuki, the Canada's best known environmentalist, got involved in the matter first in 1982. With his TV program called *The Nature of Things with David Suzuki*, he made a documentary which broadcast in the same year, causing a great public outcry, not only among the Native people and Canadian citizens, but in the whole world in general.

Suzuki surmised that in the view of local high unemployment, the Haida would welcome forest companies and job opportunities they offered. Guujaaw (who does not use his English name Gary Edenshaw any longer), a Haida well-known carver, environmentalist and for the time being president of the Council of the Haida Nation, had put it to Suzuki this way however:

Our people have determined that Windy Bay and other areas must be left in their natural condition so that we can keep our identity and pass it on to following generations. The forests, those oceans, are what keep us as Haida people today. (Suzuki 2006: 117)

Nevertheless, the efforts to protect the area from exploitation, new logging of Lyell Island was permitted by the BC government in 1985. This time the Haida had decided to act on their own and they blocked the logging roads of the island. Many of them were therefore

arrested. The solution of Gwaii Haanas issue could no longer to be postponed. When the South Moresby Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Government of BC and Canada, logging was finally put to an end on July 11, 1987.

A year later the National Park was established and the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site Agreement from January 1993 confirmed that both signing parties (the Canadian government and the Council of the Haida Nation)

*agree that long-term protective measures are essential to safeguard the Archipelago as one of the world's great natural and cultural treasures, and that the highest standards of protection and preservation should be applied.*²

The Archipelago Management Board was created to join an equal number of representatives from the Council of the Haida Nation and the Canadian government. Nevertheless, some of the Haida do not feel satisfied with the co-management idea and complain about lack of co-operation between the two sides. In his book, Gill offered an opinion of a then member of Old Massett village council, Sid Davidson: *"They call it cooperation, but I don't see much cooperation. We still get the short end of the stick."* (1997: 14)

The battle over the islands' wood is not yet finished as other areas are still being logged. On the contrary, quite recent affairs seem to start changing the situation. In March/April 2007 issue of Canadian Geographic Christopher Mason writes:

In November 2004, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that governments have a legal duty to consult with Aboriginals before allowing logging, mining, new roads and other development on Crown land that is subject to Native land claims.

Guujaaw showed Mason his optimism commenting the present-day situation: *"We're in a real transition period right now. I think it*

² http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/gwaiihaanas/plan/plan2a_E.asp#4

will become a little more stable and I think we'll have a controlling interest over the logging that does occur.”³

1.4.5 The Golden Spruce Tree

Twelve years ago, people on Haida Gwaii witnessed an absurd and unnecessary incident with two participants: a fascinating natural wonder on one side and inexplicable act of violence on the other. The story of the Golden Spruce illustrates the constant pressures on Islands' natural treasures and the endless negotiations over their future. It tells a story of malevolence, ignorance and helplessness. I find it important to comment on this event as it represents some of the Haida Gwaii battles which have not been won yet.

The Golden Spruce Tree stood near Port Clemens on Graham Island. This “*wonderful genetic anomaly*” (Gill 1997: 81) was celebrated for its golden needles and it dominated the Yakoun River shore until 1997.

With little carotenoid the tree lacked enough protection against excessive sunlight. MacMillan Bloedel Limited, a Canadian forestry company that was logging the Islands, marked the tree with a sign which said “*...the miraculous survival of the Golden Spruce is attributed to the lower light intensities found along the Yakoun River from frequent fog, moisture and overcast conditions.*” In his book, Ian Gill follows this quote with these sentences: “*I am inclined to think it is even more miraculous that the company didn't just log it, along with all the other miracles of nature that haven't won such a lucky reprieve.*” (Gill 1997: 81)

In the end it was not the logging company that cut the tree down but a forest engineer Thomas Grant Hadwin who wanted to manifest his discontent with logging practises of that time. This violent act shocked the public greatly, especially the Haida who felt both outraged and frustrated for the Golden Spruce had a great mythological significance for their culture. Although Grant Hadwin

³ <http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/MA07/indepth/>

was arrested, he was released on bail and disappeared just before his trial. He was never punished for his crime.

Fortunately, the tree's seedling survived and a little descendant of the famous Golden Spruce is being cherished at the Millennium Park in Port Clemens.

2 The Haida

Second chapter gives the information on the Haida and their society before and after the arrival of Europeans. It describes some of the most significant cultural elements and specific Haida traditions. Important events of Haida history are mentioned to explain the development of the Native settlements.

2.1 Settlement of the American continent

The appearance of first humans on the American continent has been the subject of interest of many scientists and experts. Although a reliable and satisfactory explanation has not been given yet, various theories have tried to throw light upon the distant history of Americas' habitation.

According to Dickason's book (1992), most of archaeologists and anthropologists agree on the theory which assumes the first people had come from Asia across the so-called Beringia. As has been mentioned, some 100,000 years ago most of North America was covered with ice. As a result, sea levels subsided and new masses of land emerged. What is today the Bering Straits turned into a land bridge which connected Asia with North America. *"This expanse of open grassland and tundra at one point was more than 2,000 kilometres wide, more like a continent than a bridge."* (Dickason 1992: 21). While the transformed land provided grazing for animals such as the caribou and bison, human hunters are thought to have followed the migrating game. When the climate warmed between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago, a corridor south opened up for both animals and newcomers.

Despite the different presumptions about the continent populating, *"at least part of the earlier migrations were on land via Beringia."*

(Dickason 1992: 34). Dickason concludes that by about 11,000 years ago people “*were inhabiting the length and breadth of the Americas*”. (ibid. 34)

2.2 Natives of the Northwest

Canada is stereotypically thought of as a young country with a quite short history reaching somewhere to the times of the first European exploration journeys in the late 15th and the beginning of 16th century. “*In other words, Canada’s history began with the arrival of Europeans.*” (Dickason 1992: 11). The fact that the land was inhabited long before British and French settlement has proved indisputable, though difficulties have accompanied endeavours to map the earlier periods of Native peoples’ history:

Because they were oral, rather than literate, peoples ..., reconstructing their pre-contact history in the Western sense is a daunting task. Canadian historians have, in the past, found it much easier to ignore the earlier period; (Dickason 1992: 12)

Dickason offers herself the new view of Canadian history which brings new research and information about those distant times. Archaeological research has shown the Native peoples (including the Haida) had lived on the north-western coast as far back as 10,000 years ago. (Sauvé, Sauvé 1997). The Pacific coast with its mild climate and plenty of food resources in the coastal waters provided the people with all the necessities of life. According to Muckle (edited by Hallowell 2004), about 5,000 years ago the number of Native people in the Northwest rose, their settlements growing bigger and their culture and society developing.

It was not until the late 18th century that people from a distant continent appeared in this remote part of Canada. Unlike the east coast, where the first permanent European settlement was established by the French in 1605, “*British Columbia remained predominantly Amerindian until the 1880s.*” (Dickason 1992: 208). When the first explorers appeared at Haida Gwaii shores, the east was already firmly settled and controlled by European incomers. Thanks to this, the

people of the Northwest enjoyed two extra centuries before their way of life started changing.

2.3 Haida pre-contact society

For this section I have synthesised fundamental facts concerning Haida social organisation and life before they met the white settlers. As will be subsequently explained, their traditional lifestyle and their views of the world around them, differed fundamentally from the ones introduced later by the English, French and others.

2.3.1 Haida hierarchy system

Haida traditional society was divided into two main groups, or moieties, called by their emblems: Ravens and Eagles. Marriage was not allowed within one moiety which means that a man of the Raven group had to marry a woman of the Eagle moiety and vice versa.

These two groups were then subdivided into a number of families or lineages. Each lineage consisted of separate households with a chief as a head of the house. A typical Haida household usually held as many as 30 – 40 people because it united several nuclear families. However, the house of more powerful chiefs had enough room for up to 100 family members and slaves. Slaves were usually captives from the neighbouring villages on the mainland or prisoners' children and were considered to stand outside the social structure.⁴ (MacDonald 1989)

The lineage chief personified another authority and was basically the wealthiest or the most respected person of either Ravens or Eagles. Haida society respected the matrilineal system: children became members of the same moiety as their mother. In case of chief's death, his sister's sons inherited his property and privileges. On the contrary, chief's own sons inherited the property of his wife's brother. Wealth of both natural and supernatural character was handed from one generation to another. The natural wealth

⁴ <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/aborig/haida/hapso01e.shtml>

might include rights to hunting lands or fishing streams, rocky islets where sea mammals could be clubbed, berry-picking areas, stands of fine timber, or stretches of beach where whales might be stranded. (MacDonald 1989: 16)

Supernatural wealth connected the Haida with their ancestors and included songs, dances, myths and legends together with crests and tattoo designs. Names were of particular importance, as they symbolised different stages of a person's life – they marked the owner's current social position. Two social classes were distinguished among the Haida: upper class and commoners. Commoners did not own any major property in contrast to people of higher rank. This Haida nobility performed one of the most significant ceremonies of north-western Native peoples known as a potlatch.

The “*give-away feasts*” (Dickason 1992: 67) accompanied important events of community life including marriages, deaths, giving names and especially the acquisition of a higher social rank – including the position of a chief. The ceremony was concluded by gift distribution. The value of a gift depended on the social status of the attendee. By accepting the gifts, people confirmed and legitimised the event. Building of a new house and raising of a frontal totem pole also belonged to the occasions which called for the potlatch.

According to Dickason (1992), potlatch was originally held to provide enough food supplies for the groups with shortages. Although the Haida realised the value of gained commodities, “*goods were accumulated to be given away on ceremonial occasions, such as the potlatch...*” (Dickason 1992: 78). The Haida, and other north-western Native tribes, are believed to emphasise social status and reputation over accumulating of wealth itself. That is the reason why “*acquiring prestige called for generosity, among other virtues.*” (ibid. 78)

2.3.2 Life in the village

The Haida developed a hunter-gatherer society. They fully took advantage of the rich sea-life around the islands and caught salmon, cod, halibut and sea mammals. Their typical dug-out canoes facilitated

the off-shore hunt. They also gathered berries, roots and seaweed. This provided them with sufficient amount of food, hence they did little farming.

The key resource for the Haida was red cedar, used for making the single-log canoes, building of plank houses and creating engraved totem poles. Cedar bark was softened first and afterwards woven into baskets, hats and blankets. Even fishing and hunting gear was made of wood. Regarding the metals, copper was the most coveted and valued: “...a shield made of copper was their most important object of symbolic wealth.” (MacDonald 1989: 17)

A typical village was inhabited by a few hundred people, some settlements reaching up to 1,000 dwellers. MacDonald (1989) indicates that Haida long-houses were traditionally organised in a row on a strip of beach, facing the sea. The chief's house was placed in the middle of the row, with the houses of more powerful chiefs surrounding it. Building of a new house was an occasion of great significance. It took long to accumulate the required amount of wealth. When such a situation arose, trees were carefully selected first of all. Special attention was paid to the ones that were about to turn into frontal poles and roof beams. The raising of a frontal pole was the final act of house building. As mentioned earlier, potlatch was held in connection with this particular event.

Gill (1997) talks about the Haida being excellent mariners who learned how to trade with their mainland neighbours. They sailed on their canoes, capable of paddling great distances to reach other native settlements. They could travel as far as today's Victoria and north of the state of Washington, USA. (Horwood, Parkin 2006). Because the tribes of the north-western coast valued Haida canoes as superior crafts, Haida own means of transport became the most important trading article.

Trading was not the only way how to acquire different kinds of goods. Gill affirms the Haida to be “*tough, fierce warriors*” (1997: 11) who raided the Native villages of north-west coast, capturing slaves and commodities. Dickason agrees that “*the Haida were feared slavers,*

frequently raiding the Salish of southern Vancouver Island..." (1992: 69). She also points out the fact that

warfare along the Northwest Coast appears to have been more widespread before and during early contact than it later became, particularly after depopulation as a result of epidemics. (ibid. 69)

2.3.3 View of the world

Long before the Haida were introduced to the teachings of Christianity, they had developed their own way how to interpret the world surrounding them along with their role in it. The Haida divided the cosmos into three basic levels: below the land inhabited by humans, there was the underworld, whereas above it, the sky world spread. Each of these separate levels had their chiefs. Killer whales were the masters of the underworld, the eagle was the chief of the skies and the bear of land mammals. The Haida believed that harmony among all three worlds mirrors itself in their everyday life. MacDonald (1989) adds, that such event as an unsuccessful hunt or a natural disaster was accredited to some kind of disharmony in the three-world balance.

The three-world division was reflected in the lay-out of Haida villages. An imaginary line ran through the row of houses, designating the earth – the home of humans. The narrow mankind zone was encompassed by the sea on one side and the hilly landscape, providing a passage to the sky world on the other. Another line was thought to run vertically from the deep seas, through the earth to the upper world. MacDonald (1989) describes the two lines as meeting at the house pit: a place found in each Haida house. Lineage ceremonies usually took place at the house pit which was the centre of each lineage's world. That means that Haida houses served not only as a shelter but as spiritual centres, too. On ceremonial occasions if a person entered the house through the oval doorway at the base of the frontal pole, he or she contacted the world of family's ancestors:

Houses symbolized the house lineage, and entering into them marked a clear transition from the profane world to the spiritual

world of the ancestors, bringing the Haida into intimate association with their cultural traditions. (MacDonald 1989: 19)

The Haida also believed animals to possess souls: “...*they were classified as people with special attributes and abilities.*” (MacDonald 1989: 17). MacDonald further mentions that the Haida had always showed their respect to the masters of the skies, land and sea, with prayers and food offerings to ensure successful hunts. There was a common idea that animals have their societies organised very much like the Haida, with two main clans of Ravens and Eagles, with their villages and houses. They were thought to take on their human form when they were inside their houses. Outside, they usually put on their skins and furs and spoke the animal language. Such images are represented in many Haida stories and even ceremonials. By putting on animal cloaks and masks and imitating different animal sounds, the Haida “*entered a mental state in which they believed they have become part of the animal society.*” (MacDonald 1989: 17)

2.3.4 Haida myths and legends

Mythology played a crucial role in the Native societies of North America. With no written records, they handed their stories down orally. That is also why most of the myths we know today represent just samples from the once rich number of stories which were being told among the Haida. These myths of great cultural significance “*teach, record history, and offer entertainment.*” (Gillmor, Turgeon 2000: 2). Haida myths share many similarities with the myths of the Northwest Coast area, e.g. the Raven - “*the best known trickster among west coast Aboriginals.*” (Muckle R.J., edited by Hallowell 2004: 656). Haida stories are closely related to Haida art, as their main characters were often portrayed on carved poles, storage boxes, even objects of everyday usage e.g. the fishing hooks.

MacDonald (1989) distinguishes different sets of myths including the dominant Raven cycle of legends. The Raven belongs to the most important characters of Haida myths. The Raven is a cunning trickster who always plays tricks on people and other creatures, and who likes

to change things just for his own delight. He often acts maliciously and shamelessly. In the preface to Reid's and Bringhurst's book *The Raven Steals the Light*, Claude Lévi-Strauss describes the Raven as "...a deceitful, insolent, libidinous and often grotesque character with a penchant for scatology..." (1996: 11). The Raven represents the power to transform things as well as himself. In various myths we are told of Raven's frequent changes of appearance: once he takes up his human form, on another occasion he changes himself into a salmon or a hemlock needle. Through these transformations he acquires the changes of the world around him. In the second cycle of Raven myths, Eagle accompanies the Raven. Although they often fight each other in their struggle for food, these two rivals represent the two symbols of Haida principal moieties.

It was nobody else, but the Raven "... who thought nothing of stealing rivers and streams by the thousand, and who lay with many another man's wife and many an innocent girl without risking his own heart..." (Reid, Bringhurst 1996: 93) who created Haida Gwaii. Using two pebbles, he made the Queen Charlotte Islands from the black pebble and the mainland from the white one. MacDonald deduced that Raven "is rarely a prime creator but more often a transposer and transformer who is responsible more for the present order of the universe than for the origin of its components." (1989: 18)

Most aboriginal tribes of North America are convinced that the land they occupy is the place of their origin. (Dickason 1992). That is the reason why different Native groups, including the Haida, have different creation myths. Naturally, it was the Raven who participates in the first appearance of humans on Haida Gwaii.

The Raven and the First Men (Reid, Bringhurst 1996) tells a story of the Raven who one day found a clamshell on a beach at what is today Rose Spit. Strange sounds were coming out from the clamshell and when the Raven took a look inside, he could see humans through the crevice. Humans were first terrified when they saw Raven's silhouette but he managed to cajole them to come out of the shell. First Humans were white-skinned and surprisingly all of male sex.

This fact made the Raven confused: *“He had looked all up and down the beach for female creatures, hoping to make the game more interesting, but females were nowhere to be found.”* (Reid, Bringham 1996: 35). As usual, the Raven got an idea. He took some of the men and joined them with red chitons, a kind of marine mollusc. The humans were much puzzled when *“... the chiton found its mark in the delicate groin of the startled, shellborn creature.”* (ibid. 35). The chitons soon proved to be pregnant and with the help of the ocean they gave birth to brown-skinned, black-haired humans: the Haida. *“They were no timid shell-dwellers these, but children of the wild coast, born between the sea and land, challenging the strength of the stormy North Pacific and wresting from it a rich livelihood.”* (ibid. 36). The new-born creatures were male and female who found their home on Haida Gwaii. So the Raven is responsible not only for creating the Haida but also for inventing sex, *“... all for a joke, leaving others to suffer the endless peculiar effects of his invention...”* (ibid. 93)

All Haida myths were passed down orally which resulted in their great variety. Even the creation myth has different variations in which the place where the First Humans appeared is changed. Gill showed his surprise when Guujaaw told him his version: *“It was a cockleshell, and it was on House Island.”* (1997: 67). Thanks to this, we can assume that in Haida mythology, there is never only one correct story but there are always many. *“That is what is so potent about Haida culture: it is constantly evolving, shifting, and being reinvented.”* (Gill 1997: 70)

2.4 First contacts with Europeans

On 17th July 1774 Juan Pérez, an explorer of Spanish origin, caught a sight of Langara Island, the northernmost point of Haida Gwaii, thinking that it was the mainland he saw. Thirteen years later when Captain George Dixon reached the Haida Gwaii’s shores aboard the Queen Charlotte, he found that this land was certainly separated from the mainland, surrounded by the sea. The archipelago was named after Her Majesty’s Ship: the Queen Charlotte Islands. Since George

Dixon was to investigate trading possibilities for his country, a new era started and brought many changes to the Native inhabitants. The Haida were successful as traders because of rich experience with trading with the mainland settlements. Europeans became interested in sea otter pelts that were prized highly in China and the British fur traders found a place where they could get them cheap. The Haida were keen on the wealth which came to the Islands with white men. Gill writes:

The islands were abuzz with commerce. But traditional ways began to be undermined, and the Haida became hungry for trade goods, so hungry that they blindly participated in the extinction of the very sea otter that brought them outside wealth in the first place. (1997: 6)

Some of the village chiefs were quite successful and acquired great amounts of wealth. As a result, more potlatches were held and more wealth distributed. This period was also rich on raising of new totem poles and building houses. Metal woodworking which has been introduced to the Haida by Europeans allowed “*the expression of Haida monumental art and architecture on a scale previously not possible...*” (MacDonald 1989: 19). This quote corresponds with Dickason who wrote:

... Northwest Coast cultures flourished, expressing themselves in the growing lavishness of ceremonies, but above all in their arts, by which they represented their mystical vision of the world and its powers. (1992: 212)

2.5 Consequences of European arrival

The sea otter decline started at the beginning of 1830s, some five decades after the first otter pelts were traded between George Dixon and the Haida. Complete disappearance of this hunted animal from the waters around Haida Gwaii followed soon after. At that time, Haida craftsmen discovered European interest in argillite carving. The so-called “black slate” occurs only at a quarry close to Skidegate. They converted the soft stone into miniature totem poles or pipes and

produced artistic objects “*for which there was an instant demand.*” (Dickason 1992: 212). Although the main trading object was changed to cultural objects and furs of lower value, it could not compensate the former profitable business. This sudden lack of trading opportunities resulted, according to MacDonald (1989), in Haida frequent visits to the mainland. They headed for Fort Simpson, the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post, established on the Tsimshian Peninsula in 1834.

Apart from the fur trade that showed itself fatal for the sea otter, Europeans brought something that was dangerous to the Haida themselves: diseases. The first of a series of smallpox epidemics came in late 1830s and had a destructive result: almost half of the Haida population died within one decade. With no inherited immunity, the Haida succumbed quickly and the following series, particularly the one of 1862-3, wiped out most of the Islands’ remaining Natives. (MacDonald 1989). It is estimated that 15,000 to 30,000 Native people inhabited Haida Gwaii before the European contact. After a few decades the number came down to less than 700 Natives, all resident in either Skidegate or Old Massett. The reason for moving out of their home villages is obvious: as almost all settlements were struck by disease and sometimes only few Haida survived the epidemics, they needed another community to settle in.

One more essential feature has to be mentioned in connection with European intrusion: Christianity came hard on the heels of traders and settlers. The first missionary to come to Haida Gwaii was the Reverend W. H. Collison who founded the Masset mission in 1876. Another one was established in Skidegate few years later, led by George Robinson. MacDonald (1989) marked 1881 to be the year when Skidegate residents adopted the ways of the white man. Although new houses were under construction at that time, by 1884 most of Haida long-houses were abandoned. Traditional settlement structure was dramatically changed as well, placing church to the centre of the community. The Haida left their large houses in favour of new single-family ones.

Under the pressure of Christian missionaries and the government, potlatches were banned in 1884. Dickason (1992) explains that these ceremonials were regarded as a constant unwillingness to acknowledge and accept Christianity. In addition, from the perspective of the colonisers '*...the "give-away" aspect of potlatches was held to be incompatible with western economic practices and inimical to the concept of private property.*' (1992: 286)

2.6 The Beothuk parallel

Like the Haida, the Beothuk belonged among the Canadian First Nations. They used to inhabit Newfoundland, an island located on the east coast of Canada, and perhaps some parts of Labrador peninsula. They were the first people to meet the future colonisers of their land. Unfortunately, this encounter did not bring them any positives. They vanished as a consequence of a contact with white explorers and settlers.

An interesting parallel presents itself in the comparison of the Beothuk and the Haida: two different Native groups, inhabiting islands on the opposite edges of the country. Two cultures separated from one another by approximately 5,000 kilometres of land. Their destiny might have developed the same, but as we know today, it did not, and the Beothuk were chosen as the less fortunate.

First documented Europeans to reach the shores of North America were the Norse in AD 1,000. Then it took almost five hundred years for the Europeans to appear again: the next to come was John Cabot, or Giovanni Caboto, an Italian navigator who sailed under the English colours. On June 24th 1497 Cabot reached either Newfoundland or Labrador. He claimed the land for England by raising the English banner and a Christian cross. Although he did not meet any people this time, he discovered a site which showed evidence of human presence. The abandoned site he saw is thought to belong to the Beothuk: "*a fitting introduction to a tribe that would prove so elusive.*" (Gillmor, Turgeon 2000: 13)

The Beothuk were probably among the first Natives to be kidnapped and brought to Europe, where they were paraded as a proof of the discovery of the New World. Pietro Pasqualigo, a Venetian diplomat, saw some Native prisoners in Lisbon four years after Cabot's voyage to North America: "*They are of like colours, figure, stature, and respect, and bear the greatest resemblance to the Gypsies.*" (ibid. 14). According to Gillmor and Turgeon (2000), the captives were not able to cope with the ordeal of transatlantic crossing and all of them died either before reaching European shores or soon after landing.

After initial presumed skirmishes, undocumented in detail, the Beothuk, or "Red Indians" as the colonisers called them because of the way they painted their bodies, tried their best to avoid contacts with Europeans and therefore they withdrew the coast. Moving to the interior of Newfoundland, they emerged from time to time "*if they were not frustrated by the European presence.*" (Dickason 1992: 96). In comparison with other Native groups, the Beothuk did not show any interest in trading or other contacts with the intruders. The relationship was impaired by several incidents of misunderstanding during the early encounters period and was never mended. Dickason admits that the Beothuk sometimes raided "*any European gear they could find.*" (ibid. 96)

Their behaviour scared the Europeans as the group was rarely seen and was thought of as a kind of "hidden danger". When the first settlers came, real hunt against the Beothuk started and continued for the next almost 300 years. During their short contact with the colonists and traders, they contracted various diseases. By the beginning of the 19th century, their population of several hundreds dropped down to a handful. (cf. Gillmor, Turgeon 2000). The last known survivor was a woman called Shawnadithit. She was the one who, with her drawings and rather imperfect English, told the world about Beothuk culture. She died herself of tuberculosis in 1829.

Although the Haida did not avoid the white people as the Beothuk did, the two groups' history bears much resemblance. Both cultures

had to fight against spreading disease, cope with the loss of their traditional territory and get accustomed to their rights “*being secondary to those of settlers.*” (Dickason 1992: 97)

3 Bill Reid

A jeweller, carver, journalist, writer or a sculptor – these are just some of the fields Bill Reid proved to be successful in. The next chapter is devoted to his life and artistic work and gives information on Reid’s origins and his Haida ancestry. The fact of himself being a half-Haida makes the story of an artist who chose Native art as the source of his inspiration both straightforward and complex.

3.1 The making of an Indian

Because of its simplicity and exactness, I chose the title of Reid’s biography, written by Maria Tippett and published in 2004, as the name of this section. According to her, Reid was not born an artist but his extraordinary skills were revealed in his late twenties. Although his career started quite late, his artistic devotion did not come by accident. The artist within him just seemed to be waiting for the right time to appear.

3.1.1 Native blood

William R. (Bill) Reid was born on 12th of January 1920 in Victoria BC., Canada, to Sophie Gladstone and William Ronald Reid. Bill’s father was born an American citizen of Scottish and German origin and later became a naturalised Canadian. Bill’s mother was a Haida, one of the six children of Charles and Josephine Ellsworth Gladstone. Reid’s maternal grandmother was a native of Tanu, a village on South Moresby Island. She belonged to the group of survivors of the catastrophic smallpox epidemics of 1886. She met and married her second husband in Skidegate, after joining other people who were leaving their homes and moving north to Skidegate and Masset. The family’s connection to the famous Haida artist, Charles Edenshaw was claimed through Bill’s grandfather, Charles Gladstone.

The question of Bill being half-Haida shows to be a tricky one as we explore the relationships within his mother's family side. The possible European paternity of Charles Gladstone would certainly change the situation. Tippett (2004) even speculates about a theory which says that Sophie, Bill's mother, was a child of a young Norwegian who visited Haida Gwaii in the 1890s. This would mean Bill Reid was less than one-quarter Haida. As there is no reliable source, we can only guess today which of the theories is truthful. However, it is sure that Bill Reid came from a family which had its ancestors among the Haida and at least a few drops of their Indian blood ran through his veins: it was certainly enough to influence his life greatly.

3.1.2 Reid's childhood

Sophie Gladstone, Bill's mother, was born in 1895 and spent her early childhood in Skidegate. Her parents belonged among the Europeanised Haida and were members of the Methodist Church. That is why they made sure all of their six children were baptised. (Tippett 2004). From around the age of ten, Sophie was being sent to study at Coqualeetza residential school, approximately 100 kilometres east of Vancouver, for most of the year. In her book (1986), Shadbolt paraphrases Reid's opinion that by that time his grandmother must have accepted the fact of the old times being over and she must have decided on the future of her children: "...*the best thing for the children was to get them out of the villages and educated.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 15). Sophie was largely influenced by this new world. She learned her perfect English and became a skilful sewer. She was an ambitious person, full of resolutions to enter the dominant white people's culture as these were the times "*when it was difficult to take pride in being Indian.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 15). Such an approach required not only a lot of determination but also the suppressing of her origins.

Although nobody is sure whether she had obtained a teacher's certificate or not, she was working as a teacher in New Hazelton,

British Columbia, when she met her future husband. William Reid was running a hotel in a nearby town of Smithers at that time. Sophie gave birth to Bill in 1920 and only a year later to his sister Peggy. Living in Victoria, Sophie “*in her constant search for respectability and European identity*” (Shadbolt 1986: 16) hired a housemaid and a nanny in one person. Her name was Mrs. Brown and the children always called her “Ga-Ga”. She became a member of the family for many years, accompanying the family on their frequent moves between Victoria and Hyder. After six years in Victoria, the mother, her two children and their nanny would move to Hyder where the father ran his business, only to return to the province’s capital again a few years later. Because Sophie was the head of the family, Bill was brought up in a more ‘civilised’ way than the other children of the hard mining town of Hyder. His mother taught him to be “*a nice little boy*” (ibid. 18) and was strict on behaviour: “*manners should be minded, thoughts should be well spoken, things should be well made.*” (Shadbolt 1986: 21)

Bill’s father did not develop a cordial relationship towards his son. Leaving home at the age of sixteen, his life did not teach him anything about family relationships. After a job in railroad building which took him to many places, he settled down in British Columbia and established his own business. According to Shadbolt, his hotel business was actually just selling beer to locals. Considering himself a great outdoorsman and a hunter, he could not overcome the fact that Bill was of gentle nature, brought up in accordance with his mother’s values of politeness, often unable to fight his rough classmates. Mrs. Brown reported the way he used to think of his son: “*ugly, stupid, doomed to be a failure, doomed to be a bum.*” (ibid. 18). Shadbolt points out that later on Bill recalled the better characteristics of his father, particularly the fact that he had never taxed Sophie with her Native origins. Nevertheless, Bill’s relationship with his father was never close and after leaving Hyder in 1933 the two had never met again.

After William Reid was forced to close his hotel during the Depression, Sophie had to act independently again. She took her three kids - Bill's little brother Robert was born in 1928 - and the indispensable Mrs. Brown and returned to Victoria. She had to work hard in her clothes shop but was able to take care of the family herself. Reid's tough stay at Hyder was compensated back in the city where he attended high school and finally got a chance to develop his interest in literature, music and, moreover, he made friends. His aunts and uncles used to visit his mother from time to time but Bill did not think of them as Native since they were almost all blue-eyed and red-haired. During his lifetime, Reid had offered many versions of how he had discovered his Indian ancestry. Tippett (2004) affirms that Reid claimed that he had been unaware of the fact till his early teens, but at another time he changed the date and insisted that he had found it out much later, as an adult. Such ambiguity corresponds with his mother's various stories of her origins, as she never truly believed that she was Haida. We can not assert that one of these theories is more truthful than the other. The fact which proved certain is that Sophie was not very pleased when young Bill started to ask curiously about his Indian ancestors and especially when he later showed his great interest in their legacy. As Reid remembers it, he was "*digging up those old bones which she had spent her life trying to bury.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 21, 22)

3.1.3 On the path towards art

Before Reid's life took on the artistic direction, many years have passed. He finished his studies in 1936-37 and had neither the finances, nor the motivation to continue with university studies. His knowledge of English and good speaking voice enabled him to become a radio announcer. He left home at the age of twenty and his job took him to various places in eastern Canada before he joined the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto in 1948. Shadbolt asserts that later on, Reid regarded this period as the sixteen "*wasted years.*" (1986: 25). On one hand, he entered the world of art quite late, but on

the other, the experience of announcing gave him the self-confidence he needed to overcome “*a painful shyness and a withdrawing nature.*” (ibid. 25)

He was living in Toronto with his first wife Mabel when he came across a notice of new courses in Ryerson Institute of Technology. Although interested in engraving, the only art course available was in European jewellery-making. However, Reid decided to sign up. He spent two years learning various traditional techniques as well as self-studying the work of contemporary craftsmen.

His motivation was encouraged by the first visit to Haida Gwaii. In 1943 he made this voyage of self-discovery, meeting Charles Gladstone in Skidegate. His white-skinned grandfather spoke no English, so communication between Reid and him was complicated. Nevertheless, the two created a close relationship and thanks to Charles, Bill met many older Haida villagers who have witnessed the old times and were open to sharing their memories. In 1950 Reid returned to Vancouver but continued working for the CBC for the next eight years. This could not suppress his enthusiasm for craftsmanship, so he set up a workshop where he used to work on new pieces of jewellery (see Attachments: picture no. 10-13).

3.2 An artist revealed

Young Bill started to show his interest and skill in manual work around the age of twelve or thirteen, when he began to carve various objects out of blackboard chalk and wood. Nevertheless, it took fifteen years before he began developing what was to become his true craftsmanship. Although he did not get any specific artistic education, he proved capable of managing without it. His inborn abilities and his ancestors’ pieces of art guided him through his beginnings.

3.2.1 Reid’s “Rosetta stone”

Among the first Native works of art Bill Reid had seen were the pieces made by his grandfather. Charles Gladstone, the nephew of a well-known Haida artist Charles Edenshaw, happened to live with him

in Masset when his parents' relationship broke up. Edenshaw wanted to pass his knowledge of craft to somebody and Bill's grandfather was his favoured student, so in the end he even inherited Edenshaw's own tools. (Tippett 2004). In addition, their bond was supported by the long Haida tradition which acknowledged the matrilineal system and emphasised the uncle-nephew relation. Charles Gladstone was for the most part a boat-builder and a carpenter who developed the habit of engraving argillite, wood and silver, as his uncle did. From melted silver and gold coins, he would produce bracelets and he would use argillite for carved totem poles. Although a skilful craftsman, Gladstone must be considered as an inferior artist who had the privilege of studying under the outstanding teacher. (Shadbolt 1986)

In her book, Shadbolt talks about Reid claiming Charles Edenshaw his "*Rosetta stone*." (1986: 118). Edenshaw was born in 1839 and died the same year when Reid was born, in 1920. During his life, the situation on Haida Gwaii changed dramatically: in his younger days, Haida culture was still more or less integrated, although dealing with incoming changes. At the end of his life, his culture and the nation he belonged to was devastated and lay in ruins. Adapting himself to the new conditions, Edenshaw started to produce diminutive argillite poles and houses for commercial purposes. At the same time, he kept working for the Haida community. Yet the pieces he produced for the European trade became different from those made for the Haida. Though his argillite totem poles carried the images of the same creatures which could be found on the authentic Haida ones, no family crests were depicted on them. This intentional change erased the significance of the pole as the social symbol, so such poles did not bear any sacred meanings any longer. (Shadbolt 1986)

Reid was for the first time introduced to Edenshaw's art in the mid 1950s. Coming to Skidegate for his grandfather's funeral, Reid encountered George Brown, Gladstone's close friend. Brown suggested to visit one of the residents who still possessed two bracelets made by Charles Edenshaw. As Reid puts it, after he saw the bracelets "*the world was not really the same*." (Shadbolt 1986: 84).

Motivated by the high-standard works Edenshaw had produced, Reid started to study his style and techniques he had used. He analysed the pieces of art in museums, read books about north-western artistic tradition. At the beginning, Reid often used the designs which he saw in Edenshaw's work, copying or modifying them and learning the necessary techniques to achieve such quality and finesse of craft. Using the Bear, Raven, Wolf and other designs, working on bracelets, brooches and pendants, Reid subsequently acquired the basic principles of Haida art. Naturally, learning the rules would not be sufficient to create an artist of such significance: "*...what Reid has done, ..., is to transcend the rules with which he started and to grasp the vital life of the forms, an interiorizing process which analysis alone cannot accomplish.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 96)

3.2.2 The art of well-making

Reid's attitude towards his art and craft is based on his deep sense of well-making. His pieces of art, especially those items smaller in size which he created on his work-bench, are precisely made, with surprisingly elaborate details which contribute to the complexity of design. Reid himself said: "*I try to make a well-made object; that is all that anyone can do.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 83). Reid considered well-making the most important quality of his ancestors' work and tried his best to hold to this tradition when producing his own pieces. Another feature connecting his and traditional Haida work was the appreciation of miniature art "*which compress qualities and meanings.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 94). The magic of a tiny object in which important messages were enclosed, including the great artistry of the maker, were regarded highly by Haida artists and Reid as well.

The intimate knowledge of materials he uses is of central importance. During his career he developed an affinity for cedar, gold and boxwood. Like Edenshaw who was known for his sets of tools which he had invented specially for his needs, Reid was also "*...ingenious in making or adapting existing tools to his own special purposes...*" (Shadbolt 1986: 92). Fascinated by the implements he and

his ancestors used for making their art, he created their wonderfully carved handles and always kept the blades sharp. He even made up a special bracelet-bender which is still used by the Native artists today.

In connection with the usage of new tools or new materials, Shadbolt (1986) mentions that Edenshaw was often criticised by purist observers for leaving the traditional models and coming up with their innovations. In this respect, Edenshaw made the first step towards the new direction of Haida art, as if waiting for somebody to carry on. Bill Reid accepted this challenge with the advantage of being *“free to make use of his predecessor’s innovations, or to stay close to the older traditional classic style at will.”* (Shadbolt 1986: 119). Throughout his career, Reid experimented not only with materials such as different kinds of wood, bronze, gold, silver, abalone, ivory or copper but he also produced artworks ranging from the tiny pendants or charms to the huge public sculptures which dominate the city of Vancouver today. Reid himself frequently commented on the fact that his ancestors had always welcomed the opportunity to use new equipment or material that came in their way: *“When I work I am trying my best to get inside a traditional artist’s skin, and do what he would have done with the benefit of modern technology.”* (Shadbolt 1986: 99)

3.2.3 The transition to monumental scale

In his early career, Reid specialised in smaller pieces of art. Jewellery making and creating box in gold and silver characterise this period. Reid started to work with silver first, only to choose gold as the principal and almost exclusive material later on. His bracelets, earrings, pendants, brooches and cufflinks were often inlaid with ivory and abalone shells. Holding on to the motifs of Haida mythology, he creates jewellery with Killer Whale, Eagle, Raven or Bear designs. All these objects show the artist’s *“design capability and technical virtuosity.”* (Shadbolt 1986: 124). Although Shadbolt admits these small artworks to have a limited space for content expression, she points out: *“Yet Reid has succeeded in making jewellery a form of*

small sculpture, eminently wearable, exquisitely made, each piece presenting itself effectively as object and, when he wishes, as creature." (ibid. 129)

Around the year 1947, the attitude towards the Indian art heritage started changing. Suddenly it seemed that everybody was absorbed in Northwest coast heritage. The department of Anthropology was founded within the University of British Columbia and an anthropological museum was established. The Provincial Museum in Victoria assembled teams which travelled to the abandoned villages on the Queen Charlotte Islands and were trying to salvage some of the aboriginal totem poles. Bill Reid became a member of such a team and during the 1950s visited the villages of Skedans, Ninstints and Tanu, his grandmother's native settlement. (Shadbolt 1986)

During Reid's two-week vacation from CBC in 1957 he was asked to join an experienced Kwakiutl carver, Mungo Martin, who was at that time working on a pole which today stands on the Canadian-American border at Blaine. After being introduced as a Haida, Martin seemed to have all the important information about his new assistant. Shadbolt quoted Reid in her book when she referred to the fact that the only instruction Reid was given by Martin before his first monumental carving experience was: "*carve there.*" (1986: 30). When Reid was invited to participate in a bigger project a year later, he knew that his announcing years were over. During the following four years, Reid and his colleague Doug Cranmer constructed a part of a Haida village, building two traditional houses and seven poles for the campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC). The site was opened in 1963 and later moved to the grounds of the new Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver.

In his new workshop on Pender Street in Vancouver Bill was not the only craftsman. He was helping young Haida artists who were coming to the city from their villages by providing them with the opportunity to work in his studio. Robert Davidson, the great-grandson of Charles Edenshaw, today a highly respected carver, was

one of them. He told Shadbolt that one always learned in Bill's presence whether the teaching was intentional or not. (1986: 36)

The Arts of the Raven exhibition of 1967 in Vancouver Art Gallery was mounted to celebrate the Canadian Centennial. Its intention was to gather and present the remarkable works of the Northwest Coast. Reid got involved as a consultant and got fully absorbed in the preparations, selection process, even installation. Thanks to the Canada Council senior grant, Reid went to London to improve his goldsmith skills a year later. Far from his Indian inspiration, he produced works of contemporary design: one of the outstanding pieces was the gold and diamond necklace (see Attachments: picture no. 3). Although it was obvious that his talent was not restricted only to making Indian-art inspired pieces, he did not think he "*would have been happy making pretty baubles for pretty people.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 42)

Reid's personal life did not develop as successfully as his artistic career. His first marriage ended in divorce in 1959. Then a short marriage with a social worker Ella Gunn followed but the couple split soon. When he returned from England, he actually had no family to go to and wishing for a change, he moved to Montreal where he spent three very productive years. He created the two works of art which later became one of his most popular pieces, though in a larger representation: a small carving *Raven Discovering Mankind in a Clamshell* and a gold box with a three-dimensional killer whale on the lid.

In 1972 he also created one of the most ambitious boxes he has ever made: the bear gold dish with a cover. The handle of the lid was cast in the form of a woman breast-feeding her two children, the bear cubs. This old myth tells about of a Haida girl who married a bear and gave birth to two children who looked like perfect bear cubs. When she met her human brothers once again, her husband agreed to be killed in a ritual sacrifice in order to establish the Bear clan among the humans. When the Bear Mother joined her human relatives again, she remarried a Haida with whom she had human children and her

offspring had inherited the Bear crest of their mother. (Reid, Bringhurst 1996). This motif from *The Bear Mother and Her Husband* story was used many times by Reid, but never was the woman depicted so naturally. In contrast to the traditional conception of the bear dish, the only feature which points to the woman's connection with Haida society is the labret in her mouth (see Attachments: picture no. 26). This difference "...works positively, serving to connect in our imagination a past which is known only at second hand and a possible living reality – the past, that is, given a present dimension." (Shadbolt 1986: 135)

After moving to Vancouver again, Bill's Parkinson's disease was discovered. Such a diagnosis would seem fatal for an artist who makes a living working with his hands. However, Reid's profession turned out to be his remedy for "*the shaking of hands and arms characteristic of Parkinson's can be controlled temporarily by exerting the muscles involved...*" (Shadbolt 1986: 49)

3.2.4 Pole for Skidegate

In the mid 1970s, Reid decided to carve a totem pole for his mother's village of Skidegate. Reid made a provisory working shed close to Skidegate and spent nine months in carving. Living in a trailer on Haida Gwaii, Reid was experiencing the most pleasant and idyllic times, even in his personal life. After two unsuccessful marriages he met Martine de Widerspoch-Thor, a French student of Northwest Coast anthropology who came to Vancouver from Paris. When introduced to Reid, she joined him for the summer on Haida Gwaii at the time when he started with the works. Carving together with Gary Edenshaw, he also invited several assistants including Robert Davidson. Choosing the subjects, he held to the representatives of the tree cosmic layers: the Raven, the Bear and the Killer Whale accompanied by the Dogfish. Other creatures were depicted springing out of the mouths and ears. On the top of the 17,4-metre tall pole three watchmen were seated, each looking in a different direction. The new

Skidegate pole combined the basic principles of Haida art with the features of more recent times as it did not carry any family crest.

Although local residents did not really show any interest during the process of the pole carving, they prepared a large celebration for the day of raising. In June 1978 the pole was raised in front of the new Band Council Administration building which was built in Haida traditional style. Shadbolt knew Reid was aware of the bitter irony that *“the old ranking customs and modes of thought have retreated so far into the past that probably few if any villagers recognize the animals in his pole, or wonder what their meaning might be.”* (Shadbolt 1986: 133)

3.3 Bill Reid’s masterpieces

In contrast to the amount of works Bill Reid produced during his lifetime, there are few for which he is most well-known: his public sculptures. The similar characteristics they carry seems obvious: they were all created large-scale and required a number of assistants to help with the making; all belong to Reid’s later career which was, more or less, influenced by his serious illness; they draw on Haida traditional art and myths, but interpreted in a new, extraordinary way which brings them closer to the contemporary viewer; and last but not least, they have become an inseparable part of the city of Vancouver.

3.3.1 The Raven and the First Men

Before the famous work of art was carved, Reid created a small boxwood carving called *Raven Discovering Mankind in a Clamshell* in 1970. Tippett affirms that Reid did not carve it *“with a larger work in mind, though it is now incorrectly referred to as a maquette.”* (2004: 188). The seven centimetres high carving became the milestone in Reid’s artistic career. For the first time he produced a piece of a fundamental innovative nature. The carving portrayed the Raven in the action of watching the humans entering his world. Such a picture was not a common one as creatures and animals depicted on Haida totem poles, storage boxes or objects of everyday usage were always

motionless. The actions, the adventures they have been through were carefully stored in Haida myths but not transferred into their art. Reid came with a change “*off the icon into the theatre*” (Shadbolt 1986: 143) and put his creatures back to life. Thanks to this new attribute, Reid shifted the ancient motifs further towards the present apprehension: “*The work is not dependent on the viewer’s prior knowledge to grasp what it is about – it tells its own story.*” (ibid. 141, 143). The connection between the past and present he has achieved is summarised by Shadbolt: “*He had moved out of the past without losing his connection with it, ..., freeing the creatures, who continue to be the centre of his work, to find new connections in a modern world.*” (ibid. 143)

When Reid moved back to Vancouver in 1973, after his stay in Montreal, a new project was awaiting him. Walter Koerner, the patron of the Museum of Anthropology and an enthusiastic collector of Bill’s gold pieces, commissioned him to make a wood carving for the museum’s new building. Reid remembered his little boxwood raven and decided to produce a monumental carving based on the same motif. The proposed size of the carving made the search for the suitable material lengthy and quite difficult: a cedar cube higher than three metres was not easy to obtain. Finally a series of yellow cedar planks were laminated together to form the intended block. In the meantime, Reid began to carve his Skidegate pole, so when the material was ready, he was busy with another commission. On that account he asked a Vancouver sculptor, George Norris, to start with the preliminary works. Norris had worked for two years, making the clay model, then cast it in plaster, later starting the rough woodwork using a power saw. He had left the project in the autumn of 1978 after Reid and Gary Edenshaw finished their totem pole and were ready to start the fine carvings of the “*Raven.*” Guujaaw, the Haida carver and environmentalist, was not the only assistant to participate. Reid hired a non-Native but extremely talented sculptor George Rammel to help with the making, as well as two Haida assistants Reggie Davidson and Jim Hart. The collaboration of Native and non-Native carvers brought

much nuisance. Tippett (2004) talks about Guujaaw not approving of the fact that a non-Haida artist was invited to take part in such a project. Despite the difficulties and disputes among the co-workers, the large carving of the *Raven and the First Men* was unveiled by his Royal Highness, Prince Charles, in April 1980.

Reid did not produce just another piece of public Native art, which was until then represented mostly by a totem pole, but invented a special fusion “*that was both modern and indigenous.*” “*With the possible exception of **The Spirit of Haida Gwaii**, none of Reid’s future projects would be as beloved by the people of Vancouver as **Raven**,*” said Tippett (2004: 231) and she was right. “*What other sculpture in the history of public art in Vancouver has so excited schoolchildren that they shout, as they enter the Museum of Anthropology: ‘Where’s Bill Reid’s raven?’*” (ibid. 2)

3.3.2 The Killer Whale and the Mythic Messengers

The first bronze outdoor work, the Killer Whale sculpture, was completed in 1984. Inspired by his earlier piece, a small gold box of beaver and human designs with a cast killer whale as the cover handle made during his Montreal stay, Reid created a 5.5-metre high whale which is about to jump into her own round, glassy, mirror-like pool. A miniature boxwood sculpture which also pre-dated the large version differs in the image of the sea. Its base was depicted more naturally: wild and heavy. On the other hand, all predecessors of the bronze piece share the same image of the blowhole, designed as the moon’s face. *Chief of the Undersea World*, as it was also called, was placed outside the entrance of the Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park in 1985.

Reid’s second large work in bronze were the *Mythic Messengers*, placed at Teleglobe Canada building in Burnaby in 1984-85. As a motif for this mural relief he chose his favourite characters from various Haida myths: the Bear Mother and her cubs, Nanasimget and his wife who was kidnapped by the Killer Whale, the Dogfish Woman and the Sea Wolf with his everyday ration of three whales. The hero of

the Eagle Prince legend was also included. The relief was inspired by the 19th century argillite pipes. They usually portray a number of figures interlocked together in one crowded rectangular-shaped space. In this piece, the creatures are given much more space and therefore freedom. Not only do the *Mythic Messengers* resemble the slate pipe Reid made himself in 1969, but they also bring back his beloved mythical characters he used for the cedar screen in 1968. This screen, however, broke the traditional model: instead of placing the creatures in a straight line, Reid used a square field which was filled in with the mythical creatures, all intertwined with one another. This highly complicated composition emphasised the favourite ambiguity of Indian art: “*the holding container and its seething contents.*” (Shadbolt 1986: 133)

3.3.3 The Spirit of Haida Gwaii

Bill Reid’s largest commission is known by various names: *The Spirit Canoe*, *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, or *The Black Canoe*. Cast in bronze, it weighs over six tons and is almost four metres high and six metres long. Commissioned by the Canadian Embassy in Washington D.C., USA, Reid started working on the clay sketches in 1986, continuing for the next six years till 1991, when the sculpture was delivered to the United States’ capital. The first impulse to create Reid’s most famous sculpture came on one Sunday afternoon, while he was watching a noisy family on their canoe trip to Lost Lagoon in Vancouver. That explains the working title of the sculpture: “*Sunday Afternoon on Lost Lagoon.*” (Tippett 2004: 249)

The sculpture resembles a huge argillite carving because the surface had been covered with black polish. Altogether, the canoe carries 13 figures which are crammed in the boat, heading for an unknown destination. Tippett wrote about Reid being reluctant to give the canoe its course and paraphrased his explanation that “*although the canoe appeared to be moving, it remained anchored, forever, in the same place.*” (2004: 251). The figures are often intertwined with one another and the crowded boat seems too small for such a crew.

The forepart of the canoe is occupied by the mythical heroes of the Haida story *The Bear Mother and Her Husband*. On the bow of the canoe sits the Grizzly bear, with his back to the course of the boat, facing the other creatures. Opposite of the bear sits his wife, the Bear Mother and their two cubs are portrayed between them. There are three paddlers on the port side: the Bear Mother, the Beaver behind her and the Dogfish Woman at the end. On the starboard side three paddlers are depicted as well: the first one is the Eagle, the Wolf which bites into Eagle's right wing and the 'Ancient Reluctant Conscript' – the second human figure in the boat. The Raven dominates the stern of the canoe, holding the steering oar in his talons. Under the Raven's tail, a small mythical creature is hidden: the Mouse Woman. The figure of an amphibian, the Frog, is placed partly in the canoe, partly out of it, below the Eagle's beak. In the centre of the canoe and all the other creatures stands out the chief, Kilstlaai in Haida. He is holding a staff with a killer whale at the top.

In accordance to Tippet (2004), communication represents the main idea of Reid's sculpture. Reid again placed various creatures to one cramped space: the large three-dimensional piece overflows with figures which do not seem to get along well with one another at all times. Although the Haida Chief seems to be in control of the boat, the Raven is the one who decides which direction they are going. In other words, there is always a power in this world which is stronger than the power of humans.

Four years after finishing *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, another version of this popular work was made for Vancouver International Airport which offered Reid a royalty of \$3 million. This time it was called "*The Jade Canoe*" for its green patina. The pure white plaster which served as a model for the original bronze work has been exhibited in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa since 1996.

3.4 Other artistic projects

While working on his major projects, Reid had always been concerned with other activities. Apart from writing various essays for the museums' exhibitions, he participated in several publications as an illustrator and even an author. I have decided to mention some of them as they show how wide the range of Reid's artistic work was. In the second sub-section, his later canoe venture is described.

3.4.1 An illustrator and a writer

In the middle of the 1960s Bill contributed with a series of drawings to the book of Christie Harris called *Raven's Cry*. The book told a story of Charles Edenshaw's family at the time when its members had to adapt themselves to the new conditions after the arrival of Europeans. The black-and-white illustrations resemble engravings because of the hatching and crosshatching Reid used. In one of the last drawings he created a kind of self-portrait (see Attachments: picture no. 14). Reid depicted himself in the foreground while working on a totem pole. Behind him, the ghosts of his ancestors are gathered, including Charles Edenshaw who is standing in the middle looking over Reid's shoulder. In the background, a row of Haida totem poles is portrayed and at the bottom part, the carving tools are depicted. Reid's illustration reveals his self-image at the time when he was already respected as an artist and dealt with the question of belonging into two separate societies: "*...he has suffered the ambivalence of drawing his real support from one culture, to which he has a legitimate claim, though having been nurtured in another.*" (Shadbolt 1986: 40)

Reid also participated in the publication of Adelaide de Menil's book of photographs. This time he wrote the text which accompanied the pictures of old, downfallen, decaying poles that remained somehow lonely in the places of former north-west coast villages. Before Reid was capable of putting his thoughts on paper to produce the manuscript, an accompanying exhibition of the photographs was already in preparation. "*The situation had apparently reached a point*

of sufficient desperation to release the flow of words.” (Shadbolt 1986: 48). Eventually, Bill wrote the text in approximately two hours and ended up dictating it over the phone. The text was published in the volume *Out of the Silence* in 1971. Bill’s words sound lyrical, underlining the impression of Menil’s pictures which document the slow process of Native cultures’ disappearing.

The idea for the book *The Ravel Steals the Light* came from a set of drawings Reid had made as chapter headings for George MacDonald’s book *Haida Monumental Art* in the 1980s. Bill had been engaged in Haida myths and their heroes for quite a long time and the right time came to make a publication of these stories. He chose his most favourite characters and, together with Robert Bringhurst, started re-telling some of the myths he knew well. Shadbolt (1986) adds that the Haida would have memorised the stories word by word in order to preserve the content and tenor of the myths. Reid and Bringhurst interpreted the stories in their own simple but witty way, making something up when necessary and using their imagination. Therefore the myths can not be considered as the original and correct versions. The book comprises of ten stories accompanied with Reid’s ten pencil drawings which illustrate the plot of each myth. The last story of the Dogfish Woman is actually missing because at the time of publishing Reid was pre-occupied with his other projects. As a matter of fact, Bringhurst had to write three of the stories on his own.

3.4.2 The Loo Taas

One of the projects which really brought Reid a feeling of satisfaction and joy was the making of the Loo Taas, or the wave-eater, a typical one-log red cedar canoe. In his sarcastic words, he was tired of “*seeing oversized banana skins on the beach.*” (Shadbolt 1986: 112). He previously made a smaller 5,5-metre boat but decided to create much bigger vessel this time. The slow and complicated process of shaping, scraping and hollowing the cedar log into an elegant boat was time-consuming and difficult. Nevertheless, Reid was willing to sacrifice his time, money and energy for this challenging undertaking

because it brought him close to his Native inspiration as well as to the basic principles of craftsmanship itself. Shadbolt quoted Reid's opinion that

the dialogue between the material and the maker has never been closer than in the making of a canoe because the canoe retains its own independence, a control of its own shape, and there is a need to predict what will happen... (1986: 112)

The 15,2-metre Loo Taas was successfully launched at the opening of Expo 1986 in the waters of False Creek, Vancouver.

3.5 The circle is closing

After almost thirty years of suffering from the Parkinson's disease, Bill Reid died on the 13th March 1998 at the age of seventy-eight. His wife Martine who had been supporting her husband greatly during the last difficult years, organised a tribute which took place at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver. More than a thousand people came to pay the artist their last respects. His friends, family members, artists, government officials, admirers, assistants, caregivers and simply everybody who had ever had something to do with the charismatic man. Representatives of both Native and non-Native communities were present. According to Tippet (2004) who attended the celebration herself, even some of the white Canadians were dressed in traditional blankets with Native designs and the two distinct nations suddenly seemed to have much in common. When Reid's ashes were carried to the Museum's Great Hall, the Natives began singing their mourning songs, dancing and saying prayers. As Tippet described, "*it was the First Nations people, ..., who dominated the occasion.*" (2004: 273). The celebration continued with the guests' speeches who recalled their memories of Bill Reid and among other things, talked about his influence on Northwest Coast art perception. The grand remembrance continued for six and a half hours: "*No figure in the history of Canadian art had been given such a send-off,*" said Tippet. (2004: 272)

She also explained that Bill was not a religious person, therefore he did not ask for a funeral which would hold to Native or non-Native character. His wish to “*haul his body onto a boat, weight it down with a heavy chain and drop it to a sandy West Coast ocean bottom, where it would become food for the crabs*” (ibid. 6, 7) which he shared with Guujaaw was not fulfilled. This strange idea, completed with the vision of Reid’s friends who would later feast on the crabs, sounds bizarre and quite morbid. But the fact is that it corresponds with the life of a person who had always balanced between two different worlds to find his home in the end. After a farewell ceremony in Skidegate which began on July 3rd, Reid’s ashes were taken aboard of the *Loo Taas*. Accompanied by the second vessel *Loo Plex*, the paddlers left for the long journey to the island of Tanu. After two days, the boats reached their destination: Bill Reid’s *Loo Taas* carried him to the place where his Haida grandmother had been born. When the paddlers and a few guests gathered around the grave pit on a small promontory jutting out to sea, a few ashes were scattered around the grave and in the nearby forest, the rest buried into the soft earth. Bill Reid rests on his beloved ‘Charlottes’, somewhere between the forests, seas and sky.

4 Bill Reid’s impact

Reid, with no doubt, became one of the most influential Canadian artists of the 20th century. However, the question of his contribution in rescuing Haida heritage proved difficult to answer as many people tend to exaggerate his role in the Northwest Coast art revival. Tippet commented on many reporters’ headlines and opinions which were released soon after Reid’s death. They were all celebrating and highlighting Reid as the one and only saviour of “*an artistic tradition that was in danger of being lost*” (2004: 3), ignoring the endeavour and importance of other artists and activists. This chapter gives further information on Reid, this time viewed not only as an artist but a public persona as well.

4.1 A person of great influence

Reid's attitude and relationship towards the contemporary Natives and their politics was always reluctant. He identified himself more with the Haida who have left "*a strange and obsessive and very great art form and died unnoticed.*"⁵ However, he joined the battle against logging of Lyell Island on South Moresby Island in 1980 when he travelled to Haida Gwaii and saw the damage done by logging himself. Tippett quotes Reid's response to the situation:

I'm not opposed to logging, loggers, or the lumber industry, but for heaven's sake, can't we, while we still have a little bit of a last chance, institute true multi-use of the forest, with due regard for its own regeneration, the wildlife it nurtures, and most important and most neglected, its esthetic values? (Tippett 2004: 263)

Although he wrote an essay for publication of the Island Protection Society called *Islands at the Edge: Preserving the Queen Charlotte Islands* in 1984, and together with the environmentalist David Suzuki officially supported the efforts to save the Islands' forests, he did not join the Haida roadblocks a year later, giving a simple explanation: "*I'll go when I'm recruited.*" (Tippett 2004: 264). When the logging continued, the Haida spokesman urged Reid to make a stand against the Lyell Island logging in October 1986. Reid flew to Haida Gwaii and joined the Haida who were resolved to enforce their preservation ideas as well as their land claims. This particular event brought Reid to the centre of Native politics. When the later talks between the Haida and the government failed to bring any change, it caused Reid to make an uneasy, though necessary decision: he stopped working on the plaster model for *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, claiming that "*he was not comfortable selling symbols of the Haida people to a Government that refuses to deal with Haida land claims and act to prevent logging on Lyell Island.*" (Tippett 2004: 265). This courageous protest of a well-known artist together with the huge publicity the Lyell Island issue got at that time, forced the

⁵ http://archives.cbc.ca/arts_entertainment/sculpture/topics/1273/

Government to start negotiations which, in the end, led to the establishment of Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve. Although the question of land claims was not settled, the collective efforts united the Haida and non-Haida participants whose voices were finally heard.

The fact that Reid did not refuse to take part in the Haida fight for their land says much about his relationship towards Haida Gwaii. According to Tippet (2004), Reid was aware of the fact that the songs, dances and most of the old Haida myths were lost beyond recovery. Therefore he wished to save the land which gave birth to the artistic tradition he loved and admired. We can find a direct reference to this in the book *The Raven Steals the Light*. At the end of *The Raven and the First Men* story, Reid and Bringhurst describe the old times being over and the fact that the Haida have to start over from the beginning:

It's nearly over now. Most of the villages are abandoned, and those which have not entirely vanished lie in ruins. The people who remain are changed. The sea has lost much of its richness, and great areas of the land itself lie in waste. Perhaps it's time the Raven started looking for another clamshell. (1996: 37)

4.2 Not the only one

Although Bill Reid became the number one figure which is always associated with the so-called “Northwest Coast Renaissance”, other people have contributed to the recognition of the Native peoples as well. Emily Carr and Grey Owl among others, belong to the group of white Canadians who had been concerned about the future of Native cultures and their original environment.

4.2.1 Emily Carr

Emily Carr, the icon of Canadian painting, got interested in the Indian heritage in her early life. Born in 1871 in Victoria, the villages of the Northwest Coast which she later started painting were already being abandoned at that time. At the age of 18 she went to San Francisco to study at the California School of Design, where she learned the basics of the craft but it was during her stays in England

(1899-1904) and especially Paris (1910-11) that she developed her unique, colourful, post-impressionist style for which she became famous. When she came back to British Columbia, she devoted herself to her interest in the Native cultures. She travelled through the central and coastal parts of the province to visit the Native settlements where she found her inspiration. Determined to record the vanishing cultures, Indian masks, houses or totem poles were often the subjects depicted in her watercolours and drawings. Around 1913, her difficult financial situation made her reduce her artistic work for she was not able to make her living with art. Painting rarely during this period, the landscape around Victoria usually drew her artistic attention. After many years, a lucky coincidence started off her successful career. When a student of ethnology in BC discovered her early paintings with Native art motifs, she was invited to participate in the *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art Native and Modern* which was being prepared by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa for November 1927. There she got the necessary encouragement which made her start painting again. With new energy, she began working on her landscapes of forests and broad skies and returned to her Native art subjects, defining the two major themes of her lifetime work.

After suffering a heart attack in 1937, her health was declining and she concentrated more on writing. Most of her works were based on her previous experiences and were more or less autobiographical. Her first book *Klee Wyck*, a collection of short stories that told about her visits to the Native villages, won the Governor General's Award for non-fiction in 1941. Followed by the publication of another six pieces, her books "*quickly won her the popular audience that her more difficult paintings never really brought her, though it is primarily as a painter that she has won critical acclaim.*"⁶

Emily Carr represents an outstanding person who appeared on the much isolated coast of British Columbia, at the place and time which

did not favour artists, especially women. Through her works, we can not only see but feel the magic of the moment spent in nature or at the sites of the Native inhabitants whose deep relationship to their surroundings is hidden in Emily's paintings. Her richly imaginative art became an essential component in the "*rising tide of awareness and confident self-identification on the part of native people who had for some time been considered part of a moribund culture.*" (ibid.)

4.2.2 Grey Owl

One of the most famous conservationists of 20th-century Canada was involved in a great controversy. Although born and raised in Hastings, England, he became renowned as Grey Owl, a son of a Scot and Apache woman, a new identity he made up for himself. His real name was Archibald Belaney (1888-1938) and he emigrated to Canada in 1906 where he worked as a trapper in Northern Ontario for some time. Later he joined the Ojibwa group of Natives who taught him their language, lore and habits. It was somewhere at this point when he started introducing himself to others as a half-Apache who had emigrated from the US. After two years in service during the First World War, he continued with learning the aboriginal ways of life. His Iroquois wife whom he gave the name Anahareo persuaded him to concentrate on his knowledge of wilderness and to start writing and publishing his works. On the basis of his writings, Grey Owl was hired by the National Parks service as a naturalist and a "*beaver conservation officer.*" (Smith D.B., edited by Hallowell 2004: 271) In his books, articles and even films, he promoted the idea of nature conservation and wildlife protection. With his numerous lectures on environmental awareness, he toured North America and even Britain. The Canada's most famous 'Indian' in the mid 1930s became the symbol of conservationists' fights. His true identity was revealed right after his death and caused a public outcry: at the first moment, Grey Owl was denounced for fooling everybody with his fake Native origins but later his merit had to be acknowledged.

4.3 Reid under criticism

Reid's publicity and success brought along a lot of negative criticism as well. Especially during his later career when he was working on the large projects, he was sometimes attacked for not giving his assistants enough recognition of their work. Tippett confirms that even the workers themselves "*sometimes felt that they did not always get the credit they deserved.*" (2004: 225). For instance, when *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* was unveiled in Washington D.C., Reid's assistant George Rammell was not invited to the event, although he did most of the work. "*It was the great artists of the Haida past who always got the lion's share of Reid's praise,*" explained Tippett (ibid. 255). Everybody knew that working with Reid was not easy. His moodiness and frequent states of depression made the co-operation difficult and demanding. On the other hand, Reid's assistants benefited from the projects, gaining valuable experience in making, repairing and handling Native tools, working on large scale commissions and simply by being taught by a real craftsman, however hard the studies might have been. (Tippett 2004)

The question of authenticity was also raised in connection with Reid having helpers with his major projects, sometimes numbering up to nine people. According to George Rammell, the assistants had "*a profound effect on the overall composition of Reid's work.*" (Tippett 2004: 258). Nevertheless, Tippett affirms that Rammell also admitted that each piece of art that left the studio was based on Reid's vision: "*...it was Reid's conception and Reid's idea that shaped every work – be it a piece of jewellery or a totem pole...*" (ibid. 258).

The bitter accusation of not being involved in his projects was also motivated by the fact that Reid became the highest-paid Native artist by the 1990s. His miniature gold replicas of the *Raven and the First Men* were selling for \$125,000 each which was originally the royalty for the full-scale woodcarving. With *The Jade Canoe* Reid broke all present records, as the sculpture was purchased for \$3 million and became the biggest Native-art commission ever. Tippett talks about Reid being often shocked how much money were people

willing to pay for his work. The “*Reid-o-mania*” (Tippett 2004: 254) which began in the 1980s resulted also from the improving relationships between the white and Native communities. The First Nations’ people were going through the restoration of their art and culture and Reid’s art which bridged the Native and western traditions appealed to both sides. Similarly, an artist who knew people in both “camps” and was himself of both Native and white parentage enjoyed an exceptional position on the artistic scene of that period.

However, all the people who bought the little replicas of the Raven or commissioned Reid with bigger ventures believed that the artist was involved in the making. Tippett mentioned an incident in which a patron who had commissioned the carving of a totem pole arrived unexpectedly to the Skidegate work-shed, expecting to find Reid there and not his six assistants. One of them later pointed out that the patron was very upset for “*he was paying Bill Reid prices for something Bill hadn’t touched.*” (2004: 258)

Few months after Reid’s death an article written by Jane O’Hara was published by Maclean’s magazine. The reporter accused Reid of “*not doing his own work and of failing to give his assistants adequate recognition...*” (Tippett 2004: 276). This brought many reactions of disapproval which admitted that Reid was heavily dependent on his helpers but the concept of the work was always his.

4.4 Haida Nation today

The Haida have been under the threat of extinction for many times during their history. Their population was devastated after the arrival of European traders and settlers by the diseases they unwittingly transmitted on the Natives. Their traditional lifestyle changed as the settlers became the dominant community in their own land. Establishing a society of a much different organisation, the values of the Haida were suppressed. The newcomers started to use the natural resources of Haida Gwaii which later developed into brutal destroying of the Islands’ fragile natural balance represented mainly by clear-cut logging. Although they suffered great losses, they have

successfully managed to keep their cultural identity and the awareness of who they are till these days.

According to the Statistics Canada web site, the numbers of First Nations' people in Canada grow in general: in the 1996 census, 139,655 people of Aboriginal identity were registered in British Columbia⁷, whereas five years later the number rose up to 170,025 Aboriginal citizens⁸.

The Queen Charlotte Islands are inhabited today by approximately 5,000 people of which one half is made up by the Haida. They are mostly concentrated to two centres: Old Massett and Skidegate. Another two thousand Haidas are scattered around the world with the largest populations in Vancouver and Prince Rupert on the mainland. According to unofficial sources, there are only around 100 Haida who speak their aboriginal language. This language isolate is thus threatened with extinction.

The Haida are involved in the co-management of the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site. The so-called Watchmen Program posts Haida watchmen on the most frequently visited sites on Haida Gwaii from May to September. Their task is to safeguard the sites as well as inform the visitors about the cultural significance of these places and the Haida history and traditions. The program which today offers seasonal employment for some of the Haida started before the designation of the National Park. Volunteers would use their own boats to access the remote sites and usually camp for the whole summer. Nowadays, the program is funded from several sources, e.g. the fees visitors pay when entering Haida Gwaii.⁹

⁷ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/c1996-r1996/jan13-13jan/bc-cb-eng.htm>

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<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/AP01/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=5947&Geo2=PR&Code2=59&Data=Count&SearchText=Skeena-Queen%20Charlotte%20Regional%20District&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=&GeoCode=5947>

⁹ http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/gwaiihaanas/edu/index_E.asp

4.5 Thoughts and reflections

One of the reasons for choosing this story as a topic of my thesis was the fact that in the Czech Republic, Bill Reid is not a well-known figure. Nevertheless his great importance and considerable fame in Canada is undisputed. I was first introduced to his story some years ago when searching information about the Queen Charlotte Islands for the seminar on Canadian history. The Haida and their relationship with their land were at the centre of my attention at that time as well as the fact that the people managed to survive and maintain their culture in spite of the constant pressures from the outside world. When I discovered that Bill Reid and his art played a significant role in promoting the culture and thereby contributing to the revival of the Nation's identity and pride, my research concentrated on Reid's story. I have decided to include a section based on the reflections the topic of my thesis brought me.

4.5.1 From repression to pride

The relationship between the First Nations' people and Canadians has undergone a great transformation during the last few decades. The former attitude towards the Native population was represented by contempt, lack of interest and repression of the Natives' cultural values. I was surprised to learn that boarding schools were used as a part of the government policies to assimilate the Native peoples of Canada so they would fit within the framework of the European society's rules and values. Children were often sent far from their homes, taught and forced to use English as the only language and to adopt the religion and lifestyle of the dominant society. Deprived of their cultural, social and emotional bonds, some of the children never returned back home. Many of them even experienced violence and sexual abuse during their school years. This considerable damage done to the First Nations in the past was quite recently acknowledged by the Canadian government which officially apologised for the harms done to the children at the residential schools.

Only in the course of the last three or four decades did the opinion about the Native peoples change, and Canadians acknowledged the rights and status of the people. Fascinated by their cultural heritage, Canadians started to regard the Natives as a part of their history. Today, Canadians are proud to present and appropriate the symbols of the once suppressed Nations as their own. The Inukshuk, originally a man-made stone landmark which had been used to guide the Inuit and other peoples of the Arctic region through areas with few prominent orientation points, has become the symbol of the upcoming Winter Olympic Games 2010 in Vancouver. With no apparent relation to British Columbia or the Olympics, it is understood as the symbol of friendship and co-operation.

Each country has its minorities and each treats them in a different way. One can wonder whether, in the future, we will also identify ourselves with some the minority cultures of our country which we today consider as unimportant and inferior to the major society.

4.5.2 Between past and present

Although Reid was largely inspired by Haida art, one can sometimes question whether he really cared for the content of his pieces. In one of the CBC television programs, while unveiling his Cedar Screen somewhere in the ancient woods of Haida Gwaii, he did not hesitate to admit that he indeed portrayed the Eagle and the Frog but actually did not know any myth referring to those creatures. To give another example, a human of female sex emerging from the shell was depicted in the miniature boxwood carving *Raven Discovering Mankind in a Clamshell* when Reid produced it during his stay in Montreal. This mistake was corrected on the large carving as the legend says that the first human creatures were all men. This shows that what drew his attention most was the form of the art, not the meanings the creatures originally represented to the Haida. Although he had learned some of the stories through the years, he used the motifs for the sake of artistic expression and tried to find their new meaning for present-day viewers.

During their history, the Haida had developed a great variety of art. They had special ceremonial and ritual objects like masks and totem poles, objects for practical usage as fishing and hunting gear, kitchen utensils, blankets or storage boxes. Their objects ranged from the large houses and one-log canoes to the tiny pendants and charms. These objects became the “canvas” of the Haida. What joined them all together was the fact that each one of them had its exact purpose. When the European explorers appeared on the scene, the Haida began to produce objects for collectors and traders which did not carry the original religious meanings anymore and later Reid continued in this tradition. He had always believed that the works of his had their place in museums and art galleries and should be treated as art, not traditional Native artefacts. This sometimes caused a lot of discussion and disagreement among the Natives for they have thought about the objects in the context of their culture which emphasised the function of Native art.

Reid’s mixed heritage seemed to cause him much trouble during his life. Especially in the early years of his artistic career, he never seemed too sure whether he belonged to the Haida or among the white Canadians. His interest in the culture grew when working for the CBC and he often promoted Haida art and the value of its preservation. When he started off his artistic career, his cross-cultural upbringing placed him in the middle of two groups of people: Native and non-Native. He was brought up and educated as a white Canadian but chose to take up where his Haida ancestors had left off. The two different parts within him seemed to cope with the trouble through his art. Creating works which drew from the ancient arts of the First Nations, he modified and interpreted it in a new way which spoke to the dominant society as well.

Reid is often described as a person who was in constant search for himself. Nevertheless, towards the end of his life he began to understand and accept the Native within himself. When he told the tale behind his sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* with his rumbling

voice, claiming that we are all in the same boat, one felt that he was not just promoting his new work but meant what he was saying.

5 Conclusion

There are certainly no doubts that in the so-called “Northwest Coast Renaissance”, Bill Reid is one of the key people who played an indispensable role. By ancestry he was partly Haida and partly Canadian. Such a combination proved to be advantageous and disadvantageous at the same time. He belonged to the dominant society which was well-disposed towards his art and recognised him as a masterful craftsman. Through this close relationship between Reid and the white community, the Native art finally got a chance to reach the Canadian public. Reid combined the ancient features and motifs of Haida art and interpreted them in a way which appealed to the majority of people. His timing was also fortunate for he started producing his art at the time when Canadians began reassessing their attitude towards the First Nations and the Natives were undergoing a great regeneration of their cultures. At the same time, Reid was suffering from the ambivalence of his origins, because he was never fully accepted by any of the two worlds. On the other hand, both the Natives and Canadians present Reid as their own today. So it was not only the Haida who had to search for their identity. Reid had to do it himself and it seems that it was worth trying.

It is essential to mention that Reid did not (and could not) achieve such goals by himself. There were many other artists, environmentalists and activists who contributed with their skills, influence and energy to help this issue. I have mentioned the painter Emily Carr or the conservationist David Suzuki whose work is largely valued and respected, but also many Native artists took part. Some of them adopted the example of Reid, were motivated by his success and they continued in the efforts to find new dimensions for Haida art. Robert Davidson, Jim Hart or Guujaaw (Gary Edenshaw) represent some of the contemporary artists who became successful artists and experienced craftsmen.

Reid was a transformer. As the Raven from the Haida legends, he could be compared to the cunning trickster who changed the things

around him for his own pleasure, Reid changed wood, metals or abalone into pieces of art. Through his grandfather he discovered the fascinating legacy his ancestors had left behind and devoted his life to transforming it into the works of outstanding merit. Through his art, he brought the Haida and the peoples of the Northwest Canadian Coast to the wide public consciousness and that is something for which he will be always held in high esteem by both Canadians and the Natives. Symbolically perhaps, his monumental sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* is on display in the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., at the Vancouver International Airport, as well as in the Central Hall of the Museum of Civilisation in Gatineau, Quebec, right opposite the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa.

6 Resumé

Není pochyb o tom, že Bill Reid patří ke klíčovým postavám tzv. „Northwest Coast Renaissance“, ve které sehrál nepostradatelnou roli. Jeho částečný indiánský původ ho řadil jak mezi skupinu prapůvodních obyvatel Kanady, tak i mezi většinou společností bílých Kanadčanů. Jeho postavení mezi těmito dvěma rozdílnými světy se postupem času ukázalo zároveň výhodné i nevýhodné. Reid byl vychován v duchu nové kanadské společnosti, která byla nakloněná jeho umělecké tvorbě a dokázala ji náležitě ocenit. Díky tomu se umění původních indiánských kmenů dostalo do povědomí široké veřejnosti. Reid ve svých dílech vycházel ze znaků a motivů prastarého umění kmene Haida, které přetvářel a dále modifikoval tak, aby oslovily i současného diváka. Nespornou výhodou pro Reida byl fakt, že se jeho díla, inspirovaná indiánským uměním, objevila v době, kdy kanadská veřejnost přehodnocovala svůj vztah k původním obyvatelům kontinentu, jejichž kultury právě zažívaly jakési obrození. Reidův původ mu nicméně přinášel i značné komplikace, zejména v otázce vlastní identity. V průběhu svého života se snažil zjistit, kde je jeho pravé místo ve společnosti a ujasnit si, kam skutečně patří. Stejně jako příslušníci kmene Haida, i Reid musel najít svou pravou identitu a sám sebe.

Ačkoli bývá Reid často mylně vyzdvihován jako hlavní a jediná osobnost, která se zasloužila o obrození indiánských kultur západního pobřeží Kanady, mnoho dalších umělců přispělo do tohoto boje svým uměním, vlivem a energií. Již zmíněná kanadská malířka Emily Carr nebo spisovatel a ochránce životního prostředí David Suzuki se oba svým způsobem podíleli na propagaci a ochraně indiánských kultur. Svým dílem jistě přispěli a stále přispívají i vynikající domorodí umělci jako Robert Davidson, Jim Hart nebo Guujaaw (Gary Edenshaw).

Stejně jako Havran, hrdina nesčetných mýtů a legend, který přetvářel a přeměňoval svět kolem sebe pro vlastní potěšení, tak i Bill Reid přetvářel dřevo, kov nebo perleť ve významná umělecká díla.

Zasvětil svůj život uměleckému odkazu, který zde zanechali jeho předkové a zpřístupnil jej moderní společnosti. To je přínos, kterého si budou nadále vážit jak Kanadané, tak i příslušníci původního obyvatelstva Severní Ameriky.

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8 Attachments

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Picture No. 1



Map of Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands)

Picture No. 2



Bill Reid (on the right) and nearly finished canoe in the background (1986)

Picture No. 3



Gold and Diamond Necklace

Picture No. 4



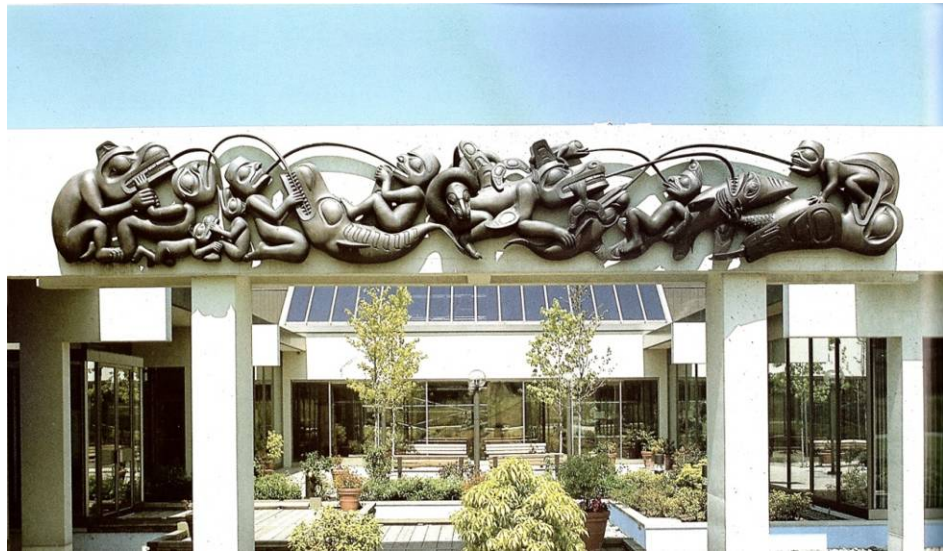
Laminated Cedar Screen

Picture No. 5



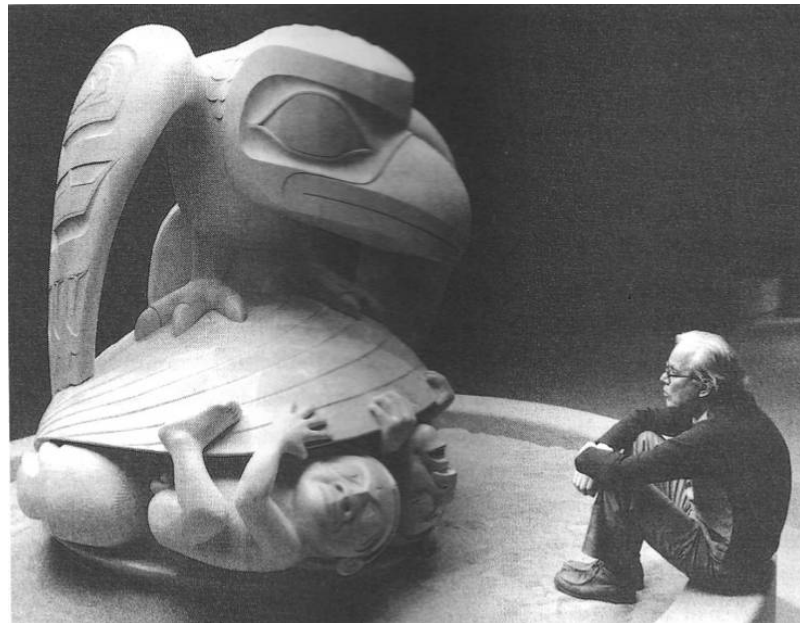
Killer Whale

Picture No. 6



Mythic Messengers

Picture No. 7



Reid and his monumental carving: Raven and the First Men

Picture No. 8



The Spirit of Haida Gwaii (the Black Canoe)

Picture No. 9



Reid' Pole in front of the Band Council building at Skidegate

Picture No. 10



Gold Bracelet with Fossil Ivory inlay

Picture No. 11



Gold Brooch with Abalone inlay

Picture No. 12



Gold Earrings with Abalone inlay (Killer Whale design)

Picture No. 13



Gold Brooch with Abalone inlay (Eagle design)

Picture No. 14



Black-and-white drawing (self-portrait)

Picture No. 15



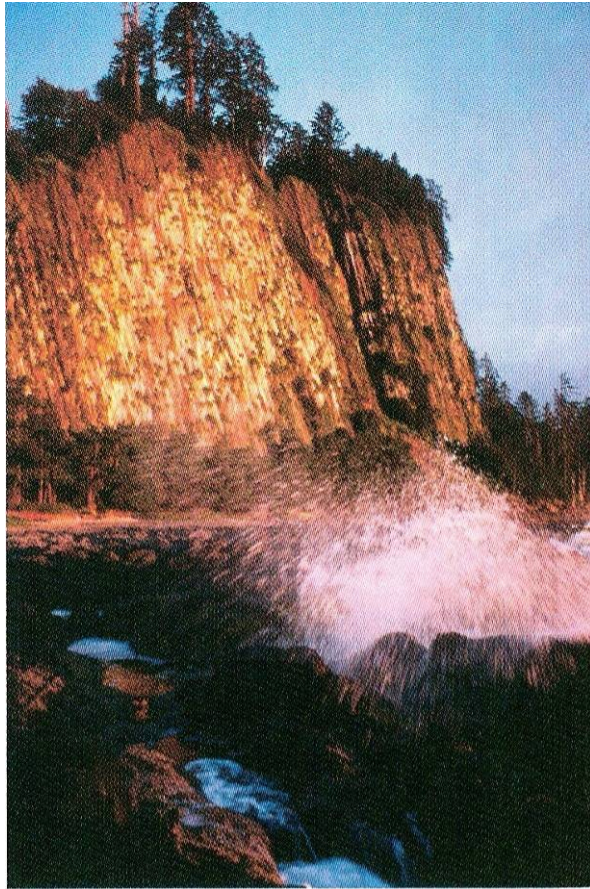
**Reid working on a miniature ivory totem pole
in his Vancouver workshop**

Picture No. 16



**Haida chiefs wear their impressive ceremonial
attire to celebrate a potlatch**

Picture No. 17



Tow Hill (Naikoon Provincial Park)

Picture No. 18



Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve landscape

Picture No. 19



Loo Taas (the Wave Eater)

Picture No. 20



Reid in the work shed at Skidegate

Picture No. 21



Bill and Martine in 1978 in Skidegate

at the time of the pole-raising

Picture No. 22



“Totem park”

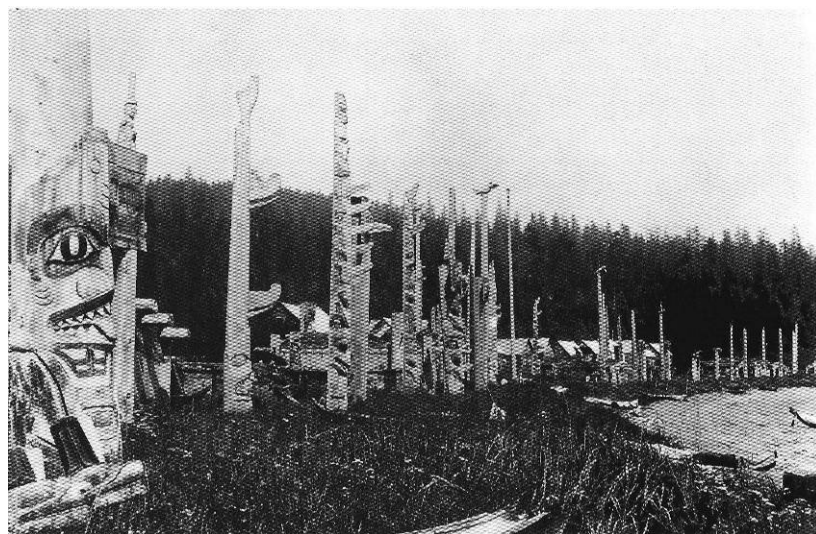
Poles and House carved by Reid and Cranmer between 1958 and 1962

Picture No. 23



Drawing for the book of Haida myths: The Raven Steals the Light

Picture No. 24



Skidegate village (1878)

Picture No. 25



Agate Beach (Naikoon Provincial Park)

Picture No. 26



Bear Mother Gold Dish

Picture No. 27



Totem poles, painted by Emily Carr, Kitseukla, 1912