

seven to ten-year-olds, honest and wholly without pretense, and probably best enjoyed by children if read to them by a person of sensitivity. It is well illustrated in pencil sketches by Robin Jacques.

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Walker's Bridgework

ELIZABETH WATERSTON

Pirate Rock, David Walker. Scholastic-Tab, 1975. 227 pp. \$1.00 paper.

David Walker's *Pirate Rock* is about two boys and their adventures in a marvellous high-powered boat in the waters around St. Andrews, New Brunswick. Reading it, after a long trek through rather dull books for boys, I feel that I, too, am moving with something high-powered, something beautifully engineered. This is the effect of David Walker's narrative style.

David Walker is the author of *Geordie*, on which that funniest of Scottish films, *Wee Geordie*, was based. He also wrote *Harry Black*, a best seller of the 1950's, a powerful novel in which memories of escapes from a German prison camp are intertwined with the drama of a tiger hunt in the hill country of modern India. Walker is author also of *Where the High Winds Blow*, another prize-winning novel, vigorously set in the Canadian Arctic and in New Brunswick.

How to classify such a man? Is he a Scottish writer? A Commonwealth writer from India? An Englishman? Librarians have catalogued his work under all these groupings, and then have added a bit of shelf space in the children's book section. As time goes by, David Walker appears more and more as a Canadian writer, and a major Canadian writer at that.

Pirate Rock, published in 1969, but now re-issued in an attractive paperback, shows many of Walker's strengths as a novelist. The plot is tight, convincing in its progress, yet surprising in its dénouement. It is the story of the two Kelly boys, who live year-round on the beautiful rugged shoreline of New Brunswick. They are hired by a summer resident, Mr. Becker, to handle his big powerboat when he takes visitors along the island-and shoal-strewn shoreline. They are hired, also, to act as general helpers on the big Becker estate, and particularly in the enclosure where he has a fine collection of wild animals. Becker's step-daughter, Kim, adds to the boys' growing uneasiness about this job. Her hostility to Becker augments their sense that something strange is going on--something involving the sleek boat, the cave where it is housed, and the hollow, whisper-filled knoll above the cave, grimly patrolled by Becker's strongarm henchman. The three young people

explore and eventually expose Becker's secret. The climax occurs at sea, when the Kelly boys daringly exploit their knowledge of boat engines, of navigation, and of the rocky-islanded coastline.

The characters, the Kelly boys and their Mom and Dad, and their friend, Kim, and her mother and stepfather, all bring in the range of emotions that Walker specializes in: humour, honesty, affection, irritation--the complex of real emotions in a family or a friendship. The setting includes foggy straits, affluent country homes, dirt roads, and a summer cottage town. All are presented deftly to carry young readers to a real Canadian world and then to lift them beyond reality to a realm of adventure.

The Kelly boys and Kim detect a strange conspiracy which eventually involves the RCMP in a wonderful chase by sea. Fantastic as the plot is, it entails some of the real life fantasies of modern science and politics: laser beams, and electronic spying equipment. These are very effectively and unobtrusively explained by the author.

It is significant that when Walker moves from writing books for adults into writing books for children he assumes that he is still in the same universe. Some of the characters in *Pirate Rock*, for instance, are people who have appeared earlier, in the adult best-seller, *Where the High Winds Blow*. Indeed, the hero of that book, "Husky" Skafe, turns up in *Pirate Rock*, in a minor role, as local boy turned millionaire. "Husky" Skafe is everything the foreign millionaire, Mr. Becker, is not.

But in *Pirate Rock* the focus is not on Skafe, who has had his heroic days, but on the young Kelly boys, who are just moving into their own age of heroic adventure. In both books, the adult and the juvenile, David Walker affirms the possibility of heroism. That is significant, too.

All too many authors divide the worlds of childhood and maturity, assigning to one a mood of affirmation, energy, achievement, and to the other a mood of cynicism, denial, deceit, or mere survival. David Walker is of the old, energetic school of Robert Louis Stevenson and John Buchan--and in his books for children and adults alike he sets his face against the modern emphasis on hopelessness and victimization.

Furthermore, in his books for children, David Walker does not abandon his dignity, his honesty, or his intellectual capacity. In *Pirate Rock* there is considerable psychological complexity in the family relations. There is also a rather shamefaced touch of romance--not the sort of sentimentality that embarrasses and amuses young people, but a glancing recognition of the first stages of attraction between fifteen-year-olds: what Evelyn Waugh called "a thin bat's squeak of sexuality". In *Pirate Rock*, too, there is a glimpse of the kind of inexplicable evil that surfaces in adult life. Fred Becker, stout and blackeyed, loving husband, friendly employer, tolerant stepfather, is still ready to kill as the peregrine hawk kills, without remorse or hesitation.

Boys and girls who read *Pirate Rock* are being given a ticket to a world of excitement and action. It is a world that borders on an equally exciting region in adult literature. My best wish for young readers is that they will find in this book a pleasure that will lure them into reading more by David Walker. They will find in *Dragon Hill* another glimpse of the New Brunswick region where Walker lives now. In *Sandy Was a Soldier Boy* they will enjoy another tight, modern adventure again using

very modern facts, this time the presence of an atomic research station in the Highlands of Scotland. Older boys and girls should try a very intriguing new work of science fiction, *The Lord's Pink Ocean*. From these books to *Geordie* and *Digby* is an easy transition, and so over the bridge into the world of adult reading. Building such a bridge for adolescent readers constitutes a great achievement.

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Indian Tales Retold

GILLIAN THOMAS

Coyote the Trickster, Gail Robinson and Douglas Hill. Illust. Graham McCallum. Chatto and Windus, 1975. 124 pp. \$6.65 cloth.

Son of Raven, Son of Deer, George Clutesi. Gray's Publishing Ltd. (Sidney, B. C.), 1967. 126 pp. \$4.75 cloth.

Potlatch, George Clutesi. Gray's Publishing, 1969. 188 pp. cloth.

Tales from the Longhouse, Indian Children of British Columbia. Gray's Publishing, 1973. 112 pp. cloth.

In *The Folktale* Stith Thompson describes the trickster figure which is so common in the lore of North American Indians as appearing in one of three roles, "the beneficent Culture Hero, the clever deceiver or the numbskill", and points out that these three types are often interwoven within the same story. It is this complex character which Gail Robinson and Douglas Hill introduce to young readers in *Coyote the Trickster*. Coyote, like the other animals which appear in North American Indian lore, is very different from the figures representing moral qualities which we know from the European animal fables in the tradition inherited from Aesop. The coyote, like other trickster figures, does not wear a simple moral emblematic mask, but may be a teacher and healer at the same time as a buffoon or a deceiver. This runs against the mainstream of our culture which identifies medicine or teaching with seriousness, sobriety, even pomposity, but never deception and buffoonery. Readers and reviewers of Carlos Castaneda's popular account of his apprenticeship to a Yacqui Indian shaman in *The Teachings of Don Juan* and its sequels were constantly disturbed by the way in which Don Juan tricked Carlos into knowledge and wondered whether the Indian teacher was really "genuine" or "sincere". Such a question makes nonsense to a person who has been brought up in a culture with a strong shamanistic tradition and its accompanying