Haig-Brown's Animal Biographies

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Haig-Brown set the course of his literary career with his first book, *Silver* (1931), the biography of an Atlantic salmon. Like it, all of his other works centre on the natural or rural world and reveal the same concept of writer as teacher. All told, however, only three of his twenty-three books belong to the animal biography genre: *Silver, Panther* (1934, published also as *Ki-Yu* in the same year) and *Return to the River* (1941). Of these he wrote only *Silver* especially for children, though the other two books, he was pleased to note, also found many readers among the young.

Actually the course of Haig-Brown's literary career had been set in England long before *Silver.* He was the son of a field naturalist and angler and, like father like son, also became an ardent angler in the streams of his own county, Sussex, and of Dorset where, as a boy, he came under the tutelage of a sportsman uncle, Decie, and his father's old friend, Major Greenhill, who may well be the model for the Good Fisherman of *Silver.* Moreover, in becoming a "naturalist writer," as he called himself, he was again following in the footsteps of his father, who had pointed the way with two outdoors books, *Sporting Sonnets and Other Verse* (1903) and *My Game-Book* (1913), which he dedicated to his year-old son. Not unexpectedly either, Haig-Brown lists Roberts and Seton among the authors who "instructed and influenced" him in general.[1] Specifically, however, as regards *Silver,* he laments that he was "still too much influenced by writers like Fortescue who wrote *The Story of a Red Deer* and Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* and so on."[2]

Despite this remark, there is no question that Haig-Brown aimed to make his animal biographies "authentic," to use his own term. He wished to be true to the facts and spirit of the natural world and to instill some appreciation of it in his readers. In this aim, his adult and children's books are one. He wanted "all people to see and understand more because there is both pleasure and fulfillment in seeing and understanding lives about them, whether they are the lives of trees and plants, or lives of animals or lives of fish." In such seeing and understanding lay, he believed, "the only hope of preserving the natural world."[3] These aims motivated all Haig-Brown's animal stories, but *Silver* and *Return to the River* much more obviously than *Panther* which works for the cause of conservation, if at all, almost wholly through the vivid presentation of a magnificent beast.

Haig-Brown is more at home in the animal biography than he ever was in the later boys' adventure stories and his fiction. In the first he avoids for the most part the difficulty he always had in creating living human characters. The Good Fisherman in *Silver* is largely peripheral to the story, however important he may be as a sensitive and reflective angler. Both he and the narrator of the story appear again, as it were, in *Return to the River* as

Senator Evans and a biologist, Don Gunner. They enable Haig-Brown to drop the subjective first-person for the more objective (and "scientific") third person point of view and to present much of his natural history as dialogue rather than exposition. Yet they are essentially an animate frame of reference for the full-length biography of a magnificent Oregon salmon, Spring. The cougar hunter Milton in *Panther,* however, called for greater individuation than either Evans or Gunner. Milton shares the story and theme of the book with Ki-yu, representing man in nature's struggle to survive as civilization encroaches on the wilderness. Yet he fills his role simply by being a hunter; his struggle with nature is never psychological, and, as a flat character, he gives his creator much less trouble than the teenagers whom, in his boys' stories, Haig-Brown tries to depict dramatically and dialectically.

In *Silver,* Haig-Brown attempted to achieve three specific goals: to tell an interesting story, to keep to the truth about salmon and to instruct Master Dickie (to whom the narrator tells the story and Haig-Brown dedicates the book) in the ways of true sportsmanship. He adopted a tone and stance he considered suited to a story for a very young child and often tried to involve him by using a cosy "we" as if to ensure the child's identification with *Silver,* a fish lacking somewhat in dramatic appeal. To vitalize the facts of the life cycle of the salmon, he employs a variety of narrative techniques that children like and that range in this story from a short *in media res* opening to a sharp climax and a brief and tranquil denouement, whose sadness reminds one of Seton's "Lobo" and "Redruff." He uses suspense effectively at times withholding or hinting, and at times providing curtain lines or curtain endings for his chapters. "That gash will kill him long before he feels salt water again,"[4] is one of the best of the curtain lines. It creates suspense, sets the stage for Silver's death, and hints at a situation in which the Good Fisherman, in catching Silver, seems, paradoxically, even more like her guardian angel.

Here and there Haig-Brown dramatizes the action. Sometimes the fish talk. Sometimes he introduces human characters who as fishermen, especially poachers, add tension to the story and give it another dimension in which nature is pitted against man. He creates little climaxes in which Silver is caught or nearly killed, working up to the great struggle with the Good Fisherman that concludes the book. Yet *Silver* is by no means an animal adventure story. The "conflict" of the plot centres largely on the annual cycle and life-death pattern in Silver's development. "It would be a pity to make [Silver] seem impossible," the narrator says, "by inventing stories about him when there are so many true ones waiting to be told."[5]

Looking back years later, Haig-Brown criticized *Silver.* Too much in the English tradition of Kingsley and his kind, he found it cute and anthropomorphic, though Keith suggests that the book's central image of discovery as a voyage and as quest for knowledge, reveals the influence of the author's experiences in the late 1920's on the West coast of North America.[6] In view of the tender age of Master Dickie, the listener, the problem lies not so much in the anthropomorphism as in the teller of the story. Up to a point

one accepts fish talking in a child's story if they speak of fish affairs, but not interpretations of fish behaviour in which, to give but two examples, it is said that Grace, the hen salmon, is "fussy and particular, as all good mothers are"[7] and that Silver, "like many people who are great and important, had an idea he was just a bit greater and more important than he was."[8]

Again as an obtruding and didactic commentator, the story-teller often shifts focus (and unfortunately sometimes point of view). At one point he holds forth on unemployment and the need of the young people of Britain to buckle down, at another on his vermin-based concept of conservation, in which—in addition to preaching fair play among those who catch fish for sport—he damns gulls, which catch fish to live. Poachers fare much better. They are "not bad men; poachers seldom are, for if things were slightly different [i.e. if they had money] they'd mostly be sportsmen."[9] He reverts to nineteenth-century thinking when he notes that the Dog salmon are so numerous in British Columbia that "nothing ever could affect their numbers noticeably."[10] Reasoning of this kind led to the extermination of the passenger pigeon and the great auk. Sometimes he lectures knowledgeably on ichthyology, but his observations are not always demonstrably "authentic," and Master Dickie has to accept as the "truth about salmon," a story in which they learn to jump nets, to take a fly through ill-temper, to migrate to the sea because of a liking for the "bitter taste" of the water,[11] and to make "such terrific efforts" to reach their spawning ground because of "fear [of] exhaustion."[12] Often the story-teller moves from his intimate "we" and such comments as a "silly little fin" to a professorial "I" and a heated commentary, surely over poor Master Dickie's head, on the significance of heredity or the causes of migration, another contentious subject. On a different level the story is ambivalent about nature. She is Mother Nature at times and at others Dame Nature, a stern school-mistress, always rational and moral. Yet the narrator makes observations that reveal Nature as only a force manifesting itself in the lives of wild creatures through both heredity and environment and natural and sexual selection. Indeed his attack on gulls stems from the fact that they eat "thousands and thousands of salmon smolts, who might otherwise have lived to become big and valuable salmon."[13] As a result of all these shifts and discrepancies, *Silver* comprises a strange melange of adults' and children's interests and attitudes.

Whatever delight and information Master Dickie got from the story Haig-Brown learned, he disclosed later, that writing of the kind for children put too many restraints on him,[14] as a comparison of *Silver* and *Return to the River,* his next book on salmon, makes clear. With *Silver,* he perhaps simply wished to recreate a situation once his, when a devoted and learned father told him stories of fish and fishermen. At least he wrote no more books like *Silver* and so with it paid his last direct respects to his childhood and the humanized nature he had known then. After it he wrote under the influence of the new world wilderness. Even when working on *Silver* his heart was far away on the Pacific coast, as Chinook's experiences in the book suggest, for he was, he says, living then in "exile" in England, where "the rivers were tame and tiny" and where there were "no mountains, not even a

rock bluff, no mauve and purple twilights with the trolling lines cutting the tide-rippled waters."[15] The criticism Haig-Brown made of *Silver* derived mainly from these circumstances. In it he had tried to combine two views of nature—the English sentimental, romantic one and the Darwinian or realistic one (with a leavening of the old tradition of Walton and his followers)—and he seems to have thought it necessary to compensate for the latter by emphasizing the sentimental view, with the result that he axiomatically stressed the "cuteness" of his story.

As if again to compensate for the sentimentality of *Silver*, Haig-Brown with *Panther* came out firmly for the realistic animal story. In its objectivity it stands at the opposite pole to *Silver* and, in ways, even to *Return to the River.* It has none of the "cuteness" and anthropomorphism that he believed marred his first animal biography. That he did not write *Panther* "especially for children" is a fact significant not only in itself but also as an indication of his approach to his subject. He was free now to be "authentic," to let the facts speak for themselves. If not written as a children's story, however, *Panther* has long been accepted as one by young readers (and librarians and literary critics), though with recent attempts to read Canadian animal stories as expressions of the national psyche, the book may now have secured a place as adult reading as well as children's.

As with *Silver,* Haig-Brown drew on his own experiences for *Panther.* He was once a bounty hunter himself and, in the winter of 1932-33, was in the field with Cecil (Cougar) Smith, a government predator hunter, to whom he dedicated the first edition of his book and to whom he owed, he admits, much of his knowledge of cougars. His research was that of naturalist and hunter rather than mammologist. Yet without the sophisticated methods of modern field work—tranquillizing bullets and electronic tracking—the book marks an important beginning in the study of the ecology and life history of the Pacific coast panther. It describes the mating habits, family relationships, methods of hunting and feeding of the cougar, and even such details as its way of plucking a bird, of purposely opening a carcass to prevent bloating, and (even more challenging to credulity) of swallowing hair to guard against tapeworms.

Panther is, however, more than matters of fact. As is also required of the animal biography, it is a work of fiction, and, in this example, one of considerable imaginative power. A living creature stalks through its pages. Haig-Brown is not trying to tell a story of heroic animal exploits, nor is he using animals as human archetypes, as critics Gold and McCulloch now seem to think Roberts did.[16] The book is an animal biography, and Ki-yu is simply a great beast of instinct and primordial reason. Not for him a broken heart like Seton's Lobo, or a clever escape over the backs of a flock of sheep like Roberts' Red Fox. Ki-yu "remembered" his mother, "loathed" wolves and watched his prey with "eyes flaming," but otherwise stays in bestial character throughout. Typical of wild animal biographies, however, Ki-yu is the fittest of his kind, but not because, as often with Roberts' and Seton's animal heroes, of human qualities, but because of his sheer animality and because he

embodies the spirit of "places where men did not come to break the pattern."[17] As excessive anthropomorphism mars *Silver* as 'science," so a marked anti-anthropomorphism mars *Panther*. The very realism of the protagonist tends to detract from his role. Purely animal, he consequently provides little with which the reader can identify. In trying to avoid humanizing Ki-yu, Haig-Brown has stripped him of much emotional impact.

Although *Panther* recounts Ki-yu's life history directly and chronologically, it is artistically patterned. Its setting balances farm and wilderness; its telling, narration and dramatic episodes; and its plot, hunted and hunter. It, however, avoids themes that are drawn from stories about people and that frequently characterize stories about people and animals. Here no Springfield Fox feeds poisoned bait to her captive cub in the name of liberty or death, no Pacing Mustang plunges from a cliff for the same cause. Though Blackstreak, Ki-yu's father, killed King, Milton's favourite dog, early in the story, Haig-Brown never tries to make anything of the revenge motif. He even concludes the biography as if to make an ironic comment on sentimental "fictional" plots of animal stories. Milton and Ki-yu do not meet at the end in a great moment of drama. Instead the old cougar is torn to pieces and eaten by a pack of wolves.

On one hand the story is a simple one involving Ki-yu and Milton, a bounty hunter, worked out for the most part in terms of crises, hairbreadth yet plausible escapes and acts of derring-do. Ki-yu swims an icy river eight times, or leaps to the safety of tree or bluff to fool Milton's dogs, or fights savagely with a bear or with some rival cougar. Dave Milton escapes from a pack of wolves. (Haig-Brown is careful, however, not to present them as deliberate man-eaters.) He crosses a great chasm on a flimsy, fallen tree. He struggles, though injured, through the night-time wilderness to the safety of his home. Yet the sensationalism of these events is never sensationalism for its own sake, for *Panther* is more than an outdoors book of thrilling adventures. It has a theme of broad implications and tells a story rooted in the old conflict of man and nature.

If Ki-yu embodies the spirit of the animal world, Milton embodies that of man's, and the plot derives from Ki-yu's efforts to live between two worlds—one, nature's, red in tooth and claw, and the other, man's, forever encroaching on the wilderness with ax and plough, and dog and gun, for man, too, must kill to preserve his way of life as he pushes the frontier farther back into the unclaimed lands. (Here, however, Haig-Brown is silent about the inroads the sportsman makes on wildlife.) Settler and cougar become involved automatically in the struggle to survive, and, in this way, Milton and Ki-yu are "kin." To stress the point Haig-Brown places much of the action of the concluding chapters in the settlers' world (as a counter-balance to the wilderness setting of much of the action of the earlier sections) which, ironically, Ki-yu tries to make his refuge. Like the hero caught between big business and big government in a later novel, *On the Highest Hill* (1949), Ki-yu has no place to hide. His story ends movingly, if not tragically, as the

once powerful beast, now blinded in one eye—almost eyeless in the Gaza of man's world—and long since lame from a ferocious fight in his own world, dies in a valiant fight for his life against wolves—an ending all the more ironic since they have hitherto skulked through the book as craven, "slobbering" "villains."

Despite this central tension, *Panther* lacks overall dramatic effect. It tries to be two books in one, an animal biography and the life of a hunter. It lacks the focus that makes Seton's "Krag" so very effective. Despite the fact that hunting is an all-pervasive theme, the stories of Ki-yu and Milton often go their separate ways, except during the hunts and at the end when Ki-yu makes the settlement his stamping ground. In *Panther,* there are no heroes or villains, or perhaps better, the two protagonists are both heroes and villains caught up in a specific conflict that in the end neither wins. Haig-Brown's refusal to take sides, as he says,[18] with either Ki-yu or Milton comes through almost as indifference. His emotions are scarely ever involved. He never smiles or sheds a tear. Hence the emotions of the reader are scarely ever involved. He is moved, however, by the deaths of Osa and her cubs, by the death of Ki-yu when his animal dignity rises to nobility, and by the faithful dogs who fight for their master's cause even unto death. In fact, the love Milton has for his dogs gives him a much-needed human touch and counteracts somewhat his callous killing of the mountain cougars.

The savage fights, the maiming, and the killing evoke horror but little terror. Although Ki-yu can be cruel and is said to have become "a terror"[19] in the farm country, he is never depicted as a fierce and deadly threat to a human being. On the contrary, sometimes he even shows himself at Hollister's farm as a big, curious, and whimsical cat. By and large, however, he simply lives a life motivated by hunger and sex, pitting animal against animal, frequently disrupted by moments when man would hunt him down or when he, changing roles, is forced to carry the struggle for survival into his enemies' farmlands.

Nature for Haig-Brown may be amoral but it is not monstrous, and in *Panther* he presents it impartially in Darwinian terms and lets the "message" of the book stand at that. By refusing to express sympathy for the victims in the struggle for survival, he avoids the kind of adulterated Darwinism that Seton so frequently indulges in. For Haig-Brown, a squirrel could never be, as it was for Seton, "a red-haired cutthroat" with a "strange perverted thirst for birdling blood." Nor within his Darwinism does he attempt (as Seton and Roberts so often attempted) to demonstrate or prove explicitly the truth of evolution by stressing animal ratiocination and emotionalism. For him even the fittest—"Nurm, a magnificent five-point buck," or Ki-yu—is largely a beast of instinct and habit, "whose joys are utterly subconscious joys, utterly simple joys of the senses."[20]

A story, a study of natural history and Darwinism, *Panther* is also an outdoors book about a hunter and, like most of the genre, incongruous as it may seem, about predator-control. Haig-Brown puts all his nature writing in

human context so that here he is not simply following a literary pattern but also considering an extant problem of the time. Although he never reduces Ki-yu to vermin, he apparently speaks as one with the bounty hunter in the dramatized episodes of the story. At least he never speaks against bounty hunting and he obviously tries to make Milton into a kind of folk hero, the successful backwoods hunter. Ki-yu, according to Milton, was a " "menace." "Sooner or later he would," Milton continues, "turn down to the farms and begin killing sheep and cattle. To shirk from hunting him would be to shirk the very work for which he was paid, to render all the rest of his hunting stupid and pointless."[21] All this hopefully hides the fact that Milton often kills just for cash without a thought of protecting anything and without compunction. One wants to feel that man is more than animal. The simple comment, "In the past winter David had killed all [Ki-yu's] females save two,"[22] reveals the casualness of David's killing. So, too, does the following (with excellent prose that accentuates the fact):

> [The panther] was lying asleep under a log, a little way from the kill and sprang up as she heard them, [The dogs] rushed her as soon as they saw her and forced her into a small hemlock tree. David hurried on when he heard the dogs baying and found her there, half-way up the tree, watching the dogs with a careless curiosity. She turned her head as he came up and snarled when she saw him, but otherwise she made no move. David caught the dogs, tied them a little way from the tree, then shot her.[23]

Unfortunately the scene was not presented to reveal its barbarity or to strike a blow for conservation. It would be unfair, however, to count it as a balancing of accounts for dogs killed in cougar fights. In them a gun had had no part.

Given the power of rebuttal, Ki-yu (and almost all the panthers that Milton had deliberately entered the wilderness, the panthers' own domain, to destroy) might easily have pointed to the self-justification of Milton's logic. Milton tries to present a practice aimed at annihilation under the guise of a campaign of control. Years later, in a new introduction to *Panther,* Haig-Brown was to write of cougars, "A few aberrant individuals may become a danger to livestock or even to humans, and these should be hunted down and removed to protect the reputation of the species as a whole."[24] This assessment makes sense, though in the last several words he steps out of Milton's character and, it would seem out of his own at the time when the book had been written.

As regards the place of the predator in the natural order, Haig-Brown is somewhat ambiguous. He does not damn cougars for killing deer, the hunters' usual complaint. Rather he falls back on the old economic argument in their defence. "They are wholly beneficial to man, for they keep the deer from growing too numerous, to be half-starved then decimated by disease."[25] However true the observation may be, it would be equally so without "beneficial to man." Nevertheless Ki-yu's role here is equivocal. As protagon-

ist (and hence strongest) he kills heavy bucks swiftly and cleanly and, moreover, refuses to eat a diseased deer. Wolves, the other major predators in *Panther,* however, always appear in an unfavourable light. They harass the deer herds relentlessly, so keeping them half-starved. Not for the wolves even the heroic fight of individual against individual, but the onset of the many, the gang, against the one. As if to emphasize their "ignobility," Haig-Brown gives them the role of killing the valiant Ki-yu, thus inadvertently placing in a bad light creatures that are merely demonstrating the acceptable function of predators.

Panther combines the objectivity of science with the heartlessness, if not cruelty, of the hunter. It never questions the morality or benefits of bounty hunting and, since it concerns itself so very much with hunting, Haig-Brown later tried to explain his position on the matter, a position that helps give the book its peculiar double focus. "I have personal experience as a hunter," he writes, "and of the hunter's very deep respect for his quarry. . . .The hunter has his function although it may be misconceived by some standards."[26] Perhaps unsatisfied with this effort to defend Milton's role in *Panther,* Haig-Brown returns to the subject again in his new edition of the work. He removes the foreword praising John Cecil Smith, "the greatest of all panther hunters," and the preface vindicating all the blood-letting and replaces them with an introduction that seems at odds with his earlier attitudes and comments, reading in part as follows: "Many of us believed that cougars have a proper and valuable place in the ecology of deer and elk ranges even as long as forty years ago and were arguing, against strong opposition, for the abolition of bounty hunting,"[27] Surely *Panther* could not have been a strong part of that argument.

Criticized for all the cruelty and killing in *Panther,* Haig-Brown, despite a disclaimer against violence in children's books, justified his story on his usual grounds of authenticity. The violence was needed "to show something as it really is." "To deny death, which is often beautiful, to children is an offense. To conceal injury and pain is an offense. To exploit either or both is the worst offense of all."[28] Haig-Brown is dealing here, of course, with a problem common to many realistic stories of wild animals, but especially the animal biography and again especially when it is long and based on the life of a large predator.

Paradoxically some of this criticism derives from Haig-Brown's strengths as an author. The chapter on Milton's night alone with his dogs in the woods, a splendid vignette, clearly discloses his ability to write realistic description:

> It was a wretchedly cold night, but David kept the fire piled with bark and managed to sleep a little now and then—facing the fire until his back grew cold enough to wake him, turning away from it until his back grew warm again and his face and chest were freezing. At one time during the night the wolves began to howl on the other side of the lake. Jack whimpered nervously in

his sleep and, still asleep, drew a little nearer to the fire. Mona shivered and pressed herself closer to David.

But daylight came at last, a grey, faint daylight, with snow in the northern sky. The valley was still and cold and drab. David piled bark on the fire and set the billy to boil snow-water just once more. He swallowed several cups of hot, strong tea and set out on the trail again.[29]

There is little here or elsewhere in Haig-Brown's work of Roberts' or Grey Owl's purple-prose romanticism, nor of the excessive detail that often spoils realism.

When, however, Haig-Brown presents action in the same vivid manner, he catches it so dramatically that he seems consequently, as some critics argue, to emphasize violence:

> Ki-yu spat and growled and snarled. The bear squealed and roared. Ki-yu's sharp claws ripped through the bear's flesh, teraing muscles to the bone. The bear's long blunt claws raked Ki-yu from shoulder to haunch. Ki-yu's teeth tore at the bear's throat and face, once gripped a forearm and bit until it almost snapped before their grip was broken. The bear's teeth split open Ki-yu's shoulder and cut one of his ears to ribbons. Ki-yu's hindclaws thrust downward mightily and gashed the bear's belly until the entrails showed through the hide.[30]

There are no fewer than five fights such as this and seven hunting scenes described in detail in the book. As a result, some critics have attacked it for its repetitiveness as well as its violence. Yet in all the episodes involved (which one critic likes for their cumulative effect), Haig-Brown tries to solve the problem of repetition of scene, if not the sameness of violence. Ki-yu plays different tricks to elude his pursuers; he fights different adversaries for different reasons—a bear for food, a rival for a mate, a pack of wolves for life itself. Both flaws—if flaws—however, have a common source in the nature of the genre. *Panther,* even aside from the hunting scenes, again simply demonstrates the violence and repetition that must be part of a full-length realistic biography of a large predatory animal.

Following the long years spent on *The Western Angler* (1939), a study of West Coast salmon and trout and a commentary on fishing, Haig-Brown turned to the animal biography again, with another book on salmon, *Return to the River.* This time, however, he wrote of a Pacific spring salmon *(Oncorhynchus tshawytscha)* as opposed to an Atlantic one *(Salmo salar),* the subject of *Silver,* and the new book was not especially for children, for he wished not to make "concessions to simplicity, concreteness or anything else [he] considered desirable in writing for children." "I would think," he suggests, "that the difference in my own age and stage of maturity made more and greater difference between *Silver* and *Return* than the difference in setting" between Britain and Canada. At the same time he was aware, he

admits, that "the setting of *Return* had a certain grandeur and the fish themselves, in their massive abundance, were an altogether bigger and more impressive story than the smaller run of the smaller river in Great Britain. So [he] would say the mood is substantially different and [he] would suspect that the conclusions left to the reader would be different too since [he] had, in *Return*, a more sophisticated concept of salmon as a massive and important resource."[31]

Unquestionably *Return to the River* was an off-shoot of his work on *The Western Angler.* It contains much the same natural history under the guise of fiction. In using this approach he had several aims. He wished to tell the story of a species in terms of an individual, the common aim of the animal biography, and so reduce his canvas to manageable size. He wished also "to straighten the records about salmon."[32] Most of all, however, he wanted to create a general interest in salmon ichthyology and ecology, and to discuss the problem of electric power dams that were strangling the salmon rivers.

Although Haig-Brown did not intend *Return to the River* particularly for children, he believed the book enabled them, as well as adults, "to reach beyond themselves, into new sympathies new understandings, bright and livelier imaginings."[33] All this aside, children are by nature interested in animals. Again, whereas *Panther* is admirable, *Return to the River* is both admirable and likeable. Moreover, with its vast setting, it provides an attraction lacking in *Panther.* The child, unconcerned with theories of migration and problems of fish management, can travel in imagination with Spring, the fishy "heroine," along great rivers, through forests and farmlands and cities to wander in the mysterious deeps of the ocean, led on by a story full of entertaining events.

For all the grandeur of the setting, however, Haig-Brown does not indulge in picturesque word-painting or the impressionism of the romantic. Neither is he Thoreauvian nor Wordsworthian. He feels for his world without trying to draw it into a poetic vision. For one thing, he is not trying to drive his reader out into some vague abstract world but to make him stand in awe, specifically of Spring and her world, and Haig-Brown has the vision and skill to achieve this aim. The description of the river that opens the book skilfully moves from a dynamic prose to a more static form, a precise expository prose, to depict the spawning bed. Again, the almost rhythmical linking of verbs ending in "ing" and those in the past tense, in the description of Canyon Pool, which Spring will leave and to which she will return, catches superbly the life and death struggle there, and also reinforces the controlling image of the book.

Time, as the long ago, like the spaciousness of the setting, adds an important dimension to the book, for its historical perspective gives it depth and feeling. When the Indian boy who spears Chinook draws its shape on the sandy shore of Salmon River, he expresses an attitude that has its roots in a

prehistoric culture. When Spring moves to and from the ocean along the rivers of the Pacific coast, she is following a pattern as ancient as the mountains and valleys through which they flow, a setting that is within and beyond time for it is now, as in the beginning, a world of "fierce competition" and "sudden dangers," a stage on which the protagonists still play out their struggle for survival according to the law of the jungle.

In a neat contrast Haig-Brown brings the past into sharp focus in the present. Senator Evans, remembering his youth, speaks as Old America warning the New of the dangers to its natural resources if it continues to act on values that had effected "the rape of America."[34] Now the salmon pass through valleys where once the "Douglas firs stood tall and straight" and through cities where sewage befouls the river and its very banks. Once free-flowing when "the splashings of Spring and her ancestors whitened the broad river from shore to shore,"[35] the Columbia, with the Willamette, Mackenzie, and the Snake, has become a strait-jacket of dams, ditches, and fish ladders. The primitive animistic Indian fisherman with his dip net has given way to seiners, trollers, and canners and to the technocrats who manage the salmon run in the name of science and the annual crop.

The nature of the material in *Return to the River* allowed Haig-Brown greater scope in one way than *Panther* had; yet it posed the old problems of the realistic animal biography, the sameness of chronological pattern, the similarity of event (escaping one predator being much like escaping another, climbing one fish ladder being much like climbing another), and writing fiction that would hold attention without falsifying natural history. With Spring he faced an even greater challenge than normal with the characteristic flatness of the protagonist's character. No salmon could have the "personality" of Ki-yu, nor could its story, since Haig-Brown refused to invent episodes, have the same dramatic possibilities as the cougar's with its terrestrial setting, its exciting scenes of violence, and its cast of hunters and farmers. Spring was an Everysalmon; Ki-yu was himself alone. *Return to the River* demanded of its author a different approach.

For one thing Haig-Brown emphasizes science more. He sets out the life history of the salmon (often in scientific terminology) in great detail. He describes the construction of the redds, spawning activities (including such matters as scale counts, age-sizes, and colouration), and finally mating and death. He specifically includes information about the oceanic distribution and range of salmon, once thought of as merely "somewhere" out there, tracing Spring's peregrinations along the continental shelf to the waters off Grahame Island, a hundred miles from Alaska. Aside from Don Gunner's patently ironic comments on Eastern experts who challenge the Westerners' (and Haig-Brown's) theories of salmon migration, *Return to the River* is surprisingly much less argumentative than *Silver.* Haig-Brown willingly admits (through Don Gunner) that *Return to the River* is in part conjectural. Nor is he himself afraid of "perhaps," particularly as regards fish movement.

If less openly didactic than *Silver, Return to the River* is far more subjective than *Panther.* Through Senator Evans, Haig-Brown adds an

emotional element to his natural history, and he himself occasionally indulges openly in the pathetic fallacy, impressionistic biology, or anthropomorphism, call it what you will. Peregrines (in some doubtful ornithology) chase "the strongest flocks. . . .for the sport of it, because their fierce, quick brains and pulsing muscles craved instant satisfaction of the urge the sight of movement stimulated in them."[36] Spring, too, "exults" in movement, feels pleasure in the drive of her muscles, and is buoyant at "the taste of salt water."[37] She knows "a stronger delight as she nears the spawning grounds," where "an excitement possessed her" as she prepared a redd.[38] The humanizing of animal behaviour here strikes a happy balance between that of *Silver* and *Panther.* The author perhaps reads into Spring's behaviour more than is scientifically justified, but not more than what, lacking contradictory evidence, seems a valid interpretation and a sincere tribute to a vital and splendid creature. *Return to the River* combines something of the old sentimental tradition of his first book with the realistic tradition of *Panther* and so has a quite different tone and imaginative thrust from the latter book. *Return to the River* is of course more mellow anyway because the nature of its protagonist precludes ferocity and gore, and it is more mellow, too, since it concerns itself more with conservation, but it differs most from *Panther* in that it reveals that Haig-Brown has got the feel of the grandeur of North America and has combined it with attitudes rooted in the imaginative sympathies of his childhood and youth.

Return to the River is more unified than *Panther* with its introductory chapters on Blackstreak, Ki-yu's father, and its two protagonists and divided narrative. In *Return to the River,* the story centres on the salmon and has an overall "plot" in as much as Senator Evans, early in the book, marks the fingerling Spring and so sets up a book-length question—will she return and in view of the tremendous odds against a double recapture by the right people, will he recapture her? Moreover, if Senator Evans and Don Gunner are, like Milton in *Panther,* often absent from long stretches of the book, their absence is far less significant, for they are essentially observers, not participants, in the story. Even if Milton is seen as symbolizing the threat of civilization to the natural world, the divided narrative reduces greatly, if it does not deny altogether, his effectiveness as a unifying force in the story. Again, even though Haig-Brown, for the sake of variety, but mainly for the chance to discuss fish management in different areas, breaks the conclusion of *Return to the River* into accounts of Sachem, Chinook, the tagged salmon, and Spring, he does not harm the unity of the narrative in any serious way. All go through the same general experiences. All are salmon, and the reader does not identify so strongly with any one of them as to preclude the four fish, in large part, having a common identity.

Spring lives in two worlds. On one hand there are nets, dams, and pollution, as if all mankind, not one lone hunter, stood against her. Unlike Ki-yu, however, she does have protectors among these enemies, a fact that helps differentiate the tone of *Return to the River* from *Panther.* On the

other hand there are nature's predators—gulls, herons, ospreys, and mergansers, sharks, lampreys, squawfish, and sticklebacks, minks, bears, seals, and sea-lions. Each has a part in a drama governed largely by "the laws of hunger," which sets animal against animal and in which Spring is both hunted and huntress. Haig-Brown makes more of her in the former role, however, since it adds variety and some suspense to the story. Spring catching *Euphausia pacifica* and smelt has far less to offer dramatically and thematically than Ki-yu hunting deer or lying in wait for farmyard cattle, for her killings are unlikely to stir the reader's feelings either against the one or for the other.

For all of Spring's brushes with death in *Return to the River,* suspense does not become significant in itself, except perhaps in the remarkable descriptions of a heron fishing, and Indian boy waiting for Sachem, and one or two short episodes involving net or hook. The reader knows that Spring, for the sake of science and the story, bears a charmed life and will live out her days, even in defiance of Seton's dictum that "no wild animal dies of old age." The narrative flows and eddies, now moving through a series of experiences in the protagonist's life, now loitering in peripheral situations to describe a lamprey attacking a salmon, and eagle robbing an osprey, or to explain methods of trolling. Here and there it even stops while scientist and angler comment on problems related to the behaviour and conservation of salmon.

Obviously meant to vitalize these subjects and to give them a human touch, these interludes involving Gunner and Evans seem text-bookish. Their opening discussion on migration reads like a debate, and only with the trollers, Red Gifkin and Charlie Wilson, does the conversation seem natural. They are not burdened with a mission. They are cut from the same cloth as Milton, the kind of men Haig-Brown met and liked when he was a hunter and fisherman. By contrast Evans (who may have been drawn from Senator Charles L. McNary of Oregon) and Gunner never appear experiental or real; their *raison d'être* centres on the thematic and didactic.

Senator Evans looks much like an atonement for Milton (and the author of *Panther*). An "incorrigible old sentimentalist," his attitudes toward nature are the very opposite to those expressed or implied in that book, though, since fly fishing is regarded as the sport of gentlemen, he can take a trout with a fly and still remain a nature lover. Remembering the days of his youth when the salmon abounded, he introduces a feeling of nostalgia and remorse that gives the cause of salmon conservation an emotional basis. It fits the story and gives it emotional depth, too, that he, now an old man, at the conclusion should watch Spring in her spawning—on her life-giving death-bed—which he "felt in his heart" was the last natural spawning of the chinooks that belonged to his river. Like the salmon runs, his way of seeing nature faces the danger of being lost in a nation dedicated to industrial and commercial exploitation in the name of Progress, to science and to biologists like Don Gunner, Evans' foil—those "cold-blooded people" who, with their rationalizations and their racks, traps, trucks, fish ladders and

hatcheries, would leave no place for a sentimental attachment to nature. Yet the Senator comes to recognize "these white-coated young men" of the State and Federal Agencies as "the symbol of America's salvation."[39] Thanks to them the dam at Bonneville supplied power without hurting fish, thus satisfying his pride in American enterprise and his concern for salmon.

For Haig-Brown, these scientists are only half the problem. He has a place for the Senator Evanses, also, for he has Don Gunner say to Evans when speaking of a salmon pool, "You may not be able to name all the whys and wherefores, but you understand without that. You feel it."[40] As for Haig-Brown himself, he plots his book so that the old man (and Silver) have a moment of triumph at the conclusion when a flood carries away the rack that Evans had tried to demolish and that had denied the fish their freedom to "spawn as they were meant to spawn."[41] His central point, however, as regards the Evanses, is that they are the people who must motivate and direct the work on salmon.

Aside from a naturalist and scientist, the *dramatis personae* of *Return to the River* include an Indian boy who sees salmon as food and as sacred beings and those, like Happy Hammond the troller, who consider them in terms of profit. Once, too, it includes a drowsy angler whom Spring playfully awakens, thus suppling the one touch of humour (never a strong point with Haig-Brown) in all the high seriousness of the book. Unfortunately it omits a canner, a spokesman from the business world, to round out the circle of Spring's observers.

The trollers, however, do come close to being the businessman's representative for, as Charlie Wilson says, their fleet seemed "a perfect symbol of individual effort."[42] It must have seemed so to Haig-Brown too, if the later *Saltwater Summer* (1949) is evidence, for that book celebrates the hard work and self-reliance of the off-shore trollers as the criteria of success. Indeed Senator Evans and Don Gunner could fit easily into Haig-Brown's juvenile fiction. Kindly and wiser older men and resourceful young men are central to it. Evans and Gunner, like the protagonists of the boys' books, have little moral or psychological complexity. Their motivations and reactions are direct responses to things and circumstances rather than to matters of their own personalities. They are as much sounding boards and propagandists as they are human beings. Had they been otherwise, they might easily have drawn attention away from the true subject of the book.

Beyond all these characters is the river itself which, without being personified, is a living presence in the book. Haig-Brown loved rivers and had already written a story of one in *Pool and Rapid* (1932), and in *Return to the River* he has actually written another, for Spring is the embodiment of the spirit of the river. "The salmon [are] the river. . . .they are its yield, growing from it, growing on it, giving themselves back to it. . . ."[43] The ditches. dams, and pollution desecrate it and the salmon die in consequence. Yet in the end the river, in a magnificent gesture of defiance, rises like a champion

and sweeps away the rack that keeps the salmon from their home waters. It would be easy to follow this line of thought too far and see it as a comment on nature's ultimate power over man and so on, or as a revelation of a wish fulfillment deriving from Haig-Brown's youthful attitudes to nature or from his fundamental dislike of the commercial world. Whatever its purpose or origin, however, it is more than a *deus ex machina* to supply the story with as happy an ending as possible, given the fact that Spring and all the others returning with her must die.

Return to the River does not, like "The Last Barrier," Roberts' story of a salmon, centre on Darwinism. Haig-Brown's dams are man-made, not accidents of nature as in Roberts' story. His concern over Spring is for a species in an environment that modern entrepreneurial man has refashioned, and not a concern over the killing of individual animals by hunter and fisherman. Haig-Brown's vision here has a different and broader orientation.

While a great salmon may be an object of awe for Evans, the trolling fleet, as earlier indicated, symbolizes for Charlie Wilson the best spirit of private enterprise (though Donald Waterfield in *Continental Waterboy* (1970) questions the observation).[44] The author carries this kind of materialistic argument to its ultimate when he himself is moved to justify the survival of the salmon because of their value to industry:

> If the sum of this efficiency [of nets and boats] was a threat to Spring and her race, it was also a justification for their survival. Year after year the drift gill-nets take their millions of pounds of chinooks in the Columbia and men live by it, fairly and freely—fisherman, packers, cannery workers and the men who supply these people with their daily needs and the men who sell salmon in the cans. . . .a solid block of human life dependent upon the salmon runs. . . .[45]

Even if he can cite the Old Testament as evidence that the creatures of nature are here for man's use, even if his argument is practical—and for business and government unquestionably the most persuasive—the word "justification," as used here, is disturbing, as it would be in any other modern discussion of conservation, and it is a denial of Senator Evans' basic view of nature.

Return to the River supposedly demonstrates the need to recognize, not fundamentally to deny, the view of Senator Evans. Without his way of seeing, there was the danger (as the Grand Coulee dam revealed) that technology would concern itself with fisheries *vis-a-vis* hydro-electric power development only if the value of the first allegedly surpassed the second. Like Senator Evans, Haig-Brown is caught in a dilemma. He, too, leans to the "sentimental" view of nature and yet believes that the one chance salmon have rests with science and engineering. So both author and Evans look with favour on the Bonneville dam. There is the suggestion also that they appreciate the whole programme of damming the rivers inasmuch as it made the "Fisheries guys" wise to all "them haywire" dams and ditches that do the

"real harm."[46] Certainly both are impressed by the ingenious way in which salmon are trapped and trucked to their spawning streams, for all these developments hold out hope for the future of the salmon runs. Yet though Evans (and the author) make little of the real difficulties of hydrologic co-ordination and fish management (the dangers of fish having the "bends" below the dams, of reservoir or so-called lake silting, and of temperature and chemical changes in the waters) the senator (and probably the author) is unsatisfied. The uncertainty enters to the detriment of the book because it superimposes the story of Senator Evans on the life history of Spring, for whatever the flood means as fiction, it takes almost all the emotional force of the argument for conservation away from science and technology, if it does not actually put them in a bad light. Haig-Brown's heart and head are not at one here. As *Panther* lacks focus since the author seems never quite decided whether his subject is Ki-yu or Milton, though the conflict between them is often direct and centre stage, so there is an ambivalence in *Return to the River.* Here Evans and Spring stand against a special manifestation of civilization so that according to the plot the balance favours nature and the old-time values of an old naturalist, though the gist and logic of the argument for conservation in the book would seem to tip it the other way.

Return to the River is an American book. When it appeared, Canada had not yet begun a dam-building programme on the West coast, much less the Bennett Dam on the Peace River. The story of Spring, written to entertain, warn, advise, and reassure the Americans, may well have been intended also for Canadians. Whatever its intent, its message seems to have fallen on deaf ears. B.C. Hydro's plans to dam the Fraser River and probably the Skeena and the Stikine stand witness to the fact. In this perspective the book seems dated. In a foreword to a new edition (1976), Haig-Brown himself becomes a Senator Evans. "Two or three years ago," he writes, "I watched a few spawning chinooks far up the Salmon River in Idaho, a sad little shadow of the runs of old" in the Columbia which, once a "magnificent river," is now little more than a "series of freshwater impoundments."[47] But like the Senator, he is half-hopeful and notes that the oxygen levels of the polluted Willamette, which once led Spring to the sea, now "rarely fall below the minimum requirements of salmon."[48]

On another level *Return to the River* has not dated, for beyond all the matters of fiction, characters, and conservation, it treats with impressive sensitivity the miracle of migration, "the far journey and faithful return," which constitutes the lives of salmon and in which Spring concretizes the dynamic force of nature. The story is more than a dramatized presentation of a natural wonder, however. Its roots are deep in the life of man, for it reflects aspects of his own world, the struggle for freedom against great odds, the questing spirit and the odyssean search for home. By juxtaposing the natural and the human, *Return to the River* puts each in a light that is common to both and that reveals the dangers of the alienation of man from nature.

Haig-Brown wants so much to be an affirmer. If all is "cycles within cycles, freshness and decay," all is also, he writes, "constant change, death

and new life."[49] In his animal biographies, this wish seems to put him on all sides at once: as hunter and nature lover, as scientist and sentimentalist, and as one who reveres the spirit of free enterprise, but laments what economic man has done and is doing to America. His ambivalence may derive from his English background. *Panther*, which is truly North American, seems in part to have been an experiment, since *Return to the River*, with its sentimentality and its interest in the rights of animals in a man-centred world, turns back some distance to the English tradition. Here Haig-Brown differs from his peers Roberts and Seton and gives the Canadian animal biography a new direction in that he openly makes his concern for the species and its environment integral to his theme and art.

[1]Glenys Stow, "A Conversation With Haig-Brown," *Canadian Children's Literature*, 1, 2 (Summer, 1975), p.11.

[2]*Ibid.*, p.14.

[3]*Ibid.*, p.13.

[4]*Silver.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1946) p.80.

[5]*Ibid.*, p.71.

[6]W.J. Keith, "Roderick Haig-Brown," *Canadian Literature*, 71 (Winter, 1976), p.9.

[7]*Silver*, p.53.

[8]*Ibid.*, p.63.

[9]*Ibid., p. 78.*

[10]*Ibid.*, p.85.

[11]*Ibid.*, p.32.

[12]*Ibid.*, p.53.

[13]*Ibid.*, p.35.

[14]Stow, p.14.

[15]Haig-Brown, "Coastscape," *Maclean's Magazine*, 86 (June, 1973), p.37.

[16]Joseph Gold, ed., "Introduction," *King of Beasts and Other Stories*, by Charles G.D. Roberts (Toronto, 1967); Clare MacCulloch, *The Neglected Genre; The Short Story in Canada* (Guelph, 1973), pp. 36-37.

[17]*Panther* (London, 1957), p.183.

[18]Stow, p.16.

[19]*Panther*, p.179.

[20]*Panther*, p.73.

[21]*Ibid.*, p.132.

22*Ibid.*, p.168.

23*Ibid.*, p.156.

24"Foreword," *Panther* (1973 ed.) p. viii.

25*Panther* (1947 ed.), p.74.

26Stow, p.16.

27"Foreword," *Panther* (1973 ed.) p. vii.

28Stow, p.15.

29*Panther*, p.159.

30*Ibid.*, p.166.

31Stow, pp. 14-15.

32*The Western Angler* (New York, 1939), p.235.

33Haig-Brown, "On Writing for Children," *Canadian Author and Bookman*, 35 Spring, 1959), p.5.

34*Return to the River*, (New York, 1941), p.28.

35*Ibid.*, p.91.

36*Ibid.*, p.102.

37*Ibid.*, p.99.

38*Ibid.*, p.240.

39*Ibid.*, p.15.

40*Ibid.*, p.48.

41*Ibid.*, p.238.

42*Ibid.*, p.133.

43*Ibid.*, p.194.

44Donald Waterfield, *Continental Waterboy* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 194-195.

45*Return to the River*, p.171.

46*Ibid.*, p.173.

47*Return to the River* (1976), p. [1].

48*Ibid.*, p. [ii].

49*Return to the River* (1941), p.52.

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