



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/JVON5553>

Aaron Glass, *Writing the Hamat'sa: Ethnography, Colonialism, and the Cannibal Dance*

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To cite this book review: Aaron Glass, *Writing the Hamat'sa: Ethnography, Colonialism, and the Cannibal Dance* by Bruce Granville Miller, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 3 (September 2023): 213-214, <https://doi.org/10.52230/KWRB7252>

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Aaron Glass, *Writing the Hamat'sa: Ethnography, Colonialism, and the Cannibal Dance* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), 489pp. Hardcover. C\$95.00. ISBN: 978-0-7748-6377-3.

This is a hard book to review. That is because the book itself reviews works of all kinds – early ethnographies, volumes of poetry, a world's fair, anthropological schools of thought, popular history, government reports, and more. Further, the book stands as a kind of history of anthropology, at least Americanist anthropology and the several Europeans who helped create it and are attached to it. It is also an easy book to review because Aaron Glass is a clear, well-organized writer and because the thorough, meticulous research he undertook to prepare this volume has been his work of several decades. A simple way to describe the book is as a commentary on perhaps all of the texts published on a cultural practice, glossed as the Hamat'sa, variously thought of as a Cannibal dance, a spiritual practice, a symbol system, and a body of knowledge, which has come to be emblematic of Northwest Coast historical culture and the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples of central British Columbia. There is much more of value in these pages than I can suggest here.

Glass carefully sets out the kind of anthropology he espouses; anthropology which is informed by Indigenous perspectives and is aware of the nuances in the ways Indigenous peoples, including the ones he works with, consume, reject, participate with, and transform anthropology and anthropologists. Glass presents a case for how to evaluate the various documents dealing with Hamat'sa, to account for the various forms of bias, conflation, and stagecraft. The book is organized around the period in which Franz Boas' wrote on Hamat'sa, and the subsequent post-Boasian literatures. Boas' writing Glass notes, is repeated, glossed and distorted in most interpretations over many decades and is used to 'illustrate the very kinds of evolutionary theory that his own anthropological brand...was meant to displace' (p. 172). But Boas is also responsible, partly indirectly, of creating the iconic Hamat'sa, which glosses over differences in practice and interpretations among the families and communities which have rights to it, and suggests a greater cultural consensus than was justified (p. 316).

Anthropologists engaged in acculturation studies, semiotic analysis, revitalization, biography, and other approaches all tried their hand at writing about the Hamat'sa, mostly in support of their own perspectives and periods in anthropology. Something similar was afoot in the Kwakwaka'wakw communities. Glass notes that 'If the Hamat'sa vacillated in anthropological evaluation across shifting epistemological paradigms...a similar dynamic occurred in the Kwakwaka'wakw communities themselves...' (p. 320). In the period of the Potlatch prohibition, performance practices were fundamentally altered, and after the ban, were performed as part of the new Indigenous empowerment and 'essential component of collective heritage' (p. 320).

An Afterword takes these developments to the present day. Andy Everson/Tanis of the K'ómoks First Nations on Vancouver Island notes that he is the descendant of 'two large cultural groups: the Salish and the Kwakwaka'wakw' (p. 369). By the time of his birth in 1972 there were "no longer any Hi'hamat'sa among the K'ómoks" (p. 369), but he heard stories about the graceful dance. However, in 1983 his grandmother had a full Potlatch and 'dance positions were once again placed on members of our family' (p. 370). Everson himself danced soon after and 'became thoroughly obsessed with learning about my culture' (p. 370). Then, while working on his MA in anthropology at UBC, he met Aaron Glass, and the two

became close friends, exchanging ideas and materials, and ruminating on Boas' materials, which Everson writes 'became dog-eared and riddled with sticky notes' (p. 371). For Everson, 'the textual sources provide us with a roadmap for the future. In recent years, Hi'hamat'sa have once again started to act...as initiated attendants who help oversee the running of our ceremonies on the floor [of the ceremonial house]' (pp. 373-74). But Everson concludes that textual materials, those that Glass has pulled together and analyzed, must be weighed against information from 'our living culture' (p. 375). Andy Everson's words are well placed to conclude the text and to place an iconic Northwest Coast cultural practice back with its' practitioners.

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