Heroes in the Perilous Land: Pattern and Meaning in Arctic Fiction for Children

Ray Jones

The Arctic has had a profound impact on the children's fiction that employs it. With its vast distances, sparse population, wild predators, and harsh weather, the Arctic refuses to remain a simple backdrop to fiction. Because the Arctic setting is as much a set of conditions and possibilities as it is a geographic locale, it occupies a central and determining role. It is, to borrow Tolkien's description of Faerie, the Perilous Land. As such, it naturally generates physical dangers. These are not, however, simple "adventures," exciting and troublesome episodes interrupting the otherwise smooth course of existence. The dangers in most Arctic tales are tests by means of which characters prove their worth and establish their identities. As the Perilous Land, the Arctic is, thus, the land of heroic adventure.

The display of heroism in Arctic tales almost invariably follows the pattern of the rites of passage that Joseph Campbell sees as the essential formula of mythic heroism: *"separation-initiation-return."*[1] The tales describe the circular journey of a character who leaves his group, faces tests that establish his maturity and worthiness, and returns to the group, often bringing, as in many myths, some benefit to the group. In these tales, however, the Arctic setting has again exerted control: it has limited the variety of episodes writers may employ to display heroism. Snow storms, drifting ice floes, scarce game, and predators who attack food caches or men are the stock-in-trade of the tale of Arctic heroism. Such limited and predictable content need not be a liability. The dragon, after all, appears in Arctic tales. Like the tale of knighthood, the tale of Arctic heroism depends upon the intensity with which it presents its predictable content and upon the significance that it gives to heroism.

Canadian children's writers have successfully written three kinds of dramatically tense and thematically significant tales of Arctic heroism. They have, first, recast Inuit folk materials to make them comprehensible to children of our culture. Such works as Ronald Melzack's *The day Tuk became a hunter* (1967), James Houston's *Kiviok's magic journey* (1973), and Garnet Hewitt's *Ytek and the Arctic orchid* (1981) create the logical structures and clear motives not always discernible in the originals. No matter how modified, recast folk tales give at least a notion of how the Inuit viewed their Perilous Land. Because a proper estimate of them depends on a comparison with originals, these will not be of concern here.

Both the second and third kinds of tales of Arctic heroism are the imaginative creations of non-Inuit writers. One focuses on the Inuit alone. This group includes five of James Houston's children's books — from *Tikta'liktak* (1965) to *Long claws* (1981) — and Doug Wilkinson's *Sons of the Arctic* (1965). These tales generally do, as Sheila Egoff says of Houston's, distill "the essence of the heroic in Eskimo life, as in a broader sense the stories of King Arthur, Roland, and Beowulf bring to a culmination the essence of the civilizations they represent."[2] Unlike the writers of romance and epic, however, these writers are only knowledgeable outsiders. Their works, therefore, may not be accurate expressions of Inuit views. Although we can question their value as anthropology, we cannot deny the power and significance resident in the details and structure of their tales.

The other kind of tale, represented by such diverse works as William G. Crisp's *Ook-Pik: The story of an Eskimo boy* (1952) and James Houston's *Frozen fire* (1977), extends the meaning of heroism. These books treat both Inuit and non-Inuit characters in order to compare Inuit and white cultures. In these works, the display of heroism becomes central to an insistence on the value of the Inuit's relationship with his environment.

In this paper, I will examine both the tales of Inuit culture and those of cultural comparison to show how they use the pattern of heroism and invest it with thematic significance. I will concentrate on, but not limit myself to, the work of James Houston, the most prolific of Arctic authors.

Tales focusing on Inuit alone use the pattern of heroism primarily to celebrate heroic endurance, both physical and mental, but they also suggest that the hero survives in the Perilous Land because he embodies the essence of his culture. These tales thus celebrate the perfect adaptation of the Inuit to their environment.

The design of the heroic tale appears in its most uncluttered form in Houston's first book, *Tikta'liktak*. As always, the development of the hero begins with an initial misfortune. Most typically, the misfortune here is the absence of game and the consequent threat of imminent starvation. Tiktaliktak's wish that he will become as good a hunter as his father indicates that he desires to carry on the traditions of his people, traditions upon which the very life of the group depends. The wish, that is, is the basis for his symbolic status as a culture hero, the embodiment of his culture's cherished values. On a more personal level, it shows that he seeks both maturity and a purposeful identity as a provider. Tiktaliktak's achievement of identity is thus tied to his success in a physical quest: if he can provide game, he will have demonstrated the traditional skills of his people and will have earned the right to an identity as a mature hunter.

The second element of the heroic pattern is the withdrawal from the group, a withdrawal necessary for the achievement of the quest. Tiktaliktak thus sets out on a hunting expedition. He soon discovers, however, that beyond his home lies the Perilous Land, an awesome realm in which the elements try to break

his spirit and destroy his life. He becomes stranded on an ice floe, but he skilfully manoeuvers himself to a barren island. This becomes the setting for the next stage of the heroic pattern, the symbolic equivalent of the mythic hero's journey to the underworld. Despairingly, moving with support "like an old man" (p.26), Tiktaliktak, "as if drawn by magic" (p. 27), climbs a hill and goes to sleep in a "rough coffin" (p.28).[3] The magical pull suggests the force of destiny: like mythic heroes, he journeys to the land of death, a land from which only true heroes can return, in order to be reborn with the virtues that will enable successful completion of his quest. Tiktaliktak rises from this symbolic death with the heroic resolve to avoid actual death. Such resolve is, of course, a value central to his people's survival. He soon catches a seal, eats, and remembers "once more that he is young" (p.30).

With his heroic and youthful vigour restored, he encounters another common element of the heroic pattern, the formal test of his worth, a contest in which he must show bravery and strength. He passes this test by killing his first polar bear. This, of course, represents the achievement of his wish to display his father's skill as a hunter and, thus, the attainment of a mature identity. The bear is so often used as the opponent in Arctic hero tales, however, that the nature of the formal test needs some elaboration. Obviously, an Inuit could provide food and fulfill the traditional role of the mature man by hunting less dangerous animals. The hunting of the bear, though, requires more than common maturity; it requires an heroic dimension because the bear is such a fierce adversary. The bear is, as an Inuit hunter says in Wilkinson's *Sons of the Arctic*, "king in this land."[4] Defeat of the bear thus demonstrates a mature man's defence of human life and the hero's kingship over both his environment and his destiny. In addition to providing this realistic and natural challenge to the hero, the bear may also bring a certain degree of deep symbolic significance that explains its prominence in all kinds of Arctic tales. In his Foreword to *Songs of the dream people*, Houston notes that the white bear dream has overtones of sex to the Eastern Arctic Inuit.[5] It also has that significance elsewhere, as readers of the Scandinavian tale "East of the sun and west of the moon" realize. We can quite reasonably see the bear, with its overwhelming power and shaggy coat — abundant hair is widely associated with sexual power — as a sexual symbol. The slaying of one by the adolescent boys who typically function as heroes in these tales thus becomes a powerful realistic image of heroism and a symbolic one of maturity.

At this point, then, Tiktaliktak is a mature man and a hero, the embodiment of the timeless skills of his people. He has gained knowledge of his abilities and of his environment, and he is able to use traditional knowledge to survive, as when he builds a shelter "like the ancient houses of his forefathers" (p.37). He continues to exhibit ingenuity and bravery by making a boat of sealskins, which he paddles to the mainland.

Tiktaliktak's journey overland towards his home contains another element

of the heroic pattern. He heads in the correct direction because he follows his namesake, an Arctic butterfly, that seems to guide him. The butterfly is a variation of the traditional folk tale figure of the helper, a *deus ex machina* who arrives when the hero has no other resources. Symbolically, such figures represent the aid of intuition or knowledge. Here, the butterfly, with its overtones of a supernatural emissary, also strengthens the reader's sense of Tiktaliktak's stature as a hero. Tiktaliktak is one worthy of help from the gods. His return to his family, the last element of the pattern, further reinforces this stature because it stresses the heroic rebirth motif introduced when he lay down in his rough coffin. He arrives, that is, in the spring, the season of rebirth, and on the day his family is to give away his clothes, thus formally admitting his death.

At first glance, Tiktaliktak's heroic return seems tinged with irony because he has succeeded in only two of the three goals he developed during the tale. He has proven himself a good hunter, and he has returned to the family about whom he thought constantly. He has not, however, succeeded in the initial object of the quest, the provision of food for his family. In most tales, success in the initial quest is a concrete sign of worth. One can say, of course, that his return to his family is his actual goal and that the return proves his heroism. The structure, though, subtly suggests that his mission was not futile. He had left a starving land, but he returns to "a place of plenty" (p. 54). His rebirth to his family and the rebirth of game are linked. The implication is that, as the embodiment of his people's bravery and ingenuity, he has passed tests and earned the gift of life for his people. Although Houston presents his hero concretely and memorably as an individual, then, he employs structure to give him a value no mortal could normally hold, no matter how successfully he had established his identity and maturity as a hunter.

The celebration of the will to live, physical courage, and the joy of return that are at the core of *Tikta'liktak* are also essential elements of Houston's *Long claws*. In this book, however, Houston employs the heroic pattern to stress an additional element, the awesome mystery of animal and human behaviour. Although its protagonists are a boy and a girl instead of a single hero, the tale follows the essential pattern I have discussed. The father of Pitohok and Upik is dead. Instead of wishing to be like him, they must actually take his place and save the rest of the family by journeying through the Perilous Land to a food cache. They are caught in the obligatory blizzard and must use traditional knowledge to survive. A white owl, called a helping spirit in a song they sing,[6] helps them to locate the cache. As they start home with food, however, a grizzly bear follows them. Both the boy and the girl display heroic fortitude, continuing homeward despite fatigue and fear. When they become lost, the owl again hovers "as if by magic" (p. 24) and guides them in the correct direction. The owl is reminiscent not only of Tiktaliktak's butterfly but also of Mafatu's albatross in Armstrong Sperry's *Call it courage* (1941).[7] It is a helper figure,

a representative of the spirit world whose presence signals their value, and a symbol of intuition. The tale ends with the return of the children, who establish their maturity by successfully completing the quest for meat.

Significantly, the children do not kill the bear in this tale. This is because Houston wants to stress the idea that the bear is not an evil creature but only a hunter looking for food. He points out, then, the unity of animal and human nature, a point to which he returns when he stresses, through the speeches of the grandfather at the end, that man can neither predict what an animal will do nor know the strength and courage of human beings until danger tests them. Although this book does not blatantly suggest the idea of the underworld journey or a symbolic death — Pitohok's hand is in the bear's mouth when his sister startles the bear, a sure sign that Pitohok is as good as dead — it does, in Upik's moment of insight and in Pitohok's wonder at his sister's courage, stress results that are similar. It provides for both, that is, the same thing achieved by reborn mythic heroes, a new vision or a greater understanding of life. The heroic pattern is, therefore, the basis for Houston's simple presentation of a profound view of the wonder of life.

Houston's *Wolf run* (1971) and *The white archer* (1967) show a similar concern with enriching the heroic circular journey. In the former, Houston tells of another adolescent orphan, Punik, who must undertake an "impossible journey" (p.21)[8] in order to provide food for his grandparents. Punik does not believe in magic, as do his grandparents, and is thus at odds with his people's traditions. After much suffering, he does get meat, just as he is on the point of death. His rebirth comes, however, because of two wolves who act the role of helper figures by catching a caribou for him. This summary makes the tale seem like a simplified version of Jean George's *Julie of the wolves* (1972). Houston does not, like George, stress the harmonious interdependence of the traditional life on the tundra. His point is imbedded in his hero's final recognition that life is not simple, that reality contains more than what is visible and tangible. He does not, therefore, celebrate Punik's maturation as a hunter. Rather, he celebrates the boy's coming of age as a man who can appreciate the values and vision of his group. It is this surrender of egotism that marks his true heroism and prepares for him to return successfully from his quest for food. Like the characters in *Long claws,* Punik thus gains his identity when a wondrous event drags him back from the edge of death in the Perilous Land. He is, in a sense, the modern Inuit reborn as the old-fashioned one who understands powers beyond those of the individual.

The theme of *Wolf run* seems a genuine expression of the Inuit vision of the world; that of *The white archer* seems like the product of Christian culture. Kungo, orphaned after vengeance-seeking Indians attack his home, journeys to an island where, like Tiktaliktak on his island, he develops skill as a hunter. Kungo, however, has a helper, a mentor who tries to explain that the true hunter must be a good man as well as a skillful one. Kungo, obsessed with revenge,

ignores such moral instruction. Symbolically reborn as the white archer, he sets out to kill the Indians. At their camp, he has a vision that confirms the mentor's notion that hatred breeds only more destruction. He thus spares the Indians and promises to return in friendship. By doing so, of course, he passes the test of his worth: his Christian compassion proves he is a good man. His reward is a symbolic restoration of the losses inflicted by the Indians. He recognizes that he is no longer an orphan: he accepts the old man and woman who had taught him on the island as "his people" (p. 93),[9] the ones who had given birth to a man capable of love. The man who had left them to wreak vengeance thus returns to what he now sees as home, bearing the greatest of gifts, love.

Houston's remaining tale of Inuit life, *Akavak* (1968), is the only one in which the central character does not undertake a circular journey. Nevertheless, the Arctic is still the Perilous Land in which a fourteen-year old boy proves his maturity and worth by guiding his grandfather through numerous dangers. In particular, Akavak establishes his maturity by heroically killing a musk-ox, an especially courageous feat because his people rarely saw them. What is most significant here, however, is that Houston adds an ironic note to the conclusion of the boy's journey through the Perilous Land: the grandfather dies just as he is about to see the brother whom he longed to meet again. Nevertheless, Houston does not use this to suggest the failure of the boy's quest. Rather, he suggests that the sharing of dangers and wonders on the journey has brought the boy a special feeling for the land of perils and for his grandfather. Physical heroism, established in the movement from one haven through dangers to a new haven, is the basis for a theme stressing the mystical continuity of life in the memory of the hero. Akavak and his grandfather are linked forever in the ultimate heroic journey to another world: ". . . he dreamed that he took his grandfather's hand and together they soared upward — upward and across the ancient mountains, over the whiteness of the glacier, and out among the stars."[10]

Because of their brevity, restrained and dignified tone, and lack of involved passages of analysis and introspection, the five tales by Houston that I have discussed create characters who seem, especially in the extremes of action, more constellations of ideal attributes than idiosyncratic humans. The novel, with its wider scope, provides greater opportunity than the tale for creating rounded characters and for extending the thematic implications of its episodes. Canadian children's writers have generally used the heroic pattern in the novel to concentrate on the cultural conflict between traditional Inuit ways and the modern white customs supplanting them. Nevertheless, at least one writer, Doug Wilkinson, has written a novel about post contact Inuit that focuses on the Inuit rather than their relationship to whites. White culture is evident — the characters are Christians, and they have motor boats and rifles — but it is incidental to the display of traditional heroism in modern garb.

Sons of the Arctic is a sophisticated novel, but it still treats the idea of maturity gained through a trek across the Perilous Land. Three Inuit boys who have gone by boat to the fishing grounds must return home overland. Wilkinson skillfully makes each an individual. Paneeluk is cautious and authoritative; Putik is impetuous and eager for adventure; and Simonee is a little boy anxious to have the same rights as his colleagues even though he is younger, less knowledgeable, and slightly frightened by circumstances. Wilkinson makes the adventures the result of the expression of their personalities. Putik, for instance, is so eager to find caribou that he convinces the others to violate traditional Inuit wisdom by crossing some hills in the wrong place. This violation is a sign of their immaturity. Once they enter the Perilous Land, they must rely on traditional skills and must prove their worth by hunting game, by surviving a snowstorm, and by defending themselves against a polar bear.

This last is the typical test of maturity. Wilkinson prepares us to see it so by having the boys repeatedly express a desire to kill a bear. Their encounter includes, however, some realistic irony. With their .22 rifles, the boys can only wound the bear. It is actually about to kill the prostrate Putik when it hears the sound of a boat and runs off. Paneeluk's comment, " 'I thought you were dead' " (p. 165), suggests that we have here the symbolic death and rebirth of the hero. The father and uncle, whose boat scares the bear, are like the helper figures in the other tales I have discussed: they arrive at precisely the time the heroes are in most need of help. In this case, the helpers also lend the youthful heroes a powerful rifle so that they can realize their wishes by killing the bear and obtaining a physical sign of their new status as hunters.

Wilkinson's book also uses the journey through the Perilous Land to distinguish between foolish adventure and necessary heroism. The wise hunter, Kayak, tells the boys that they must listen to both reason and heart if they are to survive long. His words obviously imply that survival depends upon heroism and that heroism depends upon knowledge, the accumulated wisdom of the people. *Sons of the Arctic* thus not only focuses on the individual as representative of his group's culture, but it also shows how the group's culture can aid the individual who wisely accepts it.

The novel treating the cultural relationships between Inuits and whites uses the same pattern of the heroic test in the Perilous Land as that in the works I have discussed. The display of heroism in these books functions as it does in the others: it shows the maturity and worth of an individual and the value of the culture he represents. In these works, then, heroic survival becomes a symbol of the Inuit's profound understanding of his land and thus, an indication that his lack of the material benefits of white civilization has not made him inferior. We can see two approaches and attitudes to the novel of cultural relationships in Crisp's *Ook-Pik* and Houston's *Frozen fire* and *Black diamonds* (1982).

Ook-Pik is what we might call an anthropological novel. It seeks to teach about the traditional life of the Inuit by showing the happy relationships and daily routine of a family. It also shows the way that life is changing by describing the introduction of the boy, Ook-pik, to the products, customs, and values of white society. In general, the book takes a slightly condescending look at the grandparents, who are suspicious of white ways. It suggests that white ways are both desirable and superior. Thus, it describes Ook-pik being delighted to learn about toothpaste and soap. More significantly, it has Ook-pik learning about ecology from a Mountie: although Ook-pik cannot understand the idea of the extinction of a species, he accepts the idea that he must only kill when he has need because of his confidence in the wisdom of the Mountie.

If the novel contained only such scenes of the subservient and primitive Inuit happily accepting every element of white culture, it would be an exceptionally one-sided and naive view of Inuit culture. *Ook-pik* balances the praise for white culture with a hero tale that points out the value of traditional Inuit practices. Ook-pik, who gains maturity by displaying traditional skills in the first part of the book, becomes a hero in the second when he guides the Mountie across the tundra. At one point, he saves the Mountie because he looks around "as a good hunter should" (p. 126)[11] and sees a polar bear about to attack. By killing this bear, Ook-pik establishes his ability to achieve his own goals (like the boys in *Sons of the Arctic,* he had previously expressed a strong desire to kill a polar bear), his stature among his own people (his deed proves him worthy as a hunter), and his people's values (the whites who are trying to modernize them may still need the assistance of traditional Inuit skill and courage to survive). His exceptional status as a hero, as well as the power of white culture, is subtly signalled by the manner of his return to his family. Ook-pik, like some mythic hero, returns to his people by air in a "metal bird."[12] The white man's airplane covers in a few hours a distance he had taken days to traverse. In the end, the book admires the virtues of Inuit heroism and family feeling, but it acknowledges the inevitable impingement of white values and technology.

A more complex treatment of this theme appears in Houston's *Frozen fire,* a book that takes the romantic approach to adventure by stressing possibilities rather than the probabilities found in a realistic novel like *Sons of the Arctic* or *Ook-Pik. Frozen fire* traces the adventures of Matthew Morgan and his Inuit friend, Kayak. They set out to rescue Matthew's father, a prospector who has gone down with his helicopter pilot in an Arctic snow storm. Naturally, their journey turns out to be a test in the Perilous Land. They run out of fuel for their snowmobile, suffer through a blizzard, and lose all of the equipment.

At this point, they meet a helper figure, an Inuit wildman living in an underground house. The descent underground has the usual symbolic significance because it provides the boys, who would have starved, with a new chance for survival. In addition, shortly after they rise from the underground house, Matt discovers gold, thus completing a quest his father had failed to

achieve in spite of years of effort. This is, of course, the concrete sign of success in white society, for Matt has here replaced the father, just as the Inuit hunters did in the tales I discussed. Matt also endures the trial of meeting a polar bear, an especially potent sign of his bravery because he has had an obsessive and terrifying dream about them. Finally, they are rescued when both Inuit and white boy use their backgrounds to invent ways of signalling a passing plane. The perilous journey naturally ends with a reunion with the father.

As typical as the recitation of the heroic pattern makes the book sound, *Frozen fire* is exciting and fresh because Houston manipulates the pattern well and invests every component, including the most romantically improbable, with social significance. Houston does this by using the boys as representatives of their cultures. Matt is the white man whose knowledge of the land has been acquired only by reading geology books. Kayak is the Inuit still possessing traditional survival skills. He has great contempt for white culture because he sees its irrelevance, in the form of a geography lesson about Afghanistan, and its destructiveness, in the person of an uncle, whose drinking makes him unfit for traditional life and incapable of living among whites. Kayak teaches Matt about the relativity of values when they become stranded. He shows that the knowledge of ice possessed by his grandfather, a man once dismissed as ignorant by a white man, is more essential than the subjects taught in a white school. He also shows that a flintstone that can be used to start a fire is more valuable than the gold Matt finds.

The criticism of white culture is extended in the person of the romantically improbable helper, an Inuit who wears an armful of watches without hands to indicate contempt for the white man's artificial sense of time. In the best tradition of figures from European folklore, he presents his guests with three gifts. The first, a plastic bow, breaks when Matt tries to use it, showing that the white man's things are, at least in this land, the junk he calls them. The second gift, caribou meat and a snow knife, are useful elements of traditional Inuit culture. The third gift, the direction home, is the wisdom of a man who understands his place on earth, the wisdom the hero often acquires from his journey out of the normal world.

Although Houston is highly critical, he does not naively or entirely dismiss white culture. Neither boy, after all, achieves the original quest, the rescue of Matt's father. (That comes through the father's courage and another Inuit's aid.) Houston uses irony meaningfully by having the would-be rescuers require rescue. His brilliant touch, however, is to have the rescue of the boys depend upon a combination of Inuit and white skills. Matthew, remembering a lesson his father had taught him, flashes a distress signal with a mirror. A passing plane radios the rescue party, but it locates the boys only because Kayak has drawn a ring of seal blood, reminiscent of a target, around their shelter. Both cultures thus display knowledge of "magic," effective ways of dealing with

the environment.[13] Houston complicates the issue even more. First, the mirror flashing is an Arizona Indian trick. He thus suggests that whites can adapt the knowledge of indigenous peoples to changing circumstances. Secondly, the rescue depends upon the white man's technology. He thus shows that he is not a Luddite seeking to smash all technological advances in the Arctic. He is, however, seeking to show the limits of technology — snowmobiles prove dangerous by breaking the leg of Kayak's father and by stranding the boys, accidents that would not have happened with the traditional dogsled. He is also trying to suggest that Inuit and white must learn to value each other, as do Matt and Kayak because of their perilous journey. The two boys mature and become, as Kayak announces, brothers who are eager to comfort and aid each other.

Houston has returned to these concerns in his most recent book, *Black diamonds,* a novel that is, like so many sequels, extremely disappointing. The episodes in it are more romantically improbable than and lack the thematic richness of those in *Frozen fire.* Matt, Kayak, Mr. Morgan, and Charlie, the pilot, set out to find the gold Matt discovered near the wildman's underground home. Improbably, they take a golden knife the wildman leaves as a sign to go far west. Eventually they discover oil, but the oil catches fire and the two boys are only saved by some mysterious helper. Stranded in the remotest of places, the boys and men suddenly find hope when a party of old-fashioned Inuit, whose possessions indicate that they are absolutely free from the influences of white culture, advance towards them showing friendship.

Obviously, the message is that survival depends upon an understanding of the traditional relationship with the land. The book is weak, in spite of an encounter with a polar bear and one with dangerous walruses, because the boys do not come to significant new understanding as a result of their adventures, because the episodes do not allow us to evaluate white culture and its impact on Inuit life, and because the journey into the Perilous Land is incomplete. At the end, we have no sense that the journey has been other than a mechanical device for creating melodramatic adventures. The boys have journeyed out into the land, but they have not passed significant tests created by that land. They will have to return with the help of the old-fashioned Inuit, obviously a potentially important point. Just as obviously, Houston is saving it for inclusion in another book. Until we have that book, *Black diamonds* will stand as testimony that a writer cannot give freshness to the tale of Arctic heroism simply by increasing the romantic improbabilities or by changing the nature of the dangers men can face in the arctic.

Houston's current failure cannot obscure the fact that he is the most outstanding children's writer in a field that has produced some worthwhile work. Houston and the other Canadian writers who have employed the Arctic as a setting should not, in fact, be known primarily as genre writers. They have,

it is true, felt the shaping force of their Arctic setting in the limited variety of incidents in their work. They have also, however, used the limitation to advantage by producing works that are generally plausible, dramatically compelling, and thematically significant. Their exciting tales do not contain the simple adventures of pedestrian romances. In their work, the Arctic is the Perilous Land: it tests the worth of individuals who enter it. By using the pattern of heroic adventure — separation, initiation, return — these writers imply that the only worthwhile identity is the one a person earns. But the meaning of many Arctic tales goes beyond this vision of individual maturity. Especially in the tales treating Inuit in contact with whites, the pattern of heroism is the basis for an appreciation of the value of a culture far different from our own. These tales thus celebrate Inuit life as materialistically simple but reverent towards life. Those who journey vicariously with the heroes through the Perilous Land learn that the worth of a people depends not on what they possess but on how they relate to others and to their environment. They can elsewhere learn no profounder lesson.

NOTES

[1]*The hero with a thousand faces,* 2nd ed. (1968; rpt., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 30.

[2]*The republic of childhood,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 161-62.

[3]*Tikta'liktak: an Eskimo legend* (Don Mills: Longmans, 1965).

[4]*Sons of the Arctic* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1965), p. 38.

[5]*Songs of the dream people: chants and images from the Indians and Eskimos of North America* (Don Mills: Longmans, 1972), [p. iii].

[6]*Long claws: an Arctic adventure* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), p. 15.

[7]A snowy owl also appears in *Frozen fire* at a climactic moment, Matt's discovery of gold.

[8]*Wolf run: a caribou Eskimo tale* (Don Mills: Longmans, [1971]).

[9]*The white archer: an Eskimo legend* (Don Mills: Longmans, 1967).

[10]*Akavak: an Eskimo journey* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968), n.p.

[11]*Ook-Pik: the story of an Eskimo boy* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1952).

[12]As the Mountie notes (p. 144), this is the only way to translate the word "plane." For a mythic Inuit hero who returns home by air, see James Houston, *Kiviok's magic journey: an Eskimo legend* (Don Mills: Longmans, 1973).

[13]*Frozen fire: a tale of courage* (1977; rpt., Harmondsworth: Puffin Books, 1979), pp. 128, 132, 134.

Ray Jones *teaches at David Thompson University Centre, Nelson, B.C., and writes a special column on Canadian Children's Literature for the* Children's Literature Association Quarterly.