

AMERINDIAN CHALLENGES

Dream quest, Amy Jo Annick. Annick Press, 1987. 155 pp. \$7.95, \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920303-86-2, 0-920303-84-6.

This book is the third in the publisher's Spirit Bay series, which is devoted to juvenile literature and films with Amerindian themes. Its two stories, "The big save" and "Hack's choice", have both been adapted from television films of the same titles, an asset as far as the book's illustration is concerned: the interweaving of text and photographs adds considerably to the atmosphere of the stories. Better reproduction quality would have made the contribution even more effective.

The tales themselves are sensitive probes into the challenges faced by adolescent Amerindians growing up between two worlds. "The big save" tackles two of these: that of a lad who has returned to the reserve after having been shunted from one white foster home to another for most of his young life; and that of a girl who desperately wants to be in the swim of things, but who finds that the traditional knowledge she has acquired from her grandmother has an unexpected pertinence in the world of motorized transport and other such technologies. The author is careful not to point fingers as she spins out her tale by alternating between the inner worlds of each of the two protagonists. Their uncertainties and defensive reactions are surface manifestations of their gropings toward the truth of their identities, and the nature of the roles they will fill in their communities. The fact that their searches are unselfconscious and far more important for their futures than they themselves have any way of realizing provides an edge to the story line, and avoids the sentimental. One small quibble: why would Rabbit, "citified" as he was, think it was necessary to mark trees so as not to lose his way when he left the breakdown bus to find help? Surely the bus must have been on a road, and surely the road could not have been that difficult to follow, even in a snowstorm.

"Hack's choice" deals much more directly with the question of cultural identity. Based on the story "Dream quest" by Michael G. Doxtator, it maintains continuity with the first story by taking two of its characters and shifting their roles: Hack, who has been secondary, now comes to centre stage, while his friend Rabbit (he who had been repatriated from the foster homes) moves to the sidelines. The plot revolves around Hack's hero-worship of a hockey-playing relative who returns to the reserve at the time that Hack is on the verge of becoming an adult. The powerful pull of the glamorous world of sport is pitted against the expectations of Hack's family tradition that he will become a medicine man. But it is not only Hack who is growing up: Rabbit, observing from the sidelines as he now is,

develops a clear-sightedness that contrasts sharply with his earlier confusions, even as he displays an alienation from his traditional roots that might never be bridged.

These gentle stories, profoundly rooted as they are in the Canadian experience, indicate our own national coming of age.

Olive Patricia Dickason teaches in the Department of History at the University of Alberta.

A HOPE FOR CHANGE



Zanu, Carol Matas. Fifth House, 1986. 116 pp. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-920079-27-X; **The Fusion Factor**, Carol Matas. Fifth House, 1986. 117 pp. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-920079-25-3; **Lisa**, Carol Matas. Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987. 122 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88619-167-7.

A group known as “Manitoba Educators for Social Responsibility” endorses the second of these adventure stories as a vehicle for promoting classroom discussion of the nuclear threat and for stimulating and encouraging its readers. While the subject matter of the other two stories is not the nuclear threat, clearly

in all three Carol Matas is interested in promoting the idea in her young readers that they do have a responsibility to other people, at family, community, national and world levels, and in encouraging them to believe that they have the power to make significant changes. The adolescent protagonists are placed in circumstances where their present way of life is threatened, and they bravely, in the face of death, struggle against powerful regimes and succeed in changing the course of history. Each story centres on a spirited girl with a quick temper and a willingness to enter into physical combat, who at considerable risk to herself, engages in a mission of rescue — thus breaking across the old stereotype of the male as rescuer.

In *Zanu* and *The Fusion Factor*, the same protagonist, Rebecca, a 12-year-old Winnipeg girl, by actively following up on her concern for another person — one a stranger, the other her school enemy — is accidentally propelled into the future through a time machine. The two books present a future world of sterility, computerized surveillance, and pollution.

Matas emphasizes that the future scenarios she depicts are not unalterable. At the conclusion of each of these two books, Rebecca returns to the