

Not surprisingly, given Houston's extraordinary knowledge of Arctic life, the book is at its most effective when it simply describes the Inuit ways, whether it be building igloos, listening to a shaman's hypnotizing tales or simply playing Inuit football, a game in which there are no rules, no winners and no losers. As Jon is told, "They wouldn't think it right to win against their friends and neighbors. That would make everyone feel bad."

Yet, powerful as the description of the Arctic people and their ways is, it is ultimately Houston's genius for capturing and evoking the place itself that defines his achievement. The second part of the book is devoted primarily to a spring ice fishing expedition by Jon, his girlfriend Panee, and Panee's brother Pudlo. And what begins as a meticulous description of the mechanics of such a journey quickly changes to a gripping narrative of survival when, quite literally, the wind changes. It is during this brilliantly etched storm that Jon finally discovers the inherent magic of this land and, in the process, his own ability to survive.

James Houston is a remarkably gifted man: writer, artist, sculptor and glass designer being but a few of his talents. His book too is many things: a novel of initiation, a collection of Inuit customs, a travelogue, a delightfully mature love story, but above all, it is a celebration of the land that Houston knows so well. Like Jon, the audience comes to understand and respect the severity of this place, but also its simplicity and basic honesty. Jon leaves Nanuvik hoping, through his music, to make others hear and feel it. But when he leaves, his year complete, he also realizes that he, the alien outsider, can never truly be part of it. Fittingly, the last thing Jon sees from the plane is a football game where everyone plays but not to win, a final reminder of the true Inuit magic. The real world is not so blessed.

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CHRISTMAS OFFERINGS ON NATIVE LIFE

The Huron carol. Jean de Brébeuf. Illus. Francis Tyrrell. Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990. 24 pp., \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88619-280-3; **Baseball bats for Christmas.** Michael Arvaaluk Kusugak. Illus. Vldyana Krykorka. Annick Press, 1990. 20 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 155037-144-4.

The question of appropriation of Native voice that inevitably surfaces with the publication of *The Huron carol* has been anticipated by the publishers' provision of an *imprimatur* from Max Gros-Louis, Grand Chief of the Huron-Wendate nation. The book's format is elegant: coloured illustrations in the shape

of horseshoe (or longhouse) arches are framed by repeated blue and white motifs of animals and angels. The text, attractively arranged, is easy to read. However, even Max Gros-Louis' assurance that the Huron people are "pleased that this book tells a part of our common history" does not quite still my uneasiness about this work.

The publisher's claim that Father Brébeuf, one of the patron saints of Canada, "is best remembered for this telling of the Christmas story in the setting of the Hurons" is patently ridiculous, but the carol has certainly maintained a steady popularity. We are here provided with one verse in Huron and two in eighteenth century French, as well as with the music, and J.E. Middleton's 1926 text.

A literal translation by John Stechley appears in *Columbo's Book of Canada* (1978). It suggests that Middleton took considerable liberties with Brébeuf's text. Gichi Manitou, the infant's rabbit skin robe, the offerings of fox and beaver pelts, were all the product of Middleton's post-colonial attitude towards Natives. Brébeuf's original carol opened not with "all the birds had fled" but with "The oki spirit who enslaved us has fled/Do not listen to him for he corrupts . . . our thoughts." Obviously Middleton's is the version we are familiar with, hence the publishers' attachment to it. However, a new translation might have contributed to our understanding of history and appreciation of Native culture.

Tyrell's illustrations, too, seem to be locked into a very dated attitude towards Natives. We are told that the constellations that appear in the framing borders are historically accurate, as are the costumes of the Kootnay, Sioux and Shawnee wise men. But the faces of the angel choir and the virgin, Gichi Manitou and the chiefs, all have a sad cookie-cutter sameness to them that conforms to the stereotype of the impassive Indian. The humanity that the nativity story is anchored in is nowhere evident in these icy, still figures.

The main illustrations in beautiful tones of brown and beige with small touches of colour are carefully sprinkled with snowflakes and feathers and curling wisps of smoke. Nevertheless, something is lost. For instance, the braids of Native men and women are symbolically important for they represent restoration of order to the universe. Here they merely float decoratively about the heads of the heavenly host. Tyrell's interpretation of traditional Native life has all the beauty of high romance, but is neither novel nor joyful. The sternness in Brébeuf's text, also evident in the eerie baritone rendition of the carol recently released by Native singer Tom Jackson, would have been more appropriate. Lester and Orpen Dennys might have asked a Native artist such as Daphne Odjig or Jane Ash Poitras to illustrate their Christmas offering.

Baseball bats for Christmas indicates how far we've come in recent years. In 1972, Lyn Cook's *Toys from the sky* described the Christmas airlift into the Arctic: young Inuit spoke in stilted, "my-heart-soars" English, and one illustration showed the supposedly Inuit baby Jesus laced into an Indian baby bundle.

Baseball bats for Christmas has an Inuit author, and an illustrator who stayed in Rankin Inlet while they worked on the book, so both voice and pictures have the ring of truth about them.

This is Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak's second book with illustrator Vladyana Krykorka, but this time they are without high-flyer Robert Munsch's collaboration, and the difference is immediately evident. The story line doesn't have the mythic undertones of *A promise is a promise*, but it offers instead a glimpse into the contact era of the 1950's in Canada's north. *A promise is a promise* has a contemporary setting with a legendary structure, but *Baseball bats for Christmas* draws on Kusugak's recent memories in a way that will be a welcome relief to Native parents and educators.

Back in the 1940's and 50's, northern bush pilots brought Christmas trees into the new Arctic settlements, a gesture intended to help recently Christianized Inuit feel part of the Christmas spirit. Nobody has ever explored what this well-intentioned gesture meant to Inuit. Kusugak doesn't belabour the fact that the Christmas trees had no significance for Inuit; he simply describes how half a dozen spindly evergreens dropped by bush pilot Rocky Parsons in front of Arvaarluk's hut are ignored until one of the boys realizes that they can be used to make baseball bats.

In the interim between Parson's visit and the first baseball game, the reader gets a vivid picture of Christmas in an Arctic settlement. In recent years, the importance of the bush pilot, the Hudson Bay trader, and the missionary has diminished somewhat, but Inuit have retained the custom of offering one another somewhat unusual, often second-hand, gifts. Arvaarluk's father gives away his only telescope and receives a wild dog in return; the story of how he eventually catches and tames his Christmas present is delightful.

Vladyana Krykorka's illustrations are slightly more subdued here than in *A promise is a promise*; the children's clothing, a mixture of fur and cloth, is not quite so bright but this is appropriate for the time. Her pink and red and turquoise mid-winter skies can compete any day with Ted Harrison's, though.

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TWO SPIRITED TALES

Rebel run. D. Harold Turner. Gage, 1989. (1977 First edition published under title **To hang a rebel**) 262 pp., \$4.25 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7018-X; **Rebellion.** W.J.Scanlan. Stoddart, 1989. 150 pp., \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2271-8.

Well-written children's historical fiction allows the reader to travel back in time to experience an event and an era with an immediacy and degree of in-