The outsider within: The portrayal of the Native child in some recent Canadian children's stories

Norma Rowen

Résumé: *Analyse de quatre romans qui traitent des problèmes des enfants autochtones. Trois d'entre eux ont été écrits par des Blancs et l'autre par un Métis. L'ensemble laisse voir une évolution vers la présentation du point de vue indien ou métis.*

This article's main concern is to examine the presentation of the Native child in some current Canadian children's fiction. Through this examination I hope to explore other, wider questions about children's literature itself and the limits writers of it have to encounter and manoeuvre with.

The children's literature of our culture is in its origins white and middle class and so is very much concerned with models, with presenting versions of experience that will educate the child into thinking, feeling and behaving in a way that this culture would approve of. Among these models and patterns there are two which seem to be particularly significant, both in general and for the story of the Native child. First, there is the almost universal stress placed by critics and commentators on the need in children's literature for a happy ending, for the successful solution of difficulties by the child protagonist. Perhaps this idea receives its most decisive expression in *The uses of enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim's study of fairy tales. In this book, he suggests that the fairy tale is particularly suitable for children because of its happy resolution, maintaining that the assurance thus provided better enables the child to work through material that may be painful or difficult. On the other hand, he criticizes some of Hans Andersen's more modern fairy tales for failing to provide such assurance. In his view such tales as "The little mermaid" and "The steadfast tin soldier" are "beautiful but extremely sad," and do not ultimately convey the necessary feeling of consolation (37). Most writers of children's stories seem to share Bettelheim's views and make efforts to end their stories positively, giving the child some element of hope to take away, to help him or her confront the battles lying ahead with energy and heart.

A second major concern of critics and commentators is the instilling into our children of humane and liberal values, and this leads to distinct views on how disadvantaged and minority groups should be portrayed, especially racial minorities. Macha Rudman, in her book *Children's literature: An issues ap-*

proach, discusses the whole question of such minorities in children's fiction. Focussing especially on blacks and Native Americans, she points out the crucial need in stories about these groups for images that will erase negative stereotypes, build up a sense of pride, and convey hope that a child from such a minority can have a happy and successful life. Thus, she is against a continual stress on the missing father and the broken home in the portrayal of the black family, for instance (191). In her comments on Native Americans, while cautioning against the over-idealization and sentimentalizing that can sometimes occur, she stresses the importance of stories that present images of survival and success. Thus, for instance, she would prefer a story about a Native tribe that has retained its autonomy, and control over its money supplies, to stories of hardship on the reserve or in the city, which she tends to characterize as "hard", "ugly" and "sad" (276).

While one would certainly agree in general with the views of Bettelheim and Rudman, one cannot help being aware that when the Native child becomes the subject of literature for children more problems may arise than these critics perhaps allow for. For the situation of these earliest Americans has in it elements that are particularly intractable. Often confined to the edges of society on the reserve, where their culture has been slowly eroding from lack of space and context, they yet find it hard to escape. To abandon the reserve and move into the white society that has taken over their former room is often to exchange a condition of imprisonment for one of exile. It is to move into ground that is not merely different but adverse, historically and intrinsically in opposition. Thus, the journey in can become identical with the journey out, until in the end there is nowhere that is not a place of alienation.

These elements of intractability, and the liability to a state of seemingly unresolvable internal exile which they involve, make stories about Native Americans more difficult to manoeuvre into the patterns of hope, positive images, and success we have come to require of literature for children. Often, it seems, such stories cannot be created without some measure of simplification and avoidance, some softening of the harsher and darker aspects of Indian experience, aspects that make the journey to positive things like love, hope and achievement, while not impossible, difficult and complex in a way that a more sheltered consciousness may not easily grasp. And in this connection it is relevant to point out that most children's books about Native people are not merely written by white authors but for white children, so that the child within the book must be tailored to suit the child outside the book, the reader, to ensure at least a measure of identification.

With such issues and considerations in mind, this paper will now look at some recent Canadian young people's fiction that takes the contemporary Native child as its subject. It will focus especially on four works, three by white authors and one by a Métis, one of the few Native people to have actually given voice to their own story. The three "white" books have been chosen partly be-

cause they are representative, but also because they seem to illustrate a trend, a movement towards a different way of writing the story of the Native child that becomes increasingly evident in the 1980s. The Métis story is included, among other reasons, for purposes of comparison, so that we may assess how closely these voices from the outside have managed to penetrate Native experience.

The first book to be explored is *The ghost dance caper* published in 1978 and written by Monica Hughes, a well-known and respected author of children's books. Its main figure is fourteen year old Tom Lightfoot. The product of a marriage between an upper-class white woman and a successful Native lawyer, he is having problems establishing his cultural identity. Upset by his parents' constant quarrelling, he turns to his Indian great-grandfather for help and tries to get him to conduct a ghost-dance ceremony to help him find his "manitou", the animal spirit which, according to Indian lore, helped a person find out who he was. To facilitate the performance of the ceremony, Tom and his white friend Pete steal a medicine bag from the local museum and take it to the old man.

We immediately notice in this story the employment of two motifs or devices which continually recur in books about the Native child. The first is the placing at the centre of the work of a child pair, in this case Tom and Pete. Often, though not always, of different race, these children act as the main vehicle through which themes of racial and cultural confrontation are developed. The second motif is that of the parental void. Throughout the book, we note that no help is forthcoming from Tom's parents, and in later stories about the Native child we will see this parental void increase until the child protagonists become virtual orphans. However, for some of them, including Tom, this void will be partially filled by another figure: the wise Native elder. In Tom's case this is of course his great-grandfather.

In its use of these motifs and its general handling of the story we perceive that this is a work which meets many of the requirements outlined by Bettelheim and Rudman. Its presentation of its Native characters and their way of life is uniformly positive. Their ancient religion is treated with respect and Tom's great grandfather is the moral centre of the book. In him is summed up all that is best in the culture of his people: its closeness to nature, its sense of balance and its deep spirituality. In contrast to him, and emphasizing the positivity of this portrayal, we have the figure of his grandson, Tom's father, whose move into the white man's world has left him alienated and lost. Ultimately, it is from the great-grandfather, from the Native source, that the positive ending is generated. For, finding out about the theft of the medicine bag, he insists after the ghost dance ceremony that Tom put it back in the case he got it from, and it is while the boy is carrying out this task that he encounters his manitou, a bat, who is, like himself, a creature of two worlds.

We also notice in the work how carefully Hughes tries to get close to her Native characters and their world. This is particularly apparent in her treatment of the pair. In some earlier works, like John Craig's *No word for goodbye*, for instance, published in 1967, it tended to be the white boy who occupied the centre ground. Thus, in Craig's work, it is Ken Warren, the white member of the central pair, from whose point of view we see things. He is the focalizer and his Native friend is the focalized, invariably the object of his observation, whose own consciousness is never penetrated. In Hughes' book this situation is dramatically reversed. Now it is the Métis boy in whose consciousness we find ourselves situated. He is the focalizer and it is through his eyes that we view the white boy, and are called upon to judge him and experience an increasing sense of the hardness and carelessness that lie beneath Pete's veneer of friendliness. This shift in consciousness serves more general purposes too, making us sympathise and identify with Tom, and bringing us closer to Native life as we accompany him to the reserve and undergo with him all the intricate rituals of the ghost dance ceremony.

Here then is an interesting attempt to dissolve the distance between Native protagonist and white reader, to break down the barriers between them. In coming to an ultimate assessment of the book as a study of the Native child, however, one must ask how far these attempts are successful. To what extent has the gap between Native and white worlds really been bridged? And how close do we actually come to inhabiting a Native consciousness? Unfortunately, despite the book's good intentions it seems to me that its success is quite limited and that the distance remains.

In the first place, in spite of our trips to the reserve and participation in the ghost dance ceremony, no real sense of closeness to and intimacy with the Native world and its culture is ever developed. For, aside from the figure of the great-grandfather, the life of the reservation and the nature of its community remain largely undescribed. Even the ghost dance ceremony itself seems to take place in a vacuum. Supposedly an important communal event, during its course we see and hear no-one in any detail except Tom and his great-grandfather. The rest of the participants are just lay-figures, generalized images half-shrouded in darkness. Cut off from context in this way, the old man himself begins to seem unreal, a kind of nostalgic dream.

The more important problem, however, lies with Tom himself. Through him the Native point-of-view is supposedly invoked, but there seems little in his consciousness that could not just as easily belong to a white boy. The dominating force in his world is his white mother, and all the circumstances of his life – milk and cookies, robot toys, sleep-overs with friends – are those of a white middle-class child. Most of his ideas and attitudes belong to this milieu as well. Perhaps most crucially, he doesn't seem to suffer any deep experience of racism. True, we are *told* that he does. Reference is made to his feeling of isolation in school and to his being the recipient of some racial insults; but

these things remain largely undramatized. The insults are generally unspecified, and when they are, they seem relatively mild: war-whoops at the word "Indian", for instance. It does not seem that such things would cause much damage, nor does the general impression of Tom's personality suggest that any really deep damage has been sustained. Friendly, attractive and obliging, he gives off none of the atmosphere of the isolated or traumatized being. In the end, he does not seem to be an outsider within the white world, but an insider, a fairly well-integrated and accepted boy who is just going through a period of stress with his parents.

The ghost dance caper was written in 1978. Joan Danielson Fossey's *The Indian summer of Arty Bigjim and Johnny Jack* was written only three years later, in 1981, but it indicates that in that short time considerable developments have taken place in the treatment of the Native child by white authors, developments that will be sustained throughout the decade and that will make the books written during this period very different from earlier ones. These differences begin with the authors. Unlike Monica Hughes, Joan Danielson Fossey has had close experience of Indian life, having taught Native students in a number of Northern Ontario schools; also the existence of a preface to her work by Johnny Yesno, a Native journalist, suggests that she has also sought some Native input.

The effects of her closer contact with Native life are immediately apparent in her story. In the first place there is her treatment of the pair. Monica Hughes shifted the centre to the Native boy. In Fossey's work, however, the white element has disappeared from the pair altogether. Now both members are Native, the Arty and Johnny of the title, and hence the two main roles associated with the pair have been absorbed by the Native characters. Now both focalizer and focalized, observer and observed, are Indian. What this change indicates is that the major area of tension and conflict is seen as having shifted. It is no longer located between the Native and white worlds but within the Native world itself. The differences between Arty and Johnny indicate the nature of this conflict. Arty, who is the observing consciousness, embodies that aspect of the Native psyche that is less hostile to the white world and more open to finding a place in it. Johnny, the object of his attention and anxiety, represents the opposite instinct. Exposed to the white world already through fosterage, he has adopted an attitude of adamant refusal. He wants above all to be reabsorbed into the Native world and retrieve a home within it.

The background against which this pair is presented has also undergone drastic change. Tom was a child of the white middle-class and only visited the reserve on the weekends. Arty and Johnny, on the other hand, live on the reserve and only visit the white world when they are bussed to the local school. As for the reserve itself, though it is a refuge for Arty and Johnny, it is portrayed as a fallen world where community, order and all human comfort have been destroyed by the ravages of liquor and demoralization. In fact, it has be-

come the very source and manifestation of the parental void, which has now widened into an abyss, a yawning gap of neglect and dereliction. Johnny's parents have long ago disappeared, and Arty's are either drunk or ineffective. It is true that, as in Hughes' book, there is a counterbalancing Native elder figure, in this case Arty's grandfather, who embodies and preserves ancient Native spiritual values. But he has now left the reserve, driven away by all the drinking and fighting, and has retreated into the bush to practise his traditional life of fishing and trapping there. When they get into trouble at the white school the boys go and visit him to seek guidance. They find his stories and rituals hard to follow, however, and when Arty contemplates living wild in the bush like him he realises that he can't. He no longer has the necessary skills. Arty and Johnny too are no longer the attractive figures with whom a child might easily identify. Johnny is a sullen delinquent who ends up smearing his feces over the school toilets, while Arty is a manipulator who gets along at school by flashing his charming smile at people, especially the woman teacher. For both, the white school is a terrible place of alienation. Johnny is the most at sea. Instead of coming up with answers in a quiz, for instance, he simply writes down the questions in the beautiful copperplate hand he has picked up somewhere. Arty, more familiar with the ropes, survives by various dodges. Here he is instructing Johnny on a studying ruse:

> Open the book and stare at it. Make funny faces sometimes like you's trying hard. If you get into a tight spot, go to the john. They don't stop you from going to the john if you look like you're gonna bust a kidney. (10)

Clearly, the world of school is hostile territory. Equally clearly, when the boys flee from it after the feces-smearing incident there is nowhere else for them to go.

Indeed, after the visit to Arty's grandfather, things only get worse. A man dies when Johnny throws a rock at him and the boys flee again. Eventually they gain a respite when they are taken under the wing of 'Enri, a retired judge turned magician. But for a while their fate remains in doubt.

In this book, then, we have presented, with an authenticity and poignancy not encountered in the earlier work, an image of the plight of the Native child adrift in the modern world. But what of positive portrayals of minority groups and the element of hope? How does the work cope with these requirements? And does it manage, in its portrayal of these two troubled boys, to create characters with whom readers (and for child readers this is especially important), can find some measure of sympathy? Frank as it is in its presentation of dereliction and difficulty, I believe that the book does deal successfully with some of these problems, especially in its creation of sympathy for its Native characters. Thus, in spite of their beleaguered situation, they are always allowed their dignity and their insight. This is even true of Arty's father, who has been almost destroyed by liquor. Sadly and succinctly, he sums up his sit-

uation. "In your schools," he says to 'Enri, "you took away what I was. In your towns you have no place for what I am. I have little that I can give to [my son] unless I find what I lost" (117). Later in the book, too, we are introduced to a new and different kind of Native figure in an alert and strong group of activists who are fighting to get back some of their lost land. As for Arty and Johnny, they both turn out to be boys we can feel for and deeply like. Thus, beneath Johnny's sullen exterior we discover a vulnerable sadness. And with Arty, the manipulativeness and suspect chameleon flexibility which he displays in the white world turn into a profound capacity for emotional and imaginative sympathy when he is with his own people, a primary example being his constant care and love for his friend.

All these effects are very well-created. However, in its efforts to produce a hopeful solution to the boy's difficulties, the book is rather less successful. True, everything eventually works out for them. Brought to trial under the guidance of 'Enri, a kind of white grandfather figure, they find that they are not murderers after all. The man they hit died of a heart attack, not from the blow of the rock. They have been granted a reprieve, the Indian summer of the title. Finally, Arty is put in the care of 'Enri, while Johnny is allowed to go back to the bush to live with Arty's grandfather. Unfortunately, however, both these happy conclusions seem unreal and unconvincing. 'Enri, the judge turned magician, is an unlikely figure. He has a rather literary air about him. With his big house and kindly old retainers, he is like a character out of fantasy, a fairy godfather suddenly jetted in from another sphere to effect miraculous rescue. And Johnny's return to the grandfather, his total withdrawal into the bush, has a wishful quality about it. It seems like an escape into an imagined idyll of the past, from which present realities can be forever excluded. Thus, the presentation of plight in this book is entirely convincing and authentic, but the presentation of solution is not. Thoroughly drawn into the boys' predicament, we are unable to give the same credence to the way they are enabled to escape it. We sympathise with these boys, but in the end we find it hard to believe in the kind of hope the book offers for them, and feel that the difficulties of their situation remain unaddressed.

The increased striving for authenticity that characterizes Fossey's book appears also in later books of the eighties, such as Amy Jo Cooper's "The Big Save", a story in *Dream quest* published in 1987 as part of the Spirit Bay series. As with Fossey's book, there is plenty of Native input, and it too has a central pair, Rabbit and Rose, who are entirely Native. Now, however, the story is set completely in the world of the reserve, with no white characters figuring in it at all, and, in a further interesting development, each member of the pair tells his/her own tale, thus becoming both observer and observed, focalizer and focalized. In this book, too, there is a parental void, and it has now grown even wider. In Fossey's work, the parents, though drunk and derelict, are still present; in "The Big Save" there are no longer any parents at all. Rabbit seems

never to have had any, and Rose's mother has long ago deserted her. As for the compensating grandparent, there was one, Rose's grandmother, but she too has now disappeared, spirited away into an old folks' home by white social workers.

The tension between the central pair suggests a conflict similar to that at work between Arty and Johnny. For though both Rose and Rabbit live on the reservation, they have arrived there from opposite directions. Rabbit has come from the white man's world where he has undergone several years of foster-age, and his identification with that world is strong. He hates the reservation with its ineffective little hockey team that has to use girls to make up the numbers. For Rose, on the other hand, as Rabbit contemptuously puts it, "the reserve is the big time" (30). She has come here from the bush where she has been living with her grandmother. Shy, and terrified of almost everyone, she longs for her past life and its solitude. Here again we experience the opposing pulls in the Native psyche of the white and Native worlds.

Thus far then, "The Big Save" echoes the themes and devices encountered in Fossey's book. In its solutions, however, it proves to be quite different. For between these works came the revelation of the experience of Richard Cardinal, the Métis boy who hanged himself at the age of seventeen, after having been assigned to over twenty different white foster homes. Faith in the efficacy of white adoption for Native children was now thoroughly shaken and some new thinking on the issue began. "The Big Save" bears the mark of these developments.

Briefly, its movement is away from the white world as a source of salvation and back to the Native world. Thus, the reserve undergoes a kind of rehabilitation. Although it is by no means seen as an unsullied natural Eden (its children have clearly experienced difficult times), nonetheless through the image of the children's hockey team the work projects the idea of the reserve as a community, and in Cheemo, the hockey team's coach, to whom the children are all close, we have a substitute for the parents who have been lost.

The movement back to the Native world is also apparent in the portrayal of the central pair, for it decisively suggests that the sounder personality belongs to the child who has maintained roots in the Native world. Rabbit, fostered in the white world, has succumbed to a deep hatred of his own race. To him they are losers. This is the source of his contempt for Rose. "She made me mad," he says at one point, "just standing there, not fighting or sorry or anything: just taking it" (28). Inevitably, of course, this contempt involves him too in a hatred of himself. And this self-hatred distorts his whole personality, driving him to constant bullying and boasting, and domineering behaviour. Rose, on the other hand, is in better shape. Her early life, it will be recalled, has been spent in the bush with her grandmother, and she is being fostered on the reserve, among her own people. Gradually, in this atmosphere, Rose is finding enough emotional support to gain a little more confidence.

The most emphatic endorsement of Native values over white ones, however, comes as the story reaches its climax. Returning from playing a match on another reserve, the hockey team is stranded in the winter bush when their bus breaks down. Cheemo goes off to get help, and does not return. Rabbit goes in for individual heroics, walking off alone into the snow to search for Cheemo. But it is Rose who actually saves them, precisely through the closeness to and knowledge of nature that living in the bush has given her. As the cold increases she gets them all to build a snow igloo in which they can find shelter. It is to this shelter that Rabbit himself is finally forced to return after nearly losing himself in the wilderness.

At this point in the story, too, another piece of Indian lore is used, this time to give us more insight into Rabbit and the plight he represents. The old Native legend of the windigo has already been frequently referred to in the book. The windigo is a mythical creature, a white giant created out of storm, a sort of abominable snowman whose ravening hunger drives him to hunt down human beings and devour their flesh. As Rabbit crouches outside the igloo trying to get in, the terrified children inside think for a moment that he is the windigo. And instantly we perceive the likeness. Living in the white man's world, we realize, has turned Rabbit into a kind of iceman, a creature formed out of desolation, with a ravening emotional void inside him. But the symbolism here has deeper implications too, and behind Rabbit another and more formidable figure is shadowed in. The ultimate Windigo, we realise, is the white man, and assimilation with him is death.

Eventually, of course, Rabbit is able to enter the igloo, and in a symbolic sense, begin the process of rejoining his people, while Rose becomes more confident of her own powers. Both these gains are small and tentative, appropriately child-sized steps towards finding a personal and cultural identity. It is in this smallness that much of the story's final air of authenticity lies.

In the three works so far considered we have seen a range of approaches develop in the white attempt to present the experience of the Native child, a range that I think one could fairly say suggests an increasing concern for authenticity, and an increasing sensitivity to Native voices and concerns themselves. How close, however, do these works, even the most recent ones, actually come to the realities and psychological truth of Native experience? It is perhaps now time to explore this question more thoroughly by looking at a work written by a Native American, to listen at last to a voice from the inside. Very few such works exist, but among the most striking of those is *In search of April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton, a Manitoba Métis. Written as a book for young people, it was published in 1983 by Pemmican, one of the few Native presses, and instantly became a best-seller. Obviously written out of its author's own cultural observations, it nonetheless contains a number of familiar elements. Thus, we are again confronted with a central pair, this time two Métis sisters, April and her younger sibling, Cheryl. And once again we are ex-

posed to the parental void, which opens up when the sisters, aged 4 and 6, are removed from the care of their drunken parents. In this work, however, both these motifs are invested with an anguish and intensity that seem to make them quite new. For once they have been taken away from their parents, the sisters find themselves totally on their own. Since they are not wholly Indian, they have no access to the world of the reserve. They are cultural as well as personal orphans. Nor is there even the ghost or shadow of a grandparent to step into the gap. Instead, it is filled by official caregivers, the officers of the Children's Aid Society. The substitution is symbolically suggested in a dream April has just after the separation. In the dream she has been trying to get back to her parents but is always prevented by some obstacle. Finally she finds her access to them cleared and runs joyfully forward:

> I felt such relief, such happiness! Just as I was about to jump into their outstretched arms, I glanced up at their faces again. The faces had changed. They weren't my parents. They were the two social workers who had taken us away in the first place. (21)

When we turn to the presentation of the pair, we encounter a level of passion and complexity far surpassing anything so far met with, both in the closeness existing between its two members, and the radical and intense quality of the conflict between them. For, since they are each other's sole emotional support, the two sisters are so deeply entwined psychologically and emotionally that when they start to pull in opposite directions they seem to be about to destroy each other. Not merely sisters, they become Siamese twins, two separate heads straining from the body of a single predicament. The terms of the conflict are familiar. Again, it is centered on which heritage to take up, which life to live, white or Indian. In the event, light-skinned April chooses the white path, while Indian-looking Cheryl goes in the opposite direction. These choices echo those of Arty and Johnny or Rabbit and Rose, but they differ in one crucial respect. Neither April's nor Cheryl's choice turns out to be able to produce a viable life. In the end, both prove to be journeys into alienation.

April's desire to be white is fuelled by her anger against her parents and a destructive hatred of her Native side bred in her, as in Rabbit, by some brutal foster-home experience. She is particularly afraid of falling into what one social worker describes as "the Native girl syndrome:"

> It starts out with the fighting, the running away, . . . you get pregnant . . . or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution and in and out of jails." (46-7)

At her first opportunity, April makes an ultra-conventional white marriage to a rich young business man from Toronto, and goes on to live a conventional middle-class white life. It is a full life, jammed with people and social activities, like theatre visits, dinner parties and outings. But April moves through

it all like a ghost. Invisible barriers forever separate her from the people whose life she is supposed to be sharing, and morally she remains absolutely alone, an aloneness intensified by the fact that she is by now trying to separate herself from her Indian-looking sister. Eventually her marriage breaks up and, after receiving a hefty divorce settlement, she returns to her native Manitoba to think things over.

Cheryl's response to the racism she encounters is to identify strongly with the native side of her heritage. Academically brilliant and personally forceful, she goes to the University of Winnipeg, works in the Indian Friendship Centre, and makes her world with the people she finds there. But, ultimately, she too cannot sustain her life. Brought up in the white world, she has based her identification with the Indians and Métis on images drawn from the past, on stories like those of the dashing and high-spirited Métis buffalo hunters and the heroic prairie Indians of the nineteenth century. But it turns out that such images give her no way of coming to terms with the Indians and Métis of the present, the Main Street derelicts who seem to be beyond all help. The final blow comes when she meets up again with her father, whom she barely remembers, and of whom April has given her idealized accounts. She finds he is a creature of the gutter, a drunken bum who will do anything for some spare change. Partly because of the pressure he puts on her and partly because of her acute demoralization, she turns to prostitution and alcoholism. She has finally fallen into the dreaded "native girl syndrome". When April reproaches her, however, she points out that April too has been going in for a kind of prostitution, by marrying a man she did not love just because he was white:

> How did you buy that car out there? How April? You prostituted yourself when you took Bob's money, that's how. You never loved that man. You loved his money . . . .But you still came out of it with your pay. A nice big fat roll for a high-classed call-girl." (97)

The parity between them is perhaps symbolically suggested by the fact that April becomes the victim of the rape intended for Cheryl. In the end, Cheryl's demoralization and alcoholism prove too much for her, and she commits suicide by jumping off a bridge, just as the girls' mother, we learn, had done some years before. She has been reabsorbed into the fate of her people.

This is a story then that does not hold back in depicting for us the horrors that can overtake the life of the Native child. Its account of the pain of not belonging anywhere and of the ravages wrought by constant exposure to racism is delivered with a graphic and searing passion not encountered in any of the white works discussed. In particular, we are made much more aware, perhaps through the unique closeness of the pair, of how thoroughly such experiences attack and cripple the very core of the self, causing deep splits in the psyche that almost destroy the person undergoing them.

And yet the story can still find a way to end on a note of hope, a note, to quote Margaret Laurence, of "affirmation and resolve."[1] For the loss of her sis-

ter acts as a catharsis for April, releasing psychic energies that push her to try to reabsorb the Native half she has been rejecting, to try to find her own wholeness and move from the no-man's-land she has been inhabiting to territory that is genuinely her own. The closing sequences of the novel indicate that she will succeed. Visiting some of Cheryl's Indian friends, she becomes poignantly aware that for all their drunkenness and dereliction they have an integrity, warmth and, above all, a family connectedness that she can only envy. Determined now to strive for a better life for her people, she takes Cheryl's newly-discovered son to live with her and her new and sympathetic white boyfriend, and the book ends with the resurrection of the family group lost at its opening, but, significantly, on more integrated lines.

This victory, however, has been, again to quote Margaret Laurence, very "bitterly won". Its price is greater than any exacted in the previous books, involving as it does the death of one of the protagonists and the near destruction of the other. Pain, suffering and irreparable loss mark it in a way that separates it from the relatively damage-free resolutions of the other works considered.

Ultimately, of course, it is the price paid and the pain undergone that gives the book its truth, but one must also ask how they help it to function as children's or young people's literature. A look at its post-publication history suggests that in this respect the work has entirely self-destructed. Its presentation of rape, suicide and devastating alienation ensured its absence from the usual children's book outlets.[2] Instead, it is on the adult shelves of bookstores and libraries that we find it. The truth about the Native child at its bitterest is, it seems, a story not suitable for children.

This consideration of problems in the presentation of the Native child has raised many questions. Models and strategies have become sensitive and flexible but still, it seems, no white story can yet penetrate the more horrific and intense areas of the world of the Native child. Can, then, producing models of experience approved by educators and critics be reconciled with the obligation to tell the truth, when the material being dealt with is particularly painful and difficult? Or is there something outdated about the models? As suggested, they are generally white and middle class but children's literature lately seems to be trying to incorporate material that is ever less so. As our children are exposed to harsher realities we feel the necessity of including tougher material in stories for them. This survey of recent stories about Native children well illustrates the strains that such new impulses can produce in the forms of fiction, as they come into conflict with and try to accommodate themselves to more traditional ideas about the shape and nature of literature for children.

NOTES

1 These comments are cited on the back cover of Culleton's *April Raintree*, her revised version of her original work. (See bibliography for edition).

2 Culleton's rewriting of her original work, in which she softens some of the details of rape and violence, seems to have made no difference to the book's placing in libraries, etc.

WORKS CITED

Bettelheim, Bruno. 1976. *The uses of enchantment.* New York: Vintage Books-Random House, 1977.

Cooper, Amy Jo. "The Big Save." *Dream quest.* Spirit Bay Series. Toronto: Annick Press Ltd., 1987.

Craig, John. *No word for goodbye.* Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, Ltd., 1969.

Culleton, Beatrice. *In search of April Raintree.* Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1983.

---. *April Raintree.* Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1984.

Danielson Fossey, S. Joan. *The Indian Summer of Arty Bigjim and Johnny Jack.* Winnipeg: Gullmasters, 1981.

Hughes, Monica. *The ghost dance caper.* Don Mills: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1978.

Rudman, Macha. *Children's literature: An issues approach.* Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1976.

Norma Rowen *who has taught fantasy and children's literature at York University, is a regular contributor to the CBC radio program* Ideas.