White on Red

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A Horse for Running Buffalo, Madeline Freeman. Illust. Allan Daniel. Scholastic-Tab, 1974, 88pp. $1.00 paper.

White Calf, Cliff Faulknor. Illust. Gerald Tailfeathers. Scholastic-Tab, 1973. 180 pp. $1.00 paper.

Copper Sunrise, Bryan Buchan. Illust. Kathryn Cole. Scholastic-Tab, 1972. 112 pp. $1.00 paper.

Beginning with Catharine Parr Traill's *The Canadian Crusoes* (1852) and William Francis Butler's *Red Cloud* (1882), the native peoples of Canada have repeatedly attracted the interest of writers of fiction for children in this country. For Traill and Butler the source material for these novels was directly accessible through personal observation and experience. Their works are set in the immediate past and the authors' personal involvement is reflected in a vitality in these books which overrides the intrusive moralizing in which both Traill and Butler indulge. In contrast, many contemporary writers investigating the fictional possibilities of the redman's culture examine not the Indian of the twentieth-century reservation but rather the red man of the period preceding the arrival of the white man. Three novels from Scholastic-Tab Publications, all set in the early nineteenth century, illustrate some of the problems and potential involved in this approach.

Madeline Freeman's *A Horse for Running Buffalo* and Cliff Faulknor's *White Calf* employ a standard formula available to the white author dealing with red culture. Each novel presents a pre-adolescent Plains Indian boy as protagonist and focuses descriptions of various aspects of red life on the actions and reactions of the child-hero. Both Freeman and Faulknor have evidently researched the cultures of the Plains Indians with considerale sensitivity and care; however, both authors have difficulty in reconciling this source material with fully realized fictional characters and plots.

A Horse for Running Buffalo combines fiction and history by including a preface which briefly introduces Blackfoot culture to the reader and a thirteen page epilogue which provides additional documentary information about the tribe through the use of text, photographs and maps. The narrative itself traces the acquisition, abduction and retrieval of a horse for the eleven-year-old protagonist, Running Buffalo. Descriptions of a buffalo hunt, a horse raid and a sun dance broaden the focus of the novel, but the accounts of such events are not fully integrated with the central narrative of the novel. Similarly, a creation myth of the Blackfoot involving the Old Man, Napi, and Coyote

is awkwardly imposed on the account of the young boy's experiences--and the illustrator portrays Coyote, a Blackfoot trickster figure, as a very ordinary prairie wolf. As a basic introduction to Blackfoot culture, *A Horse for Running Buffalo* effectively communicates significant information about one of the original peoples of this country; however, as a work of fiction it lacks both convincingly developed characters and a unified and consistently focused narrative structure.

Cliff Faulknor's *White Calf,* the first of a trilogy of novels dealing with the Piegan Indians, traces events in the early adolescence of the boy, Eagle Child, in a manner extremely similar to Freeman's treatment of Running Buffalo. The white calf of the title is an albino buffalo calf captured by Eagle Child in the opening chapter of the novel and released on the final page. Just as Running Buffalo's horse serves as a unifying focus in Freeman's novel, the calf is apparently designed to function in a similar way in Faulknor's book. Once again, descriptions of such activities as a buffalo hunt, a sun dance and a Blackfoot raid are interspersed throughout the narrative. The calf rather awkwardly bears the symbolic significance of these events for Eagle Child as the boy learns that "acclaim carries with it a duty. A sense of duty is a part of being a man".

A richer and more complex work than Freeman's novel, nevertheless *White Calf* is not fully successful. The novel effectively deals with many facets of Piegan life but the focus shifts too rapidly from incident to incident. So many characters and conflicts are introduced that few are sufficiently developed within a sustained and unified plot structure.

In contrast to the prairie settings of the novels of Freeman and Faulknor, Bryan Buchan's *Copper Sunrise* examines the conflict between red man and white man on Canada's east coast during the early nineteenth century. Despite the omission of precise chronological and geographical details, the novel appears to be loosely based on the massacre of the Beothuck Indians of Newfoundland in the early years of that century. The narrator-protagonist is an immigrant Scottish boy who traces the plague-ridden voyage of his family across the Atlantic and the settlement of the family on Canada's eastern seaboard. In this new home, the boy secretly becomes friends with Tethani, an Indian of the same age. Despairingly, the boy watches the massacre of Tethani and his people by whites who insistently regard the natives as marauding and cannibalistic savages. Rather disconcertingly, the white narrator reconciles himself to the violent massacre through his recognition of a copper sunrise at the end of the novel as a sign that the dead natives are now at peace in another world.

Like *White Calf* and *A Horse for Running Buffalo, Copper Sunrise* delineates various aspects of the customs and beliefs of Tethani's people. Yet although Buchan blends these elements with his fictional narrative more effectively than either Freeman or Faulknor, his elmination of all documentary references leaves the reader unable to distinguish fact and fiction. Are the details of the culture of Tethani's people historically accurate for a particular eastern Canadian tribe? Is the massacre a representation of the destruction of the Beothucks or romantic fabrication? The reader should know.

While Freeman and Faulknor present accurate anthropology which mars their fictional narratives, Buchan creates a varied and unified narrative but leaves the reader uneasy about the anthropological and historical status of his material. Between these extremes lies the path of the novelist who successfully deals in his fiction with the cultures of the original peoples of this country.

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More Native Tales

IRENE HEWITT

How the Chipmunk Got Its Stripes, Nancy Cleaver. Illust. Laszlo Gal. Clarke, Irwin, 1973. 28 pp. $3.95 cloth.

Sketco the Raven, Robert Ayre. Scholastic-Tab, 1974. 183 pp. $1.00 paper.

Nancy Cleaver's *How the Chipmunk Got Its Stripes* (Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd.) is a charming Indian "Why" tale about the friendship of a boy and a small red squirrel. The action derives from Squirrel's efforts to get help for the boy and his family when they are seriously ill. Unfortunately the other animals of the forest do not share Squirrel's concern for humans; in fact Bear is so incensed that he lunges forward and his cruel claws scrape across the small back of Squirrel causing deep wounds. "They healed slowly, leaving five dark stripes along her back which she and the boy and the boy's family did not mind at all. The stripes were marks of pride". There is a happy ending when the great Manitou intervenes, giving instructions on how the Indians can make a healing medicine.

Written in simple words and a pleasant style, this easy-reading little picture book of some 28 pages would be ideal for storytelling or reading aloud. The brown print and brown illustrations on tan paper are interesting but this monotone approach was disappointing because it did not make use of illustrator Laszlo Gal's exceptional skill in colour work, exemplified in *El Cid, Soldier and Hero,* and *Siegfried the Mighty Warrior,* both published by Golden Press.

Another in the growing number of retellings of Indian legends is *Sketco the Raven* by Robert Ayre. At the beginning Sketco is a Raven who through magic is born as a little Indian boy. He releases, from his grandfather's well-guarded boxes, the stars, the moon and the sun to make light for the Indian people. To accomplish this he must retain the power to become a raven once again. In his further adventures we find that he is vulnerable as a human being in spite of his great magic