

While Freeman and Faulkner 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 *Stegfried 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

powers. Neither all-human nor all-god, the character of Sketco can be confusing to the reader, so that it is difficult to form a firm concept of him as a person. This amorphous quality is found in many Indian folk tale heroes, probably because the lack of a written folk literature has not made possible the development of properly rounded characterization. Action is the more important aspect of oral literature.

The book includes a series of adventures that befall Sketco as he travels the Northwest Pacific country searching for his three brothers and the murderous uncle who drowned them. Along his way Sketco meets and joins the sharks in the sea but he is speared by the giant Thunder Man and his daughter Lightning who bring him to their mountain top as a captive. After escaping he succeeds in finding his brothers with the reluctant aid of Kanugu, the Fog Man. He brings the boys back to their mother but they are unhappy in the land of the living so he sadly returns them to the island of the drowned. Eventually Sketco does find his wicked uncle and disposes of him in an appropriate folk tale ending.

This is a paperback edition of a book originally published in 1961, and it thoroughly deserves being re-issued. Philip Surrey's excellent woodcut illustrations should be mentioned; these are filled with action and excitement and have only one flaw - the unattractive faces of the people pictured.

Themes common to the folk tales of many countries are found in both books. Trickery is employed by Squirrel when she calls a meeting of the animals, using Porcupine's name; Sketco tricks the salmon into jumping into his arms. The transformation of animals to humans and vice versa is another universal theme, as we know from the familiar *Frog Prince* and the bear/prince in *Snow-White and Rose-Red*; in Sketco these changes sometimes occur with bewildering rapidity. Talking animals are another feature of folk tales and in Indian stories they are found in abundance. In *How the Chipmunk Got Its Stripes* the animals do most of the talking while in *Sketco the Raven* there are numerous conversations with animals, one of the more interesting being between Sketco and the shark "with a cold sinister eye." A mythological element is very evident in the encounter between Sketco and Snowy Owl; this is reminiscent of the theft of fire by Prometheus although it lacks the tragic overtones of the Greek myth. In this tale Sketco disguises himself as a deer and succeeds in getting fire for the use of the Indians; it is ironic that the Indians at first do not appreciate the gift. Folklore often deals with locked mysterious boxes. Pandora had her box filled with troubles for mankind but the boxes belonging to Sketco's grandfather contain hope for the Indians because with light "they began at last to live".

Both books make worthwhile additions to any collection of Indian legends and between them will attract a wide age range of readers. *How the Chipmunk Got Its Stripes* will appeal to the picture book set while *Sketco the Raven* will satisfy the older reader.

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