

the young Beothuk's doomed struggle to survive is itself shot through with heartbreaking irony.

The two male protagonists are both separated and joined by the young woman Shanawdithit, historically the last known living Beothuk. Somehow transported to the present, she appears in David's narrative as Nancy, which, as we Newfoundlanders learn in grade school, was the name given to Shanawdithit by her white captors. Major's enigmatic Nancy speaks and acts as a symbol of the Beothuk, voicing their rage at the white man's usurpation and destruction.

In the end, we are left, like David, baffled by this tragedy in our history, "trying to make sense of it", knowing that our attempt, like David's, to atone for the violence of our forebears comes too late to make any difference to the vanished Beothuk. Ultimately, Major asks more questions than he answers, and in exploring the relevance of Newfoundland's "darkest hour" to our present-day personal and social conscience, his *Blood Red Ochre* adds a dark urgency to the universal, timely, and complex problem of the relationship between the native and immigrant peoples of North America.

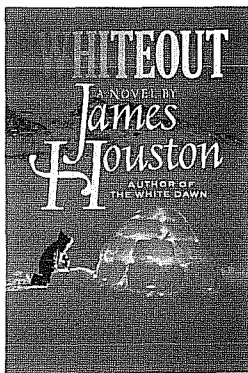
Catherine Simpson, former primary teacher and now mother of one, manages the Writing Centre at the Lewisporte campus of the Central Newfoundland Community College.

INUIT MAGIC

Whiteout. James Houston. Greedy de Pencier, 1988. 175 pp., \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920775-28-4.

Whiteout explores and explains James Houston's well-documented fascination with the Canadian Arctic and its unique and magical people. But the focus in this text is not so much on the place itself, but on the effect such an environment can have on an outsider, in this case Jonathan (Jon) Aird, a character more reminiscent of a Kevin Major protagonist than a hero from Inuit legend.

Convicted of possessing drugs, Jon is sentenced to a year's work in community service in Nanuvik, a small settlement on Baffin Island. A gifted but lazy musician, Jon is asked to teach music at the government school while living with his obsessively strict uncle, whose approval Jon needs to receive his inheritance.



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.

J. Kieran Kealy teaches children's and medieval literature at the University of British Columbia and he is the author of several articles on North American folklore and Canadian fantasy.

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