

REVIEW

Winter in the Blood (1974)

James Welch

(1940-2003)

“Welch’s first novel is extraordinarily depressing for white readers. My American Indian students at the University of North Dakota, on the other hand, thought it was very funny, which in itself is a lesson in cultural relativism. And they felt that it accurately represented reservation life in the Northern Plains region, which was the land and life most of them knew intimately.

Like Welch, I think, they knew that anger, pain, and humor were not, after all, strange bedfellows. It is a terrible journey, as we follow the nameless protagonist stumbling from one misadventure to another. He is the grandson of a woman who survived the Marias River Massacre (a historical incident which will serve in a few years as the climax of *Fools Crow*). He is a man with no name and barely any identity, so beaten down by failure that he does not even seem to be aware of his own condition. The action revolves around his memories of his brother’s death, his attempts to find his girlfriend, and the death of his grandmother. The story proceeds with macabre whimsy, sometimes amusing, sometimes just surreal, to its ambiguous conclusion.”

Mick McAllister
DancingBadger.com (2014)