Two Cultures in James Welch's Winter in the Blood

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In my previous essay, "*The Death of Jim Loney* as a Bicultural Novel," I pointed out that Linda Wagner-Martin's comment in the second volume of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* greatly distorts both *Winter in the Blood* (1974) and *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), James Welch's first and second novels. As I concentrated on *The Death of Jim Loney* in my previous essay, I will attempt to show, in this essay, how her comment largely misrepresents *Winter in the Blood*. Let me quote her comment again:

> In *Winter in the Blood* and *The Death of Jim Loney*, Welch drew with superb understatement the unlived lives of the contemporary Native American men, shut off from college educations because of family poverty and ignorance, warded away from financial respectability because of that education cut short. In each book, the protagonist had been a star high school athlete. Now a decade or more after that athletic career ended, the men have no direction and no promise. They lead aimless lives of drinking, sex (and the promise that a healthy sexual relationship might hold is undercut by their own nihilistic attitudes), and apathy. Confused relationships with parents, especially

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> with the father, whose life as an outsider to the white culture has set the model for the son, dominates [*sic*] what plot exists. But more than plot, these novels are marked by mood and tone, atmosphere as precisely drawn as anything by Hemingway or Richard Wright. Alienation and loss are what remain from reading these stunning texts. (2739)

This comment contains a number of inaccurate observations about *Winter in the Blood*. For one thing, there is absolutely no reference to the unnamed narrator's high school athletic career in the novel. We never know, therefore, if the protagonist was a star high school athlete or not. As a matter of fact, it is quite unlikely that he excelled himself in athletics in high school, because he had sustained a knee injury at the age of ten and in spite of a second operation in Tacoma, Washington, still suffers from the injury at the age of 33. In fact, beginning with the first reference to his aching "bad knee" (2) in the first section of the novel, there are repeated references to his bad knee/leg. For example, at one time, he says, "Because of my bad leg I could not squat [. . .]" (132-33). Indeed, one of the first questions that we would ask is, "Why does he have a bad knee?" and we are expected to keep asking the same question until we come to the end of Section 36, where we finally learn about the cause of his bad knee. There is also a reference to the scars when we are about a third into the novel:

> My pants were knotted down around my ankles. One shoe and one white sock stuck out beneath them. Above them, the vertical scars flanking my left kneecap and the larger bone-white slash running diagonally across the top. Keeping my head up, I reached down and slowly pulled up the pants. (53)

Reading the passage, we would have a corollary question: Why does the narrator look away from the scars? All in all, the injured knee/leg is the most noteworthy and memorable bodily feature of the narrator. It takes an extremely careless reader, then, to assume, as Wagner-Martin does, that the protagonist of *Winter in the Blood*

was "a star high school athlete."

Wagner-Martin talks about the "poverty" of the narrator's family. Teresa, the narrator's mother, however, is said to own "360 acres of hay land, all irrigated, leveled, some of the best land in the valley" (13). She is a well-to-do owner of a cattle ranch. In fact, the narrator believes that Lame Bull, his father-in-law, has decided to marry his mother because of her relative wealth. On this point, too, Wagner-Martin's assertion is beside the mark.

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Wagner-Martin talks about the "aimless" life of the narrator and his "apathy." In an interview, Welch himself admits to the "vision of alienation[,] and purposelessness, [and] aimlessness" in the novel (McFarland, *James Welch* 9). Does it, however, result from the causes suggested by Wagner-Martin?

At the very beginning of the novel, we find the narrator walking home with a swollen eye. As we find out later from various bits of information, his home is on the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana. As we learn from Section 2, the narrator has been away from home for three days (3). The narrator does not remember the circumstances in which he got the swollen eye, but we are led to conclude that he was beaten in the face by a white man in a bar in Dodson, just off the northeastern corner of the reservation. The initial movement, therefore, is from the world outside of the reservation to that of the reservation. As a matter of fact, it is important to keep in mind that these two worlds are contrasted throughout the novel.

As he heads for his home on the reservation, the narrator says:

> Coming home was not easy anymore. It was never a cinch, but it had become a torture. [. . .] Coming home to a mother and an old lady who was my grandmother. And [Agnes,] the girl who was thought to be my wife. (2)

Coming home is a torture for the narrator because he felt "nothing but a distance" (2)

from these people. The distance, he realizes, comes from within him. He says:

> I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon. And that was why I had no particular feelings toward my mother and grandmother. Or the girl who had come to live with me. (2)

Thus, another question is raised: Why does he feel distant from himself? Attempting to answer this question, at least tentatively, we must examine the way he relates to his grandmother, his mother, and the live-in girlfriend.

The narrator's maternal grandmother is almost 100 years old. She is no longer able to talk, but she used to tell the narrator many stories of her younger days. One of the stories concerned her experience as a young woman. According to the story, she was the third wife of Standing Bear, a Blackfeet chief, at the time of the starvation winter of 1883-1884. She herself was a daughter of another Blackfeet chief. During the winter, when she was still in her teens, her husband got killed in a futile raid on the Gros Ventres. As a widow of "a dark beauty" (37), according to her, she was shunned by the people of his band. Her story ended with the image of the people being driven to the Blackfeet reservation.

Twenty-five years later, the grandmother met Doagie, "a half-white drifter" (37). Shortly after they began to live together, she gave birth to Teresa, the narrator's mother. The grandmother never talked about Doagie, and the narrator wonders why this daughter of one chief and the wife of another chose to live with a half-breed drifter. Obviously, the narrator feels that the grandmother's conduct constitutes a betrayal to her ethnic and cultural identity. Thus, her story as a wife of Standing Bear, in the protagonist's mind, remains disconnected from his present. It is merely a colorful recollection of an ancient event. There could be no wisdom to be gained from it. The narrator feels distant from his grandmother primarily because he views her as a cultural and ethnic renegade. His dilemma is that he cannot wholeheartedly renounce the union of his grandmother and Doagie, because he realizes that, after all, he owes his existence to it.

The narrator feels distant from his mother, Teresa, for two reasons. First, he feels partially rejected and abandoned by her. Probably, she was not a naturally affectionate person. The narrator says, "I never expected much from Teresa and I never got it"(21). Second, the narrator is critical of her cultural orientation. Believing that her father was half white, Teresa has willingly adopted an assimilative attitude. Occasionally voicing her contempt for Native Americans in general, she associates with a Catholic priest in Harlem, who shows his contempt for Native American people, in his turn, by refusing to set foot on the reservation. The narrator himself is torn between two cultures, European-American and Native American; he is thus without any firm religious conviction and still feels quite uncomfortable about his mother's relations with the priest.

The narrator is not quite comfortable with Teresa's remarriage with Lame Bull, either. We do not know the exact nature of Teresa's relationship with Lame Bull before the novel opens. We know, however, that Lame Bull alone helped dig the grave for First Raise, the narrator's father, when he died ten years ago. Evidently, Lame Bull at the time was the person closest to the surviving family on the reservation. We can even speculate that Teresa was fairly close to Lame Bull and even liked him better than her husband while he was still alive.

In Section 5, we are told that Teresa and Lame Bull took off in a pickup. In the following section, the narrator says, "Teresa told me that they had gotten married in Malta"(13). Thus, Ronald E. McFarland talks about "the narrator's resentment over his mother's sudden marriage to Lame Bull" (*Understanding* 62). It is, however, much more appropriate to regard the marriage as something long-anticipated. The fact that Teresa does not tell the narrator about her remarriage with Lame Bull beforehand seems to indicate on one hand how she slights the narrator and on the other hand how well she knows about the narrator's low opinion of Lame Bull.

The narrator is critical of Lame Bull because Lame Bull appears to be primarily interested in his mother's ranch. Lame Bull is just as profit-oriented as his neighbors, Ferdinand Horn and his wife. He is not, however, a reprehensible character. Indeed, as Welch suggests, he is "a funny character" (Coltelli 192). At the beginning of

Section 10, the narrator reports in a humorous manner the way Lame Bull begins to grin once he becomes a proprietor. Later on in the same section, the narrator says in a similar vein:

> I could tell that, as his eyes swept the field, [Lame Bull] was counting bales [of hay], converting them into cows and the cows into calves and the calves into cash. (28)

Citing a most appropriate passage from the novel, with a slight alteration, Jack L. Davis points out another important aspect of Lame Bull.

> In the fierce quest of profit, the once-impoverished Lame Bull no longer considers the rights of all other species to share in nature's bounty. As the first crop is brought in, "Lame Bull mows alfalfa, snakes, bluejoint, baby rabbits, tangles of barbed wire." (35)

Contrary to the traditional Native American way, Lame Bull shows no respect to other forms of life at all. Although the narrator's critical attitude toward Lame Bull is couched in humorous terms, we come to realize that Lame Bull is a Native American in name only.

It is quite understandable that the narrator feels distant from Agnes, "a Cree from Havre"(4). We are told that the narrator simply brought her home three weeks ago. It was not, however, a totally irresponsible, impulsive act. Although the narrator did not realize this at the time, he took her home because "[her eyes] held the promise of warm things, of a spirit that went beyond her miserable life of drinking and screwing and men like [him]"(113). Just the same, at the beginning of the novel, he cannot hope to establish a lasting relationship with a woman based on mutual love, because he is alienated from himself.

We have examined how the narrator, on his way home, suffers from a feeling of distance from his grandmother, his mother, and Agnes. His problem actually goes deeper than that. He suffers from a sense of deep loss about his father, First Raise, and his elder brother and sole sibling, Mose. They should be waiting for his return, but First Raise died ten years ago, while Mose died twenty years ago. The narrator does not miss his grandfather, Doagie, about whom he remembers very little as Doagie died when he was only four. Furthermore, as we have seen, he apparently feels that the union of Doagie and his grandmother initiated the confusion of his ethnic and cultural identity. He has no reason, then, to miss him. On the other hand, his feeling about First Raise and Mose is entirely a different matter.

According to Wagner-Martin, the narrator has "[c]onfused relationships with [his] parents, especially with [his] father." As we have seen already, it is true that the narrator of *Winter in the Blood* has ambivalent feelings about his mother. Between First Raise and the narrator, however, there existed a genuine bond of love. In the final section of the novel, the narrator says about Mose and First Raise: "They were the only ones I really loved [. . .]"(172). The feeling is obviously reciprocal as the narrator says elsewhere that "[First Raise] loved [me and Mose]"(106) and as the narrator's memory of Mose in general is filled with the latter's brotherly love for him. In the narrator's memory, First Raise was a warm, tender-hearted man ready to protect him when he was quite young. At the same time, he remembers that First Raise stayed away from home a great deal.

As the narrator trudges home at the beginning of the novel, he makes a special reference to a log-and-mud cabin called the Earthboy place, because in the borrow pit across from the Earthboy place, the narrator and several other people found First Raise frozen dead. First Raise was apparently returning from a bar in Dodson in a drunken state. In the course of the novel, the narrator has to come to terms with the death of his father in that particular fashion.

In reference to his gun that Agnes absconds with, the narrator says, "The gun, an old .30-30, had once been important to me. Like my father before me, I had killed plenty of deer with it [. . .]"(3). He had stopped using it four years earlier, after

killing a dog with it while he was drunk. His act should be taken as a corruption of the hunting tradition among Native Americans. In Section 3, we find the narrator fishing with "a red and white spoon in [his] father's toolbox"(5). Soon, however, the narrator loses the lure as it gets caught in a windfall trunk. By learning about these clumsy attempts on the part of the narrator to follow the behavioral patterns of his father, we come to realize that he visits bars in Dodson and other nearby towns in imitation of his father. First Raise frequented the bar in Dodson, drinking with white men there and making them laugh with his stories. It is, therefore, ironic that the narrator comes home with a swollen eye, at the beginning of the novel. As we have observed already, it is quite likely that he was beaten by a white man. Thus, the narrator fails in his haphazard attempts to follow in the steps of his father.

In Section 9, we learn for the first time that Mose, who was two years older than the narrator, got killed. A question that naturally occurs is how Mose got killed. In Section 12, as the narrator recalls the time when he shared his room with Mose, he makes a most telling comment, saying he is "[a] servant to a memory of death"(38). Obviously he is deeply wounded by his brother's death. The narrator, however, chooses not to dwell upon the circumstances surrounding the tragic event. At this juncture, another question comes to mind: Why does the narrator withhold the pertinent information about Mose's death? The narrator subsequently makes repeated references to Mose's death but remains silent about its cause until Section 25, in which he somewhat reluctantly begins to narrate the fatal event.

One has to unify one's past, present, and future in order to have a stable identity. It is no wonder, then, that the narrator feels initially alienated from himself, as he is unable to deal with the most crucial events in his past, the deaths of the only two people that he loved. The novel traces the tortured way in which the protagonist finally comes to terms with these events.

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When the narrator comes home at the beginning of the novel, he finds Agnes

gone with his gun and electric razor. Ostensibly in an attempt to retrieve the gun, he heads for Malta, where Agnes has been witnessed by Ferdinand Horn, but his search for her was unsuccessful. After coming back to the reservation and visiting Yellow Calf, an old man living alone three miles apart, the narrator visits Havre by way of Harlem.

The most noteworthy person that the narrator encounters in his visits to Malta and Havre is a mysterious New Yorker, whom the narrator often calls "the airplane man"(51ff.). Concerning this character Welch says the following:

> [. . .] I don't think there is any terrific significance attached to him. You know, in one way I just wanted him as a kind of comic-relief character[. . . .] But I wanted him to be somebody to bang the narrator against, so that he would see this other world. (Coltelli 190)

As a matter fact, the narrator's surrealistic, nightmarish, and sometimes comic experiences in Malta, Harlem, and Havre are shown to suggest that "this other world" off the reservation is finally unfitting for the narrator. Thus, I do not dwell on his pattern of getting drunk, getting laid, and getting beaten in these towns. I do not discuss the airplane man, either. An important point in his sojourn in these towns is that when he at last meets Agnes again in a bar in Havre, the narrator tries to establish, in a stumbling manner, a mature relationship with her. His effort is cut short as Agnes's brother suddenly grabs him, beats him, and throws him out of the bar. The narrator presumably loses consciousness in the process. The more important point is that during his sojourn in these towns, he is caught off guard and begins to recollect what led to his brother's death.

At the end of Section 24, the narrator is in Harlem, watching the posted image of Randolph Scott on the billboard of a movie house. At the time, he suddenly remembers the conversation that he had with Mose about the movie star. The narrator says, "The twenty years slipped away and I was a kid again, Mose at my side"(103). We know that Mose was killed twenty years ago, so we can assume that this conversa-

tion took place in the same year in which Mose died. The following section mostly concerns itself with the account of Mose's and the narrator's attempt to bring down the cows from their summer range. We can speculate at this juncture that the job led to Mose's death, but the narrator's account is not to be completed in this section and, consequently, at the end of Section 25, we still do not know how Mose was killed. The narrator does not go through with his account to the end, because, as he says at the beginning of Section 26, he has been trying to "keep away" (108) the memory.

Memory works both ways. The narrator nostalgically remembers the time he rode calves with Mose (10) or the time he hunted game with him (129-30). However, the narrator has repressed the memory of the traumatic experience of Mose's death. Section 27 is a continuation of the account of the cattle drive, beginning at the point where the narrator has left off at the end of Section 25. As I said, the narrator presumably loses consciousness after he gets beaten by Agnes's brother at the end of Section 26. The implication, then, is that the narrator begins to recollect the cattle drive, while he is regaining consciousness, that is, while he is off guard again. As the recollection ends, again in the middle of the event, Mose and the narrator has the cattle running "headlong" (115) down into the valley.

As the narrator comes home for the third time in the novel, he finds that his grandmother is dead. While he digs the grave for his grandmother with Lame Bull, the narrator avoids looking at Mose's grave. As he has no choice, however, but to be keenly aware of it, the narrator, in Section 36, resumes his recollection of the cattle drive. There is an important change this time, though. When he returns to the reservation, the narrator cleanses himself of "the invisible kind [of dirt] that coats a man who has been to town"(132). Scrubbing himself, he fees that it is "good to be home" (133). The reservation is the place where he finds people like Yellow Calf, who can "understand" (67) deer and magpies. Reorienting himself, he is now ready to face something that he has evaded for a long time. As a kind of preface to the final portion of the account of the cattle drive, the narrator says, at the end of Section 35, "We shouldn't have run [the cattle. . . . It] wasn't good for them—"(139). He is now ready to admit that he and Mose treated the cattle wrongfully.

A careful reader realizes that the task of bringing down the cattle from their summer range was meant to be a two-day job. Mose, however, due to his excessive confidence in his ability to control the animals, tried to do it in one day. His overconfidence partly resulted from his apparent contempt for animals. Brutally treating the cattle, Mose called them "[g]oddamn baboons" (107) and "whiteface shittails" (115). Trying to emulate his brother, the narrator himself called them "[s]triped-ass green suckers" (107) and "goddamn horse turds" (115). As the dusk approached, the two brothers found themselves almost frantic, due to Mose's miscalculation of the time needed for the job:

> [I]t was getting dark and we still had to get them across the highway. So we had them racing full tilt down the hill into the valley, both of us swearing and swatting at their behinds with the end[s] of our ropes. (139)

> We pushed them through the first gate, up the incline and onto the highway. Screaming and swearing, we flailed at the stragglers with the ends of our ropes. (140)

The wild-eyed cow which was leading the entire herd raced down the incline toward the second gate. The cow, however, refused to go through the gate, so that Mose, placed at the end of the herd, was left on the highway. Just at this time, a calf broke from the herd. Bird, the horse which the narrator was riding, saw the calf and tried to block it as it was trained to do. While Mose was distracted by the sudden movement of Bird and its rider, a car collided with the horse that Mose was riding. As a result, Mose was killed instantly. As Bird jolted, the narrator fell from the horse's back, injuring his knee. It is of the utmost importance for us to realize that the accident could have been avoided. If Mose had had more respect for the cattle and if he had not rashly planned to finish a two-day job in a day, he would not have been on the highway as he was when the visibility was dangerously low.

v

As I have already pointed out, the narrator says, early in the novel, "I never expected much from Teresa and I never got it." He continues to say, "But neither did anybody else. Maybe that's why First Raise stayed away so much"(21). As Teresa bluntly calls First Raise "a foolish man"(19), the narrator's observation has a certain validity. After learning the circumstances of Mose's death, we realize that the narrator is, at this point in his narrative, trying to pin the blame on Teresa alone. At the same time, about a dozen lines later, the narrator says that First Raise stayed away more than ever after Mose got killed. Teresa betrays her shallow understanding of her husband when she says that he was simply "a wanderer"(20) and that he was just "restless"(20). As Robert Gish suggests, "[. . .] First Raise's death was caused as much by guilt and grief as it was by drink and exposure. We learn that it is First Raise who makes the request for the cattle drive, arranges it, and sends the boys off, ironically, with love and a good breakfast [. . .]" (McFarland, *James Welch* 51). Perhaps, First Raise should have been more specific in his instructions to his sons about the cattle drive. At the same time, perhaps, he should have been attentive enough to notice the overweening confidence and the callous attitude towards animals in Mose.

It is obvious that the narrator was partially responsible for Mose's death. He did not just lose a brother. His complicity in the tragedy is apparent. He was uncritical of Mose when Mose was overreaching himself. Instead, he was trying to emulate his brother. It is no wonder, then, that the narrator has tried to suppress the memory of his brother's death. We now understand why the narrator looks away from the scars on his knee. He is both physically and psychically scarred. The narrator has been suffering from "the [. . .] burden of guilt" (146) over the death of his brother for over twenty years. To make the matter worse, the narrator was also partially responsible for his father's almost suicidal death.

On first reading the episode about Amos, a pet duck, we may wonder about its

relevance to the entire narrative. As we finish reading about the accident in which Mose was killed, we may see a link between Amos and the protagonist, as they are both survivors. Louis Owens, for instance, says:

> Amos, like the narrator, is the only survivor among its siblings, the others having drowned when the water in their tub fell too far below the rim. Feeling responsible for the ducks' deaths, just as he feels responsible for Mose's, the narrator identifies with Amos, saying, "But he never went in. He must have been smarter than the others." (134)

We do not know if the drowned ducks were Amos's "siblings" or not. Quibbling aside, it is hard to imagine that the narrator thinks himself "smarter than" Mose. Actually, this episode should be contrasted with that of the cow drowning in the slough toward the end of the novel. The reader is meant to notice the change in the narrator's attitudes towards the drowned ducks and the drowning cow. The narrator, trying to deny his responsibility for the ducks' deaths, insists that they died because they were not smart enough. Actually, the ducks drowned because Mose and the narrator were not familiar with their behavior and failed to take proper care of them. When the narrator sees the drowning cow, he finally decides to try to rescue her, although he thinks of her as a "[s]tupid, stupid" (167) cow.

Previous to this episode, we observe a remarkable change in the narrator's attitude towards animals. The change is evidenced in his sympathy toward Bird, the old horse. He realizes how humans have subjugated Bird to utilize him for their own sake. He muses as follows:

> A cow horse. You weren't born that way; you were born to eat grass and drink slough water, to nip other horses in the flanks the way you do lagging bulls, to mount the mares. (144)

In an interview, James Welch says as follows:

> And also, the narrator felt that [Bird] too was in cahoots and was partially responsible for the death of his brother. So, that's why he thinks that Bird has carried the guilt all these years, and so together they tried to expiate the guilt in [their joint attempt to rescue the drowning cow]. (Coltelli 189)

The narrator actually says to Bird, "No, don't think it was your fault—when that calf broke, you reacted as they trained you"(146). His new attitude toward Bird suggests his spiritual growth.

The narrator's response to the drowning cow is largely shaped by another experience told in Section 38, which is one of the pivotal sections in the novel. In this section, the narrator revisits Yellow Calf, who somewhat reluctantly tells the narrator about the time when he met the narrator's grandmother in 1883. The narrator's grandmother once told him and Mose that she became an outcast after the death of her husband in the winter of 1883-84. According to Yellow Calf, the grandmother was believed to have brought the people of Standing Bear's band "bad medicine" (154). This was because shortly after she joined them, a series of troubles began. As the U.S. soldiers came, the people had to leave their homeland near the Rocky Mountains. After they reached the Milk River valley, they suffered through a terrible winter, when a large number of people starved to death. Then their leader, Standing Bear, was killed. Thus, the grandmother was ostracized and forced to live by herself in an unoccupied tepee on the edge of the camp. As he reluctantly admits, Yellow Calf alone stood by the grandmother, bringing meat for her as her hunter. In late spring, the U.S. soldiers drove Standing Bear's people to the newly created Blackfeet Reservation. Mistaken for a Gros Ventre, the grandmother remained on the same spot. Yellow Calf managed to remain with her. As Yellow Calf comes to this point in his story, the narrator has an epiphany: Yellow Calf is Teresa's father; that is, Yellow Calf is the narrator's grandfather. The narrator knows that Teresa was born twenty-five years after the death of Standing Bear. He therefore concludes that Yellow Calf and the grandmother probably kept seeing each other for these long

years.

As I said earlier, the grandmother's story about living as a wife of Standing Bear is itself ultimately meaningless to the narrator, as it is unrelated to his present. Now, Yellow Calf's story about his grandmother gives the narrator an entirely new perspective. After all, her story complements Yellow Calf's story, constituting a unified tale of true love. The grandmother was not a cultural and ethnic renegade, after all. The narrator now knows that he is not descended from a half-white drifter but from a fullblood Blackfeet. He is a fullblood Blackfeet himself. He can now dispel all the confusion of his cultural and ethnic identity.

It goes without saying that but for the sexual union of Yellow Calf and the grandmother, neither Teresa nor the narrator would have been born. Indeed, had it not been for Yellow Calf, his grandmother would have starved to death in the first place and thus have left no offspring. The narrator, then, is doubly beholden to Yellow Calf for his existence. We can assume that the narrator grasps this important implication of Yellow Calf's story.

The narrator learns another thing in connection with Yellow Calf. In the middle of the talk with Yellow Calf, the narrator wonders why First Raise very often visited Yellow Calf. After learning the true identity of Yellow Calf, the narrator realizes that his father paid visits because he knew that Yellow Calf was Teresa's father. We do not know how First Raise gained the knowledge, but he did anyway. The narrator remembers that First Raise once took him to Yellow Calf. Since Mose was not with them, the visit must have been made after Mose's death. As we observed already, the narrator is fully aware that his father stayed away more than ever after Mose's death. Thus, he is fully aware that he was not able to assuage his father's grief over the loss of his elder son. The narrator may have entertained the idea that Mose was the favored son. The narrator, however, is reassured of First Raise's deep love for him, as he realizes that his father took him to Yellow Calf to give him an opportunity to meet his grandfather. His father's act indicates his respect for the bloodline. The narrator now realizes the deep meaning of the frozen deer meat which First Raise brought to Yellow Calf when he took the narrator to Yellow Calf. First Raise was repaying

Yellow Calf in kind for what the latter did for his mother-in-law.

When the narrator sees the drowning cow, upon returning from his visit to Yellow Calf, he is no longer hanging between two cultures. Armed with new knowledge about his true generational status, he chooses to act as a traditional Native American with full affinity with the animal world. He is spiritually restored in his attempt to rescue the drowning cow in spite of the danger that his injured knee might be further damaged.

The narrator is not insensitive to the animal world even at the beginning of his narrative. Let me cite a typical passage:

> A *fly* buzzed into the house as I opened the door. The yard was patched with weeds and foxtail, sagebrush beyond the fence. The earth crumbled into powder under my feet; beneath the sun which settled into afternoon heat over the slough, two *pintail ducks* beat frantically above the cottonwoods and out of sight. As I lowered the bucket into the cistern, a *meadowlark* sang from the shade behind the house. (4; italics mine)

The protagonist grows in the novel, and the ultimate stage that he has reached is eloquently presented in the trinity of the narrator, Bird, and the drowning cow.

vi

The most fundamental problem with Linda-Wagner's reading of the novel is that she does not recognize the two warring cultures in the novel. Linda-Wagner locates the causes of the narrator's problems in the wrong places, actual and imaginary, because she reads *Winter in the Blood* uniculturally from a European-American viewpoint. Actually, the novel is constructed in such a way that the narrator gradually moves from a culturally and ethnically confused state to a new identity based on the Native American tradition.

The narrator obtains wisdom and knowledge from the stories told by his grandparents. Ultimately, he values memories. He is not future-oriented. On the contrary, the past is very important for his sense of continuity. He tries to unify his past, his present, and the future. Thus, he thinks of matters not in one-generational terms but in multigenerational terms. As he is not individualistic, he values human ties, particularly those with his family members. At the end, he feels tied to his home. He does not feel that his home is profane, while out there there is some sacred space. He is not anthropocentric. He finally achieves a state in which he feels no seam between himself and the animal world.

It is significant that the protagonist puts on a suit that belonged to his father at the grandmother's burial ceremony. He also puts on one of his father's ties. This suggests his revitalized connection with his father. In contrast to the protagonist, Lame Bull puts on his shiny green suit and his fancy new boots. As the narrator throws in his grandmother's tobacco pouch in accordance with the Native American tradition, the distance from his grandmother that he feels at the beginning of the novel is completely eradicated. Just before the narrator throws the tobacco pouch in the grave, he hears a horse whinny. The narrator reports: "The red horse down in the corral whinnied. He probably missed old Bird"(176). We are reminded of Yellow Calf's assertion that he can understand animals.

At the graveside, the narrator thinks of Agnes and entertains the possibility of offering to marry her. It is all tentative and uncertain, but the narrator seems to be ready to step forward to participate in the cyclical generational experience. Although Wagner-Martin claims that "[a]lienation and loss are what remain from reading [*Winter in the Blood*]," the novel clearly ends with a positive note.

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