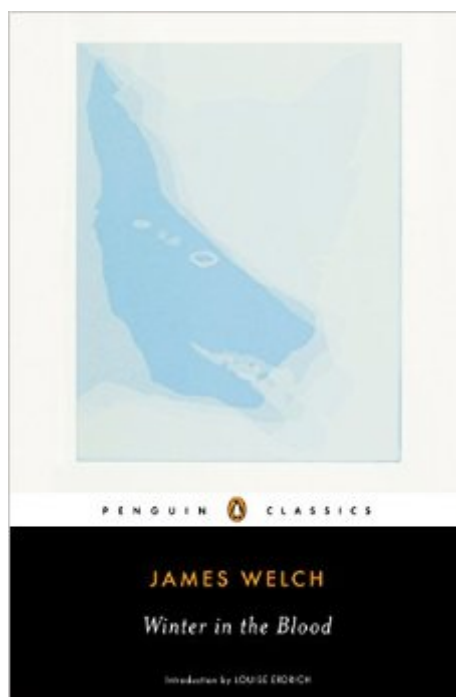


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Winter In The Blood (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

A contemporary classic from a major writer of the Native American renaissance, now adapted for film by Alex and Andrew Smith, starring Chaske Spencer and produced by Sherman Alexie. During his life, James Welch came to be regarded as a master of American prose, and his first novel, *Winter in the Blood*, is one of his most enduring works. The narrator of this beautiful, often disquieting novel is a young Native American man living on the Fort Belknap Reservation in Montana. Sensitive and self-destructive, he searches for something that will bind him to the lands of his ancestors but is haunted by personal tragedy, the dissolution of his once proud heritage, and Montana's vast emptiness. *Winter in the Blood* is an evocative and unforgettable work of literature that will continue to move and inspire anyone who encounters it. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

The ambition of criticism, it is often said, is to obtain a balanced view of the writer's work that is criticized. But where the work in question is *Winter in the Blood* this is peculiarly difficult, which is

illustrated by the great variety of critical response that ranges from Reynolds Price's reaction that it is "a nearly flawless novel" to an unsigned review in the New Yorker which refers to the novel as "an interesting, if seriously flawed first novel." The contrast between these opposite reactions makes clear that the reading of this novel is greatly determined by our experiences with 'Indian' novels, hence with our expectations. The second, in my opinion, 'seriously flawed' reaction is perhaps based on the reviewer's 'tyranny of expectations', reinforced by the fact that *Winter in the Blood* is indeed confusing with regard to the way it should be approached. On the one hand you feel like falling about with laughter at the excruciatingly funny situations in the book, while on the other hand you try hard to suppress that laughter out of respect for the Native's past and present, solely based on our limited view that books by Indian writers cannot be funny because their life and tragic history is not funny. Paradoxically, by being respectful, we are, in fact, disrespectful; by refraining from laughter out of respect for the Indian situation, we are at the same time, unintentionally, disrespectful because we categorize the Native works of art beforehand as serious, angry or whatever term that fits the stereotypical expectations. Critics have approached the novel anthropologically, sociologically, psychologically, philosophically, politically, oneirocritically, and comically.

Written by American-Indian author James Welch, *Winter in the Blood* portrays a thirty two year old American-Indian man who lives on a reservation in Montana with his mother. He engages in no activities that you could term truly heroic -- he works on his family farm, gets into a bar fight in town, has one-night stands, becomes a partner with strangers in crime. What distinguishes this novel is how it gives us a view of the 'American Experience' through non-white eyes. It is meant to be an authentic portrait of American Indian life in the late twentieth century; it is like a painting of the American West that is evocative of certain mood and of a certain time and place, but which does not convey anything very profound. The prose is earthy, gritty in style. I found it to be the best, most enjoyable part of the novel. The style is simple in a very matter-of-fact way -- it can be funny, crude, or emotionally stirring, but it is like this simply as a matter of relating things as they strike the protagonist (for instance, there is a part where he says that once he shot his neighbor's dog solely because he "was drunk and it was moving.") The prose manages to be evocative without demonstrating that the author knows how to use a thesaurus, exhibiting a skillful expressiveness executed with an economy of means. What's appealing about this novel is not so much what the protagonist does as it is the gripping means with which the scenes are conveyed. The main character, however, is not well developed; most of the secondary characters are more fleshed out

and more compelling than the protagonist himself. (True enough, though, this novel is more about the environment the central character is in than about the protagonist himself.

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