

Introduction to *Fools Crow* by James Welch

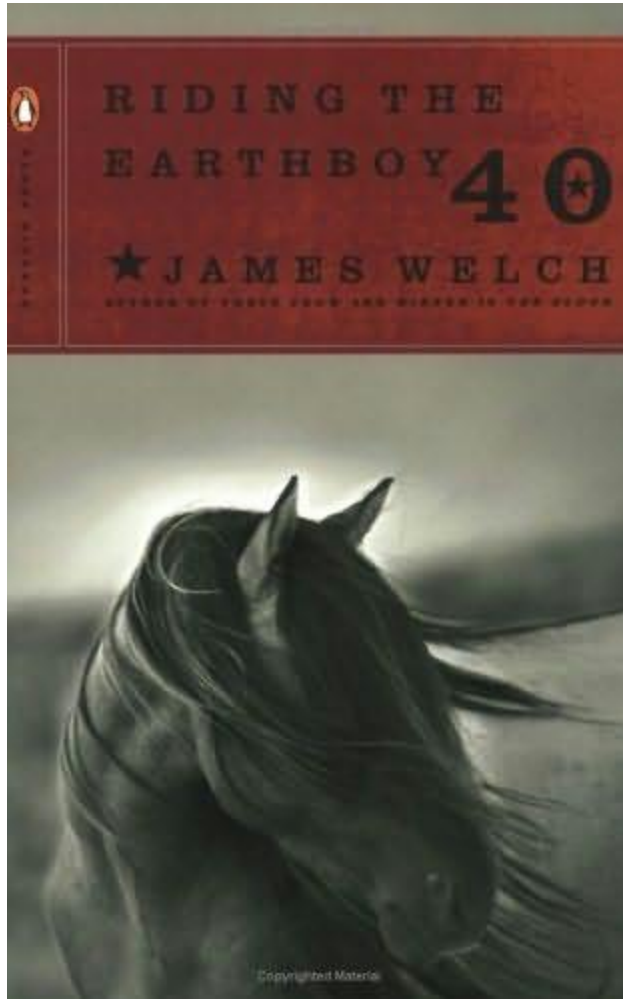


James Welch



- Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, some Irish
- 1940-2003
- Raised in poverty on the Blackfeet & Fort Belknap Reservations
- University of Montana Professor
- A creative writing class with poet Victor Hugo changed his life
- Knighted in France for his literary contributions

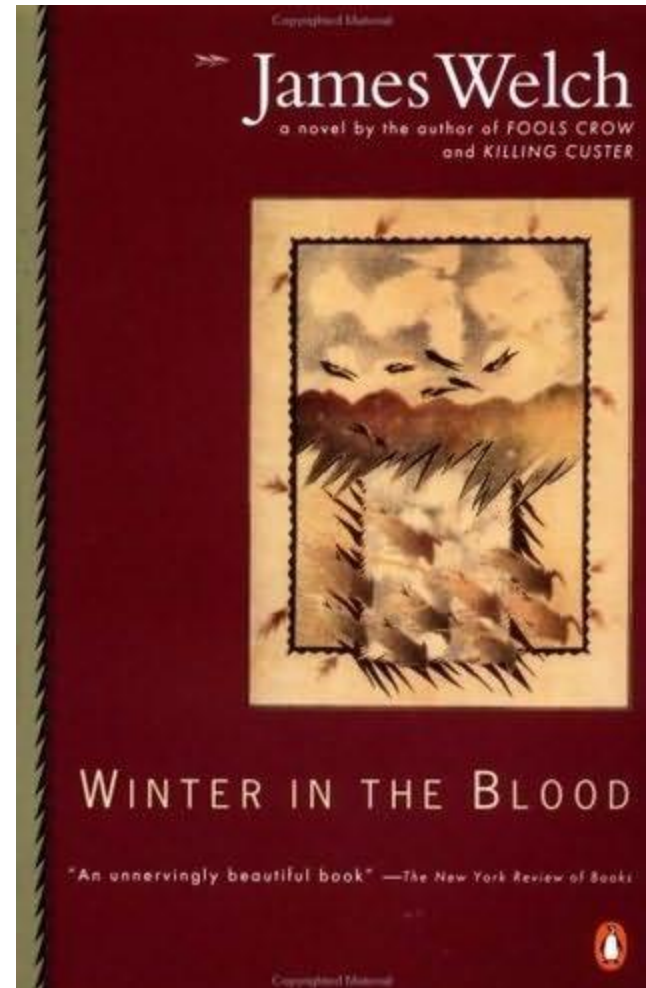
Riding the Earthboy 40 (1971)



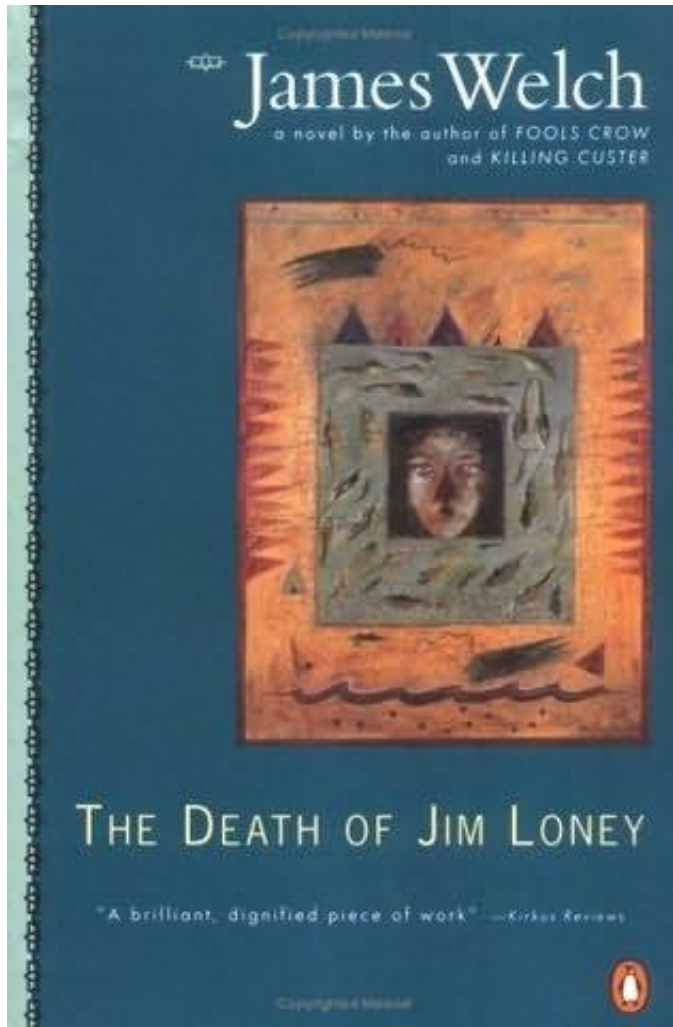
- One of the first books of poetry by an Indian writer, about Indian subjects.
- The title of the book refers to the forty acres of Montana land Welch's father once leased from a Blackfeet family called Earthboy. This land and its surroundings shaped the writer's worldview as a youth, its rawness resonates in the vitality of his elegant poetry, and his verse shows a great awareness of a moment in time, of a place in nature, and of the human being in context. (from review)

Winter in the Blood (1974)

- A nameless Indian narrator flounders on a reservation, and is only able to attain a sense of identity when learning the names and history of his grandparents (review).

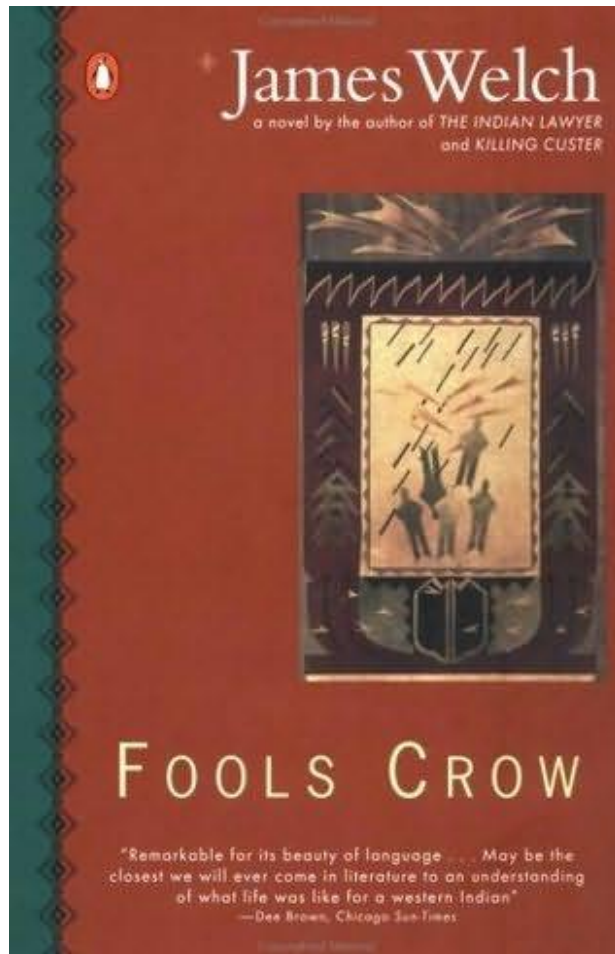


Death of Jim Looney (1979)



- Jim Loney is a half-breed Indian who is estranged from both the Indian and white communities. He lives a solitary, brooding existence in a small Montana town. His nights are filled with disturbing dreams that haunt his waking hours. Rhea, his lover, cannot console him; Kate, his sister, cannot penetrate his world (review).

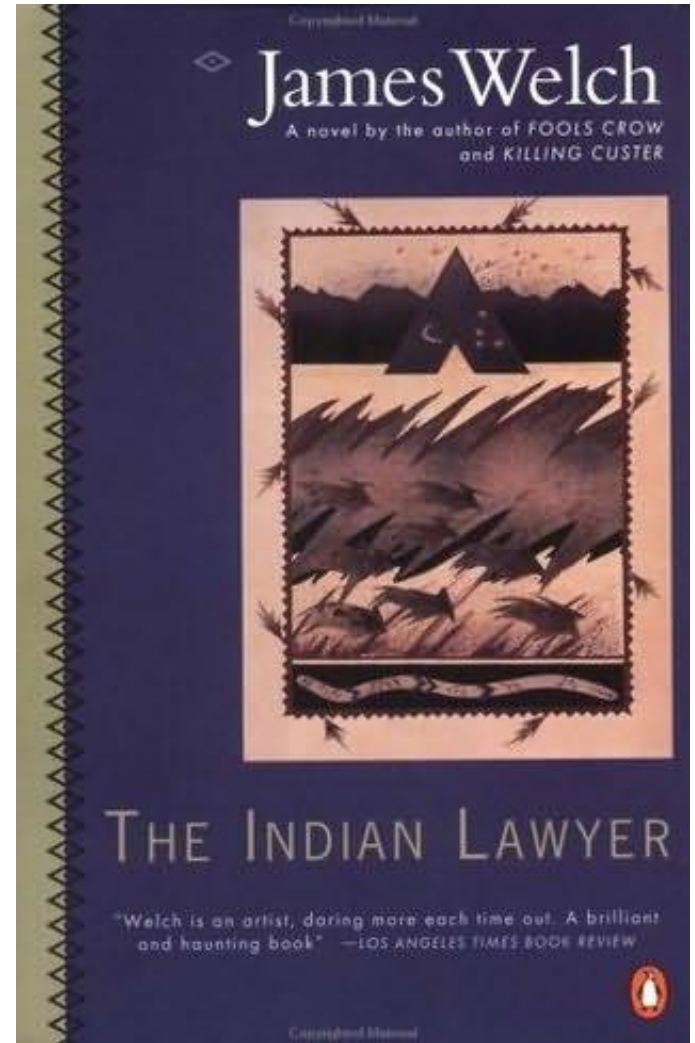
Fools Crow (1986)



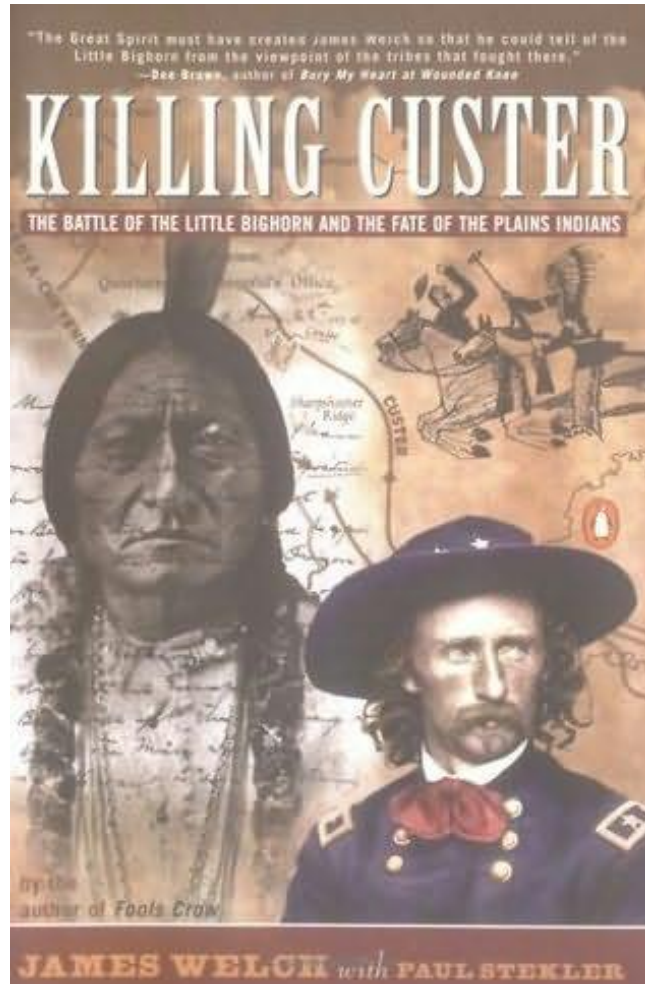
- The book is a historical record of a Pikuni Blackfeet tribe that was massacred at the Marias River by white settlers in 1870.
- *Fools Crow* focuses on the coming of age of White Man's Dog, who grows into a hunter, warrior, and healer. He is renamed Fools Crow and is on the verge of becoming a great leader of the Pikuni. But with the advent of the repeating rifle, the buffalo herds are disappearing, and the Indians are being eliminated just as quickly by smallpox and the U.S. Army. Fools Crow is given the responsibility of foreseeing and witnessing the cultural genocide of his tribe.

The Indian Lawyer (1990)

- Sylvester Yellow Calf is college basketball star, Stanford Law School graduate, partner in a Helena law firm, and candidate for Congress.
- Yellow Calf also serves on a parole board, and is seduced by an inmate's wife and then blackmailed.

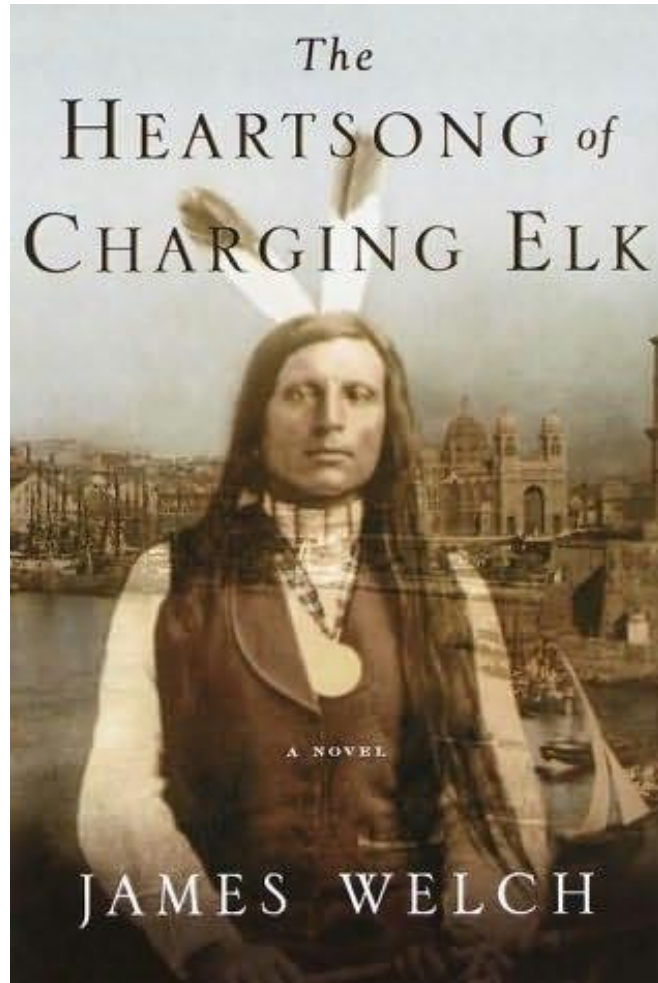


Killing Custer (1994)



- This historical nonfiction work describes the events leading up to the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.
- It explores the post–Civil War period of western expansion, told mostly from the Sioux and Cheyenne points of view.

Heartsong of Charging Elk (2000)



- Historical fiction of an Oglala Sioux who joins Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and ends up in Europe.
- He is abandoned in a Marseille hospital and must survive on the streets of 19th century France.

The Blackfoot Indians

“The Blackfoot were fiercely independent and very successful warriors whose territory stretched from the North Saskatchewan River along what is now Edmonton Alberta, Canada, to the Missouri River of Montana, and from the Rocky Mountains and along the Saskatchewan river and down into the state of Montana to the Missouri river.”

Three Distinct Blackfoot Nations

Blackfoot (Canadian) / Blackfeet (Montana)

1. Siksika means “Blackfoot”

inhabit Alberta, Canada

2. Kainahs means “Bloods”

inhabit Alberta, Canada

3. Pikuni (Piegan, Peigan, Pikani, Piikani)

means “Poorly Dressed”

inhabit Montana, Idaho

Pikuni Bands

Lone Eaters

Many Chiefs

Never Laughs

Hard Top Knots

Black Doors

Small Robes

Small Brittle Fats

Black Patched Moccasins

Grease Melters

Social Units

“The basic social unit of the Blackfoot, above the family, was the band, varying from about 10 to 30 lodges, about 80 to 240 people. This size group was large enough to defend against attack and to undertake small communal hunts, but small enough for flexibility. Each band consisted of a respected leader, possibly his brothers and parents, and others who need not be related. Since the band was defined by place of residence, rather than by kinship, a person was free to leave one band and join another, which tended to ameliorate leadership disputes. As well, should a band fall upon hard times, its members could split-up and join other bands. In practice, bands were constantly forming and breaking-up. The system maximized flexibility and was an ideal organization for a hunting people on the Northwestern Plains.”

Sun Dance

“In mid-summer, when the Saskatoon berries ripened, the people regrouped for their major tribal ceremony, the Sun Dance. This was the only time of year when the entire tribe would assemble, and served the social purpose of reinforcing the bonds between the various groups, and reidentifying the individuals with the tribe. Communal buffalo hunts provided food and offerings of the bulls' tongues (a delicacy) for the ceremonies. After the Sun Dance, the people again separated to follow the buffalo.”

Wintering

“In the fall, the people would gradually shift to their wintering areas and prepare the buffalo jumps and pounds. Several groups of people might join together at particularly good sites, such as Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. As the buffalo were naturally driven into the area by the gradual late summer drying off of the open grasslands, the Blackfoot would carry out great communal buffalo kills, and prepare dry meat and pemmican to last them through winter, and other times when hunting was poor. At the end of the fall, the Blackfoot would move to their winter camps.”

Blackfoot Treaty

“The Blackfoot maintained this traditional way of life based on hunting bison, until the near extinction of the bison by 1881 forced them to change and finally adapt to the coming of Europeans. In 1877, the Canadian Blackfoot signed Treaty 7 and settled on reserves in southern Alberta, beginning a period of great struggle and economic hardship, trying to adapt to a completely new way of life as well as exposure to many diseases they had not previously encountered. Eventually, they established a viable economy based on farming, ranching, and light industry.”

<http://www.comanchelodge.com/nations/blackfoot-tribes.html>

Blackfeet Reservation



