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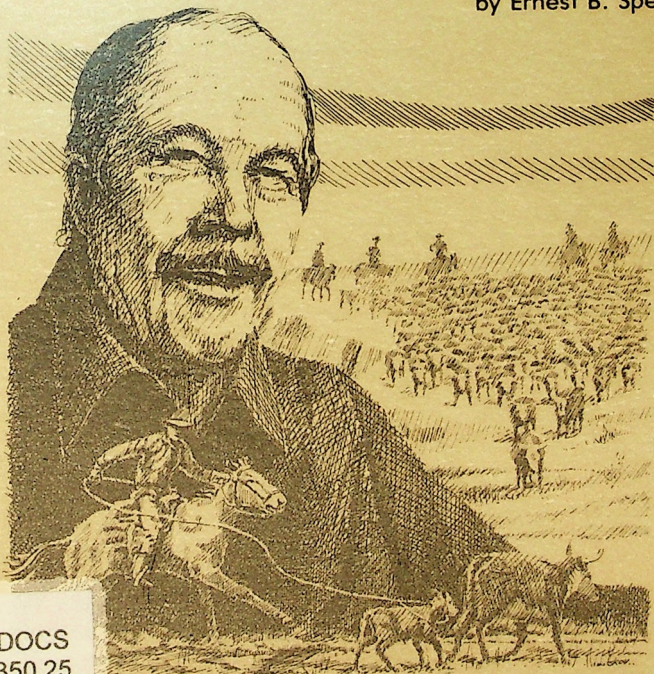


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BENJAMIN CAPPS

by Ernest B. Speck



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Benjamin Capps

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Benjamin Capps

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One might assume that a requisite for becoming a successful novelist about the Southwest is to be born in Archer County, Texas. Both Benjamin Capps and Larry McMurtry were born there, but their interests are different. Capps has been concerned with the background of his region, while McMurtry treats contemporary themes. Capps has now published eight novels, plus three pieces of non-fiction, about the West.

He was born on a ranch near Dundee, Texas, in 1922. His father died when he was four, so he grew up in the somewhat bookish home of his schoolteacher mother and became an insatiable reader. After he finished high school in Archer City at the age of sixteen, he went to Texas Technological College to study agriculture. In those depression years getting enough to eat was a problem, and Capps could muster no enthusiasm for courses in poultry husbandry, so he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps the next fall. There he learned surveying, and in 1940 he was surveying for the Army Corps of Engineers in Colorado. He had a try at chicken raising at Grand Junction, but soon he was back in Texas working at surveying and truck driving during the construction of the Lake Texoma Dam. About 1942 the idea of becoming a writer came to him, and while working on a surveying job in Greenville, Texas, he began to study Walter Campbell's *Professional Writing*.

He joined the Army Air Corps, but before he was called to duty he was nearly killed in a truck accident. Marie Thompson, whom he

had known in Colorado, came to care for him. When he was sufficiently recovered, they were married, ten days after she turned sixteen. Today she is a nurse; she evidently found a husband and a vocation at the same time.

In the Army Air Corps, Capps flew forty missions as a navigator in the Pacific theater, and because of his military service, he was able to return to college. At the University of Texas at Austin he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and earned the B.A. degree in 1948. The following year he received his M.A., doing a creative thesis, a novel called *Mesquite Country*. The greatest influence on Capps at Texas was Mody C. Boatright, who taught courses in Western American literature and life and was an internationally recognized folklorist. It was Boatright who informed Capps that writing fiction about the Southwest was not only a respectable thing, but was also an important and praiseworthy enterprise.

Capps then taught English and journalism at Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Two years were enough to convince him that teaching was not his *métier*, but he did enjoy living among the Indians in and around Tahlequah. So he became a tool and die maker in Grand Prairie, a suburb of Dallas, and he has lived there ever since. He wrote when he had time, and then in 1961 he quit his mechanical trade to write full time (*Contemporary Authors*, vol. 5-8, pp. 108-109; *Who's Who in America*, 1976, p. 501; interview with Capps, March 22, 1978).

Personally Capps is a quiet, unassuming, yet energetic person. He affects none of the Western trappings that so often adorn those who write about the West. He refused for two years to speak at the annual meeting of the Texas Folklore Society, of which he is a long-time member, saying, "I am not a public person." But, like Hawthorne, in a small group he exhibits warmth, wit, openness, and honesty.

Two things are striking about Capps's publishing history: he

published five substantial novels in one six-year period, and he has garnered award after award for his books. His second published novel, *The Trail to Ogallala*, established him as a major chronicler of the West. It won both the Spur Award of the Western Writers Association as the best Western novel of the year and the Levi Strauss Golden Saddleman Award as the best Western writing for 1964; it was selected by the American Library Association as one of the ten best books of the year for pre-college readers; and it is one of thirty-one novels selected that year for the White House library. *Sam Chance* was given the Spur Award for 1965. In 1969 *The White Man's Road* won Capps's third Spur Award. It also received the Wrangler Award of the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center as the best Western novel of the year. In 1972 *The True Memoirs of Charley Blankenship* was one of three finalists for the Spur Award, as was *Woman Chief* in 1980. *The Warren Wagontrain Raid* won the Wrangler Award in 1974 for the best Western book of non-fiction and was also one of three finalists for the Spur Award. There is no doubt that those most involved with writing about the West think Capps is one of the very best. Gregg Press is slated to put his first four hardback novels into a good library edition which will stay in print. Capps has also been elected to the Texas Institute of Letters.

At the time of this writing, Capps is at work on several projects, including some children's books and a lengthy rather philosophical essay. Capps's work falls into two categories, books dealing with the Anglo-American approach to the West and those dealing with the Indian in the years just before and during the time the white man crushed the Indian way of life.

His first published novel was *The Hanging at Comanche Wells* (1962), a paperback. On the surface it seems just another paperback western of the Max Brand, Luke Short type, but as one gets into it,

one finds it more and more the kind of story that Walter Van Tilburg Clark might have written. Although Capps once denied that he knows what a plot is (Paul Crume, "The West of Benjamin Capps," *Southwest Scene* [*Dallas Morning News* magazine], January 24, 1971, p. 22), *Comanche Wells* is carefully plotted. While the hero, Bart Youngblood, awaits the birth of his child, he also works valiantly as a deputy under Sheriff Bell to keep peace in Comanche Wells as they await the execution of William Ivey, a hired gun of the Cattlemen's Association, who has been convicted of killing the little son of a shepherd.

The power in the area is Stephen Pendergrass who owns the bank, the local newspaper, and a huge ranch. He is the brother of Albert Pendergrass, the judge who has presided at Ivey's trial. Judge Pendergrass is devoted entirely to seeing that the law is enforced and that justice is done. His brother is the cattle baron of the demanding sort who places the survival of his ranch (and the ranches of his neighbors) above all else.

The sheriff and his three deputies are able to repulse an early attempt to free Ivey. Judge Pendergrass, firing from his office in the courthouse, helps turn back the raid. The complications continue, and Capps keeps several strains of narrative going smoothly. One of the things which lifts the novel above the level of the commercial western is the running dispute between the two Pendergrass brothers. Stephen connives in various ways to spring Ivey. He tries to bribe both Youngblood and his brother. He is the leader of a second attempt to free Ivey. In contrast, Judge Albert Pendergrass is a small crippled man who has the courage to stand up to his overbearing brother. Arguments between the two display the erudition and intelligence of the little judge.

In the final showdown there is the running battle between the lawmen and Stephen's forces, and when Stephen is defeated, Ivey is

hanged. In a somewhat sentimental ending, Youngblood talks to the judge about studying law and then tells his wife they must name their new son Albert, but Capps's handling of the ending prevents it from being overly saccharine.

It is interesting to note that it was not until *The White Man's Road*, five novels later, that Capps listed *Comanche Wells* among his published works. Since it does contain the blazing guns, the good guys and the bad guys, and a hero who has to prove himself with his fists, *Comanche Wells* hardly depicts the West as Capps wanted to picture it, even though several of the characters are more than stereotypes.

The reception of *The Trail to Ogallala* (1964) signaled that Capps had arrived as a major novelist of the American West. The story of a trail drive from south of San Antonio to Ogallala, Nebraska, the novel involves the complex relations between assorted adults under trying circumstances. The protagonist, Billy Scott, a young but knowledgeable waddie, expects to be trail boss on a drive to Ogallala with three thousand head, but Lawson, who hired him, has just died. Not knowing that Scott had been selected by her husband, Lawson's wife names a Colonel Kittredge to boss the drive. Her partners agree with her selection, and Kittredge appoints "Blackie" Blackburn, a huge, strong, but dumb man, as segundo. Scott agrees to ride drag, and although he feels disappointment and resentment, he is too much the gentleman to complain to Mrs. Lawson.

His resentment increases when he sees the string of mounts in the remuda that are to be his. On the second day out he tells Kittredge that he is going back for his own horse so that he will have one good one. Although Kittredge, in military fashion, informs Scott that he cannot tell the boss what he wants to do, Scott convinces Kittredge to let him go get his horse.

Capps devotes two chapters of *The Trail to Ogallala* to "Longhorn

Critters" and "Human Critters." The first—which is included chiefly for the benefit of readers not familiar with cattle (and more especially, longhorn cattle) and the cattle drives—details the nature and condition of the lanky longhorns coming out of the winter ready to feed on spring grass and walk miles while gaining weight. The other chapter presents a sketch of each man on the drive. Here Capps pictures a group of men who could well have been on a drive along the Western Trail about 1880.

A chapter devoted to Blackie foreshadows what is to come, for it reveals that Blackie is illiterate and that he is touchy about his deficiency.

They soon discover they have a spooky herd; even though the first few days go smoothly, they try a dry drive, but the cattle turn back and run for the last water they have had, even though they are nearing other water. Because they are unhappy with the failed dry drive and because they dislike Kittredge's militaristic discipline, some men approach Scott, asking him to lead them as they take about five hundred cattle and head west for the Goodnight-Loving Trail, for they know that Scott has been up that trail. Scott refuses, keeping his allegiance to his employers, even though he knows that the trail drivers are a week behind schedule and may not get full pay.

In a few days the restless herd stampedes in a hail storm, and Kittredge is killed. This casualty leaves Blackie in command, and the conflict between him and Scott begins at once, for Scott knows that Blackie is not smart enough to boss the drive. After the herd runs three more times, Blackie says he is going to "doctor up some legs" of the steers that are most ready to run, and he plans to pick up range stock along the way to replace lost cattle. He does not cut the tendons on any of the steers, because Scott tells him what the owners will say, but he does pick up some range stock. When one of the crew quits, Blackie wants to go after him since he has ridden off on a remuda

horse, but Scott talks him out of it. After two more stampedes, there is another disagreement when Scott says they should not take the herd too close to where there are several herds waiting for the swollen South Canadian to go down. During the dispute, Scott hits Blackie and then takes a good drubbing. It is the only instance of physical violence between two people in *The Trail to Ogallala*. But after the fight, Blackie follows Scott's suggestion. Then the other herds do stampede, but their herd moves on north.

When some Cheyennes stop them and demand twelve steers for crossing their territory, Scott does the negotiating and gets them to accept three paint horses that the crew no longer need and one blind steer. Blackie wants to fight the Indians, but he accedes to Scott's negotiating because he recognizes Scott's abilities.

At Dodge City, Scott finds a letter to Kittredge, which indicates that Blackie has not written to the owners as he has said he did, so Scott sends a telegram to one of the partners, Greer, about Kittredge's death.

North of Dodge there are more stampedes, and they lose two more men. By now Scott has pretty well assumed command, although Blackie still argues with him and pretends to boss. When they reach Ogallala, Scott asks for and gets trail boss's pay from Greer who meets them, and Blackie offers no objection. Scott also gets a bonus for the men who have, although short-handed, brought the cattle through on schedule.

Since Capps's herd follows the same Western Trail as the herd in Andy Adams's *Log of a Cowboy*, one might expect many parallels in the stories, but there are comparatively few. In both stories there is a dry drive, but the results are different; there are stampedes, visits to Dodge, and other things to be expected, but in no way can it be said that Capps's book is a rehash of Adams's book. In *Log of a Cowboy* the only conflict is that involved in moving a herd up the trail. In

The Trail to Ogallala Billy Scott has both his demotion to contend with and then his running conflict with Blackie to see that the herd gets through on time and in good order. As Capps said, he hoped to be as authentic as Adams, "yet come up with distinctive characters and more of a fictional organization . . . than Adams used" (Letter to Mody Boatright, March 23, 1964).

And *The Trail to Ogallala* is more of a novel in the traditional sense. It has a protagonist with a conflict that involves his pride and his honor. Yet Capps's purpose is in some ways the same as Adams's: to reveal the nature of the long cattle drives. There are more tensions in Capps's novel, but although he gains some intensity by having the herd be a spooky one, he also runs the danger of having too many stampedes so that the reader could become blasé about them. In addition to the authenticity, it is the characters that make the novel vivid. Scott is thoroughly believable, and his fight with Blackie shows that he lets his frustrations get the better of him when he should have been able to maneuver Blackie. Blackie emerges as more than a stock figure, even though the man with bull-like strength and little intelligence is a commonly seen type.

In the most detailed study yet done of any of Capps's work, Don Graham contends that *The Trail to Ogallala* is far superior to *Log of a Cowboy*, for it is, he says, as authentic and has a fully depicted protagonist who embodies the doctrines of fidelity and work that are part of his heritage and who matures with experience. Furthermore, says Graham, there is a sense of history in Capps's book that is not present in the one by Adams ("Old and New Cowboy Classics," *Southwest Review*, 65 [Summer 1980], 293-303).

More than once Capps has made use of historical figures and events as points of departure for his novels, and in *Sam Chance* (1965) he has produced a figure who bears similarities to Charles Goodnight. Each established a huge ranch in Texas, each helped

open up a new cattle trail, both experimented by using imported Durham cattle as replacements for longhorns, both founded stockmen's associations, and each of them had a town named for him. Yet Capps points out many differences between the two: Goodnight was not from Tennessee, was not in the regular Confederate Army, came to Texas long before 1865, did not ranch in the same area as Chance, and did not admit to catching wild cattle on the range. Yet he says there are more similarities between the two men than he intended. His inspiration for the story came from Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains* (Letter to Mody Boatright, July 12, 1965).

The story opens with Chance leaving the Confederate Army after the surrender and taking his horse, which he would not surrender. Back in Tennessee he becomes engaged and then heads for Texas to make a home for his Martha. When he is offered fifteen dollars a month to hunt wild cattle west of Dallas, he makes a different deal: he is to get one-fourth of the cattle that he and his war buddy Lefors find. When Indians steal their remuda, the cattle hunters get their horses back, and Chance wants to let the Indians' horses alone. When they find the nephew of their boss tortured and killed, apparently by the Indians, the hunters ask Chance whether he still thinks it was wise to leave the Indians their horses, and he has no argument in his defense.

When Chance sees huge buffalo herds for the first time, he tells Lefors that the country could support that many cattle. After they spend the winter breaking steers to work and trapping, they sell their pelts at a good profit. A letter from Martha tells of her father's death, and her news spurs Chance to establish a home for her now that she is left very much alone. He continues to collect wild cattle on the range, hiring cowboys to help him, including a black named Ike, who has had no experience, but who turns out to be the best

cowhand of all and who remains with Chance throughout his life.

Chance accumulates over a thousand cattle, and he begins to run freight wagons from the east. He goes back to Tennessee for Martha and returns to find the house he has built burned by the Comanches and nearly all of his horses stolen. He builds a new house near a store run by a man named Briggs and goes into partnership with him, since Briggs offers him nearly five times what he expects such an offer should be. Briggs can afford liberal terms because of the new market for cattle in Abilene, Kansas.

A couple of years later, Chance takes a herd up the trail and sells it for a huge profit. Back in Texas, after dissolving his partnership with Briggs, he establishes a large ranch east of the high plains and soon has over seventy square miles under his control. The Durham bulls he brings in are soon killed by the longhorn bulls. He is now hauling freight all the way from Houston. Other ranchers begin to run cattle near him, and Chance brings in the system of using representatives from all ranches at every round-up to claim cattle bearing their brands. The using of reps had started earlier among ranchers farther south, and Chance is quick to pick it up.

In a bad year on the market, Chance for the first time takes a loss. He goes home to find a new son. When he goes buffalo hunting the next winter, he and his companions are attacked by Indians, and Chance gets an arrow in his back, but they manage to get their wagon load of hides to Ft. Griffin. From the hides he makes enough money to show some profit for the year.

During the next few years, Chance continues to hunt buffalo, and he brings some young buffalo to his ranch to breed. He also sees his first barbed wire and realizes what is coming soon in the West. There is less and less fear of raids by the Indians, and by 1880 the price of cattle is back up to fifty dollars a head, so he is prospering.

More of Chance's nature is revealed when he recognizes that there

is a side to his wife that he will never understand. He is shaken by the realization, but he puts it from his mind and determines to buy her some imported lace. The secret thoughts and feelings of a woman are not grist for as rough a mill as that of Sam Chance.

He builds a school on the ranch for his own and other children. This act is the beginning of a civic-mindedness that Chance displays more and more often as the area becomes settled. Since he has no notion of what a schoolteacher should be paid, he decides that because she has to make as many decisions as a good cowhand and does not get her grub furnished, he will pay her ten dollars a month more than a regular hand.

At no time does Chance show any reluctance to speak his mind, but not until the latter part of the book does he begin to spell out his view of the position and needs of the rancher. He is elected president of the West Texas Stock Growers Association (he has been so before), because the incumbent feels that Chance is needed to keep "crackpots" from ruining the organization. In an executive board meeting at which Chance is nominated, he lectures his fellow ranchers on several points: the open range is on its way out, barbed wire does not cut stock, there is over-grazing of the range and some kind of range inspection should be started, farmers should be kept out of grazing land but not by force, and the association needs a representative in Austin before the state legislature. Many do not agree with him, but he does not care if his lecturing results in his losing support. When it is proposed that they set some employment standards, Chance preaches a mini-sermon on the loyalty that his men feel towards him and that he feels toward them and he refuses to join any movement that would seemingly put him in opposition to his men. After he is elected president, the one wish he gets is having a representative in Austin.

Chance goes to see a granger who is plowing up the range just out-

side Chance's property and using water from one of Chance's stock tanks. Because the man seems nervous over the fact that Chance is armed, Chance hands him his pistol. He tries to explain to the man that he cannot farm successfully in that dry area. He tells the man to leave and then tries to get his pistol back. Chance has his hand on the gun when the man pulls the trigger. Chance's arm is seared, and one mule of the man's team is killed. Chance says that when the granger is ready to leave, he will give him another mule.

Chance then goes to Austin and confers with some state senators. When one of the senators attacks Chance as a ruthless cattle baron, Chance instructs the senators on cattle raising and how to lease or sell state land to be used for grazing. He displays a kind of arrogance here and in his earlier lectures to the ranchers and the farmers.

A drought hits, and most cattle are in poor condition when a severe winter comes, but Chance's stock is in relatively good shape. A huge drift of cattle moving south ahead of north winds tears down a fence he has built to turn cattle drifting on the open range, but he and his men manage to turn the cattle before they hit the fences on his own property. Although ninety percent of some herds are lost, Chance loses only seven percent of his cattle. Another bad winter marks the "end of the time when cattle might be harvested like fish" (p. 211).

As the country becomes settled, Chance eventually builds the kind of house he has long hoped to build. He donates land for the site of a town, which is later to be named for him. In her last days, however, his ailing wife asks to be buried in Tennessee, a kind of final rejection of her Texas life. Then the county is organized, and Chance becomes a county commissioner. He is disliked by everyone except his own men and other ranchers, so after quarrels, he resigns his commissioner's post. Growing testier as he grows older, he hires lawyers to prove his title to his land. He has some of his men make claims

against his land, and because they bring a poor case, Chance has his titles validated by the courts. He also has his men homestead property which he buys after they have legal possession.

His son, then sixteen, runs away, and his daughter marries, only to return as a widow and fuss over him. He goes to Tennessee to see about reburying his wife when there is a problem about the graveyard, and he finds his son there. His son has thought of his father as having been unfeeling toward his mother, but the father and son are reconciled, and the son becomes a fixture on the ranch.

At the age of sixty, Chance leases grazing land in South Dakota. When he gives ten acres to the town for a cemetery, some townspeople accuse him of salving his conscience. He lectures some newsmen on the injustice of homesteading laws as compared with laws for miners in staking claims. At seventy-five he instructs the state land commissioners about Texas land problems.

Coming to interview Chance, who is sick, a newsman is turned away by old Ike, who guards his employer with a fierce loyalty. That night Chance gets up, saddles a horse, and rides out into the pasture, believing that he is seeing again scenes from his earlier life. He dies out on the range.

Capps presents Chance's long and varied career in faithful detail, but the result is not one of Capps's best novels. He has attempted an admirable thing: to present in fictional form the information contained in Webb's *The Great Plains*, and to present the point of view of the men who settled the range country. That point of view is so well presented that it is little wonder that the novel won a Spur Award. But Chance becomes too much the polemicist, and he analyzes the situation of his day with the hindsight which Webb had.

Chance is, if not overbearing, mightily forceful toward those he deals with, yet he is not seen as being ruthless as Goodnight sometimes was when he did such things as have his cowboys stage

mock Indian raids to run off grangers. (Goodnight's tactic has been recounted as an episode in family history. My wife's grandfather, who settled next to Goodnight's property, was subjected to such a raid.)

In addition to Goodnight, there are other figures whom Chance resembles. He is somewhat like Jim Brewton in Conrad Richter's *The Sea of Grass* (1937). The two argue in the same way against nesters trying to farm the dry grasslands, but Brewton is more taciturn, presenting his position in fewer words. He seems a colder man, on the surface at least. Richter's concern is the romance between Brewton and his wife, not the ranchers' plight. Chance's romance is quite secondary in the story. Chance also resembles Teddy Blue Abbott's father-in-law, Granville Stuart. Stuart bucked the other members of a stock association on behalf of his men, contending that the hands should be permitted to own cattle. When there is bitterness about his methods, he takes all the blame himself, never saying which of his men helped him. Although accused of killing settlers, actually he was kindly toward them (E. C. "Teddy Blue" Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, *We Pointed Them North* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955], pp. 129-40).

Thus, Chance is much the sort of person the early big ranchers were. He is a realist, and because he is reasonably articulate, he serves as a good spokesman for his position. Capps has produced a convincing character; whether he is a sympathetic one is open to some question. Perhaps my granger background prejudices me. I see him as too much the smug, overbearing person that the people in the town saw.

Although Capps published *A Woman of the People* (1966) before *The Brothers of Uterica* (1967), the latter novel was the next of his works on the Anglo-American approach to the frontier.

A departure from earlier books about the whites, *The Brothers of*

Uterica deals not with the cattle country, but with a farming community, and it is told in the first person. The brothers are members of a socialistic colony. There were several such colonies in Texas, particularly La Réunion in what is now part of Dallas and an Icarian colony in the same area.

The colony (the name comes from *utopia* and *America*) contains an assortment of persons. The leader is Jean Charles Bossereau, who is kindly, well-schooled in socialist theory, persuasive, but hopelessly impractical. The "Covenant," a list of sixteen points which governs the Utericans, is obviously the work of Bossereau. Another one of the characters is a highly practical man named Finch. Although not one of the brothers, he has been hired, along with some other non-colonists, to get the farm into operation. The York brothers, Jim and Andy, are at first enthusiastic colonists, but Andy becomes disillusioned, while Jim falls in love with Bossereau's daughter, Jeannette. The narrator, Langly, is a former Methodist minister who has been too idealistic for any congregation. He becomes the cabinmate of the York brothers. Dr. Valentin later tries to take command of the colony, believing that strict discipline is its only hope. The feminist Harriet Edwards, modeled in part on Margaret Fuller, is an outspoken critic of Bossereau's management. And Dr. Sockwell, the colony's physician and a well-meaning alcoholic, is opposed to having Valentin become the leader. In fact, there is a rough parallel (of which Capps says he was not conscious) between Bossereau and Lenin, Valentin and Stalin, and Sockwell and Trotsky (Letter from Capps, March 2, 1979).

The colony, officially the New Socialist Colonization Company, has problems. First, they get a late start in planting, then they are hit by flooding followed by drought, and often they suffer from the general laziness and ineptness of some of the people. It is the laziness of others which causes Andy York's disaffection. Although Domini-

que Henri's ineptness provides a bit of comic relief, sometimes the results of his bungling are too serious to be funny. Then the brothers lose most of their chickens to Indians on a "peaceful" visit. Meetings held to iron out these problems reveal to Langly how great the colonists' disagreements are becoming.

A distinctive feature of *The Brothers of Uterica* is the series of essays which Langly writes, giving his reactions to things in the colony. Although sometimes a bit too recondite to seem appropriate in a work of fiction, they give a universal quality to events. The first essay describes an eerie experience that Langly has on a stormy night when he feels at first disoriented and then lonely and isolated. The experience makes him feel that the colonists are being too audacious in trying to settle the land and that only the Indians belong there.

What also contributes to Langly's uneasiness is the tension resulting from the power struggle within the colony. Very early, Valentin begins his attacks on Bossereau by insisting that the leadership and rules are too lax. Harriet Edwards is another who criticizes Bossereau. She stirs up the women, but Bossereau calms them down with a typically idealistic talk on women in the socialist society. When Bossereau goes to a nearby Indian village with cookies as a peace offering—because an employee has broken an Indian boy's bow after the boy shoots at their few chickens—Valentin and Harriet Edwards go into Bossereau's quarters and then announce that they are unable to find any records of company funds, but that the colony is obviously running out of money. After the incident, Bossereau stops a movement by Sockwell to have Valentin reprimanded by the assembly. Bossereau does say that the hired workers must go, but he is persuaded to keep Finch.

Next, Langly stops a fight between Andy and Jim, for it appears that Andy is about to kill Jim. Finch leaves but expresses admiration for Bossereau. When Uterica's crops fail, Bossereau is voted out, and

three committees are set up to run the colony. The crisis culminates when Jeannette Bossereau is found murdered and presumably raped. Andy, who has not been staying at the colony, is suspected of being the murderer. The brutal destruction of a girl characterized by compassionate innocence is symbolic of the end of a colony based on faith in the essential goodness of man. As Valentin tries to increase discipline, the colonists are eating turnip and mutton stew. Then Bossereau is re-instated as leader.

One day, a half-breed tells them they will be attacked by Indians and their buildings burned by sundown. To emphasize his warning, he brings the scalped body of Andy York with him. The Utericans quickly pack and leave, although Bossereau wants to stay. After they leave, they look back and see the flames starting. Bossereau grabs Langly's horse and rides toward the settlement, and later Langly and others go back and bury him with Jeannette. Although Bossereau's action is somewhat sentimental, the greatest exhibition of sentiment comes when Dr. Sockwell grabs their neatly lettered creed from the colony bulletin board and tucks it lovingly inside his shirt. Langly says there are other copies, but they were printed on cheap paper as if they were not meant to last.

Several other aspects of the breaking-up of the colony are significant. Many of the colonists panic when they learn what is in store for them. Valentin and Harriet Edwards put on a show of remaining calm, but it is Langly who organizes the retreat. I find somewhat disturbing the lack of any stated motivation for the Indian attack. Given Capps's feeling for and understanding of Indians, it is a bit surprising that nothing is said about their motivation. If Capps had alluded to Langly's earlier feeling that only Indians belonged on that land, then readers might have seen some reason for the Indian attack.

Interestingly, Martin Bucco, reviewing both Capps's novel and

David W. Noble's *The Eternal Adam and the New World*, says that *The Brothers of Uterica* supports Noble's theory of the imperfection of the individual and of society (*Western American Literature*, 8 [Winter 1969], 309). However, I doubt that Capps wrote the book to exemplify that thesis. He was not, after all, writing a treatise on psychology and economics. If the novel can be used to support such a thesis, I suspect that Capps would be ready to quote Robert Frost's famous statement that if a reader can find a political message in one of his poems, well and good, but the reader should not blame Frost for it.

The methodical tone of *The Brothers of Uterica* comes from having Langly as narrator. A knowledgeable man who is always ready to learn more, Langly is compassionate but not overemotional. Langly's calm, unbiased observations coupled with his obvious concern for his fellow colonists, remind one of Whitman's being both participant and observer.

The Brothers of Uterica bears brief comparison with another tale of a communal colony. Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* reflects something of his experiences at Brook Farm, although he denies that the colony provided more than a "theatre . . . where the creatures of his [the author's] brain may play their phantasmagorical antics" (Preface, *The Blithedale Romance* [New York: Norton, 1978], pp. 1-2). Hawthorne denied being a realist, so one must decide for himself how much of this story is imagination, how much is satire, and how much is a straight reflection of verity. With Capps one is faced with a basic realism; his aim is to picture with verisimilitude what might well have been.

To move from the rather solemn Brother Langly to the bright hopefulness of Charley Blankenship is to take a long stride. The contrast between the two characters demonstrates Capps's skill as a novelist. *The True Memoirs of Charley Blankenship* (1972) is a

Bildungsroman carrying Charley from his adolescent innocence when he leaves home to his self-confident maturity when he returns ten years later. In such a story there must be humor, for Charley's experiences and his reactions to them are bound to be amusing at times, and the humor is there.

The published version of the novel carries an introductory note which suggests that the manuscript came from the hand of Blankenship himself and that Capps has been able to use it through the courtesy of a descendant. Capps's original introductory note spells out his supposed meeting with Blankenship and his winding up with the first version of the memoirs after having seen versions eight and nine, the latter worse than the previous one, and both modeled on the pulp western magazines of the day. Years after he has received the first version, Capps finds it again, and upon reading it he sees that it is a highly authentic tale. *The True Memoirs of Charley Blankenship* is allegedly a transcription of that first version. (Capps's original introduction is in the manuscript collection of the University of Texas at Arlington, along with others of Capps's papers.)

One wishes that many of the memoirs on life on the frontier had been like *The True Memoirs of Charley Blankenship*, instead of being "corrected" versions such as those in *The Trail Drivers of Texas*. Capps's novel most resembles Teddy Blue Abbott's *We Pointed Them North* and Charles A. Siringo's *A Texas Cowboy* (1885). The chief difference is that Capps wrote a novel, and he wrote with a conscious purpose and with professional skill, so his book has more form than the accounts by Siringo and Abbott.

In 1880 at the age of seventeen, Charley leaves the drab farm life of Missouri to go look for his older brother and for adventure in the West. He finds adventure but not his brother. The adventures are the sort a boy would have found at that time and in that place. He eventually finds the Western Trail and follows it until he joins a cat-

tle drive, first as freeloader and then as cook's helper when the wrangler is promoted to trail driver. The other hands give their new hand a scrubbing in a river, and they are all set to give Charley one, but the cook stops them. Something of Charley's youthful attitude can be seen in his reaction: ". . . there I had a steady job making big money, but I wanted to be thrown in the river."

In Dodge he buys some real cowboy clothes from an undertaker and goes to work for a man who is holding his cattle to sell later. A woman known as "Weeping Lil" gets his earnings with a sob story (and by showing him a bruise on her thigh, the most explicit sex in the novel). He goes collecting buffalo bones with a man who will not pay him, and then he joins, or is forced to join, four men, all named Smith. They are an edgy bunch; one is so afraid of being hanged he will not let Charley leave for fear he will run to the nearest lawman. Charley finally gets away when they quarrel among themselves.

After cowboying in Wyoming, he starts hunting buffalo. Charley does not split his thumb, but his alcoholic, gold-bricking partner rips his hand open and cannot work. Charley seems saddled with the man until the gold-bricker breaks a leg, and then Charley unloads him on an unsuspecting Indian. Charley gives the Indian money and comments that whites have been accused of wronging Indians, but this is the only time he ever wronged one of them.

He then works on a ranch in Arizona, but he leaves because there is too much tank building. In New Mexico he nearly breaks up the wedding of a friend when he and his buddies take the groom on a drunken spree. After several more moves, he proves his riding ability on a ranch known for having the meanest string of horses in the West. He outrides a "professional" bronc buster, much to the man's chagrin. Then he meets Weeping Lil again in Colorado. Although they laugh together over the way she bilked him in Dodge, she again talks him out of his money.

Eventually, he goes home for a visit without the thousand dollars in his pocket that he hoped to have, but he does have a good horse and saddle and a present for his mother that he has been carrying for years. His return home could easily have been sentimental, but instead it is the account of a mature man seeing his parents with both affection and perspective. And this reaction does not seem beyond the range of Charley's capacity, for we have seen him mature. Charley's attitude toward his parents becomes a final measure of his adulthood.

One easily empathizes with his youthful naiveté, his eagerness tempered by caution, his modest pride in proving himself a good cowhand, his maturing from boy to man. No one who has ever forked a horse can escape feeling Charley's affection for his mounts from his eighteen-dollar Cricket to his hundred-and-forty-dollar Dusty. Lesser persons in the novel are somewhat like caricatures at times, but they are not too much overdrawn.

Earlier I mentioned that there are marked differences between *The Brothers of Uterica* and *Charley Blankenship*. In addition to the difference in mood, there is also a difference in the manner of expression of the protagonists. Langly is educated and dead serious, but *The True Memoirs of Charley Blankenship* is told as a Charley Blankenship might have written, or spoken, his story; in fact, there is the ring of the oral tale in the book. Charley's metaphors range from the clichés of the cow country to such fine inventions as the description of shaking hands with a defeated man as being like "taking hold of half a sack of Bull Durham" (p. 238). Only rarely does Capps use a word Charley probably would have not employed; never is there a phrase with a literary note.

Although most memoirs are normally written when a person is somewhat advanced in age and is often derisive about his earlier years, Charley's story has none of the older man's looking down upon

his youth. Rather Charley sees it as a time we must all go through—a simple, although sometimes amusing, fact of life.

A Woman of the People (1966) is a good novel on which to make the transition from Capps's novels about the white man to his books about the Indian, for it is the story of the capture of a white girl and her sister by Comanches. While the story in some ways resembles the tale of Cynthia Ann Parker, *A Woman of the People* is simply another instance of Capps's taking off from a factual base, then writing his own story.

Helen Morrison, who is ten, and her sister Katy, five, are captured and their parents killed. When they are auctioned off, medicine man Spitting Dog pays three horses for Katy, but Helen is sold to Lance Returner for just an iron hoop because it is assumed she is too old ever to become a good Comanche. She is called Tehanita (Katy becomes Sunflower), given deerskin clothes, and put to work at the chores of a Comanche woman. She wants to tell her sister not to play with the children of those who killed their parents, but Sunflower is rapidly becoming acculturated. The first break in Helen's resistance comes when she realizes that in order for her to live in that culture, she must learn the Comanche language (she has communicated through a Comanche woman who knows some English) and how to do her jobs well.

She learns to understand the value of buffalo hides and how to preserve the meat. She also learns to appreciate the tales of Story Teller, the father of Lance Returner's wives. When she sees some white cavalry, she starts to follow them, but she realizes that she cannot catch them and that she should not leave her sister. She is also fearful of how the soldiers would react to her and of what would happen to Sunflower if they tried to rescue her.

After a hard winter Tehanita eats raw liver from the first buffalo they kill and likes it. She is growing up, and Lance Returner and the

women of the lodge want her to run with the horses, a rite of passage in which the girls run hanging on to horses' tails. She is told that she must run to show that she is a Comanche and not a slave and that it is expected of the daughter of a war chief. To avoid running she drinks water from a nearby salty lake and becomes sick.

As they move about she keeps looking for a little isolated mountain which was near her white home; looking for this mountain becomes her last tie with her origin. After she watches the torture of a Tonkawa, a tribe greatly hated by the Comanches, she is disturbed by the cruelty of the women. Sunflower marries Little Wild Horse, and things go well when pressure from the whites diminishes during the Civil War. One spring some Lipans attack, and when Tehanita kills one of them with a lodge pole, she earns the praise of her adoptive father.

When Sunflower, now the mother of a daughter, prepares to leave with a raiding party into Mexico, Tehanita objects but is powerless to stop her. Then she is courted by Burning Hand, Sunflower's adoptive brother, but she rejects the first overture. The Mexico raiders return without Sunflower, and while the others mourn, Tehanita feels the loss of her sense of duty toward Sunflower. Escape is still on her mind, but she decides to wait until Sunflower's daughter is older before she tries to escape. She finds comfort in being close to the other women in the tipi as she begins to wonder about the nature of white people, for the Comanche sees the white man only as an enemy. She cannot reconcile her vague allegiance to the whites with her growing allegiance to the Comanches.

When Burning Hand makes another proposal, in the form of nine horses tied in front of Lance Returner's tipi, she is told what a good raider Burning Hand has become even though he has never got medicine as any young brave should. She accepts Burning Hand's proposal because she doubts that there would be any among the

whites as good as Burning Hand and because she cannot insult him before his family. After they are married, she shows her concern for him and he for her. She becomes pregnant and wants to bear his child.

When the Comanches are attacked in their winter camp by blue coats, Tehanita no longer thinks of the blue coats as being of the same origin as she, for they are now enemies. The Comanches salvage what is left of their camp after the raid and move south. They have an uncomfortable winter because of poor shelter, but there are plenty of buffalo. Those buffalo, however, act in a strange fashion, being either so skittish they will stampede over nothing or tame and listless. There are rumors that buffalo act that way after attacks by white hunters.

Soon after Tehanita bears a son, her band moves to a valley at the edge of the high plains. In the spring they move warily to the east and find the carcasses of hundreds of skinned buffalo. While the warriors are away to try to run off the white buffalo hunters, two strange Comanches show up and tell them that blue coats are in all directions and that they are therefore going to have to follow the white man's road. When their civil chief dies following a raid against the buffalo hunters, the band is disorganized, and the council decides not to name a new chief but to govern by council.

The band moves to Palo Duro Canyon where there are buffalo and where they hope to meet the New Mexico traders. They find that other bands of Comanches plus Kiowas and even Cheyennes and Arapahoes are new allies against the attacking whites. Their camp in one of the tributary canyons of the Palo Duro is attacked while the men are gone; the women climb up to the rim of the canyon, but the camp is burned and some of the women killed. When the men return, they find their horses killed too. The band spends a bitter winter, but in the spring things look better, since they find buffalo

and get some horses and ammunition from a raid on buffalo hunters. Once again they meet members of another Comanche band, who report that most of their band has gone to a reservation.

The tribal council meets and sends for Tehanita's husband. When he does not want to go, Lance Returner comes and orders him to go to the meeting. Although he has never received medicine, Burning Hand is made civil chief, a symbol of the passing of the Indian way. When he returns from the meeting that night, he tells Tehanita to prepare to leave, for it is raining, and they must go while they will leave no tracks. After they camp the next morning, she realizes he has been made chief when their lodge is set up in the middle of the camp.

The last chapter, which tells of their final surrender to the whites, reveals poignantly the position of the Indian, so that the second theme of *A Woman of the People* blends with the major one of the white girl becoming an Indian. After another Comanche comes with his wives saying he has refused to go to the reservation, they move often, and Burning Hand proves to be a wise chief in mapping out strategy.

One day Tehanita finds Burning Hand studying a revolver, saying he is frightened that the white man can contrive such a weapon which is more than a match for the rapid firing of arrows by the Indians. Burning Hand cannot see a good road for the Comanches to follow if this sort of thing is to be used against them.

He asks her if she remembers any of the white man's secrets, since she "used to be white." Because he is confused about what to do, he leaves in order to be alone and to see how the white man lives when he is not on the warpath. Tehanita follows Burning Hand and goes up to him later when she sees him looking depressed. She then sees the little mountain that she remembers from her childhood, and she tells him that she has often thought of going back to the white peo-

ple. Then she questions him about where they are; he knows the white name for the West Fork of the Trinity, a name she recognizes. She feels relieved when she confesses wanting to return to the whites, but she denies that she is trying to persuade him to go to the whites when he accuses her of it. She says she wants only to be with the People.

As they lie on their bellies watching a house of some whites, Tehanita sees a little girl and her mother, and she feels great freedom because she realizes that she has given up any thought of escape and that confession has relieved her of guilt. Burning Hand steals a sheet from the clothes line, and they go home.

When their band of Comanches approaches Fort Sill, they carry a white flag made from the sheet. Burning Hand says he thinks they will find the white man's road hard, but they go on. As they ride into the fort, Tehanita tells her son, Little Hunter, to sit proudly on his horse as his father does.

One of the most striking features of *A Woman of the People* is the picture of the day-to-day life of the Plains Indians, including their constant quest for food and their patterns of behavior. Injected into those scenes of daily life is the set of complications that arises with the coming of the white man from the east. Through Tehanita's eyes, we see the effect of the killing off of the buffalo and the constant pressure placed on the Indians by the white soldiers. Though she becomes more of a Comanche every day, Tehanita does not see the blue coats as enemies until she marries. Her indecision and her procrastination about escaping are rather typical of the thinking of a growing child and an adolescent who does not have the knowledge and wisdom to handle the problem before her. However, Capps does not handle the reactions of Tehanita as a little girl as well as he does her reactions later on. After her transition into Comanche attitudes, one sees the white man through Comanche eyes.

As Robert A. Roripaugh points out, Capps shows that the stereotype of the cruel savage is inaccurate. Such cruelty as they showed was no more than any people might show against those who were set upon destroying them (*Western American Literature*, 2 [Spring 1967], 66). Capps has not told just another thrilling tale of Indian capture; rather, he has used that format to show something of Indian culture and to show the coming of the white man from the point of view of the Indian, who was as mystified by the white man's actions as any white man was by the Indian's.

Capps's second novel about the Indian, *The White Man's Road* (1969), reaches a new height in performance. The rich texture of the novel surpasses that of his previous efforts. The protagonist, Joe Cowbone, is not only the Comanche half-breed trying to find his place in the world of western Oklahoma, but he is also everyman trying to find his place in a world from which he feels alienated. The story opens with Joe and his friend Slow Tom Armstedt being undecided whether they will go to a feast Great Eagle is supposed to have. There is a note in the indecision and purposelessness like that at the beginning of Paddy Chayefsky's *Marty*, half a century later and half a continent away. Joe and Slow Tom go to Great Eagle's feast and watch him get drunk and tell tales of his own degradation while the ungutted sheep he is cooking burns up.

Joe's mother comes for him a few days later when he is playing poker with friends. Since her action is not in keeping with a Comanche woman's conduct, it suggests that something out of the ordinary has happened. She tells Joe that White Buffalo, his white father, has come back. His father, a trader, had earlier become a Comanche and married his mother, Little Brown Girl. They had been separated when she fled St. Louis with Joe, and since then, White Buffalo has assumed that his wife is dead. Now the former white Comanche warrior is returning as a trader on the reservation.

The next day Joe and his mother find no one at the new store and the new house for the trader, so they enter the house, and Little Brown Girl remembers how houses were in St. Louis. Just as his mother is about to make use of the kitchen, they hear white women talking. The white woman who is obviously the one for whom the house is intended screams at the sight of them, and Joe and Little Brown Girl flee in spite of the "black-skinned white soldier" who tells them to stop. Joe is so angry with White Buffalo for marrying a white woman that he wants to kill him. When his mother wants to go home, he sends her with their borrowed horses and walks to Slow Tom's home, not understanding his anger when he passes Fort Sill on the way.

He goes to see his girl friend, Lottie Manybirds, who has been listening to the Reverend Fairchild. She refuses his advances—though she has not refused them before—because she wants marriage. But Joe objects to white people telling Indians in what manner and how often they should marry. He kills a turkey with shells she has given him, and her father is pleased with the turkey, but says that any man interested in his daughters must say how many coups he has counted and bring horses or good wool blankets. But he also acknowledges that a worthy suitor can be either a good hunter or a good Christian farmer.

Joe and Slow Tom go to work at fence building and meet a Mr. Powell, their boss. Powell asks if the Comanches do the Ghost Dance, a ceremony that was part of a new religion which was spreading among the Plains Indians and which predicted that the buffalo would return and the white man would leave. Powell is also interested in whether the Comanches want to keep their land as grazing land, or whether they want the reservation divided up and sold, a move which Powell opposes.

Next, Joe talks to Slow Tom about a horse raid into Texas. On the

weekend, Joe uses an advance on his pay to buy some shells in preparation for the raid. He expects two other friends to join them.

When soldiers come and invite Powell to visit with the colonel at the fort, Powell refuses to go. Two workers quit, so Joe can get Spike Chanakut and Bill Nappy to work with them while they plan to steal horses. On his way to get his friends, Joe tries to remember his life with his father. He can remember wars with the blue coats, a long walk with his mother, and seeing great buffalo herds. At seventeen he had gone on a buffalo hunt when they found only buffalo bones. He resents his past, and he resents the hold both his mother and Lottie have over him because so many of the things they stand for are meaningless to him.

He sees Freddy Bull, who can read English. Joe can speak fairly good English, but he cannot read. Freddy tells Joe that Little Brown Girl has been buying medicine from Freddy's father, medicine man Duncan Bull. When Joe asks her about it, she tells of leaving White Buffalo because she was afraid of St. Louis. Now she will do anything to get him back.

Skeptical about Indian medicine, Joe has seen the careful drowning of the medicine bundle of an honored old man after his death, but he has also seen a man throw his medicine bundle away. He has heard talk that the Messiah of the white man's religion would come if the Indians would dance the Ghost Dance, but Joe knows that most Comanches do not believe in the Ghost Dance. There is no belief for him to cling to.

When Joe brings Spike and Bill to the fencing job, Powell asks them whether the Indians want to sell their land. Joe likes Powell, but he is irritated with himself for doing so. When soldiers come again and tell Powell not to meddle in Indian affairs, Powell stands his ground and says he will speak his mind. Just then a cowboy's horse breaks loose, and Powell jumps on a mare bareback and catches the

horse. Joe wonders at his skill in riding and is suspicious of him. When they learn the fence is not in alignment, Powell smashes his compass, and Joe is happy to see a white man smashing and cursing his fancy instrument.

Rain forces a break in the fence building, and Joe goes to consult some old Indians about conducting horse raids. Medicine man Duncan Bull provides him with no useful information; he is obviously after money from Joe. Joe is told to talk to old Mad Wolf.

Powell is again told by the army to stay out of Indian affairs. When the major who delivers the message comments on the Ghost Dance, Powell says the Comanches will never accept it. He then turns to two Comanches in army uniforms with the major and tells them in old-time Comanche that they are giving away the land. After the major leaves, Powell apologizes to Joe and his friends for not letting them know that he speaks Comanche and tells them not to go on the horse raid he has heard them planning. This revelation sets Joe's mind to whirling, for he recalls that Powell mounted the mare from the right side, Comanche style, and rode as if the horse were part of him. Also, according to Spike, Powell has said that his Comanche wife and son were killed in a raid on the Cheyennes with whom they were staying.

As Joe walks home, he is unable to answer the questions he asks himself about his identity or to find the road he must travel. He thinks that perhaps a member of the tribe who has committed suicide has found the only answer. He gets Freddy Bull to start teaching him to read—even though, now that Freddy knows how to read, he says: “. . . I don't belong anywhere” (p. 166). Joe goes to talk to Mad Wolf and sits outside his tipi and listens to Mad Wolf talk of things mostly unimportant to Joe, but Joe becomes interested when he tells Joe to go on the warpath. As Joe walks slowly home, he remembers that Mad Wolf, who never surrendered, now lives on a reservation.

He decides to tell the truth to Powell, for Joe now believes that he is Powell's Indian son, but Powell repeatedly insists that all of the Indians with whom his wife and son had camped were killed in the raid on the Cheyennes. He then accuses Joe of telling a "farfetched and outrageous lie," and after they argue for a while, Joe says of his story: "It's a big joke, Mr. Powell" (p. 213). Although he knows that Powell is factually wrong, Joe decides that the older man is right to deny that he is Joe's father.

Then, knowing that the United States Cavalry has the best horses on the plains, Joe and his friends take fifty-two horses and nine mules in a raid on an Army encampment. While the raiders are hiding and trying to get some rest, the Reverend Fairchild arrives at their hiding place and tells them to return the horses. Joe and the other raiders try for days to get rid of the preacher, who never ceases his exhortations. There is a delightful irony here, for from the Indian point of view, Joe and his friends are right—they have conducted a successful horse raid—but Fairchild believes they are sinners in need of redemption. Fairchild's persistence and bravery in following them, even after they wreck his buggy, are typical of the actions of a zealous missionary. They finally get away from Fairchild by taking his horse.

Eventually losing the horses they have stolen to the soldiers that follow them, the raiders try to defend themselves atop a rocky hill. Although they are not captured, Joe is shot and lies ill for days. When he recovers enough to ride, the raiders go home.

The Indians stage a Ghost Dance, but Joe realizes that it is a fake performed for the benefit of the whites. But at the false dance, true love is reborn, for he talks to Lottie, and they renew their old relationship. During the same dance, Fairchild talks Joe into confessing to the Army by promising he will leave Joe's friends alone if he confesses. Joe turns himself in, and after a few weeks of confinement during which a captain tries to instruct him about the concept of private

property, he is released.

As Joe is leaving the prison, he sees Great Eagle being carried home dead on his horse after he has been killed in a fight following his demand for an advance on the money for his land allotment: one more Indian destroyed by the white man's methods.

Joe forces a confrontation between his mother and White Buffalo and his new wife. The new wife flees, but White Buffalo leaves too, for medical treatment. By working, Joe gets enough money to buy horses to win Lottie, and they are married by Fairchild. His mother dies, and in a few years White Buffalo comes to live with Joe and Lottie, who now have two children. The old Indians die off, and those left, after wavering, begin to follow the white man's road.

There has been no more popular theme in Western American literature than the defeat of the Indian and his resultant alienation. The novel in this vein which has perhaps received the most attention is N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968). Although living in a later time, Momaday's Abel is faced with the same dilemma Joe Cowbone faces. Nevertheless, *The White Man's Road* and *House Made of Dawn* are different in two principal respects other than the setting. First, as C. L. Sonnichsen points out, Joe does not disintegrate under the pressure of his predicament as Abel does (*Western American Literature*, 4 [Winter 1970], 304-05). Second, Capps's aim is to picture everything openly and directly, while Momaday shrouds some characters and events with a veil that gets between the reader and Momaday's purpose. Another novel of note on this theme is Edwin Corle's *Fig Tree John* (1935). Here the conflict between the Indian way and the white way culminates in Agocho's defeat in a battle with his son Johnny. However dramatic such a confrontation may be, no character in *Fig Tree John* faces a dilemma like Joe Cowbone's: Agocho totally rejects white practices; Johnny grasps them readily.

One must agree with Richard Etulain that *The White Man's Road* is the best novel that Capps had yet written (*Southwestern American Literature*, 1 [May 1971], 91)—and it remains the best of all his books. Like all of Capps's books, *The White Man's Road* is written in "a crisp prose style" that never becomes arty or precious (William Decker, *Saturday Review*, January 17, 1970). But unlike most of Capps's books, it is not based on any historical character (Interview with Capps, March 22, 1978).

Woman Chief—Capps's third novel about Indians and his last novel to date—was published ten years after *The White Man's Road* and is based on the story of a captive Gros Ventre (Atsina) girl who became a warrior chief in a band of the Crow tribe (*Woman Chief*, pp. vii-viii; Edwin Thomas Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, Norman, Oklahoma, 1961, pp. 195-200). The early traders and trappers called her "Absaroka Amazon," *Absaroka* being the Crow word for themselves. As usual, Capps has fleshed out the story and added much of his own invention.

On a raid against the Gros Ventre, a band of Crows captures horses, and one warrior, Antelope Man, captures what he takes to be a boy whom he hopes will replace his lost son. Because he has a captive, Antelope Man gets only one horse as his share, but he is chagrined when he finds that his captive is a girl. Beginning to show a lot of spirit, she uses an antelope leg as a club to hit a man who wants to see for sure whether she is a boy or a girl. When the man tries to catch her, Antelope Man defends her with his knife. This is the first stage of his growing liking for her, but he is concerned because he already has four women in his lodge.

The captive becomes "Slave Girl" when the four women—Antelope Man's two wives, his mother-in-law, and a widowed aunt—begin to make her work and often beat her. Slave Girl soon becomes a friend of the aunt and the younger wife, but the other two

continue to be hard on her. Antelope Man protects her when they do not want her to go with him to check on the horses. On a stormy night she climbs a tree and calls to the thunder to make her captors like her.

As she begins to learn the Crow language, she also begins to learn other things, such as how to make arrow points from sheet iron. When a white trader named Chicago, who has a Crow wife, comes back to the camp, he is so impressed by Slave Girl—for she knows the Blackfoot and Atsina languages and also some Spanish—that he becomes her friend and confidant. As she works with Antelope Man, he begins to teach her as he would a son. He calls her "Horse Tender"; she calls him "Father."

She becomes friends with Ride Away, a boy her own age who also tends horses. When Antelope Man's first wife tries to burn the arrow sticks that Horse Tender has hung up by the smoke hole to cure, Antelope Man kicks the sticks out of the fire. In his review of *Woman Chief* Jack Schneider says that Antelope Man is a comic figure, hen-pecked by wife and mother-in-law (*Western American Literature*, 15 [May 1980], 58), but Antelope Man is in the awkward position of defending a girl who is acting entirely contrary to Indian custom. As she shows her love for him and as she continues to act as he would have wanted a son to act, he ignores her violations of the tribal mores and does not hesitate to order the women to let Horse Tender go her way. He brings her a beautiful "half" bow from a trading trip. She asserts herself in such ways as presenting Chicago's wife with four dressed squirrels after he has told her that a person cannot get squirrels when hunting alone.

Horse Tender also asserts herself by raising a colt called Smoke whom no one but she can ride. When Ride Away says that he will ride her horse after it has been castrated, she persuades Antelope Man not to castrate Smoke. After Ride Away has gone on a raiding

trip, he wants even more to become a warrior. Ironically, it is Horse Tender who teaches him the finer points of using a bow and arrow. Because he increasingly resents the fact that she is a master of masculine skills, he frequently argues with her, but she is also more logical than he.

Once when they have been playing like children in the water, Ride Away swims under water to Horse Tender while she is bathing without her dress. They spend the night together, and from that time on, they alternately quarrel and spend nights together. They begin to kill larger game, but he denies that she could have obtained medicine from the thunder, for such medicine is too powerful.

At her request, Antelope Man brings Horse Tender a rough bois d'arc bow that he gets on a trading trip to the south, and she makes a beautiful bow of it. Then she has a big quarrel with Ride Away because she wants him to court her as he would any other girl and she does not want him to show an interest in other girls. After their quarrel, she disappears. Chicago finds her camped by herself, tells her they are both outcasts, and persuades her to return. She is, in a sense, told to face her identity problem.

When the Crows organize a hunt to obtain meat and robes for the winter, Horse Tender asks to hunt for Antelope Man's lodge since he is not able to go himself. Even though her request is denied, she kills seven buffalo that escape from the hunters. Still attracted to her in spite of her manly feats, Ride Away gives her a coin that he has gained in trading and has put on a string. Horse Tender tells him that she wants to have his baby, as if that would solve their problem.

On a strike against the Sioux, Horse Tender goes along secretly and acts as a fourth (unidentified) guard at night, and in the fight she kills some Sioux whose bodies puzzle the Crow warriors because they cannot account for those enemy deaths. Her exploits are not all violent, for she often helps lodges that are short on food. When she

fails to conceive, she consults Chicago, who tells her that she must not ride so much if she expects to get pregnant. When they join other Crow bands on a move, Chicago prevents an outcast woman from committing suicide; the woman joins Horse Tender's lodge, and later Horse Tender tries to persuade her to marry and bear a child for Horse Tender to adopt. Her love affair with Ride Away continues its rocky course.

When they are attacked by Blackfeet, the band manages to get into the fort at a trading post. Since she can speak Blackfoot, Horse Tender rides out to talk to the attackers. Five of the enemy ride out to meet her, and one of them fires at her. She kills two of them, and the others flee, and she kills a third as they ride away. She then demands and gets a seat on the council, and she presents the scalp of Streaked Hair, a Sioux Chief, as evidence that she should have a high place. She has thus earned recognition as a warrior, but she has not yet established herself as a woman.

She leads raids on other tribes with great success. Ride Away refuses her when she says she will act as a "normal" woman soon, and he plans to court another woman. She is now generally called "Woman Chief," but some of the lesser people in the band call her "Sweet Thunder Woman." Ride Away is killed in a show of bravery on a raid against the Blackfeet, proving his courage to her. When she is missing from camp after Ride Away's funeral, Chicago finds two of her favorite horses dead beside the funeral scaffold. He finds her three days later and gets Antelope Man to bring his daughter home.

She conducts more raids, leading parties of as many as 250 braves. When word comes of a great conference which the whites are organizing to establish the hunting areas of the various tribes, Woman Chief is not interested, but Chicago insists that the organizer, Broken Hand Fitzpatrick, can be trusted. When the Crows assemble, Chicago shows Woman Chief two orphans, a boy

and a girl, whom she adopts. When she talks to Fitzpatrick and Jim Bridger, she gets the Crow territory defined as she wants it.

She decides to go to her mother tribe, the Atsinas, in order to make peace between them and the Crows. Chicago tries to dissuade her, knowing that members of many tribes would like to kill her. She is killed, along with the Crows who have gone with her.

Woman Chief juggles the problems of its heroine deftly. She displays the courage and skill needed to become a warrior chief, but she also shows the warm, maternal characteristics one traditionally expects in a woman. Her masculine exploits rob her of her lover whom she genuinely loves, yet the drive to excel as a warrior is too strong for her to change. There is no indication that Capps is in any way thinking of the current women's lib movement. *Woman Chief's* only effort on behalf of women is to ask, after she has become a member of the council, that two women be recognized each year for their skills in traditionally women's roles. Capps was obviously intrigued with the story of a woman who, in a society in which sexual roles were firmly fixed, assumed the masculine role yet kept much of her womanly nature. The psychological implications of such a story are fascinating, and Capps handles them with his usual understanding of Indian culture in particular and of people in general.

Related to his novels about Indians are the two books which Capps wrote for the Time-Life series on the Old West: *The Indians* (1973) and *The Great Chiefs* (1975). He took the job of writing the texts for the books in order to make money to support himself while working on novels. It should be said at the outset that Capps is not pleased with the books. In a review of the whole series (*American West*, 13 [May-June 1976], 53), Richard H. Dillon says that the series provides a place for old *Life* magazine staff members to work out their days and that the editors have hired only one writer knowledgeable about the West: Benjamin Capps. What upset Capps was the fact that the

magazine men who served as editors were not scholars or book editors. *The Indians* is a better book than *The Great Chiefs*, but both are marred by discrepancies and gaps. If one has read much of Capps's other work, he knows that those flaws come from the editing and not from Capps's text. Capps was so unhappy with *The Great Chiefs* that he would have asked that his name be removed from the book if he had not been afraid that Time-Life would have asked him to refund the money (Interview with Capps, March 22, 1978).

Yet the books have value, for they contain a great deal of information and they are lavishly illustrated with reasonably well chosen pictures. The style is lucid and thus easily understood by those with little background in the subject. *The Indians* treats the Plains Indians, since they were considered to be the principal Indians of the Old West. It begins with an account of the alliance between and among the Cheyenne, Gros Ventre, Comanche, and Kiowa tribes. The agreement was more of mutual non-aggression pact than an alliance against a common enemy.

The next three chapters give a rather thorough picture of the life of the Plains Indians in the years just before the arrival of the white man from the east. One chapter deals with the horse in Indian culture and with the role of the buffalo in Indian life. The next chapter offers a discussion of the daily life of the Indians, including matters such as tipi construction and tipi etiquette, sign language, and the place of women. The third of these three chapters concerns the religious beliefs of the Plains Indians and includes a good explanation of the concept of medicine.

The last two chapters of *The Indians* deal with the coming of the white man. Samples of the kind of treatment which the Indians received are given, with particular attention to the brutal attacks of Custer on the Indians. The final chapter is a detailed account of Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn, the last Indian victory. Parts of

the book are quite vividly written. As he has shown in his novels, Capps has the ability to make accounts of daily life dramatic. Unfortunately, the editors' excisions have sometimes left a lack of continuity and coherence.

Since *The Indians* deals with only the Plains Indians, *The Great Chiefs* deals with most of the others, but it approaches them by focusing on their chiefs. Some of the chiefs who are the subjects of this second book belonged to tribes that are discussed in *The Indians*, including such figures as the Kiowa's Little Mountain, Lone Wolf, White Bear, and Sitting Bear. A long second chapter of *The Great Chiefs* tells of the dogged resistance of the Apache chiefs Cochise and Geronimo, who was to surrender and live the last twenty years of his life far from the rugged land he loved. The story of Quanah Parker tells of his attempt to keep the Comanche free and then to help them follow the white man's road. The fourth chapter deals with the chiefs of smaller tribes who joined with the white men because they felt that it was futile to resist and that they could gain from a voluntary allegiance. Among that group of chiefs are Washakie of the eastern Shoshoni, Sky Chief of the Pawnees, Plenty Coups of the Crows, Guadalupe of the Caddos, and Ouray of the Utes. The next chapter tells the complex story of the Nez Perce under Chief Joseph. At first friendly with the whites of the Lewis and Clark expedition and with the early missionaries, the Nez Perce gradually found themselves at odds with the whites. After a series of battles with Army troops that pursued them in their incredible march over the roughest mountains of Idaho, the Nez Perce surrendered to General Howard and his command. Also treated in the chapter is the bizarre Modoc War, during which a Modoc Chief, Captain Jack, showed his skills against the whites when he led his tribe away from the reservation. *The Great Chiefs* closes with the story of Sitting Bull and of the Ghost Dance religion which swept through the Western tribes, offering

them a false hope of the return of the buffalo and the departure of the white man.

Capps has also written one historical study which was not commissioned as part of a series and which therefore was not constrained by a series format. Entitled *The Warren Wagontrain Raid* (1974), the book is significantly subtitled *The First Complete Account of an Historic Indian Attack and Its Aftermath*. Capps is particularly interested in the aftermath. The Warren Raid became a *cause celebre*, as Capps points out, because of the prominence of Chief Satanta, the presence of General William Tecumseh Sherman in the area, the fight between the War Department and the Department of the Interior over the handling of the Indians, and the variety of attitudes toward the Indian at the time (Letter from Capps, August 20, 1973).

The Warren wagontrain raid took place in 1871 about eighty miles northwest of Ft. Worth near Ft. Richardson. Three Kiowa chiefs led the assault: Sitting Bear, or Satank (whom Capps calls Tsatangya); White Bear, or Satanta; and Big Tree, or Addo-Eta. In his preface, Capps says, ". . . no three men could better be devised to represent the nature and predicament of a people than Tsatangya, Satanta, and Big Tree, who in their actual lives symbolized the Kiowas. They were three distinct generations . . ." (p. xiv).

The book begins with a picture of the Kiowas on their reservation near Ft. Sill where they felt cramped and robbed of their free-ranging, raiding days. They set out on a raid into Texas, camped near a road traversed by wagontrains, and waited for one to appear. The story then turns to the Army and the tour of inspection by General Sherman, who had not been impressed by tales of Indian attacks. Capps then moves his narrative to the freighters with ten wagonloads of supplies for Ft. Griffin, three-days travel from Ft. Richardson.

The Kiowas attacked those freighters in typical Indian fashion; the braves were mainly interested in getting horses and mules and in destroying things that furthered the white man's occupation of the West. The raid had its messengers of defeat, but for the Indians it was a success. Rain prevented pursuit of the raiders by wiping out their tracks.

Capps then shifts to Lawrie Tatum, the Quaker Indian Agent to the Kiowas and Comanches, who wanted to treat the Indians as brethren, but was faced with lists of their crimes. Tatum did not defend the Indians to Sherman when he arrived; he even asked permission to have those guilty of raids turned over to the Texas authorities for trial.

Satanta confessed to Tatum that he had led the raid. Tricked into going to Ft. Sill, Satanta, Tsatangya, and Big Tree were arrested and imprisoned. When they were loaded into wagons to be taken to Texas, Tsatangya was put in a separate wagon. Capps provides what he believes Tsatangya's death song would have been, and then he describes, in the words of one of the guards, Tsatangya's fighting with his guards and being killed.

Before recounting the trial of the other Kiowa chiefs, Capps describes what must have been Satanta's thoughts, an interior monologue which reveals that the Indian did not understand much of the white man's way of dealing with arrested people. The trial itself is told in great detail. The case was, of course, an open and shut one, but both the prosecutors and the man appointed to defend the Indians did competent jobs. At the end of the trial, Satanta made a speech which showed why he had earned a reputation as an orator. The substance of his remarks was that if he were not executed, he would go back and use his considerable influence to prevent further raids, but that if he were killed, there would be rebellion and revenge among his people. Apparently, his plea was effective to a degree, for

Governor Edmund Davis of Texas commuted the sentences of Satanta and Big Tree to life imprisonment.

The move to the Texas penitentiary showed Satanta enough of the white man's world for him to realize that the Indian would have to accept a new road, and once again he tried to get released on the promise of stopping raids. He refused to do prison labor, but he encouraged Big Tree to work and learn the white man's ways of doing things. He began to try to understand the white man's way of thinking.

Among the whites, a sharp controversy developed between the factions that wanted a tough policy toward the Indians and those who believed gentler treatment would pacify them. Satanta and Big Tree were taken to a conference in St. Louis to show the Kiowas they were still alive. Satanta spoke persuasively to them, telling them to stop raiding so he and Big Tree could be released. Although General Sherman and most Texans opposed their release, the Quaker Indian agents and President Grant, unavoidably drawn into the dispute, favored release.

Eventually the Kiowa chiefs were taken to Ft. Sill for a meeting with Governor Davis, various Indian agents and commissioners, and the leaders of the tribes of the south plains. The upshot was that they were released on condition that Indian raiding stop. Instead of things becoming more peaceful, assorted incidents aroused the animosity of the Kiowas, and Satanta could not persuade them that revenge was futile. The raids continued, and Sherman became more powerful in Washington, so Satanta was sent back to prison. He soon committed suicide by jumping off a balcony in the prison. He was buried in the prison graveyard, but was later moved to a spot not far from Tsatangya's grave in Oklahoma.

The last of the three, Big Tree, significantly known by the English form of his name, remained with the Kiowas, joined with the Baptist

missionaries at Rainy Mountain, and became a deacon and Sunday school teacher. Those three Kiowa chiefs, whose birth dates spanned the first half of the century, represent the three stages of Indian encounter with the white man: unyielding resistance, reluctant recognition that the traditional way of life was doomed, and acceptance of the white man's road.

Three reviews of *The Warren Wagontrain Raid* raise the same objection. C. L. Sonnichsen (*Western Literature*, 9 [May 1974], 60-61), William H. Leckie (*The Western Historical Quarterly*, 6 [April 1975], 187-88), and Wayne Gard (*Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 78 [July 1974], 102-03) all object to Capps's rather novelistic treatment of his materials. Sonnichsen quotes Walter Webb's complaint that Paul Horgan did not write *Great River* as a historian would have done. Yet Sonnichsen acknowledges that the sharp lines between pedestrian history and fiction have begun to dissolve, so that, as he says, "a novelist uses all his powers . . . to convey an understanding of something that actually happened." Since the novelist can convey such an understanding, it seems foolish not to make use of such talent. While Capps's notes are not always as tightly documented as would be required of a graduate student, they nonetheless show a thorough job of research and a judicious evaluation and use of his sources. If *The Warren Wagontrain Raid* is somewhat novelistic in manner, it is also a good picture of the condition and thinking of the Kiowas at the time of their capitulation.

Benjamin Capps is as knowledgeable about the West as anyone writing today. There is an essentially scholarly side to him, but he is a skilled storyteller, so his scholarship simply provides the basis for his stories. Most often he has used actual events and people as the starting point for his novels, but he has put his inventiveness to use to write more effective stories. He has the good novelist's understanding of and compassion for humankind. While minor characters may

sometimes be stereotypes or caricatures, the major figures are always individuals. In eight novels dealing with the same general area and the same era, he has never trodden the same ground twice. In places his plots are a bit contrived, but they are never warped out of the range of probability.

Capps has the remarkable ability of creating tension while writing in an almost quiet tone. He can make the events of the daily lives of his characters become important and dramatic. His "crisp," unadorned style is fitting for the place and the period he writes about, for the frontiersman was most likely to speak directly and the Indian used a simple eloquence. In a word, he writes in the greatest tradition of American fiction, the realism begun by Mark Twain and William Dean Howells. Henry James said that a writer should be judged on how well he succeeds in accomplishing what he sets out to do. By that measure, Capps is highly successful.

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