Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey Short Guide

Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey by Jamake Highwater

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Contents

Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey Short Guide....1

Contents....2

Overview....3

About the Author....4

Characters....5

Setting....7

Social Concerns....8

Social Sensitivity....9

Techniques....10

Literary Qualities....12

Themes....13

Adaptations....15

Key Questions....16

Topics for Discussion....17

Ideas for Reports and Papers....18

Literary Precedents....19

For Further Reference....20

Related Titles....21

Copyright Information....22

Overview

The novel consists of a collection of traditional North American tales that Highwater has skillfully woven into one story. As the subtitle of the book indicates, the story of Anpao's quest and growth into manhood has certain parallels to Homer's Odyssey. The subtitle is also a subtle reminder that the Native American imagination has a mythic dimension that the European mind once had but has now perhaps lost. Like all myths, the story of Anpao incorporates important cultural values and a world view. The Native American perspective thus revealed to the reader as the story progresses is the novel's most outstanding and unique feature.

The novel gains its distinction from the way it immerses the reader in the Native American imagination. This imagination ignores traditional categories of time, place, and being. Animals are called "people," and old Wasicong, who tells the story, has eyes like a wise owl and flies up into trees. Among the main characters are the Sun, the Moon, and Morning Star. The youthful hero, Anpao (pronounced An-PAY-oh), is the dawn, son of the Sun, although he otherwise has human features (and a reverse double or twin named Oapna). His quest to marry Ko-ko-mik-e-is, his beloved, occupies the whole of the novel, and ranges over the entire history of the world. Highwater's delightful tale is enhanced by the illustrations of Fritz Scholder, a Luiseno Native American artist.

About the Author

Jamake (pronounced Juh-MAH-kuh) Highwater was born on February 14, 1942, in Glacier County, Montana. His father, Jamie Highwater, an Eastern Cherokee originally from Tennessee, North Carolina, or Virginia, traveled around the West working in rodeos, circuses, and carnivals and as a stuntman in Hollywood. The author's mother, Amana Bonneville Highwater, was of French Canadian and Blackfeet descent. Both parents embraced their identity as Native Americans, and passed this proud sense of identity to their son, who has celebrated it in his work.

When Highwater was still a child, his father died in a car accident. Later adopted by a white family in the San Fernando Valley of California, Highwater attended school and grew up in comfortable suburban surroundings.

He went on to receive degrees in cultural anthropology, comparative literature, and music.

Highwater's first books were on rock music: Rock and Other Four Letter Words (1969) and Mick Jagger: The Singer Not the Song (1973), both written under the pen name of J. Marks. But traveling to Native American reservations and living in San Francisco during the turbulent 1960s, when the Indian Rights Movement was gathering strength (for example, Native Americans "liberated" Alcatraz Island in 1969), inspired Highwater to delve into his own ethnic heritage. Between 1971 and 1975 Highwater was a senior editor of Fodor Travel Guides, and his first book on Native Americans, written under his real name, was Fodor's Indian America: A Cultural and Travel Guide (1975). A steady stream of books reflecting Highwater's heritage followed, all deepened by a comparative cultural awareness culled both from his studies and his extensive travels, particularly in Europe.

Highwater's novels all focus on Native American subjects. Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey, his first novel, won immediate recognition for its outstanding and unique quality. In 1978 it was named a Newbery Honor Book and received the Best Book for Young Adults Award from the American Library Association.

Highwater has also been involved in the production of television documentaries on Native Americans, including "The Primal Mind" (1985) and "Native Land" (1986). In general, he has been an untiring spokesperson for the culture and achievements of Native Americans.

Characters

Because Anpao (An-PAY-oh) is a linking together of many tales, there are only a few characters that appear throughout the novel. These include the Sun, the Moon, Ko-ko-mike-is, and Anpao/Oapna. Other characters are presented to illustrate a moral or historical point in one of the individual stories that make up the adventures which Anpao has on his journey.

In the "Notes on Sources" which appear at the end of the book, Highwater describes the origins of these stories and cites the books where the original versions can be located.

Central to the story is Anpao. At the beginning of the novel, he is a hero who does not understand himself or know his past. Traveling the world with his contrary brother Oapna, Anpao falls in love with Ko-ko-mik-eis. Although she has rejected all other suitors, she tells Anpao that, if he is able to have the Sun remove the scar from his face, she will marry him.

Starting the journey to the Sun, the brothers camp beside a lake. When a beautiful moon rises in the sky, Anpao points it out to his brother, who, being contrary, says everything the opposite of what he means. Thus Oapna expresses his pleasure at seeing the moon by saying, "It is the ugliest thing I have ever seen." After a few more negative comments by Oapna, the Moon becomes angry, violently captures Oapna, and takes him to her lodge.

Abandoning his journey to the Sun, Anpao decides to rescue his brother with help from the old swan-woman.

Following a daring rescue in which Anpao uses the magic things given to him by the old swan-woman, the two boys are reunited. It is then that the old swan-woman decides to help the brothers learn about their past. She tells them the story of how the earth was created, how the earth woman accidentally created death, and how the Sun fell in love with the earth woman. Although the Sun was married to the Moon, he took the earth woman into the World-Above-The-World as his secret mistress. Their child was the boy Anpao. The scar on his cheek appeared when the earth woman tried to return to the earth with her child. In anger, the Sun killed the woman just before she reached the earth and her blood became the scar on the child's face.

Since that time, the Moon has known about and hated Anpao.

Oapna is the twin brother and reflection of Anpao. He was created after the death of Anpao's mother when Anpao was living with Grandmother Spider.

Although she told Anpao not to throw his hoop into the air, he did so. The hoop came down and split the boy into Anpao and Oapna. Grandmother Spider then sent the twins out into the world telling them "we are free to do what we wish; but we must also accept whatever comes of it." It is Oapna who, early in the book, represents the alienation that

Anpao feels. When the past is revealed, Anpao can reunite with Oapna to form one person, and the journey to the lodge of the Sun can resume. However, it is not clear whether Anpao is any the wiser for his encounter with the Moon or with his knowledge of his past.

Always following and tormenting Anpao is the Moon. She plays a part when his leg becomes infected after he drinks water at a dance and when the boys stick to the turtle and drown in the putrid lake. Yet, when Anpao meets his half-brother Morning Star and is taken to the lodge of the Sun, the Moon does not seem to recognize him. Later, after Anpao saves Morning Star from the birds, the Moon embraces him as a son. As a reward for Anpao's heroism, the Sun removes the scar from his face and Anpao is transformed into a tall, handsome man, exactly like his father and half-brother. In Anpao, the Sun, Moon, and Earth are united. Still the Moon does not recognize him.

When Anpao leaves the lodge of the Sun, the Moon gives him two feathers from the Raven which he is to give to his bride and tells him to build a medicine lodge that resembles the lodge of the Sun. Unfortunately, Anpao gives neither the secrets of the medicine lodge nor the Raven's feathers to his people. Instead, he leads Ko-ko-mik-eis away from her people and Smallpox into the land under the water.

At the beginning and the end of the novel is Waisicong, a holy man who is the narrator of the story. Although he plays only a small part in the novel, Waisicong is seen by some critics as a symbol of death. While the name, according to Stott, originally meant one who has spiritual powers, its meaning has now changed and the name is used as a derogatory or scornful term for white people. At the end of the book, Waisicong tells his listeners that Koko-mik-e-is and Anpao possessed "great power to go under the water, without such power, we cannot join them. Without power, all of us must drown."

Setting

Anpao covers a period of time ranging from the creation of the world to the coming of white people (the "Big Knives"), smallpox, and fire-breathing locomotives. The story is told from the perspective of North Americans, according to whom the world has a distinct landscape full of North American flora and fauna. Much of the story seems to take place in the American West, particularly the deserts and mountains of the Southwest. But despite the realistic landscape, no specific locations can be identified; rather, both time and place exist in a mythic world.

Social Concerns

Jamake Highwater began writing at a time when Americans were beginning to realize that "literature" existed on the North American continent before the coming of the Europeans and that many non-Europeans had contributed to the development of literature in the United States. In 1969, N. Scott Momaday received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his novel House Made of Dawn.

Then, in 1970, the American Indian Historical Society hosted the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars at Princeton University. Along with African-American literature, Native American literature was beginning to receive the attention it deserved.

In 1977, drawing on the work of a variety of scholars of Native American literature and the research that he did when writing Indian America (1975), Highwater combined a wide range of traditional Native American tales and legends from many tribes into the book Anpao. While others had previously collected Native American legends, Highwater was the first to make them accessible by including them in a single epic saga. The unifying feature is the character of Anpao, a Native American boy who is sent by the beautiful Ko-komik-e-is on a quest to the Sun that takes him through the lands of many different peoples. Along the way, Anpao has experiences which are related through Highwater's own versions of Native American tales and legends such as Old Man's creation of the world, the bringing of corn to the world, the meeting of coyote and "break wind boy" (whom Highwater renames "Farting Boy"), and the horror of the Deer Woman. Pointed out in these tales are the Native Americans' beliefs in traditional knowledge, and respect for elders, nature, and animals.

Anpao's journey is also an allegorical trip through the world of the Native American from the beginning of time through the arrival of the white man. On this level, Highwater points out the destruction that the white man brings. When Anpao returns to earth from the Lodge of the Sun, he sees that the land has been invaded from the sea and that there are bad signs everywhere. The buffalo are gone and a village that he finds is full only with the stench of the dead and with the starving dogs who fight the vultures over the dead bodies. Finally, shortly before reaching the village where his quest began, Anpao meets a stranger named Smallpox who says that he is a friend of the Big Knives, the people who came from the water. When asked what he does for the Big Knives, Smallpox replies that he brings death. In "The Storyteller's Farewell" to the novel, Highwater notes that Anpao is not myth, but "reality which seems to have escaped the experience of non-Indians." This reality seems to include the destruction of the traditional Native American world.

Social Sensitivity

Anpao is intended to encourage social sensitivity toward Native Americans, their unique imagination, and their values and world view. Highwater explains his intention in the novel's afterword: I believe that there are images and ideas which are uniquely Indian and remain uniquely Indian no matter what mannerisms are employed to present them. These Indian ideas are central to the stories in Anpao ... . I have presented these old tales neither as curiosities nor as naive fiction, but as an alternative vision of the world and as an alternative process of history.

Highwater succeeds admirably in his intentions. His depiction of Native Americans goes far to counter both negative and romantic stereotypes prevalent in American culture. Young people, particularly males, can easily identify with and learn from his hero, and ecologists, both young and old, will embrace the Native American world view.

Some readers might take offense, however, at Highwater's one-sided depiction of white people, and might question the validity of claims such as "Anpao is not concerned with myth but with a reality which seems to have escaped the experience of non-Indians."

The story contains some violent scenes and images (but very little scalping), and Native American women are depicted only in their traditional roles as mothers, homemakers, and providers.

Yet these traditional roles have certain advantages: Anpao seems helpless to continue his travels until a woman has provided him with new moccasins and a bag of food. In the long run, the portrayals of male and female balance out—no one has a monopoly on wisdom or foolishness, good or evil. Finally, the story of Farting Boy might offend some readers, although others might turn to that story first.

Techniques

The novel blends history and myth into what one critic called a "prose saga" which reflects the Native American traditions and world view. In "The Storyteller's Farewell," Highwater tells the reader that "among American Indians the teller of stories is a weaver. His designs are the threads of his personal saga as well as the history of his people. Though the designs are always traditional, the hands that weave them are always new." Thus, he explains that, although the stories came from traditional sources, the actual words used to tell them and the ways in which they are linked together are his own invention.

Using the cadence of the storyteller and the oral tradition, Highwater layers stories within stories to allow the inclusion of tales from a variety of Native American tribes in a single narrative. Linked by the journey of Anpao, the tales appear to occur during a visit to a culture or tribe that is similar to the one originating the story. Thus a version of the Cheyenne story of Snake Boy appears when Anpao visits lands similar to that in which the Cheyenne people lived. This technique allows Highwater to acquaint the reader with the various cultures, and customs of a range of Native American peoples.

As a storyteller, Highwater employs many techniques found in the oral tradition. For most of the tales, he uses settings which are intentionally vague with the exact time and place being undefined. There are stereotypes and flat, one-dimensional characters who are used to represent good and evil.

Rather than using the vernacular, his narrator and characters speak in somewhat formal or lofty tones similar to those found in European myths. Within each adventure, Highwater includes at least one of the four main types of myths which were identified by John Bierhorst in his The Red Swan: Myths and Tales of the American Indians. These include myths about creation or setting the world in order; family dramas; trickster tales; and transition stories such as life to death, chaos to order, and passage through the animal world.

Symbols abound in the novel, and the reader is limited only by his or her knowledge of Native American mythology. Each of the separate adventures that Anpao has on his journey symbolizes a part of the Native American heritage. In some cases, the adventures explain an event such as where the buffalo came from. Other times, the tales are allegorical representations of Native American values and their respect for life. Some symbols remain through the adventures. For example, water becomes a symbol for death in the stories of Old Man, Snake Boy, Turtle, and the village beneath the water.

The degree of Highwater's success in writing a novel that incorporates a variety of tales and legends is seen in the awards and honors that the book received. However, not all critics believe that his approach was successful.

While praising Highwater in a February 5, 1978 review in the New York Times Book Review, Jane Yolen applauded his fluid and compelling retelling of the Native American tales.

Yet she also pointed out that simply retelling the tales with a central character does not make the story a novel and that the book should be read only as "a linking of old tales."

Literary Qualities

The novel uses mythic characters to symbolically reenact the unity of all creation, but the symbolism does not end there. Many smaller details of the novel are also symbolically significant. For example, Anpao's fall to earth with his mother leaves him with a scar on his face that he bears throughout most of the novel; he even passes by the name of Scarface.

When his father removes the scar, Anpao suddenly stands forth taller, handsomer, and more resplendent—like his father. Symbolism also regularly appears in the smaller, enclosed episodes, such as the story of Snake Boy or the story of how corn came to the earth. In the latter story, Anpao and Ko-ko-mike-is are symbolically "planted": they die, are buried together, are warmed by the anger of the Sun and watered by the tears of the animals, and rise forth in rebirth with Ko-ko-mik-e-is turning into a fruitful stalk of corn.

The mythic, symbolic qualities of Anpao make it a much more complex work than it first appears to be. Written in simple prose, it seems at first no more than a fanciful tale with an occasional didactic point. But its mythic qualities resonate with meaning and prevent the reader from accepting the story at face value. The book leaves a final impression of simplicity combined with rich, reverberating suggestiveness.

In an afterword entitled "The Storyteller's Farewell," Highwater compares the mode of his novel to the "Magic Realism" of some Latin American writers. This comparison claims more for his story than is necessary. Magic Realism injects realism with doses of exaggeration and fantasy, often in surprising and amusing ways. While these qualities might apply to the larger features of Highwater's story, they do not extend to his style, which lacks the playful intensity of Magic Realism. Highwater writes "workmanlike" prose with an occasional poetic note. Highwater also refers to Magic Realism as "a literary movement among Indians of Latin America," who may have originated the style. But its distinguished practitioners include other writers, most notably the Nobel Prize-winning Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Themes

As in many of his other novels, Highwater uses the theme of the decline and fall of the Native American world and blends it with an examination of the mythology of traditional Native Americans. While Anpao journeys through a variety of Native American legends and myths in his quest for the lodge of the Sun, he also journeys through Native American history. This journey takes Anpao across the earth, below it, and above it, as dreams and reality combine to create their own definition of time and place.

Told by the beautiful Ko-ko-mik-e-is that he must have the Sun remove the scar from his face before she will marry him, Anpao and his twin brother Oapna, a reflection of his contrary self, begin a journey. Along the way, Anpao hears the stories of the creation of the world and the beginning of death, which is brought on by a foolish woman (a version of Adam and Eve).

Finding that he is the son of the Sun and an earth woman who was killed when she tried to leave the lodge of the Sun and return to earth, Anpao learns the secret of his own identity. At that point he is able to resolve the conflict within himself and can reunite his self and contrary self into one being. At the end of his travels, the marriage of Anpao (son of Sun and earth woman) and Ko-ko-mik-e-is (a name which relates to the Moon) can be seen as unifying the sun, moon, and earth.

Critics have seen Anpao as a great hero who, after a long and difficult quest for self-knowledge, leads his people away from the evils of the white man and helps them keep alive the traditions of their culture. The journey that Anpao makes across the unknown lands is really a journey across his own mind in a quest for this knowledge. The story of the Snake Boy, in which a young hunter eats the eggs of a strange bird against the wishes of Anpao and is turned into a water snake is seen as a warning to respect all animals. A similar warning is found in the tale of the two boys who disregard Anpao's wishes and climb on the back of a giant turtle, become stuck, and are drowned. Even Coyote's predicament when he takes the bow and arrow of Farting Boy is seen as an admonishment against coveting or envying things of others. In a similar fashion, Deer Woman is a version of the modern tale used to explain the evils of prostitution. These tales stand as a moral code and support the traditional values of Native American cultures.

However, some critics see a darker side to this story in which death and destruction prevail. Arguing that others bring too many preconceived ideas to their reading of Anpao, Jon C. Stott calls for a different explanation. He contends that others find a hero tale in Anpao because these people start reading the book with that idea in mind.

After reading comments about Highwater's background, Stott reread the novel and now believes that the entire work is an ironic story. Stott concludes that "Anpao is not ... a great Pan-Indian hero, but ... an ironic hero, a failed leader who has never achieved the great insight he believes he possesses." After Anpao leaves the lodge of the Sun, his actions, according to Stott, are "consistent with the pattern of the failed hero described

by Joseph Campbell in his book The Hero With a Thousand Faces. Unable to save the Native American tribes from the destruction brought by the Big Knives and by Smallpox, Anpao abandons the people of Ko-ko-mik-e-is and leads his bride beneath the water. Even though the Sun has given him the secret of the Medicine Lodge, Anpao does not give it to his people but takes it with him into the water.

This theme of death runs throughout the stories, with even the illustrations beginning and ending with death. The first of the four stone lithographs which illustrate the novel is a picture of an owl. Contrary to the idea of a wise creature, the owl is the Navajo bird of death which will also play an important role in Highwater's novel Legend Days (1984). The last illustration is a picture of death as represented by a skeleton.

At the end of the novel, as the village of Anpao shimmers under the blue waters of the pond, singing is heard.

"The Sun's beams are running out, the sun's golden rays are running out. We shall live again." According to Highwater's notes on sources, these words come from the Ghost Dance of the Paiute and the Comanche. Part of a movement among Native American tribes to hold on to their fading traditions, the Ghost Dance movement ended with the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee. Highwater seems to say that it, like Anpao's village beneath the water, is waiting somewhere to be rediscovered by Native American peoples.

Adaptations

Folkway records recorded Highwater reading Anpao (1978).

Key Questions

With the variety of tales, the symbolism of events and characters, and the different interpretations that can be given to adventures in the novel, Anpao can form the basis for an interesting discussion. Highwater presents Native American mythology and Native American history in a single work; something that is not found in other sources. In addition, he uses myths from a variety of traditional Native American cultures in the adventures of a single hero. A discussion group could focus on one or all or these features.

1. What are the stories in Anpao which seem to parallel Western European mythology? What moral can be assigned to each version? Do the stories and their morals seem to suggest any similarities between Native American and European cultures? What differences do they suggest?

2. What is Highwater's view of the white man? How historically accurate is his portrayal?

3. This novel combines myth and history. How successful was Highwater in using this approach? In using both in one novel, has he weakened the effect of either?

4. Discuss the importance of the character Oapna. Why did Highwater find it necessary to give Anpao a "contrary self"? What is Highwater trying to portray when he has Anpao shoot arrows into the sky and then find Oapna hanging in the tree?

5. When Old Man dies, the last word that he utters as he is covered by water is "Anpao." Why do you think Highwater chose this name for his central character?

6. What is the significance of the chapter title "All That Happened Must Happen Again?" To what is the title referring?

7. Although Anpao is a child of the Sun, why is he able to protect Morning Star from the attack of the birds? What is the significance of this episode?

8. Introducing the novel is a quote from John Niehardt in Black Elk Speaks. In what ways does this quote parallel the journey of Anpao?

9. Compare the myths in Anpao to the original sources cited by Highwater in the notes section at the end of the novel. How are they different and similar? Why do you think Highwater made the changes that he did? How do these myths fit into the categories identified by Bierhorst?

10. Critics have given two different interpretations to Anpao. One is Anpao as a hero; the other is Anpao as an ironic hero, a failure. Which is more accurate? Can both interpretations be true?

11. Water can be a symbol of death throughout the work. What other symbols can be found for life, death, and transitions?

Topics for Discussion

1. In the Native American story of the creation, Old Man, the creator, dies and sinks beneath the waters he has created. Is his death shocking? How can it be explained?

2. At the end of the novel, Anpao and Ko-ko-mik-e-is marry and stride off into the bottom of the lake together. How can this ending be explained? Is it a happy or sad ending? Does it have anything to do with the encroachment of white society at the end of the novel?

3. Throughout the novel, animals are often called "people." In what sense is this appropriate?

4. In the story of Snake Boy, the foolish boy eats the forbidden eggs and turns into a snake, but proceeds to live happily as a snake swimming around in the river. What is the intended moral of the story?

5. Highwater uses water symbolically in the novel. What are some of the things water symbolizes? How do these meanings change according to the context? How are all of these meanings united?

6. In the episode titled "Anpao Brings the Corn," Anpao and Ko-ko-mik-e-is briefly die, are buried, and rise in rebirth. Why are they "planted" together? Why does only Ko-ko-mik-e-is rise as a fruitful stalk of corn? Should the episode be titled "Ko-ko-mik-e-is Brings the Corn"? Why or why not?

7. In the novel, white people are called "Big Knives" and bring iron weapons and smallpox to the Native Americans. The Sun is not "certain whether they are monsters or men." Is Highwater's depiction of white people fair?

8. Are white people "civilized" and Native Americans "savages"? Or is it the other way around? Are people who live in nature "savages," or are "savages" the people who destroy nature?

9. Do you know anyone who is a "Contrary"? Are you ever a little "Contrary" yourself some days? Why? Is this type of behavior always bad, or does some good ever come of it?

10. During his quest, Anpao has to achieve unity or integration within himself. Is this part of the process of growing up and maturing? Is the process ever completed?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Trace the process by which Anpao matures. What part does Oapna play in this process? What stages of development are suggested by "Lessons of Heaven and Earth," "Battle with the Birds," and the story of Anpao's scar?

2. Explain why Anpao must go to so much trouble in order to marry Ko-komik-e-is and why Ko-ko-mik-e-is waits so long for him, rejecting other suitors.

3. If you have read Homer's Odyssey, discuss the parallels and differences between the Odyssey and Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey.

4. Discuss the interactions between "Sky Beings" (or gods), people, and animals in Anpao. Do these interactions symbolize ecological relationships? Explain.

5. Discuss the nature of the gods in Anpao. What do you make of the fact that the Sun has both a mistress and a hot temper? What do you think of the Moon's vindictiveness? Is Morning Star a bit of a spoiled brat? What seems to be implied by the fact that Anpao is half mortal, half god?

6. Define and describe the Native American imagination, taking Anpao as a typical product.

7. Define and discuss the nature of Native American "reality" as depicted in Anpao.

8. Discuss the relationship of humankind to nature and the earth. Does the Native American version of "reality" as depicted in Anpao offer some valuable insights into this relationship? Is modern civilization threatening to turn us all into Snake Boys?

Literary Precedents

As the subtitle suggests, Anpao has been viewed as a Native American version of Homer's Odyssey since both chronicle the adventures of a young man who meets mythological creatures while on a journey. Critics have said that Highwater does for Native American culture what Homer did for the ancient Greek culture. As Anpao discovers the tales of a variety of native American tribes, Odysseus discovers the tales of the Aegean peoples. Highwater is careful to cite the original sources of the tales that he includes.

Highwater himself compares his writing to the Central and South American literature which is sometimes called "magical realism." As he states in "The Storyteller's Farewell," "Magic Realism is the outcome of the writing of Indians who are fully trained in both the language of the dominant civilization and the 'otherness' of Indian culture." Thus horses become magic dogs: "the products of the vision of a people whose experience is fundamentally different from that of white civilization." This may be true, but it is important to remember that the genre was introduced by Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban novelist, in his Kingdom of This World, and that among the writers of magical realism are authors such as Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Columbia. They accept a broader definition of magical realism to include works which enrich the idea of what is real by incorporating magic, myth, and religion, not necessarily Native American ones.

For Further Reference

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——. The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America. New York: Harper & Row, 1981. This scholarly, philosophical work is Highwater's most thorough exposition of the Native American view of reality. It was the basis for the 1985 PBS award-winning documentary "The Primal Mind."

Marriott, Alice, and Carol K. Rachlin.

American Indian Mythology. New York: New American Library, 1968. This book is one of the best sources for those wanting to explore Native American mythology further.

Ross, Jean W., ed. Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook: 1985. Detroit: Gale Research, 1986. Article on Highwater provides biographical information on the author and brief descriptions of his writings.

Thompson, Stith. Tales of the North American Indians. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972. This is one of the most respected collections of Native American stories.

Related Titles

In the appendices to the novel, Highwater notes his reliance on works of traditional Native American literature when selecting the tales used in Anpao.

His bibliography lists compilers of tales such as John Bierhorst, George Grinnel, Alice Marriott, and Carol K. Rachlin. It is Grinnel whom he credits with recording the Blackfeet story of Scarface which contains the idea for the character of Anpao.

Although Highwater has never used the characters from Anpao in any other novel, he has used similar themes in some of his other works. The theme of myths as a constant which unites a society is found in many of his other novels and nonfiction including The Primal Mind (1985) and The Language of Vision (1994). He also focuses on the history and traditions of Native Americans in many of his novels. In The Sun He Dies (1980), the account of the destruction of the Aztec civilization is heavily based on the myths of the Aztecs and their beliefs that the invading white men were really the returning Quetzalcoatl, the gentle god who created the Toltec people. He continues to explore the effects of the coming of the white man in the novels of his Ghost Horse Cycle.

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Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor
Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design
Amanda Mott

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)
ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)
ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature□Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction□19th century□Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction□20th century□Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3□dc20 96-20771 CIP

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994