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is the land we love, and it is the only thing that gives purpose to our lives.''

Hecetu Yelo (And that is true).

*Art Raymond*

University of North Dakota

**I Wear the Morning Star.** By Jamake Highwater. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. 156 pp. \$11.50 Cloth.

This novel for young adults (age 12 and up) is the third part of the Ghost Horse Cycle (with earlier parts *Legend Days* and *The Ceremony of Innocence*). It is complete in itself, but there are themes, images, and motifs that connect the trilogy which began with the story of Amana, a young Blood Indian girl who comes of age at the end of the open, traditional life of the Northern Plains Indians in the 19th century.

In this novel, Amana is now old, and it is her grandson, the adolescent Sitko, who is the protagonist, coming of age in the modern American West that is largely ignorant of or hostile to the traditions and language that Amana has taught to Sitko. From her he "had learned how to dream" and "that *everything* is real" (page 32). But his parents are separated; his renegade Cherokee father, an erstwhile Hollywood stuntman, has left Sitko's mother Jemina, Amana's half Blood, half French Canadian daughter. And at the beginning of the novel Sitko is dragged off to a boarding school, ironically named the Star of Good Hope, where he painfully finds himself an ugly duckling.

Briefly he has interludes of hope when his admired older brother Reno arrives at the school, but Sitko cannot accept Reno's advice and example: abandon the old ways, deny your culture, fit in—to get along, go along. Denying his language and race, Reno is a popular success as a tall and handsome star athlete. But Sitko clings to what his grandmother taught him. Once Reno catches him telling younger children at the school a Brother Fox and Old Man tale. Reno admonishes Sitko, but although the boy understands Reno's worldly wisdom, he stubbornly rejects it for the strange power he feels within himself and in the natural world.

Sitko's alienation increases as Reno turns away, as even the other ugly ducklings at the school desert him, and as the school authorities treat him more and more harshly, trying to beat him into obedience. Only his talent for and love of art give him some psychic escape from this hostile world. Cut off from the rituals and beliefs of the past (as the school literally cuts off his long black hair that Amana had taught gave one power), Sitko is at the edge of despair when he is momentarily rescued by his mother, who brings him back to live with her and her common-law husband, a former friend of Sitko's father and a Hollywood film worker.

But except for the comfort and reassurance of his grandmother's presence, new problems beset Sitko, and the old ones of prejudice and pressure to abandon his heritage for crass material values continue. Both in school and at home he is still the ugly duckling—different, an outsider, a rebel. His stepfather hates him, his principal beats him, his friends are few.

But gradually he grows and learns, often through his art. When he is frustrated with the limitations of crayons, his grandmother and friend Larry give him their scant pennies to buy water colors, and their belief in him and their gift "was the freedom to find myself and to express my visions as a true artist" (page 75). He comes to accept his difference, and his grandmother greatly helps in his growth through her telling of old stories and teaching him the importance of an oral tradition. As her final gift to him, Amana sends him on a vision quest, an ordeal which is successful; his vision animal is the fox, about whom Sitko knows the old stories, and his vision gifts are the colors of his art: "These colors will be your song" (page 92).

Yet tension increases in his home, Reno becoming an alcoholic, the half-mad stepfather assaulting Sitko and driving him from the home. Their real father returns and shoots the mother and stepfather, killing her. The dying grandmother can no longer help Sitko, but he escapes to art school on a scholarship, sustained finally by his faith and his art. His father dies in an automobile crash, Reno in an airplane crash; his stepfather dies of an overdose of pills; Amana dies of old age.

Whether or not this fairy-tale ending is credible—the ugly duckling transformed into a swan and not only a promising artist but also, miraculously, and with no preparation, a reader of Proust,

Joyce, Faulkner, *et al.* and an ecstatic listener to the music of Schönberg and Webern—the themes of alienation, Native American cultural suppression, and the concomitant disintegration of family life are not only credible but also very familiar. The problems Sitko faces and overcomes read like a litany of the struggles of many Native Americans in 20th century America. For readers unfamiliar with them, especially young readers, junior high and up, for whom the book was written, it is probably a good introduction. I can readily imagine them either identifying or sympathizing with Sitko.

For other readers already familiar with the somewhat hackneyed themes, their pleasure in the book may be muted. Just as the young boy is distressed by the stereotypical Western movie depicting Indians only as cruel savages, many other episodes depict stereotypes (both white and Indian) to which knee-jerk responses seem to be expected. The boarding school personnel are uniformly insensitive and cruel, the stepfather is a monster of one dimension, the renegade Indian turns into a drunk and a sadistic killer whose acts are unexplained and unmotivated. Indeed, the blood bath at the end of the novel may be disturbing to both adult and young readers. Were it to suggest a world full of caprice, it would be philosophically more sound than it is combined with the ugly duckling story, the universal tale of solace that tells the young that their psychic pains will soon disappear as they molt into beautiful swans. That is, the signals are mixed. On the one hand, life is hell for Native Americans, whether they try to remain “traditional” or whether they “acculturate.” On the other hand, if one remains true to one’s self and nurtures an art, “*There are other worlds*” full of beauty and free of pain (page 108). It is a bittersweet Horatio Alger story.

Except for a few lapses into a diction that one could hardly expect from the adolescent first-person narrator, the book is well, often poetically, written.

Robert W. Lewis  
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**The Sun Came Down.** By Percy Bullchild. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. 390 pages, illustrated. \$22.95 Cloth.