# Contemporary Literary Criticism

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# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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PROJECT EDITOR

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Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hèbert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction,* edited by Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism.* Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82.

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# Rudolfo A. Anaya
## 1937-

(Full name Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya) American novelist, short story writer, essayist, poet, and writer of juvenilia.

The following entry presents criticism on Anaya's career through 2006. For additional information on his life and works, see *CLC,* Volumes 23 and 148.

## INTRODUCTION

Anaya is among the most influential and prolific authors of Chicano fiction. Rich in symbolism, poetry, and spiritualism, Anaya's work depicts the American Southwest and its historical conflicts, often incorporating traces of subtly fictionalized autobiography. Patterned after a literary tradition that encompasses Chicano cultural history as well as the work of such American authors as James Fenimore Cooper and Henry David Thoreau, his writing is also informed by the oral tradition of Mexican American *cuentos,* or folk tales, and frequently employs dream imagery to achieve a mystical atmosphere. Although Anaya's novels, poetry, short stories, and nonfiction are rooted in twentieth-century New Mexican life, they wrestle with issues of self-identity and spirituality that extend beyond regional fiction toward a universal portrayal of human experience.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The fifth of seven children, Anaya was born in the small town of Pastura, New Mexico, to Martin and Rafaelita (Mares) Anaya. His father, who came from a family of cattle workers and sheepherders, was a *vaquero,* a horseman who worked on the ranches surrounding Pastura, and his mother came from a family of poor farmers who were devout Catholics. Soon after he was born, his family moved to Santa Rosa, New Mexico, where Anaya lived for the next fourteen years. Anaya spent his childhood on the *llano* (the plains)—roaming the countryside with his friends, hunting, fishing, and swimming in the Pecos River. Spanish was spoken in the home, and Anaya was not exposed to English until he went to school. In 1952 his family moved to Albuquerque, where he was introduced to a cultural and ethnic diversity he had not previously experienced, as well as the painful reality of racism and prejudice aimed at Latinos. When he was sixteen, while swimming in an irrigation ditch with friends, Anaya suffered an accident that changed the course of his adolescence. Diving into the ditch, he broke two vertebrae in his neck and nearly died. His convalescence was long and painful, but after spending the summer in the hospital, he eventually recovered from his injuries. The experience produced in the teenage boy a passion for life and an appreciation for the ability of adversity to either destroy or reshape one's existence. After graduating from Albuquerque High School in 1956, Anaya attended a business school, intending to become an accountant. When his studies proved unfulfilling, he transferred to the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque. A freshman English class sparked his interest in literature, prompting him to begin writing. In 1963 Anaya graduated from the university with a B.A. degree in English. He later earned a master's degree in English from the same institution. He took a teaching position in a small New Mexico town and continued to practice his writing daily. In 1966 he married Patricia Ann Lawless, who supported her husband's desire to write and served as his editor.

During the 1960s, Anaya taught junior high and high school during the day and worked on his writing after school and in the evenings, struggling to find his literary voice. His first novel, *Bless Me, Ultima,* was published in 1972 and received the Premio Quinto Sol Publications Award for the best novel written by a Chicano. With his newfound acclaim, Anaya secured a faculty position at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, where he remained as teacher and advisor until he retired in 1993. During the 1980s he branched out, experimenting with writing plays, short stories, poems, documentaries, travel journals, and children's stories. In 1981 he co-founded *Blue Mesa Review,* the literary magazine of the University of New Mexico creative writing program. During this time he also served as an editor for numerous publications, as well as a translator of other Chicano works. After his retirement from teaching, Anaya devoted his time to writing and traveling throughout South and Central America. His 1992 novel *Alburquerque* (the original spelling of the city's name) garnered the PEN Center West Award for fiction, while *The Farolitos of Christmas* (1995) and *My Land Sings* (1999) each won

a Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award. The Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association was bestowed upon him in 1997. In 2001 he was honored with both the National Medal of Arts from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Wallace Stegner Award from the Center of the American West.

## MAJOR WORKS

Anaya's fiction is embedded in myth and bound by common themes such as the deterioration of traditional Hispanic ways of life, social injustice and oppression, disillusionment and loss of faith, and the regenerative power of love. Together, his first three novels comprise a trilogy that traces the experience of Chicanos over several decades. A first-person narrative, *Bless Me, Ultima* details the childhood and coming of age of young Antonio Márez Luna, a boy who grows up in the rural environs of Las Pasturas and Guadalupe, New Mexico, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Behind almost every experience and adventure Antonio undergoes there is Ultima, a *curandera,* or folk healer, who comes to live with the Márez family at the beginning of the novel. Ultima is a miracle-worker who cures the sick through her extensive knowledge of the herbs and remedies of the ancient New Mexico settlers. Guided by her unseen but pervasively felt presence, Antonio moves through a series of incidents that show him the traits of greed and evil in men. Not only is Ultima a guiding force, but she also acts (along with the recurring motif of the golden carp, an Aztec symbol of divinity) as a reminder of Antonio's ancestral roots.

The main character of *Heart of Aztlán* (1976) is Clemente Chávez, a farmer who loses his land at the start of the narrative and is forced to move into a barrio in Albuquerque. In the city, the teenage children of the Chávez family (Jasón and Benjamin) lose themselves in drugs, sex, and violence. Prompted by a desire to preserve his family, Clemente undertakes a soul-searching quest for identity and emotional fulfillment in his new environment. Central to this journey is the character of Crispín, an elderly musician whose powers of healing and ties to the ballad tradition of the Mexico-United States border endow him with the cultural connectivity that Clemente seeks. It is Benjamin, though, who inherits Crispín's guitar, thereby becoming an agent of cultural renewal for his community. *Tortuga* (1979) draws upon Anaya's experiences after his diving accident. In this novel, Benjamin lies in a hospital, partially paralyzed and confined to a body cast. He hears the screams, cries, and tales of the children in the hospital, yet he cannot move. In despair, Benjamin, (who has been nicknamed "Tortuga," or turtle, because of the cast) attempts suicide. It is only the wisdom of a terminally ill boy that allows Benjamin to appreciate the value of his own life.

Patterned after the rhythm of the seasons and employing melodramatic elements associated with the thriller genre, Anaya's next five novels are known as the "Albuquerque cycle." In *Alburquerque* a former Golden Gloves champion, Abrán González, is planning a return to the ring when his dying mother reveals that he was adopted. González's subsequent attempt to locate his biological father (Benjamin Chávez, from the earlier trilogy) is set against the dirty politics of Albuquerque's mayoral race in which the dignity of the city's heritage is at stake. A minor character in *Alburquerque,* the private detective Sonny Baca emerges as the leading character in the next three novels of the cycle. *Zia Summer* (1995) finds Baca tracking down the murderer of his cousin, Gloria Dominic. His search eventually pits him against the evil influences of Raven, the leader of the Zia cult—an antinuclear protest group made up of women who, obeying Raven's mandates, practice sacrifices and blood rituals. Composed of thirty chapters that correspond with the age of its detective hero, *Rio Grande Fall* (1996) features a multilayered plot, beginning with Baca's cleansing and initiation under the guidance of the *curandera* Lorenza Villa. Other subplots include the resolution of three murders, the conspiratorial world of the CIA and Latin American drug cartels, and the gothic netherworld of Raven. Relying more heavily on fantasy and magical realism than the previous novels in the series, *Shaman Winter* (1999) involves a dream-like narrative structure in which a wheelchair-bound Baca travels back in time to prevent Raven from destroying the female forbearers of the Baca family tree. *Jemez Spring* (2005) follows Baca as he tries to prevent Raven from detonating a nuclear bomb in New Mexico's Jemez Mountains.

In addition to composing novels, Anaya has worked in a variety of other genres. *The Silence of the Llano* (1982), his first collection of short stories (three of which are excerpts from his first three novels), deals primarily with the subject of mythmaking and the nature of fiction. Some of these tales are reprinted in *The Man Who Could Fly* (2006), which brings together pieces spanning a thirty-year period. His nonfiction work includes *A Chicano in China* (1986), which recounts the author's Asian travels, and *Lord of the Dawn* (1987), a retelling of traditional Chicano folk tales and myths. Along with Francisco A. Lomelí, Anaya edited *Aztlán* (1989), an anthology of essays regarding Chicano heritage and its links to Aztec culture. Included in the volume is Anaya's own influential essay, "Aztlán: A Homeland without

Boundaries," which evokes the Mesoamerican origin myth of Aztlán to speculate on the nature of modern Chicano identity. *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* (1985) is a book-length, mock epic poem told in picaresque style, while *Roadrunner's Dance* (2000) is a children's picture book in which the titular bird defeats a bullying rattlesnake. Combining chapters from his novels with short stories, poems, and essays, *The Anaya Reader* (1995) includes his well-known essay "The New World Man," as well as "The Man Who Found a Pistol," the tale of a teacher who shoots and kills his own double after his wife leaves him.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Anaya's early work is often considered an outgrowth of the Chicano movement, a loosely affiliated group of students and artists in the southwestern United States who pushed for Mexican American empowerment during the 1960s and 1970s. For example, critics have drawn parallels between Anaya's use of the Aztlán motif and the Chicano movement's preoccupation with Aztec mythology as a means of asserting the rich cultural tradition of Mexican Americans facing marginalization. They have likewise connected his utilization of the golden carp in *Bless Me, Ultima* to the mythopoetic ethos of the Chicano movement. Reviewers have praised his trilogy for interweaving Mesoamerican symbology with archetypes celebrated in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid,* thereby creating a tenuous harmony between European and Latino heritage. Moreover, scholars have contrasted Anaya's use of cross-cultural mythology with author Gary Soto's adherence to generic Mexican American characterizations, and have detected a reconciliatory tone akin to that of Native American author Leslie Marmon Silko in Anaya's portrayal of ethnic conflict, specifically in *Bless Me, Ultima.* This novel has been favorably compared to Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in terms of its depiction of indigenous and institutionalized religions.

Additionally, the negative consequences inherent in the merging of disparate cultures has been detected in Anaya's work, particularly with respect to the female characters in *Bless Me, Ultima.* According to commentator Debra B. Black, "[T]he novel is primarily an acculturation novel, and this theme underlies all other interpretations. More importantly, gender politics, exacerbated by the forces of acculturation, function to marginalize the women characters in the novel and deny them a voice." Other reviewers have underlined the pervasive anxiety regarding miscegenation that permeates the novel. Critics have also analyzed *Heart of Aztlán,* describing it as a work that both celebrates the possibility of communal healing (via the shamanistic personage of Crispín) and advocates a globally conscious political and spiritual revolution. Furthermore, reviewers have commented on Anaya's contemporary appropriation of the traditional role of the Mexican American storyteller in his fiction. Scholar Mario Materassi, for instance, has characterized the first-person narrator of "The Man Who Found a Pistol" as an extension of the author's persona, stating, "In fact, it is exactly a 'persona': a storyteller who, like Anaya, has shouldered the task of talking about, talking to, and talking for his people, and does it in a manner appropriate to the modern storyteller that he is."

Anaya's later novels have been studied as experiments in genre that combine conventional literary techniques with magical realism to call attention to such issues as cultural identity, ecological awareness, and spirituality. As reviewer Carmen Flys-Junquera concluded, "Anaya, by hybridizing genres—nature writing, romance quests, detective fiction—subverts the dominating cultural ethos of mainstream America and points out the Chicano worldview, where community and the relationship with the land is central, as a possible alternative. One could suggest that through his use of hybridized genres and magical realism Anaya plots the Chicano culture, represented by the extraordinary, the intuitive, the spiritual, and the magical, clashing with the routine, the ordinary, and the empirical of Anglo culture."

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

*Bless Me, Ultima: A Novel* (novel) 1972
*Heart of Aztlán* (novel) 1976
*Tortuga* (novel) 1979
*The Silence of the Llano: Short Stories* (short stories) 1982
*The Legend of La Llorona: A Short Novel* (novel) 1984
*The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* (poem) 1985
*A Chicano in China* (nonfiction) 1986
*Lord of the Dawn: The Legend of Quetzalcóatl* (folklore) 1987
*Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* [editor; with Francisco A. Lomelí] (essays) 1989
*Alburquerque* (novel) 1992
*The Anaya Reader* (short stories, essays, and poems) 1995
*The Farolitos of Christmas* (juvenilia) 1995
*Zia Summer* (novel) 1995
*Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert* (novel) 1996
*Rio Grande Fall* (novel) 1996

*My Land Sings: Stories from the Rio Grande* (juvenilia) 1999
*Shaman Winter* (novel) 1999
*Roadrunner's Dance* (juvenilia) 2000
*Jemez Spring* (novel) 2005
*The Man Who Could Fly, and Other Stories* (short stories) 2006

## CRITICISM

**Paul Beekman Taylor (essay date May-August 1996)**

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[*In the following essay, Taylor analyzes the merging of European myth with native Chicano lore as well as the connection between flight, language, and escape in Anaya's fiction.*]

> Oh, if I had the wings of an angel, Over these prison walls I would fly.
>
> —American folksong

> Sitting late at night over my typewriter, I discovered I could leave my time and place and transport myself into other streams of time. . . . This is the work of the writer, to learn to fly.
>
> —Rudolfo A. Anaya, ***A Chicano in China***

In the tropology of the Western literary tradition, the artificer-flier mediates between systems of being and systems of knowing. Geoffrey Chaucer on an eagle's back in *The House of Fame* soars from mundane physical concerns toward the center of the universe where tidings of love are found. Shelley's skylark mediates man's aspirations to join art to nature in a bond to the heavens, and Gerard Manley Hopkins's windhover figures Christ and the spirit's soar to salvation. In this rich store of figurations, flight merges quests for art with the soul's inclination toward its source; that is, worldly with spiritual aspirations. The precursors of these figures are the Greek gods and Muses, whose identity with the arts and the planets reflects the cosmic proportions of the poet's powers since the age of Homer. Hesiod's *Theogeny,* 53-115, attributes to the Muses the memory of origins. Virgil's *Georgics,* 2.475, praises the Muses as revealers of the mysteries of the cosmos, and his *Aeneid,* 9.525-9, evokes Calliope's power of memory for poetry. In Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury and Philology,* the flights of Mercury to the earth and Philology to heaven trace a path for art and wisdom to traverse between worlds. In Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice,* Orpheus spans the orbits of the planets to realize the music of the spheres. In the European literary tradition at least, flight of bird, waves of sound, and paths of light figure powers of memory, wisdom, music, and poetry to carry spirit, reason, and imagination free from the constraining weight of the body and its appetites.

The hermeneutics of this tradition are standard in the Eurocentric bias of American culture, and "Native American" and Chicano writers, whose indigenous lore has its own figures of flight, cannot tell their story to an "Anglo" audience without altering received Eurocentric hermeneutic conventions that would read "native" texts in European ideological contexts. The contemporary writer and teacher Rudolfo A. Anaya both resists and appropriates the European literary trope of flight in forging a particularly Chicano political and moral polemic against the despiritualizing effects of Anglo cultural imperialism.[1] How Anaya shapes and merges the European with indigenous traditional thought in Chicano story to make a particular cultural stand is the topic of this brief essay.

Anaya is a recycler of worn myth. Paraphrasing his own words, yesterday's dried and withered European literary figures are "the pulp" on which his vibrant and fecund Chicano story appears (***The Silence of the Llano*** 131); but the informing source of that new story is an indigenous Nahuatl myth in myriad shapes that has never become part of a "past" for Anaya, since it has not voided its enduring present. It is carried by every Chicano.[2] Indigenous Mesoamerican myth is recreated anew with each story told, for the Chicano's hereditary lore is not a fixed-text authority like the European's Bible. Anaya, like many of his compadres, is a "trickster" re-creator, an artificer with a zest for life whose art engages, tantalizes, and tricks the Anglo destroyer. His story "cheats" the Anglo out of his goods, while dazzling him with the process and product of his art.

Anaya's recycled story both reveals and conceals much of its sources. It is not so much influenced by European myth as it appropriates what is usable in it for merging it with—or, perhaps, containing it by—his native Chicano lore. Conversely, the reorganization of fragments of received European matter within his own "local" lore imbues the old with something of the fresh force of the new, making it contemporary in a transcultural exchange that touches the English language as well as its vestiges of myth.

The question of precedence and influence is complex, since Anaya consistently alludes to European literary

models in ways that suggest that he is either depending upon them or duplicating them in order to cancel their Anglo particularity. There are obvious parallels in the two mythological traditions concerning the topos of flight. The flier in European lore is one who escapes one cultural matrix in order to engender another. He is one whose acts make story. Flying for Anaya, on the other hand, is an act that informs the flier with story. The storyteller-flier is central to Anaya's fiction, and particularly to his tetralogy ***Bless Me, Ultima*** (1972), ***Heart of Aztlán*** (1976), ***Tortuga*** (1979), and ***Alburquerque*** (1992) where Anaya's fliers constitute a nexus between the invisible form, or idea of creation, and its material appearance. As such, the bird and other fliers are shapes of the writer's intelligence, emanations of the creative logos that connects the elements and fills the space between the sun's fire and the air, water, and earth of nature. The flier mediates between the landscape, an idea of self, story, and reader-listener.

In the essay from which I take the quote heading this paper, Anaya goes on to identify the writer's autotransport through streams of time with "the work of a *brujo,* the task of the shaman to fly into other realms of time or heaven or hell and rescue the souls of our characters."[3] The choice of the word brujo is telling here, for in Anaya's native culture, *brujo* (feminine: *bruja*) is typically a pejorative term, used by Chicanos to castigate someone as a witch. Anaya is careful to have that one-sided designation put into question, for the powers of the shaman's magic or the curandero's healing is often mistaken by those who do not understand its scope, and the "white magic" of the curandero is too easily confused with the "black magic" of the brujo. In effect, in Anaya's cultural ideology, the good brujo or shaman is not so much a cosmic fertility force as a medicine man to cure the Chicano of the ills caused by Anglo encroachment upon his land, language, and arts. The Anglo is the "bad brujo," counterpart of Huamac's and Moctezuma's witches. As Anaya's Juan Chicaspatas proclaims humorously,

> Indeed, the brujos of Moctezuma
> were a frightful lot
> Magicians of darkness,
> they were the most powerful
> shamans in all Tenochtitlán.
>
> (1985, 32)

In this respect, then, the shaman and the brujo-curandero have the power to block or to direct man's quest for physical and spiritual renewal; they are potential guides in a quest for a lost Paradise, but not everyone has the power to evoke their favor. Mircea Eliade conceives of the track of the shaman voyager—most typically as a bird from a mountain top—as a line of flight along an *axis mundi* joining the world's center with heaven; reaching the goal of his quest, the shaman "recovers the paradisial state" (1962, 90-91). Anaya's Clemente Chávez, in ***Heart of Aztlán,*** travels from the heart of the barrio in Albuquerque to the mountain top where the ancient Aztecs emerged from the earth.

As critics have noted, Anaya uses the term shaman regularly in his prose for the figure of the shape-shifter who can take on another form of being in his quest—often, but not always, as a bird—and so the sensations of flight felt by his fictional persona pertain to the shamanic experience of transport out of one's normal being (Cazemajou 1990, 254-73). In ***Alburquerque,*** Abrán is identified by Lucinda, who is in complete rapport with the land, as the snake that sheds its skin to renew its being (172-75), and her father, Juan Oso, storyteller and sculptor, crosses the threshold between the worlds of men and bears, just as in N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child,* Locke Setman turns into the bear he carries in his name-element *set.* The distinction between the shaman, who actually takes on the powers of flight to move across ontological thresholds, and the bird that is an icon or figure of the human soul moving between two worlds, is fundamental, but Anaya obscures easy perception of the difference. In the European conventional *psychomachia,* the bird's flight is an allegorical trope for the passage of the human soul. An ancient-model use of it is described in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* II, 13, in the persuasion of King Edwin's court to convert to Christianity in 627 C.E. by the example of a bird that flies through a winter hall like the soul that passes quickly through the bright habitation of mortal life before passing again into the limitless unknown from whence it came and to where it passes.

Anaya suggests the same sort of reading with local stories of Mesoamerican origin. In ***Tortuga,*** for example, the Navajo boy Geronimo sings a ritual sunrise song that describes the sun on its daily path across the sky, carried on the back of the mountain Tortuga (44); a Chicano boy, Ronco, dreams that he flies upward on Tortuga's back (190); and, most significantly, the hero dreams of the flight of "Salomón's army"—the children suffering from poliomyelitis imprisoned in iron lungs—on Tortuga's back into the sky where the mountain and its joyous burden achieve an ecstatic stellification (186-87). The essential and significant difference between these flights and European allegory, however, is that the flights in song and dream of Anaya's fiction are potentially real and never simply figures or allegories of transport.

Anaya consistently enlarges the conventional meaning in the European literary icons of flight; that is, he

ence. Clemente Chávez recalls, after listening to Crispín's music, "that there were certain spots of earth on the wide llano where he had once stood and felt the elation of flying! Yes, the power of the earth surged through him until he felt himself soaring over the landscape" (1976, 86). When he had asked the curandero known as *el hombre volador* to explain this sensation, the response was that "the dark secrets of the earth were only for those who were willing to search to the very core and essence of their being" (86). This looks at first sight to be a mystical instruction to turn inward, but in the context of the crowded and dim Albuquerque barrio, in contrast with the huge, open, and bright expanse of the Llano Estacado, flight and search for essence of being mean escape from oppressive social and psychological bonds that hold one back from a sense of personal being. Clemente's feeling is transformable into real power only after Crispín tells him the myths that have accompanied the Chicano in his migration. That is, story animates and revivifies physical force.

In ***Ultima,*** el hombre volador is la Grande's instructor, and it is easy to assume by his epithet that his knowledge of the powers of the plants on the llano derives from a capacity to scan the landscape from a superior perspective. Such a flier over the landscape can mediate man's physical needs and his sense of well-being in nature. Native American fiction is replete with comparable figures, from the hummingbird and fly who mediate man's needs in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*; the mother of Sunchild who rises to her groom, Sun, in N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*; the dark bird that flies in and out of Jim Loney's vision as a specter of his genealogy in James Welch's *The Death of Jim Loney*; the marvelous raven who directs the fortunes of White Man's Dog in Welch's *Fools Crow*; the shape-shifting red butterfly in Orlando Romero's *Nambé, Year One* to the bees who kill the Anglo sheriff, protecting the Osage woman Belle Graycloud, in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit.*

Nonetheless, the powers of flight of el hombre volador represent more than the brujo's power to heal and protect. They comprise the specific healing lore transmitted orally in a story to Ultima, who in turn tells a story about each plant whose virtue she recommends to the young Antonio. It is a story that soars freely across the geographical and cultural terrain of the Chicano to the Anglo listener and reader. Story is, in this sense, a means of conversion of the enemy to friend.

For Anaya, as for Native American writers as a whole, dreams and visions as well as story are ontologically equivalent to "reality." They are arenas for flights of the imagination free from the weight of the awakened body conscious of social oppression. In dreams the shamanic traverse through realms of time is most easily accomplished. The seven-year-old Antonio of Ultima dreams that he flies over the llano to the place and moment of his birth, sees and hears the rival contentions between his mother's and father's families over his future, and hears Ultima declare: "I pulled the baby into the light of life, so I will bury the afterbirth and the cord that once linked him to eternity. Only I will know his destiny" (6).[6]

The flight dreams of the impressionable Antonio carry him well beyond the boundaries of his own immediate time, place, and social circumstance. While his first dream of Ultima had his soul witnessing its own (temporary) deprivation from eternity in the process of its incarnation, his second dream reverses the direction to witness the achievement of eternal grace for others:

> I dreamed about the owl that night, and my dream was good. La Virgen de Guadalupe was the patron saint of our town. The town was named after her. In my dream I saw Ultima's owl lift La Virgen on her wide wings and fly her to heaven. Then the owl returned and gathered up all the babes of Limbo and flew them up to the clouds and heaven. The Virgin smiled at the goodness of the owl.
>
> (12)

In Antonio's later visions, the babes of Limbo are themselves winged angels once in heaven (42), and Antonio's soul "floated with the holiness of prayer into the sky of dreams" (57). He dreams of the Golden Carp's ascension into heaven as the sun at the world's end (168). Ultima's soul is incarnate in her bird fetch (242), and just as Ultima had buried the physical correlative of his prenatal soul, he will bury the owl, which is the correlative of hers (148). This is the ultimate destiny she had realized for him at his birth. The flight of the imagination, which is dream as well as flight within dream, collaborates with waking experience to move events across place and time. In this sense, dreams and visions are latent story in wait for the writer's flight to realize them.

It is not surprising, then, to find that the storyteller in Anaya's fiction moves across boundaries of ordinary measures of time. In her medicinal instruction to Antonio on the llano landscape, Ultima recalls her own training as a curandera:

> "Long ago," she would smile, "long before you were a dream, long before the train came to Las Pasturas, before the Lunas came to their valley, before the great Coronado built his bridge . . ."
>
> (37)

In ***Heart of Aztlán,*** there is a similar recollection of Crispín explaining to Jasón Chávez the origin of his guitar:

from Troy, much like the protective spirit of the owl of Ultima that guides Antonio in his confused quest to understand his destiny. In Virgil's Aeneid, the doves of Venus attend Aeneas on his errant route toward the destined founding of Rome, the city of love. In the Christian iconography of the Annunciation, the initial mystery in Christ's messianic career, these doves of love are interpreted as incarnations of the Holy Spirit.

Like Christ, Quetzalcóatl is inextricably associated with the sun, but an intertextual link of prior significance for Anaya's own cultural and social polemic throughout his fiction is the myth of escape from isolation across a limen between cultures. For this voyage, the classical archetype is Daedalus, who dedicates a temple on Mount Chalcidius to Apollo/Helios after crossing the Aegean Sea in his flight from captivity in Minoan Crete (*Aeneid* VI, 14-19). Daedalus is imprisoned in a foreign land, and when he takes wings to escape, he carries back to his homeland a precious knowledge of insular Minoan culture, though he leaves a son behind to the waves as the price of return. There is a Germanic reflection of that myth even closer to Anaya's stories of flights of return bearing profit. I am thinking of Völund (Weland the Smith), who is maimed, enslaved, and imprisoned on an island by King Nidud to make tools and precious ornaments for the court. By the cunning of his art, he acquires the power of flight and escapes from the island, after killing the king's sons and impregnating his daughter. He returns to his homeland with recovered powers and treasure goods, leaving a metis son in the womb of Nidud's daughter.[5]

One need not argue direct influence of these stories on Anaya, but it is obvious that the social and spiritual problems he addresses—and the narrative style that shapes his story—have precedents in European as well as Native American traditions. Anaya's Chicanos, like the biblical Jews and figures in Greek myth are similarly exiled, imprisoned, or enslaved in another land, far from the place they consider their source or "heart," and they also acquire new combinations of mestizo identities. Each feels loss and yearns for return to an idea of former dignity. In ***Ultima,*** Gabriel Márez dreams of escape to California; in ***Heart,*** Clemente quests for the *sipapuni,* the sacred source of the emergence of la raza. In ***Tortuga,*** the hero is obsessed with the urge to "get out" of the hospital to begin a new life. In ***Alburquerque,*** Abrán feels he can only find his proper place once he discovers where he has really come from, while his friend Joe, having returned spiritually wounded from Vietnam, wants only to be able to return to his people's pueblo; and, finally, Ben Chávez, twenty years after his return from an imprisoning hospital, regrets the son he has abandoned. All of them feel trapped in an alien world without the vital cultural sense of being they can still barely perceive in the cuento of their people. All yearn to fly across temporal and cultural boundaries.

A fable told by the Catholic priest, Father Byrnes, in ***Ultima*** figures the difficulty of translating identity, or story of self, from one cultural context to another. In order to illustrate to his catechism class the ungraspable magnitude of an eternity of suffering in hell, he tells of a sparrow whose task it is to transport a mountain of sand from one continent to another, one grain at a time (193-94). Each round trip takes weeks to accomplish, he adds; and, when one girl in his class asks the priest if eternity, then, is equal to the time it takes to move the whole mountain, and if that is the length of time souls must burn in hell, Father Byrnes replies confidently that the period it takes to move the mountain is but the first day of eternity.

In its immediate context, the lesson of the sparrow (recalling the retreat lesson of James Joyce's Father Arnall in *Portrait of the Artist*) is a rhetorical strategy for explaining in representative spatial and temporal terms something that is outside both space and time. In this respect, the sparrow's flight figures man's impossible task of translating his sinful flesh into purity of spirit. The sparrow who is able span two continents also figures the angels of Revelation who fly medium caeli between God's stability and nature's mutability (Rev. 14:6) and whose paths trace a bond of love between God and man, eternity and age. The artist subject of Joyce's novel is Stephen Dedalus, whose story, like Antonio's in ***Bless Me, Ultima,*** is of an apprenticeship in a writing that achieves flight from chains of church, national identity, and parental ties.

The corresponding power of flight with which several of Anaya's major characters are endowed is not to rejoin a source in God, as Anaya's Tonio is taught to expect before his disappointment in Holy Communion, but to converge his being, as Ultima teaches him, with the natural harmony of the earth. Quetzalcóatl exemplifies this chthonic link, which is distinct from the rite of the Eucharist, which is to join a soul with a universal spirit. In the fictional context of each of Anaya's novels, however, Father Byrnes's lesson has sociopolitical applications that are immediate and urgent, not only because Anaya's Chicanos find themselves imprisoned in mazes of social space and circumstance from which they would escape, but because they realize in pain that escape requires a cultural and psychological translation of self, a shamanistic shift of being from man to bird.

The translation takes painfully long to be learned, but those who will learn it already have an earlier and vague sense of its potential throughout their experi-