



Rudolpho Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*: A *Mestizaje* Education

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A landscape marked by Spain's and Portugal's colonial enterprises, Latin American culture remains today a product of hybridity. According to Octavio Paz, the Latin America colonies can be distinguished from their Northern American counterpart—the New England colonies in which Native peoples were largely exiled to society's fringes—by Spain's and Portugal's imperializing pattern of absorbing indigenous peoples (361-2). Paz attributes this universalizing pattern, the desire to incorporate, to a Catholic doctrine which emphasized conversion, largely as an impulse of the Counter-Reformation (363). Whether this or another reason compelled it, this colonial absorption produced a people of mixed inheritance. From Peru to Brazil and Columbia to Mexico, Latin Americans are at once European and Indigenous, Catholic and Pagan, and colonizer and colonized. It is no surprise then, given this underlying hybridity of Latin American peoples, that this reality and the tensions it produced crossed the Mexican/American border with Latin American immigrants. It is this contest and co-mingling of cultures and faiths that Mexican-American author Rudolpho Anaya dissects in his classic Chican@ novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*. In his artful complication of his protagonist's equivocal development, Anaya crafts a *bildungsroman* that points to the impossibility of effacing either the

Indigenous or the European components of the *mestizaje* heart.

A simple young adult novel on the surface, *Bless Me, Ultima* is both subtly complicated and highly controversial. Since its publication in 1972, the novel has been banned from school districts across the country. In the process, it managed to garner the rather undesirable status of being number 75 on a list, compiled by the American Library Association, of the books most banned during the 1990's (Mehta 1). Yet *Bless Me, Ultima*'s list of accolades stretches at least as long as its instances of censure: Former First Lady Laura Bush chose the novel for inclusion on her to-read list, high school Academic Decathlon teams have analyzed it as their literature selection, and The National Endowment of the Arts has included the novel in their "Big Read" program (1). The most consequential of all such tributes, however, is the novel's receiving the Second Annual Premio Quinto Sol (López 198). The prize was the brain-child of Quinto Sol, an intensely independent, all-Chican@ publishing house whose singular, founding purpose was to stand as a beacon of "Chicano cultural expression unchanged by editors or owners of another culture" (qtd. in López 198). Their mission, particularly via the awarding of the Premio Quinto Sol, was to provide for Chican@ authors a means to rally

Latin@ Americans to demand their dignity as a people and to celebrate their inherited voice. That Anaya's novel was chosen to stand as a vanguard during the Chican@'s Civil Rights struggle of the 1960's and 70's (Anaya, "Introduction" ix) expresses volumes about *Bless Me, Ultima*'s beloved, almost mythic status. In that tumultuous season, critical to the valorizations of Latin@ peoples, Anaya's novel stood as the officially endorsed voice of the Chican@ population.

But if we accept *Bless Me, Ultima* as this official voice of the Latin@, some interesting questions demand to be contended with. The Chican@ population by the 1960's was almost 90% Catholic (Englekirk and Marín). Yet one of the many objections to *Bless Me, Ultima* stems from its alleged "anti-Catholic" sentiments (Mehta 1). How can a single text at once represent a largely Catholic population and simultaneously threaten that core cultural element? Here, we see the novel's hybridity begin to emerge. Something more is at work than a univocal people uniting together to create a formidable and effective political and aesthetic front. Due to *Bless Me, Ultima*'s almost unparalleled importance to the Chican@ movement, this hybridity—cultural, religious, and social—becomes particularly important to studies of this Chican@ novel particularly and Chican@ literature broadly.

I would assert that it is in Anaya's young narrator Antonio "Tony" Márez that this hybridity is most manifested. His *bildungsroman*-style journey can be read as a crossroads of two very disparate educational modes whose intersection will challenge the most foundational elements of Tony's self comprehension. His Euro-Iberian roots are challenged by his Indigenous heritage; his orthodox Catholicism by Native mysticism; his family's respected social status by accusations of witchcraft and abnormality. It is as we study

Tony's movement from a clear, crystalline cultural conception to a muddled, hybrid nationalism that we begin to perceive the full hybridity of the Chican@ population as depicted in *Bless Me, Ultima*. Here, too, we locate the novel's power to speak to its original audience and the generations of Latin@ youth who have since read it, youth who may well have experienced the same pull between the two poles of their cultural heritage.

The novel opens with Tony firmly ensconced in the more traditional and widely accepted of the two educations to be discussed. Born into a family well-respected in their town of Guadalupe, New Mexico, Antonio has been raised a good Catholic by his devout mother (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 31). His father, despite a bitterly suppressed wanderlust and nomadic vaquero background, holds a steady job as a highway paver and stands as the honorable patriarch of his family (9, 30). When there is unrest in the town, Tony's father is frequently applied to as a man of sense and strength (17, 21). Tony's is a family with a "good name" (57).

Before he has even begun to outgrow childhood, Tony's mother has decided he shall become a priest, "a man of the people" and thusly a man of position (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 10). Only six years old, he is on the threshold of commencing the formal education which will equip him to reach that priestly pinnacle. With the start of his public school career, during which he will be molded into a main-stream American—for "it was only after one went to school that one learned English"—Tony is securely moving toward the future bequeathed him by his Euro-Iberian ancestors. It is a journey of formal education, Catholic devotion, social stability, and status. His mother already knows that "[a]n education [both academic and religious] will make him a

scholar...[a] priest," positions of power which will situate him well in society (57).

But when Ultima, *la curandera* who embodies Native healing secrets, comes to live with the Márez family, everything changes. It is Ultima who initiates Tony into his second educational mode. The educational path she lays for Tony is one of mystery and magic, a gritty school of experience diametrically opposed to the formality of Tony's classroom instruction. As he begins to pursue it, this second path veers into uncharted territory, literally and figuratively. Initially, this territory is benign. Ultima leads Tony through the wild *llano*—the plains and hills surrounding his home—instructing him on the healing plants they gather in their "magic harvest" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 42). She teaches him to sense and be at one with the "*presence*" of the river, a mystical concept emphasized by Anaya's consistent marking of this sense of the word with italics (45). Such a "*presence*" is wholly experiential and metaphysical. Undoubtedly, it bespeaks a mysticism with which the Catholic Church would not be comfortable, for this "*presence*" is also identified as the "soul of the river," pointing to a Native animism (16). It is this sort of belief system, one tying deity to natural phenomena, which the Spanish and Portuguese, particularly the Jesuit monks, worked so restlessly to eradicate (Zamora 3, 10, 34).

As his education with Ultima progresses, Tony's lessons move out of the security of natural landscape and into ever more foreign, frightening terrain. Chapter "*Diez*" (86), contains a lurid description of an exorcism in which Ultima uses Tony as her apprentice as she fights to lift a curse cast on Tony's Uncle Lucas by three evil witches. Along with herbal medicines, Ultima's methods incorporate rituals echoing both Catholic exorcism and voodoo (105, 107). This is an unearthly chapter that depicts evil

witches shape-shifting into coyotes—a practice mirroring the Native American folkloric figure of the evil skinwalker—the vomiting of "poisonous green bile," and the burning of the living ball of hair Uncle Lucas eventually vomits as a sign of his cleansing of the curse (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 103, 106-7, 110; "Skinwalker"). Later, a second scene doubles the previous one as Tony again assists Ultima in her supernatural engagements, this time joining with her to expel cursed ghosts from the home of the Márez's family friends. Notably, these ghosts are those of Indigenous peoples, the Comanche, to be specific (240). These three Indians are twice wronged: first when they are hanged for theft by Chicanos who then refuse to burn the Comanche bodies according to their custom, and second, when they are raised by the witches and cursed, "forced...to do wrong" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 240). Ultima asserts, "The three tortured spirits are not to blame, they are manipulated" and she proceeds to free them, granting their spirits the cremation their bodies craved (240). In standing as both their advocate and their liberator, Ultima firmly aligns herself with Native interests. She even goes so far as to request a similar burial for herself when Death should determine her time to have come (247).

Generally, Ultima's warfare against evil is gratefully received by those who benefit from her services. She is lauded as "courage[ous]," told she can "never [be] thank[ed]...enough" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 109, 248). Yet she remains a social outsider, perceived by the larger community as belonging to a forbidden caste like that of the East Indian untouchable. When Ultima attends church with the Márez family for the first time, an action which introduces her presence to the people of Guadalupe, suspicious whispers follow her. She is called "'Hechicera, bruja'"—sorceress, witch (36). Distinct from her title of *la curandera*, with its connotations of healer and wise-woman, the epitaphs the townspeople apply

to Ultima have purely evil associations. In the course of the novel, Tony is twice harassed by his peers for his association with Ultima, who they, too, label a *bruja* (116). They assert her evil abilities to change into an owl and to transform men into frogs (116). In tones which betray the violent impulses aroused by the fear of *la curandera* and her evil double, the *bruja*, one of the boys declares, "You have to kill them with a bullet marked with a cross...It's the law" (116). Here, the mystical is revealed as a threat not only to the Catholic religion, but also to the social order. Society demands, via law, the disarming, even the destruction, of the shaman woman. In an intensified mirroring of this threat, the next chapter unveils a mob armed with crosses and torches. The sole purpose of the rabble is to remove Ultima from the safety of Márez home and kill her (138). Although the vigilantes are eventually dispersed, their aims unrealized, Ultima's salvation is but a reprieve. One man's vengeful determination to send the "old witch... to hell" is the arrow which finally fells her, resulting in her death and burial at the close of the novel (269).

What in Ultima mandates this fear, this low-class, almost criminal standing? I believe her social rejection is born of two elements of Ultima's character: her cultural "mis-alliance" and her religious deviation. To address the first, we must direct our gaze toward the status of the Indian within the Chican@ community, for it is Ultima's Indian associations which mark her as an outsider. In explaining the role of *la curandera*, Anaya calls her "a repository of Spanish, Mexican, and *Native American* teachings" (Anaya, "Introduction" viii, emphasis added). As mentioned above, Ultima's conception of the earth is animistic, a religious perception and system tied to American Indian people groups. The intimacy Ultima shares with the "soul of the river" is not a singular friendship; she believes that human "spirit[s]

shar[e] in the spirit of all things" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 16). This is perfectly in line not only with the animism of North American Indigenous peoples, but also with the "Mesoamerican cultures....[whose] belief systems...posit the sacred significance of the physical universe" (Zamora 10). In this way, Ultima is associated with the entirety of the broad span of Indigenous peoples who have influenced the *mestizaje*: the Pueblo Indians of the United States Southwest and the Mesoamerican tribes of South America.

Furthermore, the *brujas* who curse Tony's uncle are not the only figures in *Bless Me, Ultima* to be linked with the Native American skinwalker. Particularly associated with the Navajo, the skinwalker was a witch who could transform into a variety of animals—coyote, crow, fox, owl, wolf—and were so adept at casting curses that they could do so simply by locking eyes with their victims ("Skinwalker"). The demonic *brujas* of the novel transform into coyotes, a widely reviled animal, and use their powers malevolently (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 103). Ultima never uses her magic for any but righteous causes. This, however, does not negate the consistent references Anaya makes to Ultima's ability to transmute her soul into animal shape—in particular, her companion owl (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 270). The owl is generally considered a more auspicious animal than the coyote, but it is still one distinctly tied to the skinwalker ("Skinwalker"). As a folkloric figure both Indigenous and evil, the echo of the skinwalker in Ultima's magic cinches her negative Indian associations ("Skinwalker"). It is precisely such associations that account for the fear inspired by her mystic abilities.

From the novel's beginning, Indians are rejected as outsiders, forbidden from integration with the ordered society of the town. One of Tony's friends, a boy named Jasón, is notable for sustaining a forbidden friendship with such an

Indian, a figure so exorcised from the society of Guadalupe that he lives in an “old cave” in the “old Indian...burial grounds” (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 11). We are told that “Jasón’s father ha[s] forbidden Jasón to talk to the Indian, he ha[s] beaten him, he ha[s] tried in every way to keep Jasón from the Indian” (11). These efforts are unsuccessful, but their extremity communicates volumes about the degree to which the Indian, a forcefully forgotten ingredient in the ethnic makeup of the *mestizaje* people of the town, is feared and disdained. Even Tony’s father, depicted as a rather enlightened character, associates Indians with the uncivilized. In response to his daughter’s use of slang words like “gosh” and “okay,” he asks, “What good does an education do them...they only learn to speak like Indians” (57).

It is into this atmosphere that Ultima enters, carrying with her the stigma of Indigenous magic, Indigenous roots. As *la curandera*, she is a reminder of all that is Indian and of the Indian essence that is a part of the Chican@ inheritance, regardless of whether the Latin@ population chooses to recognize it or not. For two race-related offenses, Ultima is relegated to the lower rung of the class system. Firstly, she carries the Indian within herself via her magic and so must be reduced to an equally low social standing. Secondly, she is a reminder of the very cultural inheritance that long separated Chican@s from the privileges enjoyed by their Euro-Iberian cousins; it is their very Native-ness, their Indigenous extraction, which divided them from the purely European and ultimately culminated in the Civil Rights movements of Anaya’s 1960’s and 70’s. Ultima, as a manifestation of this Indigenous, low-status cultural group, marginalized by Latin America and the United States alike, is rejected for her Native associations. For, if Guadalupe were to wholeheartedly embrace the Indian-linked Ultima, they would by extension be embracing the Indigenous

essence within themselves. This would produce a disturbing disruption of the divide many Chican@s worked to place between themselves and their Indigenous cousins. As Caminero-Santangelo has noted, one of *Bless Me, Ultima*’s primary concerns is the exposition and amelioration of these “cultural pressures that caused Mexican Americans to deny their Indian heritage in the decades—even centuries—before the Chican[@] Movement” (117). To Anaya’s readers, the Indian-yoked Ultima is presented as a heroic, benevolent character, a figuration of the value of the Indigenous. But the characters and society which surround her within the narrative-world of *Bless Me, Ultima* reject her for the same affiliations which are meant to ennoble her in her reader’s eyes.

Certainly, my reading of Ultima runs the risk of seeming too reductive. I align her with the Indigenous and mystic, but doesn’t she pray to saints, particularly to the Virgin Mary (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 5, 64)? Such religious rituals would seem to cinch Ultima’s Catholic associations—as a Chican@, she is, of course, Euro-Catholic as well as Indian. Yet even these references, so clearly Catholic in nature, may be traced to Indigenous connections. Chican@s have noted the distinctiveness of Mexican Catholicism from its European progenitor (Rodriguez 90-1). Whereas the European Catholic Mary is “a serene white lady who matter-of-factly squashe[s] the Genesis serpent with her bare feet” (see fig.1), the Mexican Mary, the highly venerated *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, is a “young Indian maiden—dark” (90-1; see fig.2). An icon of New World Catholicism so culturally pervasive she decorates park benches, graffiti-scarred walls, and tattooed biceps, this dark Mary is depicted as both Indian herself and as having revealed herself to an Indian (Zamora 44). Furthermore, the site where *la Virgen de Guadalupe* first appeared was a sacred space originally dedicated to the Aztec goddess

Cihuacóatl (41). The *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, therefore, while European in her affiliations with a European religion, is inextricably and even primarily tied to the Indigenous; she cannot be severed from the Indian culture into which she is born. She, like so many other saints of Mexican Catholic hagiography, is the child of syncretism—in this case, the overlay of a European religion onto a pre-existing Indigenous faith. This syncretism “allowed the accommodation of the prehispanic pantheon of the Americas” into Latin American Catholicism and so provided an important tool of conversion for the Spanish and Portuguese (39). Nevertheless, this maneuver could not efface the Indigenous origins of these saints and so provides for us a metonym for the enduring presence of the Indigenous within the Chican@ heritage. As an object of reverence for Ultima, *la Virgen de Guadalupe* reflects what Ultima is herself: an Indigenous woman of spiritual power injected into a *mestizaje* world. Even in Ultima’s worship of this figure of European Catholic reverence, Anaya draws our eye back to *la curandera*’s Indian origins, insisting upon our recognition of them.

Yet within the world of *Bless Me, Ultima* the imposed recognition of the Indian frequently produces unpleasant consequences for those who embrace it. For their friendship with Ultima, Tony’s family also finds its secure social status and well-being threatened. When the mob seeking to prosecute Ultima for witchcraft marches upon the Márez house, Tony’s anxiety is not just for Ultima. He fears that the Márez house, his father and his family, “would be overrun” (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 138). Indeed, Tony’s father feels the necessity of repeatedly reminding the mob of his authority and status: “[Y]ou know me! You call me by my name, you walk upon my land!” (135). His felt compulsion to reassert these markers of community standing reveal the crumbling nature of the Márez family’s social currency. Such powerful

statements ultimately calm the horde, but the aversion of danger is near. This scene of threatened mob violence is repeated on a smaller scale when Tony, as previously mentioned, is antagonized, even physically attacked, by his friends for his association with Ultima (116). At the beginning of the novel, before forming his ties with Ultima, Tony is readily accepted among his peers and “bec[omes] a part of their gang” (41). But the closer he grows to Ultima, the more his social status erodes. Another character, Narciso, is actually killed for defending her (180). Her low social status and its accompanying vulnerability affect all those who touch her, threatening to demote them to a similar class.

Yet even as Tony is receiving from Ultima this experiential, Indigenous education with its lower class associations, he is simultaneously undergoing his formal education, cultural and religious. During his third grade year, Tony makes great advances in his academic studies, learning even to read his “prayers...in English” (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 188). His intellectual gifts and scholarly application vaunt him forward in school and gain his parents’ approbation (79, 188). In the midst of his academic gains, however, this education is mirrored and even surpassed by his religious one: “By the end of March [Tony and his classmates a]re well on [their] way with [their] catechism lessons...[and s]chool work gr[ows] monotonous beside it” (200). To both Tony and his religious instructors, his religious education is considered no less critical than his scholastic one.

Rather, these twin knowledges are equally necessary for Tony’s social integration and success. Tony’s mother recognizes this and so, atypically for the older Chican@ generation as portrayed in the novel, “believe[s] that if [Tony i]s to be successful as a priest [he] should know both languages [English and Spanish], and so she

encourage[s him] in both" (188). Within the town of Guadalupe, the European languages of English and Spanish and the European religion of Catholicism are key to unlocking his upward mobility and success as a member of the community.

The importance of the Catechism to social standing and advancement is underscored by the counter example of one of Tony's friends, a boy named Florence. Having "give[n God] up" (207), Florence is instinctually disliked by the priest teaching the students' catechism. The boy's religious education is peppered with punishments of disgrace and humiliation particularly public in nature, as when Florence is made, for arriving tardily for Catechism, "to stand in the middle of the aisle with his arms outspread" (209). Tony, safe within the approved circle of the Catholic believer, remains unpunished for an identical breach. By dint of his religious conformity, he ensured sanctuary from social rejection. In order for a citizen of Tony's Chican@ society to be perceived as productive and advancing, he must embrace this dual education of Catholic and English instruction. The only alternative is the shamed, low-class lifestyle to which Ultima is largely relegated.

Another well-known Chican@ book underscores the close alliance of class-security and Catholicism. In contrast to Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory* has not been embraced by the Chican@ community or its Civil Rights movement—quite the opposite. Rodriguez has been excoriated for his dismissive attitude toward the Chican@ Civil Rights movement, his opposition to bilingual education as counterproductive to success in the United States, his aggressive promotion of cultural assimilation at the expense of cultural nostalgia, and his unashamed flaunting of his material wealth (Staten 104). The one element of his Chican@ heritage which Rodriguez does not

divest himself of is his Catholicism as he continues, even in his adulthood to "go to mass every Sunday" (Rodriguez 107). He does clarify the hollowness of his religious beliefs when he confesses, "My education may have made it inevitable that I would become a citizen of the secular city" but he retains the practice as a point of social orientation (115). His fashionable society friends read his religion as "mere affectation" and so Rodriguez's Catholicism actually becomes a point of comedic entry into his social circle as his friends laugh at his "burlesque [of] the folk-mass liturgy," his "attempt to play the Evelyn Waugh eccentric to a bland and vulgar secular age" (109). For this man who has been so intentional in severing himself from the encumbering, socially-limiting elements of his Chican@ heritage, this is one vestige of his ethnic background which can be retained and even deployed, in an altered form, to please the prestigious circle which comprises his American society. Like Tony, Rodriguez gains tools for social access and success through his ritualized integration into the predominant Christian rather than pagan culture. Yet even Rodriguez, with his dismissive attitude toward cultural complexities, cannot altogether separate within himself the Indigenous and European influences which co-create his Chicano heritage. He embraces European Catholicism (even Irish Catholicism, in his early education), yet one of the first self-descriptions we receive of Rodriguez references his Indian inheritance, his "Indian features" (1, 88-89). As a member of the *mestizaje*, Rodriguez cannot disentangle the two.

And so we sense in Rodriguez's case and see clearly in Tony's the interweaving of two educations—the Native, mystic, and lower-class with the European, Catholic, and socially advantaged. In their mingling, we see the mechanics of hybridity functioning to create cross-cultural, cross-religious, and cross-class tensions. Rodriguez attempts to choose one

education—the Euro-Catholic. Similarly, the majority of *Bless Me, Ultima*'s minor characters seem to adhere to one line of cultural knowledge. Tony, however, is exposed to and engages with both. In Anaya's young protagonist, this produces a world of questions, the majority of which remain un-answered.

In one moment, Tony is alive with the possibilities of new, Indigenous-belief systems and cries out "What if there were different gods to rule in [God's] absence?...What If the Virgin Mary or the Gold Carp ruled instead" (208). In the very next moment, Tony cringes before the thunder he takes to be God's wrath and yells "Forgive me, Lord!" as he crosses his forehead, instinctively finding refuge in the Catholic rituals (209). Theresa Kanoza argues that the novel has a resolved ending; Tony learns to synthesize his Catholic and Pagan beliefs, his mother's dreams of priestly status, and Ultima's outcast philosophies (166). But I cannot help questioning this reading. Even at the novel's climax, as Tony is elevated by an uncanny union with Nature, he reveals his tumultuous indecision as he at once "doubt[s] God...praises the beauty of" the pagan mythology he has been taught (272). Neither this doubting nor this praising is a firm, definite declaration of belief—it is only a continuation of ambivalent, conflicted explorations of faiths. *Bless Me, Ultima* concludes without the readers' being told which educational path Tony will embrace. That he loves and reveres Ultima is certain; his faith and his fate are not. Unlike most *bildungsromans*, *Bless Me, Ultima* does not conclude with a distinct resolution of personhood for the young protagonist.

This inscrutable end is an interesting manipulation for Anaya to make upon the *bildungsroman* form. So much of the novel's energy builds toward the necessity of Tony's making choices for his future. One of the first scenes of the novel showcases a dream in which

Tony remembers his own birth. Within this vision, his father's family asserts that Tony will be a vaquero like their people, while his mother's family argues that Tony shall be a farmer, a priest (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 5-7). This theme, in which Tony is offered a binary choice, threads throughout the novel, and subsequently tangles with several other dichotomies—religious, social, ethnic—which demand Tony's attendance. Yet there is a distinct vacancy of answers to all these demands for decisions. Even Ultima, the chief repository of the novel's wisdom, cannot provide Tony with answers. "I cannot tell you what to believe," she says, "As you grow into manhood you must find your own truths" (125). But we do not see Tony grow into manhood. We do not see him make final choices. His questions hang without response. Why does Anaya so diligently cultivate Tony's two educational paths only to refuse to provide closure?

I believe the answer may lie in Gloria Anzaldúa's philosophy, revealed in her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza*. The borderlands she addresses are slightly different than those of Tony's narrative. Whereas Tony tries to navigate the Indian and European components of his Chicano heritage, the cultural influences Anzaldúa juggles are the Indo-Mexican and the Anglo, cultures who collide over the physical space of the United States/Mexico border as well as over many other psychological and spiritual territories (Anzaldúa 19). She writes, "I have been straddled that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape" (19). Yet she makes no attempt to escape this place where "the lifeblood of two worlds mer[ge] to form a third country—a border culture" (25). She does not try to choose between the territories which form this contentious front. In one of the frequent poems which intersperse her prose—

another manifestation of borderland intermixing—she asserts, “This is her home/this thin edge of/barbwire” (35). She cannot, will not, reside in a place less capable of containing every aspect of herself.

Although Anzaldúa's book was published fifteen years after Anaya's, I believe such a borderland is precisely what Anaya crafts for Tony. Anaya does not demand that his protagonist choose between his parents' dreams or between his cultural educations; how could he mandate such a binary decision and still allow Tony to remain true to all the heterogeneous aspects of himself? Instead, Tony is left to exist in a third state, his own borderland, where he may access and hold all the parts of himself. By establishing the many demands (generated both by himself and by others) which urge Tony to align with one education or another, Anaya is simulating the pressures which come upon the borderland-dweller, the pressures “to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd” (Anzaldúa 19). These pressures are not simply authorial devices relevant only to the novel's plot. They are demands which many of Anaya's readers likely feel. In recreating these within *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya effectively imitates his readers' cultural anxieties, offering them further points of connection to the novel. By closing *Bless Me, Ultima* without concretizing Tony's decision for either of his educations, Anaya offers his readers the same choice, the same possibilities. Will they adhere to one education? Or will they risk that borderland wild?

For this hybrid tug, this duality of religions and classes, ancestries and belief systems is too intermingled and too equally integral for any young Chican@ to chose between the two and remain a whole individual. Instead, Anaya's exhortation, via *Bless Me, Ultima*, to the young Chican@s of the Civil Rights movement may have been a call to recognize and embrace this

dual nature—both native and European, high class and low class, mystic and Catholic. *Bless Me, Ultima* guides its readers away from the sort of diametrical, univocal processes by which Rodriguez seems to have viewed his heritage, his societal place. Rodriguez's single narrative perspective perhaps, partly accounts for his inability to connect with his fellow Chican@s; in dissecting and dismembering his cultural heritage, he enervates his ability to articulate anything meaningful to the Latin@ who knows a more holistic cultural experience. Anaya's beloved novel, however, urges a complexity of self-understanding which incorporates all proffered educations. It is a novel built within the borderland existence of the Indigenous and European. If Tony is unwilling to adhere to one education by the novel's close, he is also unwilling to dismiss either. Instead, he holds both in tandem. Only through a similar acceptance of his or her hybrid heritage can each Chican@ embrace the diverse aspects of their uniqueness and their fluctuating, complex standing as *mestizaje* among the cultures of the world.



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