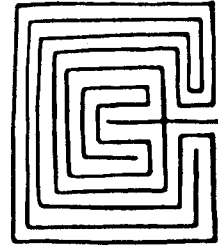


"Chicano in China" <



Rudolfo Anaya
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Rudolfo Anaya, Chicano in China

by Ruben Martinez

In mid-May of 1984, Rudolfo Anaya and his wife, Patricia, embarked on a month-long journey to China as part of a small group of Kellogg Foundation fellows and their spouses. Anaya's perceptions of and encounters with the Chinese were recorded in a journal he kept during his trip and published in 1986 as *A Chicano in China*. Had the journal been written by another Chicano, it probably would not have been published. Other Chicanos visited China before Anaya and they, too, probably kept journals of their experiences. But Rudolfo Anaya is not just another Chicano: he ranks among the foremost American authors of today and is the most popular of contemporary Chicano writers.

Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya was born on October 30, 1937, in the village of Pastura, New Mexico, located at the western end of El Llano Estacado (the Staked Plains), an area which extends easterly from central New Mexico into west Texas and Kansas. Educated in the public schools of New Mexico, he graduated from high school in 1956, then studied business for two years at Browning Business School. Unfulfilled by the study of business he turned to the study of literature at the University of New Mexico, receiving the Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1963. He then accepted a teaching position at a small town in New Mexico, later teaching in the public schools of Albuquerque. It was during this period that he began to work on *Bless Me, Ultima*, the novel which was to propel him to the forefront of Chicano literature. In 1968, he received the Master of Arts Degree in literature from the University of New Mexico. In 1974, he began teaching creative writing and Chicano literature at his alma mater. Today he is Professor of English.

Anaya has received numerous awards for his creative work and literary scholarship. In 1971, he received the Premio Quinto Sol, one

of the most prestigious literary awards in the field of Chicano letters, for his first novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*. In 1979 he received the Before Columbus American Book Award for his novel *Tortuga*, and in 1983 the Hispanic Caucus of the National Conference of Teachers of English presented him with an Award for Achievement in Chicano Literature. He has received honorary degrees from the University of Albuquerque and from Mary Crest College in Iowa. He also has received awards from the Governor of the State of New Mexico. He has lectured at universities throughout the country, including Yale, Notre Dame, Hawaii, Wisconsin, Texas, Colorado, and UCLA. In 1980, he read from his works at the White House during the National Salute to American Poets and Writers.

Anaya's literary works are imbued with the cultural traditions and landscape of the *manitos*, a distinct Chicano grouping situated in New Mexico and southern Colorado. He is concerned not only with conveying the Chicano world view through the *cuentos* (folk stories) of his people, but also with communicating his people's problems, dilemmas, fears, joys, and love. In particular, he is concerned with conveying his people's deep relationship with *la tierra*, which he terms "the epiphany in landscape." For Anaya, the epiphany is infused with both spiritual and sensual aspects, and he likens it to our ability to love and to make human connections that are so essential to our well-being.

His work, it is argued by some scholars, contains traces of the Aztec world view. While the cosmology of the Aztecs (and other pre-Columbian peoples) is not yet completely known, there is consensus among scholars that they saw themselves as "the People of the Fifth Sun." According to Frank Waters in *Mexico Mystique*, their world was preceded by the worlds of earth, air, fire, and water, respectively. Together, these worlds constitute the four basic elements of classical antiquity. The world of the first sun, *Ocelotonatiuh*, was inhabited by giants who were devoured by tigers. The inhabitants of the world of the second sun, *Ecatonatiuh*, were destroyed by wind, with the survivors being turned into monkeys. Those of the world of the third sun, *Quianuitonatiuh*, were destroyed by a rain of fire, with the survivors being turned into birds (turkeys). The inhabitants of the world of the fourth sun, *Chalchiuhtlicue*, were destroyed by flood, with the survivors being turned into fish. The world of the fifth sun, *Tonatiuh*, constituted movement and unified and synthesized the elements of the preceding four worlds. Contained in Anaya's works is a quest for understanding how man can harmonize his relations with the elements of the universe. This quest for harmony, along with the presence of Aztec symbols and myths, reflects the Aztec view in his works.

Whereas *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlan* (1976), *Tortuga* (1979), and the *The Silence of the Llano* (1982) are major works of fiction, *A Chicano in China* is a nonfictional journal in which readers come to know Rudolfo more intimately than before.

Readers become acquainted with Anaya as a person, a husband, a scholar, a traveller, a *manito*, and a Chicano. By accompanying Anaya as he sets out each day of his trip, readers are privy to his attitudes, perceptions, reactions, and reflections on his encounters with the peoples and cultures of China. Never before has a Chicano scholar of Anaya's stature produced a work of such a personally revealing and intriguing nature. The promise of the journal lies in the opportunity that it provides readers to understand themselves better by more fully understanding the Chicano world view as it is presented by Anaya.

Anaya is not just another American visiting China. He is a Chicano, conscious of his ethnic identity and deeply steeped in the customs and traditions of this people. His attitudes toward China, its peoples and cultures, differ from those of most Americans precisely because he is Chicano and because of his own personal views and interests. As a Chicano, Anaya takes pride in his indigenous roots, his ties to native peoples of this continent and their great civilizations of the past. As a Chicano, he is humble, in the positive sense of the word, toward other peoples and cultures, seeking to communicate, to learn, to understand. His own personal interests move him to seek spiritual and humanistic connections between the cultures of China and pre-Columbian societies. He is especially interested in connections having to do with relationships between the Earth and the dieties of these cultures. In short, Anaya embarked on his journey as a humble pilgrim seeking enlightenment through communication with the peoples and cultures of China. He kept his journal in order to share his experiences with other Chicanos, that they, too, may know China.

Anaya addresses issues that concern *manitos*, Chicanos, racial minorities, and Third World peoples in general. Throughout his journey he interprets the worlds of China through the world view of the *manitos*. Free markets become *mercados*, melodies become *rancheras*, complex irrigation systems become *acequias*, Taoist temples become the *Santuario de Chimayo*, and so on. These interpretations provide readers the opportunity more fully to understand Anaya, *manitos*, and Chicanos in general. *Manito* readers will immediately recognize the familiar objects and practices against which the foreign are compared. They will delight in the zany similarities which he sees between the foreign and the familiar. At the Great Wall of China he wonders how Hispanic culture will fare in the

United States: "[I]s our culture a force living in the soul of the people? A force connecting us to our history, a force as powerful as the Great Wall of China, that wall which is a symbol of Chinese resistance? No one knows except, perhaps, the winds of time, which have many things to reveal to us yet" (43). At the Southwest National Minorities Institute in Chengdu he asks if our federal government will "ever establish a university to teach Hispanic or Native American thought and language" (108). Riverboating down the Yangtze he thinks of the Cultural Revolution and is reminded of the *Movimiento* and how Chicanos, too, "felt the repressive hand of the Gang of Four" (119). At Wuhan he wishes that politicians could understand that Chicanos have an inherent right to be a Spanish-speaking people. At still a broader level, Anaya effectively emphasizes concerns relating to racial minorities and Third World nations in general. At the outset of his journey, while flying from Albuquerque to San Francisco, he wonders if Japanese Americans loved Manzanar (a WWII relocation camp). In Beijing (Peking), reflecting on the views of foreign service bureaucrats, Anaya concludes that the Chinese are people of the new world. "They will solve their own problems" (49). At Chengdu he tires of the Ugly American: "Loud, vociferous, insensitive. I am surprised at some of the older members of our group. Crude. Foolish. Stupid. How predictable is the character of the ugly American. This upstart culture, which has no manners in the face of an ancient culture" (91). In Shanghai Anaya tells us that we should go to China as guests rather than critics. In this instance, Anaya seems to be addressing Anglo-American readers. He knows that Chicanos and other Third World peoples "... understand the coming of foreigners into the land" (145). He knows that it is contrary to their cultures for one to enter a stranger's house and tell him how to run it.

Now, lest readers get the impression that Anaya's journal focuses solely on racial and Third World considerations, I shall discuss his more personal concerns.

Anaya's personal interests lead him on a journey of self-discovery as he seeks to understand "... the old Asiatic world that sent its migrations of people across the Bering Strait thousands of years ago; those people were the ancestors of Native America" (3). In particular, he went to China "looking for ancestral signs," for connections between the old Asiatic world and the mythology and thought of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The major mythological and spiritual symbols discussed by Anaya are dragons, golden carp, *tortugas* (turtles), Buddha, the Goddess of Mercy, and the Tao.

At the Forbidden City, the old Imperial City of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Anaya is fascinated by the many dragon figures decorating the Palace. He sees connections between ancient China and

ancient Mexico. The Palace grounds, buildings, courtyards, and images remind him of Teotihuacan, the great "city of the gods." "The face of the fierce dragon looks out at me from walls, from gargoyles, from decorative pieces, almost exactly as the serpent head in the pyramids of Mexico" (21). He wonders if Quetzalcoatl, the great culture-hero of the *Toltecas*, had his beginning in Asia.

Golden carp hold a strong fascination for Rudolfo Anaya. He remembers the golden carp he saw as a youngster in the rivers and lakes of Santa Rosa, New Mexico. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the golden carp is a god who chose to be turned into a fish so that he could take care of his people, who, themselves, had been turned into carp for having eaten the sacred fish of the gods, the carp. In that novel, the importance of the golden carp revolves around water, the origin of life and one of the four basic elements. It symbolizes spiritual cleansing and peace. In the journal, Anaya finds contentment in seeing golden carp in China. "Yes, I have returned to the land of the golden carp, I have returned home" (159).

Tortugas also hold a fascination for Anaya. His third novel *Tortuga* describes the rite of passage of an adolescent nicknamed "Tortuga," who becomes paralyzed after wounding a giant tortoise. At the Provincial Museum of Shanghai, Anaya sees large stone tablets engraved with Chinese calligraphy perched on the top of huge turtles. He wonders why the *tortuga* haunts his writings as an archetypal image. Then, he understands: "The turtles are supporting the tablets; the tablets are engraved with the word; the word is civilization. The turtle supports civilization, the world of the Chinese, sea creature, creature of the water, brother to the dragon" (71). Nearly two weeks later, at Narita, Japan, Anaya visits a Buddhist temple and finds a pond with turtles and two golden carp. He is elated: "What a sight! The turtles and the holy fish of my stories together, creatures of God living in the presence of the Buddha of the temple" (188). This idyllic scene evokes a sense of harmony in the universe, a sense that, for Anaya, seems fleeting and elusive in a world seemingly characterized by disharmony.

For Anaya, the Buddha is an important but enigmatic ethereal force. He wonders if the Buddha is embodied in one of the spiritual figures of the Americas. "Is he an aspect of Quetzalcoatl, the positive force we need to balance the aspect of the dragon?" (48). In Xi'an he is surprised to see statues of the Buddha straddling the dragon. He asks himself if this is an incorporation of the sacred and the profane: "The Buddha on the dragon controlling the supreme energy of creation, procreation, the energy of the Earth's source, which gives birth" (58). In Hangzhou Anaya sees a porcelain Buddha surrounded by children and is reminded of clay figures made by the Pueblo Indians of New

Mexico. The figures are of a storyteller: a woman with children clinging to her. Anaya welcomes the Buddha as a Kachina into the pueblos.

Buddha, Anaya learns, was taught the true path by the Goddess of Mercy. Interested in identifying the "archetypal feminine figure in the Chinese memory," Anaya questions a distinguished professor of psychology at Sichuan University, Chengdu, about this figure. He learns that "the feminine figure appears in the forms of goddesses" (104). One such goddess is the Goddess of Mercy. Another professor tells him a story about a goddess who, with her pet rabbit, is imprinted on the moon. Anaya is reminded that the pre-Columbian people of Mexico believed there was a rabbit on the moon. He can see the rabbit when the moon is full; now he must look for the Chinese goddess.

At Hangzhou Anaya marvels at a large statue of the "Goddess of Mercy standing on the head of a golden carp which comes out of the waters" (158). Here he learns from a tour guide that the Goddess of Mercy taught Buddha after fifty-three masters had refused to teach him. Anaya recalls the baroque churches in Mexico: "The Goddess of Mercy looks very much like the Virgin of Guadalupe standing on her moon. The babes of limbo surround the feet of the Virgin; the fifty-three young Buddhas surround the Goddess of Mercy" (158). Intuitively, Anaya makes the sign of the cross.

Near Chengdu Anaya set out on a pilgrimage to the TianShi Cave Temple on Mount Qingcheng. The temple, he tells us, is the birthplace of Taoism. One can only imagine the number of people who make regular pilgrimages to this sacred place. As he walks, Anaya recalls *El Santuario de Chimayo* in New Mexico and the yearly pilgrimages made by Chicanos, especially during Holy Week. Unprepared for the journey, Anaya has to turn back without seeing the temple, but he flies down the mountain with the Tao resting in his soul.

Back in Albuquerque he goes over notes of his trip. He reflects on his experiences and the connections he made with the Chinese, their cosmologies, their lives. He writes in a voice that reveals a degree of uneasiness, one that attends cognitions which are not yet fully understood by the self. Still, he writes, he attempts to bring China back to his homeland that others too can appreciate its colors, its laughter, its landscape, its hope, and its fears.

Interview with Rudolfo Anaya

by *Ruben Martinez*

The following interview was conducted with Rudolfo Anaya at his Albuquerque home on February 20, 1987.

Martinez: There is a commonality in our experiences. I was raised in northern New Mexico in the fifties and we got our drinking water from a nearby spring or *ojo*; we heated our homes with woodburning stoves and lit them with kerosene lamps. Today, when I'm playing with computers and flying across the country in airplanes I feel like I am a traveler in time, traveling across the centuries. It is just an intuitive sense, but I am sure that you have the same feeling. I am wondering how this feeling has influenced your writings. Do you have the sense that I am talking about?

Anaya: Yes, I very much have the feeling that I have come from across cultures and through time, to use your phrase. But I think that most people have that feeling anyway. If you reflect on your life you become aware that life is a series of levels or times within the lifetime, and you simply outgrow a time and go to a new level. I think you can do that even if you remain in the same locality, the same town. In our case we obviously moved away from our small rural New Mexican towns, and we find ourselves caught up in the professional world that takes us, as you suggest, around the country to lecture. I think you cannot help but reflect on that; it is an interesting phenomenon.

Martinez: How has this feeling influenced your work? Where does this feeling enter?

Anaya: Well, I like the feeling because I like to travel. I have had the opportunity to travel. I have been to different places in the world. I like the feeling of moving to other worlds and other times, like being in Peru and Macchu Picchu, and in cities in China or even in villages in Greece. I have literally moved across time and space to view this

world, then I come back to my world and connect. I think that is a very refreshing thing to happen to a person.

Martinez: Do you think that having had these experiences enhance your capacity to relate to other cultures, to other peoples?

Anaya: Yes, absolutely. They not only enhance the capacity to relate to people in their time and place but they give you a fuller understanding of your own self. I am not only related to my rural New Mexican background, I am related to the world, or I should be. There are a lot of little rural towns all over the world, as there are cities, as there are museums of art, and it is interesting to make those connections and pull them together. I think it is fulfilling to a person.

Martinez: As I was reading the short autobiographical piece that you sent to me I recalled the speculation of others that your novels are based on personal experiences. I know that your novels transcend your personal experiences, but in this autobiographical statement you are very explicit about this link, and people who read it will see that there really is a direct connection to your novels. Can you say something about this connection?

Anaya: Well, I have always drawn from experience to create novels. When I first published *Bless Me, Ultima* people asked me, "Is that you in *Bless Me, Ultima*? Are you Antonio, the little seven-year-old character that starts the novel?" My answer was always yes, you see, I have a very close relationship to the characters I write about because they come out of my life. At the same time you have to remember that fiction somehow transcends that reality, that experience and reality that we use as a basis, as the ground, from which to work. I then let it take off, let it spiral, let it create itself so that it is not a completely historical reflection. I am doing it partially as a reflection of where I came from, the people I came from, the towns I came from, the barrio in Albuquerque here where I grew up, but always allowing the element of the imagination to create fiction and to create art, to create some kind of pattern out of that total experience.

Martinez: What is your understanding of art, whether it be literature, painting, or music, and what is its role in the larger society?

Anaya: Well, for me art is that place where I go to think, to reflect on myself. Whether it is music, or a painting, or a book or a poem it seems to me that art is what connects me to the rest of the world, to humanity. It teaches me that it is a reflection of my own nature and it does not matter who does it, whether it is a Chicano writer or an African writer. In that sense it plays a very crucial role because that is one of the places, and there are other places, but that is one area where we can go to reflect. That reflection lets us know who we are and how we are growing or not growing, both as a communal group and as persons.

Martinez: The person and the group are linked dialectically?

Anaya: Yes. You also can add that the Chicano literature that we have been writing over the past twenty years begins to talk about the fundamental world view of the people, of the group. That is tremendously important. Again, you reflect on those values of that world view; without that reflection you, we are apt to be consumed by that which is not you, us, more easily. Part of the aesthetic values that we describe as beautiful, as valuable, also take place in art and in the constant experimentation that we call art or literature. So, I see its role as very crucial. I received a liberal arts education and am very grateful for it. At the same time I see its role, especially in our contemporary society, as a very crucial one.

Martinez: At this point in time specifically?

Anaya: Especially now, yes, because our society's orientation seems to be so grounded in material acquisition, in attention to strict science, and in attention to goals that have to do with values that are imposed from without. All of these things need to be constantly looked at by the individual and by the group that the person belongs to because all of those goals may not be worthy goals, and if you do not analyze them and reflect on them then you are apt to be sucked into believing that they are worthy goals.

Martinez: So, to some extent what you are saying is that art is a medium for the moral conscience of a group or a people?

Anaya: It is very true in our history that this is so because if you look at the *cuentos* that we grew up with and what the old people tried to inculcate in us you find that they were teaching us literary history when they taught us our oral literary history. They were inculcating in us our world view, teaching us humor, and teaching us a sense of the aesthetic. Because they practiced their *cuentos*, they had devices that were techniques, and these were taught to us as well. So there was a great deal that was being taught to us, making us aware of our relationship to our community, to our family. Art is especially crucial to the Chicano population because if we do not look closely at ourselves we might—let me put it this way—the most blunt way to put it would be that we might be destroyed. That is, we might disappear if we do not pay strict attention to what is happening to us as a group. So, those of us who write not only continue in the steps of our fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors, but we also have to use our literature in new and subversive ways so that our contemporary group, our contemporaries right now, come to us in the same sense that we went to our ancestors and reflect on the literature and what we are writing. They can therefore make clearer choices for the future.

Martinez: This subversion that you speak of, is it the subversion of this very broad process that characterizes a highly industrial and

technological society? Is that what you refer to when you speak of subversion?

Anaya: Yes, that is part of it, but it also has to do with language, with history, with values. All of these things can be imposed from the outside on our community, and all of them may have some value. Because we live in a world that is multicultural and intercultural we live with many groups, that is a necessity. As I said before, it is kind of a refreshing world to live in when you see it in its multifaceted aspects. But it seems to me that there is a danger when particular groups within the multiplicity of cultures acquire too much power and instead of sharing important values they impose values. That becomes a problem that we have to address, and it should be addressed in art. So I think in that sense literature has to be subversive. It has to tell the community not only what has occurred historically but what is going on now.

Martinez: That brings two questions to mind. One is the perennial question regarding the relationship between politics and art, and the other has to do with the contemporary nativistic or anti-immigrant movement which seeks to make English the official language of the nation. This also is being done on a state-by-state basis. In *A Chicano in China* you wrote of the importance of language to group identity. Will you expound on that please?

Anaya: Well, I think the English Only Movement in this country is a reflection of fear. It seems to me maybe to get a little bit into your field of sociology, that when we have economic hard times or difficult times that have to do with war or when we perceive ourselves as being acted upon by aggressive outside forces, society seems to turn around with fear and looks at certain groups within it and attacks them as if somehow they are the cause or probable cause of that fear. I think that what we are seeing in our society is the mainstream society turning around and looking at the Spanish-speaking community in this country and saying, "You should all be speaking English because, if you do not, you somehow are tied up with all the problems that have to do with Latin America and immigration and so on." I see it as a people acting out of fear. Society breaks, it goes against the very grain of a pluralistic world, against the very grain of the sharing of languages, of acquiring more languages. It seeks instead to become a monolingual, monolithic nation.

Martinez: Ray Padilla, a specialist in bilingualism, sees language as a tool and a technology. His view is that denial of the opportunity to maintain our language involves technological loss and hampers our participation in the larger world.

Anaya: Absolutely. That's true.

Martinez: What about the politics question? I have read pieces where you have addressed this question, and other Chicano scholars

also have addressed it. This subversion that you discussed earlier seems to place art in a very broad political arena. Do you perceive it in such a context?

Anaya: Well, I think that when we talk about what we write we are talking about an art form that really should touch all of life. Nobody writes a poem or a novel only to put it in a box labelled "Poem" or "Novel." We write to share with people, and our work should go out not only into the economic and political arenas, it should go to places where people are studying literature, religion, language, everything. I guess my definition of writing is that we are creating something that is very broad and should be available to the society at large in all its ramifications, not just one ramification.

Martinez: So that it would not be limited to one aspect of life?

Anaya: That's right. I think it is especially important for us who were writing during the Chicano Movement in the 60s and 70s to keep that broad and clear view about literature. I think part of the political problem within the Chicano Movement was that some of the critics or some of the leaders, say in the early Movement, expected only one type of literature. They expected a rhetorical message oriented vis-à-vis the Anglo-American society. We were suffering, we were oppressed, and we saw that very clearly in socio-economic terms. So, there was a call to address only that issue. I simply could not see myself as a writer addressing only that issue. I was interested in a lot of other issues that had to do with who I am as a person and the community I come from.

Martinez: Do you think the decline in the intensity of the Movement created a context in which Chicano authors are freer to write?

Anaya: I don't know. The Movement, because of its intensity, was good. It was like we really had to look at ourselves and there was not much time. We had to know who we were as a people and where we were going as a community. A lot of that was very good. The intensity created a lot of poets, a lot of writers that would never have gotten going otherwise. On the other hand, I do notice now that we do not have the intensity of the late 60s and early 70s. Nevertheless, a lot of good writers and artists are coming about. So both times have something to contribute to the development of our art. I guess the only thing that I felt personally during the intense period of the Movement was the fact that some people, a very small group, wanted to be in charge of the message. To me, that was a limiting way to look at art.

Martinez: Was it the intensity of the Movement that helped you find your natural voice?

Anaya: No, I don't think so. In fact, to find your voice you really just have to trust your own instincts and write a lot. My voice comes

principally out of the oral tradition of the *cuentos*, the stories that people used to tell, and just experimentation with my own techniques. I don't think that I have ever picked up a voice that tries to reflect a group movement. My voice is very personal, it is intimate, it's me. It has more to do with my upbringing as a child than anything else.

Martinez: So, your voice stems from your cultural background?

Anaya: It is the cultural background that I knew growing up in New Mexico, in Santa Rosa, in Puerto de Luna in the 40s and 50s.

Martinez: You have a personal voice, but also a group or communal voice. When I read your works, perhaps because I have a similar background, I can feel the tone, the message, at a level which is very personal to me and probably to all *manitos* in a very particular way, and to all Chicanos as well.

Anaya: Oh, see, that is what I am always striving for as a writer. I am trying to draw you, the reader, in as close as I can to what is going on in the story so that we can share it. That is exactly what the old people used to do when they told the *cuentos*. Listening to somebody tell a *cuento* we would be fascinated by the magic of the story, and possibly frightened if it was a scary story, but we were drawn into it. So that is what I strive to do. If there is a reflection of a communal voice in my work it is probably because each of us absorbs the values of our community and the interest our community has in storytelling. We reflect a bit of that in our writing.

Martinez: It also creates different levels of closeness between the readers and the characters in the story. For example, as a *manito* I feel a very intimate relationship with your characters and their experiences. I also know that art has broader, more universal messages so that people of other cultures can also relate to them. Generally speaking, would you say that Chicano literature and, more specifically, your works are understood by the community of Anglo-American literary scholars? If so, at what level of closeness is it understood?

Anaya: The levels of meaning that people respond to in any work of art should be universal. I should be able to read any writer in the world and respond to the world and the characters he creates because we are all human beings and we are all caught up in the same dilemmas. Cultures create colors, very interesting and fascinating colors, but at the root of the dilemma everything is human. The interesting thing about Chicano literature that you might be responding to is that on a level other than the universal the images presented in the novels and poems of our Chicano writers are specific. The images are specific images. Suddenly in *Bless Me, Ultima* you see Antonio. He is not a *gringito*, he is a *mexicanito* growing up here in New Mexico. The image is specific. He can be

you, he can be someone like you or someone with whom you grew up. In the villages, we all knew people like *la curandera*, Ultima, the healers. So, the response is now not only universal, but it is closer to you, it is closer to all. Maybe, if nothing else when I said our literature has been subversive, the literature of the Chicano Movement, it was subversive because of this. We gave back to our community a specific image of itself. Members of the community could be close to it, they could be intimate, they could love or hate it, but at least it was them and they could recognize it as such. They recognized themselves in it.

Earlier you asked why I think art is important; it is because of this sense of reflection. You get into the story and you say, "Wow! This is me, or this could happen to me or this has happened to me." This sense of reflection is very important. What we are providing, those of us who write, is more immediacy to this reflection. If you read the novels being written now by Chicanas in the Southwest or anywhere in the country, you should be able to look at their image and say, "Good, now I understand myself better."

Martinez: How would you describe the present context of Chicano literature, and would you speculate as to its future?

Anaya: It is very open and very dynamic, very refreshing. A lot of Chicanas are producing now. I am writing a lot. So, I think the future looks very good, very bright. I am in touch now with young writers, students, people whose work I am editing. There is a lot of good work coming along. So, for whatever it is worth, whatever we did during the Movement, those of us who are already aged or coming out of the 60s and 70s, it is a good feeling because we can see that the social and political intensity may have died down a bit, but the artistic intensity has not, it has kept going.

Martinez: What about publishing outlets? You had trouble publishing your first major novel. Other Chicanos and Chicanas have had trouble publishing principally through the major publishing companies that are more accessible to other writers. Are we still forced to publish our own work?

Anaya: Yes. I think that of all the elements in the puzzle the hardest one to put in place is publication. It is fair to say that the major publishers in this country now are closed to Chicanos. We simply are not being accepted there. We have to continue to rely a lot on Chicano firms, Chicano publishers, and these are very limited. Right now there is more good quality work out there than is getting published. We have a lot of good work coming out that easily could be doubled or tripled if we had access to more publishing firms. So this is an extremely crucial problem.

Martinez: Let's turn to the topic of *la tierra*. How would you describe the *manitos'* connection to *la tierra*? There is a relationship

that is understood intuitively and cognitively, and your own world view seems to lend itself to understanding the intuitive relationship more than that of any of the other writers whose work I have read. Also, you write about the epiphany of landscape. How would you describe this relationship to *la tierra*?

Anaya: You are right, I have always seen it as deeply intuitive, probably even spiritual. The attachment that we have is, first of all, a long attachment. When you look at the Hispano Mexicano presence in New Mexico you see it dates back over 400 years. We have had time to really send our roots into the earth so that it cannot be anything except a spiritual connection. Because of our close relationship with the Native Americans along the Rio Grande and because of our very own nature, our own heritage as native Americans, we also have that connection with the earth. You take these two elements and what you have is a communal group that for a long period of time relied on the earth for subsistence, thereby becoming very tied to the cycles of weather, of planting, of nurturing, of watering, of caring. It is easy to see why the *tierra* becomes *la madre tierra*. The Native American concept of mother earth is one that is very close to us.

Martinez: Some critics have stated that your work harkens back in sadness and nostalgia to a forgotten, idealized, and unattainable past. Do you think this is a fair criticism of your work?

Anaya: Yes, sure. Anything if fair criticism so long as it is done right. It seems to me that there are a lot of ways by which we can define Chicano literature, and one of the definitions comes out of the continuing dialectic between us, as Chicanos, and the mainstream Anglo American culture. That culture imposed itself on our land in the mid-19th century, after the war with Mexico. One view of Chicano literature, then, would be that it must always reflect this continuing problem. I have no argument with this view. I think it is crucial and important for our understanding of who we are as a community. I mean it is history, and it is there. We see everywhere around us the outcome of that historical process, right? So I see it and I understand it. But, another way to also understand ourselves is to look at our world view, that is, our soul. Looking at how we were formed and where we come from leads me to give as much importance or, perhaps, more importance to relationships such as the one we have with *la tierra*. I just cannot take these 400 years or more of my history or heritage and say that they no longer mean anything—they do. Even though I now live in a city, I'm an urban dweller, I still see this relationship that we have had historically as being of prime importance because out of that relationship come all the other relationships: the relationship with community, what we do together, how we were taught to live together, relationships of

harmony to people, to community, to earth. I just do not want to throw these out the window. They are not what nurture me but what inspire me. My dreams come out of there, why should I toss them out the window? Even in the city we can still have our *jardincitos* [small gardens]. Those of us who have that love for the land, we have to keep working it.

Martinez: So you would not say then that there is a longing for the past, rather there is a sense that knowing our past helps us to understand ourselves today.

Anaya: If by longing for the past you mean a desire to return to the past, then I have to say that I know that I cannot return to the past of my childhood or the past that my grandfather knew, say in Puerto de Luna as a rancher, as a farmer, and as a complete communal man. But that past does not have to be dead. I carry it in my memory. I write about it and I think it is a very useful element, it is just part of me. So I am not longing to return to a specific time, I am just exploring what went on in that history, exploring those relationships and their importance, and letting them become part of the soul of the story.

Martinez: You have mentioned the collective unconscious in at least one of your pieces. Tell me how you understand it.

Anaya: I understand it to mean that somehow we are all connected. I understand myself as belonging to what I call a community or a tribal group. I am a member of a tribe. I not only have a personal history and a personal memory, but that group also has a group memory. I find it very fascinating to try to tap into that group memory through myself and come up with the symbols, the resources, the values, dreams, relationships, and the way of looking at the world that are not only particular to me but are particular to my tribe. That is how I understand the collective memory.

Martinez: There also is in your works a search for harmony in the universe, at least I detect it. I do not know if you have ever been explicit about it, but can you relate to me your understanding of this search for harmony?

Anaya: Essentially, I think that is what all of us want to have inside, a certain peace of mind, a certain harmonious relationship to our fellow human beings and to the universe. We want to understand why we are here and what our purpose is in life. A great deal of my searching for that harmony seems to come out of Native American thought, Native American religious thought. It comes out of their concepts, their ideas of how you create harmony in your community, how you relate to God, if you call it God or if you call it *kachinas*, and how you relate to the elements of nature. They have to do with how you relate the subsistence of the pueblo to rain and snow, or the lack

of them. I feel very tied to the natural world, to the natural elements, and to the harmony that exists there. When I see that harmony and I reflect on it I have a desire to be harmonious with it and within myself. So, I think it is a process of life where a person searches for its meaning. The meaning in life to me is not to acquire position or wealth, it is to achieve harmony within myself.

Martinez: Have you studied Native American religions and cosmologies or is it an intuitive understanding that you have?

Anaya: I have never done what would call a strict academic study of Native American religions or cosmologies. I pick up a book here and there. I am very much the type of person that likes the intuitive approach. It's what I learn when I meet people or when I am at the pueblo, at a dance, or when someone gives me an article or a book. I like to run into the experience or find it within myself, that is more my approach.

Martinez: There is one short story of yours which is quite different from all the others, although one certainly can find similarities in the universal meaning of your work. The story is "The Captain." What prompted you to write this story and why a Nazi officer?

Anaya: Oh, that is a . . . I was going to say that's a strange story, and all stories are strange in how they come. That story was a dream. I saw the images in a dream. I got up in the morning and I came to my study and wrote it. Principally, I think it is about perversion. In this case Hitler, who has so much power, falls into perversion, and power, to get back to harmony, acts against harmony. So, I just wrote it. The dream was so vivid, I don't know why it came to me.

Martinez: Have you reflected on why you had the dream?

Anaya: No. There was no tie to anything that had happened right before I had it. I had not seen a movie or read a book. I was not thinking about the Nazi era in Germany at all. The dream came that night. The image was vivid enough for me to get up and write the story, and that's it.

Martinez: Have you had any responses to the story?

Anaya: Well, it is in a little anthology that few people have looked at, so I have not had very many responses. It has not been widely circulated.

Martinez: Let's talk about your major works. Most of your critics seem to agree that *Bless Me, Ultima* is your best novel and that those that followed it were not of the same quality. Yet in your autobiographical statement you wrote that *Tortuga* is your best work. Will you tell me why you say this?

Anaya: *Bless Me, Ultima*, I think, has several things going for it. Number one, it is a first novel and writers who are lucky with their

first novel tend to get tagged with them a great deal. Quite frankly, without being immodest, I think it captures the soul of part of our community. So, people responded to it. This gets back to that image and people reflecting on it.

When *Heart of Aztlan* came out I think people were expecting a second installment of *Bless Me, Ultima* and were disappointed. By the time I got to *Tortuga* I had learned many of the techniques of writing. I had progressed. I was exploring a different universe but I was still dealing with the natural elements, water, the mountain, and so on. There also is mythic content. Readers who read *Tortuga* carefully, and who are, say, judicious readers, have the same response I have. They like it. They really like it once they get into it, but it is not an easy novel to read, there is a lot of suffering in it. It is not the kind of thing you pick up to read in bed.

As for the critics, I cannot comment very much on how the public or the critics respond to my novels. My good in life has been to keep writing, and I have tried to write in as many forms as I can. I have written short stories, novels, and plays. I have a children's story I am going to publish this year. I have several essays. I even wrote one epic poem, *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas*. I am very interested in all sorts of writing and forms and find it a challenge to experiment in those forms. My intent is just to keep writing and not worry if one of my works is liked more than another.

Martinez: What inspired you to write the epic poem and what would you say is its essential meaning?

Anaya: The epic poem requires a long explanation because *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* is a section in a new novel I am writing. It takes place in a scene when the writer is called upon to recite the poem, so he recites it. This happens a lot in bars. In fact, the scene takes place in a bar where a bunch of people are gathered to talk and drink. One of them is asked to recite the poem, he recites it, then later the characters in the poem become characters in the novel. Do you see now why the explanation is very long?

I took the epic poem out since it was complete and it got published by itself, which is fine. Its meaning is the meaning that I have had since I began writing. It has to do with Juan Chicaspatas and Al Penco, his friend, going back to Mexico, to Aztlan, to the meaning of this New World. We will find the definition of the New World Man by going back into our history, by going back into our collective memory, to use that term, and by going back to our values. The New World person, that is who I want to be and that is what I am after. I will more closely understand that New World Man by understanding my indigenous history. So, they go back and understand part of the legends of their original homeland, which doesn't have to be Aztlan,

it could be Taos. Somewhere we have that sense of our original homeland, our original values, our communal values, and we have to understand them. I think one of the crucial questions we have to face is how Chicanos have been cut off from that understanding historically. The educational system has not given it to us and that is why we are a dispersed people. We are not completely in touch with our own history and that has been one of my purposes in writing, to bring that understanding back to my community.

Martinez: One of the features of Chicano literature is a search for identity, perhaps a search for an understanding of our role in the universe. Would you say, then, that this poem is in this genre?

Anaya: Yes, there is a search for identity and for our homeland. These are brought back because, as you know, the poem ends with them saying, "Now we have to go out into the world and teach everybody what we saw on our return to the indigenous world."

Martinez: Let's talk about your trip to China. The tone of the journal is exhilarating. It sounds like you and Patricia and the others were really excited about your experiences. Your excitement comes through in your journal. Are there some themes that you have had time to reflect on that were not included in the journal that you would like to expound upon now?

Anaya: Themes that were not included that I would have loved to have put in? There are too many to mention. I look back and think of all the tofu we ate, and I think I do not mention it even once in the journal. Yet, there is such a thing as tofu. I could go on and on. Almost everyday I meet people who have gone to China or are going there, and just in brief conversations people mention this or that.

This morning before you arrived my wife and I were talking about Shanghai, one of the last cities we visited. We were talking about how over crowded it is with the new apartments that are being built, about the lack of heating in the apartments, and about the city being rundown. There are realities that I wanted to talk about that come up now and I say "Gee, I wish I had gotten those in the journal." It's too late, you see. I had so much time each night to write and my impressions were very personal, you know, what I had done, what they had caused me to think, and so on. Maybe I will have to wait for *A Chicano Returns to China* to get in the rest.

Martinez: One of the things captured beautifully in the journal is your personal touch. You communicate at a personal level with your readers, and you explicitly state that you wanted to share your experience with the community.

Anaya: Yes. When I started writing the journal, I felt I had to talk to someone. So, while I was writing my entries at night I would talk to *la Raza* back in New Mexico and say, "*Raza*, if you could just be

here with me now, here is what you would see, here is what I am feeling, and here are the connections I'm making."

Martinez: That comes through in the journal because as I was reading it I could really connect with some of the similarities you saw between the familiar here and the foreign over there. I was saying to myself that *manitos* were going to connect with the journal, and had they been there with you they would have made similar comparisons between the familiar and the foreign.

Anaya: Well, as I state in the journal, I have been very fortunate to be able to travel and one of the things that is important in the education of our young is to have that same opportunity and the same excitement about seeing the world. We are a very important communal group in the context of world groups and the more we know about all those other communities the better it will be for our people, our group. So, I have that desire to get these Chicanos going to China, to Tibet, and to every corner of the world. I admire nations that do that with their young people. They send them out and expose them to other young people from all over the world. I think we have to do more of that.

Martinez: On your trip to China you seem to have been more fascinated by dragons than by the golden carp. I believe that your readers would not have expected this.

Anaya: Well, you see, the dragon was very interesting in 1984 because I had already begun work on my novel which will be published this year. It is called *Lord of the Dawn*, and it is my retelling of the legend of Quetzalcoatl, the Toltec diety that is part dragon and part bird, the plumed serpent. So, perhaps that energy of the Chinese dragon was calling to me because I was involved with the Toltec, indigenous Native American dragon. That is the only way I can explain it. It was very fascinating to be working on that novel, to have it in the back of my head, and at the same time be hit with the reality of the Chinese dragon and what it means. If the Asiatic continent sent emigrants to the Americas, then the largest number of Americans are originally an asiatic people. Talking again of the collective memory, we can ask what they brought with them. Is Quetzalcoatl a distant dream or memory of the original Chinese dragon, and what are the aspects that define that dragon?

Martinez: You went there seeking connections between Meso-american cosmologies and the ancient civilizations of China. You probably cannot make those connections in the sense that sociologists would like to see them made, that is empirically, but you undoubtedly made intuitive connections. Would you relate those connections?

Anaya: Well, from my point of view I insist that I can make those connections, and I do not care to make them as a scientist. I think the

connections I make are the ones that are in the journal, connecting the dragon and its energy, connecting the golden fish, which is an asiatic fish, to my childhood at Santa Rosa. I connected dreams I had in China with New Mexico, and I connected persons who visit me in my dreams to myself. What is the power of dream? I do not know. They all seem to fit in China because the place was so foreign and so far way, so distant, yet it reminded me that the world is not that big. The world is small.

The best feelings were in the communes where the farmers were at. I had this definite feeling that my grandfather, who was a farmer, could have sat and talked with those men without any problem at all, without the politics of the world getting in the way.

Martinez: Did you find harmony?

Anaya: Finally, yes. At the end I think I did. It was not there at the beginning. It was a very threatening trip at the beginning, but I guess I should say I began to find it. I began to pull it together and have a clear understanding of why I went there and what happened to me there.

Martinez: The journal ends with a postscript which conveyed a sense of uneasiness, a sense of distress or perhaps, at another level, harmony. What are you communicating in the postscript?

Anaya: Well, I think that is the thing about going to a different world, about traveling. If we are really wise we will open ourselves up to the experience, become like sponges and take in everything. Well, that is a frightening thing. You see, by taking in everything you can change beyond what you had planned. You leave yourself open to experience. Not very many people do this and yet that is exactly what I am suggesting we have to do. So, I felt that I had opened myself up and I had taken the Chinese people, their dragon, parts of their religion, their cities, and everything into myself. And yes, for awhile it was not going to be harmonious. I had taken in too much too soon. I had to come back to my earth and settle myself. Working on the notes of the journal when I came back really helped me put it in perspective.

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