

Professor Robert K. Anderson  
Department of Modern Languages  
California State University, Stanislaus

Draft

### The New World Gospel as Proselyted in Rudolfo Anaya's *Jalamanta*

In Rudolfo Anaya's novels, the reader typically meets the author in the latter's role as a shaman, or community healer. Within them, this renown author conveys his diagnosis that our "modern" materialistic and power-hungry societies "[have] made us not as unified, not as harmonious as archaic man" (Anaya, "Mesa" 446). He also reveals a cure that provides hope for a peaceful transition into the new millennium. The aim of this study is to analyze the maladies of our era as depicted by Anaya and to identify his shamanic recipe for ushering in a new era of peace and brotherhood as it is revealed in his novel *Jalamanta* (1996).

In this novel, Anaya endeavors to provide a characterization of "original man," who, according to him, enjoys "a certain peace of mind, a certain harmonious relationship to [his] fellow human beings and to the universe" (Anaya, "Interview" 22-23). His perspective has its roots in the American Southwest, the author's land origin: "As I review my writings, I understand that it is the indigenous American perspective, or New World view, which is at the core of my values" (Anaya, "New World Man" 4). In substance, within *Jalamanta* the author glorifies the "ways of the old tradition"<sup>1</sup> that fostered communal rather than antagonistic relationships. Upon teaching the contents of "the old books of the prophets of the desert [which] contained the knowledge needed to understand mankind's relationship to the Universal Spirit" (2), *Jalamanta*, the author's "persona," as it were, extols their values and communal bonds. He describes his ancestors as people who cared for the soul and sought "that clarity of consciousness that unites [the individual] with the cosmos" (18) and the "Universal Spirit" (2). To cite this protagonist: ". . . In all their stories they told of their close tie to nature, and for them nature was the entire realm of the Earth and sky." (162).

Counter to this positive depiction of original man, Anaya portrays an inferior "modern man." This, as explained by Anaya himself, is a person who finds himself cut off from "original

unity and harmony" ("Mesa" 456) and who has grown so perverse that he finds himself in peril of destroying the earth itself, a gift of the gods" (Anaya, "Mesa" 456).

This negative lifestyle has spread throughout the fabled Seventh City of the Fifth Sun to which Jalamanta returns after serving an exile of thirty years. Through the protagonist's portrayal of the city's "authorities" and their subjects, we perceive that they have allowed themselves to be severed from the cultural roots of their ancestors, embracing an existential posture grounded in material acquisition. Two prime illustrations of this phenomenon are manifest via two members of the governing establishment, Iago and Benago. The former, the primary opponent of Jalamanta's spiritual teachings, prospers in his material endeavors as a wine merchant (10). He has grown fat and "[complains] of the gout that makes it difficult for him to walk" (57). Moreover, he is cynical (57) and wracked by the veil of jealousy (189). The latter "has grown old in his quest for power" (107). He preaches hate, thereby rising in power (107). Furthermore, he has grown corpulent, with sagging jowls and a thick chest (108). Concerned solely for the physical, for "[eating] at a trough of material goods" (39), these "authorities" and a vast majority of their subjects have allowed themselves to become tied like slaves to the needs of their egos (176). Ignoring, even renouncing the spiritual (162), they promote the destruction of the old tribal relationships.

The above-mentioned "manipulators of power" (9) and "military dogma" (24) perceive of their subjects as "objects and forget they possess a soul" (58). Their supreme imperatives--power and possession--turn "brother against brother" (20). Consequently, the veils of distrust (26), lust (23), "anger, hate, bigotry, greed, excessive pleasure and gratification, and many other selfish desires take possession of the mind and body" (26). To quote a young woman in the novel: "Everyone grabs what he can, and it serves only to increase the violence and mistrust" (30). The ultimate results are the "fragmentation of the soul" (168), as well as alienation from everything that surrounds the individual.

Jalamanta, too, has experienced the "injuries" that this era causes the individual (168). Before his voyage to the underworld in search of his own lost soul (169), he, too, had suffered

separation, or loss of "the strength of center" (167) caused by the previously identified "demons of [his] own creation" (169). Upon reading the novel, the reader witnesses how all of these negative attributes "take possession of the mind and body" (26) and become veils that "block the nourishment of the soul" (26). To cite Jalamanta: ". . . We create egos and create a distance between each other and the soul. The mind created its aloneness" (82). "Then," according to the former, "it's every man for himself, grabbing what he can" (30). Thus, veils cloud the soul (101), creating an "age of shadows" (91). It is appropriate, therefore, that Jalamanta depicts the city as a "place so shrouded in darkness" (118) and the world as a place "without light" (42). To quote one of Jalamanta's disciples: "Matter suffocates the soul, drags it into darkness" (178).

As previously asserted, Rudolfo Anaya has conveyed in *Jalamanta* his fundamental diagnosis that the "civilizing and socializing influence [of our times] has made us not as unified, not as harmonious, as archaic man" (Anaya, "Mesa" 446). He also provides "prescriptions" for his characters, as well as his readers, to achieve "a certain harmonious relationship to our fellow human beings and to the universe" (Anaya, "Interview" 22). To this end, in the novel he casts a magical healer, or shaman, a figure deeply rooted in the indigenous traditions of Anaya's southwest. First, however, this individual, Jalamanta, must undergo a period of instruction and metamorphosis, a rite of passage.

By way of explanation, in communal societies throughout the world, prospective shamans must abandon the body and, aided by a tutelary personage (Eliade, *Myths* 61), traverse the door to the cosmic center, and travel through flight "to the depths of the Underworld . . . and back again" (Halifax, *Shaman* 24). They must participate in a series of developmental ordeals based upon a tripartite framework: suffering, death, and resurrection (Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 33). In this context, death signifies personality transformation. Having ascended the *Axis Mundi*, the shaman "has come to know . . . the still point between the pairs of opposites, and has experienced the dissolution of separateness and the attainment of balance in the field of the infinite" (Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 20). The "resurrected" being must return to the "clan" with this new vision and bestow it upon his fellow man (Campbell 30).

In *Jalamanta*, the reader becomes aware that the protagonist has experienced trials that constituted his rite of passage toward shamanhood. Prior to the beginning of the novel's temporal setting, this experienced shaman has entered and exited "a place of suffering, death, and forgetfulness" (3). Originally assisted by a female tutelary figure who pointed "the way to the door of light," he had learned how to journey through "the world of the dark labyrinth" (65) and found the "center" of his soul (63). In the shamanic mold, he has likely undergone on numerous occasions a figurative death, observing his bones broken and "tossed on the desert sand" (65). Many years before his return to the Seventh City, the afore-mentioned guide had brought him back to life by helping him gather his dismembered or "fragmented soul" (66).

Anaya conveys this newfound harmony through the image of twisting or merging serpents. Jalamanta's accomplishment is ciphered in his walking stick, a "withered staff made from the twisted roots of a desert tree, crowned by the carved head of two entwined snakes" (6-7). In support of this assertion, I defer to Juan-Eduardo Cirlot: "Two entwined serpents . . . signify two forces . . . in balance" (Cirlot, 91).<sup>2</sup> Thus, upon his arrival at the Seventh City, he is known "Jalamanta," the "puller or "remover" (*jala*) of the "manta" (*blanket* or *veil*) (26): "I am Jalamanta, he who pulls away the veils that blind the soul" (26). It is within his power to help his community to overcome its fragmentation and disharmony:

When Jalamanta returns to the City and to Fatimah, the love of his life, he exhibits the proverbial symptoms that follow such a transformative experience. He sparkles with inner light yet is burning with fever (6). He must be cared for in order to overcome the illness resulting from his traumatic voyage to the underworld.

In the process of becoming shamans or of maintaining such a status, therefore, "modern voyagers," like their ancestral counterparts throughout the world, must die to one mode of existence and be reborn to another. Having connected with the sacred, it is incumbent upon these figures to put to use the knowledge gained (Noll 53). They must return to the "clan" with their new vision and share it in order to fulfill their sacred calling: "to restore the lost harmony" (Halifax, *Shaman* 21). Having learned how to reconcile the sacred values of their forefathers

with the demands of modern urban society, they are prepared to share this boon with his community. Jalamanta is such a figure.

From all appearances, in *Jalamanta* Anaya portrays an ideology, or "gospel," similar to what Kenneth Meadows has described as "shamanist" in nature. By way of explanation, as postulated by this author of *Shamanic Experience*, "a shamanist is a person who, by applying the spiritual principles of the shaman, is enabled to experience the extra-ordinary whilst living an ordinary life in a modern society" (Meadows 1). In essence, a shamanist operates in accordance with a different perspective from that of Western Culture, which finds itself mired in a materialistic orientation (Meadows 8).

First, shamanists, according to Meadows, hold the view that nothing exists in isolation, that all life forms, including human beings, are interconnected. As illustrated earlier, this belief, embraced by the ancients of Jalamanta's "pueblo" and inherited by Jalamanta himself, weaves itself throughout the novel. As Jalamanta and Fatimah participate in the Sun's epiphany in a "modern" space and time, "the mystery of the universe and its unity [move] through them. . ." (152). Fatimah feels "connected to the soul of the mountain, the desert, the river valley" (153). Both feel that they "[commingle] with everything around them" (16).

Second, shamanists believe that the reason for this connection, as it were, is that there is a Supreme Intelligence behind all things in existence. Meadows has explained that "shamanists live in an intricate and infinite Web in which everything is connected by strands of energy, like the arteries and capillaries that carry the life blood to every cell of the body" (Meadows 41). In *Jalamanta* we find numerous allusions to such a belief. Jalamanta himself alludes to the "Universal Spirit" (42) and describes how its "divine and vital energy" (110), manifest through light, is capable of unifying mankind. As Jalamanta declares: "When I am filled with light, I feel connected to all of life" (78).

Third, shamanists recognize "that the whole of Creation is thus a giving of itself, and a receiving back into itself through what has been freely given" (Meadows 173). In essence, the afore-mentioned spiritual entity is a "Love-energy" (Meadows 37), or "power that brought

everything into existence, and from which everything is derived" (Meadows 37). It is not surprising, therefore, that in *Jalamanta* the protagonist, also known as "Amado" (2), or "beloved," affirms the following: "Our love of one another is a reflection of the Universal Spirit, the spark of love that animates. We are the receptacles for that light, we are that very same star dust of the First Creation" (148). As Fatimah explains, however, this love-energy must be shared, or re-woven into the love-web of the cosmos: "We are like plants, using the energy and passing it on, binding together the poles of matter and spirit. We integrate and thus enhance our consciousness" (156). *Jalamanta* echos this concept:

I say, love this desert teeming with life, this river that waters your crops and animals, these trees that provide fruit, and woods of mountain that provide fuel for your homes and fireplaces. Love the animals of the Earth, bird and beast, fish and fowl. This Earth so filled with the light of the Sun reflects the expanding Cosmos. Its beauty is a dream of splendor. The gift of light flows through everything both the living and the not-living. The energy of the Sun permeates the Earth, and the Earth lives. Yes, you should love this Earth. (32-33)

Thus, *Jalamanta* encourages his charges to trod "the Path of the Sun" (176), fill the soul with light, and reach out for union. "That reaching out is an expression of the will to be, . . . the will to join with humanity" (180), of the desire to "[arrive] at unity with the Universal Spirit" (110).

Fourth, a shamanist preaches that the power to choose one's path, to shape one's reality, can only come from within. As Fatimah explains: "People bring their cure with them" (19). To quote *Jalamanta*: "The Path of the Sun begins with the first step. . . . You must decide" (37-38).

Through this protagonist, Anaya continually alludes to this path toward harmony and unity. *Jalamanta* begins the novel by encouraging his "pueblo" to recover their original unity and harmony by plugging into the infinite web of the Universe in which everything is connected by strands of love-energy. He admonishes them to follow the Path of the Sun. From his own journeys into the underworld, he has learned that individuals can cultivate their own souls (49) by opening themselves to clarity (42): "Your real power comes from within, not from the gold

you possess" (32). "Find your strength within" (170). Through Jalamanta, Anaya impresses upon the reader the need to teach the body, mind and soul to act as one (133). To quote Anaya himself: "The meaning . . . in life is not to acquire position or wealth, it is to achieve harmony within [oneself]" (Anaya, "Interview" 22-23). Interestingly, each day Jalamanta re-enacts a cosmic gesture that both brings him clarity and symbolizes his single-minded aspiration to merge the polarities: "I turn to the four directions and offer the sunlight I hold in my hand to the sacred Earth. . . . Through mind and flesh I feel the sunlight penetrating me, renewing me, passing through me to enter the Earth" (42). In his description of coronations within archaic societies, Eliade reveals the significance of this sign: "When [the king] is anointed he stands on the throne, arms lifted; he is incarnating the cosmic axis fixed in the navel of the Earth (that is, the throne, the Center of the World) and touching the Heavens" (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 39-40).

Thus, from this novel, we learn that in order to achieve this balance or equilibrium, the individual must embark upon his/her own quest, as it were, "to go in search of the lost soul" (163). It is the shaman's duty to orient and guide the voyager toward clarity, toward the center. To quote Jalamanta: "Our path is to converge on the center, to feel the creative passion of unity" (149). Phenomena such as memories, dreams, contemplation and meditation help free the soul from its veils and from its weightiness (27, 31 and 90), as it were. In metaphorical terms, they trigger the soul's descent to the underworld and/or flight (174) to the heavens (174) where it can fill itself with light: "The soul in its journey is filled with the Universal Spirit, and to be filled with that clarity is to achieve true enlightenment" (111). The Universal Light, or the vital energy of love, then, becomes the unifier of those things that are fragmented and separated from one another, such as body, mind and spirit (148).

In similitude of shamanists worldwide, Anaya has manifest a genuine concern about historical transitions, in the natural evolution from chaos to peace and harmony: "The battle is of epic proportions, we are in the midst of one of those times of history which will create a new consciousness" (Anaya, "The Myth" 200).

The author, who has acknowledged that all of his work "is infused with the mythic" (Anaya, "An Interview" 19), depicts this epic battle by means of archetypal symbols that connect him with his ancestors and with the cosmos. In *Jalamanta*, he focuses repeatedly upon the point of transition between alienation and unity, fragmentation and reintegration, darkness and light. Embracing a primitive world view, he communicates the message that instead of constituting polarities, these elements have mutually sustaining relationships. They work in harmony, "like the yin and the yang" (Anaya, "Myth and the Writer" 418). To cite Mircea Eliade: A "dominant idea is one of rhythm carried out by a succession of contraries, of 'becoming' through the succession of opposing modalities" (Eliade *Patterns* 183). In other words, darkness follows light; light gives birth to darkness.

The novel, for instance, repeatedly alludes to the Fifth Age, evoking the Aztec belief that the universe has undergone four previous periods of chaos and re-creation, of darkness and luminescence. It demonstrates the role of the shaman in causing light to brighten darkness. Jalamanta, for example, believes that "the era of the Fifth Sun was ending in fear and ignorance" (40) and that "the end of the millennium was near" (5). He understands that "out of chaos peace may be born" (21). The following two affirmations by this prophet emphasize and clarify this point: "Pain and suffering are part of our growth into a new humanity" (59); and: "This community of souls will create the power of love you need to usher in the era of the Sixth Sun. Yes, there is hope, for as one era of time dies, a new dawn is on the horizon" (139).

In sum, Rudolfo Anaya incessantly communicates to his reader his conviction that the excessive materialistic desires of modern men have caused veils to descend and trap them "in a dark labyrinth" (33). In history's natural cycle, however, a new light, a new consciousness must emerge from an age of darkness. Shamans such as Jalamanta and Anaya--admittedly a writer-shaman himself (Anaya, "Rudolfo Anaya: An Interview" 78)--all teach the "pueblo" of the New World how to combat chaos and darkness and restore the harmony of the ancients. In Jalamanta's words: "It is up to us to light the way, to imagine the new era. We must be creative, for the forces of violence and chaos are inherent in the universe" (22).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rudolfo Anaya, *Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert*. New York: Warner Books, 1996. 164. Subsequent references to this text will appear in parenthesis.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Spanish to English by the author of this article.

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