

World Literature Today

Your passport to great reading

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/>)

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/subscribe>)

Subscriber Tools (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/subscriber-services>)

Renew (<http://worldlittoday.myshopify.com/products/print-subscription-renewal>)

Donate (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/donate>)



[HOME \(/\)](#) | [MAY 2016 \(/2016/MAY\)](#) | [MAY 2016 BOOK REVIEWS \(/BOOK-REVIEW/2016/MAY\)](#)

◀ 202

Poems from the Río Grande by Rudolfo Anaya

[VERSE \(/REVIEW-SECTIONS/VERSE\)](#)

Author: [Rudolfo Anaya \(/author/rudolfo-anaya\)](#)

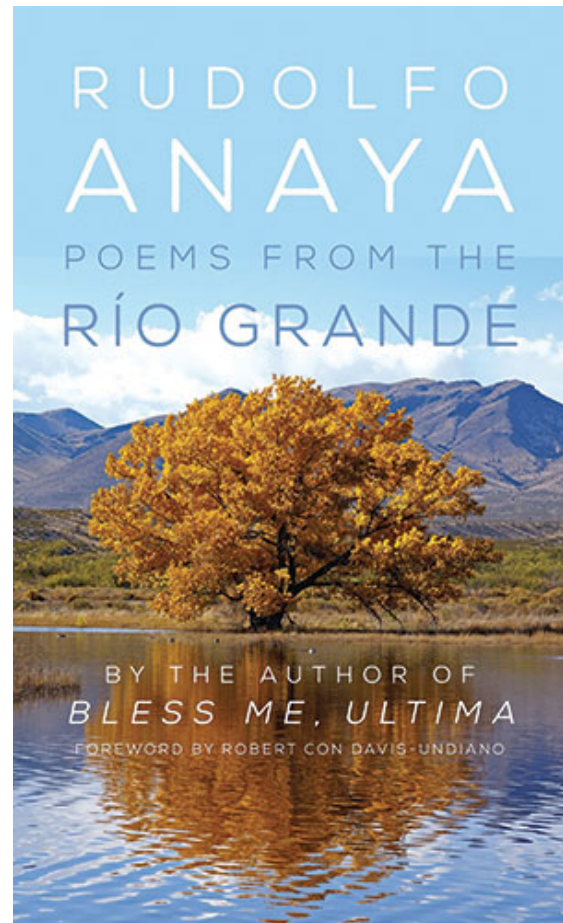
Norman. University of Oklahoma Press. 2015. 103 pages.

There is nothing like it in Chicano literature. Rudolfo Anaya's writing, distinct and unusual since the publication of *Bless Me, Última* (1972), has been an exalted reflection on his regional history and its layered settlements and conflict-ridden peoples: Native American, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American. *Poems from the Río Grande* is the first collection of poems by a revered Chicano writer who writes for *la gente* (the people) but who has also been acclaimed by literary critics around the world for his lyrical prose. In compelling stories, Anaya's characters achieve fleeting moments of peace and spiritual unity in a land historically fecund with sporadic strife ignited by men hurled from distant shores by hubris and the spirit of conquest.

In the book's preface ("Poetry as ritual"), Anaya comments on his poetics and lifelong artistic attempts to transport himself to an Absolute from his everyday world, taking him—as a *Nuevomexicano*—to a heritage woven with threads from different world cultures ("Poetry unites. Poetry connects," Anaya affirms). Words such as "sacred," "soul," and "the Absolute" appear in

Anaya's preface and poems as tacit challenges for the reader to rethink and reconceptualize—from one's secularized and unbelieving vantage point—the possibilities and experiences latent in a language of transcendence we have all but forgotten.

Originally titled “Songs of the Río Grande” and written over more than two decades, the collected twenty-eight poems stream like the days of a lunar cycle, fateful and varying in themes and moods from a wistful meditation on the poet's epitaph (“Last Wish”) and a humorous but cautionary fable against drugs (“Beware the ChupaCabra”) to travels with his late wife, Patricia. Other poems refer to legends, myths, and poetic traditions from Egypt, Japan, and Mesoamerica; one poem is a parody of Western classics (Virgil's *Aeneid*), sung with *Nuevomexicano* humor; another in particular, “Elegy on the Death of César Chávez,” mourns the death of the Chicano union organizer. The poems also allude to one of Anaya's early novels, *Tortuga* (1979), in which the eponymous main character inherits Crispín's guitar and accepts from Salomón his destiny as a *guitarrero*, a singer of *corridos* (ballads).



As the elderly version of Tortuga, Anaya strums and sings about righteous heroes, village storytellers, communal food, and the flow of water in fragrant orchards. These poems portray a world that young Mexican Americans, for the most part, have not seen, known, or tasted. Cultural identity and a sense of self can never be the result of a willful confinement, nor of a break from one's past and a frontier's new beginning, Anaya seems to say. *Poems from the Río Grande* consists of poetry that sings of an *other* America, one that instead of seeking safety in isolation discovers in all rivers of the world—the Nile, the Ganges, the Río Grande—the natural setting for the rise and innovative vitality of a civilization. Mexican American cultural history surges and whirls underground in Anaya's poetry and narrative, and it is to this all-encompassing river that one must periodically return to drink.

Roberto Cantú
California State University, Los Angeles

Get the book on Amazon (<http://amzn.to/1OIOo0J>) or add it to your Goodreads (<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25778314-poems-from-the-r-o-grande>) reading list.

Other Reviews in this Issue **4** Views Left



(/2016/may/nine-coins-nueve-monedas-carlos-pintado)

Nine Coins / Nueve monedas

Carlos Pintado. Trans. Hilary Vaughn Dobel

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/nine-coins-nueve-monedas-carlos-pintado>)



(/2016/may/contigo-en-la-distancia-carla-guelfenbein)

Contigo en la distancia

Carla Guelfenbein

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/contigo-en-la-distancia-carla-guelfenbein>)



(/2016/may/tout-ce-quon-ne-te-dira-pas-mongo-dany-laferriere)

Tout ce qu'on ne te dira pas, Mongo

Dany Laferrière

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/tout-ce-quon-ne-te-dira-pas-mongo-dany-laferriere>)

4 Views Left



(/2016/may/meresz-magyarok-30-emberi-tortenet-krisztian-nyary)

Merész magyarok, 30 emberi történet

Krisztián Nyáry

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/meresz-magyarok-30-emberi-tortenet-krisztian-nyary>)

« All reviews from this issue (</book-review/2016/may>)

More by Rudolfo Anaya



(/2013/november/old-mans-love-story-rudolfo-anaya)

The Old Man's Love Story by Rudolfo Anaya

(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2013/november/old-mans-love-story-rudolfo-anaya>)

BACK ISSUE

(/node/60/)



(/2016/may)

May 2016

The May 2016 issue is double-packed with interviews, fiction, poetry, and essays.

[PURCHASE THIS ISSUE »](http://worldlittoday.myshopify.com/collections/frontpage/products/may-august-2016)

(<http://worldlittoday.myshopify.com/collections/frontpage/products/may-august-2016>)

Table of Contents

Editor's Note (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/editors-note-may-2016>)

4 Views Left

Four Asian Voices (/section/four-asian-voices)

INTERVIEW: "Violence and Being Human: A Conversation with Han Kang," by Krys Lee
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/violence-and-being-human-conversation-han-kang-krys-lee>)

LIST: *WLT's* 10 Sidebar Shorts with Han Kang (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/wlts-10-sidebar-shorts-han-kang>)

READING LIST: "A Contemporary Korean Reading List," by Han Kang
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/contemporary-korean-reading-list-han-kang>)

PUTERBAUGH ESSAY SERIES: "Writing a Life Back into the World," by Bernice Chauly
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/writing-life-back-world-bernice-chauly>)

INTERVIEW: "Prayer Flags and Kinship Rivers: A Conversation with Wang Ping," by Amy Lantrip
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/prayer-flags-and-kinship-rivers-conversation-wang-ping-amy-lantrip>)

POETRY: Two Poems, by Ming Di (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/two-poems-ming-di>)

Essays (/section/essays)

"The Persistence of Books," by Rebecca L. Walkowitz
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/persistence-books-rebecca-l-walkowitz>)

PREMIUM "Delhi: 21st Century City," by Vikram Kapur (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/delhi-21st-century-city-vikram-kapur>)

"The Neustadt Prize and the Framing Effect," by William Marling
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/neustadt-prize-and-framing-effect-william-marling>)

"The Local as the Global: Reflections on Teaching World Literature," by Emad Mirmotahari
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/local-global-reflections-teaching-world-literature-emad-mirmotahari>)

Interviews (/section/interviews)

"Building an Architecture for the Wanderer": A Conversation with Nathalie Handal, by Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/building-architecture-wanderer-conversation-nathalie-handal-rachel-morgenstern-clarren>)

"You Write in the Breeze of Knowledge, Not in Light of It." A Conversation with Hasan Ali Toptaş, by Hülya Yıldız
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/you-write-breeze-knowledge-not-light-it-conversation-hasan-ali-toptas-hulya-yildiz>)

Fiction (/section/fiction)

"Snow," by Carlos Pintado (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/snow-carlos-pintado>)

"A Broken Foot, a Hex Wrench, and Baby Gaggia," by Anastasia Edel
(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/broken-foot-hex-wrench-and-baby-gaggia-anastasia-edel>)

"The Green Ball," by Lygia Fagundes Telles (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/green-ball-lygia-fagundes-telles>)

4 Views Left

Poetry (/section/poetry)

Two Poems, by Rachel Tzvia Back (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/two-poems-rachel-tzvia-back>)

Two Poems, by Rajzel Zychlinsky (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/two-poems-rajzel-zychlinsky>)

Two Poems, by Amit Majmudar (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/two-poems-amit-majmudar>)

"Room 219," by Luis García Montero (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/room-219-luis-garcia-montero>)

In Every Issue (/section/every-issue)

City Profile: "Dylan Thomas's Swansea," by Logan Webb (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/dylan-thomass-swanssea-logan-webb>)

READING LIST: Summer Reads 2016 (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/summer-reads-2016>)

Translator's Note: "From Pasolini to the Pope," by Oonagh Stransky (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/pasolini-pope-oonagh-stransky>)

Global Frequency: "1,001 Riffs," by Rob Vollmar (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/1001-riffs-rob-vollmar>)

PREMIUM International Crime & Mystery: "Expanding the World of the Private Eye: Walter Mosley Becomes a Grand Master," by J. Madison Davis (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/expanding-world-private-eye-walter-mosley-becomes-grand-master-j-madison-davis>)

Editor's Pick: Michelle Johnson's Summer Reads (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/michelle-johnsons-summer-reads>)

Editor's Pick: Jen Rickard Blair's Summer Reads (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/jen-rickard-blairs-summer-reads>)

Editor's Pick: Sara Wilson's Summer Reads (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/sara-wilsons-summer-reads>)

Editor's Pick: Rob Vollmar's Summer Reads (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/rob-vollmars-summer-reads>)

Director's Pick: *The Mexican Flyboy* by Alfredo Véa Jr. (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/directors-pick-mexican-flyboy-alfredo-vea-jr>)

Outpost: "Entering Apartheid's History in Johannesburg," by Laura Hernandez (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2016/may/entering-aparheids-history-johannesburg-laura-hernandez>)

BOOK REVIEWS (/book-review/2016/may)

View all reviews in this issue (</book-review/2016/may>)

4 Views Left



(<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/90years>)

World Literature Today
630 Parrington Oval, Suite 110
Norman, OK 73019-4037
405-325-4531

Donate (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/donate>)

Subscribe (<http://worldlittoday.myshopify.com/products/print-subscription-u-s>)

Subscriber Services (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/subscriber-services>)

Contact (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/contact>)

Advertise (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/advertise>)

Media Kit (<https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/sites/default/files/static/docs/2018-wlt-media-kit-web.pdf>)

Accessibility (<http://www.ou.edu/publicaffairs/WebPolicies/accessstatement.html>)

Sustainability (<http://www.ou.edu/green/>)

HIPAA (<http://ouhsc.edu/hipaa/>)

OU Job Search (<http://www.hr.ou.edu/employment/>)

Policies (<http://www.ou.edu/content/web/landing/policy.html>)

Legal Notices (<http://www.ou.edu/content/web/landing/legalnotices.html>)

Copyright (<http://www.ou.edu/publicaffairs/webpolicies/copyright.html>)

Resources & Offices (http://www.ou.edu/content/web/resources_offices.html)

Updated 08/31/2018 12:11:30 by World Literature Today: jlrickard@ou.edu (mailto:jlrickard@ou.edu)