Anaya II of II

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San Diego
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A Voice From...

HOLLYWOOD

by Steve Hayes

Also in this issue...

Spalding Gray:
Somewhere Between Black and White.
by Cory J Meacham

Rudolfo Anaya:
Healer from the Southwest.
by Myra Hirada

...and much more.

HEALER FROM THE SOUTHWEST:

THE MAGICAL ART OF RUDOLFO ANAYA

by Myra Harada

When I met Rudolfo Anaya, I was washing mushrooms. It was April, and he had come to San Diego to speak to city and county secondary school teachers about Chicano writers. I had been invited to meet him over dinner at a mutual friend's house.

While I awaited the appearance of the celebrated Chicano novelist, I tried to make myself useful in that desultory manner guests have. I had read most of his fiction – his critically acclaimed trilogy, *Bless Me, Ultima; Heart of Aztlán;* and *Tortuga*; his twice-told myths, *La Llorona* and *Lord of the Dawn*; the exquisite tales in his collection *The Silence of the Llano*, and others; and many of his nonfiction works, including *A Chicano in China* – and I knew what he looked like, so I felt thoroughly prepared to meet him in my fastidiously professorial way.

I was not prepared.

After he appeared and as I extended a still-damp hand, I heard no introductions. I heard instead the wail of *la llorona* across the New Mexican plain, breathed the anarchic dust of vaqueros on horseback, and saw a turtle-shaped mountain move.

Such is the magic of Anaya's art. Indeed, magical realism is a phrase attributed to this "new" voice among Chicano writers, who liberates old concepts of illusion and reality. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the award-winning autobiographical novel that has swept Anaya's reputation beyond national boundaries, he reaches into his childhood to tell the stories of all those people who "raised children and suffered and died" around him. "They had believed in this universe I grew up in," says Anaya, "but nobody had given them immortality."

His poetic storytelling weaves the ancient culture of the indigenous American with the Euro-Hispanic one, and places the uniqueness of that mestizo in the Anglo-American context. Antonio, the young boy, begins his quest for self-identity with the help of Ultima, a *curandera* or healer who has magical powers. With the healing, integrating forces of Ultima's ancient understanding, Antonio struggles with the brutality and degradation that threaten him, and by extension the Chicano community.

Anaya's writing emerges from the springs of his childhood in Santa Rosa, New Mexico, "a medieval universe" of peasants, vaqueros, and Catholicism. It was a universe constellations apart from the English-speaking one into which he was flung at six years old; it was, nonetheless, a coherent world. From this childhood world, Anaya reaches out to try to cope with adulthood. "I am in the first three novels that I wrote," he says. The young protagonists in the trilogy represent progressive stages in his own becoming. The characters were not resolved in these novels, but they will find resolution in Anaya's new novel, *Albuquerque 1992*, which he completed in May. (It will be published by the University of New Mexico Press next spring.)

MYRA HARADA, a third-generation Asian-American from Hawaii, is a professor of English with degrees in French and English literature. She teaches writing and American literature at San Diego Mesa College. She has been a consultant to industry, has recently served on the steering committee for the San Diego Community College District Master Plan, and is a commissioner for the San Diego Park and Recreation Board.

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Author Rudolfo Anaya

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Rudolfo Anaya

In *Albuquerque 1992*, the fate of the pregnant young Anglo who is in *Heart of Aztlán* will be revealed. In the beginning of the new novel, a young boy who has been raised in the barrio by a Chicano family learns that his real mother is dying. When he goes to her deathbed, he discovers that she is Anglo. The novel is the story of his search for his Chicano father and for his place in American society. He represents what Anaya calls in the novel the "new mestizo," the Chicano-Anglo, rather than the "old mestizo," the Hispanic-Indian. The young man encounters powerful forces in society that want to re-create Albuquerque into a vast, glittering gambling casino interconnected by waterways, a commercial venture that would threaten the traditional cultures of New Mexico. The hero's struggle with self-definition becomes intertwined with this contemporary social issue. However, Anaya promises, the conclusion does not require our hero to reject one culture for another.

After *Albuquerque 1992* will come *Zia Summer*, a mystery novel. In solving the mystery, Anaya will apparently be led to discover the details along with his reader: He does not intend to work out the plot beforehand. He says, "You murder someone in the beginning and you try to find out who did it, along with your detective." Anaya plans to write four novels, one for each season: *Albuquerque 1992* for spring, followed by *Zia Summer*, with fall and winter yet to be conceived.

In the conception process, Anaya reveals that there are different audiences that peer over his shoulder. There seems to be no particular reason for them to come. "Anybody can appear. They speak to me and they chuckle. Even critics come by. Sometimes they are very real – my sister will appear and I'll say, 'This is for you.' Sometimes ghosts." I asked him if he ever saw the whole Chicano Federation out there in the audience, and he replied, "It's hard to see federations; mostly it's one-on-one."

Anaya, who is also a professor of creative writing at the University of New Mexico, affirms that the writer – whatever his ethnicity, religion, or politics – gives first allegiance to his art. In today's arena of cultural politics, however, Anaya recognizes that a minority writer may feel an obligation to explain or promulgate his or her culture, but doing so must come naturally to the artist. If younger writers are to

Continued from previous page

be encouraged, he advises, such an obligation should not be forced on them. Says Anaya, "Art as obligation is not art."

Anaya's dedication to the primacy of art does not mean, however, that he ignores the social context of Chicano art and culture. The Chicano movement of the '60s and '70s fought inequities not only on political and economic battlegrounds but on an artistic one as well. The Chicano renaissance, of which Anaya was a part, demanded recognition of a worldview as significant as the one that had structured and defined the "American" experience as an exclusively Anglo one.

Like many if not most Chicanos, the first language Anaya spoke was Spanish. His parents spoke no English. The transition from the Spanish-speaking world to the English-speaking schoolroom was traumatic.

Like many if not most Chicanos, the first language Anaya spoke was Spanish. His parents spoke no English. The transition from the Spanish-speaking world to the English-speaking schoolroom was traumatic. "I don't know how I survived," Anaya muses. "Why was I able to adapt and cope and learn the language?" By the eighth grade, many of the kids who were bused in from the ranches hadn't made the transition, he said. In a 1980 interview, Anaya talked about running with a gang and also being the only one of his friends who went to the library on Saturday mornings.

In high school there was no literary stimulation, Anaya says. "We weren't expected to excel." He was not awakened to literature until his college freshman English class at the University of New Mexico. It "touched a core" that had always "wanted to think about literature, to enjoy it." The professor was sensitive to Anaya's presence. "He was not close to me, but he realized that I was very different. There were very few Chicanos in the class." Anaya's college years also produced his first creative writing, which was poetry. "We all thought we were poets. It was kind of a new world that we could show off in." He later discovered his particular affinity and talent for fiction, although his prose is still redolent of the emotive qualities of poetry.

Anaya acknowledges that the Chicano worldview is a blend of cultural memories – Hispanic, Greek, Judeo-Christian, and Native American. Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Chaucer, and the writers of the Spanish Golden Age are all "with us," he says. Chicano literature is an evolutionary part of traditional Western literature and represents a departure only in that it reflects indigenous American cultures. In his essay "A Chicano in King Arthur's Court" (a sendup of Mark Twain's novel), Anaya explains that as a university student he was affected by the great works of authors such as Eliot, Pound, Wallace Stevens, Hemingway, and Faulkner, and had tried to emulate their styles and techniques in telling his own stories. These borrowed tools, however, proved inadequate for his needs: His experiences refused to be told through the use of foreign mouthpieces.

"What I'm trying to do," he says, "is look that in our work."

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"What I'm trying to do, and what I've seen many Chicano writers do," he says, "is look at what is indigenous – what is us – and reflect that in our work."

Several critics have suggested that the effect of this "indigenous" writing is that fact and imagination exist side by side in Anaya's works – an integration of the two worlds of illusion and reality. For example, in *Heart of Aztlán*, Clemente, a major character, seeks knowledge from a divining stone: He wants to know if he should lead the railroad workers in a strike against the company. In the short story "The Village the Gods Painted Yellow," a tourist to the Mayan temples of Uxmal willingly risks having his heart cut out: "This is why he had been chosen, because he had sought and now he-of-little-faith had been restored. He felt the power course through his blood and he raised his voice, calling for the pyramid to rise from the empty jungle."

Anaya rejects the notion that the worlds of fact and imagination exist separately. He does not need to try to integrate them; they are naturally integrated, naturally one world, for the Chicano. "It's just the way we are. It comes from our values, from our view of the world." Perhaps Anaya, in keeping with Romantic tradition, envisions childhood as the state closest to nature, for he believes that childhood doesn't separate illusion and reality. "I think that's why it intrigues writers like me, for example, to write about the world of childhood, when all those things were more integrated." "Children," Anaya notes, "indulge in myth-making all day long on a daily basis. When we're myth-makers, we're in touch with the world around us – gods, goddesses."

Cutting ourselves off from the "myth-making process" gives us over to "whatever we call civilization." For Anaya, as for another regional Romantic, Mark Twain, civilization presents false images and values. Because society is inauthentic, Anaya associates with the instinct of community. He says, "It is the community that forms me, lends me its values, whose stories I know, whose myth connects me with this earth, this land."

The communal enterprise, according to Anaya, is a new world value very much opposed to the Western value, which prizes the individual. In the creation of myth, the community, not the individual, constructs a system for dealing with the world. Myth cannot be made by individuals. Only as a part of a commmunity can one begin to understand what one's role is, what good and evil are,

Anaya rejects the notion that the worlds of fact and imagination exist separately.

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what harmony means. In Anaya's view, each new age presents new forces demanding storytelling that asks us to re-examine truths. Therefore myth, which "resonates with universal symbols" that span cultures and time, should continue to evolve.

I asked Anaya whether these healers who appear in his novels could be found in our midst if we looked for them.

It seems that Anaya assumes the role of healer through his writing. There is often a magical healer in his novels: Ultima is a *curandera*; Crispín, the blind musician with the blue guitar in *Aztlán*, has magical powers of healing; and the child of wisdom who cannot speak, Salomón, whispers soothing words that heal. "It's part of me," says Anaya. "My wife pointed out that it's also in my *Albuquerque* novel, which I thought was a very political, social novel.... The woman who falls in love with my hero is a nurse. When he goes to the hospital and his mother is dying, he meets her. He could have met a hundred other women in different kinds of work. Why a nurse? It ties into the healing theme....' So that theme seems to be persistent in the novels."

I asked Anaya whether these healers who appear in his novels could be found in our midst if we looked for them. "They're all around us," he answered. When I suggested that he himself was a healer, he hesitated; then, smiling doubtfully, he recalled that one of his critics had pointed out that his protagonists were "very blind and very slow to see the healers, the shamans." Although he identifies closely with his heroes, Anaya is, of course, both shaman and young protagonist in search of truth. "But the question also arises," Anaya quickly added, "can a book go out and heal? If it can, [the author] *is* one of those persons!"

Undoubtedly Rudolfo Anaya is one of those persons. He salves the wounded faith that connects us to our ancient, authentic selves. His readers – whether Chicano or unhyphenated American or international – have found his art magical and healing. •

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- **Bless Me, Ultim Tonatiuh-Quint**
- **Heart of Aztlán 1976.**
- **Tortuga. Berke**
- **The Silence of t Tonatiuh-Quint**
- **The Legend of L Tonatiuh-Quint**
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- **Heart of Aztlán. Berkeley: Editorial Justa, 1976.**
- **Tortuga. Berkeley: Editorial Justa, 1979.**
- **The Silence of the Llano. Berkeley: Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol Int'l., 1982.**
- **The Legend of La Llorona. Berkeley: Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol Int'l., 1984.**
- **Lord of the Dawn. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.**

Nonfiction:

- **A Chicano in China. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986.**

asked publishers to remove the magazine from their mailing lists for review copies. SDWM had heard that **Frances L. Bardacke**'s column "Book Buff" was about to be canned, but the writer herself says that's not the case. "Oh, there were some rumors going around," Bardacke scoffed during a recent telephone interview, "but they're all gone now!" When asked if any changes at all are slated for the column, she stated simply, "It's not going to change, I can tell you that much." In her May column, Bardacke reviewed local writer **Faith Ringgold**'s new book *Tar Beach*, which tells, as Bardacke puts it, "the deceptively simple tale of a loving black family, which transforms their rooftop into a summer picnic ground." Ringgold, a professor of art at UCSD, based the book on a "story quilt" she made that now hangs in New York's Guggenheim Museum. Although the book is colorfully illustrated and has a fanciful theme, Bardacke insists that it should not be restricted to the chronologically young; she dubs the work "a book for children of every age." Crown Publishers released *Tar Beach* in February to honor Black History Month.

COMIC CONVOCATION: The 22d Annual San Diego Comic Convention will be held July 4 through 7 at the San Diego Convention Center downtown. The event will feature the largest comic marketplace in the U.S., with a 92,000-square-foot showroom and over 500 purveyors of pulp, past and present. Also featured are writers' workshops, panel discussions, seminars, masquerades, art shows, movies, cartoons, fantasy gaming, parties, awards, and more. The guest list for the event, much too long to reprint here, includes noted sci-fi writer **Larry Niven**; writer/producer/director **Clive Barker** (*Hellraiser*); sci-fi/fantasy author **Raymond Feist**; comic book legends **Stan Lee, Jack Kirby** and **Will Eisner**; "Star Trek" actor **Walter Koenig** (Chekhov); and many others. Tickets for the convention are $15 per day or $45 for all four days, and are available at the door. For more information and a complete guest list, call (619) 491-2089.

WRITERS WITH A CAUSE: St. Vincent de Paul Village ("A Community of Services for the Homeless and Needy") needs you! On May 13, the Village published the first issue of the *Village News*, a quarterly tabloid aimed at raising San Diego's awareness of the Village and its services. "We're trying to get our programs out to the people through the paper," says creative director **Cliff Billmeyer**. To that end, Billmeyer is seeking writers willing to volunteer their services. "We are completely open to working with new and unpublished writers," he says, noting that a byline in *Village News* is not without its rewards: The publication is distributed to a 20,000-member mailing list that includes such eminent names as Copley, Hahn, and Kroc; it also will appear as an insert once a year in the *San Diego Union*, thereby reaching an audience of about 250,000. For a free copy of *Village News* and a set of the most helpful writer's guidelines you'll ever receive, send a 9 x 12 SASE ($1.21 postage) to Billmeyer at 1550 Market Street, San Diego, CA, 92101-7346.

ANAYA COLLOQUIUM: After you read **Myra Harada**'s profile of **Rudolfo Anaya** in this issue, you may want to know more about the work of this premier Chicano novelist. If so, you're in luck, because local poet, critic, and professor **César A. González**, editor of *Rudolfo A. Anaya: Focus on Criticism* (Bilingual Press), is offering an honors course on Anaya at San Diego Mesa College beginning September 3. The group is limited to 15, and González says the course will not be "a packaged lecture tour." Instead "it will explore beliefs and values in Anaya's writing," and Anaya and four critics and contributors to *Focus* will meet with the class on separate occasions. For more information, call the Honors Office at 560-2873, or call González before July 18 at 560-2751

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