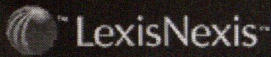


Anaya, Rudolfo - "Bless Me, Ultima" - Censorship - Banned Books



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HEADLINE: Colorado Book Banning Makes N.M. Author's Tale More Relevant

BYLINE: Jim Belshaw Of the Journal

BODY:

For those of you keeping score, Rudolfo Anaya's classic of Chicano literature, "**Bless Me, Ultima**," remains solidly ensconced at No. 75 in the American Library Association's list of "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-2000."

"Frequently Challenged," of course, translates roughly to "Books Used as Fuel for Wholesome Exothermic Oxidation Activities."

Which is to say, burned, or at the very least **banned**, that most glorious state of grace sought by all aspiring novelists.

If you're **banned** in the right places, it won't be long before Amazon.com is hot on your heels and you're looking for a wheelbarrow to haul off the royalty checks.

The latest manifestation of America's penchant for supporting free speech until someone actually does it comes from Norwood, Colo., where the superintendent of schools has **banned "Bless Me, Ultima."**

The Associated Press reports all of the usual suspects showed up for the banning:

- * Parents offended by obscene language.
- * Parents offended by "paganistic practices" in the book.
- * The school superintendent, who freely admitted he had not read the entire book, handing over more than two dozen copies of it to a parent so the parent might destroy them.
- * The quote from the superintendent: "It's less a matter of censorship than a matter of sponsorship. That's (the book) not the kind of garbage I want to sponsor at this high school."
- * The teacher who ordered the book, properly chastised and presumably repentant, apologized to parents and won't be disciplined. (Oh, drat. What are we going to do with the tar and all those feathers now?)

"I was told by a newspaper editor in Colorado that I was spreading paganism," Rudolfo Anaya said when we spoke about this latest banning. "So I guess they're afraid of pagans."

The book, initially published in 1972, tells the coming-of-age story of a boy. Over the years, it has been **banned** many times in many places, including Farmington, N.M.

It has sold something in the neighborhood of -- ahem -- 5,000,000 copies.

"The book in my mind and the minds of so many readers is a simple story of a kid growing up and he has to make a lot of choices between good and evil," Anaya said. "Most of the letters I get from students, in fact almost all of them, say that's what they're going through, making choices. There's always been certain people who want to keep books away from other people and they don't have a right to do that."

But this is 2005 P.W.M. (Post-Wardrobe Malfunction), the one-year anniversary of Janet Jackson's Super Bowl revelation, a year that has seen the likes of cartoons air-brushed and "Saving Private Ryan" cleansed from the airwaves.

The censorious among us are feeling their oats.

"Usually, they say it's the strong language, but the language in the book is very much in keeping with the characters and story," Anaya said. "I don't use strong language gratuitously. Some people object to the idea of witchcraft and curandera who helps lift a curse from the boy's uncle. But it's all part of traditional psychology and I don't know how people read it as more than that. There are always people (like the curandera) in cases like that. Today, we call them shrinks."

Whenever the book banners pop up, they seem never to learn the same lesson that always follows the ban. The AP reported that the lesson in Norwood came from a high school junior who wrote a letter to the editor in the local paper.

"I never knew this book existed," he wrote. "Now I feel it is my obligation to read it and see what our superintendent found so dangerous that it must be destroyed."

Atta-boy.

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