Anaya, Rudolfo

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Alburquerque. By Rudolfo Anaya. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1992. 280 pp., cloth, $19.95. ISBN: 0-8263-1359-0.

Rudolfo Anaya's new novel, *Alburquerque* restores the missing **'r'** in the spelling of this southwestern city's name. And therein lies a tale that is very close to Anaya and which he tells with passion, humor and care. *Alburquerque* is a novel that richly blends fantasy with history, producing a tale that can be read as political allegory. Read as such, Anaya's novel, using New Mexico as a literal and figural ground, offers as strong criticism of the ideology of racial purity and the excesses that may issue from it. The story that Anaya has to tell is about the mixture of races underlying the history of New Mexico and the clash of cultures and politics inhabiting that history. In *Alburquerque*, Anaya has given birth to a cast of characters that embody and give voice to that history. Being very close to those characters, Anaya emerges as a character in his own novel, weaving himself into the pattern of his own text in the figure of Ben Chávez. As teller of and character in this tale, Anaya's voice rings with a double emphasis when it affirms the role of the storyteller in the preservation of New Mexican and Native American cultures.

Anaya weaves his political allegory around the figure of Abrán González, ex Golden Gloves Champ and homeboy from Barelas barrio. As the complicating action of the story opens, Abrán is about to embark on a journey in search of his own *mestizo* past. The circumstances that surround how Abrán became the son of a Mexican father and an Anglo mother begin to unravel when he gets a letter from a woman who is close to death and claiming to be his mother. Rushing to the hospital, Abrán almost runs over an old woman of the barrio, doña Tules, who delivers the message, "Tú eres tú," in the mode of mystical revelation. The rest of the search will bring Abrán back to this simple truth, though its simplicity does not obviate the need for the journey. Abrán must still dig for his *mestizo* roots and find the absent father.

At the hospital, the woman who calls herself his mother is only moments from her death and, as Abrán looks into her face and holds her hand, all she can utter is his name. Here, Anaya's narrator draws close to the consciousness of Cynthia Johnson, the dying woman, and brings into focus a part of the history that gave birth to Abrán. Cynthia Johnson, a girl who assimilates New Mexican Hispano culture and makes it her own, falls in love with a young Mexican kid from the barrio. But racial prejudice being what it is, Cynthia's father, Walter Johnson, despises the child and makes her give it up. In eminently patriarchal fashion, he imposes a vow of silence on all those involved: "What a cruel bargain my father made, the vow of silence. There is no greater punishment than silence" (27). These words, spoken in the interior consciousness of the dying Cynthia are not heard by Abrán. Later, Abrán learns from Vera Johnson, wife of Walter Johnson, that the bargain Johnson strikes with his daughter exacts from her nothing less than her son's life. "You were to live only if we gave you up," (33) Vera explains to the bewildered Abrán. The silence that Walter Johnson imposes over the scene of Abrán's birth is the arbitrary law of the father, and at the level of political allegory, symbolizes the blind hatred that characterizes racial bigotry, the lengths to which it will go to erase its other. Walter Johnson despises his own flesh and blood because it represents the fall of his daughter from the purity of his Anglo blood, all the while knowing that Vera is Mexican (though not the fact that Cynthia does not spring from his seed).

But Walter Johnson is not the only one haunted by dreams of racial purity. Frank Dominic, high stakes political wheeler-dealer of Albuquerque, dreams against all plausible reality of tracing his non-Hispanic name to Spanish royalty. In Walter Johnson and Frank Dominic, Anaya has painted a picture of the type of Anglo that immigrates to the Southwest and learns to live and love the culture and language of New Mexico. But even when finding a new life, the Johnsons and Dominics come to own the land rather than to respect it. This is not to say that Anaya portrays them as unsympathetic characters. On the contrary, Anaya grants himself the right to delve into the consciousness of each in order to show how much each learns to love his new home. For this reason, Anaya, taking Ben Chávez's point of view, says of Dominic: "Ben knew Dominic yearned to be a scion of the Spanish conquistadores. Frank grew up with the Mexican kids, learned the language and fell into the dream that he really was a descendent of one of the old Spanish families" (67). What brings Dominic's downfall in the end is his Eurocentric dream to make of Albuquerque a city appropriate for and worthy of his royal rule. In a three-way race for mayor against Walter Johnson and the incumbent Marisa Martínez, Dominic wants to ascend to political power as much as to legitimize his vision of a Spanish royal past. Anaya's narrator, only at a slight remove from Ben Chávez's consciousness, tells the reader: "Those who sought the Spanish in their genealogy never ceased to amaze Ben. Did Frank really believe he was related to the old dukes of Alburquerque? The Spanish legacy was a vision that many grasped for, and many a nut in New Mexico had spent his life's earning trying to find his link to a Spanish family crest. Dreams of blue blood, visions of he Alhambra, and Spanish conquistadores . . . Is that why Dominic married Gloria, to lay claim to a family once related to the Duke of Alburquerque?" (70). At the apex of the novel, where Dominic stages his strongest bid for the mayor's office, he steps up to a microphone sporting a cape and espousing his dream of royalty: "Caballeros y señoras de Alburquerque! This is an historic day for our city, la ciudad del Duque! This city named after the royal family of the Duke of Alburquerque will once again regain its rightful heritage. As a descendant of that royal family . . ." (262). Standing in the crowd are Ben Chávez and the mayor who can only register on their faces the excess of Dominic's quest for power under the guise of a pure identity: "Ben Chávez winced. The myth of Spanish blood had come full circle . . . He looked at Marisa and she, too, shook her head" (262).

But if the myth of racial purity looks pathetic because Dominic can stage it on such a grand scale, its effects are no less so among Hispanics who harbor it. Don Manuel and his wife doña Eufemia are of such ilk and for that reason the recipients of a stinging critique that issues from Vera Johnson but is just as close to Anaya's narrator in point of view. At a party where Walter Johnson is to announce his candidacy for mayor, Vera is hard-pressed not to notice the old couple's hypocrisy: "Vera looked at them and pitied them. They had to pretend to be Spanish and not Mexican in order to be accepted into Walter's circle" (232).

Complementing Anaya's satire of the myth of racial purity is the simple truth that slowly unfolds leading Abrán back to the face of Ben Chávez. "Tú eres tú" is what doña Tules tells Abrán at the beginning of his journey and it is a truth that Lucinda, his future bride, keeps repeating to him throughout the story. This revelation hints at the moral of Anaya's allegorical novel. Self-identity, Anaya hints, is more the product of culture than race. Of utmost importance in this political process of self-figuration, Anaya self-reflexively affirms, is the role of the storyteller in preserving the elements of culture out of which personal and communal identity is built. Read in this way, *Alburquerque*, far from being a simple quest for self, is a novel of political resistance, holding its various story lines together under this common theme.

It is upon this controlling narrative trajectory that Anaya bears a close resemblance to Ben Chávez. Thus, in an episode where Abrán visits a local tavern to find comfort in a few shots of whiskey, Ben Chávez surfaces to recite to him an epic poem about Aztlán and rescue him from the ontological groundlessness assailing him. In fact, Anaya, through his epic song, assures Abrán of the power in one's culture to confer identity: "Abrán, born of the Mexican father and gringa mother, was the new Chicano, and he could create his own image, drawing the two worlds together, not letting them tear him apart. Abrán, the new mestizo" (207). Ben Chávez appears in his epic poem about Aztlán as an instance of fulfilled prophecy: "Into the late hours Ben recited the story of Juan Chicaspatas and Al Penco . . . how they were given the commandment to return to the barrios of Aztlán to help the poor and the outcast. They were to help their people by becoming troubadours, wandering minstrels, like the old cuentistas who went from village to village to tell Chicanos their history and legends" (207). Insofar as Ben Chávez recites his epic to turn Abrán back onto his search, he fulfills the commandment given to Juan and Al. And, insofar as Anaya has written *Alburquerque* to record that search, he too fulfills the commandment. At each of these levels of allegory, Anaya represents Chicano/a storytelling as vital to the community: a concrete means of political resistance against the loss of Chicano/a culture and language in New Mexico. Anaya sees in Native American traditions, customs, ceremonies and storytelling the same mode of resistance. In the closing scene of the novel, Joe Calabasa, Abrán's Native American friend, decides to return to his pueblo—with a law degree in his hand and a commitment to preserve Native American ways of life through the act of storytelling.

Anaya's novel, with its focus on the figure of the *coyote* in Chicano/a culture, is more evidence of the importance that the concept of *mestizaje* has come to play in contemporary Chicano/a letters and criticism. *Alburquerque* is also a testimony to the rich creative potential that resides in this concept. Clearly, Rudolfo Anaya has struck into a new vein of creativity, mining the resources of *mestizaje* with a care matched only by his love for his native New Mexico.

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Without Discovery: A Native Response to Columbus. Edited by Ray Gonzalez. Seattle: Broken Moon Press, 1992. 233 pp., paper, $14.95. ISBN: 0-913089-31-1.

Whether characterized as "Columbus-bashing" or as revisionist history by constituents of the reading public, *Without Discovery: A Native Response to Columbus* erupts on the Quincentennial canonical literary scene. Like the volcanos which physically birthed the Western Hemisphere, relieving the hidden pressure and creating new visual perspectives, this collection with twenty-three contributors offers violent catharsis for the authors and heretofore unheard or hidden perspectives to the readers.

In a television interview recently, Victor Villaseñor, author of *Rain of Gold*, spoke of his own catharsis and ethnic perspective in writing the chronicle of his Mexican American family. Mired for years in frustration, hurt and rage at social inequities in the United States, Villaseñor attributed his ability to finally focus and direct his emotions to his father, who confronted him with the responsibility of those who have rage: to use it.

Using the rage is what the authors of *Without Discovery: A Native Response to Columbus* have done. No matter the social or political persuasion of the reader, this book has made it impossible to continue to deny the rage or relegate the perspective to the fringes. The use of that rage which comes out of the search for personal and group identity is the leitmotif tying the works of the collection into a consistent whole. These are the ethnic perspectives of Native Americans and of Hispanic Americans previously disenfranchised by the traditionally more powerful, if no longer larger numerically, Eurocentric interpreters of the history of this hemisphere.

The multi-genre collection of works is divided into five untitled sections, though each has unifying traits. The works move from calls for recognition and informational attempts to educate through intents to emphasize the multiplicity so far ignored, all the while entertaining and riveting the reader. The emotions expressed and elicited run the gamut as well, moving from catharsis to hope.

Scattered throughout the sections, the poetic works, always emotion-laden, vary from Wendy Rose's "For Some, It's a Time of Mourning," a first-person, almost stream-of-consciousness, prose-poem celebration of enduring Native nature in spite of real and figurative plunder to Linda Hogan's poetic/prose mix which ends the collection. Rose's underlying angry demand to be heard culminates in Hogan's calm, sad recognition of the past blended with a tentative hope for an inclusive future: "Think of what could have been. Think of what it yet may be" (228). Diane Glancy's Native American history, "Sugar Woman," the most "traditional" poetically, which uses a free-verse maple syrup metaphor, falls somewhere inbetween.

In Part Four of the book, poets Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Ray A. Young Bear, Inés Hernández and Victoria Lena Manyarrows write about being poets. Alire Sáenz defends his multiple cultural identities, conflicts and languages against a lifetime of excluding definitions for an "American poet." He claims his identity not as *the* but as *an* inclusive American/Chicano poet and proudly proclaims, "I write to document what has largely remained undocumented, underrepresented, and misrepresented in American culture," (131). He echoes Villaseñor in the desire to use his emotions—however positive, however negative—to accomplish his purpose of establishing a collective identity for the term, "American poet." Young Bear does something of the same for the Native American poet, skewering the stereotypes of those he would teach through his poetry. But Hernández and Manyarrows go even further with inclusiveness, emphasizing the multiplicity so long stifled, not only in ethnic but gender terms, not only with contemporary issues but pre-Colombian ones, not only using literary means but those of other art forms, specifically musical means.

Essays appear in each section, detailing modern Native American rites of identity like Robert Allen Warrior's account of the "first-ever" intercontinental 'encuentro' of American Indians" in 1990 in Ecuador (15). Most essayists, however, respond to the Quincentenary. Suzan Shown Harjo's uncompromising answers to Barbara Miner's interview questions about the indigenous perspective of the Quincentenary brook no evasion of the validity of conflicting views of this hemisphere's history from Columbus' arrival to present day. José Barriero puts it succinctly and movingly as he quotes one Native American leader, "to celebrate [the Quincentenary] would be like the Jews rendering homage to Hitler every few years or the Japanese revering Truman for Nagasaki and Hiroshima" (58).

Most of the essays emphasize the ambiguous place of the mixed-blood American head-on. Carlos Muñoz, Jr. laments the disminution of the Chicano movement, absorbed and metamorphosed. He raises the old problem of labels/terms again, what to call the unique amalgamation of Native and European that makes up today's population. He objects to the current "Hispanic" as being too reminiscent of Spain and thus, over-emphasizing the European aspect, which has historically overwhelmed the Native aspect, yet he offers no alternative. The problem remains: how not to label yet not deny identity. These authors particularly emphasize the Hispanic/indigenous link as well as the multiplicity of language(s), playing with code-switching and word-plays such as Muñoz's "burrocrats" (63).

The Jewish aspect of this blend of people in the Western Hemisphere, arguably the most marginalized/forgotten over the centuries, serves as Ed Chávez's metaphor for the disenfranchized in "The Minority Within." The most "realistic" of the three fiction selections in the third part, "Cimarrona," by Alicia

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