

A Whole of Many Parts

by Lou Liberty

Albuquerque

by Rudolfo Anaya

(Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1992)

The philosopher asks, "Who am I?" Only the storyteller/poet is brave enough to answer, "You are who you are." Rudolfo Anaya does just that in his latest novel, *Albuquerque*. In the process he demonstrates to us that what appears to be insignificant — like the lost *R* in the original spelling of Albuquerque — is often the key to understanding.

Anaya has done his homework. Sketching a sort of history of Albuquerque within the framework of his novel, he shows the reader the diversity that is New Mexico's largest city. More importantly, he presents a panorama of characters who are at once familiar and startlingly new. Through their quest for identity we gain insight into our own.

Anaya's book might best be compared to a *corrido*, the indigenous ballad form that keeps the narrative of New Mexicans. *Albuquerque* sings with the voices of those descended from Hispanics who came for gold, glory, and God; of Anglos who appropriated the land as part of Manifest Destiny; of Jews under forced conversion who escaped Spain with their lives, serving alongside the Conquistadors; of Mexican immigrants seeking a better life in the North; of Native Americans trying to maintain an ancient way of life in the face of rapid and often destructive change. What Anaya presents is a rich chorus attempting to blend its music despite the barriers of cherished prejudices and eternal power struggles.

Viewed in another way, *Albuquerque* is a classic *Bildungsroman*, the story of a young man's education and

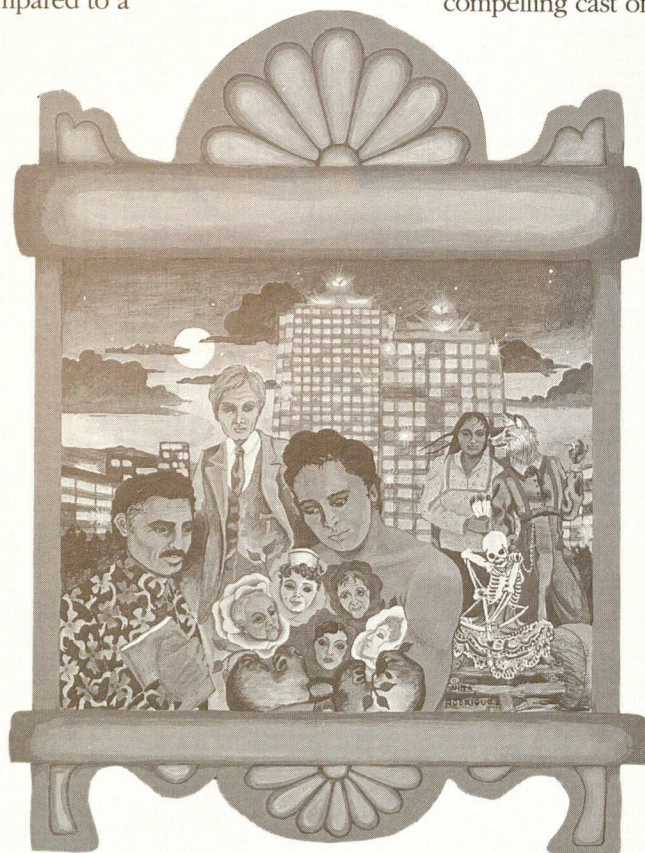
maturation. The book begins with a bar fight and a discovery. In the bar fight, Abrán González, a golden gloves champion, saves Ben Chávez, a writer, from Chávez's high school nemesis and sees Chávez safely home. González's own homecoming is unsafe and he has no one to champion him. He discovers that Ramiro and Sara are not his parents, that he is the son of the dying renowned painter Cynthia Johnson and an unknown Hispanic father. Abrán's quest to find his father takes him through Albuquerque's halls of power to the barrio's mysterious *bruja*, doña Tules, to the placitas of northern New Mexico, and finally to downtown Albuquerque. Along the way he is accompanied by a compelling cast of characters, most notable among

them the cameo appearances of La Muerte and Coyote.

"Tú eres Tú," doña Tules says to Abrán at the beginning of his journey. "You are you." From Jack's on Central to the West Mesa, from Martineztown to the Rio Grande Boulevard corridor, from downtown to Lovelace, Anaya shows us through the mestizo Abrán González the variety and rich mixture that are Albuquerque and ourselves. He shows us that, like the lost *R* in Albuquerque, we can eliminate no small thing without losing an important part of the whole nor can we ever know ourselves without all the parts.

"Tú eres Tú." Fortunately for us, Rudolfo Anaya is who he is, a storyteller/poet willing to answer the philosopher's question.

Art by Anita Rodriguez



imprecision. Previously, computers had been limited to either-or, black-or-white, all-or-nothing kinds of thinking. With fuzzy logic, however, Shakespeare's "To be, or not to be" is no longer the limit to the question. Now, a whole range of possibilities becomes available between these two extremes.

Put simply, fuzzy logic introduces adjectives and adverbs in computer reasoning.

At last, we're talking about something I understand. After all, literature is fraught with fuzzy logic — it always has been. This kind of thinking is essential to art and culture and the basic expression of ourselves as human beings.

Let me show you what I mean by working through a couple of analogies — backwards. We'll take examples from a classic work of literature, then remove the fuzziness from the passages, limiting all statements to strictly precise either-or, Cartesian logic. This will illustrate the kind of thinking computers have been restricted to before the advent of fuzzy logic.

To start with, one of the most famous lines in literature is the opening sentence of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Here it is with is fuzzy logic intact:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity...

Here's the same sentiment, but with the fuzziness removed to make it more compatible with the logic of current computer programming:

The time interval x was the period exhibiting a 100 percent maximum of possible values as measured along some arbitrary social scale, the interval x was also the period of time exhibiting a 100 percent minimum of these values as measured along the same scale...

No need to go any further with this one. We've already set up an untenable paradox, and the passage simply continues with more of the same for the rest of a very lengthy paragraph. Let's turn to another example from the same book. Here's the closing sentence from *A Tale of Two Cities*, which is probably as well known as the opening one, in its unaltered state:

It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.
Now, here's the same thought, revised so that it conforms to strictly binary thinking:

t is a thing which exceeds by 98 to 99.5 percent the value of each member of the set of all other things I have done prior to this precise moment in time; it is a rest to which I go that exceeds by the same range of values any other I have known prior to the same temporal reference point.

These examples demonstrate the importance of fuzzy thinking when it comes to dealing with the real world. The point is that — until now — computers haven't been able to function at a level high enough (some might say low enough) to approach human thinking. Or, as the Bard might have put it:

To be, or not to be — that is the decisional matrix. Whether 'tis preferable within a conceptual framework to suffer the illogic inherent in existence, or to resist the consequences of these limitations, and by opposing them, bring closure to our current existential state.

On a societal scale, the significance of this technological change will prove staggering. I must admit, however, to being a little surprised at finding that my fellow writers and I (as well as virtually every other artist and thinker in history) have been using fuzzy logic — this "hot," "new" aspect of our high-tech world — for thousands of years. We've been in the vanguard of technology without ever knowing it. Heck, we were usually reproached for our fuzziness. Nobody told us how important this kind of thinking — the fuzzy kind that comes so naturally to us — really is.

Now that the secret's out, I think I'll write the screenplay for the first movie to popularize this lucrative new field. I might call it *Star Trek: The Fuzzy Generation*. Or maybe *Bill and Ted's Fuzzy Adventure*.

My father the engineer would be so proud. ■■■

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