Rudolfo Anaya and I had not seen each other for years when I visited him in July, 1993. After a long conversation in his office at the University of Albuquerque, he invited me to lunch in the barrio Barelas, *the neighborhood where he lived for a long time. Over a cup of cinnamon tea, I was telling Rudy a folk tale that my grandmother used to tell me, when he interrupted me and said: "Why don't you write a short story on it? If you don't, I will." In his calm and fascinating voice, the voice of a true-born storyteller, he started to reshape my anecdote, drawing out of it the most hidden archetypal and mythical implications on the human condition.*

Popular culture, legends, folklore, history, and the multifaceted myths which become stratified in the subconscious of each person and resurface at a later stage are the main sources of Anaya's creative writing. When I asked him the meaning of the golden carp, one of the central symbols in his first novel, Bless Me, Ultima, *which has become a classic of Mexican American literature and sold more than 300,000 copies, Rudy replied that he could not give me a conclusive answer. The images of fish, obviously deriving from the Christian iconography and symbolism, had been in his mind since he was a child. But, later on, other images had formed layers in his consciousness: the big fish that in the Bible swallows Jonah, the fish as symbol of fertility and vital energies of many Oriental religions, the fish of the Aztec mythology which may have a positive or a negative valence. Thus, in* Bless Me, Ultima *the golden carp is a symbol of Christ as well as of a syncretistic divinity of the later Amerindian autochthonous cultures.*

When Antonio, the protagonist of the novel who relives memories of

his childhood in a prolonged flashback interspersed with his dreams, sees the golden carp, at first he is puzzled as to which of the two implied conceptions of life he should choose. From Ultima, the healer who is his spiritual guide, he finally learns that conflictual attitudes are the result of a limited conception of reality: what really counts is the totality of life which is characterized by an interrelation of all its components.

Bless Me, Ultima, *the first of a New Mexico trilogy including* Heart of Aztlán *and* Tortuga, *is partly a parable of the search for identity on the part of Mexican Americans which may initially require "the rejection of Christianity, the conqueror's religion, and a return to indigenous paganism." However, when considered in its complex, overall pattern, the novel "recovers a vision associated with a world view found in all ancient peoples, a view which offers to modern America a mythic vision that has been lost, a vision of the sanctity of all life, a vision of the beauty and everlasting quality of the land, and a sense of the unity of life and time that transcends the lineal, judgmental, and historical view accepted by Western Christians" (Lattin 625-26).*

As a New Mexican writer, Rudolfo Anaya has been deeply influenced by the corpus of Mexican and Spanish lore—much more so than by the Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage. Consequently, as a critic put it, he "has been able to create new visions out of old realities" (Leal 335). This is hardly surprising, for among the Southwestern states New Mexico is the one where "Chicano integration into the culture of the United States had a relatively homogeneous ... development, perhaps because it was the first to be colonized by the Spanish and the last to undergo the Anglo-Saxon colonization" during the latter quarter of the nineteenth century (Bacchiega 15; *my translation).*

A blending of fantastic symbolism and imagery, visionary approaches to reality, magical realism, mythopoeic references, and occasional, overt, although not always successful hints to socio-political issues, is the peculiar mark of Anaya's novels and short stories. His style, which is often conversational, reminds one of the storytelling of the local oral tradition. This is particularly so in the short stories. At the same time, modern fictional techniques such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, superimposition of temporal levels, epiphanies, simultaneity of action, and a fragmented narration are also essential ingredients in his writing. Anaya is very conscious of the problems inherent in the craft of fiction and the

rhetorical use of language. This is attested by the many illustrations of his own poetics (and even of what he takes to be his failures) published as "Notes from the Author," interviews and short stories of a metafictional nature. A case in point is "The Place of the Swallows," a story included in the collection The Silence of the Llano, *which "describes the power of language and fiction to reify and to transmute the dynamic relationship between life and art" (Candelaria* 32). *In Anaya's words, stories "can be a simple but compelling form" and those who write them "must be keenly aware of style and form . . . the aura of the story is the vibration of time and truth inherent in the new reality that the story creates" (Anaya* 47, 49).

"Message from the Inca," which Rudolfo Anaya kindly gave us for publication in RSA Journal, *is set at the time of the conquest of Cuzco by the Spaniards, whom he calls "barbarians," thus reversing the concept found in the ancient historiography of colonization that viewed the Amerindians as uncivilized. Anaya essentially creates an atmosphere of deep sorrow and helplessness about the fall of the Inca empire. Yet the king, who has a cyclical vision of Time, fatalistically accepts the end, knowing that continuity is guaranteed in the form of the birth of a new era in which the Inca civilization is perpetuated.*

While Cuzco is under siege, a messenger of the Inca is given a message to take to Machu Picchu which has not been, and never will be, discovered by the colonizers. During his journey, the messenger has several visions, one of which is a premonition of modern times—he sees an airplane and a train. Time seems to have gone mad: the messenger glimpses the harmony within nature of bygone days, and images of both future progress and devastation. He finally reaches Machu Picchu and delivers the quipus *to the virgins of the Sun God. Then he finds himself in modern times, when throngs of tourists are visiting Machu Picchu, which was discovered in 1911. One of the people present, an obvious metaphor for a writer, talks with the messenger who chooses to give the* quipus *to him. Hence the* quipus, *the cord used to convey messages by tying knots on it, stands for the evocative power of signs and language which eliminate the obsessive horror of nothingness through memory. Anaya's story also implies that for the wheel of Time to continue to turn, it needs a driving force. Death and resurrection are parts of the same cycle. The price paid for this process may sometimes be a decline of civilization itself in relation to the initial archetype.*

Works cited

* Rudolfo A. Anaya is a prolific writer and critic. His creative works include four novels: *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlán* (1976), *Tortuga* (1979), and *Alburquerque* (1992); two short novels: *The Legend of the Llorona* (1984) and *Lord of the Dawn. The Legend of Quetzalcòatl* (1987); one collection of short stories: *The Silence of the Llano* (1982); an epic poem: *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas;* and a travel journal: *A Chicano in China* (1986). One of his short stories, "Children of the Desert," was published as "Figli del deserto" in *L'Umana avventura* (primavera-estate 1989): 108-10, trans. di Marco Grampa. Anaya is also the author of a children's story, *The Farolitos of Christmas: A New Mexico Christmas Story* (1987).

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