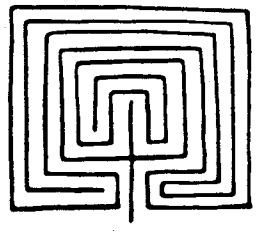


*Clackamas in "Clives"*

*Rudolph Anaya*

# WRITERS' FORUM



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# Rudolfo Anaya, Chicano in China

by Ruben Martinez

In mid-May of 1984, Rudolfo Anaya and his wife, Patricia, embarked on a month-long journey to China as part of a small group of Kellogg Foundation fellows and their spouses. Anaya's perceptions of and encounters with the Chinese were recorded in a journal he kept during his trip and published in 1986 as *A Chicano in China*. Had the journal been written by another Chicano, it probably would not have been published. Other Chicanos visited China before Anaya and they, too, probably kept journals of their experiences. But Rudolfo Anaya is not just another Chicano: he ranks among the foremost American authors of today and is the most popular of contemporary Chicano writers.

Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya was born on October 30, 1937, in the village of Pastura, New Mexico, located at the western end of El Llano Estacado (the Staked Plains), an area which extends easterly from central New Mexico into west Texas and Kansas. Educated in the public schools of New Mexico, he graduated from high school in 1956, then studied business for two years at Browning Business School. Unfulfilled by the study of business he turned to the study of literature at the University of New Mexico, receiving the Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1963. He then accepted a teaching position at a small town in New Mexico, later teaching in the public schools of Albuquerque. It was during this period that he began to work on *Bless Me, Ultima*, the novel which was to propel him to the forefront of Chicano literature. In 1968, he received the Master of Arts Degree in literature from the University of New Mexico. In 1974, he began teaching creative writing and Chicano literature at his alma mater. Today he is Professor of English.

Anaya has received numerous awards for his creative work and literary scholarship. In 1971, he received the Premio Quinto Sol, one

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of the most prestigious literary awards in the field of Chicano letters, for his first novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*. In 1979 he received the Before Columbus American Book Award for his novel *Tortuga*, and in 1983 the Hispanic Caucus of the National Conference of Teachers of English presented him with an Award for Achievement in Chicano Literature. He has received honorary degrees from the University of Albuquerque and from Mary Crest College in Iowa. He also has received awards from the Governor of the State of New Mexico. He has lectured at universities throughout the country, including Yale, Notre Dame, Hawaii, Wisconsin, Texas, Colorado, and UCLA. In 1980, he read from his works at the White House during the National Salute to American Poets and Writers.

Anaya's literary works are imbued with the cultural traditions and landscape of the *manitos*, a distinct Chicano grouping situated in New Mexico and southern Colorado. He is concerned not only with conveying the Chicano world view through the *cuentos* (folk stories) of his people, but also with communicating his people's problems, dilemmas, fears, joys, and love. In particular, he is concerned with conveying his people's deep relationship with *la tierra*, which he terms "the epiphany in landscape." For Anaya, the epiphany is infused with both spiritual and sensual aspects, and he likens it to our ability to love and to make human connections that are so essential to our well-being.

His work, it is argued by some scholars, contains traces of the Aztec world view. While the cosmology of the Aztecs (and other pre-Columbian peoples) is not yet completely known, there is consensus among scholars that they saw themselves as "the People of the Fifth Sun." According to Frank Waters in *Mexico Mystique*, their world was preceded by the worlds of earth, air, fire, and water, respectively. Together, these worlds constitute the four basic elements of classical antiquity. The world of the first sun, *Ocelotonatiuh*, was inhabited by giants who were devoured by tigers. The inhabitants of the world of the second sun, *Ecatonatiuh*, were destroyed by wind, with the survivors being turned into monkeys. Those of the world of the third sun, *Quianuintonatiuh*, were destroyed by a rain of fire, with the survivors being turned into birds (turkeys). The inhabitants of the world of the fourth sun, *Chalchihuitlicue*, were destroyed by flood, with the survivors being turned into fish. The world of the fifth sun, *Tonatiuh*, constituted movement and unified and synthesized the elements of the preceding four worlds. Contained in Anaya's works is a quest for understanding how man can harmonize his relations with the elements of the universe. This quest for harmony, along with the presence of Aztec symbols and myths, reflects the Aztec view in his works.

Whereas *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlan* (1976), *Tortuga* (1979), and the *The Silence of the Llano* (1982) are major works of fiction, *A Chicano in China* is a nonfictional journal in which readers come to know Rudolfo more intimately than before.

Readers become acquainted with Anaya as a person, a husband, a scholar, a traveller, a *manito*, and a Chicano. By accompanying Anaya as he sets out each day of his trip, readers are privy to his attitudes, perceptions, reactions, and reflections on his encounters with the peoples and cultures of China. Never before has a Chicano scholar of Anaya's stature produced a work of such a personally revealing and intriguing nature. The promise of the journal lies in the opportunity that it provides readers to understand themselves better by more fully understanding the Chicano world view as it is presented by Anaya.

Anaya is not just another American visiting China. He is a Chicano, conscious of his ethnic identity and deeply steeped in the customs and traditions of this people. His attitudes toward China, its peoples and cultures, differ from those of most Americans precisely because he is Chicano and because of his own personal views and interests. As a Chicano, Anaya takes pride in his indigenous roots, his ties to native peoples of this continent and their great civilizations of the past. As a Chicano, he is humble, in the positive sense of the word, toward other peoples and cultures, seeking to communicate, to learn, to understand. His own personal interests move him to seek spiritual and humanistic connections between the cultures of China and pre-Columbian societies. He is especially interested in connections having to do with relationships between the Earth and the diets of these cultures. In short, Anaya embarked on his journey as a humble pilgrim seeking enlightenment through communication with the peoples and cultures of China. He kept his journal in order to share his experiences with other Chicanos, that they, too, may know China.

Anaya addresses issues that concern *manitos*, Chicanos, racial minorities, and Third World peoples in general. Throughout his journey he interprets the worlds of China through the world view of the *manitos*. Free markets become *mercados*, melodies become *rancheras*, complex irrigation systems become *acequias*, Taoist temples become the *Santuario de Chimayo*, and so on. These interpretations provide readers the opportunity more fully to understand Anaya, *manitos*, and Chicanos in general. *Manito* readers will immediately recognize the familiar objects and practices against which the foreign are compared. They will delight in the zany similarities which he sees between the foreign and the familiar. At the Great Wall of China he wonders how Hispanic culture will fare in the

United States: "It's our culture a force living in the soul of the people? A force connecting us to our history, a force as powerful as the Great Wall of China, that wall which is a symbol of Chinese resistance? No one knows except, perhaps, the winds of time, which have many things to reveal to us yet" (43). At the Southwest National Minorities Institute in Chengdu he asks if our federal government will "ever establish a university to teach Hispanic or Native American thought and language" (108). Riverboating down the Yangtze he thinks of the Cultural Revolution and is reminded of the *Movimiento* and how Chicanos, too, "felt the repressive hand of the Gang of Four" (119). At Wuhan he wishes that politicians could understand that Chicanos have an inherent right to be a Spanish-speaking people. At still a broader level, Anaya effectively emphasizes concerns relating to racial minorities and Third World nations in general. At the outset of his journey, while flying from Albuquerque to San Francisco, he wonders if Japanese Americans loved Manzanar (a WW II relocation camp). In Beijing (Peking), reflecting on the views of foreign service bureaucrats, Anaya concludes that the Chinese are people of the new world. "They will solve their own problems" (49). At Chengdu he tires of the Ugly American: "Loud, vociferous, insensitive. I am surprised at some of the older members of our group. Crude. Foolish. Stupid. How predictable is the character of the ugly American. This upstart culture, which has no manners in the face of an ancient culture" (91). In Shanghai Anaya tells us that we should go to China as guests rather than critics. In this instance, Anaya seems to be addressing Anglo-American readers. He knows that Chicanos and other Third World peoples "... understand the coming of foreigners into the land" (145). He knows that it is contrary to their cultures for one to enter a stranger's house and tell him how to run it.

Now, lest readers get the impression that Anaya's journal focuses solely on racial and Third World considerations, I shall discuss his more personal concerns.

Anaya's personal interests lead him on a journey of self-discovery as he seeks to understand "... the old Asiatic world that sent its migrations of people across the Bering Strait thousands of years ago; those people were the ancestors of Native America" (3). In particular, he went to China "looking for ancestral signs," for connections between the old Asiatic world and the mythology and thought of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The major mythological and spiritual symbols discussed by Anaya are dragons, golden carp, *tortugas* (turtles), Buddha, the Goddess of Mercy, and the Tao.

At the Forbidden City, the old Imperial City of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Anaya is fascinated by the many dragon figures decorating the Palace. He sees connections between ancient China and

ancient Mexico. The Palace grounds, buildings, courtyards, and images remind him of Teotihuacan, the great "city of the gods." "The face of the fierce dragon looks out at me from walls, from gargoyles, from decorative pieces, almost exactly as the serpent head in the pyramids of Mexico" (21). He wonders if Quetzalcoatl, the great culture-hero of the *Toltecs*, had his beginning in Asia.

Golden carp hold a strong fascination for Rudolfo Anaya. He remembers the golden carp he saw as a youngster in the rivers and lakes of Santa Rosa, New Mexico. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the golden carp is a god who chose to be turned into a fish so that he could take care of his people, who, themselves, had been turned into carp for having eaten the sacred fish of the gods, the carp. In that novel, the importance of the golden carp revolves around water, the origin of life and one of the four basic elements. It symbolizes spiritual cleansing and peace. In the journal, Anaya finds contentment in seeing golden carp in China. "Yes, I have returned to the land of the golden carp, I have returned home" (159).

*Toriugas* also hold a fascination for Anaya. His third novel *Toriuga* describes the rite of passage of an adolescent nicknamed "Toriuga," who becomes paralyzed after wounding a giant tortoise. At the Provincial Museum of Shanghai, Anaya sees large stone tablets engraved with Chinese calligraphy perched on the top of huge turtles. He wonders why the *toriuga* haunts his writings as an archetypal image. Then, he understands: "The turtles are supporting the tablets; the tablets are engraved with the word; the word is civilization. The turtle supports civilization, the world of the Chinese, sea creature, creature of the water, brother to the dragon" (71). Nearly two weeks later, at Narita, Japan, Anaya visits a Buddhist temple and finds a pond with turtles and two golden carp. He is elated: "What a sight! The turtles and the holy fish of my stories together, creatures of God living in the presence of the Buddha in the temple" (188). This idyllic scene evokes a sense of harmony in the universe, a sense that, for Anaya, seems fleeting and elusive in a world seemingly characterized by disharmony.

For Anaya, the Buddha is an important but enigmatic ethereal force. He wonders if the Buddha is embodied in one of the spiritual figures of the Americas. "Is he an aspect of Quetzalcoatl, the positive force we need to balance the aspect of the dragon?" (48). In Xi'an he is surprised to see statues of the Buddha straddling the dragon. He asks himself if this is an incorporation of the sacred and the profane: "The Buddha on the dragon controlling the supreme energy of creation, procreation, the energy of the Earth's source, which gives birth" (58). In Hangzhou Anaya sees a porcelain Buddha surrounded by children and is reminded of clay figures made by the Pueblo Indians of New

Mexico. The figures are of a storyteller: a woman with children clinging to her. Anaya welcomes the Buddha as a Kachina into the pueblos.

Buddha, Anaya learns, was taught the true path by the Goddess of Mercy. Interested in identifying the "archetypal feminine figure in the Chinese memory," Anaya questions a distinguished professor of psychology at Sichuan University, Chengdu, about this figure. He learns that "the feminine figure appears in the forms of goddesses" (104). One such goddess is the Goddess of Mercy. Another professor tells him a story about a goddess who, with her pet rabbit, is imprinted on the moon. Anaya is reminded that the pre-Columbian people of Mexico believed there was a rabbit on the moon. He can see the rabbit when the moon is full; now he must look for the Chinese goddess.

At Hangzhou Anaya marvels at a large statue of the "Goddess of Mercy standing on the head of a golden carp which comes out of the waters" (158). Here he learns from a tour guide that the Goddess of Mercy taught Buddha after fifty-three masters had refused to teach him. Anaya recalls the baroque churches in Mexico: "The Goddess of Mercy looks very much like the Virgin of Guadalupe standing on her moon. The babes of limbo surround the feet of the Virgin; the fifty-three young Buddhas surround the Goddess of Mercy" (158). Intuitively, Anaya makes the sign of the cross.

Near Chengdu Anaya set out on a pilgrimage to the Tianshi Cave Temple on Mount Qingcheng. The temple, he tells us, is the birthplace of Taoism. One can only imagine the number of people who make regular pilgrimages to this sacred place. As he walks, Anaya recalls *El Santuario de Chimayo* in New Mexico and the yearly pilgrimages made by Chicanos, especially during Holy Week. Unprepared for the journey, Anaya has to turn back without seeing the temple, but he flies down the mountain with the Tao resting in his soul.

Back in Albuquerque he goes over notes of his trip. He reflects on his experiences and the connections he made with the Chinese, their cosmologies, their lives. He writes in a voice that reveals a degree of uneasiness, one that attends cognitions which are not yet fully understood by the self. Still, he writes, he attempts to bring China back to his homeland that others too can appreciate its colors, its laughter, its landscape, its hope, and its fears.

## Interview with Rudolfo Anaya

by *Ruben Martinez*

The following interview was conducted with Rudolfo Anaya at his Albuquerque home on February 20, 1987.

*Martinez:* There is a commonality in our experiences. I was raised in northern New Mexico in the fifties and we got our drinking water from a nearby spring or *ojito*; we heated our homes with woodburning stoves and lit them with kerosene lamps. Today, when I'm playing with computers and flying across the country in airplanes I feel like I am a traveler in time, traveling across the centuries. It is just an intuitive sense, but I am sure that you have the same feeling. I am wondering how this feeling has influenced your writings. Do you have the sense that I am talking about?

*Anaya:* Yes, I very much have the feeling that I have come from across cultures and through time, to use your phrase. But I think that most people have that feeling anyway. If you reflect on your life you become aware that life is a series of levels or times within the lifetime, and you simply outgrow a time and go to a new level. I think you can do that even if you remain in the same locality, the same town. In our case we obviously moved away from our small rural New Mexican towns, and we find ourselves caught up in the professional world that takes us, as you suggest, around the country to lecture. I think you cannot help but reflect on that; it is an interesting phenomenon.

*Martinez:* How has this feeling influenced your work? Where does this feeling enter?

*Anaya:* Well, I like the feeling because I like to travel. I have had the opportunity to travel. I have been to different places in the world. I like the feeling of moving to other worlds and other times, like being in Peru and Macchu Picchu, and in cities in China or even in villages in Greece. I have literally moved across time and space to view this

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world, then I come back to my world and connect. I think that is a very refreshing thing to happen to a person.

*Martinez:* Do you think that having had these experiences enhance your capacity to relate to other cultures, to other peoples?

*Anaya:* Yes, absolutely. They not only enhance the capacity to relate to people in their time and place but they give you a fuller understanding of your own self. I am not only related to my rural New Mexican background, I am related to the world, or I should be. There are a lot of little rural towns all over the world, as there are cities, as there are museums of art, and it is interesting to make those connections and pull them together. I think it is fulfilling to a person.

*Martinez:* As I was reading the short autobiographical piece that you sent to me I recalled the speculation of others that your novels are based on personal experiences. I know that your novels transcend your personal experiences, but in this autobiographical statement you are very explicit about this link, and people who read it will see that there really is a direct connection to your novels. Can you say something about this connection?

*Anaya:* Well, I have always drawn from experience to create novels. When I first published *Bless Me, Ultima* people asked me, "Is that you in *Bless Me, Ultima*? Are you Antonio, the little seven-year-old character that starts the novel?" My answer was always yes, you see, I have a very close relationship to the characters I write about because they come out of my life. At the same time you have to remember that fiction somehow transcends that reality, that experience and reality that we use as a basis, as the ground, from which to work. I then let it take off, let it spiral, let it create itself so that it is not a completely historical reflection. I am doing it partially as a reflection of where I came from, the people I came from, the towns I came from, the barrio in Albuquerque here where I grew up, but always allowing the element of the imagination to create fiction and to create art, to create some kind of pattern out of that total experience.

*Martinez:* What is your understanding of art, whether it be literature, painting, or music, and what is its role in the larger society?

*Anaya:* Well, for me art is that place where I go to think, to reflect on myself. Whether it is music, or a painting, or a book or a poem it seems to me that art is what connects me to the rest of the world, to humanity. It teaches me that it is a reflection of my own nature and it does not matter who does it, whether it is a Chicano writer or an African writer. In that sense it plays a very crucial role because that is one of the places, and there are other places, but that is one area where we can go to reflect. That reflection lets us know who we are and how we are growing or not growing, both as a communal group and as persons.

*Martinez:* The person and the group are linked dialectically?

*Anaya:* Yes. You also can add that the Chicano literature that we have been writing over the past twenty years begins to talk about the fundamental world view of the people, of the group. That is tremendously important. Again, you reflect on those values of that world view, without that reflection you, we are apt to be consumed by that which is not you, us, more easily. Part of the aesthetic values that we describe as beautiful, as valuable, also take place in art and in the constant experimentation that we call art or literature. So, I see its role as very crucial. I received a liberal arts education and am very grateful for it. At the same time I see its role, especially in our contemporary society, as a very crucial one.

*Martinez:* At this point in time specifically?

*Anaya:* Especially now, yes, because our society's orientation seems to be so grounded in material acquisition, in attention to strict science, and in attention to goals that have to do with values that are imposed from without. All of these things need to be constantly looked at by the individual and by the group that the person belongs to because all of those goals may not be worthy goals, and if you do not analyze them and reflect on them then you are apt to be sucked into believing that they are worthy goals.

*Martinez:* So, to some extent what you are saying is that art is a medium for the moral conscience of a group or a people?

*Anaya:* It is very true in our history that this is so because if you look at the *cuentos* that we grew up with and what the old people tried to inculcate in us you find that they were teaching us literary history when they taught us our oral literary history. They were inculcating in us our world view, teaching us humor, and teaching us a sense of the aesthetic. Because they practiced their *cuentos*, they had devices that were techniques, and these were taught to us as well. So there was a great deal that was being taught to us, making us aware of our relationship to our community, to our family. Art is especially crucial to the Chicano population because if we do not look closely at ourselves we might—let me put it this way—the most blunt way to put it would be that we might be destroyed. That is, we might disappear if we do not pay strict attention to what is happening to us as a group. So, those of us who write not only continue in the steps of our fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors, but we also have to use our literature in new and subversive ways so that our contemporary group, our contemporaries right now, come to us in the same sense that we went to our ancestors and reflect on the literature and what we are writing. They can therefore make clearer choices for the future.

*Martinez:* This subversion that you speak of, is it the subversion of this very broad process that characterizes a highly industrial and

technological society? Is that what you refer to when you speak of subversion?

*Anaya:* Yes, that is part of it, but it also has to do with language, with history, with values. All of these things can be imposed from the outside on our community, and all of them may have some value. Because we live in a world that is multicultural and intercultural we live with many groups, that is a necessity. As I said before, it is kind of a refreshing world to live in when you see it in its multifaceted aspects. But it seems to me that there is a danger when particular groups within the multiplicity of cultures acquire too much power and instead of sharing important values they impose values. That becomes a problem that we have to address, and it should be addressed in art. So I think in that sense literature has to be subversive. It has to tell the community not only what has occurred historically but what is going on now.

*Martinez:* That brings two questions to mind. One is the perennial question regarding the relationship between politics and art, and the other has to do with the contemporary nativistic or anti-immigrant movement which seeks to make English the official language of the nation. This also is being done on a state-by-state basis. In *A Chicano in China* you wrote of the importance of language to group identity. Will you expound on that please?

*Anaya:* Well, I think the English Only Movement in this country is a reflection of fear. It seems to me maybe to get a little bit into your field of sociology, that when we have economic hard times or difficult times that have to do with war or when we perceive ourselves as being acted upon by aggressive outside forces, society seems to turn around with fear and looks at certain groups within it and attacks them as if somehow they are the cause or probable cause of that fear. I think that what we are seeing in our society is the mainstream society turning around and looking at the Spanish-speaking community in this country and saying, "You should all be speaking English because, if you do not, you somehow are tied up with all the problems that have to do with Latin America and immigration and so on." I see it as a people acting out of fear. Society breaks, it goes against the very grain of a pluralistic world, against the very grain of the sharing of languages, of acquiring more languages. It seeks instead to become a monolingual, monolithic nation.

*Martinez:* Ray Padilla, a specialist in bilingualism, sees language as a tool and a technology. His view is that denial of the opportunity to maintain our language involves technological loss and hampers our participation in the larger world.

*Anaya:* Absolutely. That's true.

*Martinez:* What about the politics question? I have read pieces where you have addressed this question, and other Chicano scholars

also have addressed it. This subversion that you discussed earlier seems to place art in a very broad political arena. Do you perceive it in such a context?

*Anaya:* Well, I think that when we talk about what we write we are talking about an art form that really should touch all of life. Nobody writes a poem or a novel only to put it in a box labelled "Poem" or "Novel." We write to share with people, and our work should go out not only into the economic and political arenas, it should go to places where people are studying literature, religion, language, everything. I guess my definition of writing is that we are creating something that is very broad and should be available to the society at large in all its ramifications, not just one ramification.

*Martinez:* So that it would not be limited to one aspect of life?

*Anaya:* That's right. I think it is especially important for us who were writing during the Chicano Movement in the 60s and 70s to keep that broad and clear view about literature. I think part of the political problem within the Chicano Movement was that some of the critics or some of the leaders, say in the early Movement, expected only one type of literature. They expected a rhetorical message oriented vis-à-vis the Anglo-American society. We were suffering, we were oppressed, and we saw that very clearly in socio-economic terms. So, there was a call to address only that issue. I simply could not see myself as a writer addressing only that issue. I was interested in a lot of other issues that had to do with who I am as a person and the community I come from.

*Martinez:* Do you think the decline in the intensity of the Movement created a context in which Chicano authors are freer to write?

*Anaya:* I don't know. The Movement, because of its intensity, was good. It was like we really had to look at ourselves and there was not much time. We had to know who we were as a people and where we were going as a community. A lot of that was very good. The intensity created a lot of poets, a lot of writers that would never have gotten going otherwise. On the other hand, I do notice now that we do not have the intensity of the late 60s and early 70s. Nevertheless, a lot of good writers and artists are coming about. So both times have something to contribute to the development of our art. I guess the only thing that I felt personally during the intense period of the Movement was the fact that some people, a very small group, wanted to be in charge of the message. To me, that was a limiting way to look at art.

*Martinez:* Was it the intensity of the Movement that helped you find your natural voice?

*Anaya:* No, I don't think so. In fact, to find your voice you really just have to trust your own instincts and write a lot. My voice comes

principally out of the oral tradition of the *cuentos*, the stories that people used to tell, and just experimentation with my own techniques. I don't think that I have ever picked up a voice that tries to reflect a group movement. My voice is very personal, it is intimate, it's me. It has more to do with my upbringing as a child than anything else.

*Martinez:* So, your voice stems from your cultural background?

*Anaya:* It is the cultural background that I knew growing up in New Mexico, in Santa Rosa, in Puerto de Luna in the 40s and 50s.

*Martinez:* You have a personal voice, but also a group or communal voice. When I read your works, perhaps because I have a similar background, I can feel the tone, the message, at a level which is very personal to me and probably to all *manitos* in a very particular way, and to all Chicanos as well.

*Anaya:* Oh, see, that is what I am always striving for as a writer. I am trying to draw you, the reader, in as close as I can to what is going on in the story so that we can share it. That is exactly what the old people used to do when they told the *cuentos*. Listening to somebody tell a *cuento* we would be fascinated by the magic of the story, and possibly frightened if it was a scary story, but we were drawn into it. So that is what I strive to do. If there is a reflection of a communal voice in my work it is probably because each of us absorbs the values of our community and the interest our community has in storytelling. We reflect a bit of that in our writing.

*Martinez:* It also creates different levels of closeness between the readers and the characters in the story. For example, as a *manito* I feel a very intimate relationship with your characters and their experiences. I also know that art has broader, more universal messages so that people of other cultures can also relate to them. Generally speaking, would you say that Chicano literature and, more specifically, your works are understood by the community of Anglo-American literary scholars? If so, at what level of closeness is it understood?

*Anaya:* The levels of meaning that people respond to in any work of art should be universal. I should be able to read any writer in the world and respond to the world and the characters he creates because we are all human beings and we are all caught up in the same dilemmas. Cultures create colors, very interesting and fascinating colors, but at the root of the dilemma everything is human. The interesting thing about Chicano literature that you might be responding to is that on a level other than the universal the images presented in the novels and poems of our Chicano writers are specific. The images are specific images. Suddenly in *Bless Me, Ultima* you see Antonio. He is not a *gringito*, he is a *mexicanito* growing up here in New Mexico. The image is specific. He can be

you, he can be someone like you or someone with whom you grew up. In the villages, we all knew people like *la curandera*, Ultima, the healers. So, the response is now not only universal, but it is closer to you, it is closer to all. Maybe, if nothing else when I said our literature has been subversive, the literature of the Chicano Movement, it was subversive because of this. We gave back to our community a specific image of itself. Members of the community could be close to it, they could be intimate, they could love or hate it, but at least it was them and they could recognize it as such. They recognized themselves in it.

Earlier you asked why I think art is important; it is because of this sense of reflection. You get into the story and you say, "Wow! This is me, or this could happen to me or this has happened to me." This sense of reflection is very important. What we are providing, those of us who write, is more immediacy to this reflection. If you read the novels being written now by Chicanas in the Southwest or anywhere in the country, you should be able to look at their image and say, "Good, now I understand myself better."

*Martinez:* How would you describe the present context of Chicano literature, and would you speculate as to its future?

*Anaya:* It is very open and very dynamic, very refreshing. A lot of Chicanos are producing now. I am writing a lot. So, I think the future looks very good, very bright. I am in touch now with young writers, students, people whose work I am editing. There is a lot of good work coming along. So, for whatever it is worth, whatever we did during the Movement, those of us who are already aged or coming out of the 60s and 70s, it is a good feeling because we can see that the social and political intensity may have died down a bit, but the artistic intensity has not, it has kept going.

*Martinez:* What about publishing outlets? You had trouble publishing your first major novel. Other Chicanos and Chicanas have had trouble publishing principally through the major publishing companies that are more accessible to other writers. Are we still forced to publish our own work?

*Anaya:* Yes. I think that of all the elements in the puzzle the hardest one to put in place is publication. It is fair to say that the major publishers in this country now are closed to Chicanos. We simply are not being accepted there. We have to continue to rely a lot on Chicano firms, Chicano publishers, and these are very limited. Right now there is more good quality work out there than is getting published. We have a lot of good work coming out that easily could be doubled or tripled if we had access to more publishing firms. So this is an extremely crucial problem.

*Martinez:* Let's turn to the topic of *la tierra*. How would you describe the *manitos'* connection to *la tierra*? There is a relationship

that is understood intuitively and cognitively, and your own world view seems to lend itself to understanding the intuitive relationship more than that of any of the other writers whose work I have read. Also, you write about the epiphany of landscape. How would you describe this relationship to *la tierra*?

*Anaya:* You are right. I have always seen it as deeply intuitive, probably even spiritual. The attachment that we have is, first of all, a long attachment. When you look at the Hispano Mexicano presence in New Mexico you see it dates back over 400 years. We have had time to really send our roots into the earth so that it cannot be anything except a spiritual connection. Because of our close relationship with the Native Americans along the Rio Grande and because of our very own nature, our own heritage as native Americans, we also have that connection with the earth. You take these two elements and what you have is a communal group that for a long period of time relied on the earth for subsistence, thereby becoming very tied to the cycles of weather, of planting, of nurturing, of watering, of caring. It is easy to see why the *tierra* becomes *la made tierra*. The Native American concept of mother earth is one that is very close to us.

*Martinez:* Some critics have stated that your work harkens back in sadness and nostalgia to a forgotten, idealized, and unattainable past. Do you think this is a fair criticism of your work?

*Anaya:* Yes, sure. Anything if fair criticism so long as it is done right. It seems to me that there are a lot of ways by which we can define Chicano literature, and one of the definitions comes out of the continuing dialectic between us, as Chicanos, and the mainstream Anglo American culture. That culture imposed itself on our land in the mid-19th century, after the war with Mexico. One view of Chicano literature, then, would be that it must always reflect this continuing problem. I have no argument with this view. I think it is crucial and important for our understanding of who we are as a community. I mean it is history, and it is there. We see everywhere around us the outcome of that historical process, right? So I see it and I understand it. But, another way to also understand ourselves is to look at our world view, that is, our soul. Looking at how we were formed and where we come from leads me to give as much importance or, perhaps, more importance to relationships such as the one we have with *la tierra*. I just cannot take these 400 years or more of my history or heritage and say that they no longer mean anything—they do. Even though I now live in a city, I'm an urban dweller, I still see this relationship that we have had historically as being of prime importance because out of that relationship come all the other relationships: the relationship with community, what we do together, how we were taught to live together, relationships of