

Anaya, Rudolfo - Essays by Anaya

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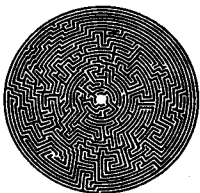
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Rudolfo Anaya on The New World Man



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THE NEW WORLD MAN

My wife and I first traveled to Spain in the fall of 1980. We took an overnight train from Paris to Barcelona, journeyed through Andalusia and then on to Madrid. We returned home with wonderful memories of the Alhambra, Toledo, Madrid, El Escorial, and many other places we had wanted to experience. At the famous El Prado museum I fell under the spell of the genius of Goya, and the images of his prophetic vision are with me today. In 1988 when we returned to Spain, my trip was in part a pilgrimage to meditate again in the presence of Goya's work and to visit and contemplate the genius of Gaudi's inspiring church, La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

That return was made possible by my invitation to Barcelona to discuss my work at the Third International Conference on Hispanic Cultures of the United States; after that conference I attended a small gathering of Spanish scholars, and professors from the University of New Mexico at La Fundación Xavier de Salas in Trujillo. Again I had the opportunity to discuss my work as a Hispanic writer from New Mexico.

Spain is preparing for the celebration of its quincentennial explorations in the Americas, and the conferences are the beginning of a series intended to rekindle the relationship of Spain with Hispanic America. We, the *Hispano Nuevo Mexicanos*, share in that history, and so my thoughts turned to those historic events and their implications in the life and history of the Hispanic population of our Southwest.

The great majority of the *Mexicanos* of the Southwest are *Idohispanos*, part of *La Raza* of the New World, the fruit of the Spanish father and the Indian mother. We have taken pride in our Hispanic heritage, that is, we know the history of the Spanish father, his language, and his character. We know that in this country it has been more seductive to identify with one's white, European ancestry. But the focus of that identification with that which is Spanish has, until recently, caused us to neglect our indigenous native

American roots, and thus we have not known and honored the heritage of our mother, the Indian mothers of Mexico and the Southwest.

In world mythology there are few archetypal searches for the mother, perhaps because the mother is always in evidence, she is always there; in early religions she was the goddess of the earth, the provider. We forget that it is the mother who cultivates and in many ways creates our nature, both in an individual and communal sense. For the *Mexicanos* of the Southwest the mother is Malinche, the Mexican woman who was the first Indian woman of Mexico to bear children fathered by a Spaniard. But the mother is more real than the symbolic Malinche; in our mothers is embodied the archetype of the indigenous Indian mother of the Americas, and it is her nature we must know. Why have we neglected her? In other words, why have we neglected that part of our history which was shaped by indigenous America?

I was born and raised in *Nuevo México*, heir to the land of my *Hispano* ancestors, son of these Spanish and Mexican colonists who settled the fertile Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. My ancestors settled in the Atrisco land grant, across the river from present-day Albuquerque. I trace my family back a few generations because the land grant has created a sense of communal belonging for the Anayas. As I think of the quincentennial of Columbus's crossing, I ask myself how I relate to that Hispanic legacy which left the peninsula in 1492 to implant itself in the New World. How do I relate to the peninsular consciousness of the people who crossed the Atlantic 500 years ago to deposit their seed on the earth of the New World?

Located at the heart of what is now the Southwest United States, the people of *Nuevo México* have retained the essence of what it means to be Hispanic, having preserved the Spanish language, the Catholic religion, and the folktales and folkways which came to us

from Spain. But our nature was also formed by intermarriage with the Pueblo Indians of the Rio Grande. Our Spanish heritage and character are evident; it is a legacy left by those who came from Spain to settle in *Nuevo México*.

Those ancestors imbued the history of *Nuevo México* with their particular world view. For more than four centuries those ancestors lived in the isolated frontier of northernmost New Spain. But they did not survive and multiply in a vacuum; they survived and evolved because they adopted many of the ways of the Pueblos. The Spanish character underwent change as it encountered the native Americans of the Southwest, and from that interaction and intermarriage a unique American person and perspective were born.

We need to describe the totality of that world view which was formed in what we now call the Southwest, understanding that we are heirs not only of our Spanish character but of our Native American nature as well. The Spanish character is the aggressive, conquest-oriented part of our identity; the Native American nature is the more harmonious, earth-oriented side. I believe we must give attention to the characteristics of both sides of our identity in order to be more spiritually and psychologically centered when relating to the world. To pay attention only to one side of our sensibility is to be less self-actualizing, therefore less knowledgeable of self. If we are to understand our potential, it is important that we know the indigenous side of our history, not just the European.

As I review my writings, I understand that it is the indigenous American perspective, or New World view, which is at the core of my values. I have paid attention to the nature of my mother, not only the symbolic Indian mother, but the real Indian mothers of the Americas. The blood that whispers the essence of the earth and people of the Americas is the nature of my mother; it reveals the symbols and mythology of the New World, and that comprises the substratum of my writings.

During the Columbus quincennial festivities, a discourse will take place between Spain and its former colonies in the Americas. I wish to add a definition of my New World view to that discourse, hoping

not only to share some of the findings of my personal literary quest but also to encourage my community of *raza* to pay more attention to our multicultural and multiethnic history. The journey is always toward illumination of the self, toward that which is called the authentic self. We must know more of the synthesis of our Spanish character and Indian nature, and in that way know ourselves better.

The Americas represent a wonderful experiment in the synthesis of divergent world views, and each one of us is a representative of that process. The illuminations of self that are revealed as we explore and understand our true natures can be one of the most rewarding experiences of our lives, for so much of the sensitive part of life is a search and understanding of the inner self. To define ourselves as we really are and not as others wish us to be allows us to become authentic, and that definition carries with it the potential of our humanism.

Our Hispanic ancestors in the mid-sixteenth century settled along the Rio Grand of *Nuevo México*, bringing to the land their language. They gave names to the land and its features. It is in the naming that one engages in the sacred, that is, by naming one creates a *sacred sense of time*, a historic sense of time. By engaging in naming, our ancestors imposed themselves on history and gave definition to history. The language used in that naming ceremony is our birthright.

I live in Albuquerque, a name that invokes some of the history of the Iberian peninsula. In Spain I spoke my *Nuevo Mexicano* Spanish, a dialect that was preserved by my ancestors and which evolved in the mountains and valleys of New Mexico. But language changes with the passage of time and the vicissitudes of survival, and so I returned to Spain more proficient in English than in Spanish. All my novels and stories are written in English. While my parents' generation still communicated only in Spanish, my generation converses almost completely in English, a function of our professional lives. Still we struggle to retain our Spanish language, not only because it relates us to that part of our heritage, but also because it connects us to our brethren in Mexico and Latin America.

I returned to Spain to share with Span-

iards the nature of my New World consciousness. At times I felt uncomfortable in believing I had to conform to the Spanish character, but the truth is that I now realize we who return to Spain no longer need to feel constrained to conform to the Spanish character. My generation of *Hispanos* liberated ourselves from that constraint by naming ourselves Chicanos. For us, using the word Chicano was our declaration of independence, the first step toward our true identity and the institution of a process by which we rediscovered our history.

By naming ourselves Chicanos we stamped an era with our communal identity, we reaffirmed our humanity by exploring and understanding the nature of our mothers, the indigenous American women. Those of us of Mexican heritage took the word Chicano from *Mexicano*, dropping the first syllable and keeping the *Xicano*. We are proud of that heritage even though we are not Mexican citizens, and although we are citizens of the United States we are not Anglo-Americans. The word Chicano defined the *space in time* as we struggled to define our contemporary history, and therefore Chicano came closer to embracing our Native American heritage.

Our first declaration of independence was from Anglo-America, that is, we insisted on the right to our *Indohispano* heritage. Now I believe the declaration has to go further. We have to insist on being the *señores of our own time*, to borrow a phrase from Miguel León Portilla. To be the *señores and señoras of our own time* is to continue to create our definition and sense of destiny in time; for me it means a bonding of the character of our Spanish heritage with our Indian American heritage.

Enough of the search after the father, let us turn now and know our mothers. And so this essay is a declaration of independence from a narrow view which has defined us as *Hispanos* with only a Spanish heritage. The definition of our identity must be a New World definition. Such a definition should encompass the multiple roots and histories of the Americas; it should encompass the nature of the mothers whose soul provides the unique aesthetic and humanistic sensibility that defines us.

Language is at the essence of a culture, and so we must remember that in *Nuevo*
(Cont. pg. 25)

(*New World Man Cont. from pg. 4*)

México, as in the rest of the New World, there existed pre-Columbian languages. The indigenous Indians had named their tribes, the rivers, mountains, and the flora and fauna. They were the *señores of their own time*. The New World did not live in silence, awaiting the sound of European languages; it had its languages and it had participated in the sacred ceremony of naming long before 1492. This is a fact which we *Hispanos* from the southwest United States must accept when we discuss our ethnicity, for not only was the Mexico of our indigenous ancestors peopled with Indians, the Rio Grande Valley, which became the home of our Hispanic ancestors, also was thriving with many great Indian pueblos.

Language follows the urge of the blood, it moves with the adventurer to take root and be nourished by the colonist who tills the new soil. Languages mix, as does the blood, and so the gene proof of this *Hispano* from *Nuevo México* is both Indian and peninsular. Knowing this allows me to honor my mothers as much as my fathers. My journey has been that of a writer, and in my first novel it was the *curandera* Ultima, the indigenous woman who came to speak to me and share her secrets. She reflects the nature of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the indigenous mother born of the synthesis of Spanish virgin and Indian goddess. It is through Ultima that I began to discover myself. In my writings I have sought the true nature of the New World man, that person who is authentic to the New World view. The truth is that I had only myself to encounter in the journey, and so I am the New World man I have sought. I am an indigenous man taking his essence and perspective from the earth and people of the New World, from the earth which is my mother.

I will be aware of this in 1992 as we celebrate the astounding history, the language, and the world view which the Iberian peninsula planted in the New World. 1992 will be a year of celebration, and we will review and learn from all the aspects of that history even as we take pride in the positive aspects of that century of exploration. But for me the question of celebration is much more than a return to Hispanic roots; it is a philosophical question which

speaks to the character of my nature.

One of the most interesting questions we ask ourselves as human beings is that of identity. Who am I? We seek to know our roots, to know ourselves. When we encounter the tap root of our history we feel authentic and able to identify self, family and community. Finding self should also mean finding humanity, declaring personal independence also means declaring that independence for all individuals.

How did you begin this journey of self-knowledge, people ask me. I listened to the *cuentos* of the old people, the stories of their history, and in retelling those stories and starting my own odyssey, I had to turn within. I had to know myself. Everyone does. The spiritual beliefs and mysticism of the Catholic Church and the love of the earth were elements of my childhood, so I turned to those sources in my stories. The folkways of my community became the web of the fictions I create, for the elements of drama exist within the stories of the folk. Even today, when I feel I have outgrown some of the the themes I explored as a young writer, I know my best writing still comes when I return to the essence of my culture.

But in all writing the depth of the universal element is that which allows us to communicate across national or ethnic boundaries, and so for me the most meaningful and revealing area to enter in search of the New World person was mythology. It is in myth that we find the truth in the heart, the truth of "our place in time." It is possible for anyone to enter and explore his or her memory, and to discover there the symbols which speak to the personal and collective history. It is in this search that I found the legend of the Golden Carp and the other mythological symbols which permeate *Bless Me Ultima* and my later work. I found universal archetypal symbols, but these symbols were colored with a native American hue. The earth, the elements, the sacred directions, the tree, the owl of the old *curandera* Ultima, the golden carp, the shaman as mentor or guide — all of these elements spoke to me of my New World nature. And it was Ultima, my Native American mother, who led the way and taught me to see.

My search continued. In *Heart of Aztlán*

I worked with the myth of Aztlán, a legend which describes the place of origin of the Aztecs. I attempted to make that legend meaningful in a contemporary context by exploring its possibilities as a Chicano homeland. In *Tortuga* I continued the search into the earth and totem animals, the search into the healing process of water and earth as well as the art of writing itself. The writer may well be the new shaman for the old, displaced tribes of the Americas. In the novel *Tortuga* I returned to the important revelations available to us in the nature of the mother, whether the mother was viewed as earth goddess or the feminine presence of the young girl who loves *Tortuga*.

My search has allowed me to understand that we often praise our Hispanic identity and its roots in the same breath as we shun the indigenous roots which have also nurtured our history. If I declare my independence of consciousness from the Iberian peninsula, it is because I have found that the symbolic content which best describes my nature comes from the people and earth of the Americas. So I declare, as an important step in the process of knowing myself, my independence. I see myself as a New World man, and I feel that definition is liberating and full of potential.

During this time of the Columbus quincentennial, it is important to look at the evolution of the consciousness of the Americas and to discern the unique world views which that evolution created. It is important for us and for Spain to look at the Americas and find, not an image of the Spanish character, but an image of our unique New World nature.

When I first traveled in Spain in 1980 I went into Andalucia. There in those wide expanses and mountains which reminded me of New Mexico, I felt at home. But a person needs more than the landscape to feel connected; we need the deeper connection to the communal body, we need to feel connected to our community.

The broad, political history of the independence of the Spanish colonies in the Americas is well known; now we must turn to an exploration of our personal and communal identity. That is what Chicano writers and artists have been doing since the cultural movement of the 1960s. The defi-

inition of Chicano culture must come from a multicultural perspective. Many streams of history define us and will continue to define us, for we are the synthesis which is the Americas.

Christ and Quetzalcóatl are not opposing spiritual figures; they fulfill the humanistic yearning toward harmonious resolution. Harmony within, harmony with neighbors, harmony with the cosmos. The Virgin of Spanish Catholicism and the Aztec Tonantzin culminate in the powerful and all-loving *Virgen de Guadalupe*. And *los santos* of the Catholic Church and those more personal saints of my mother's altar merge with and share the sacred space of the *Kachinas* of the Indian pueblos.

This metaphor, *Los santos are the kachinas*, has become a guiding metaphor of synthesis for me. The Old World and the New World have become one in me. Perhaps it is this syncretic sensibility of harmony which is the ideal of New World character. The New World cultures accepted the spiritual manifestations of Catholicism; Christ and the saints entered the religious cosmology of Indian America. A new age of cultural and spiritual blending came to unite humanity's course in the Americas. It was an age born in suffering, but the very act of birth created the children who were heirs to a new world view.

The New World view is syncretic and encompassing. It is one of the most humanistic views in the world, and yet it is a view not well-known in the world. The pressure of political realities and negative views of the mestizo populations of the Americas have constrained the flowering of our nature. Still, that view of self-knowledge and harmony is carried in the heart of the New World person.

What is important to me as a writer is to find the words by which to describe myself and my relationship to others. I now have the insight that allows me to speak of my history, and to posit myself at the center of that history. There I stand poised at the center of power, the knowing of myself, the heart and soul of the New World man alive in me.

This is a time of reflection for those of us who are the mestizos of the New World,

and I believe the reflections in my writings and my attention to the myths and legends of Mesoamerica and the Rio Grande help expand the definition of our *Indohispano* heritage.

My trip to Spain was beneficial for me. I brought back memories of the Alhambra where I felt my soul stir to Moorish rhythm, and in the paintings of Goya's dark period I saw his apocryphal vision of an era ending. At La Sagrada Familia of Gaudi I bowed to genius, in the Valle de los Caidos I reflected on the Civil War...and on the wide expanses of Andalucía I thought of home. In all these places my memory stirred, and still I yearned for my home in *Nuevo México*, the mountains I know, the sacred places of my way of life. In that yearning the message whispered its secret, it was time for me to state my declaration of independence, time to center myself in the consciousness of the New World.

I was the New World man I had sought, with one foot in the glorious *mestisaje* of *México* and the other in the earth of the *Indohispanos* of *Nuevo México*; my dreams are woven of New World earth and history. I could walk anywhere in the world and feel attached, but it was *Nuevo México* that centered me, it was the indigenous soul of the Americas that held my secret.

It is important to know that the search for identity is not an esoteric search and not a divisive process. It is a way to reaffirm our humanity. We are all on this search, we all advocate justice, basic human rights, and the right of all to declare their independence of consciousness. We hope the spirit generated in Spain during the 1992 celebration addresses and encourages these basic rights.

History and the collective memory are vast. One delves into these powerful forces and finds that one is part of every other human being. I am extremely proud of my New World heritage, but I know the tree of mankind is one, and I share my roots with every other person. It seems appropriate to end on this archetype of the tree. The tree, or the tree of life, is also a dominant symbol of the Americas, and its syncretic image combines the tree of Quetzalcóatl and the cross of Christ. My ancestors nourished the

tree of life; now it is up to me to care for all it symbolizes.

Novelist **Rudolpho Anaya** lives in New Mexico. This essay is adapted from an address delivered at the Third International Conference on Hispanic Cultures of the United States, Barcelona, Spain, 1988.

(Letters Cont. from pg. 24)

with pumpkin pie and pine forest with Harlem and Senegal and B school with Malcolm X and collective work and responsibility and kente cloth with pinstripes. But DuBois wrote about double consciousness over sixty years ago. So it's no big deal.

NBA huh. It's been going on generation after generation. These (the real cultural workers) are no overnight sensations, even if they are young.

So where's the beef, dead-flesh eater Ellis? What is the aesthetic, what's the code, the coda, the logic, the logos? What's it all about?

So, dilettante, write half-assed platitudes. Be the voice for the pseudo b-boys and fake homegirls, hungry for their unearned fifteen minutes. Every decade somebody jumps out there with some revisionist bullshit, and I guess this time it's you.

The rest of us will just keep on keeping on, keep on creating.

Regina Howe
Corning, New York

O So Dear Reader:

Your tiff is with Trey, not with me. The opinions expressed in by our contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the Before Columbus Foundation, the Before Columbus Review, or its editor. This review is a forum where diverse opinions can be expressed and debated; that's why your letter is being published. And what tunes did my parents dance to? Anything they could do the Charleston to; so you know I'm surely old enough to be yo' mama. Before Joan Armatrading, there was Odetta. Let's not forget her. Keep reading, keep writing, keep creating, and keep on keeping on.

—Ed.