# AN ANALYSIS OF RODOLFO ANAYA'S NOVELS AS EPICS

## A Thesis

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by

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# Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for all the love and support they have given me during the time I have worked on this thesis.

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#### CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Since time known to man, people have used their imaginations to create the dynamic personalities known today as heroes. Emerging from an energetic and vibrant culture during times of discord, the hero rises to the challenges of his times and represents the traits most valued in his culture, such as courage, nobility, and fortitude. What makes a hero so fascinating is that he has become master of his own destiny, defining his own identity and challenging his people to redefine themselves and to see the world in a new vision.

There is a question whether contemporary society has a place for heroes, admirable as they may be. Anti-heroes such as Heller's Yossarian of Catch-22, Camus' Merssault of The Stranger, and Nietzsche's Zarathustra, are examples of societies' rejection of the traditional hero. But there are contemporary writers who continue to search for the essence of the hero, understanding that the hero must reflect today's world as well as maintain his historical character. Among contemporary writers who have renewed the hero motif is Rodolfo Anaya.

Rodolfo Anaya has published three novels: Bless Me,

<u>Ultima</u> (1972), <u>Heart of Aztlán</u> (1976), and <u>Tortuga</u> (1979). 
He has also published a novella, <u>The Legend of La Llorona</u> (1984), and a poem entitled the <u>Adventures of Juan</u> Chicaspatas (1985).

Anaya through his novels interprets the hero and his quest to the contemporary reader. The novels examine how the Anglo culture is hastening the death of New Mexico's rural Mexican culture through assimilation and technology. Anaya's novels are commentaries on the effect of our contemporary urban society on the Chicano and other ethnic groups. In Tortuga, the hero witnesses the injuries suffered by anyone who fails to conform to the values of the larger society. In Heart of Aztlan, the powers within society are portrayed as amoral and materialistic. Like a Franz Kafka character, Clemente Chávez must deal with faceless enemies, never directly confronting his adversaries, but struggling against their bureaucratic representatives: Fr. Cayo and Mannie. Unlike the Kafka character, Joseph K. Chavez searches and discovers the answers to overcome his anonymous enemies. As in epics of the past, Anaya's heroes rise above the discord within their society.

Antonio, Chávez, and Tortuga are confronted with two interrelated conflicts: identity and technology's dominance

over society. One of the impacts of technology is that it causes people to question their identities, which are based upon past traditions. Antonio's search for identity helps him to understand the importance of his history as a critical link which enables him to survive in a changing world. He hears his family speak about the impact the railroad has on the people of New Mexico. The introduction of the railroad foreshadows the coming of a technological world that has its origins with the industrial age. Michel Serres writes about this new age in his essay, "Turner Translates Carnot." The before and aftermath of the industrial age is viewed from two paintings depicting two distinct worlds. Gerrard's painting, Recapitulation, painted in 1784, shows the old world with energy sources based on nature and primitive technology. Turner's The Burning of the House of Parliament, completed in 1835, represents the new world in which "the furnace appears as the new model of the world," and man has achieved complete control over his energy sources. The furnace is used to symbolize creation beginning anew. Serres writes: "The furnace is the engine for going back to chaos. The foundry is where creation starts over at zero." It is the first sign of an industrialized world that eventually makes its presence known in New Mexico.

In Bless Me, Ultima, the world at war makes its impact on New Mexico and by the end of Heart of Aztlán many New Mexicans, in less than a generation, have made an uneven transition from rural to urban life. The industrial society places pressure on all individuals to conform, particularly the New Mexican people. Comprehending that they cannot return to their former lives, the New Mexicans nevertheless refuse to accept in their culture contemporary values that prefer objects to life. The world of the present is so hostile toward those who fail to assimilate that the New Mexicans become nostalgic about the past. Heart of Aztlán, the people recall earlier days in New Mexico when they worked together like a family. Manuel mentions that "the communal life of the pueblo or the ranchito supported each person. And the life of the village was reflected in the spirit of la familia" (p. 103). But that spirit no longer exists in the oppressive urban world encountered by Chavez. In Barelas, the railroad owners impose unjust working conditions upon the workers and Chavez concludes that the owners and their allies are masters of a technology that is destroying his community.

Martin Heidegger writes in an essay entitled "Questions Concerning Technology" that "technology" means

". . . a way of revealing." As individuals develop new tools, these instruments shape the future. But technology has a greater meaning than developing new tools. Technology means a revealing truth. The revelations that Heidegger sees are that society places too much emphasis on machinery, failing to see that the arts, too, reveal the future and show truth.

Modern technology devalues the importance of God, nature and sacred mysteries. 4 This motif is explored in detail in Anaya's novels, Heart of Aztlan and Tortuga. Clemente Chavez and Tortuga are confronted by a society that places greater value on material wealth and power than the individual. Chavez and Tortuga question what alternatives can be created so that they cannot only survive, but live in hope. By challenging the world, the main characters become heroes to their communities and rebels to society at large. They become mythopoetic heroes, that is, heroes who combine the best of mythic and literary qualities. Slochower defines this particular hero as one who "chooses his tradition, rejects the stultified in favor of the creative roots in the past. . . . By aligning himself with the ligh levels of the past, man gains the dignity of belonging without becoming depersonalized."5 Anaya's heroes fight people's indifference and bitterness

searching the past to see what they can discover about their ancestors' lives and what their ancient culture has to offer to the present generation. The heroes find the origins of traditions and maintain those historic truths. Society must preserve these truths but continue advancing itself into the future.

Heidegger's book <u>Being and Time</u> discusses the same fundamental idea. He sees that traditions blind people to their past. To practice tradition without understanding the history behind it is to live superficially. The mythopoetic hero uses judgment to see beyond appearances to know truth. Antonio discovers truth through his father and Ultima. He sees that one can wed the past with the future. Gabriel Márez explains to Antonio, "It seems I am so much part of the past—I said. Ay, every generation, every man is part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new—" (<u>Heart of Aztlán</u>, p. 236).

The heroes' search becomes more than a personal goal. As Chávez's and Tortuga's search grows in importance their community identifies with them because they offer hope. For example, when Tortuga regains his ability to walk, patients call him a "free man." They express their unity with Tortuga by listening to his song about their

experiences in the desert hospital and having a celebration in his honor. The patients perceive, as Lukács explains, that their destiny lies with its hero. 7 The community learns to identify with these dynamic personalities because they represent the future. Anaya's heroes are not in search of personal glory nor are they like the legendary aristocratic heroes. Antonio, but in particular Clemente and Tortuga, can be called democratic heroes because they pass on to their people what they have learned. Anaya's heroes rise above the masses because they dare to question and challenge authority, while the rest remain caught in the quagmire of a changing world. Antonio, for example, is criticized by his mother for asking so many questions. Chávez is hunted by the authorities because he calls for justice in Barelas. When the hero returns home he discovers that his "heroic quest is not eliminated, but assimilated" by the community. 8 As Chavez returns home, he explains to his community his hopes for the future.

He wanted to tell them that the people he had met in his journey were the same everywhere, that they cried and laughed the same, that they share in the same life stream which was their destiny to carry to a completion. But the roar of the people drowned out his words. They understood what he was saying. . . . (p. 208)

Anaya's protagonists are epic heroes because they follow a particular structural pattern that has its

beginnings with the original hero, Gilgamesh. Like the ancient hero, Anaya's protagonists overcome their personal or historic limitations to bring back to their society a gift that will free the people from their intransigiency and allow them to be renewed. Therefore their actions are perceived as dramatic.

This heroic drama is set in three acts. Act One is paradise lost. It is a time when the people find themselves yearning for a past they have idealized in order to escape current miseries. Tortuga, for example, recalls his early childhood in order to escape his present physical and emotional pains. In this oppressive world creative human initiative and potential are devalued in favor of conformity. The people are disillusioned and exist from day to day. This state continues until someone questions modern society's values and rejects the idea that one must accept one's current life, such as it is.

The Second Act is the quest. The searcher is ostracized because by his questioning, he challenges the current power structure. He goes outside traditional institutions to find answers about his identity and discovers his historical roots. Antonio, for example, finds his true education not in the classroom, but with his father and Ultima. Through the assistance of his two aides he learns

about his family history and with it is able to create a new identity.

The heroes' journeys are fraught with trials and tribulations, Antonio, Chávez and Tortuga metaphorically traveling to lands of awe and wonder and encountering strange and unusual individuals. The heroes' "travels" provide them with the opportunity to grow and mature.

Maturity is something they can never fully achieve in their own land. As they continue with their journeys, their aides provide the searchers with guidance and insights that help them continue their quest. But there comes a time when a hero must make the critical decision to continue on the final leg of his journey alone. It is a decision that Tortuga makes when he enters alone into the polio wards.

In the third and final act, the hero ends his journey and returns home with the knowledge necessary to renew his community. He makes a decision to deny his former self and be reborn with a new identity and vision of the future. This action is performed in a symbolic act: the hero traveling to the underworld, where he discovers his future. It is a courageous act because the searcher is never certain that he will be able to return to the world of the living. This action, among others, helps define Anaya's main characters as heroes. Antonio's journey into the

underworld occurs through a nightmare, Chávez's in a surrealistic journey into the center of a mountain. By renewing his community, the mythopoetic hero frees his community to continue on to fulfill its destiny. Learning from their history, the heroes renew their commitment to the future and help their communities to redefine themselves in a world of conflict.

#### Notes

- 1 Rodolfo Anaya, <u>Bless Me</u>, <u>Ultima</u> (Berkeley: Quinto Sol Publications, 1972); <u>Heart of Aztlán</u> (Berkeley: Editorial Justa Publications, 1976); <u>Tortuga</u> (Berkeley: Editorial Justa Publications, 1979). All references to these novels are based upon these editions.
- Michel Serres, "Turner Translates Carnot," in Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy, ed. Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 61.
- Martin Heidegger, Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, trans. David Farell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 294-96.
  - 4 Heidegger, Basic Writings, p. 307.
- 5 Harry Slochower, <u>Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics</u> (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1970), p. 15.
- Martin Heidegger, <u>Being and Time</u>, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 7th ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), pp. 41-45, 447-49.
- <sup>7</sup> Georg Lukács, <u>The Theory of the Novel</u>, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 66-69.
  - 8 Slochower, p. 25.
- Shirley Park Lowry, <u>Familiar Mysteries</u> (Oxford, England: Oxford Press, 1982), p. 81.

## CHAPTER 2

## Act I: Paradise Lost

The ancestors of Antonio Márez Luna, Clemente Chávez, and Tortuga once shared a time they considered paradise. Their ancestors described it as a time when people lived in harmony, when the native people of New Mexico had direct communication with God. By knowing their creator, they received truth, beauty, and benevolence and were able to transmit them to their present and future generations. In short, their ancestors knew absolute reality. This "paradise" was based in part on a common religion and culture, but also on their common goal of building a new community.

Antonio's ancestors came to the New World in hopes of creating a better life. As a new community, they left their problems behind them, deemphasizing differences and stressing their common goals. Samuel, a character from Bless Me, Ultima, mentions that once life was peaceful and the gods blessed their people with a fertile homeland: "A long time ago, when the earth was young and only wandering tribes touched the virgin grasslands and drank from the pure streams, a strange people came to this land. . . .

This fertile valley was to be their home" (p. 73).

In <u>Heart of Aztlán</u>, Old Manuel speaks of a time when there existed a unified community. He comments to Clemente Chavez and others that this is an ideal they should strive for in the present. While Bless Me, Ultima and Heart of Aztlán have several references to an Arcadian past, Anaya's third novel, Tortuga, presents only brief memories about a distant Garden of Eden. The main character, Tortuga, after whom the book is named, has only a few fragmented memories about his childhood. Tortuga's paradise was a world filled with nature's beauty. "The rainbows of my childhood, beautifully sculptured arches reaching north and south, shafts of light so pure that their harmony seemed to wed the sky and the earth" (p. 2). Tortuga's memories lean heavily toward a darker vision of the world. He recounts images of desert wastelands, overcast skies, patients awaiting death, no longer believing that they will be cured.

Tortuga witnesses and experiences an indifferent world, a world nearly always a place of fear and hopelessness and, therefore, difficult to improve. Contemporary events have driven the characters away from God. The young patients are divided, bitter, and spiteful toward one another. They would like to leave the hospital, but since

they have no way to achieve that goal, they live in despair. Having lost communication with their creator, they become confused and begin to question their identity.

Anaya's characters once saw themselves like the ancient Hebrews: one people with one God, their unity based upon a common history and a belief in one supreme being. But now the New Mexicans' lands have lost their harmony. In a sense, they have regressed to pre-Christian times because there now exist many "gods." These gods may be pagan, as in the case of the Golden Carp, or expressions of technology, such as the atomic bomb, the railroads, and medical machinery.

In each novel there are characters to reestablish that lost link with God so that they can recreate their ancestors' Arcadian community. For some the need to reestablish a link with God can take extreme actions. Danny, a patient living in the same hospital as Tortuga, has a strange and fruitless relationship with God. He believes that he, like prophets of old, has direct communication with God. But Danny's God is one of vengeance, and in the end he fails to find peace. Tortuga comes to understand that one cannot retreat to the past because to do so one must become regimented and inflexible, unable to change to meet future needs. Tortuga must sacrifice his old identity and accept

responsibility if he wishes to renew his world.

The fear of losing their link with God is causing tensions within the Márez and Luna families. Their harmony is challenged by a culture distinct from their rural New Mexican life style. The coming of the Anglo culture to New Mexico causes lasting changes within the two families. Gabriel Márez remembers the origins of the culture clash, recalling that when the Anglos came to New Mexico they also brought the railroad. Eventually the Anglos took control of New Mexico, causing the corridos to become sad and conflicts to occur; and one day: "The people were uprooted. They looked around one day and found themselves closed in. The freedom of land and sky were gone" (p. 119).

Although between the two cultures there is never direct confrontation between the Anglos and New Mexicans. The Anglos are portrayed through the imagery of industrialization, such as the railroad and barbed wire. Anglo power extends over New Mexican lives, reaching its zenith when Antonio Márez's three brothers, along with a family friend, Lupito are taken to war. Anglo domination through the use of technology leaves its mark on everyone in New Mexico, particularly on Lupito. It is through the young soldier that Antonio begins to realize that the placid world of his ancestors has now turned into a chaotic one.

Lupito is the first known victim of the Anglos' domination of New Mexico. The Anglos demand that he fight their battles for them. When he returns to Guadalupe from the South Pacific, he is profoundly changed for the worse. The character Lupito reminds one of Virginia Woolf's character Septimus from her novel Mrs. Dalloway in that his experiences with the outside world have left him discoriented and alienated from his family and friends. Reality and imagination, once separate, are now fused. Like Septimus, he is visited by spectres of war.

Antonio witnesses Lupito's death on the bridge. For Antonio it marks the violence which, once exclusively part of the outside world, has now become part of himself. Lupito's death is one of several violent deaths that occur within a two-year period. The violence, among other factors, leads Antonio to question the world about him.

Hostilities between the two cultures divide the community. Many people feel helpless in the face of events occurring around them and withdraw from their social responsibility, becoming indifferent toward others. The community does not want to confront its problems and it ostracizes those individuals who expose them. Lupito is one such example. His conflict symbolizes the community's plight. Outwardly, the people barely tolerate each other.

Inwardly they are in turmoil, unable to decide where their future lies. While the community keeps its agitation hidden, Lupito, unable to suppress the inner turmoil that torments his soul, kills Clemente Chávez's brother and calls attention to his misery. In Old Testament justice, Lupito is in turn killed. Except for Narciso, no one else questions why the soldier was killed or what made him relive the war. "'You all know Lupito. You know that the war made him sick--' But the men would not listen to Narciso" (p. 18). They do not listen because they know what caused Lupito's terminal "illness." Lupito's death keeps the people from confronting and resolving their overburdening problems. Anglo society had turned him into a soldier whose main function was to kill. When he returned home to New Mexico, he was unable to return to his former self. His inner being was in chaos caused by the war. Narciso is another example. While before the war he was a respected community member, now he is on the fringe of the community, jobless and a drunk. In Guadalupe he is ostracized. No one cares about his future. Like the dead soldier, the community would like to ignore its problems and relive the past. Gabriel Márez dwells on his youth and dreams about moving to California. María Márez Luna talks about her ancestor who founded Guadalupe.

Nor is Antonio Márez's community concerned with the problems of others. No one cares for Florence's family when his mother dies. Without income or help from the community, Florence's sisters are forced into prostitution. When these events lead Florence to question God's existence, he is met with hostility from most of his friends. The community, also aware of their conflicts among the Luna, Márez and Trementina families, reacts to those problems with indifference. This is aptly mirrored in the people's attitude toward Narciso's death. When the Marez's friend is killed, the citizenry is too involved with its own problems to seriously consider the evidence before The jury's attitude about Narciso's death is explained thus: "The coroner's jury that gathered under the juniper tree found the cause of death to be accidental or self-inflicted, they hurried home. Because Narciso was the town drunk, nobody cared much" (p. 169).

The indifference of the people stems from the conflict between rural Mexican and urban societies. The rural New Mexicans do not understand Anglo cultures and feel helpless to solve the problems it has created from them. The New Mexican community's alienation and helplessness are reinforced with the explosion of the first atomic bomb. It reemphasizes their problem. Who are they? The New

Mexicans are now part of a culture that can claim to be god-like because the Anglos have captured the sun's power in the form of the atomic bomb. The community questions the Anglo culture's wisdom to play God, but they are impotent to do more than talk among themselves, "'The atomic bomb,' they whispered, 'a ball of white heat beyond the imagination, beyond hell--'...'Man was not made to know so much,'...'they compete with God, they disturb the seasons, they seek to know more than God himself. In the end, that knowledge they seek will destroy us all---'" (p. 183).

Disoriented by the new atomic force, people of the community fear their future under an urban society that can claim to have God-like powers. Native New Mexicans, seeing the future as opaque and uncertain, begin to view the past as Arcadian in contrast to their present situation. Community members lose their perspective on personal relations and societal needs because, caught up reliving the past, they have no time to live the present. The atomic bomb marks a new age that is noted more for destruction and death than for life and harmony. Eric Fromm mentions that modern Western man fails to place the highest values on his fellow human and Nature. He is unable to use his full creative powers. This has been described by Fromm as

"malaise, ennui mal du siecle, the deading of life, the automatization of man, his alienation from himself, from his fellowman and from nature." 2

Gabriel Márez feels that alienation while living in Guadalupe. Antonio mentions that "he was never close to the men of the town" (p. 3) and that he "did not like the town or its way" (p. 21). With the Anglo domination of New Mexico, the effect of the war on families and urbanization, Gabriel and María Márez decide to retreat from Guadalupe to a home built on the edge of the llano. These changes prompt Gabriel Márez to constantly recall the old days on the llano when he was a vaquero and to talk about moving to California.

All these events affect Antonio. His mother frequently recalls that her ancestors were the first colonizers of the valley of El Puerto. His parents want to decide Antonio's future for him on the basis of their nostalgic views. His father wants him to be a vaquero and his mother wishes him to be a priest. Antonio is confused. Where does his future lie? It is at this point that Ultima, a curandera, comes to the Márez's home to become Antonio's personal guide and teacher. It is through Ultima that Antonio comes to understand his past. And once this is accomplished, Antonio is ready to face the future.

Bless Me, Ultima concludes with a mixture of sadness and hope. The sadness comes from Ultima's death and from seeing a rural Mexican culture come to an end. The hope comes with Antonio. The boy comes to realize that his identity need not be that of a prisoner of the past. Antonio can take from the past and synthesize it with the present so that he can meet the future with hope.

Although Antonio Márez and Clemente Chávez both deal with similar questions of identity, there are differences. Clemente Chávez lives in an urban setting and he is a family leader. Antonio is a child, but a future leader, who lives in a primarily rural setting. Both characters struggle with an identity crisis, but Clemente Chávez also deals with a larger question that is, whether he can lead the Barelas community against its oppressors.

There are other bases of comparisons between <u>Bless Me</u>, <u>Ultima</u> and <u>Heart of Aztlán</u> besides the question of identity. Both novels deal with war. New Mexicans have been forced to leave their homes to go to war, in some cases never to return. Most who do return hope for a better future in the city. But they do not find it. The railroads, first mentioned in Anaya's earlier novel, are now a powerful economic and political force, dominating the workers' lives and fragmenting the citizenry. Some community leaders have

allied themselves with the railroad and city officials. Many workers accept their plight, others do not. Most people mistrust their official leaders.

The people of Barelas, like Antonio's parents, retreat nostalgically into the past, remembering it as being much happier than the current abysmal reality. Clemente Chávez and his wife, Adelita, look upon the past with fondness. Other characters express the same attitude. Arriving in Barelas, the Chávez's neighbors refer to a way of life that once existed: "In the old days it used to be las colonias, the ranchitos, the pueblos, and whenever we traveled from one to the other we were always welcomed. It was the way of the people. This is the way it should be . . ." (p. 62). Adelita and Clemente Chávez remember the picnics and dances of their youth.

But the people of Barelas forget that their old world fell short of that Arcadian world. Somehow sadder moments of life are glossed over. Before Clemente Chávez married, he nearly was killed because he failed to obtain permission from Adelita's father to speak or dance with his future wife. At that same dance, a man was killed because he failed to apologize over a spilt drink. Clemente Chávez describes that latter action as "a small thing, a thing of honor" (p. 35). As pressure is placed upon the families,

the Arcadian past becomes increasingly distant. Crispín, a blind guitar player, sings corridos recalling the leaders who helped take their forefathers to victories over their oppressors. But the corridos and the discussion just add to the frustrations that the people feel about their future.

Their crisis revolves around the railroad, city and Church. As institutions, they have a stultifying effect on the people they are supposed to serve. The people seek justice and they are given injustice. The workers look to the Church for help and leadership and are rejected because it has allied itself with the rich rather than the poor. The railroad crushes all opposition at the first opportunity. Aware of these things, Clemente Chavez's hopes for a better life for his family are dimmed. He sees, for example, the reaction of the railroad owners to those who question their authority over the workers: "A wildcat strike had been called to protest conditions at the shops and within the union itself. In retaliation the railroad fired the men and the company union rubber-stamped the act" (p. 33).

With no income, the Barelas families suffer as they look for other means of support. Those who do not strike suffer as well because the railroad does not provide an

adequate income. In Clemente Chávez's family, this means that the older children must work. Since they now help provide the family's basic necessities, the older children challenge the parents' authority. The younger children face other problems. One decides to leave school and another faces hostilities from gang members. Clemente Chávez and Adelita feel powerless to help their children. Finally, Clemente Chávez expresses his frustrations.

"'Your supper is ready,' Adelita said softly. Clemente looked at it and scowled, then pushed it away. 'And where is my family?' He cried out. 'Is the man of the house to eat alone! Like a dog! I want my family around me when I eat!'" (p. 73).

Clemente Chávez blames the city for his problems. His frustration in attempting to keep his divided family together creates in him a sense of hopelessness about the family's future. He is perceptive enough to know that any dividing family has little or no future. He realizes too that in this "paradise lost," the railroad stands as a symbol of the foreign culture that has imposed its will upon the native New Mexicans. The workers' union broken by the railroad, the company installs puppet leaders to create the illusion that the workers have leaders to defend their rights, thus leaving the workers powerless, with no

true leader to unify them into an effective force.

The community's problems are not illusions. conflict that begins between the workers and the railroad extends into the barrio itself as faceless powers get a strangle hold on the city. As the young people are assimilated into Anglo culture, an environment of urban blight, gangs, violence and worker unrest is created. Harmony is nonexistent. The city now produces people who are selfcentered, individuals who may at one time have been concerned with their fellow humans but who now think only of themselves. Lalo, a railroad worker, loses his job because of his union organizing. At first, he wants to create unity of all elements within the community. But his frustration leads him from bitterness to hatred toward the railroad, and he then restricts himself to the interests of the workers, concluding that violence is the only means by which to solve their problems.

The workers' plight is not limited to their poor working conditions and ineffective union. Mannie, a businessman and politician known as "El Super," was once a potential community leader. Corrupted by greed, he fails to voice the people's needs and speak out against injustice.

Instead, "El Super" shows contempt toward his people.

Jason, Clemente Chávez's son, sees injustice in Mannie's

action. His father aptly explains that Mannie's attitude and actions are the price one pays when one adopts the urban Anglo viewpoint. Materialism and injustice have also been chosen by another leader, Fr. Cayo, the parish priest. Clemente Chávez sees the priest as one who fails to identify with his history. Other priests, such as Hidalgo, have "dared to cry out against injustice" (p. 135), thus initiating the liberation of the Mexican people. But Fr. Cayo, like Mannie, chooses materialism and contempt over altruism and respect for the people. His name "Cayo" in Spanish can have two meanings. Spelled "cayo," it means "he fell." Pronounced as "se calló," it means "he was silent." Both terms are appropriate. The priest is a fallen leader, silent to the cries of injustice against his parishioners. As a priest, he is supposed to serve as an intermediary between God and his people. But the Barelas priest serves only himself. He has fallen from leadership of God's flock to service of the rich and powerful. priest fears man more than God.

The discussion of identity and leadership progresses; it will be shown in greater detail how these three individuals have failed to serve their people. Each fallen leader has given in to the temptations of materialism and power. Each failed to empathize with the community's

conflicts with the city. Mannie, Fr. Cayo and Lalo became leaders without a following.

Without leadership, Barelas' people find themselves in a chaotic state. The community attempts to maintain some sense of harmony by spending Sunday afternoons in the park during the summer. It is the only time in which the different barrios come together. When Monday comes, the nostalgic memories will give way to the bleak present. Those few pleasant moments are too little to balance the turmoil the community faces each day. Their prayers for a leader go unanswered. Chávez, Manuel and other community people sense that God has left Barelas, and they come to question whether God even cares any more. Manuel expresses this allegorically: "Jesús, who lived here before you, he kept a good garden. Since he left I have tried to water it as often as I could, but it needs a lot of work, the weeds are taking it over--" (p. 18). This may be taken to mean that Christ once looked over and protected the garden, that is Barelas, but abandoning His garden He left it open to evil forces, in the form of institutions, to enslave the people of Barelas. In Bless Me, Ultima, the narrator suggests that during society's transitional state, the Christian God is no longer omnipotent nor omniscient as once believed. The priest, God's representative, is

powerless against the evil of the Trementina sisters.

Antonio's questions on identity and society's troubles lead him to encounter others, such as Florence, who question not only the current problems, but whether God exists. Others, such as Cico, have rejected the Christian God and in His place have found other "gods." Cico sees the Christian God as being jealous. Florence questions a God who does not care for his creations.

In <u>Heart of Aztlán</u>, Clemente Chávez's God abandons
Barelas. The railroad owners and their allies become like
new pagan gods that have replaced the Christian one.
Throughout the novel the railroad is associated with snakes
symbolizing evil.

A distant rumbling filled the dark and erupted in thunder and flashes of fire. Even at night the trains would not rest, they thrashed about like snakes in a pit and demanded service. Humble men, shadows of the night, moved to do their bidding. (p. 18)

They are suffering a crisis similar to pre-Christian times when the gods demanded total worship and attention, and the worshippers receive little in return. The community must fight alone against the faceless persons who manipulate the technology enslaving the community. Like the old gods they take their strength from fear, hate and death. Barelas needs a leader, a savior.

By the end of Tortuga, Salomón and Tortuga no longer

believe in God. Salomón tells Tortuga that

If we could say we're being punished then it would follow that God is punishing us, and we would be worse off than we were before . . . we would go on fabricating lie upon lie. . . . It's very difficult to accept the fact that our existence has no meaning to the absent god. The only meaning it has is the meaning we give it. (p. 159)

Since God no longer exists, humanity must take responsibility for its actions, not rely on God for help. The modern community, with the help of an empathetic human hero-savior, must re-identify with its history. Although evil continues to exist, it is created by man and therefore can be overcome by man who believes in love and gives of himself.

Clemente Chávez, like Tortuga, becomes a leader through a process of maturation. From the beginning, he understands the needs and concerns of Barelas' people, but his family and work problems consume his energies and prevent Chávez from taking an active role in overcoming the railroad's social and economic power. Chávez's family is going through different stages of assimilation. The pressure of working for the railroad worsens his problems. The basic components of his identity are all threatened. He even comes to question the validity of his traditions. Adelita, who throughout the novel provides her husband with support and encouragement, attempts to show that

change is an inherent part of life. She explains, much like Heidegger writes in <u>Being and Time</u>, that one must be aware of the roots of one's traditions. Many times one can be caught up in following traditions that keep the historical truth from revealing itself. If one can maintain a link with the past, then one can create a unity that cannot be altered by others. Ultima expresses this same viewpoint that one must know one's origin. Antonio understands this concept and creates an identity that unites him with the past and future.

Clemente Chávez comes to the realization that he, too, is on the road to redefining himself as the people's leader. He, then, is able to share with his people the concept that one can transform one's cultural past to meet the needs of the future. With the community behind Clemente Chávez, the people will fill the void left by God. A united people will be victorious over the railroad owners and their allies.

The questions of identity differ between Antonio and Clemente Chávez. Antonio's search deals with a personal understanding of who he is in relationship to his ancestoral past and his future. The search Clemente Chávez is involved in is more inclusive than Antonio's. He wishes not only to redefine himself as a leader, but also to show

others there is a need to be one with their past.

As Clemente Chávez begins his search, another young man is making a journey by ambulance into a desert wasteland, in the opening scene in Anaya's third novel, Tortuga. His personal identity is apparently lost; he will be known only by the nickname, "Tortuga." During his journey Tortuga recalls his early childhood, remembering his family, home, and his childhood. As the ambulance drives through the desert to the hospital, the young man describes the surroundings as desolate and a dismal description that reflects the young man's inner feelings of bitterness and despair as he thinks to himself about the desert: "alkaline and white. Only the most tenacious shrubs and brittle grasses grew seemed to grow, clinging to the harsh land like tufts of mouldy hair" (p. 1).

Once in the desert hospital, Tortuga is placed into a body cast. To the other patients he resembles a turtle, hence his new nickname. It is through the eyes of Tortuga that the reader sees the desert hospital, whose purpose is to treat crippled children and care for orphans. Most of the medical personnel are concerned more with regimentation and routine than with the patients as individuals. Since they are isolated from friends and family, it is clear why the young patients become cynical, alienated and bitter.

No one ever leaves the hospital cured. The ambulance driver calls this trip to this hospital the journey to death. Mike, one of the patients, describes their situation as hell, though the patients' only "sins" are that they are crippled or orphaned. Since the hospital staff has so little contact with patients, it is up to the machines to watch over them. As Tortuga observes: "The machines were new, every day they brought in a new one, every day the workmen opened the walls to run wires, wires which could monitor the vital signs of the dying body" (p. 184).

Hospital life is stagnant for Tortuga and the other patients. There they find little hope for the future, their identities lost as they live cut off from the world.

Their treatment reflects the attitude of the outside world. Only two children have attempted escape. One died in the snow. The other, Juanito Faraway, successfully escaping from the hospital, arrives in a town only to be rejected by the people there and forced to return to the hospital. From his experience the children learn that the impersonal, uncaring atmosphere of the hospital mirrors that attitude of the world toward them, the imperfect, outcast children.

The hospital is a hostile institution, designed to

keep children out of the way, not to provide love and proper care. Dr. Steel mentions that many patients leave the hospital, but none is successful in returning to the world. It takes the killing of an entire ward of terminally ill children to bring to the attention of the board of directors the children's plight.

This indifference of those in power toward their fellow humans is an issue first raised in <u>Bless Me</u>, <u>Ultima</u>. When Narciso was killed by Tenorio, the coroner's jury was more interested in its own comfort than in justice. So it ruled that Narciso's death was accidental. Antonio's brothers, Eugene and Leon, always put their own pleasure over the needs of the family.

The world is not only indifferent, but selfish. The railroad owners in <u>Heart of Aztlán</u> care only about power. Others, like Father Cayo, put their own material needs first and foremost. In <u>Tortuga</u> is described what happens to the young people who cannot survive the violent transition from rural to urban life in a culture that focuses its attention on technology and power instead of people. It is as Eric Fromm has written about modern Western man:

[T]he production of more and more things, became paramount aims of life. In the process man has transformed himself into a thing, life has become subordinated to property, "to be" is dominated by "to have." Where the roots of Western culture,

both Greek and Hebrew, consider the aim of life the perfection of man, modern man is concerned with the perfection of things. 4

Society's emphasis on technology creates an imbalance in people's values, and as a consequence people see the world as rather mechanical and impersonal in operation, with every event having a cause and effect. This prevents contemporary man from perceiving, as Salomón does, that there are mysteries that cannot be solved in a cold, rational manner. Nature and humans possess qualities that defy definition.

The change in values wrought by the emphasis on technology is demonstrated in the perceptions of the children's hospital and townspeople and their relationship to one another. When the patients go to town to see a horror film, they identify with the man-made monster instead of the human characters. The children cheer the monster and boo the hero. When the townspeople see the crippled children for the first time, they fail to empathize with the children's suffering. They fear and hate them like the monster in the movie. They call them "movie freaks" as well as other demeaning names, such as circus "freaks" and "one-legged woman" (p. 154). As with Lupito, the young soldier in Bless Me, Ultima, no one reflects upon the reasons for the crippled children's state.

There are parallels between the monster in Frankenstein, the movie (1931), and the hospital children in their circumstances and treatment. Some live isolated in iron lungs, feeling not fully human. Like the monster they are hated and feared by the outside world. And like the monster, they are seen as a threat to the established order. The children, by their suffering and illness, remind people that they have sacrificed love for materialism. So they are exiled to the remote hospital.

The young people, like Frankenstein's creature are embittered by their experiences in the outside world. Many begin to imitate their oppressors, creating their own classification system that places the most helpless at the bottom and imposing demeaning identities such as "vegetable," on the most crippled children. Like people in the outside world, many patients fear and hate the terminally ill.

Except for Salomón and Tortuga, no one comes to visit these children. Their isolation is greater than any of the other patients because they are rejected even by their peers. Most of the patients fail to realize that, whether orphaned or crippled, they are all victims of an uncaring society. The urban populace with its faceless "gods" created the "vegetables," the crippled, the orphaned, and

battered children, and then cast them away to die in unloved isolation. Mike explains it best,

Everyday there's a new patient, a new battered kid. If it isn't polio or MD or palsy it's what we do to each other. That's the worst kind of sickness. Somebody out there is always cracking a kid's head: parents, cops, teachers, you name it, the name of the game sure ain't love. It's the opposite. And that's why we're here. (p. 89)

Urban society creates many marvelous inventions and discoveries, with the greatest being the extension of life. But society, like Victor von Frankenstein, once realizing that its creation is imperfect, rejects it. This is in contrast to the Christian God, whose love is unconditional. The urban world fails to love its "monsters." Like Frankenstein's monster, the crippled children express greater humanness in their innocence and thirst for love than do the creators of modern technology. Salomón mentions that the crippled children have the gift of unconditional love and that they await the day that they can return to society.

But like the monster, many patients now hate those who have created them. They believe that hope no longer exists. These young people are condemned to live forever in the hospital cut away from the rest of the world. Frankenstein's monster, like the patients, expresses his frustrations, anger, and unrealized hopes, knowing that he

is condemned by the outside world. As the children leave the theatre, a patient begins to sing a song about their recent "adventures" outside the desert hospital. The song draws the parallels between themselves and the movie monster, concluding that like them, the monster is an outcast and unloved. In Mary Shelly's novel <u>Frankenstein</u> (1818), the monster directs his feelings toward his creator, Victor von Frankenstein. The creature's comments apply to what the patients feel and think about their situation:

"Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; . . . Shall I respect man when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union."

While the children are physically crippled, those in the outside world are spiritually crippled by their dependence on technology. Modern society has failed them because it does not foster unconditional love. When society failed to adhere to its Greek and Hebrew values, it was able to reject children. The children believe God too has rejected them, that the indifference of the people must be based on an equally apathetic God.

This apathy develops because of people's failing to be true to their history. As <u>Bless Me</u>, <u>Ultima</u> unfolds,

Antonio's parents recall there once existed a harmonious state between God and his people. But there have been transgressions; for example the conflicts between the Márez and Lunas and the priest's failure to advocate Christ's love as part of the Church's teaching. The New Mexican people have become content with the old ways. They value rigidity over flexibility. Gabriel's uncertainty about his faith or Ultima's power shows that he and others have placed their faith in rationality rather than what Heidegger calls the mysterious, the exalted and holy. And while Gabriel places faith in rationality, a chaotic world consumes New Mexico.

This new society is distinct from the old world in its emphasis on urbanization and technology. The problems that existed before the Anglos' coming to New Mexico are now compounded by this cultural conflict. Existing divisions among individuals, families and institutions are intensified by the Anglo. Though internal conflicts exist, the New Mexican people still share the common threads of history, religion and culture. But by the end of Bless Me, Ultima all of these threads are frayed. The New Mexicans attempt to hold onto their rural way of life, but the railroad has drastically changed that world. As their way of life is changed despite their efforts to preserve it, the

New Mexicans' faith in an all-powerful God is weakened.

God's image suffers additionally as the Church fails to use its influence to assist the New Mexicans in achieving equality and justice in the new urban society.

In <u>Heart of Aztlán</u>, God's stature is lessened in the same way. First, the railroads place a strangle hold over the community. The railroad is seen by the workers as an evil that they cannot overcome because God has abandoned them. Secondly, the Church, whose purpose is to teach, guide and defend the poor, does nothing. As a leader, the priest refuses to involve himself with the New Mexicans' plight. The Church leader is a sensuous man rather than a spiritual one. He allies the Church with the powerful.

"Do you think the poor of the barrio pay for the upkeep of the Church? No! Wealth flows from wealth! And the sources of wealth need stability to exist! And the Church provides that stability! We teach the poor how to bear their burden; they are promised the kingdom of heaven. . . " (p. 142)

By the conclusion of <u>Tortuga</u>, God is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. He is ridiculed and scorned. The only patient who still believes in God as all-knowing and powerful has a warped view of Him. God, for Danny, is one who condemns rather than loves.

Tortuga has lost his identity by being cast off from his community and then stripped of his dignity in the hospital. In the first few weeks in the hospital ward,

Tortuga can only sense his anger toward his father, the medical staff, and God. But before his anger consumes all his energies, he encounters another young man, Salomón, through whom he will be reeducated to see the world's totality and its mysteries. Salomón becomes Tortuga's mentor because he sees him as a future savior. Unlike the rest of the world, he does not impose his will on Tortuga. What he does ask of Tortuga is that he see life in its totality, with happiness, beauty and tragedy all as part of the human experience.

Anaya's heroes are on a search for new identities. Confronted with a world in turmoil, as heroes they act while the rest of the world lives in a state of despair. Their quest, though difficult, will eventually bring hope to their communities.

## Notes

- Peter R. Stillman, <u>Introduction to Myth</u> (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Co., 1980), pp. 29-30; Harry Slochower, <u>Mythopoesis</u>: <u>Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics</u> (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1970), pp. 23-24; Leo Spitzer, <u>Classic and Christian Ideas of World Harmony</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), passim.
- <sup>2</sup> Eric Fromm, "Today's Spiritual Crisis," in <u>The Gospel According to Zen: Beyond the Death of God</u>, ed. Robert Shol and Audery Carr (New York: New American Library of Canada, 1970), p. 9.
- Martin Heidegger, Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, trans. David Farell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 55-65.
  - 4 Fromm, p. 9.
- 5 Harold Bloom, "Afterword," in Mary Shelly's Frankenstein (New York: New American Library, 1965), pp. 216-18.
- 6 Mary Shelly, <u>Frankenstein</u> (New York: New American Library, 1965), p. 138.
- Heidegger, "Questions Concerning Technology," in Basic Writings, pp. 307-08.

## CHAPTER 3

## Act II: The Quest

Act One finds Anaya's heroes caught between two worlds: the dying world of their forefathers (and, for many, all that is left are memories) and that of the new urban Anglo-American culture. Lukács writes that the hero comes into existence because of the alienation that exists in his world. While others resign themselves to their situation, Anaya's heroes confront their ambivalence and question why it exists. Heidegger writes that one's questioning leads to searching for answers. The three heroes search to determine the causes of the community's crisis. In Heideggerian terms, Antonio and the others decide to investigate and ascertain. In so doing, they redefine themselves and in turn help create a community that is united for the future.

Answers to the heroes' questions are not to be found in the institutions of the community. At first, Antonio looks to the school for the answers to his identity questions and to the Church regarding God's relationship with his people. Finding no answers there, he finally turns to Ultima as his new "teacher." Both Chavez and Tortuga

confront institutional leaders for explanations for the physical or moral decay of their communities. Railroad workers are losing their jobs for protesting unjust working conditions, and various other people are turning to thievery, drugs, and violence. Chávez asks Mannie and Fr. Cayo to justify their lack of response to community problems and their hostility toward the people. When Chávez fails to get answers from the representatives of traditional institutions, he retreats in the wilderness to continue his search.

Tortuga confronts Dr. Steel to find out why no one returns home cured, but he is not given a satisfactory answer. Patients doubt that the hospital's basic purpose is to cure them and send them home. One explains: "We're not supposed to be enjoying ourselves here! This is a prison, don't forget that. . . . That's what they want us to forget . . . our real purpose is to get out" (p. 138). No one can answer Tortuga's questions about the suffering and isolation that afflict him, neither Danny, the selfappointed representative of God, nor the clergymen. As the narrator explains, "No one knew the answer" (p. 105). The reasons remain hidden until, through his friend and teacher Salomón, Tortuga finds the answers.

Heroes look beyond customs and traditions to find

insight into themselves and the world about them. Anaya's heroes seek answers to how they can create a better life in an urban society. Like the Grail hero, Anaya's heroes challenge traditions by asking the central question. Eliade writes:

"Where is the Grail?" . . . those few words propound the central question . . . Where is the supreme reality, the sacred, the Center of Life . . . No one had thought, until then, of asking the central question—and the world was perishing because of that religious and metaphysical indifference, because of the lack of imagination and absence of desire for reality. 3

Me, Ultima. Antonio experiences the conflict of being caught between two worlds: the one of his parents' that is coming to an end and the new world brought about by the Anglo. Within that Antonio also faces a personal conflict: his father wishes him to follow the traditional family occupation of vaquero, but urbanization has made that occuation obsolete. Antonio's mother wishes him to follow her family's tradition and become a priest. But to Antonio the Church seems inflexible and indifferent to the sufferings of its people, for instance Florence's family. The Church also appears powerless to defend against evil as represented by the Trementina family. Antonio is divided. To follow one tradition is to deny the other. The hero concludes that he must search for answers that can free him

to develop his own identity and destiny.

The conflicts between the two cultures that begin with Bless Me, Ultima are more pronounced in Heart of Aztlán. Chávez and his family symbolize the rural family struggling to adapt to urban life. They are forced to leave their ranch, where they can no longer make a living, and move to the city because it offers the only opportunity for employment. Chávez is aware of the culture shock that faces his family, but he sees no alternative. His efforts to forge a new life in the urban sprawl prove to be arduous because the railroads exploit the workers and the community at large.

Some workers react with protests, strikes, and violence, and others with acceptance of a downtrodden existence. Through the control of technology, government and Church, the Anglo subjugates Barelas, leaving the community disoriented. Some despair, others adopt negative values. Sapo, a former gang member, no longer values life. He kidnaps, threatens, and kills members of his community. Lalo values violence and Mannie is more concerned with profits than with struggles for justice.

The families suffer from the negative effects of assimilation, insecurity and fragmentation. Chavez is fired from his job and estranged from his family and

friends. But he refuses to accept this "plague" as the cross that he and his community must bear. Instead, he sets out to find how he can cure the community of its fatal illness. To achieve peace for himself and unity for his people, Chávez must take his search into the "urban inferno."

In another inferno, a desert wasteland, a young man known only as Tortuga seeks to understand his relationship to his new community of hospital patients. Although at first Tortuga's bitterness prevents him from accepting his new identity, he believes that, despite its suffering, life has meaning. His search for the meaning of life leads him to discover his destiny.

There are several characteristics common to the three heroes: Antonio, Chávez, and Tortuga. Each has an overriding need to understand what is happening to his world and how he can return it to a peaceful state. Each finds his being drained by the urban world. Each either has his identity imposed upon him or finds it inadequate to meet the present crisis. In the end Antonio takes his new identity from both the Luna and Márez families. Clemente refuses to be identified as "insane," a "troublemaker," or "blasphemer," redefining himself as a community leader.

Tortuga shows others that they have a future once they take

control of their lives and believe in Salomón's teachings on love, sensitivity and dignity. Finally, each hero, in his search for enlightenment, encounters danger, adversity and challenges.

Antonio is the first hero to know that change is necessary as times evolve. His journey to enlightenment begins at a very young age, when he encounters the outside world on entering the first grade. Before leaving home, he was merely the family's youngest child. Now Antonio is a student with the corresponding privileges and responsibilities. His decision to go to school shows his maturity. The search for education takes him to the small town of Guadalupe, and there he encounters education's "magic." tells about his experience with education: "I wanted to ask her immediately about the magic of the letters . . . " (p. 54). Antonio's successful experiences in school lead to his promotion. Guadalupe also provides a Catholic Church that offers Antonio religious instruction, the sacraments, and the knowledge of right and wrong. The priest is supposed to have the power to act as an intermediary between God and his people. But the Church fails to provide a holistic education. The priest's teachings are based upon fear and guilt rather than on God's love.

The various opportunities that the town presents are

outweighed by the Anglos' domination of it. Just below the surface there lies a deep friction. From time to time one can see conflicts arise, such as when the teachers change the children's names from Spanish to English. individual teachers nor the school reach out to the community. Nor do the teachers encourage families to participate in the school system. As for the Church, it bears little resemblance to the early church that went out to serve the Creator's people. The early church served the people and emphasized God's love. The present one, like the school, isolates itself from the people. The priest, who speaks only English, has limited contact with the people. The Church has cut off the people from the Judeo-Christian values that form an integral part of their identity. In contrast to the limited education he receives in Guadalupe, Antonio gains from Ultima a personal education that is based on Antonio's ancestral culture. When Antonio travels to his mother's ancestral homeland, El Puerto de los Luna, he is for the first time without his mentor, Ultima. But by this time he has matured enough to make his own decisions and have his own insights regarding the world about him. Antonio discovers the entire life of the Luna family revolving around working the land. Farming to the Luna family is a vocation that involves understanding

nature. Antonio sees the Lunas' respect for nature and for the first time sees a community working in harmony with it. In the self-sufficiency of their love for the land, the Lunas isolate themselves from the outside world. They try to relive a simpler time when conflicts between cultures did not exist; when those conflicts intrude into their lives, they are not prepared to deal with them. Antonio's grandfather prohibits everyone in his family from helping his daughter's family when violent incidents begin to occur against them. Earlier, María Márez Luna committed Ultima and her family to help her brother Lucas against the Trementina sister. Over that time the Trementinas had sought revenge upon Ultima and the Marez family. Ironically, María Márez's father fails to assist her family even though they helped save his son's life. His inactions reflect the malaise of their time.

While rural inhabitants are affected by the chaos of the times, it is the urban dwellers in particular who are crippled by the tensions and conflicts between the two cultures. As <u>Heart of Aztlán</u> begins, loss of hope is widespread in the urban environment. The city drains the people's energies. As in <u>Bless Me</u>, <u>Ultima</u>, people have begun turning inward, away from their fellow humans.

Bless Me, Ultima suggests that Guadalupe may have some

redeeming qualities. It provided Antonio with basic education and certain insights into his faith. But the urban world that Chávez confronts in <a href="Heart of Aztlán">Heart of Aztlán</a> offers nothing to his family. The city is a plague on the poor. In his journey through the city, Chávez encounters many strange and unusual people, by-products of the urban setting: pachucos, gang members, and zoot suiters, each group speaking its own patois, a mixture of English and Spanish. Each subgroup lives a life that sets it apart from society, accepted by neither the Mexican nor the Anglo. Unable to identify with either, the young people rebel against both cultures. These rebels are fascinating to one of the Chávez girls. She sees the pachuco as a nihilist hero, who attempts to destroy the present in order to create a new one.

[W]hen I first met Chuey I felt as if I was talking to a liberator, someone who was out to break all the rules and create a new way of living. Maybe I expected too much, but it is true that they don't accept the old ways. They've changed the language, the way they dress, everything . . . (p. 70)

Although Chávez never personally involves himself with the zoot suiters or pachucos, they help define the world in which he now exists. It is the urban environment that has caused these young people to reject their ancestral values. Most affected by the malaise of the city are the community leaders, who have been warped by current problems into

selfishness.

One such is the local politician, Mannie, known as "El Super," an ironic name since his influence is limited. Mannie sees the people he is supposed to serve, individuals in the lowest social and economic levels of society, as parasites. "El Super" does not ask what causes his people to live in such squalor. His concern is with gaining and maintaining economic and political power. Questions of unity, honor and love do not concern him. Mannie says, "'Forgive me, Chávez, but before, I thought you were merely a crazy fool, now I know that you are mad. You can keep your honor, I will not trade it for the things that it has taken me a lifetime to acquire--'" (p. 154). El Super represents everything Chávez opposes. Chávez shows compassion for his family and community. Mannie sees the community as "leeches." Ironically, it is Mannie who lives off the community. Chavez believes that there are solutions to Barelas' curse. El Super does not. Chávez sacrifices for his family. Mannie thinks only of himself. He, like Father Cayo, is a leader who has turned to the ease of materialism rather than serve and sacrifice for the community.

As a leader, Lalo places himself as one who can challenge and overcome the people's enslavers. But his methods

are based on violence and revenge. The narrator explains, "Lalo . . . spoke of violence, he preached a revolution that would wrench the power away from the bosses" (p. 82). The workers do not trust Lalo and cannot see how violence can bring about peace and justice to the community. Lalo, like the pachucos, is nihilist. He is willing to see the entire system destroyed so that it can begin again. His purpose is revenge rather than hope. The current Barelas leaders claim to be the people's voice. But each so-called leader fails to rally the people behind him. As traditional "leaders," they have cut their ties from their people because they failed to listen to their cries for justice and peace.

Chávez ponders whether he can lead his people out of slavery into a promised land. Like Moses, Chávez questions whether he is the leader who will unite the people of Barelas. His questioning, in part, is caused by Crispín's corridos of past struggles and leaders. The people learn through Manuel and Crispín what constitutes a true leader. Chávez and others hear Crispín singing "corridos of prior revolutions, he sang of ancient heroes, men of the people.

. . his melody and the magic of his words carried them out of their present misery to a time of legends and myths . . . " (p. 83). The corridos remind Chávez that the

present struggle for self-determination is one of many during his people's history. Manuel explains that a "pueblo without a good leader is not united in its efforts to serve the people . . ." (p. 83). Only a leader with these qualities can bring victory to Barelas. But Chávez's questioning whether he has the qualities to be that leader, his constant soul searching causes confusion and conflict within his already tormented soul. He does not want to be a leader, but what is the alternative? The traditional institutions are corrupt. Present leaders, like Lalo, are not the solution. His family's future being dark, Chávez searches for an answer to whether he will lead the masses to victory over their enemies and the technology that enslaves them.

Finally Chávez retreats into the wilderness to reflect on his plight. When he goes, he leaves behind a city that offers despair and destruction to those who reside there. But Chávez refuses to give in to despair. He turns, for the moment, to the countryside where nature, not man, controls life. There he will stay until he is ready to come down from the mountain, spiritually rejuvenated and with the cultural values meant for a new generation.

With his guide's help, Chavez begins a new journey into death's world to discover the meaning of heart of

Aztlán and his true destiny. The land that Chávez observes is wild, untamed by humans, a land recalling earlier times when the Mexicans roamed the llano as vaqueros. Like the llano of Bless Me, Ultima, this is a place where the natural and supernatural coexist. Chavez hopes that here he will be able to find the answer to the question of his future identity. In the wilderness he encounters an old woman who guards the magical black rocks that have the power to foretell the future. Up to this time, Chavez has been consistently a rational adult living in a socially irrational world. But once Chavez enters into the wilderness the novel takes on a quality of "magical realism." This supernatural world is out of place with the dark realism that preceded it. But the switch in the novel from realistic to the supernatural can only suggest that where rationalism has failed him he may now turn to the past, where magic and reality were one, for the answers he needs.

Chávez makes two journeys into the wilderness, one by himself and one with Crispín. Both times he is motivated by Crispín's corridos, "stories" that are lessons on the Mexican struggles to achieve self-determination. Chávez sees a relationship between his questions on leadership and the corridos. Crispín's stories of liberation and the heart of Aztlán urge Chávez to seek out the meaning these

legends have for his future. He comprehends that, to achieve any meaning from Crispín's stories, he must search his inner self as well as the outside world where an old woman guards the black rocks that can foretell his future.

The first journey is filled with mystery and terror. He encounters a man apparently lost in the wilderness. The man looks and behaves much like a wild animal. His appearance contains a warning to those who want to return permanently to nature that they do so at a significant sacrifice, the loss of a cultural heritage of centuries. That loss signifies the loss of part of one's own self-identity. To regress totally to nature offers no hope for future generations and is an irresponsible act. To live like the savage means to return to a primitive time when life is reduced to its barest essentials. Questions of identity, community, technology, and the future are nonexistent. One simply lives day to day. This motif of nature and civilization is expanded upon in Tortuga's discussions with Salomón.

The guardian of the black rocks, realizing that Chávez is desperate to know his future, makes him an offer. He can have access to the magical rocks if he will renounce his personal and moral belief by selling his soul. Chávez considers the long range ramifications of his actions and refuses her tempting offer. If he were to renounce his

beliefs, he would deny his destiny. His destiny as a hero--his identity--is based upon his moral and personal beliefs, which in turn are founded upon the community's history. To renounce his beliefs would mean severing his ties to the community.

The confrontation between Chávez and the old woman can be compared to Satan's temptation of Christ. Satan offers Christ power, material possessions and food. Christ refuses Satan's offerings because to do so would deny his identity as the Son of God and also his destiny as the world's savior. Christ and Chávez, as heroes, are not concerned with personal glory, but with spiritual renewal of the people and with speaking out against injustice. Both the woman and Satan are tricksters who want to prevent the hero from achieving victory. The old woman's trickery offers another test for Chávez, to see whether his rational or irrational side will dominate and whether he will be able to fulfill his destiny. By maintaining his integrity, Chávez remains free to pursue the answers to his questions at a later date with his spiritual aide, Crispín.

Heart of Aztlán is divided into two worlds, one in which Ultima's magic is a common occurrence and the other with the stark realism of such novels as <u>Germinal</u>, <u>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</u>, or <u>Grapes of Wrath</u>. What

these novels all have in common is their tribute to humanity's struggle for self-determination. Tortuga continues this motif and expands upon it. But the magic first encountered in Bless Me, Ultima begins to fade and a new reality takes its place in Heart of Aztlán. By the end of Tortuga, magic exists only as a fading memory. But the questions of technology, of controlling one's destiny, and of identity and others are continuing motifs in Anaya's third novel, Tortuga's struggles, like those of Chavez, to regain his identity, dignity, and his success offer a model for others to follow. Tortuga follows a structural pattern similar to that of Heart of Aztlán. Much of the action falls within a limited area. For Chavez it is Barelas and the rural lands. For Tortuga, it is the hospital and its surroundings. Like Chavez, Tortuga begins an emotional change once he communes with nature.

Tortuga discovers that the desert hospital seemingly works to destroy the children's identities. The patients' families attempt to maintain contact, but distance severely limits their communication, thus making their loneliness nearly complete. As a consequence of their isolation, the patients as well as hospital personnel develop distorted self-images. The terminally ill are identified by other patients as "vegetables." Some patients exhibit bizarre

behavior. Cynthia, a young girl, is seen only at night. Danny, another patient, becomes a religious fanatic. chief nurse is highly organized but lacks compassion. Tortuga wanders through the hallways, he encounters these and other people who have been cast aside by the modern urban world. Danny's faith is blind. He believes that "holy sand" will cure his paralytic arm. But the sand has the opposite effect. The sand becomes a symbol, suggesting that religion as an institution is barren, providing people with neither life nor hope. Danny's actions cause others to question whether God exists producing bitterness, fear, and contempt for life among the patients. If God exists, He does not exist for them. Tortuga concurs with the others. It is this alienation that prompts Tortuga to the search in which he meets Ismelda and his mentor Salomón. Through these characters Tortuga reflects about his and other patients' future lives. According to Lukács, the hero's alienation makes him search for answers that society cannot or will not provide him. 4 Unlike the workers and patients in the hospital, Ismelda has the freedom to come and go as she pleases. With the exception of Dr. Steel, she is the only person working at the hospital who has not been affected by some illness. Her good fortune is the result of her continual contact with nature. She and her

community live, work and co-exist with nature. Ismelda is a conduit to Salomón and through him to a new identity for Tortuga.

with the exploration of "paradise lost" the heroes realize that their world is badly crippled. Anaya's heroes, like the ancient heroes in legendary quests, need the assistance of teachers who can help prepare them for the future. Anaya's aides help the hero make his transition from the past into the future, help clarify the hero's past, and help him reestablish the historical links to the future. With the aides' assistance, Antonio, Tortuga and Chávez become persons who can offer their communities the opportunity to unite and help them understand their true history.

When Ultima comes to the Márez home, she begins to instruct Antonio on what the community's history means to him. It is a personal history. Through her he learns that history is more than a collection of facts. Ultima's pupil realizes the need to understand the underlying causes for each event. As Heidegger writes, one must unconceal and bring forth the historical truths that have been hidden by traditions. When a person follows tradition without realizing its essence, he fails to stay true to his origins and to his real identity. When one looks beyond the

superficial, then the essence of one's history is revealed and one is prepared to face the future.

The New Mexican landscape is Ultima's instructional instrument. She explains that the llano symbolizes to Antonio's father and grandfather freedom and the development of a culture. Gabriel Márez learned to be a vaquero on the plains. The vaquero took pride in the skills and traditions they developed from living on the llano and the chance to interact with nature. Antonio mentions

the medicinal herbs that have helped people through the ages: She spoke to me of the common herbs and the medicines we shared with the Indians of the Rio de Norte. She spoke of the other tribes, the Aztecs, Mayas, and even those in the old country, the Moors. (p. 39)

Nature is a force that can be utilized to benefit humankind. But nature can also be enlisted to work against individuals. This happens when the Trementina sisters make mortal enemies of the Luna family and use natural and supernatural acts to terrorize them. So the llano is a land where the supernatural and natural coexist and can be empowered for good or evil. Ultima helps Antonio see nature's power, beauty, and mystery. Antonio's education with Ultima gives him the strength to overcome "the tragic consequences of life" (p. 237).

Understanding one's relationship to the past, and the opportunity to react to it in light of new realities, is a

complex lesson. It is one that Anaya's heroes must master if they hope to be an integral part of the world. The first to gain a new perspective about his world and the future is Antonio. From a Heideggerian viewpoint, the boy begins to appropriate, that is, to integrate what he has learned into his being. Antonio explains: "Ultima told me the stories and legends of my ancestors. From her I learned the glory and the tragedy of the history of my people, and came to understand how that history stirred in my blood" (p. 115).

Ultima dedicates the last part of her life to preparing Antonio for the future. She, along with other guides, centers her life around him. At times, this makes her a one-dimensional character like Odysseus' aides who assisted the hero in his journey home. Auerbach writes that their one dimensionality comes from serving their hero. Their sole existence is based upon this service. As servants of the hero, they have no life of their own. Ultima protects Antonio from Tenorio and his evil daughters. She teaches Antonio history and provides him with an education that will last him a lifetime. Antonio's father, Gabriel, provides Antonio with the final key to help him complete his education. Unlike Ultima or Antonio's other aides, Gabriel is a character that grows and develops. In the

beginning, Gabriel constantly talks about his dreams to go to California. He has little concern about present realities and is frequently intoxicated. In short, he is a dreamer. But Gabriel is concerned for his children. By the end of the novel, he has left his dreams behind and realizes that his foremost responsibility is to his family. He develops a philosophical outlook that provides Antonio with the final key to understanding his past and future. He states: "every man is part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new--" (p. 236). Gabriel realizes that one needs to change with new realities. Antonio learns from his father that he and others have the ability to change traditions and renew them for future generations.

This is the essential lesson that all of Anaya's heroes learn. The past cannot change. But the future is open for them to create a new life. With this new understanding about the past, Gabriel sees that it is time for past conflicts between the Luna and Márez families to be resolved. As Antonio's education is being completed by his father and Ultima, we witness that the old world has also reached its climax. Gabriel mentions to Antonio that "I would have liked to have sent you to the llano . . . but I think that way of life is just about gone, it is a

dream" (p. 235).

Past differences now have little meaning in a rapidly changing Anglo-urban world. With the old world coming to an end, Antonio's guides have an intense desire to see past hostilities resolved. They want the hero to see what has happened to their world and discover the true qualities that their cultures have to offer his generation. María and Gabriel Márez want their son to respect the past and make it part of his life. Their attempts to provide this lesson are clumsy at times, but their intentions are sincere. Ultima imparts to Antonio a true ancestral history that helps him understand why the world is in such chaos.

Chávez sees what the new world has brought to New Mexico. Hopes for a better world are gone. Chávez attempts to find a means, with the help of his two aides (his wife, Adelita, and Crispín, a blind guitar player), to alleviate the crisis in Barelas. To accomplish this, Chávez must accept his new role in life. He believes that the corridos and Crispín's comments are directed toward him, but his thoughts are on his family and their survival in an urban hellhole. As a teacher, Crispín is like Ultima in that he is aware of the perplexities that confront the community. He is a patient teacher and works with Chávez to see the community's need for a uniting force

to overcome the railroad's strangle hold over the Mexican people. Crispín also prepares the community for a new leader by recalling past heroes and commenting on their struggles to overcome their enemies. Like John the Baptist, Crispín prepares the way for the savior. Chavez learns with the community that to succeed in overcoming their oppressors they must unite behind a leader. conclude that the present generation can do the same. Crispin is more than just a minstrel; he is a historical treasure house. He wants Chavez to learn from history. Chávez, like Antonio, learns from his teacher that one must take from the past and renew it for the future. Crispín explains: "'The legend renews itself with each generation, and we must know how to unravel the meaning of the sign--' . . . 'There is meaning in all the stories of the people . . . that is why we cannot let those legends die . . . '" (p. 84).

Crispín does not get personally involved with Chávez's life until approximately halfway through the narrative. The person who helps Chávez on a day-to-day basis is his wife, Adelita. She is the bond that holds the family together. She provides him with love, support and encouragement. When Chávez leaves his native homeland to head into the opaque future in Barelas, he knows that he is

leaving behind a large part of his past. The narrator comments: "the pain he felt as the roots of his soul pulled away and severed themselves from the earth which had nurtured his life" (p. 3). Chávez is faced with a sudden change. He understands that his role is that of family leader but the drastic changes raise doubt in him about his abilities. It is at this moment that his wife comes to his assistance. Their discussion has a Heideggerian view. It is centered around whether one can move into the future without maintaining fundamental elements from the past. And Adelita stresses to Chavez that one can do both: "'We can build a new home.' Chávez nodded, 'but can we take the spirit of the land with us?' 'iSi!' she answered forcefully . . . 'we will take it with us . . . . Our land is everywhere'" (p. 7). But the family's experiences in Barelas fragment it into two camps: the older son and daughter versus the father, with Chavez's wife caught in the middle. The younger children are becoming assimilated. Adelita works to heal the rift between the two warring camps. But as the narrative progresses, the family deteriorates. Adelita, like other aides, calls for her hero to take a new outlook on life. Chávez's wife states directly that one can take one's basic beliefs and ideals from the past and apply them to the future.

Powers within the city cause the poor to despair. The railroad work entails long hours and poor working conditions. The owners show more concern for their profit margin than their workers' welfare. As for the union officials, they have failed to be true to themselves or the workers because they focus their energies on pacifying the workers rather than seeking justice. Chávez sees that the power rests in the hands of a few who refuse to comprehend their role as leaders.

Anaya suggests, however, that to achieve total victory one must be whole. Victory is achieved through awareness of one's history. By understanding their history, Chávez and others can control their destinies. Crispín and Adelita want Chávez to aspire to something greater than simple survival. Both see in Chávez a leader whose future lies with the community. On this point Lukács and Heidegger write that a hero's destiny lies in struggling with his community to achieve complete freedom for the future. But to achieve this goal Chávez must first expand his identity from family to community leader. It is up to Chávez to reach into his being and mold himself into a complete leader.

The power structure within Barelas redefined the workers' identities. They are no longer fathers, husbands,

workers or citizens, but are "troublemakers." The Church defines them as "communists." And like Tortuga and the other patients, they no longer place their trust in institutions that manipulate them. Like Danny, many workers use violence to express their frustration and anger. Frustration and anger lead the workers into calling a "wildcat" strike that ends in a riot. The owners react with anger and revenge. These actions and others lead to further fragmentation of the beleaguered community. For fear of hardship to their families, many workers hold on to their jobs at any cost. Others decide to leave because they are tired of being persecuted. The strike emphasizes that the new society is divided into haves and have nots, rich and poor, powerful and powerless. Traditional institutions no longer serve the people in need, only the powerful and selfish.

Chávez learns to place his faith in Adelita and Crispín to assist him in finding a new life. Chávez's experiences with the urban world are emotionally damaging. But with the help of both aides, he will search for answers about how to survive, endure, and recreate their battered land into a peaceful community. The two aides complement each other. The success of his quest is dependent upon his placing trust in his aides and developing a new identity.

Chávez concludes that he must be faithful to the community's history and his personal beliefs, if he hopes to help Barelas.

The only way Chavez can find answers to his questions is to leave the city. The rural landscape reminds him that nature is an inherent part of the New Mexicans' past from which modern society has cut itself off. Nature helps replenish Chávez's soul, and so he heads into the countryside that surrounds Barelas to search for his answers. As Chávez travels to another world, so does Tortuga as he searches for peace for himself and medical treatment so that he will be able to walk again. Ismelda is the first guide to help him with his quest. Tortuga sees in her qualities that he admires. She is patient, caring, but most of all she has the freedom of movement that he no longer has. Like most of Anaya's aides Ismelda is not a fully developed character. In part, her appearance depends upon Tortuga's willingness to listen to his teacher, Salomón. Ismelda wants to introduce Tortuga to the power and beauty in nature and to guide him toward his teacher. Ismelda asks that Tortuga believe in Salomon. As aides both Ismelda and Salomón have critical roles in Tortuga's quest.

As Tortuga's faith in his teacher grows, so too does

his physical strength. (Ironically the inverse occurs to Salomón.) Tortuga regains hope because he can walk, but more importantly because he knows that he has the ability to create a new life. Salomón sees a need to redirect Tortuga's energies from a destructive to a constructive mode. To accomplish this goal, Salomón relates his own personal story in the hope that Tortuga will learn from it. Salomón originally was to be a farmer. His father, a loving man, attempted to teach Salomon their history, traditions, and customs which would lead him to be a good farmer, especially the relationship that they as farmers have with nature. But Salomón rejects that identity and destiny to become a nomadic hunter. Farming is a step up the social and cultural evolutionary scale for humanity that Salomón rejects in favor of survival on a day-to-day basis as a hunter. His break from his true past is what leads to his eventual paralysis and institutionalization. Like Tortuga, Salomon had been bitter about his paralysis. But for Salomón that changed when "One day I opened my eyes, and felt that I was empty of hate and rage which had filled me. It was a soft summer day. . . . That day myeyes were opened to the beauty and wonder of the creation" (pp. 41-42). Although Tortuga wants to follow Salomon, his bitterness is deep. Salomon hopes Tortuga will become the

spokesman for the orphans and crippled children.

In the beginning, Tortuga does not want any relationship that may cause him pain. He feels that he has suffered
enough. Like so many others, Tortuga prefers to remain
isolated, not caring for or loving anyone. Salomón
presents several "parables" to Tortuga that explain the
need for one to face the world and not to "return to the
womb." Salomón mentions that man

"was determined to walk upon the earth and explore this new land of the sun. . . . He wanted to share the new beauty with his brother the turtle. . . . But the turtle was afraid . . . and when frightened, they always retreat to the safety of the water. We cannot retreat into darkness, Tortuga, we cannot build shells like the turtle . . . our commandment is to live in the light of the sun . . . to walk in the light of the sun . . . " (pp. 68-69)

Salomón knows that one must forge on and live, not fall behind and stagnate. To experience life is to experience beauty and mystery, death and rebirth. Salomón teaches that just as nature is an integral part of life so too should humans separate themselves from nature. Human beings have reason; they use knowledge creatively and pass on that knowledge to future generations. But possibly the most important difference between human beings and nature is that humans are aware of their own mortality. For Salomón, that awareness leads to reflection upon his past life. After years of questioning and study, Salomón

concludes that all life is interdependent and calls for tolerance, respect and appreciation for others. Salomón, like St. Paul, sees humanity symbolically as one body, each part with its special function and everyone needing to work in harmony.

Tortuga's society is crippled because people do not understand that they are interdependent and should accept others as they are. When people begin to worship machine-like perfection, they begin to devalue individuals who do not live up to those nonhuman standards. It is people's imagination that created the machine. It is people not machines, that deserve the higher value. But most importantly humans offer love, a virtue that a machine cannot give. A leader can reunite an urban society on the basis of love of all life. This is Tortuga's mission. All his previous experiences in life are preparation for his returning to society to bring back these gifts of learning that he received from Salomón. Through his help, Tortuga understands that any search involves sacrifices in one's life and the giving up of outmoded customs and traditions.

Antonio and Chávez reach the same conclusion, that one cannot remain tied to antiquated traditions. Antonio asks his father whether one can make a new religion, implying that he sees that religion has validity only if it can

change. In Tortuga's world God no longer exists and his faith is based upon a love and respect for man and nature. He, along with Antonio and Chávez, must be prepared to face the future. Antonio and Chávez live in an urban world of poverty, repression, and forced assimilation. Clemente explains urban society's effect on the community when he states that "the greatest tragedy is the paralysis which injustice and oppression inflict on our people!" (p. 206) To achieve hope both Tortuga and Chávez must give up their own self-centeredness and think about the future.

In times of stress the hero searches his soul to see what he has to offer his people. All of Anaya's heroes work to achieve unification and truth, but to accomplish that goal they must let their old selves "die" and be "reborn" to serve the community. These motifs of death, rebirth and community are explored in the final act.

#### Notes

- 1 Georg Lukács, <u>Theory of the Novel</u>, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 60-62, 66.
- Martin Heidegger, "Being and Time: Introduction," in Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, ed. David Farell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 44-45.
- Mircea Eliade, "Nostalgia for Paradise: Symbolism of the Center and the Ritual Approach to Immortality,"

  Parabola: Myth and Quest for Meaning, 1 (Winter 1976), 15.
  - <sup>4</sup> Lukács, pp. 60-62, 66.
- Joseph Campbell, <u>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</u>, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 71-72.
  - 6 Campbell, pp. 73, 77.
- Heidegger, "Questions Concerning Technology," in Basic Writings, pp. 295-98, 309.
- Eric Auerbach, <u>Mimesis: The Representation of Real-ity in Western Literature</u>, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 7-9, 12-13.
- 9 Lukacs, pp. 66-67; Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 7th ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 437.

### CHAPTER 4

# Act III: The Homecoming

As Anaya's heroes progress in their quests, learning from their personal experiences and the teachings of their guides that they must put aside antiquated traditions in order to be reborn, each realizes that his journey of transformation will be incomplete until he has ventured into the world of the dead. Since there is no guarantee of safe return, each must make a conscious decision to undergo this trial. As in mythical times, entering the underworld is an act of great courage and as such is a test of the true hero. 1

The journeys of Anaya's heroes into the world of the dead are metaphorical: Antonio's is in a dream, Chávez's in a surrealistic journey inside the mountain, and Tortuga's in a spiritual catharsis in wards for the terminally ill. On his return from the "underworld," each hero has completed his metamorphosis, forging a new identity for himself and restoring historic virtues lost to present society. Antonio discovers that one's identity can be changed and still have its roots in the historic past. Chávez offers Barelas the opportunity to unite and overcome

its oppressors. Tortuga brings back to his fellow patients and community a universal love.

The decision to return home to share their revelations is one of the most important of their heroic stature. These gifts the heroes offer their communities are what Gide calls links in a living chain uniting the past and the future. However, the opportunity to regain these lost virtues is only achieved at the cost of tragedy in the community, for very often people will only become aware of the larger tragedy surrounding them when they are touched by tragedy of a personal nature. For Barelas, it is Benjie's (Chávez's son) brush with death that makes the people realize how oppression has "crippled" their community. As leaders, the heroes accept their new responsibility to help create a new vision within the community that maintains the essence of the native culture.

Bless Me, Ultima presents the first experience in the world of the dead. Antonio encounters the underworld in a nebulous, ominous dream. Antonio's metaphorical underworld experience begins after Florence's drowning. His death is one of three that Antonio personally witnesses. All of these deaths were individuals who had become fringe members of a self-centered community. As Antonio's nightmare begins, he sees three shadowy figures approach him. They

are Narciso, Lupito, and Florence. As they approach, he hears a voice stating that the germ of creation lies in violence. This prophetic statement foretells the final tragedy that occurs on the Marez's land. The spectres present an apocalyptic view in which the present world is beyond reform and can only begin anew through destruction. As in St. John's Apocalypse, there are cryptic images. 3 The sacred altar and the chalice are desecrated by the priest. The chalice is no longer symbolic of spiritual life and the altar is no longer the center of the world, a means to communicate with God. 4 Cico kills his pagan god, the golden carp. Neither the priest nor Cico believes in his gods. In Antonio's nightmare neither pagan nor Christian God can provide comfort or help to the suffering. Even Ultima cannot stop the future. As Antonio's dream nears its end, he cries out: "My God, My God why have you forsaken me . . . " an obvious allusion to Christ's last words as recorded by St. Mark's Gospel. Anaya deliberately chooses Mark's Gospel because it is the only version in which Christ dies alone. This particular quotation from Mark's Gospel originates from Psalm 22. Both Psalm and the narrative of Christ's crucifixion emphasize loneliness, fear and hope. 5 The implication is clear: Antonio's dream is foretelling the darkest events that will occur to the

Márez family. The nightmare emphasizes Antonio's fear of the future. He believes that he is being abandoned by friends and family. But in all the turmoil there lies hope for a better future. Ultima reassures Antonio about the future as she explains to him that "'life is filled with sadness. . . . But as you grow into manhood you must not despair of life, but gather strength to sustain you . . ."

(p. 234). The dream clearly states that the Márez's world is no longer viable. The dream is nihilistic in that institutions, traditions, and gods of the past are destroyed. Yet there now is an opportunity to create a new world if Antonio will take control of his life and create his own future.

These apocalyptic images are reminiscent of Michel Serres' observations on a Turner painting in which the violent genesis of the industrial age is symbolized by a foundry. The industrial age is introduced to New Mexico by the railroad; its advent marks as great an upheaval as did the foundry in Turner's time. The railroad brings both the hope as well as new problems for the New Mexicans.

Bless Me, Ultima suggests that the new world will fall far short of a New Jerusalem. Serres amplifies on the furnace as a symbol of the advent of the industrial era acting like a conduit "for going backwards toward chaos. The foundry

is where creation starts over at zero. History is recast into primitive matter." Heart of Aztlán shows what the industrial age brings the New Mexican people.

In Anaya's second novel the world of the future, based on technology and urbanization, is worse. Old values change, and the new ones that are introduced do little to perfect people or improve their lives. The New Mexicans view the coming of the new world with ambivalence. The old are fearful that the new world will destroy their traditions and way of life, while the young are hoping that the new world will provide them with greater freedom.

In <u>Heart of Aztlán</u>, young people's hopes for a better life do not materialize. In Anaya's first two novels, the coming of the industrial age creates a disturbance that affects mostly native New Mexicans. It is Chávez's underworld experience that provides him with the understanding that guides his future life. The new world is godless, without the absolute values of old. Like a Nietzschean hero, he has the opportunity to challenge established values and develop new ones. But to achieve this goal the hero must be in a continual state of knowing himself and his relationship to the outside world. The underworld provides the pivotal experience that will help Chávez to go on to fulfill his destiny.

Seeking a way to break from poverty, repression, and his loss of heritage through assimilation, Chávez breaks away from this "river of torments" and willingly ventures into the world of the dead in a surrealistic experience similar to that in Dante's <u>Inferno</u>. The irony is that this is a hell for the innocent rather than for the guilty. As in Antonio's dream, these spectres speak to Chávez about their past lives. It is a bitter irony that even in death these souls still could not find peace.

";Injusticia!" The long lines of men bound in chains of steel called to him. ";Miseria!" frail, skeletal women cried as they gathered hungry children to their withered breast. ";Pobresa!" (sic) The masses echoed, and the torrent was so strong it lifted him up and tossed him into the raging waters. (pp. 130-31)

His journey into the underworld affected Chávez profoundly, providing him with new insights into the meaning of Aztlán. Chávez reinterprets Aztlán to mean something more than a specific geographical area; he envisions Aztlán as a metaphysical presence in the hearts and minds of the New Mexican people. Many will resist Chávez's plans for Barelas. The priest and Mannie say that he is a threat to the established powers, but having learned that change is possible, Chávez wants to replace old values that no longer benefit the people. He sees that if the community will base its culture on the individual rather than on a specific area of the land, Aztlán will become dynamic,

able to change positively with the times.

Each hero is changed by his experience in the underworld. Chavez learns that in a changing world people must renew their inner beings before they can overcome their oppressors. Chavez sees that he must bring back unity and love to the community. By placing his faith in his people, Chavez offers his extended family a new future. His new self provides him with the link that enables him to become one with his community. For Barelas, Chavez becomes a savior. The Biblical motifs that began in Bless Me, Ultima continue in Heart of Aztlán. Chávez is portrayed as the suffering Christ. In the underworld, crucifixion wounds appear on his hands. Through Chávez's "death" and "resurrection" he becomes a focal point of hope and inspiration for the people of Barelas. There are parallels between Chávez and Christ that go beyond imagery. Both attempt to work with the religious and political establishments of their times, but both are seen as threats and rejected by those in power.

Chávez's experiences in the underworld create empathy in him for his community, and he wants to develop mutual trust between himself and the people. The renewed Chávez offers a stark contrast to the other leaders, the priest, Lalo, and Mannie who place their trust not in their people,

but in power, violence, and materialism, respectively. Trust in the community, as exemplified by Chávez, is another criterion of a hero. Heart of Aztlán's hero redirects his energies from bitterness, frustration and hatred to trying to unite a community, and in time he understands fully what his role requires.

As the stories of Chávez and Tortuga develop, common motifs appear. Both heroes are isolated from their families, communities, and nature. The answers that they look for cannot be found in the present world. In Heart of Aztlán, the work, education and new fellowships the city provides are no compensation for the city's repression of the people. Tortuga and his fellow "inmates" hope to be cured and return home, but that hope never comes to fruition and the children doubt whether the hospital cares about them. And so like Chávez, Tortuga seeks answers as to how a community can maintain fidelity to its past and future in a technological society. Since Salomón is the only one who provides a means to discover the answers to his questions, Tortuga reluctantly accepts Salomón's rite of passage.

Tortuga's passage into the underworld occurs when he decides to enter into the deepest recesses of the hospital, the polio wards, to see the hospital's forgotten children.

There,

What I saw was burned into my memory forever. Even after I closed my eyes I could still see the comatose, shriveled body of a small child, and I could smell the putrid odor of the excrement that passed from the withered cocoon as it twisted in pain. (p. 117)

Tortuga's experience in the terminal polio wards makes him aware that his suffering is only part of a greater suffering that exists within the hospital. After much reflection, Tortuga concludes that the patients' need is <u>love</u>. This is what he learns from his experience in the underworld. It is love that the modern world has destroyed. Love is the gift that he wishes to return to his communities, the one where he now resides and one to which he will return.

Tortuga sees that no one has ever taken the time to let the hospital's children know that they are loved. The hospital has failed its prime objective, that is to care for the patients and return them to their loved ones. The hospital personnel have limited contact with the patients, and many fail to show any empathy for their situation. Salomón, in stark contrast to the institution, cares about and empathizes with his fellow patients. His love is unconditional, almost Christ-like. Even though many patients fail to listen to Salomón's words, they respect him for trying to instill hope. And yet, many patients

simply no longer care.

As an institution, the hospital deemphasizes personal contact as machines take the place of human attention, contact, and love. This lack of human attention causes insecurity, fear and bitterness. Danny is an example of what happens to those who are deprived of love. Tortuga is aware that he has the ability and opportunity to sensitize others to the children's plight. He can help others understand that beauty, love and death are all part of the life cycle. Like his mentor, Tortuga comprehends that isolation and bitterness only cause one to waste away one's life energies. Tortuga has a duty to be a model for his fellow "prisoners."

Learning from his experiences, Tortuga now brings back what he has learned to his two communities. Tortuga, like Chávez, reinterprets the community metaphorically, as a mystical body. If one part of that body is injured, the entire body is affected. Therefore when society lets its crippled waste away, society is injured as well. Salomón teaches Tortuga to be true to his history, a hard lesson that Salomón learned through experience after failure to heed it early in life caused his paralysis. When Tortuga overcomes his paralysis, he demonstrates the truth of Salomón's message. With Salomón's death Tortuga, like

Peter, must now go out and preach Salomón's "gospel of love."

Each hero wants to unite his community for the future through the "good news" that he has discovered in the underworld. Antonio unknowingly is attempting to unite his parents' generation with the future generations represented by Cico, Florence and Lupito. Once leaving the underworld, Antonio sees the world in an entirely new light, just as Tortuga and Chávez did. When he visits his grandfather's home, he recognizes the importance of nature to the farmers. The Lunas as farmers symbolize the families of civilization. As farmers, they reinforce Ultima's teachings that nature is an integral part of life. Antonio's father helps him understand that one needs to change with the times in order to fulfill one's responsibilities to others.

The first steps toward unity are taken when Antonio's Uncle Pedro respects Antonio's decision to be called Márez rather than Luna. Pedro begins the conversation: "'It has been a long time since there was an educated Luna. . .'
'I am a Márez,' I answered. I did not know why I said it, but it surprised him a little. 'What--,' Then he smiled.
'That is right, you are a Márez first, and then a Luna'"
(p. 239).

When the troubles first began between the Trementina and Márez families, Antonio's grandfather and uncles failed to come to Márez's aid. Pedro is aware that he and his family have a duty to their extended family. Ironically, the origin of this conflict lies with María's brothers seeking help from Ultima and the Márez family.

Just as Antonio brings "gifts" from the past to his family, so does Chávez in his own way. When Chávez returns home, he challenges the people to unite. Chávez wants to impart his "new knowledge" to the priest, knowledge that ironically the Church is supposed to have received from its founder, Jesus Christ. As an outsider, Chavez is perceived as a hostile force. He attempts to be optimistic and giving, while the priest is leery and cynical. The curate's attitude reflects a constricted vision of what the Church can offer its people. The arguments between the two are similar to De La Fontaine's fable on the wolf and the lamb. There exists a struggle between reason and power. Chavez, like De La Fontaine's lamb, has only words with which to defend himself; but those words cause fear and bitterness within the priest. Like the wolf, Fr. Cayo manipulates reason to prove his contentions.

Since the Church is unwilling to help, the only alternative for Chávez is to go directly to the people.

This action threatens the very existence of the Church and other institutions; as the priest comments: "they realize that the man who finds the key to destroy one of them can destroy them all. . . . 'Then I will find that key,' he answered the priest . . ." (p. 143). It is implied in the debate that a rational, trusting, and empathetic leader can overcome tyrannical powers and liberate his people. Chávez exemplifies the concerned leader as he explains that "while my people are not free, I am not free" (p. 142). Chávez's actions make him a new force from which the common individual can voice his needs and act against injustice. In the final analysis, Fr. Cayo is not himself the wolf, but only represents the carnivorous powers that wish to kill the lamb of God, that is, Chávez.

Chávez has the key to uniting his people: the destruction of the institutions that have enslaved them. He bases this key on the cultural history of the Mexican people and defines it as "el alma de la raza," describing it as the "bond that unites us all, it is the holy sacrament of the new movement, it is a universal brotherhood!" (p. 147). It will be the method in which a fragmented community can be reunited. He wants the people of Barelas to create a universal brotherhood founded on love. Chávez is cognizant that individuals need to maintain their own unique

identity. But individualism can also cause division. Sartre, Chávez realizes that unity and individualism are achievable if there is collective responsibility. 10 Individuals freely entering into the brotherhood maintain their personal dignity. The creation of a cohesive community causes people to see that they are interdependent, each contributing in his own way to the cause. One can see a relationship between Chavez's call for unity and St. Paul's letters to the early Christian churches, particularly to the Corinthians and Ephesians. 11 Chavez, like Paul, sees everyone coming together using their talents and gifts for the betterment of the community. Like Paul, Chávez compares the community to the mystical body of Christ. When one part of the mystical body is injured, the entire community is affected. Chavez says, "I cannot let things remain as they are, because I would not be free. . . . While my people are not free, I am not free" (p. 142). There is a similar theme in Paul's letters when he writes, "If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it." 12 Both share a common concern for their people. Chavez calls for unity based upon an agapian love. A brotherhood establishes a basis for eliminating their imprisonment and provides the people with a new beginning, with a willingness to take responsibility for their brothers and sisters.

But such a movement requires many sacrifices, and for some this is asking too much. Lalo explains it thus: "I work for my movidas to feed my family and keep a roof over their heads! I know how to cheat the welfare people, I know how to trade stamps for things I need, I know the way the barrio lives and where I can pick up an extra dollar . . ."

(p. 148).

Such actions as Lalo describes provide only "survival." Maintaining such petty vices and hatred only imprisons individuals into what Oriental philosophers interpret as man's interior enemies. 13 This applies equally to the controllers of institutions, who imprison themselves in materialism, power and self-centeredness. Before people can overcome their exterior enemies such as the railroad owners, they must first perfect themselves and renew their trust in one another. Barelas must become the Christ, eliminating interior enemies such as greed and ignorance so that it can achieve liberation. Chavez explains that by maintaining those vices, the community fails to achieve the higher values such as unity and trust that are an integral part of "El alma de la raza." He states, "mere survival drains our energy. Don't you see that as long as we work only for our own little gain that we remain strangers to each other, and we violate the

sacred trust of our fathers, el alma de la raza . . . " (p. 148). Individuals giving up their petty vices and deceitfulness achieve a lasting liberation that will guide them to victory over their former selves and their outward enemies. But many workers have experienced such deep anger and bitterness that they use any means to free themselves from their oppressors, including violence. This works to the advantage of the autocrats, who want the New Mexicans to be identified as petty thieves, living day to day like savages according to the standards of the outside world. Clemente vainly argues that "It was planned this way to keep us down, and it has worked -- " (p. 148). Chavez's analysis proves true. After Lalo's group incites a riot, the police are called in. The railroad owners malign the workers, calling them "communist," "dissident men," and "radicals" (p. 150). The workers' cries for justice go unheeded, and violence, for the present, ends the workers' hopes for unity, justice and peace. Lalo wanted liberation through violence. He achieved added oppression.

Chávez turns to Mannie to become the people's leader, but Mannie's attitude remains unchanged. He still fails to believe in his community or its future. Mannie's and Lalo's primary objective is not sacrifice, but immediate gratification. Mannie cynically states that "'if I thought

I could make a profit in this struggle of yours I would join . . . But no,' he added, 'There is no money to be made from poor people'" (p. 154). His attitude is based, in part, on the fact that he does not control his life. Mannie's business is controlled by outsiders who, in effect, control him. His concern is in maintaining material wealth; he entertains no thoughts of leading the people against those who control him. Such values as self-determination, unity and trust are alien to Mannie's character. Lalo and Mannie have no visions of the future.

nor justice to Barelas. Barelas is so caught in a quagmire of unrest caused by the railroad that many cannot see that change for the better is possible. People like Sapo and Lalo, who espouse violence, in the end learn that it only delivers misery and despair. Hope and unity come to Barelas only when the community accepts Chávez. But it takes the tragedy of an innocent adolescent's near death and paralysis to make the people reflect upon what has happened to their lives.

Tortuga's "underworld experience" in the terminally ill wards and his faith in Salomon cause a dramatic change for the better in him. The first visible sign of change is that he begins to walk again. There is a second, more

fundamental change in Tortuga. The bitterness that once existed is now gone. He now knows what the world has lost is love. That love that once was lost he now brings back to his peers and homeland. Tortuga mentions that "My love is the love I brought with me from the dark wards . . . a love you must reach to share . . ." (p. 133). Now, Tortuga integrates this love into his being. Love has been defined as helping people to understand the truth about themselves and their possibilities. <sup>14</sup> So the gift of love that Tortuga brings back is multifaceted.

Tortuga begins to sing about his experiences in the hospital, becoming the voice of the crippled children. As a leader, he wants the outside world to know of its "sins" of commission and omission against the hospitalized children. Neither Tortuga nor Salomón calls for Old Testament justice; what they conclude is that both the oppressed and oppressor need love. The love that Tortuga offers is concentric, beginning within him and growing as he shares it with his fellow patients. The patients now see Tortuga in a different light and find renewed hope in him. He is called a "regular," a "free man"; Cynthia calls him "my brother . . . my lover" (p. 151). Love, then, is the critical element lost by society brought back now to the patients to begin a new life. Tortuga's actions signify

that the communities of crippled children and the urban society may one day overcome their divisions and be united as one family in peace and love. Tortuga, like Antonio, is unknowingly acting as a bridge between urban society and the children it has cast away. Some patients, such as Danny, cannot accept Tortuga's love because it requires unselfishness and openness to others. To the extent that Danny has accepted the values of the urban world, he is representative of it. His failure to accept Tortuga's love causes the death of many children and a recognition by others that the answers to creating a better life were always there if they had only listened to Salomón. Life as expressed through the New Mexican culture is degraded by the Anglo-urban society. By the time the hero emerges, death and subjugation are commonplace within the community. Like Chavez, Tortuga will challenge both his fellow patients and his community to take control of their lives and to change their present state. But as much as the patients wish to renew themselves, in both instances it takes a tragedy to force the people to look inward. Like Chávez's community, the patients realize that they share partial responsibility for the injuries that afflict their lives. The hero's presence at the critical time provides them with the vehicle for change.

Antonio's dream foretelling that violence is the germ of creation is fulfilled with Ultima's death. It signifies not only the end of an age, but the possibility for beginning anew. Their present troubles overshadow their past differences. Antonio's father tells his son that "'Perhaps it is time we gave up the old differences . . .'" (p. 235). For the first time Antonio learns that discord need not continue. Antonio passes on to Uncle Pedro his insights on personal identity, his reasons for adopting the Marez family name. His uncle respects his nephew's decision. It is the tragedy of Ultima's death that creates the opportunity for the two families to unite. Aware that the present crisis demands a new attitude and ideas, Pedro endangers his own life and defies the Lunas' tradition of non-involvement to come to the family's aid.

The Márez and Luna families achieve peace on two levels. The deaths of Ultima and the two Trementina sisters bring their dispute to an end. On a deeper level, members of the family understand that change is inevitable and that if their culture is to continue, it too must develop. By respecting Antonio's new identity and coming to the Márez's aid shows that Pedro understands that change is necessary, that one's own history and not traditions should be the center of their lives. Antonio will be a

role model for future generations to follow. As the old world comes to an end, the Luna and Marez families face a changing world with the opportunity to be united in peace.

By overcoming his doubts and interior enemies, Chávez has crossed the "river of torments," freeing himself from the hatred, bitterness, and despair that imprisons other people's hearts. In a motif found in all three novels Chávez (like Christ) shows that all life is interrelated, that doing harm to another is doing harm to oneself. But the message people are not ready for Chávez's message. Caught up in trying to survive, they fail to look beyond their despair to the future, and that failure brings about tragedy for the community.

Running through the narrative is a feud between Sapo, a former convict and gang member, and Jason, Chávez's son. The feud, which began when Jason forcibly prevented Sapo from killing a young man, has gradually escalated as subsequent incidents increased the tension between the two. The smoldering feud erupts when Sapo decides to kidnap Jason's brother, Benjie. He shoots Benjie, paralyzing and almost killing him. Stopped in its tracks by the Chávez family's catastrophe, the community reflects upon the new injuries that its "body" has suffered. Some feel that a "plague" has engulfed their city. While they recognize

that they are victims of institutions that have exploited them, they become aware that they too must share responsibility for what has happened to their community. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Chávez realizes it is his responsibility to unite the people and lead them in the fight for their liberation. In uniting behind Chávez, the people of Barelas signify that they have decided to give up their old ways and want to renew their spirit.

In contrast to the priest and Mannie, who caved in to their interior enemies, Chávez can be the new savior because he offers a new spirit greater than that which materialism and power can provide. Chávez believes that if one has love in his heart, one can overcome his enemies. He tells the crowd waiting outside his house: "When ever discrimination and injustice and oppression rear their ugly heads the fire can be called upon to burn them away! . . . is the fire of love . . ." (p. 208).

Danny becomes the vehicle of tragedy in <u>Tortuga</u> when he kills an entire ward of terminally ill patients by turning off the electricity that operates their iron lungs. Earlier he had tried, unsuccessfully, to kill Tortuga. His action reinforces Salomón's point that contemporary man fails to see that "life is sacred" (p. 42). After Danny's arm is amputated, he realizes his suffering is only part of

a greater suffering that all patients experience. Danny expresses to Tortuga, "'Oh, such sad things have happened to us . . .'" (p. 184).

But the fundamental change that permits the children to unite behind Tortuga is that he offers them hope. Cast off by society, isolated in a desert hospital far from friends and family, the young patients have felt condemned to spend the rest of their lives in bitterness and withdrawal. Children who have attempted to re-enter urban society, Juanito Faraway for example, were rejected. Mike, another patient, points out that no one ever successfully left the hospital. But because Tortuga refuses to accept his plight and listens to Salomón's teachings, he learns to walk once again and returns to his family. By his actions, Tortuga proves the truth of Salomón's teachings.

Tortuga's empathy with the young people's suffering helps to make him an effective leader. He knows what it means to be a cripple and how despair undermines the individual. Tortuga wants people to know that many of modern society's values are empty and have failed to advance humanity. The introduction of technology has not improved Tortuga's community; it has created new forms of suffering by alienating them from nature and imposing poverty and social isolation. It will take love to lead the community

of patients and the larger community of urban society to regain the path, to mature and to evolve, always attempting to strive for a higher plateau. Once those communities have incorporated love into their being they will see, as St. Paul and many philosophers have written, that we are all one. 15

The central motif of personal identity is first introduced in Bless Me, Ultima. Antonio's life at first was characterized by dissension, but from Ultima he learns the basic lesson that he could better prepare for the future by redefining his identity incorporating his family's long history. He says that "I learned the glory and tragedy of the history of my people, and I came to understand how that history stirred in my blood" (p. 113). By uniting the past with his vision of the future, Antonio creates a synthesis which becomes an integral part of his identity. He acknowledges change as a necessary part of his being, as Ultima explains, "Accept the change, make it part of your strength--" (p. 234). Originally Antonio's quest was a personal one, but as his quest grows and he matures, his actions help future generations free themselves from rigid, empty rituals and traditions.

Heart of Aztlán expands the identity motif from the individual to the community with the thesis that Barelas

can redefine and therefore liberate itself, that the people need not be tied to imposed images of themselves as selfcentered workers without work, living from day to day. With Chavez's help, the community creates an identity by synthesizing the new with the old. Their new identity, the foundation on which the community unites is based on a new definition of Aztlán, interpreted by Chávez in metaphysical terms. New Mexican civilization resides not in a mythical homeland, Chavez tells them, but rather within the hearts of the people. This concept permits their civilization to live and develop within each one who identifies with the future. Thus Barelas' identity and unity are founded upon believing in universal brotherhood and Aztlán. At the end of the narrative that brotherhood is beginning to form: "the old men nodded and gave their blessing to the movement. 'No more waiting' The young ones whispered to each other . . . 'we're on the move!' They cheered and linked arms together" (pp. 206-07). As a united community, they achieve victory over their oppressors.

Tortuga, like Chávez, wants to achieve unity of body and soul for his communities through his quest. The identity motif in <u>Tortuga</u> is much broader than in either <u>Bless Me</u>, <u>Ultima</u> or <u>Heart of Aztlán</u>. Anaya expands the motif to include a whole generation of young people who

have been crippled by urban society. In <u>Tortuga</u>, then, is an acknowledgment that many different groups have been affected negatively by the development of urban society. The patients and hospital personnel represent a variety of groups: Juanito Faraway is an Indian boy, Buck a cowboy, Sadsack is a young Anglo, an aspiring baseball player whose legs were amputated. Another is an Irish nurse crippled by polio.

Tortuga brings hope to this diverse group after he makes what would seem to be an obvious discovery: that he is truly human. But he, like many individuals in urban society, has been stripped of his human dignity. Considering the lack of love and compassion he has received from his family and the hospital staff, it becomes clear why this is such a profound revelation to him known only as the turtle. Salomón inspires Tortuga to struggle on with his life, to face his destiny as a human being. Salomón illustrates with an allegorical story about how man, who once lived in the water with other sea creatures, makes the historic decision to leave the sea and live upon the earth

and to explore this new land of the sun. He called his new life "walking the path of the sun" . . . . He wanted to share the new beauty with his brother the turtle. . . . Only a few came upon the land . . . when frightened, they always retreat to the safety of the water. We cannot retreat into the darkness, Tortuga, we cannot build shells like the turtle . . . our commandment is to live in the light of the sun. (pp. 68-69)

Through parable and metaphor Salomón teaches Tortuga his identity is tied to nature and humanity. Like the first man to walk upon the earth, Tortuga should embrace life, always trying to advance, not letting pain or suffering hinder his destiny. Tortuga's and humanity's destiny is to struggle toward perfection and toward understanding, as Salomón states, that all "life is sacred" (p. 42).

In urban society, by contrast, certain lives are considered more valuable than others. With such a value system humanity broke away from its pursuit of perfection, regressing into a primitive state in which power and strength determine who survives.

The young people find a hero in Tortuga, one with whom they can identify because his actions give them hope that they too will be cured and return home. The most important part of Tortuga's new identity is the one he accepts from Salomón, who sees Tortuga as a singer, a new Crispín. As a singer or minstrel he represents man's creative powers. Tortuga writes songs that express his desire to see urban society rise toward "wisdom and love . . . and duty which leads to perfection." Tortuga's new song also has Biblical allusions. In Revelations and Psalms the bringing of the "new song" symbolizes the beginning of a new order

based upon love and justice. 17 He returns home to sensitize the people with his songs so that they will remember and reunite with their destiny. Tortuga, then, like Antonio, acts as a bridge between two groups: the hospital patients and the urban society that placed them there. Eventually, Tortuga's goal is to see these two groups become one. To achieve this he must, as Salomón tells Tortuga, "Make a song of rejoicing from all you have seen and felt! Sing a song of love . . ." (p. 196).

In many ways both Heart of Aztlán and Tortuga can be seen as allegorical stories. Both narratives symbolize a crippled world. Both stories take place within a limited area, Heart of Aztlán in Barelas and Tortuga in the hospital. Both communities are imprisoned. The only characters able to travel outside that prison are the heroes and their aides. Both Barelas and the hospital are filled with physically, emotionally and spiritually crippled characters. These characters are in a state of upheaval that leaves them with an incomplete identity, one that fails to enable them to live constructively. At the conclusion of Tortuga's and Chávez's quests, the heroes have struggled to achieve a reversal of urban society's trends toward technological perfection at the expense of human beings. The two heroes have discovered those lost virtues,

such as unity, love and history, which are necessary to make life meaningful once again; and they return home to share what they have learned.

Anaya's tales open the question of why society has gone so far in devaluing life and placing its faith in technology, materialism, oppression and other interior enemies. Lukács writes that it takes a tragedy for humanity to ask itself the central question, ". . . how can life become essential?" 18 Through the discord that has engulfed the world, Anaya's heroes ask what modern society has done for humanity and for civilization, and whether they can be true to their past while they continue developing their culture for future generations. While the rest of the people remain immature and in despair about their present state, the heroes dare to question whether they must accept continual stagnation. Dante writes in Convivio that people have a responsibility to others, and this ethical thread has been woven into European history by the Greeks since before Aristotle's time. 19 Anaya's heroes follow the individual's duty according to this historical pattern. At the end of each of the three novels the hero's quest is no longer a solo journey. The people realize that the heroes' quests give new meaning to their lives as well and know that their destiny is galvanized with his. The

hero has come to be identified with what Nietzsche defines as the highest values: purpose, unity and truth. 20 Anaya's characters do not forget the past that has caused them so much pain. They incorporate the past and share it with future generations. The people's historical role is to follow the example provided by Antonio, Chávez and Tortuga.

#### Notes

- 1 Harry Slochower, Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1970), p. 24.
- Slochower, "André Gide's Thesus," in <u>Mythopoesis</u>, p. 293.
- William Barclay, The Revelation of John, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 3-5.
- 4 Gertrude Jobes, <u>Dictionary of Mythology</u>, <u>Folklore</u> and <u>Symbols</u> (New York: <u>Scarecrow Press</u>, 1962), pp. 76, 309.
- 5 Stephen C. Doyle, "Mark's Gospel: Messiah with a Cross," in <u>Catholic Update</u> (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger, 1979), pp. 1-4; Alexander Jones, ed., <u>The Jerusalem Bible</u> (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), "Psalms," p. 803; "Gospel According to Mark," pp. 88-89.
- Michel Serres, "Turner Translates Carnot," in Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy, ed. Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 60-61.
  - <sup>7</sup> Serres, p. 61.
- Martin Heidegger, <u>Nihilism</u>, Vol. IV of <u>Nietzsche</u>, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 5-7.
- Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 45-47.
- 10 Slochower, "The Existentialist Myth," in Mythopoesis, p. 309.
- 11 Jones, "1 Corinthians," pp. 304-05; "Ephesians," pp. 334-35.
  - <sup>12</sup> Jones, p. 304.

- 13 Carl Olsen, "Mystic Hero in Search of Liberation," Journal of Dharma, 4 (July 1979), 238.
- 14 Jacob Needleman, "Psychotherapy and the Sacred,"

  Parabola: Myth and the Quest for Meaning, 1 (Winter 1976),
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- 15 Ian Kellas, <u>Peace for Beginners</u> (London: Writers and Readers, 1984), pp. 32-37; Siddhartha Gautama, <u>The Dhammapada</u>, trans. Irving Babbitt (New York: New Directions Books, 1965), p. 4; Jones, "1 Corinthians," pp. 304-05; "Ephesians," pp. 334-35.
- 16 G. A. Gaskell, ed., <u>Dictionary of All Scripture</u> and <u>Myths</u>, Vol. II (New York: Julian Press, 1960), p. 703.
- 17 J. E. Cirlot, <u>A Dictionary of Symbols</u>, trans. Jack Sage, 2nd ed. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), p. 703.
  - <sup>18</sup> Lukács, p. 35.
- 19 Joseph Campbell, <u>The Masks of God: Creative Mythology</u> (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 634.
  - Heidegger, Nihilism, p. 61.

### CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

Anaya's three novels can be seen in two parts. Bless Me, Ultima stands by itself as an introduction to Heart of Aztlán and Tortuga. The first novel presents a way of life that is rapidly dying away, a culture approaching its nadir. World War II, in particular the explosion of the atomic bomb, marks the beginning of the end for the rural New Mexican world. The uncertainties the characters feel about the rapid changes in their society are expressed in different ways. Antonio's father continually dwells on the past. His mother tries to live Antonio's life by deciding for him that he should become a priest or a teacher. priest, whose model should be Christ, concerns himself with law and ritual rather than people. Even Ultima is affected, involving herself with other people's problems only if others will take responsibility for the consequences. Even as the old world comes to an end with Ultima's death, the future remains uncertain.

Heart of Aztlán and Tortuga depict an apocalyptic world. The old world has come to an end and the New Mexicans are thrust abruptly into an alien society beyond

their understanding, an urban world of high technology and new, materialistic values, a world in which the workers fail to reap the benefits of their labor. The railroad owners and their allies, working through individuals who have betrayed themselves and their community, have forced Clemente's community into submission. Heart of Aztlán shows the corrupting effects of a tyrannical capitalistic system on the priest, Lalo, and Mannie, the local community "leader." Anaya's second novel questions relationships within modern society, showing how a class system subjugates individuals and sets up artificial barriers between people. The need of Anaya's heroes to comprehend what is occurring to their world is a dominant motif in all three novels. The hero's need for knowledge is a theme that dominates European literature. Goethe's Faust, Heidegger's Being and Time, Gide's Immortalist and Sophocles' Oedipus, The King are some examples.

For the community, the hero's new knowledge represents the opportunity to create a new cultural consciousness. 

A new identity is one that is firmly rooted in the community's history with a vision toward the future. Chavez and Tortuga are like the messianic heroes who fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament by bringing forth a new age of prosperity, peace, and justice for their people. 

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Antonio, but especially Chávez and Tortuga, show that both the individual as well as the community can create a new identity. The heroes show their communities that a new identity encompasses history, love and unity, and that the new identity will help the community defend itself effectively against being assimilated into an emotionally destructive technological society.

Since God has been eliminated by technology, the heroes cannot achieve harmony, that is, an everlasting peace with God. What the hero does bring about is a humanistic peace, an inner peace that can grow and expand to affect others through the example of the hero. It can be described as concentric, beginning within the hero, then expanding to affect everyone who comes in touch with the hero and is willing to listen to what he has to offer. hero forms an accord with the people, a secular covenant to achieve a new life in a world that is uncaring about people's lives. It is a peace that the people must continually renew by remembering their history. If the community were to forget, another hero would have to rise and again question the present malaise and help to reestablish peace. The hero's quest brings about a better life for those who suffer in an uncaring world. Antonio, and in particular, Clemente and Tortuga let others know that by following in

their path they can achieve liberation from an uncaring world and find a future.

### Notes

- 1 Margaret Fleming, <u>Teaching the Epic</u> (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974), Introduction, pp. 1-3.
- Alexander Jones, ed., <u>The Jerusalem Bible</u> (Garden City, NY: n.p., 1966), "Introduction to the Prophets," pp. 1124-25, 1140; "Isaiah," passim; "Joel," p. 1474.

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