

LA FUERZA DE LA TIERRA: PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES
IN RUDOLFO ANAYA'S *BLESS ME, ULTIMA*

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ABSTRACT

Rudolfo Anaya believes that the power of the land stems from man's personal relationship with the earth. He believes that an energy flows within the earth and that man may tap into that source to create physical and spiritual harmony with nature. Anaya's perception of landscape is central to his philosophical and artistic visions, and this study examines Anaya's beliefs regarding the power of the land and applies those beliefs to his literature. A detailed definition of landscape is established, and the thesis specifically examines Anaya's utilization of physical and cultural landscapes in *Bless Me, Ultima*.

Rudolfo Anaya's perception of personal landscape is directly related to the idea of universal harmony, and his beliefs are applied to the domain of the human spirit. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya integrates physical and cultural landscapes to create a spiritual bond between the characters and the land which reflects man's inherent unity with nature.

Via physical and cultural landscapes, the novel emerges as an organic whole and it becomes clear that the power of the land is the driving force behind Rudolfo Anaya's creativity.

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Chapter 1

A Sense of Place:

Rudolfo Anaya's Philosophical and Artistic Visions

I don't believe a person can be born and raised in the southwest and not be affected by his landscape. (Anaya, *Writer's Landscape* 99)

Jagged-peaked mountains touching an azure sky, the stark-red beauty of a solitary rock formation, the boundless expanse of the high plateau stretching into eternity--these expressions describe the landscape of the Southwest United States, the landscape of Rudolfo Anaya. Born in the New Mexican village of Pastura, south of Santa Rosa, Anaya has lived most of his life in New Mexico. He is no stranger to the searing heat of the summer sun, the prick and sting of blowing sand, or the sense of timelessness which pervades the desert. In fact, these elements are his lifeblood; they are primal forces in the creation of the man and the writer.

Anaya's belief in the power of the land stems from his individual relationship with the earth. He believes that

there is an energy flowing within the earth and that it is possible for man to become attuned to that energy and tap into that source. Once tapped, this earth-energy creates harmony between man and landscape, and it is that harmony which may ultimately bring man to the realization of personal epiphany:

The power of the earth is reflected in its landscape. And each one of us defines our relationship to the energy of place according to our particular world view. Energy flows from the earth and as one learns how to receive that energy one also learns how to give of one's energy to dissolve the polarity of metaphor and create the unity of epiphany. (Anaya, *Writer's Landscape* 99-100)

Anaya's statement regarding the "polarity of metaphor" requires examination. The "man/place metaphor" is comprised of two elements: on one pole stands man, and on the other is the majestic, awe-inspiring landscape of the Southwest (Anaya, *Writer's Landscape* 99). Man first views the landscape around him, and his innate senses absorb it completely. He sees the physical environment around him; he smells its subtle fragrances, feels the currents of air brush against his body, and touches the plants, the rocks, and the

dirt beneath his feet. The vista before his eyes becomes internalized; his senses evoke a natural response to the landscape around him. Anaya believes that it is this natural response of man to his landscape which provides the setting in which epiphany may occur. In fact, according to Anaya, "the epiphany is the natural response to the landscape, a coming together of these two forces" (*Writer's Landscape* 99). Anaya believes he is in constant touch with this epiphany; he feels a close kinship with his environment at all times, and he is always receptive to the power in his landscape.

Rudolfo Anaya believes that man should utilize his natural senses to develop a close relationship with the environment. If man is physically attuned to his personal landscape, then he will be spiritually attuned as well. The external will become internal, and when man responds to what he sees and smells and feels around him, then he can receive the earth's natural energy and create the physical and spiritual unity of epiphany.

If Anaya's belief in the dissolution of polarity between man and place and the necessity of fusion between the physical and spiritual is true for all men, then it is certainly true for the writer. Because writing is a task which demands a great deal of creative energy, it seems logical that Anaya's theory regarding the power of landscape

would be particularly beneficial in the writer's creation of setting, mood, characterization, and theme. Indeed, Anaya believes very strongly that it is a writer's task to convey landscape to the reader and work through the man/place metaphor:

When the writer has incorporated his sense of place into his art and the entire sense of the landscape--characters, emotion, experience, detail and story--permeates his craft, the reader will respond, and that response is the beginning of a new epiphany. (*Writer's Landscape* 102)

Anaya's theory regarding the power of landscape is twofold: first, man must learn how to tap into the earth's natural energy by becoming both physically and spiritually attuned to the landscape around him, thus dissolving the polarity of the man/place metaphor and creating the unity of epiphany; and, secondly, the writer must be able to convey the landscape to the reader to work through the harmony of this essential metaphor and create a new epiphany via the reader's response to the writer's landscape. Anaya addresses this important aspect of his theory:

How does the power of the epiphany translate itself into the writer's task? My sense of place helps to

define my center, and that center becomes the point of view from which I observe life. The discovery of place was very important to me, and very crucial to the writing of *Bless Me*, *Ultima* and *Heart of Aztlan*. My writing before that discovery was busy duplicating false models; it had no flavor to it, no characters, no story. (*Writer's Landscape* 100)

The power of epiphany is crucial to the writer's success because the epiphany provides energy. When a writer is creatively energized, the written landscape becomes real, characters seem to awaken and move, and life materializes from the pages of the work. But one important question remains after examination of Anaya's theory, and that is the question of application. A writer may accomplish the twofold task of establishing his relationship with the landscape and then conveying that landscape to the reader by duplicating the power of epiphany:

Now, in that lonely act of writing when I struggle with my craft, I aim to duplicate the power of the epiphany. The relationship I feel with the earth fuses with time and memory and imagination and creates the scenes, characters, images, symbols and themes that are woven into the story. Sitting

quietly behind the typewriter I evoke the
epiphanies sleeping in memory and the flood begins.

(Anaya, *A Writer Discusses His Craft* 41-42)

The sense of memory, then, is significant because it is through the writer's memory that he may recreate the original epiphany experienced as a result of his response to the landscape. It is important to understand that when Anaya uses the term "memory," he is not simply referring to that one particular epiphany which the writer experienced through the power of the landscape, but he is also referring to the primal memory which exists in all humans. Man's experience with the land is not temporal in nature; his relationship with the earth is tied to the human history which precedes his present existence. Man's life experience is only a part of what has gone before him and that which lies ahead. Josephina Niggli, a Chicano writer who sees industrial culture as a destructive and dehumanizing force, suggests that few people are truly detached from their cultural origins. The cultural memories reside deep in their minds, ready to emerge (Paredes 32). Within the human mind exists the subconscious collective memory of human origins, of interaction with the land over the course of history, of a basic relationship between man and nature which, in spite of urbanization and industrialization, remains unchanged. It is

these memories steeped in the roots of man's cultural history, combined with the power of his immediate landscape, which Anaya calls upon for his creative energy:

There is more depth to the land than just the reality of the land. There is a whole historic essence that lives within me, that is part of me. My reverence, my love for, my response to the land comes not only out of my brief lifetime, but it has also to do with that historic essence that I carry with me and is part of that complete historic lifestream: the timestream. I am connected to the land not only during my lifetime but I am connected to it because the people that I am from were connected to it. (Moody 3)

Three important forces are evident in Anaya's philosophical and artistic visions: these are the forces of place, memory, and imagination. In order for Anaya to explore realism in writing, he must be in tune with both his immediate landscape and his primal memories. His relationship to region is an important aspect because it is the "taking off point" (Anaya, *Writer's Landscape* 98). It is the place where imagination and the image-laden memory begin their work. Anaya's development of sense of place combined

with the relationship which exists between landscape and epiphany are the key ingredients in his creative process:

The raw sensual beauty of my encounters with the presence of the river and the llano and the wind and rain and sun had become a part of me! . . . I became intensely aware in my writing of the process by which the landscape and its epiphanies had become incorporated into memory and how the same energy and emotion present at the actual epiphany could be used in writing! I felt I had found a natural reservoir that was as deep as I cared to explore. (Anaya, *Writer's Landscape* 102)

To stand upon the land and become one with it, to receive its power in the present and store that energy alongside the primal memories already in existence within the mind, is to create the physical and spiritual unity of epiphany. Rudolfo Anaya's sense of place is the key which unlocks his process of creative writing. His award-winning novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*, is a prime example of Anaya's belief in the power of the land. For the man and the writer, sense of place is foremost, both in his literature and in his life.

Chapter 2

From Earth to Mind:

The Duality of Landscape

Any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.

(Norwood 231)

The basic issue at the heart of this study is the concept of landscape. Landscape is dual in nature: it is the tangible and visible objects within man's immediate vista, and the invisible, varied patterns of man's past and present activities. It is for this reason that the concept of "landscape" requires an exploration of this duality.

An examination of the origins of the word "landscape" aids in understanding the term. In its Old English form (*landscipe*), the term was used in the Middle Ages to refer to a district owned by a particular lord or inhabited by a particular group of people. The modern form of the word "landscape" dates from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, when the influence of Dutch *landschap* painters encouraged a revival and redefinition of landscape to refer to representations of scenery, especially rural scenery (Mikesell 10). The popular conception of landscape

was well expressed by Philip Gilbert Hamerton, who wrote several books on landscape appreciation in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In his 1885 book entitled *Landscape*, Hamerton wrote:

The word can be used in two senses--a general and a particular. In the general sense, the word 'landscape' without the article means the visible world, all that can be seen on the surface of the earth by a man who is himself upon the surface; and in the special sense, 'a landscape' means a piece of the earth's surface that can be seen at once; and it is always understood that this piece will have a certain artistic unity. (10)

This dual definition is reiterated in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, where landscape is described as "a portion of land or territory which the eye can comprehend in a single view, including all the objects so seen, especially in its pictorial aspect." Moreover, both Hamerton and *Webster's* give the term a subjective connotation, for the reference is to area or scenery as viewed by a particular human observer.

Landscape study in the field of humanistic geography offers additional insight regarding the duality of landscape. The predominant belief among humanistic geographers is that

as man outwardly views his landscape, he creates internal landscapes which express his social and personal identity. These internal landscapes reveal his tastes, values, aspirations, and even his fears. Humanistic geographer Edward C. Relph offers this belief in his definition of landscape:

It is everything I see and sense when I am outdoors, including not only visible forms but also the smell of gasoline fumes, the feel of the wind, and remembered experiences. (57)

The idea emerges, then, that man's view of landscape is perceptual in nature. On one level are the physical, natural forms in the landscape around him; these forms are concrete and tangible. On a deeper level, however, man tends to internalize the physical elements. As these images are processed within the conscious and subconscious minds, they take on both personal and cultural meaning.

Cultural history must enter strongly into any explanatory study of landscape. The idea that cultures change in the face of contact with the land has long held the attention of anthropologists. Throughout history, the landscape has reflected significant cultural conditions and has highlighted the character and importance of man's activity. In fact, a primary objective in the field of

landscape study is the tracing of "natural landscape" into a "cultural landscape" (Mikesell 11). It is possible to expand the definition of "cultural landscape" by examining its historical essence as expressed by Philip Wagner in his book entitled *Man, Space, and Environment*:

Human beings do respond and adapt to their environment: not simply to the environment of the moment, though, but to all those countless local environments in which they have learned in the past, and in which those who taught them have learned. (58)

This idea is strikingly similar to Rudolfo Anaya's belief in the existence of a collective human memory and the importance of primal images to man's perception of landscape, both external and internal. According to Anaya:

What we all share is a kind of collective memory It simply says that there was more harmony, there was more a sense that we knew we are dust. That we had been created from it, that we were in touch with it, that we danced on it, and the dust swirled around us, and it grew the very kind of basic stuff that we need to exist. (Márquez 46)

One of man's basic quests is for spiritual unity and harmony, and Anaya believes that satisfaction in this quest

may be obtained from the land. He implies that because civilized man is no longer receptive to the power of the land, he is out of touch with his spiritual self. The dichotomy of man's spiritual and psychic debility is a characteristic of modern existence. Many believe that these debilities arise as a result of socialization and the dialectic. Man's social evolution has endowed him with the ability to discuss ideas and to reason by dialogue. His intellectual capabilities are sometimes in conflict with the eternal truths inherent in nature. Man's socialization often results in dialectical tension between the opposing forces of intellect and nature. Anaya disagrees:

I say it comes from our spiritual self, a disharmonizing force. Our civilizing and socializing influence has made us not as unified, not as harmonious, as archaic man. To go back and get in touch, and to become more harmonious, we go back to the unconscious and we bring out all of the symbols and archetypals that are available to all people. (Márquez 47)

Thus, Anaya believes that a reconciliation of elemental forces is necessary for man to achieve spiritual unity. Man's perception of the landscape is the key to this reconciliation. He must relate to the earth on two levels,

the physical and the cultural, in order to attain harmony with nature. It is this perception of the landscape which creates its duality. Viewing the physical, external landscape should not result in a separation from the land; rather, internalizing the visual and sensory elements of the landscape give it cultural meaning. Wyman Herendeen notes this physical and cultural duality of landscape:

Man does not look to the landscape for an extension of himself, but as another way of looking within himself. He does not see the world as external nature distinct from himself, but as another aspect of his and (at the same time) his culture's mental processes. (17)

To define landscape in cultural terms, one must understand that landscape is not a passive environment. The land stimulates and influences human behavior. This aspect of landscape is particularly critical in the study of cultures or historical periods in which human, natural, and spirit worlds are blended in ways not conceptualized in the scientific, industrialized community. Environment communicates; indeed, all communication has to reach its human target through man's sensory (environmental) field (Wagner 55-56). The relationship between man and landscape is not complete without communication:

A place or a landscape declares its underlying intent, and its ideal meaning, when living people activate it and actualize it. Otherwise it may be nearly mute. (Wagner 59)

Communication plays a vital role in man's relationship with the land. Man needs to communicate with the land, physically and culturally, to receive its harmonizing force and create spiritual unity. The land, in turn, recreates itself through the channels of human communication such as art and literature. Man responds to the natural splendors of the land and absorbs its life-giving energy. This response bonds him to the earth and allows him to recreate the earth-energy via artistic talent. Man communicates his vision and thereby imbues his landscape with life and meaning.

Physical and cultural landscapes provide the context and background for life. The landscapes people see and those they create reflect their life experiences. An extensive literature explores these relationships, not only in American landscapes and particular American regions but also in other cultures and in broad historical perspective (Norwood 4). Certain key ideas regarding the function of landscape recur in literature, and the most significant of these are that landscape incorporates the natural and cultural features.

Most importantly, landscape provides both personal and cultural meaning.

Throughout literature, landscape is viewed as a source of strength and personal identity. A common literary theme exists wherein people seek personal transformation through interaction with the landscape. Human response to landscape is shaped by many factors, including personality, lifestage, religion, class, and politics (Norwood 4). In addition, the circumstances of man's encounter with the landscape are highly influential in producing his response. Most importantly, however, a response to landscape is indicative of man's inseparable bond with nature. It is not surprising, then, that the focal point of landscape literature is to see nature as art, rather than art as nature:

All the physical world is inseparable from the shaping art of language. All literature shares in the recreative process by which the world is remade by the word, and by which we try to reaffirm that unity between language and nature. Nature separate from art and the organizing perceptions is inconceivable. The intellect strives to realize itself in nature through words and language.

(Herendeen 7)

Nature is certainly a source of revelation for man; it is in the boundless freedom of nature where thoughts can take their widest range. The natural landscape is a reservoir of creativity, though it is always the product of one's unique perception. It is important to remember that man's idealized images and visual prejudices color the features of his landscape on both levels, physical and cultural. What one man sees before him is probably not what the man beside him sees. It is human perception which colors the landscape, just as it is human perception which creates the literature of the land.

An author may choose to incorporate landscape in writing for three basic reasons: (1) to describe both the region and the essential facts of a people in faithful detail; (2) to develop the writer's own interpretation of man's relationship with the earth; and (3) to develop the theme of man's role in nature. A writer may employ landscape description either as an end in itself or as a way to establish mood, set scenes, define characters, or develop themes. However a writer chooses to incorporate landscape in his literature, and for whatever reason, literary landscapes are always the product of a union between nature and imagination. While landscape is based in nature and in man's response to it, it is the

combined powers of memory and imagination which bring the landscape to life:

Memory is the most important faculty serving the creative intellect. It is through memory that the writer reaches back through the recesses of the intellect to divine wisdom Mentally, he moves from place to place, topic to topic, in the pursuit of understanding. (Herendeen 15)

Memory, then, is the primary tool in which a writer conveys his landscape to the reader. The writer may use his individual memory, as well as his cultural memory, combined with the power of the landscape to produce creative energy. Frances Yates, in her book entitled *Art of Memory*, reflects on the importance of place, memory, and imagination in the creative process:

Thought can embrace any region whatsoever and in it will construct the setting of some locus. Any 'place,' whether real or imaginary, becomes the product of the creative mind. (qtd. in Herendeen 15)

Rudolfo Anaya also places great emphasis on the power of memory in the creative writing process. His memories, of course, stem from his contact with one landscape in particular--the Southwest. It is a unique landscape in many

ways. While many people visualize the Southwest as only a desert region, it is also an extension of the high plains of the Texas Panhandle and Oklahoma. But what distinguishes it from that somewhat monotonous region is its variety of landforms--innumerable, red-earthed mesas scattered amid golden grass; the steep and jagged canyons; the sparse fringe of pinon and juniper trees. The physical makeup of the Southwest gives it a fundamental unity: its topography, climate, vegetation, and the very quality of sunlight and distance help to create an aura of solitude. Its sensations of open space, light, and altitude create immense vistas and exude a sense of timelessness. Photographer and writer Nancy Newhall catches the power of the Southwest landscape in this description:

Noon in the desert is a vast blaze overhead and a hard glow below. You are shut in by vast distances of light. You walk in the focus of the sun's rays. You are clothed in sun; sun glows in your blood, until even your bones feel incandescent You feel in your body why the desert wears gray, and why it blooms with such vital brilliance. (qtd. in Norwood 234)

The cultural landscape of the Southwest is unique, as well. There exists in the Southwest a confluence of American

Indian, Chicano, and Anglo peoples, each with a cultural heritage and tradition. It is, in essence, an ancient landscape with a visible chronology. The prehistoric Indian migrants produced a juxtaposition of the primordial and the human, while the Spanish farmers and ranchers contributed their own European heritage and traditions. This combination of physical and cultural landscapes influenced the development of Rudolfo Anaya's belief in the power of landscape and the creation of epiphany. He has lived the same burning sun, the same boundless *llano*, the same mysterious rivers which his ancestors lived. It is no wonder that his landscape possesses not only the natural, majestic beauty which has endured through the ages, but also the silent messages of primal memories:

. . . in those early formative years I was haunted by the soul of the river, that tremendous energy of the place which I later called the 'presence of the river.' That presence, which was the same power I felt on the open *llano*, touched my primal memory and allowed me to discover the river gods and the other essential symbols which were to become so important in my writing. It was those times when I

surrendered myself to the surge of energy that I
felt the potential of the epiphany. (Anaya,
Writer's Landscape 99)

Anaya's relationship with the earth is deeply-rooted; he is attuned to its energy, both physically and culturally. The landscape of the Southwest has endowed him with a creative power which is evident in his life and his literature. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya integrates both physical and cultural landscape to define setting, theme, and characterization; to create chaos and confusion; and, ultimately, to resolve conflicts and spiritual complexities. The chapter which follows will provide a detailed examination of this integration.

Chapter 3

Nature's Path to Spiritual Unity:

The Function of Landscape in *Bless Me, Ultima*

The sun was good. The men of the llano were men of the sun. The men of the farms along the river were men of the moon. But we were all children of the white sun. (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 25)

These words spoken by Antonio Marez, the central character in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, highlight the four physical elements around which the novel revolves: the llano, the river, the moon, and the sun. These aspects of physical landscape reflect the natural environment of the Southwest, and they are the primary materials used by Anaya in the writing of this work. Because Anaya's roots are firmly anchored in the soil of the Southwest, he is acutely aware of its external qualities and its cultural history. His response to the Southwest landscape is immediate and complete. He uses the essential elements of the land, combined with the pre-Columbian thought and cultures of its indigenous people, to create the setting, characterization, and theme of *Bless Me, Ultima*.

Bless Me, Ultima is told in the first person by its main character, Antonio Márez (often referred to as "Tony"), who is six years old at the beginning of the story. While events within the novel unfold as if in the present, Anaya makes it clear that a significant temporal distance separates Antonio from the experiences he describes (Martínez and Lomelí 35). The novel depicts the process of Antonio's psychological maturation--his quest for manhood. Tony's quest is tied to his relationship with the mysterious Ultima, an old woman viewed as a benevolent *curandera* by her friends and as an evil *bruja* by her enemies. The story begins when Ultima comes to live with the Márez family, and it is with Ultima's help and guidance that Antonio learns to recognize the existence of sin and evil. The plot evolves in a series of episodes that are significant in Tony's psychological development: Ultima teaches him about nature--the *llano*, the river, and the Luna farm at Las Pasturas; he participates with Ultima in curing his uncle from the curse of a *bruja* and in lifting another curse that is affecting a family friend; he experiences spiritual conflict between the rituals of the Catholic church and the rituals of ancient Indian religions; he is a witness to the violent deaths of two men; and, finally, he sees Ultima die. During the process of Tony's quest and throughout the novel, Anaya incorporates both

physical and cultural landscape to define characters and scenes, to cause chaos and confusion, and ultimately to resolve conflicts and create spiritual unity.

The setting of the novel comprises both the physical and spiritual backgrounds against which the action of the story takes place. In this dual sense, the elements which comprise the setting are: (1) its actual geographic location, including its topography, scenery, and climate; (2) the characters' occupations and their daily manner of living; (3) the time period in which the story takes place; and (4) the cultural and spiritual environment of the characters, e.g., the emotional, social, moral, and religious conditions through which the characters evolve.

Anaya's use of physical and cultural landscape is integral to the creation of setting in *Bless Me, Ultima*. In its physical sense, the novel is grounded in the primordial elements of earth, water, air, and fire. The story takes place primarily in the small town of Guadalupe in eastern New Mexico where both Anglos and Hispanos live. The Márez house is located on the edge of the *llano*, the vast expanse of land upon which the *vaqueros* roam and cling tenaciously to a spirited but vanishing way of life. The *llano* is a wild piece of nature which often embodies the force of evil, and it is subject to the harshness and changeability of the

seasons. Summer brings whirling winds and blistering heat to the llano:

In the summer the dust devils of the llano are numerous. They come from nowhere, made by the heat of hell they carry with them the evil spirit of a devil, they lift sand and papers in their path.

(Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 51)

Winter on the llano is no kinder. Freezing temperatures and the force of the wind make it a formidable environment:

Snows alternated with the wind of the llano, the coldest wind of the world. The snows would melt then the wind would freeze the water into ice.

Then the snows would come again. (*Ultima* 141)

In spite of its sometimes hostile environment, the llano also provides a sense of calm and tranquility where people may find peace and solitude. Its open plains and rolling hills represent the purity of nature, and this purity is often contrasted with the evil found in the town of Guadalupe:

The two lightposts of the bridge were a welcome sight. They signaled the dividing line between the turbulence of the town and its sins and the quiet peace of the hills of the llano. (*Ultima* 158)

This contrast between purity and sin as shown through the landscape of the *llano* reflects Anaya's belief that the civilization and socialization of man have made him "not as unified, not as harmonious, as archaic man" (qtd. in Márquez 47). Sin is an unavoidable result of civilization; the solitude of the *llano* retains its purity.

Another important aspect of physical setting in the novel is the river which runs between the *llano* and the town. The lush grass and thick trees along the banks of the river are a stark contrast to the barren, sun-baked earth of the *llano*. But like the *llano*, the river, too, is changeable in nature. Sometimes the river basks in quiet beauty:

The green of the river passed through a bright orange and turned brown. The trickle of water in the river bed was quiet, not singing as in the summer. The afternoons were gray and quiet, charged with the air of ripeness and belonging.

(*Ultima* 141)

Yet the river is also dark and frightening. After witnessing Lupito's death, the physical landscape of the river creates chaos and fear in Antonio:

The dark shadows of the river enveloped me as I raced for the safety of home. Branches whipped at my face and cut it, and vines and tree trunks

caught at my feet and tripped me. . . The horror of darkness had never been so complete as it was for me that night. (*Ultima* 20)

Anaya's physical descriptions of the river serve to create more than simply visual images; the river exudes a sense of the unknown. The silence of the river drapes it in an air of mystery which is referred to throughout the novel as the *presence* of the river. Antonio feels this *presence*, and Ultima explains:

'What is it?' I asked, for I was still afraid.

'It is the *presence* of the river,' Ultima answered.

. . . The *presence* was immense, lifeless, yet throbbing with its secret message.

'Can it speak?' I asked and drew closer to Ultima.

'If you listen carefully--' she whispered.

(*Ultima* 38)

Antonio's fear of the *presence* of the river is assuaged by Ultima. Through her natural wisdom, Tony learns that the *presence* is actually the "soul of the river" and that it is a symbol of unity (*Ultima* 14). Tony begins to understand the nature of spiritual unity through the landscape of the river. He comes to realize that his soul is part of a universal

soul; Tony is, in fact, beginning his personal dissolution of Anaya's "man/place metaphor." When Tony can finally fuse the physical and the spiritual, then he will achieve the wholeness of spiritual unity.

The physical element of air is another component of setting in *Bless Me, Ultima*. Anaya primarily uses this aspect of physical landscape through the image of the wind, although the air element also contributes to the landscape through the images of clouds and sky. It is the wind, however, which portends evil and foreshadows disaster throughout the novel. On the day that Narciso is killed by Tenorio, Ultima whispers a warning to Antonio as he leaves to go to school: "'Take care of the evil in the wind,' she whispered and bent low to kiss my cheek" (*Ultima* 142).

Anaya also uses the wind as a symbol of the power of nature; its unpredictable force often overpowers man. Anaya reminds the reader that although man's intellect can shape and control many aspects of life, nature remains independent. Whether the wind gently ripples the water of the river or blows with a vengeance across the dry earth of the *llano*, it is a force man can never completely control:

The choking dust was so thick that it shut out the sun. I was used to the dust storms of early spring, but this one in the middle of summer was

unnatural. The wind moaned and cried, and in the middle of the sky the sun was a blood-red dot.

(*Ultima* 88)

Because man can never completely control the natural elements of his environment, Anaya believes it is crucial that man achieve a reconciliation between his intellectual power and the power of nature. Without such a reconciliation, man cannot hope to attain spiritual harmony or unity. Man's relationship with the earth must exist on two levels: the physical (natural) and the cultural (intellectual). Human perception of the physical landscape should result in a personal bond with nature; this perception and subsequent bond represent the duality of landscape. Frank Waters offers insight regarding this duality:

Rudolfo Anaya's writing achieves a reconciliation of this dichotomy between natural feeling and acquired intellectual knowledge. Perhaps these dual influences were symbolized in his native homeland by the *llanos*, the wide free plains of the *vaqueros*, and the *barrios* of the settled farmers.

(4)

Just as Anaya's use of landscape is crucial to the creation of setting in *Bless Me, Ultima*, it is also crucial to his development of characterization. The ability to

characterize successfully the people of one's imagination is certainly one of the primary attributes of a good novelist, and Anaya's success in this category rests largely upon his use of landscape. Each character in the novel is readily associated with certain aspects of the landscape: Ultima embodies all the natural elements of the earth--llano, river, wind, and sun--and she symbolizes man's unity with nature; Maria Luna, Antonio's mother, is connected to the moon and the harvest; Gabriel Márez, Antonio's father, is a wild and free adventurer of the llano; and Antonio represents an integration of his parents' conflicting natures--he is a product of both the fertile earth and the wild, free wind. Throughout the course of the novel, these aspects of physical landscape are internalized within each character so that the reader receives a clear vision of who each character is. Ultima's personal landscape encompasses the major conflict in the story: the opposing natures of the pastoral Marez and agricultural Luna families. She has lived on the open plains of the llano in Las Pasturas and in the fertile environment of the valley in El Puerto de la Luna, and she has gained the respect of people in both places. Ultima is Antonio's godmother, but more than that, she is his spiritual and physical protectress. She is strongly associated with the physical landscape of the novel: the llano, river, wind,

sun, and the natural herbs and roots she uses in her *curanderismo*. As a *curandera*, Ultima possesses knowledge of the natural mysteries of the earth, and she symbolizes man's physical and spiritual unity with nature. When it is first decided that Ultima should come to live in the Márez household, Antonio's parents express some concern over the effect her reputation as a *curandera* would have on the children:

I knew why he expressed concern for me and my sisters. It was because Ultima was a *curandera*, a woman who knew the herbs and remedies of the ancients, a miracle-worker who could heal the sick. And I had heard that Ultima could lift the curses laid by brujas, that she could exorcise the evil the witches planted in people to make them sick. And because a *curandera* had this power she was misunderstood and often suspected of practicing witchcraft herself. (*Ultima* 4)

Because Ultima is a *curandera*, she acts as a kind of repository for the ancient wisdom and knowledge of the Indo-Hispanic culture; she is the personification of the Indio concept of man's unity with nature. Moreover, Ultima represents both the Indian and Hispanic cultures which serve as the primary context of this novel:

She is the character who most perfectly represents the ideal mestizaje, the intermingling of Indian and Spanish blood which results in the crossfertilization of cultures, a blend that unites primordial Indio ways with Christianity.

(Portillo-Orozco 80)

This concept is an important one in Anaya's use of landscape. It is through Ultima that Antonio learns the knowledge of life and self; she knows the answers to his spiritual questions. Her character embodies a fusion of the natural and supernatural worlds, and this fusion is achieved through Anaya's use of landscape. In the beginning of the novel, as Ultima instructs Tony in the ways of *curanderismo*, she teaches him the secrets of nature directly from the physical landscape: how to speak to the spirits of the plants; how to listen to the voices and rhythms of nature. The wild *llano* provides Ultima with the herbs and roots she needs to heal the sick, and these medicinal plants take on more potent properties when gathered in the moonlight:

Many times late at night I was to see Ultima returning from the llano where she gathered the herbs that can be harvested only in the light of the full moon by the careful hands of a curandera.

(*Ultima* 2)

Tony gains knowledge of the supernatural realm as Ultima instructs him in the matters of curses and their cures. She possesses this knowledge as a result of her basic and instinctual relationship with nature which stems from her cultural memories and the power of the physical landscape. The combination of these two forces enables Ultima to effect her healing practices. She combines botanical, psychological, and faith curing with magic, but magic is used only when the source of the illness is magical (Mitchell 60).

One of Ultima's most important roles is as the mediator in Antonio's development. Landscape and religion are the two primary forces in the Márez/Luna conflict, and Ultima is able to relate to the spiritual natures of both families. She teaches Tony about his mother's family, the Lunas--the quiet people of the earth who farm in the fertile valley according to the procreative cycles of the moon. She also instructs Tony in the ways of his father's people, the Márez family--their wanderings across the open *llano*, their ties to the wind and the sea, and their lives as *vaqueros*. In religion, Ultima is a devoted Catholic like the Lunas; but like the Márez family, she is also a devout lover of nature and is intensely aware of God's presence in the physical landscape. Antonio is witness to several encounters between Ultima and Gabriel Márez when they discuss the freedom of the *llano* and

the beauty of the earth, and he learns much about the value of nature from their discussions:

'Ah, there is no freedom like the freedom of the llano!' my father said and breathed in the fresh, clean air.

'And there is no beauty like this earth,' Ultima said. They looked at each other and smiled, and I realized that from these two people I had learned to love the magical beauty of the wide, free earth. From my mother I had learned that man is of the earth, that his clay feet are part of the ground that nourishes him, and that it is this inextricable mixture that gives man his measure of safety and security. (*Ultima* 217)

Before Ultima's arrival, Antonio had not been initiated to the wonders of nature. Although he had been aware of nature, his eyes had not been truly opened as they were when Ultima came. Through Ultima, Antonio is able to see the real beauty of nature:

She took my hand and I felt the power of a whirlwind sweep around me. Her eyes swept the surrounding hills and through them I saw for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river. My nostrils quivered as

I felt the song of the mockingbirds and the drone of the grasshopper mingle with the pulse of the earth. The four directions of the llano met in me, and the white sun shone on my soul. The granules of sand at my feet and the sun and sky above me seemed to dissolve into one strange, complete being.

A cry came to my throat and I wanted to shout it and run in the beauty I had found. (*Ultima* 213).

There is more than just an appreciation of nature growing within Antonio. Because he is beginning to internalize the landscape around him, he is beginning his quest toward spiritual unity. He is, in fact, realizing his personal epiphany. Anaya's theory that man must develop harmony with his physical landscape in order to tap into the earth's energy is evident here. Through *Ultima*, Antonio has responded to his landscape and can thus receive its creative energy. He no longer feels lost and alone in nature; he sees himself as an integral part of the natural whole:

In the hills *Ultima* was happy. There was a nobility to her walk that lent a grace to the small figure. I watched her carefully and imitated her walk, and when I did I found that I was no longer

lost in the enormous landscape of hills and sky. I was a very important part of the teeming life of the llano and the river. (*Ultima* 37)

Because of Ultima's close ties with the llano, it is only fitting that at death she return to the earth. At the end of the story, Ultima requests that Antonio bury the owl (her soul) beneath a juniper tree on the open llano:

'Now, take the owl, go west into the hills until you find a forked juniper tree, there bury the owl. Go quickly--'

'Grande,' my mother called outside.

I dropped to my knees.

'Bless me, Ultima--'

Her hand touched my forehead and her last words were, 'I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enters your heart, look for me in the evenings when the wind is gentle and the owls sing in the hills, I shall be with you--' (*Ultima* 247)

Ultima is returned to the earth she loved, and nature's cycle is complete. Even after death, Ultima's spirit may be found drifting on the wind among the hills of the llano. Antonio will carry her spirit inside of him, just as he will carry

the spiritual truths he learned from Ultima. He is forever bound to his natural landscape: the llano, the wind, the river, and the sun.

The major conflict in the novel stems from the opposing natural forces of Maria Luna and Gabriel Márez. This conflict between the agricultural Lunas and the pastoral Márezes has roots that go as deep as the very foundation of human consciousness (Lamadrid 498). Anaya's use of landscape in his characterization of these two families shows the two basic ways that man relates to the earth:

Rudolfo Anaya strikes a deep chord in portraying two primordial ways of relating to the earth, the pastoral and the agricultural. *Bless Me, Ultima* is not a quaint, historical sketch of rural folkways, but rather a dialectical exploration of the contradictions between lifestyles and cultures. (Lamadrid 498)

Maria Luna and her family possess distinct characteristics which tie them to their agricultural roots. The Lunas are farmers who are quietly in touch with the rhythms of nature. They are attached to the land in a permanent sense, and their extended family lives and farms together in the fertile valley of El Puerto de la Luna. As their name indicates, they are the symbol of the moon:

So it was fitting that these people, the Lunas, came to settle in this valley. They planted their crops and cared for their animals according to the cycles of the moon. They lived their lives, sang their songs, and died under the changing moon. The moon was their goddess. (*Ultima* 85)

The Lunas communicated with nature through their plants and crops, and these are important elements of their landscape. Antonio sometimes found his uncles difficult to understand, and he was confused by their quiet ways:

They spoke very little. My mother said their communication was with the earth. She said they spoke to the earth with their hands. They used words mostly when each one in his own way walked through his field or orchard at night and spoke to the growing plants. (*Ultima* 44)

Religion plays an important role in their lives, and their family has ties with the priesthood. Maria Luna and her family harbor hopes that Antonio will become a priest and bring religious honor to the family. It is the earth, however, which continues to provide the Lunas with their basic truths and spiritual lessons. The summer that Antonio spent with the Lunas taught him much about their way of life:

My uncles were farmers, men who took their only truth from the earth, and so by early afternoon we were out in the fields and orchards and the most important thing became the harvest. (*Ultima* 131)

Their harmony with the land is closely related to Anaya's concept of the "man/place metaphor." Their relationship and respect for the earth provide them with an inner peace and sense of place in the universe. From the Lunas, Antonio is able to further dissolve his polarity and continue his quest for unity:

I watched closely how they worked the earth, the respect they showed it, and the way they cared for living plants. Only Ultima equaled them in respect for the life in the plant. Never once did I witness any disharmony between one of my uncles and the earth and work of the valley. Their silence was the language of the earth. (*Ultima* 237)

Gabriel Márquez is a descendant of the conquistadores who crossed the sea and became men of the *llano*. They loved the wide, open spaces of the sea just as they love the freedom of the unbounded land. Gabriel Márquez is associated with the sea, not only through his name but also through his description as the man who belonged "wandering across the ocean of the plain" (*Ultima* 5). Although the Márquez family is

not religious in the traditional sense, their bond with nature enables them to develop spiritual unity. They are people of the sun, and they speak with the wind. Their strong tie to the wind is first evident when Gabriel tells Antonio, "I came from a people who held the wind as brother" (*Ultima* 9). This aspect of the Márez landscape grows in strength throughout the novel. During one of Antonio's discussions with his father, he learns that the Márez family views the wind as a spiritual teacher who speaks to them through the *llano*:

'But why are the storms so strong, and full of dust?' I asked.

'It is the way of the llano,' he said, 'and the wind is the voice of the llano. It speaks to us, it tells us something is not right.' He straightened from his labor and looked across the rolling hills. He listened, and I listened, and I could almost hear the wind speak to me. (*Ultima* 184)

Through the character of Gabriel Márez, Anaya emphasizes the value of nature as man's teacher. Gabriel's personal landscape allows him to tap into Anaya's concept of "earth-energy" and realize his physical and spiritual dependence on nature:

. . . 'a wise man listens to the voice of the earth, Antonio. He listens because the weather the winds bring will be his salvation or his destruction. Like a young tree bends with the wind, so a man must bow to the earth-- It is only when man grows old and refuses to admit his earth-tie and dependence on mother nature that the powers of mother nature will turn upon him and destroy him, like the strong wind cracks an old, dry tree. . . . It is we who misuse the earth and must pay for our sins--' (*Ultima* 185)

Gabriel's religious beliefs are evident here. Nature takes the role of God because she can guide, instruct, protect, or destroy. Man must be attuned to nature to absorb her wisdom and attain spiritual harmony; refusal to do so results in destruction. The strength and unity of nature are within man's grasp, but he must bond with the earth to receive its power. Gabriel's "earth-tie" is his sense of place in the scheme of the universe; it is his personal landscape.

The Márez-Luna conflict has a profound effect upon the character of Antonio. From the moment he is born, Antonio finds himself torn between the fiery spirit of the vaqueros and the peace of the farmers. His dream of the circumstances surrounding his birth makes clear the conflict

between the Luna and Márez landscapes that will shadow his life forever:

This one will be a Luna, the old man said, he will be a farmer and keep our customs and traditions. Perhaps God will bless our family and make the baby a priest.

And to show their hope they rubbed the dark earth of the river valley on the baby's forehead, and they surrounded the bed with the fruits of their harvest so the small room smelled of fresh green chile and corn, ripe apples and peaches, pumpkins and green beans.

Then the silence was shattered with the thunder of hoofbeats; vaqueros surrounded the small house with shouts and gunshots, and when they entered the room they were laughing and singing and drinking.

Gabriel, they shouted, you have a fine son! He will make a fine vaquero! And they smashed the fruits and vegetables that surrounded the bed and replaced them with a saddle, horse blankets, bottles of whiskey, a new rope, bridles, chapas, and an old guitar. And they rubbed the stain of

earth from the baby's forehead because man was not to be tied to the earth but free upon it.

(Ultima 5)

This conflict of personal landscapes affects all aspects of the characters' lives. It determines where the family lives, a compromise location midway between Las Pasturas on the llano and El Puerto in the valley. Through Gabriel's insistence, the house is built at the end of the valley where the llano begins. Antonio mediates between his father and mother, trying to please his mother by scraping a garden out of the rocky hillside:

Everyday I reclaimed from the rocky soil of the hill a few more feet of earth to cultivate. The land of the llano was not good for farming; the good land was along the river. But my mother wanted a garden and I worked to make her happy. (Ultima 9)

The conflict between their personal landscapes creates tension in the marital relationship of Maria and Gabriel. The wife yearns for the peaceful, fertile environment of her youth on the farm in El Puerto de la Luna, whereas her husband continues to hear the wild call of the llano:

'Any land will flow with milk and honey if it is worked with honest hands!' my mother retorted.

'Look at what my brothers have done with the bottomland of El Puerto--'

'Ay, mujer, always your brothers! On this hill only rocks grow!'

'Ay! And whose fault is it that we bought a worthless hill! No, you couldn't buy fertile land along the river, you had to buy this piece of, of--'

'Of the llano,' my father finished.

'Yes!'

'It is beautiful,' he said with satisfaction.

'It is worthless! Look how hard we worked on the garden all summer, and for what? Two baskets of chile and one of corn! Bah!'

'There is freedom here.' (*Ultima* 49)

Most importantly, the conflict foreshadows Antonio's future. The success of Antonio's quest rests in large part upon the dissolution of this basic conflict. He must find a way to assimilate the best of the pastoral Márezes and the agricultural Lunas to create his own personal landscape. Ultima, as his spiritual guide, attempts to explain the natural source of the conflict to Antonio:

It is the blood of the Lunas to be quiet, for only a quiet man can learn the secrets of the earth that

are necessary for planting--They are quiet like the moon--And it is the blood of the Márez to be wild, like the ocean from which they take their name, and the spaces of the llano that have become their home. (*Ultima* 38)

This perspective demonstrates Anaya's belief in man's natural response to the environment. From childhood, the landscape exerts a profound influence in the shaping of character, in the development of moral and ethical values, and, ultimately, in the course of destiny. Over the years, the physical elements of the landscape are absorbed and become internalized. Man's landscape is not only his teacher but also his fate. Gabriel Márez explains this concept to Antonio:

A man cannot struggle against his own fate. In my own day we were given no schooling. Only the ricos could afford school. Me, my father gave me a saddle blanket and a wild pony when I was ten. There is your life, he said, and he pointed to the llano. So the llano was my school, it was my teacher, it was my first love-- (*Ultima* 51)

As the central character in the novel, Antonio is a combination of the two natures, Márez and Luna--the wind and the earth. Before he can achieve reconciliation between

them, however, he must understand their total significance. He must find a way to understand the mysteries of the earth, to appreciate its beauty, to relate physically and spiritually to the opposing forces of nature. He must seek natural knowledge, and he does this through Ultima:

And I was happy with Ultima. We walked together in the llano and along the river banks to gather herbs and roots for her medicines. She taught me the names of plants and flowers, of trees and bushes, of birds and animals; but most important, I learned from her that there was a beauty in the time of day and in the time of night, and that there was peace in the river and in the hills. She taught me to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time. My soul grew under her careful guidance. (*Ultima* 14)

The growth of the soul is crucial to the process of individuation that all men must undergo. To be receptive to the beauty of nature, to open oneself to its power, to seek understanding of its mystery is to embark upon the journey toward self-understanding and spiritual unity. This journey must address the fundamental issues which affect all men: freedom of thought, resolution of spiritual dilemmas,

development of natural faith, and relation to man's tie with the historical past. Antonio's quest for manhood deals with all of these issues, and the answers he finds are based in understanding his personal landscape.

Through the landscape of the river, Antonio faces his two greatest challenges: recognition of the existence of sin and evil and resolution of his spiritual dilemma. Tony's first recognition of the existence of sin and evil occurs early in the novel when he witnesses the death of the hunted, war-crazed Lupito along the banks of the river. From his hiding place behind the reeds, Tony sees firsthand the violent nature of man. He feels that a personal part of his landscape has been contaminated as he observes Lupito's agony and the vengeful actions of the men on the bridge:

'Ayeeeeeee!' He screamed a blood curdling cry that echoed down the river. The men on the bridge didn't know what to do. They stood transfixed, looking down at the mad man waving the pistol in the air. 'Ayeeeeeeee!' he cried again. It was a cry of rage and pain, and it made my soul sick. The cry of a tormented man had come to the peaceful green mystery of my river, and the great presence of the river watched from the shadows and deep

recesses, as I watched from where I crouched at the bank. (*Ultima* 17)

The men on the bridge begin firing on Lupito, and Tony turns to run. As he flees from the evil he has seen, the landscape of the river adds to the fear and confusion he is experiencing:

The dark shadows of the river enveloped me as I raced for the safety of home. Branches whipped at my face and cut it, and vines and tree trunks caught at my feet and tripped me. In my headlong rush I disturbed sleeping birds and their shrill cries and slapping wings hit at my face. The horror of darkness had never been so complete as it was for me that night. (*Ultima* 20)

Later that night, the river continues to make its presence known in Antonio's subconscious thoughts. He dreams of moving west with his father and his three brothers in search of adventure. His father wishes to build "a castle across the river, on the lonely hill of the mockingbirds" (*Ultima* 23). His brothers tell Antonio that he must fulfill his mother's dream for a farmer-priest, but Tony is determined to help his father. He cries that he "must lift the muddy waters of the river in blessing to our new home!" (*Ultima* 23) The river then asserts itself in the form of *la*

llorona, which becomes an important motif throughout the novel and a powerful influence in Tony's quest:

Along the river the tormented cry of a lonely goddess filled the valley. The winding wail made the blood of men run cold.

It is la llorona, my brothers cried in fear, the old witch who cries along the river banks and seeks the blood of boys and men to drink!

La llorona seeks the soul of Antonioooooo. . .

It is the soul of Lupito, they cried in fear, doomed to wander the river at night because the waters washed his soul away!

Lupito seeks his blessingggggggg . . .

It is neither! I shouted. I swung the dark robe of the priest over my shoulders then lifted my hands in the air. The mist swirled around me and sparks flew when I spoke. It is the presence of the river! (Ultima 23-24)

The Márez-Luna conflict is evident: Antonio wants to fulfill his father's dream of adventure in the west, but he also feels obligated to fulfill his mother's dream of the priesthood. Placing Tony in the role of priest, the soul of Lupito asks for his blessing. The conflict remains unresolved. The most important element in the dream,

however, is the river. It symbolizes Antonio's recognition of the presence of sin in the soul of man. Once Antonio has witnessed sin through the death of Lupito, he is no longer pure. Antonio has lost his innocence, and the figure of *la llorona* foreshadows the evil to come.

The myth of *la llorona* is not limited to New Mexico; it occurs all over Mexico and other Latin American countries in a variety of versions. According to Robert Gish in "Curanderismo and Witchery in the Fiction of Rudolfo A. Anaya: The Novel as Magic":

. . . its origins are archetypal and though particulars vary, *La Llorona* is commonly thought a prostitute who has a baby and throws it in the river only to be punished by God who sends her to look for the child where she abandoned it. As she wanders along the river, she wails 'O, my children,' frightening and perhaps killing the men she finds. Not uncommonly, *La Llorona* is considered an old witch, 'una vieja bruja,' appearing as an animal or a ball of fire. (8-9)

It is generally believed that myths tell a version of historical fact, probably because so much of history was recorded only in people's minds (Portillo-Orozco 36). This is true for the myth of *la llorona*, which appears to be based

on the historical account of La Malinche, the Indian woman who was both interpreter and lover of Hernan Cortéz. Maria del Refugio explains this version of the myth in her story entitled "La Llorona in Mexico":

. . . there existed a story called la llorona. This was during colonial times, or rather during the conquest, when Mexico was still called New Spain.

During that time, for his work among the Indians, Cortés had as an interpreter a beautiful Indian woman. Her real name was Marina, but she was nicknamed La Malinche. As time passed, Cortés began to notice her since she was so beautiful. She attracted him so much that love blossomed between them and soon they had a son, who was baptized with the name Hernando. Time passed, the child grew, and when Cortés had no further business here, he wanted to return to Spain, but he didn't want to abandon his son who had caused him so many difficulties. He insisted so much that La Malinche (as she was called) got ill from worrying that her son would be taken to Spain. She became insane and was put away in a well-guarded dungeon. Since her malady was only temporary, she soon regained her health and was set free. Cortés continued with his plan but he was never successful because he didn't want her for a wife; she was always his mistress.

He wanted his son, knowing Spanish blood ran in his veins. Cortés couldn't take Marina with him since she was an Indian. When their son was seven years old, Cortés couldn't wait any longer. He said that he would take the child through agreement or by force. Marina, not knowing what to do, took their child in her arms and brought him to the balcony. From her breast she withdrew an obsidian knife and told Cortés: 'If you want your son, here he is, but you shall not take him alive.' She plunged the sharp knife into the child's breast, piercing his heart. After making sure that her son was dead, she stabbed herself, mother and child lying in a heap on the floor. Afterward her soul

escaped from her body issuing a lament . . . 'Aaayy!'

According to history, from that time, her spirit roams everywhere at night, catching people's attention by her painful lament. People call her *la llorona*. (qtd. in Portillo-Orozco 36-37)

The first recorded account of the *la llorona* myth is in *The Broken Spear, The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, and several Aztec versions of the myth exist (Portillo-Orozco 38). An examination of its Aztec origins reveals that while the identity of *la llorona* may vary, she consistently appears at night in remote places issuing cries of lament:

. . . the Aztec goddess *Matlaciúatl* (the woman with the net), is a vampire-like creature who stalks desolate places preying and feeding on men. Others bring forth versions saying that she is *Ciuapipiltin*, a goddess who ventured forth at midnight dressed in flowing robes, carrying an empty cradle, looking and lamenting for her lost child. *Ciuacoátl*, a pre-Columbian earth goddess, is also mentioned as the prototype of this anguished vision. And many claim that *la llorona* is *La Malinche*, the Indian mistress of Cortés, who eternally laments the betrayal of her people. (Portillo-Orozco 39)

In all her various forms, *la llorona* has haunted and frightened men for centuries. Bordering on the edge of reality and fantasy, she represents the fusion of ancient Indian legends and historical fact. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the *la llorona* motif emerges in Tony's experiences with nature. She is the ambivalent presence of the river, which Antonio fears yet with which he shares both his soul and a sense of mystic peace. She is also the symbol of sin in Antonio's quest; he must find a way to reconcile the forces of good and evil in his personal landscape so that he may banish *la llorona* forever and attain the spiritual unity he seeks. Tony's initiation into evil causes his loss of innocence and creates a spiritual dilemma which he struggles to resolve. As a Catholic, Tony expects to find answers to his spiritual questions by becoming one with God in Holy Communion. He is disappointed to learn, however, that Holy Communion does not provide the answers he seeks. Confused and unfulfilled, Tony is introduced to the legend of the golden carp by his friend, Samuel, who was "wise and old when he talked, kind of like my grandfather" (*Ultima* 71). While Samuel and Tony often fish the river, they never fish for carp. It is commonly known in town that it is "bad luck" to fish for carp, but Tony does not understand why this is so. The answer to this mystery lies in the quiet waters of the river:

'Have you ever fished for the carp of the river?'

. . . 'No,' I answered, 'I do not fish for carp. It is bad luck.'

'Do you know why?' he asked and raised an eyebrow.

'No,' I said and held my breath. I felt I sat on the banks of an undiscovered river whose churning, muddied waters carried many secrets.

(*Ultima* 72-73)

Samuel decides to tell Tony the legend of the golden carp, and Tony gains additional insight into the nature of spirituality. Samuel tells the story of a people who, long ago, wandered lost for many years. Keeping faith in spite of their hardships, the people were finally rewarded by discovering the fertile valley where Tony now lives. The valley was rich with food, and only the carp was denied these people. However, after a forty-year drought, the people became desperate and ate the carp. As punishment for their sin, they were turned into carp themselves, but one god pitied them and was turned into a golden carp to live among them and protect them. This god in the form of a fish was very big and the color of gold. He was "the lord of all the waters of the valley" (*Ultima* 74). For the first time in his

life, Tony realizes the possibility of the existence of another god, and his spiritual dilemma deepens:

'The golden carp,' I said to myself, 'a new god?' I could not believe this strange story, and yet I could not disbelieve Samuel.

'Yes,' Samuel answered. His voice was strong with faith. It made me shiver, not because it was cold but because the roots of everything I had ever believed in seemed shaken. If the golden carp was a god, who was the man on the cross? The Virgin? Was my mother praying to the wrong God? (*Ultima* 75)

It is interesting to note the historical and cultural implications of this myth. The legend of the golden carp is a combination of beliefs from ancient Indian religions and Christianity. While similarities exist between this legend and some of the stories in the Bible, the aspect of culture exerts a powerful influence in its assimilation. In "Cultural and Mythical Archetypes in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*," J. Karen Ray explains this cultural influence in terms of folklore:

In the myth of the golden carp, Anaya presents the Indian rendering of European Christianity. The parallel between the golden carp story and the

Biblical stories demonstrates the Mexican cultural and mythical assimilation. As the Spanish conquerors attempted to Christianize the Indians, the natives merely translated the Biblical stories into their folklore. Thus the golden carp represents the naive and somewhat confused version of the missionaries' religious teachings. (27)

Landscape, both physical and cultural, plays an important role in the depiction of this legend. The cool and quiet beauty of the river symbolizes the peace and harmony of natural religion, in stark contrast to the ceremonial rituals of the Catholic church. The landscape of the golden carp is one of purity and patience:

We sat for a long time, waiting for the golden carp. It was very pleasant to sit in the warm sunshine and watch the pure waters drift by. The drone of the summer insects and grasshoppers made me sleepy. The lush green of the grass was cool, and beneath the grass was the dark earth, patient, waiting . . . (*Ultima* 104)

The golden carp's appearance in the river mesmerizes Tony; the natural beauty of the landscape is internalized within him, and he is filled with peace and knowledge:

'He comes--' We held our breath and peered into the water beneath the overhanging thicket. The two brown carp had seen us, and now they circled and waited for their master. The sun glittered off his golden scales.

'It's him!'

The golden fish swam by gracefully, cautiously, as if testing the water after a long sleep in his subterranean waters. His powerful tail moved in slow strokes as he slid through the water towards us. He was beautiful; he was truly a god. The white sun reflected off his bright orange scales and the glistening glorious light blinded us and filled us with the rapture true beauty brings. Seeing him made questions and worries evaporate, and I remained transfixed, caught and caressed by the essential elements of sky and earth and water.

(*Ultima* 227)

The spiritual landscape of the Catholic church, however, is one of confusion and uncertainty. When Tony takes his first Holy Communion, he does not understand the emptiness which remains inside him, and he is not allowed the time he needs to examine his feelings:

I had just swallowed Him, He must be in there! For a moment, on the altar railing, I thought I had felt His warmth, but then everything moved so fast. There wasn't time just to sit and discover Him, like I could do when I sat on the creek bank and watched the golden carp swim in the sun-filtered waters. (*Ultima* 210)

This contrast between the two religions is intensified when Antonio thinks about their different methods of punishment for sin:

. . . I thought about the sins of the town and how the golden carp would punish the sinners. He would drown them in clear, blue water. Then we passed the church and I thought about God's punishment for sinners. He casts them in the burning pit of hell where they burn for eternity. (*Ultima* 130)

This juxtaposition of the landscapes of Indian religious lore against Catholicism magnifies the spiritual conflict taking place within Antonio. He is full of unanswered questions regarding the evil he has seen, and his faith is deeply shaken:

God! Why did Lupito die?

Why do you allow the evil of the Trementinas?

Why did you allow Narciso to be murdered when he was doing good?

Why do you punish Florence? Why doesn't he believe?

Will the golden carp rule--? (*Ultima* 210)

Just as the legend of the golden carp is a product of cultural assimilation, Tony's quest for spiritual unity must be one of assimilation, as well. He must learn "to take the best from the freedom of the vaqueros, the stability of the farmers, the order of Catholicism, and the magic of paganism and create a new, richer, and more vital culture" (Ray 26). Physical and cultural landscapes must combine within Antonio to create his own personal landscape. This idea of assimilation and unity is also evident in *Ultima's* spiritual philosophy. From *Ultima*, Antonio learns that he must "take the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp--and make something new. That is what *Ultima* meant by building strength from life" (*Ultima* 236).

Anaya uses both physical and cultural landscapes to create the pervasive theme of union which runs throughout the novel. In the character of Antonio, all aspects of the novel merge together. The solution to the problems of sin and evil and to Tony's spiritual dilemma is unity. It is from *Ultima*

that Tony learns this important lesson, and it is taught in terms of landscape:

. . . the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows into seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no ocean. And the same salt waters of the oceans are drawn by the sun to the heavens, and in turn become again the waters of the moon. Without the sun there would be no waters formed to slake the dark earth's thirst.

The waters are one, Antonio. I looked into her bright clear eyes and understood her truth.

You have been seeing only parts, she finished, and not looking beyond into the great cycle that binds us all. (Ultima 113)

All of the natural elements of landscape around which the novel revolves come together in Ultima's message to Tony. The cyclical unity of nature is evident through Anaya's use of physical landscape: the waters of the rivers and seas flow according to the effects of the moon and the sun, then they are absorbed as nourishment for all life on earth. The cycle repeats itself, recreating and sustaining life. The physical elements of nature are interdependent, as are the physical and cultural facets of man's soul. Nature is man's greatest

teacher; once he comprehends the unified cycle of nature, he will learn how to integrate the different aspects of heart and mind to create peace and harmony.

Tony realizes that he must create his own personal landscape. He does not have to be just Luna or Márez; he can draw strength from both families as he combines both pastoral and agricultural landscapes. His father agrees:

'Then maybe I do not have to be just Márez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both--' I said.

'Yes,' he said, but I knew he was as proud as ever of being Márez.

'It seems I am so much a part of the past--' I said.

'Ay, every generation, every man is a part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new--' (*Ultima* 236)

Gabriel Márez is right when he tells Antonio that no man can escape his past. What he must do is examine the basic materials which comprise his physical and cultural makeup, then he can modify these materials and develop new ones in the creation of his own personal landscape. Gabriel's advice to Tony reminds the reader that man's cultural landscape is forever tied to the past. The collective memories of human

origin, of man's interaction with the land, and of man's relationship with nature are alive in the subconscious of all human minds. These memories maintain an important place in the theme of unity and contribute to the essence of man's immortality. The ability to explore both the past and present exists in the freedom of nature. It is the power of the land and the memories of the past which enable man to achieve his sense of place in the universe:

But from my father and Ultima I had learned that the greater immortality is in the freedom of man, and that freedom is best nourished by the noble expanse of land and air and pure, white sky. I dreaded to think of a time when I could not walk upon the llano and feel like the eagle that floats on its skies: free, immortal, limitless.

'There is power here, a power that can fill a man with satisfaction,' my father said.

'And there is faith here,' Ultima added, 'a faith in the reason for nature being, evolving, growing--'

And there is also the dark, mystical past, I thought, the past of the people who lived here and left their traces in the magic that crops out today. (*Ultima* 220)

In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya proposes the processes of assimilation and integration of physical and cultural landscapes to "perceive the wholeness of the fabric of human experience" (Ray 28). In Antonio's quest for individuation, he learns that unity is the solution to all the conflicts in his life. In the conflict of his vocation, he does not have to choose priest or farmer or vaquero; he can combine aspects of all three to create a new possibility appropriate to his nature. His family conflict, too, can be resolved through unification. He does not have to be either Luna or Marez but can adapt the lessons he learned from both families to create his own identity. Unity is also the solution to Tony's spiritual conflict. Because Mexican Catholicism is a mixture of traditional Catholicism and Indian paganism, the native American and European myths are joined together and are united through Tony in a cultural and spiritual whole (Ray 28).

Tony's quest leads him to a deeper understanding of nature. Through Ultima's natural wisdom and guidance, he learns to appreciate his landscape. He is able to see the beauty of nature, to allow it to grow and blossom inside him, to let it create inner peace and spiritual unity. The strength that comes from being attuned to the natural forces of both physical and cultural landscape allows Tony to

triumph over the conflicts he must face in his quest for manhood. By the end of the novel, Tony has learned the source of a certain magic that exists in the universe--the magic that allows man to become one with nature and that empowers him with the strength and the will to succeed:

And that is what Ultima tried to teach me, that the tragic consequences of life can be overcome by the magical strength that resides in the human heart.

(*Ultima* 237)

Chapter 4

A Sense of Self:

Landscape and the Human Spirit

A sense of place or ambience is an important ingredient in literature, and I believe a most important ingredient in living. (Anaya, *Writer's Sense of Place* 67)

Man's relationship with the land is one that continues tradition and introduces change. The culture, values, and history of mankind are linked to the landscape; the uncertain future lies in the ever-changing face of the environment. Man's quest for identity and search for self depend in large part upon the ability to exist in physical and spiritual harmony with the earth. The land possesses a sense of permanence, which man seeks to attain:

It is a fundamental human urge to seek a permanent identity for ourselves, to be a part of an order which is more lasting than we are: a moral or ethical order which transcends our individual existence. The Romantic generations derived this kind of satisfaction from their feeling of oneness

with nature . . . It is possible for the landscape to provide us with some symbols of permanent values. It is possible for it to provide us with landmarks to reassure us that we are not rootless individuals without identity or place, but are part of a larger scheme. The landscape can do much to reinforce our identity. (Herendeen 48)

The philosophical and artistic beliefs of Rudolfo Anaya are reflected in this idea of the land as the element through which man may attain permanent identity and union with nature. This study has examined Anaya's personal beliefs in the power of man's physical and cultural landscapes and has demonstrated how he incorporates these beliefs in his literature. Physical and cultural landscapes are monuments to man's survival and quest for self, and Anaya believes that through landscape a writer is able to transmit a sense of identity. The magic of words captures a writer's sense of place and transforms it through images. Hispanic writers possess a distinct sense of the Southwestern landscape; their literature transmits a long tradition of families not only tied to the land but nourished by it (Rebolledo 96-98). The writings of Rudolfo Anaya reflect his Southwestern heritage and convey the sense of nourishment that man derives from the land.

Anaya's personal beliefs in the power of landscape stem from his individual relationship with the earth. He believes that an energy flows within the earth and man may tap into that source and become attuned to that energy. He refers to this concept as "earth-energy," and this energy creates harmony between man and the landscape. This idea is directly related to Anaya's belief in the "man/place metaphor," which is comprised of two elements: man and the landscape. As man views the physical landscape, it becomes internalized; man's natural response to the landscape provides the setting for personal epiphany. If man is physically attuned to the landscape, then he may receive the earth's natural energy to create spiritual unity. Anaya feels a close kinship with the land at all times, and he is always receptive to the earth-energy this relationship creates.

Rudolfo Anaya's theory regarding the power of landscape is directly applicable to the process of writing. As the writer attains physical and spiritual harmony with the landscape, the polarity of the man/place metaphor is dissolved, and the writer is able to convey the landscape to the reader. A new epiphany may emerge as the result of the reader's response to the landscape. The power of epiphany is crucial to the writer's success because the epiphany provides energy. Through the writer's personal earth-energy, the

written landscape becomes real to the reader. The writer must recreate the original epiphany experienced as a result of the writer's response to the landscape. The power of memory is significant not only because it refers to that one particular epiphany but also because it triggers the primal memories which exist in all humans. Anaya believes that man's relationship with the land is not temporal in nature but is tied to the human history which precedes man's present existence. These cultural memories reside deep in the mind of man, and they are released when man establishes a personal relationship with the land. Anaya believes a basic relationship exists between man and nature, which, in spite of urbanization and industrialization, remains unchanged. These cultural memories, combined with the power of the immediate landscape, provide the creative energy which a writer may use to convey landscape in literature.

In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya uses physical and cultural landscapes to define setting, theme, and characterization; to create chaos and confusion; and, ultimately, to resolve conflicts and spiritual complexities within the novel. The novel revolves around four elements of physical landscape: the llano, the river, the moon, and the sun. These aspects of physical landscape are used to create the setting of the novel, and each element is then internalized to serve as the

basis of the novel's characterization. Each character is readily associated with the physical landscape: Maria Luna is connected to the moon and the harvest; Gabriel Marez is the wild and free spirit of the *llano*; Antonio is a combination of his 'parents' conflicting natures; and Ultima embodies all four elements--*llano*, river, wind, and sun--to symbolize man's unity with nature. Anaya's beliefs regarding cultural landscape are also evident in the novel. Through the mythical images of *la llorona* and the golden carp, Anaya reminds the reader that man's cultural landscape is forever tied to the past. The collective memories of human origin, of man's interaction with the land, and of man's relationship with nature are alive in the subconscious of all human minds.

The assimilation and integration of physical and cultural landscapes comprise the pervasive theme of unity within the novel. Through Antonio's quest for individuation, Anaya makes it clear that the strength to triumph over the conflicts and complexities of life comes from spiritual harmony with nature. It is through Ultima's natural wisdom and guidance that Antonio learns to appreciate his physical and cultural landscapes. By the end of the novel, Antonio has learned to see the true beauty of nature, to internalize it, and to allow it to create inner peace and spiritual unity.

In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya uses landscape as the organizing principle to which all parts of the novel are related. Physical and cultural landscapes work together via setting, characterization, and theme so that they have a fundamental relationship to each other and an essential relationship to the work as a whole. The cyclical unity of nature is evident through Anaya's incorporation of physical landscape: the waters of the rivers and seas flow according to the cycles of the moon and sun, then they are absorbed into the earth as nourishment for the future. The cycle repeats itself, thereby recreating and sustaining life. The cultural facets of man's soul are also integrated in a unified cycle: nature is man's great teacher, and once man is attuned to the physical harmony of nature, it is possible to integrate the personal aspects of heart and mind to create spiritual unity. Anaya believes the land possesses a healing power, which adds to this idea of physical and cultural unity:

And just as the natural end of all art is to make us well and to cure our souls, so is our relationship to the earth and its power. I do not merely mean the awe and sense of good feeling which we experience in the face of grandeur and beauty in nature, I mean that there is an actual healing

power which the epiphany of place provides.

(Anaya, *Writer's Landscape* 101)

The power which stems from the "epiphany of place" is the spiritual unity which man seeks, and the relationship with the land is the means to that end. Anaya uses the power of the land to perpetuate his humanistic outlook on life; through his personal relationship with the earth, he establishes his philosophical and artistic identity:

I'm a humanist looking for the best there is in all of us. I want to know and feel the entire universe, the time that flows through it, the web that connects us all. As Don Juan would say, 'I want to be able to see.' I want to understand the philosophy and psychology of being who I am, then take it from there. (Moody 4)

Anaya's desire to "know and feel the entire universe" is one that is common to all mankind, and his writings reflect this universal quest for understanding. Universality in a literary work exists when an author is able to convey the human emotions common to all peoples of all civilizations through characters, images, and action. One form of communication through which an author may achieve universality is the environment. Man's environment offers a wide range of possibilities for communication:

. . . environments embody more than one communication channel, in fact a great and variable multitude of them, and some or all may operate together in a harmonious way. . . . If the medium is the message, then any man's environment is in turn a great and variegated, synergetic medium.
(Wagner 58)

Rudolfo Anaya has chosen one aspect of the environment as his primary form of communication--the landscape. He believes that the physical and cultural power of the land enables man to understand both the past and present states of the human condition. Frank Waters explains Anaya's ability to convey the primal memories of the cultural past to the universal human spirit:

His perspectives are still expanding, like those of all of us in this shrinking one-world. The values of all cultural entities, be they civilizations, races, nations, or isolated cultural entities like those of the Chicanos, are embraced within the universal domain of the human spirit, which knows no boundaries. What it has felt and divined in ancient Egypt and Mesoamerica, in the American Southwest and Santa Rosa, and what it is feeling and divining everywhere today in this tragic world

of change, is essentially the same. It is that inner urge toward realization of our common humanness and its inherent harmony with the entire universe. (qtd. in Vassallo 6)

Anaya's perception of his personal landscape is directly related to the idea of universal harmony, and his beliefs uncover the very essence of the human spirit. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya utilizes physical and cultural landscapes to create a spiritual bond between the characters and the land which reflects man's inherent unity with nature. All aspects of the novel are touched by the land; it is the pivotal element that integrates setting, theme, and characterization to create organic unity. It is clear that Anaya's belief in the power of the land is the key to his creativity:

Every writer attentive to the earth pulse and the human pulse of his place has accessible to him all the symbology, imagery, and archetypes necessary to touch the chords of his people and region on one level, and of humanity on a deeper level. (Anaya, *Writer's Sense of Place* 67)

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