ANAYA'S SPIRITUAL WORLD IN ITSELF, AND IN THE CONTEXT OF CHICANO AND LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Among the readers, critics and publishers there are some who insist on using the term magical realism in relation to supernatural events which occur in Anaya's fiction. In the few years after the publication mega-success of García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), it was almost inevitable that beginning with Anaya's first and spiritually rich novel, *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), many readers and reviewers might read the novel as a kind of Chicano magical realist masterpiece. Now, Anaya was aware of this and acknowledged in 1999 that a work like *Tortuga*, the third and last volume of his "somewhat autobiographical New Mexico trilogy [. . .] verged on magical realism". Nonetheless, Anaya never seems to have used that term in reference to *Bless Me, Ultima*, nor indeed to other narratives by him. And, as this study will establish, this is because Anaya recognized in the trilogy (whose second volumen is the 1976 *Heart of Aztlan*) the prior reality of the New Mexican cultural mestizaje between Spanish and Indigenous influences becoming one living and dynamic reality.

The aim of this paper is 1) to account for and otherwise describe Anaya's own representation of an essential, enchanted, 400-years-in-development New Mexican spiritual world, and how it develops in his work; and 2) to contextualize this unique world in fiction by Mexican American and Latin American writers during the last decades of the twentieth century. Much will be gained, it will be shown, by distancing Anaya's world from a magical realist one. Think of how Isabel Allende distanced *The House of the Spirits* (1982) from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a profound process of inter-textual dialogue which allowed her to emerge from the tremendous shadow of García Márquez and tell her own stories her way. Or, pause to consider how the spells and powers of Ultima and the Trementina sisters have as much and as little explanation as many popular and biblical beliefs in the supernatural, but how those powers and spells shape characters' lives within *Bless Me, Ultima.*

KEYWORDS: Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima,* Chicano Literature, Latin American Literature, magical realism

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Today (in late March, 2021), for the last time after doing it periodically for the few previous months with similar results, my google search "Rudolfo Anaya and magical realism" produces many pages of hits which address the topic more or less directly. I did the search because Anaya himself sometimes linked his fiction to magical realism, and because critics and publishers enforced the connection. For example: in a Warner student and book discussion group edition of *Bless Me, Ultima* Anaya writes that *Tortuga*, which he considers the third volume of his New Mexico trilogy, "verges on magical realism" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* x). But at least as early as on the 1992 front inside flap of the dust jacket for Anaya's fourth major novel, *Alburquerque*, the University of New Mexico blurb states that for this urban novel "Anaya draws on his trademark magic realism." Many others develop that point. In his readily accessible and reprinted literary encyclopedia article, the prolific writer for such publications, Nasrullah Mambrol of the University of Kannur in extreme southwestern India, begins by affirming that Anaya's "works project a Magical Realism that blends contemporary life with the hidden manifestations of humanity and cultural identity."[1] At the other end of the non-specialist literary critical spectrum, on weebly.com, a free website builder site, Brent Taylor starts his article "*Bless Me, Ultima*" by declaring that "Anaya uses several tools and elements to tell Antonio and Ultima's story. The most commonly occurring tool is magical realism, which Anaya skillfully uses to set the tone for a small but magical town in New Mexico." Taylor then concludes his short piece by asserting "it is clear that every page relates to magical realism in one way or another and this book would be nothing without it." Finally, seeing the importance given to supposed magical realism in Anaya, this introduction, which could be much longer, may finish with the empirical observation that Warner Books, Anaya's most important big commercial publisher, gives prominent place to *Bless Me, Ultima* on the dust jackets of its hardbound Anaya editions as well as on the covers of paperback ones. For example, the four

Sonny Baca novels have on the front of their dust jackets, right above the author's name, the words "A Mystery Novel by the Bestselling Author of *Bless Me, Ultima*," and for the short, trade-paperback formatted novel *Jalamanta*, both on the dust jacket for its hardcover edition and the cover of its paperback edition, Warner prints "Bestselling Author of *Bless Me, Ultima*" above Anaya's name. In the cases of all five novels and their various formats and editions, the type face used for Anaya's name is larger than than that used for the title of the books in question.[2] Beyond question, then, it is normal to associate Anaya with "his trademark magic realism."

Returning to the google "hits," normal in them are the following characteristics: statements as to Anaya's leadership role in creating—as a "father," "godfather" or "guru" of—Chicano literature; second, an affirmation that Anaya's first novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*, is his best known and best-loved production; and, third, that this novel is a work of "magical realism". Now at the level of general reference works, Mambrol's 2008 article gives the best example of an organized, but non-specialist synthesis on how magical realism and indeed magic appears in Anaya. There Mambrol observes: Anaya's works "project a Magical Realism that blends contemporary life with hidden manifestations of humanity and cultural identity." Referring mainly to what Anaya himself calls "my somewhat autobiographical New Mexico trilogy" (*Bless Me, Ultima*, *Heart of Aztlan* and *Tortuga*; Anaya *Bless Me, Ultima*), and indexing them as Anaya's novels which "best exemplify [the following] themes and characterizations," Mambrol states: "the principal characters struggle with the sometimes contradictory notions of Chicano identity tied both to an Aztec and Spanish past and to the English-speaking world of the present." The primary goal of this article is to examine these "contradictory notions" as they relate to Chicano identity and the way Anaya deals with what from at least 1969 until, perhaps, the early twenty-first century, is his version of the synthesis in New Mexico of more than four centuries of Spanish-indigenous, indigenous-Spanish physical, cultural and spiritual *mestizaje*. It will be maintained that to use the concept of "magical realism" as a tool for understanding the synthesis is too blunt an instrument. This is particularly the case when the primary example for understanding the concept is its presence and use in Gabriel García Márquez' fabulously enduring and influential

1967 novel *Cien años de soledad* which was translated into English in the United States only in 1970.

1. THE NEW MEXICO TRILOGY IN ITSELF AND IN ITS TIMES

In Antonio Márez Luna, the young protagonist of *Bless Me,* Ultima, Mambrol sees as central to the novel the creation of "a psychological and magical portrait of a child's quest for identity." This occurs when the events of the plot leave him "subjected to competing realities that he must master in order to grow up." These realities come at the same time as Antonio's preparation for and fact of his First Communion. Mambrol stresses how Antonio's home-bred and religious-training by the local priest in "Roman Catholic beliefs" contrasts with "the magical world of the pre-Columbian past" into which he enters through Ultima, the *curandera*, who "is a creature of both worlds [...] a magical character who guides Antonio through the ordeal of understanding and dealing with these challenges." Noteworthy is Mambrol characterizes the Catholic world as one of beliefs, the pre-Columbian as a world of magic. Also important: Mambrol does not address, perhaps because of the relative shortness of his article, the issue that Antonio's farming, maternal family—the Lunas—, and his father's family's—the Márezes—vaquero/ranching life seem to go back, at the time of the 1972 publication of *Bless Me, Ultima*, to the start of something no longer than a four-centuries-old New Mexico of Spanish, indigenous and, finally, mestizo culture rather than to the more abstract, distant "pre-Columbian [...] world of magic." Anaya himself readily acknowledges in *Bless Me, Ultima* "the teaching of the Catholic church and the native spirituality" coming together in the novel" (Anaya *Bless Me, Ultima*). More specifically he stresses that in the novel what is operative is "The beliefs of my traditional New Mexican culture "which "are grounded in the Catholic religion and Spanish folktales from the Iberian world," but as "influenced by cultural borrowing from the Pueblo Indian way of life" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* x).

Turning his attention to *Heart of Aztlan*, the second volume of the trilogy, Mambrol asserts that the novel is, "like *Bless Me, Ultima*," "a psychological and magical portrait of a quest for Chicano identity and empowerment." And this despite neither addressing the fact that the word “chicano” appears in a passing way but once in *Heart of Aztlan* (184) nor does that mention carry the contextual heft of directing or being a considerable factor in that “quest for Chicano identity and empowerment.” That said, the family centering the novel, led by Clemente Chávez and his wife Adelita, is very different from that of the *Bless Me, Ultima* protagonist Antonio Márez Luna whose whole life during its extension in the novel transpires in the area of the same fictional Guadalupe, NM from which the Chávez family leaves after the first seven and a half pages of the first chapter of *Heart of Aztlan*.[3] This novel’s primary setting is the alienated, industrialized big city Albuquerque instead of the tradition-rich New Mexico llano which permeates every page of *Bless Me, Ultima*, i.e., in “the flat country where the hills are smooth and gentle” and for which Clemente always pines (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 134). *Heart of Aztlan* portrays loosely the Chávez family as a less fortunate version of young Antonio’s Márez Luna one. Names are changed, but it is the Chávezes desperate finances in the poor farmland of the real-life Pasturas-Santa Rosa, Guadalupe County, New Mexico (of Anaya’s younger years) that drive them to Albuquerque. And it’s not that the Márez Luna homestead in *Bless Me, Ultima* is better than the Chávezes. While the Luna farmers actually live off the land, Antonio’s family survives in the country only because his father, the former-vaquero, now earns his and his family’s living by working for the county highway department. In *Heart of Aztlan* the father Clemente must sell the family land for a pittance which barely covers its debts. Then the family drives two hours west, via the old, storied US Route 66 (today’s I-40), to join older son Roberto (a simplification of the three Márez Luna brothers who after their return from WWII in the Pacific, physically unscathed, leave the family for the city). Roberto, having moved previously to the real-life Barelas neighborhood of south Albuquerque (and Anaya’s real-life home during his teen years) prepares the way for Clemente to seek salaried work in the real-life Santa Fe (Railroad) Yards of that time. But rather than this novel centering on some version of the very young Antonio-very old Ultima relationship, *Heart of Aztlan* portrays realistically Barelas as a gritty factory-town dominated by the extensive Yards, and stresses the exploitative, post-war recessionary work conditions under which the local workers, Mexican American men in large numbers in fact, labored. And, most importantly, it is in this strange, non-traditional world that the initial breakdown of Clemente's paternal authority in the family occurs.

The other, "magical portrait" aspect of *Heart of Aztlan* invoked by Mambrol centers on the presence and activity of a long-time, but unlikely—neither family nor economic driven—immigrant from Mexico City: Crispín, the old, blind, blue-guitar playing "poet of the barrio" (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 13). The novel makes clear that Crispín came specifically to New Mexico decades before on a mission whose historical roots are not in the central Mexico of his youth, but are instead of two kinds. The first is that he is on a poetical/mythical quest determined by his belief that all Mexicans "are the fruit of the people who wandered from the mythical land of Aztlan, the first people of this land [i.e., the indigenous people of northern Mesoamerica, or specifically today's New Mexico] who wandered [about six centuries earlier] south in search of a sign" (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 83). And this sign, as becomes clear in the text, is perhaps the most famous one of Mexican culture: the eagle perched on a cactus devouring a snake. Or, in other words, the mythic sign which determined the founding of Tenochtitlán, today's Mexico City, two centuries before the arrival of the Spanish under Hernán Cortés.

The second motivation behind Crispín's journey to New Mexico is not found in the text per se of Anaya's novel. Rather it is contextual to the 1960s post-1964 Civil Rights Act's rising of Chicano consciousness for the rest of the decade and into the 1970s and 1980s of Anaya's own most militant period of Chicano consciousness.[4] Hence, the middle and late 1960s constitute the societal, then-contemporay reader's understanding of the motivation for Crispín's poetic/mythic mission: trace/find in the far Mesoamerican north the homeland left by—in effect the original New Mexican—Aztecs on their way to becoming the founders of Tenochtitlán, present-day Mexico City. But in the pages of *Heart of Aztlan*, the resonance of Crispín's properly Chicano homeland seeking mission among the men of Barelas is muted at best. In the bar where Crispín strums his guitar and sings the stories of Aztlan and its people, the men are interested but, with Clemente constantly asking how this helps their strike against the Santa Fe Railroad, and Crispín having no answer, we read: "the story was done, the men were spent," and "the grime and poverty of the barrio enveloped them again and they understood the intriguing story did not get them back their jobs" and felt "the despair of going jobless that winter" (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 85).

The "magical portrait" of which Mambrol writes comes about in this way. It is late November, earlier December of the first early 1950s months of the Chávez family living in Barelas; the strike continues and men like Clemente are surviving because of welfare. Drunk as usual one night Clemente is the last to leave the bar in what could be called the "magical" Chapter 13. As he wanders the deserted streets in wind-driven snow, he stumbles and falls into the snow in the gutter. He contemplates his situation: failure in farming the land, failure in maintaining authority at home, failure at work and in trying to organize the workers against the Santa Fe. He is ready to give up and die, and would have laid there until he did. But in less than twelve full pages (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 120-132), the blind Crispín finds and rescues him, and then follows their successful visit to the old woman who controls the magic rocks which results in three pages in italics (129-131) wherein Clemente, at first accompanied by Crispín and then alone, makes a magical journey through a desert. Then, "Torn and bleeding and barely alive he found himself on a moonlit meadow at the edge of the sacred lake" (130). In words that I will presume neither substantially to quote or paraphrase, it seems that in the presence of all the victims of injustice that have succumbed to the "chains of steel" regime of the Santa Fe Railroad (130), Clemente feels "Time stood still and in that enduring moment he felt the rhythm of the heart of Aztlan beat to the measure of his own heart," and he has an ephiphany as he shouts out "I AM AZTLÁN" (131). Although he is ready to die, thereby joining all the victims he finds there, instead the elemental powers of place preserve him and, now in normal type font, he finds himself "gasp[ing] for breath and "fe[eling] the searing pain of reality returning" as he comes to himself down the mountain and hears the music of Crispín's guitar" and whose player/owner is coming to save him again from dying (131). Chapters 14, 15, less than two pages in 17 (169-170)[5], and last Chapter 21, the book ends with what can only be called a symbolic victory, and more an ending in literature than in life. The workers lead by Clemente are in the Santa Fe Yards. Crispin honors leader Clemente's request by "strumm[ing] a tune of liberation on the blue guitar," while the Clemente and the

Mexican workers of Barelas ready for a new confrontation with "armed guards" who "fingered their rifles nervously," while the "dogs they held on leashes growled uneasily" (Anaya 1988: 208). And this happens even as, above the din of the Clemente-led march on the Santa Fe Yards, all can hear "the blaring sirens announcing the mobilization of another force [the arriving police] at the barricades," but undeterred, to the united cry of "¡Adelante!", Clemente and the other Barelas Mexican workers surge forward as the novel ends (208-209). It remains, in the Chicano-Aztlan heated mid 1970s—as well as today—, for the reader to finish the scene and end the novel to "hir" satisfaction.

In *Tortuga*, the third volume of the New Mexico trilogy, missing is anything similar to the coming-of age themes of the cross-cultural llano world in *Bless Me, Ultima*, the Barelas barrio of Albuquerque and Aztlan quest themes of *Heart of Aztlan*. Instead front and center the reader confronts a completely different setting and indeed world: that of the remote Crippled Children and Orphans Hospital of New Mexico, a state institution for the poor, and its patients and staff (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 6).[6] Some of these patients, including the eponymously nicknamed protagonist (for the full body cast he receives upon hospitalization and which for many resembles a nearby mountain ridge[7]), are Mexican American or, better said in the novel's terms, *raza*. Others are indigenous or Indian, others Anglo, and, with time it is learned, that there are also "vegetable children." With no indicated race nor ethnicity they dwell apart in a remote ward never visited by most patients, nor indeed by their families. Shrunken by diseases like polio and with no prospect of recovery, they come to have a vegetable-like sameness among them. They survive for some unspecified period of time only thanks to the iron lungs they live in and to the real-life nuns who feed and clean them. Returning to the majority of patients, there are some who, like Tortuga, have conditions which may actually be treated and even cured at the Hospital. And Anaya, building off his own hospitalization in the real-life Carol Tinley Hospital for Crippled Children following a diving accident at age sixteen, tells the story of how his protagonist is changed by his time at the institution. This is because of whom he meets and how they all influence him as he successfully pushes through the horror on one hand of the living with so many kids who have no hope, and, on the other, fighting the tedium and pain of rehabilitation to recovery.

Emblematic of the non-racial, non-ethnic essential oneness of the children is a spectacular and the reader suspects completely invented sequence. This occurs when those children who are ambulatory enough—even though they need wheel chairs or crutches, or are misshapen by their particular disease—are taken in the hospital bus to the one movie theater in the adjacent small town. As unthinkable, I believe, as it would be in real life, the adolescents are taken to see what seems to be—anachronistically, given the early 1950s time line of the novel—an imprecise, but novelistically efficacious retelling, in synthesized version, of the 1931 and 1935 Boris Karloff movies *Frankenstein* and, its sequel with Elsa Lancaster, *Bride of Frankenstein*. Anaya makes real the patients' greatest excitement and empathy as they view on the screen versions of their own crippled, misunderstood selves figured in the composite bodies of Frankenstein's "monsters." Selves, be it said, who understand and, more to the point, deeply feel the monsters'—and their own—capacity and need for the love, even if it be from a creature like them of the opposite gender. So intense is the experience that some of these adolescents, aroused into passionate fury, pair up and even couple in the theater aisle with each other. When the movie ends and order returns to the theater, the patients leave the theater. On their way to the bus some local high-school football team members and their girlfriends mercilessly razz them, all the time calling them "freaks." Not being able to stand that abuse, the more mobile adolescent patients unite in fighting and routing their mockers in a street brawl. Winning the field of combat, the patients, aided by the usually negative figure of the head nurse and helped by a large, strong orderly, are exultant and return to the hospital feeling, for once, very good about themselves.

Now only on page 168 of the 197 pages of *Tortuga* in its 2004 edition (with pp. 199-200 being Anaya's 2004 "Afterword" to the novel) does the alert reader of *Heart of Aztlan* understand who the protagonist known only as "Tortuga" in the novel really is and realize that his back-breaking accident was not in something like a car wreck. Rather Tortuga is actually Benjie, the youngest and wildest of the five Chávez offspring from *Heart of Aztlan*. It happens that he was in injured as the consequence of falling from the ladder up the

Santa Fe Yards water tower after been obliged to climb it, being shot in the hand and having fallen to the ground while in the middle of a dispute between his brother Jason and Jason's arch enemy: murderer, reform-school "graduate," and zip-gun wielding Sapo (Anaya, *Heart of Aztlan* 197-199). This knowledge, however, does not change the thematic center of gravity of *Tortuga*: it remains firmly centered on the not-ethnic, not-Chicano, deeply human hospital experience of what Mambrol calls Tortuga/Benjie's "symbolic entry into a world of supernatural transformation." And this process is begun by and shepherded throughout the novel by the most ambiguous person in *Tortuga*'s cast of characters. He is the bedridden, "small, thin boy" called "Salomón," and who, as he is more closely observed by Tortuga, becomes "the frail, angelic boy" who when he "open[s] his lips to speak," really only "speaks," at least to Benjie, "in the deep night and in dream" where paradoxically "there was only silence" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 22). One of the devices Anaya employs to communicate these magical communications is, as in the Clemente-reaching-Aztlan sequence in *Heart of Aztlan*, to represent Salomon's words to Tortuga/Benjie as italicized sections of the novel.

Towards the end of the book—when the reader realizes that Tortuga is Benjie—, his mother sends him from Albuquerque a package and a letter. In accord with the dying Crispín's declared wish, the package contains the old poet/singer's blue guitar (Anaya, *Tortuga* 168). Benjie/Tortuga is surprised. For he, running with the local *marijuaneros*, had no time nor special relationship with Crispín, nor understood how Crispín had become his father Clemente's guide in finding the magical lake and river of Aztlan in the mountains, nor how his transformed father had become the leader of Barelas against the Santa Fe Railroad. The Benji of *Heart of Aztlan* was nothing but a rebellious youth—and unlucky at the end to be Jason's brother—with no care for the loss of traditions and values which affect his father Clemente so grievously; nor, even more so, for the rights of passage which returned his father Clemente, thanks to the aid of Crispín, to the pride of his manhood and community leadership in the last third or so of *Heart of Aztlan* (Chapters 13-21). But by the end of *Tortuga*, the formally bitter and sceptical, but now healed and renewed Benji decides to accept Crispín's blue guitar. Instead, though, of singing of Aztlan and its wandering people, Benji will take up the now apparently-dead Solomón's wish.

And this is stated for the last time on the penultimate page of *Tortuga*, written in the italic letters which signify Solomón's dream-delivered messages to Tortuga/Benji. As the healed and transformed youth rides the Greyhound from the hospital town for home two hours north, he dozes off. What wakes him is the sense that the deceased Solomón is present there and has been whispering these words to him: "Make a song of rejoicing from all that you have seen and felt! Sing a song of love, Tortuga! Oh yes, sing of love!" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 197). But there is no Salomón on the sun-filled bus. The reader understands better why Benji has accepted fully Crispín's blue guitar, but will not sing of the people of Aztlan. Instead he will ponder the ill-fated Solomón's complicated message affirming hope and love despite his own tragic life and the worse ones endured by those sad shrunken creatures in the iron-lung ward of the hospital who in their vegetative, prospect-less lives have all the same striven to live as long as possible. Solomón's choice of Tortuga/Benji for this labor seems to have been made even before he met the recently arrived boy in the body cast. Solomón, most definitely a magical creature, foresaw that Benji/Tortuga would be rehabilitated despite the despairing state of spirit in which he arrived at the hospital. Furthermore, Solomón knew that as a result of having been hopeless, but having fought back to health, Benji would have a unique understanding of suffering without prospect of recovery; and, perhaps even foreseeing that Crispín would pass his singer's mantle and blue guitar to the unpromising Benji, Solomón understood that Benji, despite the deteriorating patient Danny's attempt to drown him (when he was still in the body cast), would be the person of feeling and insight needed to sing of /for those with no hope but the vain desire itself to live.

Before moving onto the next section of this paper, it might be well to contextualize further the personal relation of Anaya to the places and themes of the New Mexico trilogy. And this is nicely done thanks to Anaya's twenty-six-page *Autobiography. As written in 1985* at the request of TSQ Publications, one of the derivative publishers resulting from the breakup of Quinto Sol Publications, the UC Berkeley-based publisher of the academic and storied *El Grito: a journal of contemporary mexican-american thought* (1967-1974) as well as the creator of the $1,000 Premio Quinto Sol, the first national literary prize for Chicano writing, awarded four times between 1972 and 1975.[8] The section headed "A New Life" is of special interest. Anaya begins: "I attended school in Santa Rosa [NM] until the eighth grade," i.e., when Anaya was around fourteen or twice as old as protagonist Antonio of *Bless Me, Ultima* (Anaya, *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* 8). He continues: "It was then that the gang of boys I had known began to fall apart. Some had moved away from the small town. Some began to fight with each other. Prejudices I had not known before appeared" (Anaya, *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* 8). In the next paragraph he describes a true loss of childhood innocence:

> We, who had always been brothers, now separated into Anglos and Mexicans. I did not understand the process. I had always known I was brown, that I was *mejicano* in the language of my community, that we were poor people. But those had been elements of pride, and now something had come to separate us (*The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* 8-9).

In the following paragraph he states that his family moved to Albuquerque in 1952 when he was fifteen, and so left behind the lands and childhood experiences that gave way to their literary recreation in *Bless Me, Ultima*, the first volume of the New Mexico trilogy, and opened the door to the second and third volumes, *Heart of Aztlan* and *Tortuga*, as he explains in following pages of the *Autobiography*. Here, though, the salient point is clear. *Bless Me, Ultima* is so different from the other two volumes in great part because it represents the author's best attempt to portray, what for him and, as it turns out, his protagonist Antonio Márez Luna, is a kind of pre-lapsarian world of people—good, bad and indifferent—who are experienced based on their behaviors, not pre-judged by their race or ethnicity. Despite everyone being poor in the Santa Rosa of Anaya's 1940s and very early 1950s, it was heaven on earth for the young Rudy. But around 1951 "something had come to separate us […] into Anglos and Mexicans," and then by the mid and late 1960s the *mejicanos* morphed into being "Chicanos." And being Chicano and the idea of Aztlan are themes of virtually all Anaya's post-*Ultima* novels as well as of the collection of the book *Aztlan. Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, with its first 1989 version edited by him and Francisco A. Lomelí, and a second "Revised and expanded edition" more than a generation later in 2017 by them and Enrique R. Lamadrid. But the Chicano theme and reality is not in *Bless Me, Ultima*, no matter what can be called the "retro-reading," of it through the prism of the Chicano Movement which, as we have seen, is most present in Mambrol's and many others' reading of the New Mexico trilogy. As with the first and third, written-in-Spanish Premios Quinto Sol, Rivera's *… y no se lo tragó la tierra* and Hinojosa's *"Estampas del Valle" y otras obras,* the characters and situations of all three novels are the same: the downtrodden, poor life of the vast majority of Texan and New Mexican *raza* or Mexican Americans in the middle of the twentieth century. Yet, what—in the activist late 1960s and 1970s—identifies singularly these three novels' protagonists and their world is easy to see. Like the young Anaya in pre-lapsarian Santa Rosa and his younger protagonist Antonio living in a still remoter part of the llano of New Mexico, the protagonists and the people they live with and among do not self-identify—seem not even to know the word—as "Chicano," and less still with all the tones and attitudes of militancy the word acquires in the 1960s. Nothing could be further from the world portrayed in those first three Premios Quinto Sol than the 1969 Denver which saw, under the leadership of former boxer Rudolfo "Corky" González, the founding of the civil-rights organization Crusade for Justice; nor, from the Denver meeting in March, 1969 of the First Chicano National Conference. Resulting from the conference was the creation of the famously militant *El plan de Aztlan* designed to be "the ideological framework and concrete political program of the Chicano Movement—whose official language was English—because of its emphasis on [Chicano] nationalism and the goal of [Chicano] self-determination."[9] Arising at this juncture also was the activist Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) whose mission was indeed to implement the *Plan* which, despite the title in Spanish, was written in English.

2. THE FOUR PREMIOS QUINTO SOL AND THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

As was commented upon above respecting Anaya's "Afterword" to the 2004 or twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Tortuga*'s first publication, he acknowledged that "a few early critics said that [*Tortuga*] didn't fit the social realism we needed in the heady days of the 1970s Chicano Movement." Perhaps in our "woke" times, it is easier to access the critics' position while understanding Anaya's. For he goes on in the "Afterword" to state that "In story and style I think *Tortuga* is a high point in my early years as a writer" even though "I am known as the author of *Bless Me, Ultima*" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 200). He then continues to explain why: that despite not being what could be called a "Chicano-Movement document," the novel centers on something more basic: the human. Stating that "I believe there is a universality in *Tortuga*", Anaya describes the grounds for that universality in the extreme suffering and long hospitalization the protagonist suffers and then poses the essentially rhetorical question: "Who has not undergone a traumatic event in life?" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 200). By extension, then, does Anaya not implicitly ask: who cannot relate to the life-robbing paralysis of the children he portrays as poor, largely forgotten little vegetable-like creatures in the seldom-visited iron-lung ward of the same hospital that is assuring protagonist Tortuga's health-restored return to the world? And does that miserable, albeit non-political plight, not merit attention? Moreover, as Anaya makes clear in his 1985 mini-autobiography, his own diving-accident caused hospitalization in the early 1950s at the real-life Carrie Tinley Hospital for Crippled Children was not political nor "Chicano". The hospital's real-life, then particularly remote location 240 kms. due south of Albuquerque both explains the impressive, angst-filled apprehension of narrator Tortuga's description of the ambulance ride to that Hospital, and, besides, answers with a definitive yes the question as to the importance of the human, non-politicized drama the novel develops. Hence, when P.B. Taylor gives a very Chicano reading (esp. pp. 139-143) to the process of Tortuga/Benjie's transformation from being broken, paralyzed and hopeless to restored health, he does so by retro-reading that process through the lens of two subsequent works: Anaya's next major novel, the politically-themed *Alburquerque* (1992), and his earlier mock epic poem *The adventures of Juan Chicaspatas* (1985). In the novel *Alburquerque* a sub-theme is that Tortuga/Benjie has become the forty-year old University of New Mexico professor and writer Ben Chávez who is trying to write the epic poem of Aztlan and its people. This, of course, was the mission entrusted to him around fourteen years earlier by Crispín when he left him the blue guitar. At the same time a more universal "song" of redemptive suffering is what Salomón, the deathly-sick child with no ethnicity, no politics, wanted Tortuga/Benjie to do after having lived and survived the hell of all the mortally-ill children at the hospital. Those points stipulated, our purpose is not to discuss the competing claims of critics and author per se. Rather let us consider for a moment the facts of authors' fictions and the world into which they are published. While writers may, of course, write what they want, their public all the same and at all levels, from general reader to critics and scholars, has its expectations for productions by given authors. And, clearly, Anaya felt it necessary to explain his work—*Tortuga* in this instance—to his public understood in its broadest dimensions.[10]

Now, to the extent that the Chicano Movement owes it early literary masterworks—as represented by the four Premio Quinto Sols awarded between 1971 and 1975—to the efforts of the founders of Quinto Sol Publications and the sub-set of editors for the academic, but storied *El Grito: a journal of contemporary mexican-american thought*, one thing in the present context is truly noteworthy: not one of those prize winning works has a dominant political theme. Texan Tomás Rivera's *…y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) is the coming-of- age novel of an unnamed First-Communion age boy in the early 1950s of the lower Rio Grande Valley and the migrant laborer world of the Upper Midwest. New Mexican Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) sets its similar stage-of-life narrative in the llano of his home state when WWII is ending; First Communion also is an important part of his story. Texan Rolando Hinojosa's *"Estampas del Valle" y otras obras* (1973) is set in a few small towns of the lower Rio Grande Valley, and tells the parallel stories of two cousins orphaned early on in their lives and until as they come to early manhood, having both returned from the Korean War. In their stories, as in the one told by Rivera, there is injustice at the hands of Anglos, but in their worlds it is fellow *raza* members who are the worst of the *homo homini lupus* kind to their own.

Owing, it seems, to problems within Quinto Sol Publications, the fourth and last Premio Quinto Sol, was delayed until 1975, being published not by Quinto Sol itself, but by the derivative and short-lived Tonatiuh International and was awarded to the El Paso based poet and dramatist Estela Portillo Tambley. She won her Premio

Quinto Sol in 1975 for *Rain of Scorpions and Other Writings.* a collection of nine short stories and the eponymous novella set mostly in the *frontera* lands where Texas, New Mexico and Mexico create their own particular subculture. It is perhaps the most "political" of the awarded volumes, but not for any Chicano Movement politics. Rather it stands for the revindication of women's rights in patriarchal society. Thelma Reyna, in the second and longer of her two online reviews of *Rain of scorpions* (that of 14 May 2012), addresses this issue directly and in a way most important for this article. She states that "Portillo Trambley felt that Chicano writers must not limit themselves to Chicano themes and struggles" and, dramatist that she was, "believed that our stage is the human stage and that our characters and messages must be universal." Is this not in essence, as discussed above, Anaya's own defense, or, better said, informal apologia for not injecting the Chicano Movement into *Tortuga*? Reyna notes that, like the Anaya of that single novel, all Portillo Trambley's work "was sometimes criticized by fellow Chicano writers for taking this stance instead of joining in the militancy of Chicanismo" (continued from the 14 May 2012 review).[11]

3. MAGICAL REALISM AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE NEW MEXICO TRILOGY

By the time Anaya received the 2015 National Humanities Medal, awarded to him in the White House by President Obama on September 22, 2016, not only was Don Rudolfo confined largely to the wheelchair in which he was seated as the Medal attached to the distinctive red ribbon was placed over his head and then hanging from his neck, but most definitely "the heady days of the 1970s Chicano Movement" were long over. In fact with the 2014 or 9th International Conference on Chicano Literature hosted by the University of Oviedo, but organized, as from the beginning, by the Instituto Franklin de Estudios Norteamericanos at the Universidad de Alcalá, the conference title had been—as would be three years later the 2017 edition of *Aztlan. Essays on the chicano homeland*—"revised and expanded." It became what it is today: the "International Conference on Chicano Literature and Latino Studies."[12] And even though in *Borderlands/"La Frontera": the new mestiza,* first published in 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) embraced fully and discussed most amply the feminine dimensions of Aztlan's gods in the book's essays and poetry, and, fittingly then, dedicated it "*a todos mexicanos* on both sides of the border," her example in that regard was not followed. Subsequent researchers and essayists in borderland studies—interpreting "borderland" rather broadly since the new "borderland" really extends from deep into Mexico through the Mexico-Texas border areas per se and all the way across the U.S. from northern California, through Illinois and into the Northeast—have not emulated Anzaldúa's interest in Aztlan as a reality or useful concept. Last year, for example, Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez published a collection of essays titled *Teaching late-twentieth-century mexicana and chicana writers*. But this was not/is not just any collection of essays. For it belongs to the prestigious "Options for teaching" series of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA). The Association solicits proposals by would-be editors for volumes in the series, and when one is accepted, organizes the respective calls for papers for the given volume, and once the volume is set, supplies much editorial help in creating the resulting book of which it is the publisher. Now from the narrow perspective of the present study, most significant is that not one of the twenty-six contributors to Martínez' volume—nor Martínez herself in her long, substantial introduction to volume of 344 pp. + x—invoke Aztlan, even when writing about Anzaldúa! But this kind of reality is in fact what the close, honest literary historian and cultural historian Lomelí noted in his revised introduction—"Revisiting the vision of Aztlan"—to the "Revised and Expanded" 2017 edition of *Aztlan. Essays on the chicano homeland.* Activists, from the mid-sixties onwards, in their zeal, "sometimes used myth to prevent expansion into a larger cultural agenda within the Chicano Movement, such as granting women a more central place in the Movement"; and so "by privileging a narrow nationalist agenda, they excluded those they meant to serve" (Lomelí 14). And despite Anzaldúa not taking offense not feeling excluded, but rather creating her own feminine Aztlan, she was the exception among Chicanas even as her example recedes to the margins of contemporary awareness.

For his part Anaya was content to let the version of his contribution to the 2017 edition of *Aztlan. Essays on the chicano homeland* remain as it appeared in the 1989 edition. Apparently, long-widowed and welladvanced into his declining years, he let the essay, first written in the central epoch of his career, stand as an historical document on one hand, and, probably, the central and definitive discursive statement of his overall vision of who he considered himself to be. Yet, that said, it seems clear that both for readers and for Anaya more important than the conceptual underpinning of his work was his lifelong goal "to touch people" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 200). Referring precisely to the non-political, non-Chicano-Movement novel *Tortuga* which he considered, as we have seen, "a high point in my early years as a writer," he stated that as author, "My reward is the reader who thanks me" (200). Yet, as Anaya frequently acknowledged, and whatever the values of *Tortuga*, more people have been "touched" by *Bless Me, Ultima* than any other volume in the New Mexico trilogy, or, for that matter, in his entire oeuvre. Let us consider why.

The full Anaya quote about how readers reward him may provide the way in. In the third to last paragraph of the two-page "Afterword" to the 2004 edition of *Tortuga*, first published, remember, twenty-five years before, Anaya wrote:

> Stories are about revelation. I revealed Tortuga's experiences as much for me as for the reader. My reward is the reader who thanks me for *tackling the themes* in the book. That person's comment is worth more than twenty weeks on the best-seller list. *I write to touch people*, and when they respond the circle is complete. The pain is lifted. As we reveal the frailties of our human bondage, we touch others. That touching makes us stronger (Anaya 200; emphasis mine).

At least since Aristotle's *Poetics* the case in the West has been made that the reason a writer crafts a work is to produce an effect in the viewer, listener or reader. Anaya's desire "to touch people" is his way of saying that. Then, too, the *Poetics* premises that extended creative works, specifically tragedy in his case, are 1) poet imitating life processes deriving from the probable actions of personages of specific character confronted by specific circumstances, and, 2) the audience's reaction to how those actions are plotted or developed in a natural sequence through to their conclusion. Anaya, at least initially, refers instead to readers' response to his "tackling the themes" in the novel *Tortuga*. In so doing he separates from Aristotle by discussing his literary creation in conceptual, not experiential terms. Aristotle, writing specifically of tragedy—and there is the most definite tragic pall which hangs over *Tortuga* as novel despite the protagonist's rehabilitation and release from hospital—posits, on the other hand, the critical concept of catharsis. This concept has nothing to do per se with the themes of any particular extended literary creation. It describes, rather, how the plot sequences protagonists' actions to produce pity and fear in the audience. Then, as the full recognition, the full feeling of the horror of the where the actions are leading, have lead the characters, those powerful emotions are purged, "catharsized." The spectator or reader or viewer has had a wrenching experience which, nonetheless, is valued for making present in "hir" life an *understanding through experience* of what our life sometimes is. In the last paragraph of the "Afterword" to *Tortug*a, Anaya—always the story-teller full with his material and preoccupied by how to reach his audience with it—adopts a less conceptual approach to his relation with readers than the earlier lines we have been discussing. He explains that "Writing is about sharing one's story with others" and his hope that "in sharing my story"—both his own hospitalization as rendered in Tortuga/Benjie's, and the stories of "those prisoners in the iron lungs"—that "I have touched someone" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 200). These comments by Anaya recall others in the "Q & A with Rudolfo Anaya" which comes at the end the 1999 Warner edition of *Bless me, Utlima*. When asked by the not-identified interviewer "Which of your books was the most difficult to write?", Anaya responds "*Tortuga*," and explains: "It was painful to recreate the hospital and the suffering of the children" (Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* 282). And every reader of that novel has felt some of that pain. What Anaya does not include in his response was everything in the novel that has to do with fellow patient Danny, described early on as "a pathetic kid, dressed in an oversize hospital shirt and holding his withered hand up" (Anaya, *Tortuga* 34). Danny, as it turns out, fails at one point to have body-cast-imprisoned Tortuga drowned by his hench-boys, but at the end of the novel Danny himself turns off the electricity to the iron-lung ward, thereby killing all the "vegetable" polio victims who depended on the power-driven devices. Both patients and staff know that Danny is being spiritually destroyed by the uncontrollable withering that began with his fingers and months later by novel's end has extended far up his arm. But when Tortuga, now Benjie leaves the hospital, the issue of what will be done to control the murderous boy is left unsolved. Fellow patients and the doctor in charge know what Danny has done, what he has become, but the reader only knows one thing: a disintegrating, dead-end killer is loose, and the hospital society is not being protected from him. Another kind of novelist—think of Rolando Hinojosa taking Becky Escobar née Caldwell from being a minor character in *Mi querido Rafa* and *Dear Rafe* to making her the protagonist of *Becky and her friends* and *Los amigos de Becky*—could have made Danny the protagonist of his own novel (see Miller, "Twentieth century female protagonists" 159-164). But while Anaya instead leaves Danny behind as *materia novelable*, his reader cannot forget Danny. That "pathetic kid" of early on in *Tortuga* develops to become as monstrous and evil as Shakespeare's hunchbacked, limping Richard III, he of the withered arm, or Iago in *Othello* or Edmund in *King Lear*. But unlike those characters who meet their tardy, but just ends, Danny, at novel's end, will apparently carry on until only nature ends his tortured, deadly days.

Now one reason for Anaya leaving the not ethnically-characterized Danny behind as a character is that Danny is not Chicano. He is simply a patient at the state hospital for any and all New Mexican "crippled children" (as they were then described), and has no relation to the overall thematic of Anaya's oeuvre. Only because of Anaya's aforementioned diving accident as a Barales adolescent did that extremely diverse cast of hospital characters become part of the New Mexico trilogy. For, as suggested above, Danny as an individual character may in fact have more "relatives" in Shakespeare than in Anaya.

Let us, then, return to "central" or "core" Anaya, and, perhaps, in no better venue than when discussing *Bless Me, Ultima*, the work he always acknowledged was "the favorite" novel among his readers. The Chicano culture which he calls the "backdrop for the novel" is described in this simple, factual way: "The beliefs of my traditional New Mexican culture are grounded in the Catholic religion and Spanish folktales from the Iberian world. These beliefs are influenced by cultural borrowing from the Pueblo Indian way of life (*Bless Me, Ultima* x). Now, Anaya himself in "A homeland without boundaries" from the *Aztlan* essay collection of 1989 and 2017, David Carrasco in "A perspective for a study of religious dimensions in chicano experience: *Bless Me, Ultima* as religious text", and, to abbreviate what could be a very long listing indeed, Héctor Calderón in "Writing the dreams of la Nueva México: Rudolfo A. Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* and the Southwest literary tradition" all explore and expand magnificently on that simply-described cultural "backdrop" to *Bless Me, Ultima*. And the simple truth about the religious and spiritual in Anaya has, I think, absolutely nothing to do with magical realism as indexed always by reference to García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad/One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the single work with which that ism is most identified and by which defined. In that novel there are bursts of events and persons which simply erupt into the action and lives of the characters with no preparation, no system of cause and effect unless their specific nature is associated by characters with traditional Catholic beliefs. For example, José Arcadio Buendía being haunted by the spirit of Prudencio Aguilar, the man whose killing leads eventually to the founding of Macondo, or perhaps even the somewhat blasphemous ascension of Remedios the Beauty into the clouds on a windy day while hanging sheets to dry. For an event or person to be magically realist, it can, by definition, have no explanation in any religion or myth known in Macondo among its people; it can be no part of any systematic meta-physics, no part of any organized accounting for what cannot be physically surveyed, described, catalogued according to any taxonomy but its own.

When Anaya is asked in the "Q & A with Rudolfo Anaya," "What is your own experience with the supernatural?", the first sentence of his response is fundamental to understanding his world at its simplest, most characteristic level: "The supernatural and ordinary reality are worlds that exist side by side" (*Bless Me, Ultima* 282). And that is for me the essence of any world vision or individual experience of the supernatural. And that is what I have been told by those who have heard in western Ireland the keening of the banshees; and in Celtic northwestern Spain by a famous Galician writer summoned when he was three or four to the Santa Compaña's council of his family's dead; and by relatives whose bad luck was to have bought an old farm house on Maryland's Eastern Shore which they finally learned was built on an old Indian burial ground. When the questioner of the "Q & A" asked Anaya "What would you like your readers to come away with after reading *Bless Me, Ultima*?", his response says it all: "I hope they experience a very unique world. I hope they follow Antonio's journey and 'live' with him through his experiences". Yes, exactly. In mid-March, 1980 it chanced that after having lost daylight while driving the incredibly flat Texas Panhandle and arriving hours later at a motel in the almost complete darkness of Anaya's boyhood home of Santa Rosa, the next day I walked out of my room into the brisk air, new smells, transparent sky, confronted by huge lichen-covered boulders among which lower down the unseen Pecos River was making its way. Years later I took up *Bless Me, Ultima* and after that have often journeyed those lands with the Anaya-shaped, Anaya-derived Antonio. Then on June 30, 2020, with Antonio "riding shotgun" for me as for decades, and out of touch on purpose for not wanting to hear anything more about COVID-19, I drove through Santa Rosa on the way to Santa Fe. How strange to learn the next day in Santa Fe that Don Rudolfo was no longer with us. But that "odd couple" young Antonio Márez Luna and old Ultima with her familiar owl are always out among the junipers, and, strangely, the luckless Florence, the no-one's child who drowns for no reason whatsoever, lingers just out of sight.

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NOTES

1 At the end of the Mambrol literariness.org entry, this notice is found: "Source: Notable American Novelists Revised Edition Volume 1 James Agee — Ernest J. Gaines Edited by Carl Rollyson Salem Press, Inc 2008." In other words Mambrol's article may actually date from 2008, but be more readily accessed in its online literariness.org version. I in fact have three such entries in another literature encyclopedia, each one ten pages long, albeit shorter in the reprint because of not reproducing the illustrations from the original printing. The author's rights to the entries typically cease when s/he cashes the check received for writing them. Also typical: such authors are never notified of the reprint editions of their work; they learn of them by surprise while googling for something else.

2 Casting my eyes toward a bookshelf in my study I see dust-jacketed volumes by Saul Bellow, John Updike, Joan Didion, Philip Roth and others that follow a similar practice. Once a writer is well-known, publishers often demonstrate more confidence in the author's established name than in that author's new title by using a larger type face for the author's name than for the title of the book itself.

3 Just in case: see Anaya's short *Autobiography. As written in 1985* for the basic information that is the background to his own youth Santa Rosa, NM (after birth in Pastura some 30 kms. to the SW), and both located in Guadalupe County, NM, which becomes the geography of the Chávez family's life and culture before departing for Albuquerque two hours to the west.

4 We shall return to this matter further on. Let it suffice now to point to the 1989 and 2017 editions of *Aztlan. Essays on the Chicano Homeland.* The 1989 edition was edited by Francisco A. Lomelí and Anaya himself, with introduction by him and the lead article by Anaya. The 2017 "Revised and Expanded Edition" has a revised introduction by Lomelí and the same article by Anaya. Six more essays expand the edition; Enrique R. Lamadrid, whose contribution to the volume is not specified, appears as a third editor in 2017.

5 Pages 169-170 narrate how the sell-out Mexican community leaders, the priest Father Cayo and money-man Super, came to Clemente with a bag full of money in exchange for him, who would now be set for life, forsaking the strike he was now leading and leaving town for good. However, and this is depending on factors that will be discussed later either a magical realist or a supernatural event, Clemente simply touched the bag, it went up in flames, destroyed the money, and the priest and Super fled in fear.

6 The real-life equivalent for the novel's hospital was the Carol Tingley Hospital for Crippled Children founded in 1937 in Hot Springs, NM (since 1950, because of a contest run by a radio quiz program of that name, it is called now Truth or Consequences), with the direct aid of polio-victim and then sitting U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. To the protest of locals it was moved two hours north via I-25 to more central Albuquerque in 1981 and became the Carrie Tingley Hospital located on the campus of the University of New Mexico. In our language of today the "carrietingleyhospitalfoundation.org" web site states the purpose of the hospital whose work it supports: provide "adaptive programs, resources, and assistance that allow children with special needs to discover their independence and creativity despite their physical limitations, as well as financial support to the UNM Carrie Tingley Hospital for equipment and research." For a period-piece document on the place, hospital and surrounding area, see the modern reprint of the 1940 *New Mexico: A guide to the colorful state* (1940): *The WPA guide to 1930s New Mexico,* pp. 257-258.

7 In *Tortuga* this mountain called "Tortuga" is readily seen from the hospital and the protagonist's resembles the outline of a turtle's carapace. In the real-life Hot Springs or today's Truth or Consequences, NM, there is a nearby geological formation which is called "Elephant Butte."

8 In case the younger reader lacks a reference point for how much $1000 was between 1972 and 1975, suffice it to say that that sum would have covered during those years more than half a year's rent for a one-bedroom apartment for my wife and I when we were living in Hyde Park, the neighborhood of the University of Chicago (where Luis Leal was awarded his Ph.D. in Spanish in 1950 and Ana Castillo earned her MA in Latin American Studies in 1979).

9 The text of the *Plan* may be found in many online sites. But, especially in the present context, most interesting is to consult its reprinting in both editions of the already cited *Aztlan. Essays on the chicano homeland*. While Anaya's contribution, "Aztlan. A homeland without boundaries," remains unchanged in the expanded and otherwise revised 2017 edition, the volume itself as well as Lomelí's new introduction present a Chicano world much changed from 1969. The near half century between 1969 and 2017 have changed so many things!

10 For more light on that heartfelt personal dimension to *Tortuga* see Anaya (The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas 9-11; 22).

11 This is not the place to go into the details, but of the four Premio Quinto Sol books only Portillo Trambley's had a revised edition. This was published in 1993. Maythee Rojas states that "The new edition, which consists of [the title piece] novella and eight short stories, features four new stories in place of five of the original ones" (Rojas 9). Thelma Reyna adds that the author's increasingly "refined critical eye caused her to replace a handful of the original stories with new ones and caused her to inject substantive changes to characters and themes in the original stories she kept" (from the 30 April 2012 review). It is clear that the author Portillo Trambley and scholars with a positive view of her work understood that the fourth Premio Quinto Sol volume had certain issues.

12 See Miller's "The Latinidad of *Becky and her friends/Los amigos de Becky* in the 21st century" (85-90). There is found a very short account and documentation of the expansion of the Conference's scope in the context of discussing the "latinidad" of Hinojosa's Becky Caldwell.