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'A Moment of Magic': Coyote, Tricksterism, and the Role of the Shaman in Rudolfo Anaya's Sonny Baca Novels

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**“A MOMENT OF MAGIC”: COYOTE, TRICKSTERISM, AND
THE ROLE OF THE SHAMAN IN RUDOLFO ANAYA’S
SONNY BACA NOVELS**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

In memory of Hector Torres, whose guidance in the early stages of this project was invaluable, and whose absence fills its pages. A true “Señor de la luz” whose spirit of generosity and inquiry speaks to me as I read, research, and write. You are missed by many.

For my children—Allyson, Ryan, Isaac, and Evan—whose light guides me in all I do and inspires me to be the father they deserve. May your futures be full of magic, joy, and possibility.

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ABSTRACT

In Rudolfo Anaya's *Zia Summer*, *Rio Grande Fall*, *Shaman Winter*, and *Jemez Spring*, the protagonist—Sonny Baca—undertakes a murder investigation that ultimately leads him to confront Raven, a mysterious figure whose acts of violence threaten the social fabric of Albuquerque, the American Southwest, and the entire world. In battling Raven, Sonny comes to realize that both he and his foe have the ability to access a spiritual power that takes root in the myths and belief systems of various cultures, including Sonny's Chicano community, Native American peoples of the region, and ancient civilizations throughout the world, from which Sonny draws power as he becomes a shaman and healer. This dissertation explores how Anaya presents Sonny's transformation as a model for self-empowerment in the face of colonial and neo-colonial violence. Tracing postcolonial theory, border studies, and contemporary discussions of trickster figures in Native cultures, this study argues that Anaya confronts both the genre expectations of the detective novel and the implicit racism and discrimination that continue to pervade cross-cultural interactions in the Southwest.

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CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF RUDOLFO ANAYA'S LITERARY AND THEORETICAL WORK

Colonial systems function in a variety of ways, from the overt economic and political control evidenced in classical European colonialism to the more subtle forms of neo-colonialism of educational structures that favor a certain historical narrative or epistemological model of understanding human experience. Regardless of the specifics, the underlying purpose remains the same—valorizing those behaviors and beliefs which sustain and expand hegemony while discrediting and/or ignoring alternative modes of interpreting and defining reality. In contemporary American society, such colonialist practices frequently emerge in the form of suppressing voting rights among minorities, perpetuating racial stereotypes through popular culture, and limiting the extent to which value systems that contradict the meta-narrative of scientific progress and capitalism achieve validation. In this light, colonialism extends to a wide range of systems that all seek to dictate the terms of the discourse by which ontological categories of real or imaginary can be understood. The modern, scientifically-based, Western mode of epistemology separates the rational, tangible world of everyday experience from the intuitive, invisible ways of knowing understood variously as religion, superstition, mystery, and magic, particularly when those modes of interpreting experience derive from cultures that colonial powers viewed as primitive or backwards. A significant part of the colonial experience has been the labeling of entire populations—and their belief systems—as irrational and therefore less “real” than the seemingly objective nature of the Cartesian logic of the modern world. Countless examples of this classification exist, from academic disciplines (arts vs. sciences, for example) to pop psychology and the

distinction between left-brained and right-brained people and their learning styles. It is not unreasonable to assert that the entire goal of Western modernity seems to be defining and categorizing the universe into these two fields—what we cannot see and thus cannot truly know, and what we can measure and quantify.

Into this space come postcolonial expressions of resistance, in a variety of forms—artistic, intellectual, political, economic, and religious. Regardless of the way in which that resistance emerges, it consistently identifies and targets a gap in the colonial endeavor, exploiting that opportunity to refashion the discourse, reimagine the contours of the social structures, and rethink the parameters of the ontological possibilities that exist outside of the hegemonic norms. Since the mid-twentieth-century and the rise of postcolonial thought, theorists and artists have explored the ways in which hybridity, subversion of hegemonic values systems, and the expression of alternative histories serve to empower the colonized. Among the most interesting of these forms of resistance are those that go beyond the immediate realm of material circumstances, focusing instead (or, more often, in addition) on the various ways in which colonized peoples expressed religious belief as an epistemological framework that opposes the official and standardized models of the colonial center. Expressions of pre-colonial and anti-colonial systems of belief and practice mark the modes of resistance to hegemony in places as varied as sub-Saharan Africa, South America, India, and the Caribbean. In these and countless other settings, populations living at the physical and psychic margins of society reanimate, reshape, and re-create non-Western religious systems that the colonial center either forgot or never saw in the first place, forming syncretic forms of belief that respond

to the experience of colonized peoples. In the American Southwest, the space imagined in the late twentieth century as the Chicano homeland of Aztlán, a powerful version of this form of resistance finds expression in the syncretism of indigenous and Western beliefs, the blending of *santos* and kachinas into new representations of spirituality and communal self-identification. For writers from both Native and Chicano backgrounds, these modes of religious expression become a potent means of opening a space for the ethnic and cultural Other in the face of colonial pressure to erase difference and accept the demands for silence and invisibility—to forget culturally-specific identities, worldviews, and lifeways. And these spiritually-rooted forms of resistance operate beyond the surface of colonialism, calling into question not only the enactment of power, but the philosophical framework upon that power is constructed.

Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* has, since its initial publication over 40 years ago, taken its place in the canon of modern American literature, a fact that has over the past fifteen years been solidified as Anaya has received the National Medal of Arts, and as *Bless Me, Ultima* has been selected as a text for the NEA's Big Read project and adapted for both theatrical performance and a motion picture. Clearly, there is something about this story of a young boy coming of age in a turbulent historical moment, amid complex familial and social tensions that he does not understand, that resonates with readers and speaks to the cultural yearnings of groups and individuals who are powerless in the face of discrimination and dehumanization. Due to that lasting impact, *Bless Me Ultima* has given Rudolfo Anaya the intellectual capital to write profusely on issues of language, racism, the human longing for spiritual connection, and the rapid pace of cultural change

in his native New Mexico and the United States more broadly. For most of the 1980s, Anaya focused on writing non-fiction, including a memoir, literary criticism, and a series of essays on culture and history, all while his early novels found new readers in a generation raised in the wake of the Chicano Movement, for whom Antonio from *Bless Me, Ultima* was a symbol of the struggles of a culture to rethink the imposed options presented by the dominant culture—assimilation or rejection. And the narrative arc of *Bless Me, Ultima*, *Heart of Aztlán*, and *Tortuga*—the effects of war and military buildup, urban migration, the conflict created by unjust working conditions in the city’s industrial district, and the potential to overcome the conditions through collaborative resistance and empowerment—resonated powerfully with readers, leading to a rich body of Anaya scholarship.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Anaya expanded his work from the traditional literary and critical endeavors of his early career, writing children’s books, young adult fiction, and detective novels. The latter includes four novels that have received scant scholarly attention, but I contend that these four novels present an important commentary on contemporary life in the American Southwest and the social tensions of that cultural space. Anaya’s poignant use of myth critiques what he sees as the fundamental injustices of a society that oppresses entire groups, robbing them of self-definition in the present and the sense of identity that comes from a connection to a communal history. And a careful study of the Sonny Baca novels reveals that they are rich with the same kinds of themes—cultural hybridity, individual vs. communal identity formation, the connection between the physical world and a spiritual plane of existence, and healing as a means of

reconciling an oppressed people from the pains and injustices of violence—that have made *Bless Me, Ultima* such a rich as respected part of the Chicano literary discourse for four decades. What we see in *Zia Summer*, *Rio Grande Fall*, *Shaman Winter*, and *Jemez Spring* is the same interest in giving voice to his people and the same emphasis on Chicana/o identity as a mixture of both Indigenous and European roots, both of which must be acknowledged, understood, and appreciated in order for communal and individual wholeness to be made possible.

In 1992, Anaya published his first full-length novel since *Tortuga*, the third in his trilogy centering on the massive social changes in post-World-War-II New Mexico, in 1979. This novel—*Albuquerque*—centers on a coming-of-age plot similar to that of *Bless Me, Ultima*, but with several important differences. Chief among these is the fact that the hero is no longer a boy, but a young man, not a priest-in-training, but a boxer, not the child of two families battling for his future, but an orphan of mixed ethnic backgrounds seeking to discover his parents' identities and histories in the hopes of reconstructing his own identity. But like *Bless Me, Ultima*, this novel is concerned with issues of politics, both as an electoral process and as a series of conflicts between competing groups—the long-time Anglo political class, the young Chicana/o community, and the new money cultural hybrid—each represented by a different candidate for mayor of Albuquerque. *Albuquerque* received scant critical attention and limited popular success, but the novel has had two enduring legacies that make it a key point in Anaya's literary production.

First, it marks a second phase in Anaya's career as a novelist, returning him to the genre

in which he first found success as a writer, and following a decade devoted to teaching, criticism, and essay-writing. Like *Bless Me, Ultima, Alburquerque* depicts the struggles of a young male protagonist who must define himself in relation to his family, his ethnic community, and the larger social forces of a highly stratified and inherently racist culture; like Antonio, Abrán faces a world that is changing rapidly, and those changes are reflected in the internal struggle to determine who he is and who he will be. In *Alburquerque*, Anaya returns to his roots and produces a novel that—while flawed in several important ways—asks important questions that resist facile answers. A key part of this is how Anaya thinks through hybridity by emphasizing both Abrán’s multiethnic identity and role of both Chicana/o and Native cultures in the text. The novel culminates on Easter weekend and presents some of the same themes of rebirth and fecundity, also emphasizes this image of flight. In a key scene, Jose Calabasa (who is also mentioned briefly later in *Jemez Spring*), the friend of the protagonist, Abrán, takes on the character of Coyote, scales the walls of Zimmerman Library on the campus of the University of New Mexico, and relieves himself, picturing in his mind the image of the great texts of Western civilization being stained with the urine of a Native American trickster, the mark of the cultural tradition that had been elided from that meta-narrative.

The second legacy of this novel is a minor character who appears briefly—Sonny Baca, who has been hired by businessman and mayoral candidate Frank Dominic to take compromising photographs of the city’s mayor, Marisa Martinez, with the young and newly-famous Abrán. Sonny serves solely as a plot device to complicate Abrán’s budding romance with Lucinda and Ms. Martinez’ efforts to win reelection, and his appearance in

the text is limited to just a few pages. But the character—like Ben Chavez, the younger brother in *Heart of Aztlán* who returns in *Albuquerque* as Abrán's father—returns a few years later, becoming one of Anaya's most important creations, a figure who in his own right represents the efforts of Anaya's Chicano community to combat injustice, rewrite the missing history of the marginalized and excluded, and effect social change on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. Anaya's overarching project—the retelling of tales that are culturally important but relatively unknown outside the culture (and even within it, as young people gravitate toward popular culture and away from those traditions)—finds voice in Sonny's story; the world-weary detective finds a new life and new sense of meaning as he reconnects with the past and discovers the relevance of ancient myths in his life.

Sonny's role in *Albuquerque*, while limited in scope, indicates something of his impact, even here, not yet fully formed. While he takes the job for Dominic (who is, as we learn in *Zia Summer*, married to Sonny's cousin Gloria) and photographs Abrán and Marisa Martinez, he feels pangs of regret for doing so. In a telling moment immediately after taking the compromising photographs, Sonny considers destroying the film, but resigns himself to his role in this drama, but not until after thinking to himself that “the beauty he had just witnessed told him this case was different” (137). And when, at the end of the novels, the pictures, which had been distinct and unmistakable in Dominic's office, appear blurry and inconclusive when printed in the local paper, we are left to wonder if somehow Sonny's guilt has somehow rendered the pictures flawed, his first act of tricksterism. A sensitive soul, Sonny Baca emerges in *Albuquerque* incomplete and

imperfect, but the seed is there, and a few years later, Anaya will use this character—substantially changed and described in detail as a flawed man with the potential inside him to undergo a profound spiritual transformation that pits him against evil and allows him to understand himself, his community and history, and the heuristic of tricksterism that serves as a powerful metaphor for inter-cultural conflict. Not bad for a second-rate detective taking dirty pictures of a politician and her younger man.

Albuquerque also serves as a template for the direction of Anaya's work for over a decade following its publication, as the broader audience of this mass-market novel and its emphasis on the unraveling of a mystery (here the identity of Abrán's father, and, by extension, his own identity as a mestizo and son of an illicit relationship) lead to the four detective novels that follow in its wake. Like *Albuquerque*, the four subsequent Sonny Baca mysteries present a rather simple tale of tracing the clues to find a hidden truth, and the actual discovery is made by the audience early on in the essay. Beginning with *Zia Summer*, and continuing through the three subsequent detective novels—*Rio Grande Fall*, *Shaman Winter*, and *Jemez Spring*—Anaya enters into a new genre for him, one that both allows him new opportunities to address an audience that may be unfamiliar with the history and cultures of the Southwest, and constrains some of the moves he can make as an author, favoring as the genre does the impulse toward resolving the tension of crime and its punishment. This generic limitation presents complications relative to his project—Anaya must reinscribe the legal system that derives from the hegemonic power while simultaneously critiquing that hegemony. To do so, he taps into the heuristic model of trickster as a transgressor of boundaries, which Anaya associates throughout the novels

with Sonny Baca.

In Anaya's next novel, the 1995 *Zia Summer*, Sonny Baca returns, but this time he is the central character, one who goes on to star in three additional novels, and one who serves as a marker of the complex project Anaya began in *Bless Me, Ultima*, that of giving voice to a marginalized ethnic community by reimagining key historical, religious, and cultural motifs neglected and disdained by the dominant culture—in particular the Native American trickster figures of Coyote and Raven and their stories and myths. As Ralph Rodriguez posits, the Sonny Baca series is concerned with themes that include “the waning of the ways of the ancestors in the face of an increasing commercialization and commodification of culture; and the displacement of native Nuevo Mexicana/o as a result of urban development” (109). Connecting this to Anaya's earlier work—*Bless Me, Ultima* in particular—Rodriguez explores *Zia Summer* and the subsequent novels in terms of how “Anaya constructs an elaborate mythology for surviving in the world, and in creating that mythology he weaves a tapestry of spiritual beliefs that draws on Catholicism as well as indigenous spiritual practices” (119), an endeavor that revolves around Sonny's role as a detective, seeking out clues to the crimes at the center of each text, as well as the larger narrative of violence against and marginalization of the Chicano community by the dominant culture and the myths of Manifest Destiny and cultural interaction in the Southwest. The character of this version of Sonny Baca—one that is radically different than the brief sketch given in *Albuquerque*—figures prominently in the novels, and Anaya makes a concerted effort to present Sonny as a well-rounded character, with real motivations, significant personal flaws to accompany his virtues, and an insatiable

curiosity and desire to discover his place in the complex cultural space of contemporary New Mexico, drawing from American Indian, Hispanic, and Euro-American meta-narratives to construct his worldview. As Susan Sotelo argues, “Sonny could be seen as [...] a sort of New Age Native American” (36), one who bridges the deep divides that typically separate the various cultures of the region.

In this space works Anaya, whose respect for and relationship with Native Americans—both individually and as larger groups—do not (in fact, cannot) change the fact that he writes, always and already, like any writer, from the vantage point of his own specific cultural space and history, a space and history that are deeply engrained in cross-cultural conflict, not only with the Native populations of the region, but also with later arrivals such as Anglo American traders, explorers, and settlers, as well as twentieth-century newcomers—African Americans, Asian Americans, and more. Thus, when the trickster figures of Coyote and Raven, common in various forms in a number of Native cultures, take center stage in the four novels, they become not only the mirror image of the detective plotline in which Sonny Baca tries to thwart the violence of the mysterious Raven, but also of the tension that arises from Anaya’s use of these markers of Native culture. By inserting these motifs into his novels (or, rather, by building his novels around them), Anaya tries to acknowledge and honor the prominent Native traditions of the Southwest—particularly Navajo, Pueblo, and Hopi traditions—but, in the end, the conflation of oral tradition with written text, of Native and Hispanic, and of modern and pre-modern makes for a disjointed and problematic narrative in which Coyote appears in the text when a *deus ex machina* device is needed, and goes largely unnoticed and

unremarked upon when other concerns reign.

Anaya's use of Native American characters and themes in these novels in some ways harkens back to much of the body of criticism of his early work, particularly *Bless Me, Ultima*, which has frequently been read from within the major metanarratives of Western civilization. Thus Paul Taylor's "The Chicano Translation of Troy," in which the "general pattern of displacement and migration" of "the European literary tradition" is identified in Anaya's first three novels—*Bless Me, Ultima, Heart of Aztlán*, and *Tortuga*—in order to "fin[d] a *proper* place for the Chicano story in a Eurocentric literary economy" (Taylor 19, emphasis added). Similar works by Glen Newkirk ("Anaya's Archetypal Women in *Bless Me, Ultima*") and Theresa Kanoza ("The Golden Carp and *Moby Dick*") make similar connections between Anaya's earlier work and the classic patterns, themes, genres, and characters of European tradition. And while exploring the bildungsroman characteristics of Anaya's work may (or may not) say more about the Eurocentric readings of these and other critics, it is important to recognize in Anaya's work—clearly centered as it is in the specific cultural geography of New Mexico—a strong connection to the literary traditions of Europe and ancient Greece. *Bless Me, Ultima* is, finally, a novel meant to fit within a specific literary tradition, while adapting that tradition to the particular cultural context of Anaya's mid-twentieth-century rural New Mexico. Thus, an interest in bridging disparate cultures is an important key to understanding Anaya's literary work. Since the proclamation of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* nearly 40 years ago, the field of Chicana/o literature and literary criticism has encompassed a variety of discordant voices, included those who claim an indigenous, a

Spanish linguistic, a Mexican cultural, an assimilated Anglo American, a Tex-Mex style blending, or a radical political tradition.

In this model, resisting cultural encroachments by the dominant society is of the utmost importance. Thus we find Anaya emphasizing the unique history of New Mexico, not only in this novel, but throughout the series. In considering the motives behind Frank Dominic's plans for urban development, including a series of canals through the city, Sonny considers the Spanish, Moorish, and Mediterranean influences brought to Spain's empire in the New World, and, upon realizing how remote that history is, thinks to himself, "I would like to see the Alhambra [...] Maybe to know more about that past" (209). This theme of recovering the past, reconstructing memory and its associated sense of identity, plays out in the significant events of all four texts. This yearning for the past at times borders on a fruitless nostalgia, but Anaya clearly is focused on reimagining a neglected historical narrative in order to both valorize his ethnic community and point to the potential for a future that overcomes the violence of ethnocentric modernity and colonial and neo-colonial expansion and dominance. And as *Zia Summer* comes to a close, we find Sonny looking at the cottonwood tree in his neighbor's yard, a tree that seemed dead, now miraculously alive with new growth, which Anaya refers to as "a story to add to the stories" of the land and its people" (346).

In addition to the cultural hybridity embodied by Coyote in the text, there is also a spiritual component to this figure and its presence in the narrative. In this regard, Coyote enacts what Benito and Manzanar refer to as "the textual reinscription of multivocality

and ambiguity [that] opens a whole new range of unexplored possibilities” (4). These possibilities coincide with Anaya’s overarching project of reinserting neglected narrative voices into the larger discourse about land, history, power, and existence in the American Southwest. Coyote, therefore, serves as the trickster figure in the text, he who crosses borders, calls into question models of reality and imagination, and, as Larry Elis puts in, “defines category” (55), being both sign and signifier, presence and absence. He serves as a form of “trickster discourse,” which is, as Gruber explains, “a rhetorical principle in Native narrative, a multivocal presence in narrative form and structure that disrupts conventional patterns of representation and expectations as they relate to how (linear) narrative ought to proceed” (103). Thus, Coyote appears in *Zia Summer* in moments that complicate the simple mimetic version of time and space, leading Sonny in vision-states and dreams, stages of existence that resist the linear temporality of the novel form in which he writes.

Coyote is a rich character, with roots in various cultures of the Southwest, and Anaya refers to Coyote in the language and symbolism common to those cultures, amalgamating them to form a specific image of the trickster. Theresa Melendez describes Coyote thusly:

The coyote figure of indigenous traditions has been a source of considerable symbolic wealth in Mexican folklore, history, and language usage. More recently it has emerged in Chicano literature. The history of this figure is difficult to narrate, not only because the coyote exists in the fleeting traces of oral tradition, but also because of the multivalent nature of the coyote himself. (295)

This is certainly the kind of role played by the image of Coyote in *Zia Summer*, as Coyote

is heard and felt, but rarely seen, and Sonny's growing identification with Coyote becomes a source of power and insight for him.

A second contemporary form of the image of Coyote is as an ethnic hybrid, especially as an Anglo-Hispanic ethnic hybridization. The “ambiguous social and legal positions” that Martha Menchaca describes as being at the core of Mexican Americans’ “mixed racial origins” (37) result in deep tensions and internal conflicts among people who find that they are, by virtue of mixed blood, considered neither fully White nor truly non-White. This is the trickster mode of Coyote as racial hybrid, and Anaya explores this idea repeatedly, not only in *Zia Summer*, but throughout the Sonny Baca series. Doing so draws from the dominant culture's fear of hybridity and desire for racial purity and insistence on either/or categorizations; as Harryette Mullen asserts, “assimilation is unimaginable without miscegenation” (77). For a writer like Anaya who is interested in questions of postcoloniality, this theme is rich in possibility, and he makes several gestures toward Sonny Baca as a postcolonial trickster figure. Sonny confronts this topic directly in his conversation with Akira Morino, a wealthy Japanese businessman who has moved to Albuquerque, drawn by its landscapes and history, and by Gloria Dominic, with whom he had an affair. Because of this tie, Sonny arranges to meet with Morino in his downtown penthouse apartment high over the city. There Morino avers innocence in Gloria’s death, and then leaps into a philosophical treatise on the history of both Japan and New Mexico, and the connections he sees between the two. As part of this discussion, Morino states, “All nations are products of colonization. [...] A new migration comes and a new culture is layered on the old” (272). This references to the multiple waves of newcomers—each

displacing some aspect of the existing culture and importing new value systems and lifeways—underscore one of Anaya's central themes, that the Southwest is a site of continual change through cultural interplay and exchange, and that recognizing the long and complex history of those encounters enables us to rethink our present assumptions about identity.

In these novels, we encounter a different Sonny Baca, one who has a humanizing past (a former high school teacher whose first marriage ended in divorce) and a life that readers can relate to. Like Anaya's other protagonists, Sonny finds himself adrift in a world that challenges his very sense of being. His deep roots in the land and history of New Mexico—a theme that Anaya revisits throughout the series—strain to keep him grounded, and the forces of cultural conflict, crushing economic inequality, and the corrupt political landscape of the local, state, and national governments all threaten to uproot him, a theme underscored in *Zia Summer* by the image of the old cottonwood tree that appears dead, only to send off new growth when the summer rains arrive. This image represents more than a tree sprouting new leaves, as Anaya locates himself in a tradition of writers who connect to the natural world, and for whom images of landscape “more deeply underscore the crucial importance of land to culture and identity” and who “question accepted notions about the meanings of places, exposing the lingering traces upon the land of violence, oppression, forced labor, and ecological damage” (Martin 132). In this respect, Anaya's repeated emphasis on environmental concerns, the beauty of the land, and the trauma of the past converge in the Sonny Baca novels to present a model of communal renewal through an understanding and appreciation of place—its intrinsic appeal and its

history as a site of conflict, colonialism, and exploitation.

Sonny has settled in an old home in Albuquerque's North Valley, an area that for Anaya marks the tension between tradition and change—a place where old haciendas and agriculture exist alongside the mansions of recent arrivals to the area, and where the construction of a bridge over the Rio Grande through the neighborhood caused a heated controversy, threatening both the rural nature of the area and the property value of these new upscale homes. There he meets and comes to admire his neighbor, the elderly but spry don Eliseo, who practices the rituals of the Indian and Hispanic traditions he is part of and serves as Sonny's mentor, protector, and confidant. Sonny also begins a romantic relationship with Rita, who owns a popular diner on 4th street, a major north-south artery that runs along the route of the old Camino Real from colonial Mexico to the outpost of Santa Fe. And he begins a new life as a private investigator, enjoying the freedom this lifestyle provides, as well as the psychological link it provides to his own great-grandfather and namesake, Elfego Baca, the lawman who acts in the novels as a symbol of early Hispanic resistance to Anglo intrusion and violence toward the inhabitants of New Mexico and their traditional lifeways. Sonny carries Elfego's old pistol with him, but he never fires it at a person, a sign of either weak nerves (his fear), or a complex dynamic in which the lawman must find tools other than guns to confront a violent and unjust world.

From this arises a tension that pervades the four novels, as Sonny both “prize[s] his freedom (*Zia Summer*, 2) and longs for a meaningful connection with his neighbors, his

family, his community, and Rita, and it is this drive to connect with others on his own terms—not as an employee at a local high school—that serves as the central metaphor for the texts. Sonny feels at various times a kinship with various characters, including honest cops, dangerous women, criminals, homeless families, orphans, and politicians, but he only truly loves those whom he can trust—specifically Rita and don Eliseo, his neighbor and mentor. These two archetypes—the father and the lover—repeatedly advise, guide, and save Sonny when he finds himself lost or trapped, and the personal tragedies associated with these two characters—Eliseo’s death at the hands of the antagonist Raven and Rita’s miscarriage—both occur in the third novel, *Shaman Winter*, which marks the darkest part of the series. It is no accident that this also marks Sonny’s rebirth and ultimate success in channeling his spiritual power as a master of his dreams and a shaman himself. Sonny rises in the precise moment that the people he loves and depends on most fall. And more than anything else, it is Sonny’s victory over self-doubt, selfishness, and fear that marks him as a hero, just as Anaya’s other heroes triumph not through strength alone (Antonio as a young boy relies entirely on his spiritual sensitivity, while Abrán’s win in the boxing ring pales in comparison to his success in finding the secret of his identity), but through the development of a personal ability to blend disparate narratives and create from that dissonance a new sense of self and community rooted in a postmodern vision of hybridity.

In this respect, the Sonny Baca series marks a high point in Anaya’s decades-long project of empowering the Chicano community, not simply through activism, protest, and political might, but through a deeply personal reconfiguration of being, the enactment of

an idea he refers to in a 1999 interview with Martha Espinoza, in which he asserts that the key to combating colonializing influences is “to understand not only our European heritage, but also our Native American heritage” (65), a clear recognition of hybridity and its impact on identity. Implicit in this call to action is the fact that failing to do the heavy lifting of questioning the constructedness of the self leads to an incomplete identity, a gap that threatens both self and community. Without an awareness of and respect for the multiple threads of one’s identity as part of a group, Anaya argues that the individual will forever remain adrift, lost in a world that is alien and unknowable precisely because it relies on a set of values that exclude the colonial object. This fracturing, according to Anaya’s model, lies at the heart of the complex and deep-seated economic and social problems that face ethnic minorities in the United States. Anaya reconfigures Chicana/o identity as a complex matrix of backgrounds that come together in the unique space of New Mexico, where the legacy of colonialism and racism persists in insidious and often subtle ways. Anaya’s solution to these issues, therefore, includes both politics and aesthetics, including the creation and study of cultural expressions that derive from the mestizo identity of the Chicana/o, as well as an educational system that acknowledges and valorizes multiple historical narratives and mythologies, not just the Euro-centric, Anglo-dominated ones of the colonizer. History must be retold, religious practice must be understood more broadly, and community must be reinscribed as a means of connecting individuals to each other and to their past, with both of these relational axes—horizontally to one’s family and neighbors, and vertically to one’s ancestors and heritage—point to the kind of inclusive, future that Anaya envisions for the generations that follow.

Sonny's sense of belonging extends beyond his relationships with other people, reaching into the spiritual sense of place that figures prominently in the novels. In one of the few pieces of scholarship about the Sonny Baca novels, Carmen Flys-Junquera argues that the natural world "is central to the Chicano worldview and is found in virtually all its literature," including Anaya's fiction, in which "natural landscapes unquestionably dominate" (120). This theme of the natural world as a powerful presence in his work echoes what Holly Martin says in her discussion of *Bless Me, Ultima*, in which she asserts that the physical world "plays a dynamic role in leading the character toward a self reconciliation" (131). Like the other heroes in Anaya's work, Sonny undergoes a transformation that relies heavily on the physical world in which he moves, and Anaya's descriptions of the natural world are telling—from the *llano* of *Bless Me, Ultima* to the northern New Mexico mountains of *Albuquerque* to the rugged landscape of the East Mountains in *Zia Summer*, place plays a central role in shaping the development and growth of Anaya's protagonists. Throughout the four Sonny Baca novels, Anaya explores different aspects of the varied New Mexico landscape, following Sonny through the Rio Grande bosque, the Jemez Mountains, the brutal deserts of the *jornada del muerto*, and the canyons of Bandelier National Monument. In each place, Sonny finds himself drawn to the power of the natural world, connecting with his surroundings in ways that many people fail to do, and it is this awareness of the spirit of place that permits Sonny to grow in meaningful ways.

The main thematic element of the four novels is the transformation that Sonny undergoes

as he confronts evil, in the form of Raven, an ominous figure who rises from ancient myth to terrorize the modern world with threats of nuclear warfare and political fanaticism; accesses spiritual power under the tutelage of Eliseo and Lorenza, the healer who brings Sonny to the world of spirits; and learns to identify with and draw power from his spirit guide, the *nagual* Coyote, ultimately becoming a shaman. This process enables Sonny to become something more than a crime-solving detective and thereby emerge from his battles with Raven—and the attendant physical and psychological trauma of those encounters—both stronger and more sensitive, capable of defining himself in new and powerful ways, yet simultaneously more connected to the cultural legacy he has inherited from both Native and Hispanic ancestors. He becomes in the process what Anaya refers to in his writing as “a New World man,” the embodiment of a series of cultural blendings that underscore the rich heritage of Chicano-ness in the American Southwest. As Robert Con Davis-Undiano asserts, this process allows writers like Anaya to “bring together very complex assemblages of ideas and values and perform the crucial task of helping a culture resist the chaos of incessant change and to anchor that culture in its own past” (117). While Undiano’s emphasis on stasis undervalues that role of ongoing cultural evolution carried out by artists who call into question the insidious sides of any culture’s past—and in particular the sexism and internal racism, for example, that exist in the *Hispano* world that Anaya describes—the analysis he lays out of Anaya’s role in rethinking an ontological model of Chicanismo that, in Davis-Undiano’s words, succeeds in “encompassing the traditions of the past and projecting a favorable future” for the culture (123).

As a fully-realized cultural hybrid, the new Sonny becomes a manifestation of a trickster ethic, an idea that Sonny identifies as an important model for interpreting human experience. Anaya's model of tricksterism rests on the assertion that people's actions are not simple, linear, discreet functions, but rather part of a complex matrix of history, spirituality, and community, and that the figure of Trickster provides a means of interpreting those behaviors on a deeper, more meaningful level. In discussing how trickster figures and tropes function, Gerald Vizenor argues that trickster tales are "stories of an utmost priapic, elusive, undefined character of transformation, conversion, and trickery" (*Native Liberty* 229). Often conceived of as a crossroads figure, Trickster marks spaces of liminality, including not only cultural hybridity, but also the syncretic nature of religious belief and practice found in the novels, the genre blending undertaken as Anaya experiments with the conventions of detective fiction, and the temporal displacement of the novels, which take place over the course of one year, yet incorporate historical events from the mid-1990s debate regarding the Montano Bridge in Albuquerque's North Valley and the post-2001 anxieties about terrorism. The novels are not just about Trickster; they are themselves enactments of tricksterism, and Anaya becomes a meta-trickster, weaving tales that fold back in on themselves, upsetting and undermining simplistic readings and easy generalizations about the nature of self, culture, and textuality. Anaya is, in a very literal way, embodying tricksterism in the novels themselves, in the interaction with the reader.

Thus, the project of achieving subjecthood for a marginalized group is not just about gaining political or economic rights, but also the ontological and epistemological freedom

to speak, and to be heard. This, in turn, relies on a realization that the material reality of the present depends in part on acknowledging the importance of one's cultural heritage, including the myths and rituals of the past. The various representations of Trickster in the novels—including the opposing characters of Sonny-as-Coyote and Raven, the detective novel genre conventions of disharmony and the search for clues, and Anaya's interest in exploring syncretic cultural phenomena—form the foundation for this study, with an emphasis on both what occurs in the novels and how Anaya uses those plot elements, characters, and tropes to lay out a model of tricksterism that brings a pre-modern and non-Western heuristic to a contemporary, English-speaking, mainstream audience. We will begin with *Zia Summer*, in which Anaya first experiments with this genre and introduces the people who inhabit the world of the novels, and where he imagines New Mexico as a unique place of connection between the spiritual and the mundane. Next, we look at the complications that arise in *Rio Grande Fall*, as Anaya makes clear that killing Raven will be harder than it appears in *Zia Summer*, and that his plot is not the ecologically-driven idea of the first novel. In *Shaman Winter*, Raven's ambitions become clear; he is seeking both to overthrow the federal government in a coup financed by reactionary extremists and to dismantle Sonny's personal history and thereby erase him from existence completely. The series concludes with *Jemez Spring*, a tale of rebirth and resurrection that returns Sonny to the time of year in which he first appears in the pages of *Albuquerque*, this time empowered fully to confront Raven's darkness on his own terms, simultaneously baptizing and destroying the antagonist in the muddy waters of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER 2

ANAYA, NATIVE AMERICAN LITERARY THEORY, AND TRICKSTER TEXTS

In his Sonny Baca quartet—which consists of the novels *Zia Summer* (first published in 1995), *Rio Grande Fall* (1996), *Shaman Winter* (1999), and *Jemez Spring* (2005)—Rudolfo Anaya continues the project of exploring cultural, ethnic, and religious hybridity that he famously began in *Bless Me, Ultima*. And in many ways, these later Anaya works represent a culmination of his efforts to both redefine and empower the Chicano community by connecting contemporary concerns with history, myth, and the oral tradition in which he places himself. However, little scholarly examination has been made of these texts, and what has been has been limited in scope, much of it written even before the publication of *Jemez Spring*, the final installment in the quartet. Among this scholarship of the Sonny Baca novels are done a chapter in Ralph Rodriguez' *Brown Gumshoes*, which explores Anaya's detective novels as part of a larger trend of Chicana/o writers taking on this genre; discussions of *Zia Summer* and *Rio Grande Fall* in the *Rudolfo Anaya Critical Companion* text by Margarite Fernández Olmos; and articles on the ecological aspect of the first two texts and the role the Sonny Baca novels play in the emerging world of Chicana/o detective fiction. The reception by Flys-Junquera and others has been generally positive, but the undercurrent of much recent Anaya scholarship includes a critique of how gender and Indianness both problematically emerge in his work.

While the novels themselves have not been particularly well-received or thoroughly discussed, they present a fertile and intriguing site for exploring the intersections of race,

culture, economic privilege, and political power among Chicanas/os in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, as a new generation of Chicana/o writers and theorists has emerged from the activity of the original Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the establishment of Chicano Studies departments on university campuses throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Here we find Anaya engaging in a different genre, one that he stretches beyond its traditional boundaries, and employing the themes of tricksterism and hybridity to address both contemporary anxieties about nuclear proliferation and international crime, as well as deep-rooted questions about cultural identity, religious belief, and the intersection of the individual sense of self and the communal drive to express selfhood through myth and ritual. The Sonny Baca novels, therefore, despite their flaws in terms of plot, character development, and sensitivity to questions of gender, mark a powerful and important means of understanding the state of Chicana/o literature and theory in a thoroughly multicultural world.

The limitations of these novels in many ways coincide with the critiques made more generally of Anaya's work—that it is too grounded in the Western narrative tradition to effectively critique the systems that make colonialist attitudes possible, that his characters fall into easy stereotypes of the ethnic minority groups they represent, that women are either absent from or peripheral to the plot, and that he presents a model of hybridity that relies too heavily on the literal mixing of blood that favors a heteronormative approach to gender roles. In short, what Karai says about *Bless Me, Ultima*, which “attracted as much praise for its uplifting spiritual content as criticism for its acquiescent integration into commodity production and lack of subversive potential” could be said about the Sonny

Baca novels as well (266). But I contend that it is precisely this sense of ambivalence toward the postmodern, dislocated, multivocal tack of contemporary literature that makes Anaya's work so attractive; we have here a writer who speaks critically of the very tradition from which he emerges and into which he writes. In this respect, Anaya metonymically stands in for the contemporary world of literary studies, bridging the rhetorical and artistic traditions of Western modernity with the more diverse, more inclusive, more self-aware canon of the postmodern era. If Anaya is not all things to all critics, he is nonetheless much of what we see in the battles over the representation of different voices, worldviews, and epistemological models in the academic and popular discourse.

Here, more than two decades after the publication of his first and seminal novel about a young boy growing up at the intersection of several cultural, spiritual, political, and linguistic landscapes, Anaya revisits the idea of hybridity in a new set of novels that investigate more how the blending of disparate cultures in the American Southwest plays out in complex and often contradictory ways. Holly Martin argues that the land itself, a fractured space carrying the traces of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, women of various cultures, members of ethnic minorities, and the land itself through logging, mining, and nuclear waste disposal, “serves as a catalyst that jolts the character into a heightened state of awareness of his own cultural hybridity” (131). Carole Boyce Davies presents these contradictions and tensions as part of the colonized group’s “constant striving [...] for full representation” (4), an endeavor that entails both valorizing the subjected group’s history and identity, and repudiating the violent and

exclusionary acts of the oppressor, all while blending aspects of both identities; in short, hybridity is an objective that a colonized people can work toward, what Anthony Appiah calls “an opposition between ‘universalism’ and ‘particularism’” (56), not necessarily a finished product that can be achieved in a measurable way. In the Sonny Baca novels, this hybridity plays out in various ways, and exploring these aspects of hybridity indicates something of its limits as an ontological category in a modern pluralistic society, where difference is simultaneously celebrated and dreaded—at times by the same people. To begin, it is important to trace some of the primary theoretical models of hybridity that inform a reading of the Sonny Baca novels.

Discussions of hybridity draw heavily from postcolonial theory, most notably the work of Appiah, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, all of whom speak directly to the question of hybridity. Bhabha, for example, famously asserts that the late-twentieth century forced “a profound process of redefinition” on “the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ nationality identity,” opening up a space for hybridity to occur and flourish (7). This concept of hybridity, while reliant primarily on the physical mixing of colonial and colonized genes to create a new ontological category, serves as a powerful marker of resistance to the colonial demand for separateness and categorization. Within these theoretical structures, postcolonial identity is multifaceted and fractured, affected as it is by both the indigenous cultural identification (often marked by a set of unique and presumably homogeneous racial, linguistic, religious, or other factors) and the cultural influence of the colonizing power (including its own values and preferences, which are typically enforced on the colonized population in violent ways, including political and

linguistic repression, de facto discrimination and segregation, and actual genocide). As the tension between these cultural spaces exerts itself, the line between the colonizer and the colonized blurs, following a Hegelian model of synthesis as liminality overtakes essentialism, as per Spivak's claim that "there can be no universalist claims in the human sciences," that all efforts to fix identity fail the moment a linguistic marker is employed (53).

Another useful discussion of hybridity comes from Cristina Beltran's "Patrolling Borders: Hybrids, Hierarchies and the Challenge of *Mestizaje*," which reviews some of the major forces involved in defining Chicano conceptualizations of hybridity, working backward from Gloria Anzaldúa to Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and Alurista. Beltran first describes hybridity as "an attempt to legitimize and give voice to groups or individuals who lack power in society and create theoretical space for alternative epistemologies and epistemic frameworks" (595). The emphasis on empowering disenfranchised segments of the population echoes postcolonial theorists' works on hybridity, but Beltran problematizes the dualistic nature of early postcolonial works, many of which, in their nationalistic fervor, placed a high premium on essentialist definitions of identity. Beltran tackles this issue by posing the question: "How do we legitimate and include marginalized subjects and their claims without essentializing them?" (595). Her answer is that, although "the hybrid subject has been hailed as an anti-essentialist approach to identity," hybridity as a marker of identity "too often reproduce[s] already-existing narratives of romantic identification and exclusion," and that "contemporary theories of hybridity continue to invoke the category of experience as a fundamental precondition for political agency and

knowledge” (596). For example, Gloria Anzaldúa, in her seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera*, argues that a hybridized identity allows an artist or critic “to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (102). This model of hybridity serves as a powerful lens through which to examine how trickster figures and themes function in literary expression generally, and Anaya’s Sonny Baca novels specifically.

In coming to an understanding of how this border crossing fits into the larger heuristic model of the borderlands, it is valuable to explore some of the recent trajectories in this field. Drawing from the work of Anzaldúa, others have theorized the border as a rich site for observing and critiquing the interactions of power and culture. And if, as Benito and Manzananas argue, “literature textualizes the encounters or clashes between cultures, races and classes” (4), then it is in literary expression that we can begin to grasp how lines of demarcation—be they physical or psychic—shape the lived experiences of people on both sides of those lines, and, more poignantly, those who live in the liminal space created by the borders. In this respect, studying the work of Rudolfo Anaya enables us to see clearly how this process is enacted, as he addresses Chicano, Indian, Anglo, Black, and Asian cultural blending; rural and urban spaces; modern and traditional lifeways; and a variety of models of spiritual practice and belief. Anaya’s fiction is consistently concerned with the role that borders and the crossing of those borders play in the lives of his characters and, by extension, members of the communities they represent. *Heart of Aztlán*, for example, presents a series of physical and cultural border crossings, from the Chavez family entering the urban space of Albuquerque, to the ways in which the barrio

both insulates and isolates its inhabitants, to the transgressive relationship between Benjie and Cindy. This theme reappears in *Albuquerque*, as Abrán—the mestizo figure—reconfigures his own identity and his relationship with his ethnic community by revisiting his identity as the son of the Chicano Ben Chavez and the Anglo Cynthia Johnson. At the same time, Abrán reverses the urban migration of a generation before by returning to rural New Mexico in order to form a relationship with Lucinda. In each of these cases, and “the forces of landscape are key factors on [the characters’] road to self-actualization” (Flys-Junquera, “Shifting Borders” 98-99), which is a central theme of all of Anaya’s work. Place—both as a physical space and a contested concept claimed by multiple groups, each with its own value systems and epistemological models—determines plot and, ultimately, destiny.

This critique of experiential models of hybridity that seek to grant legitimacy to speak for or to a marginalized group provides a point of departure for the study of Anaya’s approach to hybridity, which is itself highly informed by his involvement in and commitment to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to reconfigure Chicano identity in terms of the blending of Spanish and Indigenous ancestry. It is here that the theme of trickster becomes important to understanding how Anaya conceives of and presents this model of boundary-crossing. The most overt trickster figure in Anaya’s work comes toward the close of *Albuquerque*, as Coyote accompanies Joe Calabasa as he travels from a rural pueblo north of Albuquerque to the city, where together they disrupt both the daily events of student life on the campus of the University of New Mexico and the cultural definitions of Hispanic-ness, Indian-ness, and Anglo-

ness. This scene begins with Joe praying for help returning to Albuquerque to help Abrán, after which “the old trickster appeared beside him, dressed in purple pants with a gold chain draped on one leg, a bright green velvet shirt, bright red suspenders, sunglasses, a wide-brimmed straw hat, and new Indian tevas on his feet” (249). This outlandish image of Coyote invokes the role of Trickster as a playful, rule-transgressing figure who clearly defies expectations of appearance and behavior. In so doing, Anaya places his version of Trickster within the tradition identified by Doty and Hynes as consisting of the themes of “plurality, plurivocality, and ambiguity” (9).

This subversion of social norms continues after Joe and Coyote arrive in the city and crash the Spring festival on the campus of the university, which Anaya describes as “swarming with sun worshipers: sorority girls chased by beer-guzzling frat boys, a family of hippies left over from the ‘60s selling brownies laced with marijuana, and rings of freaked-out students bobbing, weaving, and soaking up beer” (251-52). Echoing the seemingly amoral and debauchorous tone of many trickster tales—in which the trickster’s sexual appetite leads to violations of social norms and, ultimately, pain for the trickster and/or the community—this scene captures the licentiousness the Anaya both celebrates (“‘Thank you, grandfather sun,’ Joe grinned as the beauty of the young women came into focus” [251]) and bemoans as a result of the dissolution of the traditional lifeways, represented in the novel by the idyllic nature of Abrán and Lucinda’s visit to her familial home in the village of Cordova, in northern New Mexico. In the end, Anaya’s representation of Coyote fits in the model that Brian Burkhart imagines:

Coyote is described as a philosopher in many American Indian stories. In part,

this is because he wonders about things, about how they really work. Often in doing so, however, he forgets his place in the world; he does not remember how he is related. (15)

This idea of Coyote as a powerful yet foolish character, one who undoes past violence, only to succumb to his own foibles and shortcomings, becomes a powerful theme throughout the Sonny Baca novels as Anaya's protagonist learns to understand and use the power of Trickster.

But the most powerful enactment of tricksterism here comes after Joe and Coyote reach the roof of the library, at the heart of campus. Feeling the need to urinate, Joe relieves himself on the roof, but the effect is comically extreme:

The hot, steaming yellow liquid foamed as it hit the roof. It was a torrent that flowed across the tar and gravel flat roof, finding its cracks and crevices. The huge splash washed into the stacks, ran down the spines of books, soaked reference tomes and microfilm. Even the classics were not spared (253).

Having desecrated the written word—and becoming in the process “Coyote Who Pisses on Broken Treaties” (253)—Joe and Coyote leave, their mark indelibly made on this facet of Western logo-centric modern society. In this respect, this scene follows the pattern of trickster described by Lewis Hyde:

Trickster is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there at the gates of the city and gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We constantly distinguish—right and wrong, sacred

and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead—
and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. (7)

Coyote and the characters that Anaya associates with him cross the borders between realistic and fantastic, socially acceptable and obscene, heroic and dangerously subversive.

All of this is part of Anaya's ongoing project of describing what he refers to as the "New World Man," the title of a 1989 essay in which he argues that literature by minority writers in the United States (and the Americas more broadly) serves to define a new artistic and social sensibility that counterbalances the impulses of Eurocentric thought and art. In discussing this idea, Robert Con Davis-Undiano explains that Anaya's "New World person" (Anaya himself has since de-gendered the initial idea, although the problematic sexism inherent in this original concept is both undeniable and deeply-rooted) "embodies [...] the syncretic nature of being a *mestizo*," and that this hybrid identity "has to be the most profound expression of this culture" (134). While claims about material reality and sexual identity could place those issues at the fore, in the place of ethnic identity, the fact is that Anaya himself privileges this facet of cultural identity in his work, and it is instructive to focus on that aspect of selfhood in the *Sonny Baca*, which have been largely ignored by academic and popular discussions of Chicana/o literary discourse. Because, as Falconer and Lopez put it, Latinos or Hispanics are often viewed as a monolithic and homogeneous group," the challenge that Anaya faces is to carve out a space in which his characters can both represent the cultural milieu from which he writes and at the same time complicate simplistic and essentialist renderings of

that culture (1). But understanding how Anaya carries out and represents tricksterism as a marker of and metonym for all kinds of hybridity—racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic—leads ultimately to a clearer picture of the tensions associated with ethnic otherness in contemporary America, as Anaya himself writes from the perspective of don Eliseo, Sonny Baca's elderly neighbor and mentor, whose vantage point includes the wide sweep of recent history and whose worldview values history, ritual, myth, and the oral tradition.

In fact, the Sonny Baca novels are littered with references to American Indian trickster figures, legends, and practices that bring a layer of depth, cultural complexity, and, at times, tension to the novels. Coyote appears again, not as the garishly-dressed figure who washes Western literary works on urine, but as a presence, both in the physical world and in Sonny's dreams and spiritual journeying. And in the novels, Anaya includes the complementary trickster figure of Raven, a darker, more insidious force whose willingness to use violence for whatever ends contrasts starkly with Sonny's role as enforcer of the law and social norms, even as he frequently transgresses those norms himself. Both Raven and Coyote serve to introduce to the novels an extended and far-ranging discussion of traditional cultural and ethnic practice and belief, as well as the influence modern social structures have had on those traditional ways. Thus, beyond the surface conflict between Sonny-as-Coyote and Raven, the texts embody a trickster aesthetic, one that shifts meaning as the narrative evolves and as Anaya transgresses generic boundaries and conventions. The mystery novel-turned spiritual quest and the blending of Anglo-American, Chicano, and Indigenous value systems and lifeways all

combine to create a complex, multidimensional set of novels that push beyond the traditional world of what has been an overwhelmingly monocultural genre; at the same time, the world of Chicana/o literature is expanded through Anaya's experimentation in different narrative modes and plots that move beyond his earlier works.

Similarly, the texts themselves invert and upset generic conventions and the norms of detective fiction, making all four novels trickster texts, what Gerald Vizenor refers to as "a semiotic sign in a language game" ("Trickster Discourse" 204). By inserting trickster moments into the texts and making the tales themselves tricksters, Anaya inverts traditional expectations about these powerful and deeply-rooted elements of culture, as well as the very ontology and epistemology of disparate cultural groups. Similar work has been undertaken over the past 15 years by several writers from ethnic minorities who write detective novels that include an element of resisting the conventions of the genre by insert references, themes, and figures specific to their various cultural backgrounds. As Lucha Corpi, one of these voices, explains, "the challenge—the precise art—for any crime writer is in finding ways to offer much more than just the unraveling of the plot, bringing to justice those who have broken the law, and restoring, finally, the social order" (139). The "more" to which Corpi alludes is often the introduction of signs like Trickster, upsetting the expectations readers bring to the mimetic form of the detective novel, the simple binaries of hero and villain, crime and order. Thus, Anaya's use of trickster figures and themes in the Sonny Baca novels entails in part a resistance to the existing expectations of his audience, and part of his project is to work within the conventions of the genre while simultaneously dismantling its foundational logic and relationship to the

prevailing values of Western modernity.

The theme of trickster as a marker of postmodern concerns with the multifaceted nature of human experience outside of the traditional Manichean binaries imposed through an ideological perspective rooted in Western modernity permits artists and theorists to employ signs of tricksterism to challenge hegemonic structures that would inscribe the experience and values systems of non-Western groups in violent ways. Gerald Vizenor, for instance, uses the trope of trickster to indicate something of the impulse toward complexity and uncertainty in postmodern contexts, what he calls “the postindian simulations of tribal survivance” (*Manifest Manners* 15). The idea of survivance pervades Vizenor’s work, and his assertion that “survivance is an unnamable narrative chance that creates and teases a sense of presence” ties this concept back to Derridean conceptualizations of the trace that remains even in the wake of genocide and the erasure of specific epistemologies (*Native Liberty* 23). The act of writing trickster—writing a trickster tale, imagining a trickster figure, employing a trickster heuristic—is, according to Vizenor, an act of resistance that argues for the Indigenous presence that cannot be dismissed simply by wishing it so; survivance is, in a word, continuation, the negation of efforts to deny the existence of that which precedes and lasts in the face of colonialism, discrimination, and violent appropriation.

The relationship between Trickster and the question of epistemology lies at the heart of Brian Burkhart’s essay, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us,” in which he outlines the contours of American Indian ways of knowing in the world, and how those contrast

with Western epistemological models. Burkhart argues that in Indigenous contexts, knowledge is not the commodified concept that it is in Western metaphysics; rather, knowledge is communal, trans-generational, and tightly aligned with human existence. Thus, to seek knowledge is to miss the point, as knowledge exists in the context of what we are able to understand. As Burkhart puts it, “from the American Indian perspective, our knowledge is not limited since we have as much as we should” (18). In the context of postmodern preoccupations with questions of epistemology, this model of knowledge is both liberating and demanding, as it allows us to escape the logical traps of radicalizing the pursuit of knowledge and forces us to rethink the fundamental nature of knowledge. This model opens new doors and raises new expectations for how theory, art, and life intersect to create and interpret meaning.

This view of trickster as a voice for postmodern eruptions of the monolithic world of literary expression and analysis results in some of the most insightful theory and creative literature of today, and understanding these themes is crucial to an ethical reading of many contemporary texts from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In order to grapple with Vizenor’s concept of trickster as marker of a heterogeneous, multivocal discourse, let us take a moment and trace Western conceptualizations of American Indian trickster figures and the ways in which these interpretations of such complex figures limit the ability of those outside the particular culture to appreciate tricksters. As Berkhofer argues, the earliest European view of indigenous populations (both in North America and other sites of colonization) was that of deficiency, emphasizing difference by underscoring a perceived lack in the artistic, literary, and religious expressions of culture; a mentality

that he refers to as those who “saw cultural diversity, but [...] did not really approve of it” (49). The encounter with difference led to the idea that the non-European Other was missing vital aspects of language, history, religion, civilization or some other key component of the post-Enlightenment view of culture. This was clearly convenient for colonial powers seeking wealth, power, and dominance, but the ideologies behind this view of the “Indian” became engrained in popular culture, religious discourse, and literature and other arts. Colonizers used what Berkhofer calls “a seemingly scientific foundation for the folk wisdom concerning the differences attributed to races” to create social structures that were inherently racist and exclusionary (55). By the nineteenth century, the Indian as cultural inferior to the European or Euro-American was standard, and informed most intercultural interactions. In this light, trickster figures were seen as degenerate symbols of a valueless society, evidence that non-European peoples were amoral, dishonest, and sexually perverse, and that the cultures from which these figures came were either less evolved than Western ones or, in more extreme interpretations, totally sub-human.

The advent of modern social science in the late nineteenth century, however, brought about an important change in perceptions of Indian cultures generally and trickster figures specifically. Anthropologists began to study indigenous groups around the world as unique and viable cultures with historical, religious, and literary traditions that were analogous (if not equal) to those of Western societies. In the United States, this move, coupled with the tradition of appropriating Indian mythology and symbolism to demarcate America as being derived from but uniquely different than Europe, made

possible the study of a particularly distinct history of North America as a site of long-standing and impressive cultures. This model built off the literary tradition of writers such as Longfellow and Cooper, whose emphasis on the uniquely American aspect of this blending set the groundwork for a model of Americanness built on a legacy of Native culture. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, anthropologists were excavating and writing about the ruins of the “Anasazi” of the American Southwest, figured symbolically as a lost civilization worthy of studying, examining, and ultimately, archiving. Perhaps the most interesting of these Boasian anthropologists is Alfonso Ortiz, from San Juan Pueblo in northern New Mexico (see *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* for a useful glimpse into Ortiz’ anthropological insights into the religious and social structure of the Pueblo cultures of the eastern Rio Grande valley). Trained at the University of Chicago, Ortiz wrote several thorough and insightful works on the pueblos of northern New Mexico, arguing that the cultures and traditions of these groups are not only valid for scientific study, but of great interest as models of complex social structuring. In one such article, Ortiz examines the dual organization of the Tewa pueblos into seasonal groups with distinct responsibilities and sophisticated means of internal governance. And in *The Tewa World*, Ortiz examines the themes of becoming and being—the idea that human existence is a process of gradual evolution of the self from a lower state to a higher, more spiritually informed one—in pueblo society. The fundamental weakness, however, with this sort of analysis is that, for all its apparent valuation of Indian culture as fully developed (rather than “deficient”), these studies were (and are) still done according to a Western scientific model, and as such, the anthropologists and ethnologists were compelled by the ideological structure in which

they worked to make broad and inherently violent comparisons between indigenous and Western cultures. In this context, trickster figures are often alongside and in relation to the Greek Hermes, the Roman Mercury, the Norse Loki, or the Slavic Veles. In the end, the idea was still that Indian cultures were somehow derivative of—and therefore inferior to—European traditions.

Another important reevaluation of trickster figures came about in the first half of the twentieth century, with the popularity of Freudian and Jungian psychology. Trickster figures were now being studied not as culturally-specific markers of various groups' values and mythologies, but as universal themes of human unconscious behavior.

Radin's *The Trickster* (which includes an essay by Jung on archetypes), for example, explores the repressed impulses represented by the trickster, who in this model serves as an outlet for transgressive behaviors that are deemed to be socially unacceptable, but that are rooted in primal desires that need expression. This approach to the study of trickster figures allowed for the leveling of the playing field; no longer were European traditions—which were just as rife with subconscious eruptions of the sexually licentious—seen as implicitly superior to non-Western ones. Instead, the universal human experience of suppressing the id became the normal theory applied generally across cultures. The flaw here, of course, is the universalizing impulse, the willful or incidental blindness to the unique and varied cultural contexts from which various trickster figures emerge, and the ways in which different literary traditions present and interpret these figures. As with the anthropological view of tricksters, the psychological one is also rooted in a particular methodology that colors the interpretation. For example,

most anthropologists, ethnologists, and psychologists, even when they conducted their own fieldwork among the peoples they studies, tended to assume that the older male members of the community (the elders of the tribe, as it were) were the chief repository of cultural knowledge.

But tricksters also serve as subversive elements, embodying the drive to transgress boundaries and social norms. As Gruber puts it, “tricksters are frequently able to transgress sex/gender lines and take both male and female shape,” thereby upsetting standard models of identity, a fact that makes trickster a fertile site for exploring marginalized members of society (71). It is in this light that the assertion made by Doty and Hynes is instructive:

Anyone attempting to study trickster figures faces significant methodological issues. For example, at one extreme one finds colleagues trained in Jungian psychology talking about *the* trickster as a universal archetype to be encountered within each of us and in most belief systems. At the other extreme, some anthropologists have called for the elimination of the term “trickster” altogether because it implies that a global approach to such a figure is possible whereas they find it appropriate to focus only upon one tribe or national group at a time (4-5).

This narrow methodological approach to the study of tricksters in various cultures has led to an ignorance of most female trickster traditions and a thoroughly sexist set of data to be analyzed by the Western scientific community. Likewise, the reliance on the elders of the community for insights into tricksters may also explain in part why trickster tales often serve to reinforce social norms by demonstrating the dangers of upsetting cultural

standards. Thus, the tendency to view tricksters as didactic tools may be a result of a particular version of trickster often presented by a narrow segment of the population under study. And it is against this anthropological version of interpreting trickster figures that emerges a desire to view tricksters more ethically, focusing on Kroeber's assertion that "trickster is never simply a 'character' but a figure of speech, a deliberate anomaly of language" (36). This way of seeing tricksters relies on a decidedly postmodern and non-Western model, one that explores the rich body of trickster folklore, oral tradition, literature, art, and mythology as a linguistic as well as representational act.

Trickster as an interpretive strategy—a rhetorical element that runs counter to Western meta-narratives and heuristics—informs a reading of Anaya's work, as figures like Coyote in *Albuquerque* resist simplistic readings; they act selfishly and impulsively, while simultaneously working to serve the needs of the community they emerge from. The image of Trickster defiling that which is considered sacred, whether the symbols of the Native tradition or the books of the Western canon, marks this as a "figure [that] defies categorization and analysis, shape-shifts to eclipse her/himself from academic view, and disrupts all attempts at (academic) definition" (Gruber 95). In this respect, the allure of trickster figures in contemporary literature may be because of how trickster figures resist easy interpretations and readings that fit within the Western tradition of analysis and provide what Kelsey refers to as "a set of interpretive strategies that ground tribal texts in their specific backgrounds, histories, and cultures" (9). By stepping outside the boundaries of that tradition and calling into question the validity of that endeavor, writers who engage in telling trickster tales and who introduce trickster characters into

their stories displace the claims to authority and preeminence of Western metaphysics and heuristics.

The post-structuralist and deconstructive moves of the latter half of the twentieth century, along with the exploding of the American literary cannon over the past several decades, has led to a third perspective on tricksterism, that of the postmodern view espoused by Gerald Vizenor, Alan Velie, Jeanne Smith, Elizabeth Ammons, and others. This perspective holds that an ethical study of trickster figures is only possible (if at all) from within the unique cultural context from which it emerges. Based on Derridean concepts of alterity, Lacanian interests in power relations, and postcolonial studies of hegemonic structures and resistance to them, this view asserts that in order to study tricksters, one must have a clear background into both the particular social context of the group in question and the assumptions and traditions of the dominant society whose values dictate the language and tenor of the analysis. Thus, the key to an examination of American Indian trickster figures is to study both the historical/cultural worlds of the particular tradition, and the ways in which that tradition has been treated, studied, and perceived of by Euro-American societies over the history of contact, including the political, military, economic, and educational treatment of that group and their contemporary material reality. Chief among these theorists is Vizenor, whose work focuses on how postmodern concepts of uncertainty, polyvocality, and temporal displacement inform a reading of Indian literature and trickster figures drawn from Native traditions, which he argues have suffered the inherently violent and racist “reduc[tion of] tribal literatures to an ‘objective’ collection of consumable cultural artifacts” (“A Postmodern Introduction” 4-5). In the

introduction to *Narrative Chance*, Vizenor relates this theme to the postmodern dismantling of the traditional canon and the rereading of standard canonical texts. He then explores the use of heteroglossia—the multiple narrative voices, points of view, and linguistic moves common to minority writers resisting and subverting the demands of the dominant society—to contend that a successful American Indian text navigates between different worlds, resisting an easy labeling as either “authentic” or “assimilated,” but as a unique postmodern voice for the silenced and voiceless. This allows Native writers and academics to “untie [...] the *hypotragedies* imposed on tribal narratives” (11) and express a unique, culturally-specific, powerful voice for both the individual and the larger community. Vizenor speaks for a need to resist the homogenizing, commodifying, violent impulses of modernity to revitalize ancient traditions and themes that are under erasure by Western modernity.

An important limitation of this concept, however, has to do with the roots of Vizenor’s ideas and the ways in which he couches them. Drawing heavily from European post-structuralists, Vizenor’s argument runs the risk of privileging the very voices his theory attempts to resist, and by tracing this theoretical line through Derrida to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Hegel, Vizenor reinscribes the values of modernity—the discursive practices of synthesis, the argumentative patterns and categorizations founded upon Cartesian epistemological models. This is coupled with the critique of Vizenor that argues that his theoretical works are too engrained in not only a Western tradition, but a dense, unapproachable, Western style that excludes many Native readers and writers. This critique asserts that only a privileged, educated reader coming from a Eurocentric

place in the academy would be able to access and respond to Vizenor. It is this sense of connection to the European and Anglo-American theoretical tradition—and the limitations inherent in this approach to reading Native texts—that Penelope Myrtle Kelsey critiques, describing Vizenor as the best of a poor selection of theorists attempting to shoehorn Western hermeneutics into a decidedly non-Western literary tradition, to disastrous ends; she says that “the bulk of [Vizenor’s] theoretically oriented essays still take Eurowestern theory as their foundation, despite his attempts to indigenize them” (3). Building from this critique, Kelsey outlines what she calls “a set of interpretative strategies that ground tribal texts in their specific backgrounds, histories, and cultures” (9). Placing her theoretical model in contrast to existing ones that trace their evolution directly from Euro-American models of post-structuralist thought, Kelsey develops a framework that privileges the specific cultural elements of individual Indigenous societies—their gender roles, mythologies, linguistics, and histories.

By looking at Native epistemologies from this vantage point, Kelsey argues that “we as readers are practicing tribal theory by allowing the tribal foundation of the text to emerge and motivate our theoretical praxis” (2). Another important voice in this theoretical work is that of Alan Velie, who examines the theme of chronotope in trickster texts. Velie argues that the temporal displacement common to many trickster-centered narratives is not simply a literary device, but rather a rewriting of the linear history imposed by Western modernity, “the spirit of survivance” (148). By presenting a recursive, cyclical version of time, in which events repeat, conflate, and fracture, authors are able to insert new voices, as Vizenor does in *The Heirs of Columbus*, in which the narrative of

intercultural conflict is reversed by renaming, reimagining, and repositioning Pocahontas and Columbus as markers of Native and European cultures. Velie's use of Vizenor's concept of survivance, which moves beyond the simple physical act of surviving genocide and colonization, to include the cultural healing required in the wake of that history of violence, relies heavily on his assertion that trickster acts as "the player and victim of tricks, perpetual underdog and survivor, a figure of unbridled appetites who transcends good and evil to serve as culture hero for diverse peoples," making him a truly complex, uncategorizable figure in the literature and theory of minority discourse communities.

Other important work in this area has been done by Elizabeth Ammons and Jeanne Smith, who both argue that the only viable way to explore trickster figures and trickster techniques is to work within the specific cultural context to find how a particular trickster tradition is embedded in culture. Ammons, in turn, argues that female minority writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries themselves acted as embodiments of tricksterism by subverting the white male world of publishing and thereby giving voice to an important and widely ignored experience. By resisting what Ammons refers to as the "master codes" at play for specific political purposes in late nineteenth century America, female writers of American Indian, African American, Asian American, and Mexican American descent were able to speak of and from their experiences while operating within the literary world of the day, acting as tricksters themselves. For both Ammons and Smith, the key element of the trickster figure is that of cultural survival achieved through resistance to dominant society. However, both Ammons and Smith make the

argument that individual authors are *themselves* tricksters, as they resist hegemonic demands for homogeneity, but this reading is both overly simplistic and misguided. Any discussion of trickster characters or themes needs to focus on the texts themselves, which is more useful than claiming that a particular author is or is not a trickster, which waters down the trickster tradition just as the earlier anthropological and psychological models did.

Similarly, Andrew Wiget's seminal work, "His Life in His Tale," explores how American Indian trickster figures have traditionally have been both misinterpreted and appropriated by mainstream society, resulting in the kinds of misconceptions of trickster as morally flawed or fundamentally perverse. Wiget argues that a better understanding of trickster figures comes from exploring the typical non-textual modes of transmitting trickster tales in a traditional Indian society. This then points to the fundamentally subversive act of tricksters—not just transgressing various cultural norms and committing taboo acts, but in fact deconstructing the entire category of culture; as Wiget puts it, "trickster functions not so much to call cultural categories into question as to demonstrate the artificiality of culture itself" (94). Emphasizing the orality of trickster tales, Wiget presents a version of tricksterism that is not reliant on textual conventions of Western modernity, and in which such conventions as the common introduction to Coyote tales ("Coyote was walking along") indicate not rote or simplistic structures, but a generic consideration rooted in performance. In fact, Wiget sees the performative nature of traditional trickster tales as the most important overlooked facet of how tricksters operate, not in the fixed medium of the text, but in the performative one of the oral narrative, which gives the

narrator/performer the opportunity and even the obligation to in turn play trickster by altering and adapting the text.

This is precisely what critics such as Amy Elias, Kimberly Blaeser, and Nancy Peterson do, looking at how particular authors employ what Elias refers to as a “Coyote aesthetic” to insert a new conceptualization of a trickster figure into literature and theory (192). Each of these critics approaches specific texts and examines the ways in which trickster figures emerge as both characters in these texts and as devices used by the author. Elias, for instance, discusses “the dual role of formal fragmentation in Native American contemporary literature” (186), referring to how the colonial experience fragments both individual identity and the larger cultural sense of self. Trickster then permits a re-formation of that lost element of selfhood, working both with and against the “different cultural markers and meanings” that exist in the Euro-American and Native cultural contexts (Elias 191). By so doing, Elias emphasizes how the fragmentation of narrative can both echo oral story-telling traditions and permit the conceptualization of a postcolonial American Indian identity that is self-actuated, and not defined by the colonial imagination. In this respect, trickster figures “may open up an imaginative liminal space where the monolithic ‘Indian’ chiseled by Hollywood and nineteenth-century literature can be shattered and where one-dimensional readings of Native-White history can be transgressed” (Gruber 96). This act of resistance to colonialist images of the Indian and neo-colonial political maneuverings to disempower Native peoples relies on a fundamentally non-Western and anti-modern reading of human existence and reality.

The real limitations of most discussions of Native literary theory, however, is that they tend to rely on an ontological model of defining self as not something else—not Euro-American, not monotheistic, not part of a Western Manichean logic. As part of the effort to define the Indigenous as originary, pre-dating Western modernity, and not simply reacting to it. As Jodi Byrd explains, “Indians are typically spectral, implied and felt, but remain as lamentable casualties of national progress who haunt the United States on the cusp of empire and are destined to disappear with the frontier itself” (xx). Byrd proposes instead an Indian critical theory that not only “understand indigeneity as radical alterity and uses remembrance as a means through which to read counter to the stories empire tells itself,” but that presents that alterity a self-contained, capable of and reliant on individual and communal agency in the formation and perpetuation of culture (xii-xiii). The end goal of this kind of approach to culture, art, and history is to claim a space for Indigenous voices that does not rely solely on the act of resistance, one that rejects both the surface trappings and the underlying logic of that which is not Indian. While not directly addressing the theme of tricksterism, Byrd’s *Transit of Empire* informs this discussion of subversive textual elements that work outside of the world of Western metaphysics. In particular, her theorization of Native literary discourse emphasizes the very themes of “theory, narrative, and politics and the place of indigenous peoples within contemporary theories of postcoloniality, queerness, and race” in ways that align with this image of trickster as boundary-crosser (xii). The very act of opening this theoretical space for an ontology that both pre-dates the modern and dynamically rethinks issues of gender and racial identity challenges colonialist assumptions about what Nativeness means. And looking at how current theories of indigeneity function highlights the role of trickster

characteristics in the process of resisting colonialism through acts of historical reimagining, narrative disruptiveness, temporal displacement, and rethinking the relationship between the sacred and the profane through humor, failure, and self-effacement.

Similarly, Blaeser's discussion of "ideological possession" (83) and the use of humor to resist this sort of violence draws from textual examples of tricksterism to explore contemporary Indian literature as a reembodiment of traditional trickster themes. As Blaeser puts it, trickster tales—and the use of humor to upset the stereotypes of stoic and ultimately non-human Indians—"work to unmask and disarm history, to expose the hidden agendas of historiography, and, thereby, remove it from the grasp of the political panders and return it to the realm of story" (85). This reading of tricksterism highlights the role of the absurd, the ironic, and the unexpected in narratives in which trickster themes play a major role. And Peterson's work analyzes the retelling of history, using Hutcheon's postcolonial theory to frame postmodernism as a viable approach to the history of violence toward Indian populations, one that does not simply rewrite the past (which itself opens to door for further epistemic violence), but reconfigures the possibilities of the past and permits multiple retellings of events. It is ultimately this version of postmodern tricksterism that is most attractive and most useful, one in which the logic and values of Western modernity are critiqued in conjunction with the value systems and traditions of various cultures to both critique different systems and valorize perspectives that are outside of Western modernity. It seems a question of not only ethics, but ontology; in order to be (or, to use Ortiz's concept, become) something one

can respect, one ought to be able to step outside of personal experience and worldview and call one's own values into question. And trickster figures do just that—they force readers to consider a reality that they cannot see, a history they cannot truly know, but which they must force themselves to appreciate in order to act ethically toward the Other. As Peterson argues, this “reconceptualization of history” permits the retelling of important narratives from the neglected perspective through the untelling of the official or traditional narrative (987).

Let us now trace some of the theoretical discussions of tricksterism and place these in the context of postmodern thought. Elizabeth Ammons grounds her discussion of tricksters in American minority writing by referring to Frederic Jameson's concept of the “master discourse” inherent in modern thought. Such master discourses—such as individuality, capitalism, democracy—silence and erase possible alternative realities such as traditional views of community and responsibility for the Other. Ammons argues that tricksters serve an opposing role in both fracturing and challenging such master discourses, thereby opening a space in which previously-ignored beliefs about human existence can emerge. This kind of project emerges along three related lines: trickster as counter-hegemonic voice, trickster as ahistorical figure, and trickster as a being rooted in non-Western ontology. Tiffany Ann Lopez's discussion of Chicana trickster figures and themes describes such figures as counter-hegemonic because they empower the unempowered and ridicule the powerful. Likewise, Jeanne Smith's discussion of tricksters in American literary history speaks of their role as the voice against authority. Tricksters such as Coyote often challenge authority and act against accepted social structures, and minority

writers who employ such figures often do so to speak out against injustice done by the dominant culture.

One of the central positions of postmodern thought is that modern conceptualizations of time as a linear and progressive movement are both culturally-imposed by a specific Eurocentric worldview drawn from the age of scientific rationalism and incomplete. By moving then from modern European (and Euro-American) literature to both global sources of narrative and historical ones that pre-date modernity, we can gain a richer sense of how time, as conceived of in various cultural contexts, operates and affects human existence. Such discussions of recursive and cyclical temporalities occur frequently in contemporary literature, especially in the figure of the trickster figure. To explore this theme, it is helpful to look at both postmodern theory and specific cultural manifestations of trickster figures in contemporary American literature, figures who invert, conflate, and explode conceptualizations of time and replace this linear model with a variety of alternatives. Doing so, however, runs two major risks. The first is that of universalization; to draw commonalities among disparate traditions and make broad claims about trickster figures would be the same mistake by cultural anthropologists who identified Christ figures in African or American Indian mythology, for example. The second is the danger of reaching no conclusion at all. In order to be of use, therefore, this discussion must run the gauntlet between saying something horribly wrong and saying nothing at all.

Perhaps the most important factor in contesting this impulse toward universalizing the

Native American cultural elements that frame trickster figures and themes comes from the theoretical framework that Kelsey presents, what she refers to as “worldviews and [...] theoretical bases [that] become vehicles for Indigenous resurgence, resistance, and survival” (1). This “tribal theory” (Kelsey 1) emerges not from the Western model of interpreting literary production, but from the specific elements of individual tribal cultures, elements that are best understood from within the culture. The risk that non-Native writers run is appropriating those cultural elements in unethical or neocolonialist ways, and a reading of Anaya’s work must perforce acknowledge that risk. But the underlying desire to approach those cultural spaces with respect and curiosity—not to possess, but to be possessed by—the spirit of Trickster, to accept the push-back that comes from a figure that resists easy categorization and that shifts and evolves. As Kelsey emphasizes in her discussion of Charles Eastman’s writing and public persona, there exists in trickster tales a “performative nature of race and ethnic difference” (50).

A second theme of tricksterism is that of trickster’s ahistorical nature. Patricia Linton and Andrew Wiget both trace American Indian trickster figures that are capable of disrupting white meta-narratives because they pre-date those very narratives and thereby employ a logic and a metaphysics that function outside of modernity and its systems. This enables these tricksters to operate independently of the logic of modernity, for they themselves emerge from a moment that is not only before the colonial contact, but before all recorded history, making tricksters thereby malleable markers and pre-textual expressions of human experience, rather than the fixed, circumscribed ones of Western modern thought. This also makes tricksters capable of outliving the concerns of the present,

giving them an ahistorical perspective that makes modern conceptualizations of reality unreliable. Finally, both John W Roberts, in his discussion of African American tricksters, and Bonnie TuSmith, in her address on the role of the scholar as a trickster, refer to the culturally-specific nature of tricksters, whose logic is drawn from a non-Western source. Roberts, for instance, argues that because African American tricksters operate from an African literary tradition, they are able to transgress the boundaries of standard white literacy. This kind of polyvocality renders such tricksters powerful in attacking dominant cultures.

In this respect, Anaya is crossing multiple boundaries, including both the boundaries of genre and those of culture, as he writes an Indigenous presence into the Chicana/o world of his novels, emphasizing more overtly and directly than in his earlier works the role of Native American culture in the beliefs and practices of his characters. Don Eliseo's religious practice, for example, incorporates elements of Native worship, what Kenneth Lincoln refers to as "tribal orality—origin myths, spirit journeys, cautionary tales, healing chants, morality tales, communal prayers, and ceremonial dances drawing the people together through song and story" (xi-xii). Similarly, the process through which Sonny learns to understand and access a spiritual power that he was oblivious to at the beginning of the series mirrors the role of "multiple voices [...that] gesture toward a different understanding of self" (Kelsey and Carpenter 61).

Eva Gruber's discussion of humor in Native American literature makes this point as well, arguing that one of the powerful mechanisms for critiquing and dismantling colonial

power structures is the ways in which traditional Native cultures employed humor in a variety of forms. Humor, according to Gruber, is a fundamental part of the cultural logic of many Indigenous societies in North America, and early interactions with Europeans entailed a humorous reading of the actions, motives, and foibles of these new arrivals, whose very existence could best be explained through humor. A key part of the response to the power of colonialism came—and still comes—through trickster tales, which tend to emphasize the exploits of a wily but ultimately flawed character who can be associated with the dominant society and its weaknesses, or the colonized people and their various means of resisting that hegemony. In either case, “trickster characters in both traditional and contemporary Native writing [...] breach boundaries in permitted disrespect [...], challenge accustomed patterns, subvert authority, hold up a mirror to the audience, and address issues that otherwise would not be discussed openly” (Gruber 8-9). Because the logic of trickster runs contrary to many of the values of Western modernity, and because these figures emerge from the mythos of the specific cultures, trickster becomes a powerful subversive trope of critique and resistance in the work of writers and scholars who seek to explore and dismantle the rigid binaries of colonial and neo-colonial systems.

In the Sonny Baca novels, Anaya, who writes from a heavily Hispanic and Catholic background and cultural geography, undertakes to write into the space of contemporary New Mexico the Native America cultures that are largely absent from his earlier works, and from much of Chicano literature. This absence underscores ethnic and class-based tensions that are well entrenched in the American Southwest, because, even though the

term *Chicano* historically connects to an identification of “indigenous Mexican ancestry and [...] a postcolonial social conscience through [...] awareness of a historically oppressive relationship” between Anglo America and Mexican Americans (Godina and McCoy 173), Chicano literature in the Southwest is marked by what Dasenbrock calls “a heritage of conflict and contact” (309). And chief among the forms of conflict has been the legacy of the local Pueblo cultures being hedged in over the centuries by Spanish, Mexican, and American governments and citizens, sometimes in benign ways, but often in violent, appropriating ones. The result of centuries of Spanish colonialism and indigenous resistance has been an uneasy truce in which elements of each cultural tradition are appropriated and integrated to form the legendary “tri-cultural Southwest.”

An important voice in this discussion of cultural diversity in the contested space of the American Southwest is that of Gloria Anzaldúa, whose *Borderlands/La Frontera* serves as a call to reexamine the history of the US-Mexico border and the other symbolic borders between and within Mexican American and Mexican cultural spaces. Foremost among Anzaldúa’s efforts is that of reconfiguring the dominant metaphors that relate to the life of a colonized person of mixed racial background in the contemporary American Southwest, a borderland in which the lines of demarcation are thought to be as fixed as the international border, which Anzaldúa deconstructs as being an arbitrary, historically-contested, limiting metaphor. In speaking of Anzaldúa’s work with metaphors of race, sex, and power, Erika Aigner-Varoz argues that “she consciously attempts to change the popularized pejorative messages of such metaphors because they serve as destructive, limiting borders of culture and self” (49). By speaking against the dominant culture and

its imaging of the Chicana as an object, Anzaldúa seeks to give voice—and thereby life—to an unheard, unrecognized reality, one of *mestizaje* and the inherent complications of a hybrid identity.

The image of the wild tongue is central to Anzaldúa's project, which permits the silenced voice of the queer mestiza to speak against the homophobia, sexism, and racism that pervade both Anglo and Mexican cultures. Her project, then, is rooted in the effort to combat what she refers to as “attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor” (76), an act of resistance and rebellion against both overt and subtle forms of discrimination, dislocation, and displacement. By claiming a voice, Anzaldúa argues, the objectified colonial Other can find power, create meaning, and deconstruct the power of hegemony. Heavily rooted in Derridean concepts of alterity, Anzaldúa's discussion blends languages, dialects, and genres to embody the kinds of literal and symbolic blending that occur on the border. As Aigner-Varoz posits, “Anzaldúa engages in a dialectical process in order to transcend imposed conceptual boundaries that have made her an outcast” (47), an act of transgressiveness that underlies the entire project of Chicana/o self-assertion in the face of colonial oppression and hegemony. By calling into question a clean history of Anglo American presence in the Southwest, which she does by means of both linguistic and generic disruptions in her text, as well as the inclusion of her own multiple identities, Anzaldúa participates in a larger effort to reframe the interactions between Indigenous peoples, colonial oppressors, and the mixing that occurs between these two groups and that results in new ontological categories of hybridity.

In many ways, this project involves achieving a sense of wholeness for a community that has been repeatedly dehumanized, defined from without, framed in terms of lack. In discussing how Anzaldúa posits a model of *curanderismo* for a broken and subjugated people, George Hartley argues that Anzaldúa works toward “a decolonizing countermovement to Euro-American glorifications” of both the Spanish intrusion into the Americas and 19th-century Anglo-American westward expansion into the Southwest under the banner of Manifest Destiny (136). For Anzaldúa, both of these conquests have fractured and wounded the personhood of indigenous populations, rendering them psychically unwhole, a state that requires then healing. Within this context, “Anzaldúa’s self-definition as a *curandera* of conquest, a healer of *la herida abierta*, the open wound created by the borders that neocolonialism has imposed” is a powerful marker of both resistance to hegemony and efforts to rebuild, the simultaneous acts of delegitimizing colonial logic and reconstructing a model of selfhood built on non-colonial history, myth, and spiritual practice (Hartley 136). Thus, no one historical or mythic narrative will suffice; a composite of multiple sources, each of which is understood as inherently valuable and worth listening to, is necessary for true wholeness to be achieved.

This healing and wholeness rely on the spoken and written word, the amalgamation of textual and oral traditions. The act of speaking, for example, lies at the heart of many forms of traditional healing, including the *plática* that Anzaldúa employs in her work—the talking through the issue that makes up so much of the spoken-word style of *Borderlands*. Thus, Anzaldúa’s claim that “I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*” is not simply a metaphor, but an enactment of healing; the world is

remade as she speaks it, creating a new reality that confronts, repels, and replaces the model of colonial dominance (92). Similarly, the written word, which Anaya describes as “a useful tool of engagement, a way to put students in touch with their social reality” becomes a means of relinking an oppressed people to a heritage (“Censorship” 18). The theme that these two writers—who are often viewed as being very different from each other in tone and style—both emphasize, that of language as a powerful means of rethinking communal and individual identity, carries throughout much of the literature on postcoloniality, hybridity, and the drive to claim selfhood in the face of hegemonic violence and epistemological annihilation.

Language is also an important component of *Bless Me Ultima*, which describes the challenges that Antonio faces when he leaves the comfort of home to attend school, where he is renamed Tony and forced to speak a foreign tongue, one which will forever alter his life. Written to both a bilingual Hispanic readership and more broadly an English-speaking Anglo one, *Bless Me Ultima* employs code-switching from English to Spanish and back to both disrupt the otherwise traditional narrative form of the *bildungsroman* (we periodically get reminders that the conversations in the Marez-Luna household are occurring in Spanish and are mostly translated into English by the narrative voice, an absent presence whose existence marks the text¹) and reverse the traditional power dynamic wherein the English speaker is privileged. This linguistic act is perhaps the most radically postmodern aspect of the text, as readers are periodically reminded that what they are reading is not the “original” conversation between, for example, Tony’s parents, but a spontaneous translation by the narrator, a translation that

occasionally breaks down in the untranslated moments of Spanish eruption into the narrative.

Anaya also plays with religious traditions to create a space for alterity and give voice to disparate cultural elements. In *Bless Me Ultima*, Antonio is “destined” to be a Catholic priest, but his religious doubts and his belief in the pagan figure of the Golden Carp complicate this process; this religious syncretism in the text also includes Ultima’s homeopathic teachings and Antonio’s father’s pantheistic beliefs about man’s connection to the earth. As Alex Hunt explains, Antonio’s “maturation is a process of reconciling the stern Catholic instruction with the teachings of Ultima of the animistic natural world she represents, a world of indigenous spiritualism” (180). Similarly, in his Sonny Baca novels, Anaya combines orthodox Catholic beliefs and traditions with Buddhist and Native American beliefs to indicate something of how the contemporary American Southwest is a site of blending between different religious systems. The figures of Raven and Coyote, drawn from Native American mythology, become central to the texts, in which nuclear holocaust is always present as a potential apocalypse and political intrigue colors every interaction. This blending of various religious traditions complicates the seemingly homogenous Mexican Catholic world of Anaya’s Albuquerque, creating something new in its wake.

These themes and concepts taken together form a concept of Chicana/o identity and culture that is related to Emma Perez’ idea of “diasporic subjectivity,” the creation of a version of the self based on the various movements—both physical and imaginary—of a

Chicana/o community. The roots of that community itself are in an indigenous, pre-Columbian history; an Iberian tradition (which itself incorporates a Moorish cultural trace); and an ethnic American perspective. Together, these elements form a version of Chicana/o-ness that both resists Anglo efforts to totalize and provides a counter narrative to the Western one of industrialization, modernization, and homogenization. In this model, identity can be both individual and emancipatory *and* collective and communal, religion can be both empowering and subject to doubt, and language can be made flexible to accommodate a variety of experiences and perspectives.

This tension is part of a largely unspoken legacy of cultural conflict in the Southwest that emerges periodically when questions of water or land rights, tribal sovereignty, or casino revenue, for example come into play. But the reality of those tensions is an important part of the cultural landscape, and examining how those tensions play out in the literature of the Southwest opens a valuable perspective on the inter-ethnic struggles of contemporary New Mexico. And it is against this backdrop that Anaya's Sonny Baca novels appear, serving as a link between the largely Anglo detective genre, the Chicano culture from which Anaya writes, and the Native American traditions that play a prominent role in the texts. In many ways, this gesture fits with Anaya's long-time commitment to opening the literary canon to represent the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of a more diverse range of voices, including not only Hispanic writers, but also African American and American Indian writers. This multicultural dimension of Anaya's work as a writer and member of the literary world is reflected in places such as his 1989 essay, "The New World Man," in which he argues for a study of literature that

reflects the various traditions and identities of America. This idea is at the heart of Anaya's interest in and use of Native American characters, themes, and traditions in these novels.

At its core, this move hearkens back to the emphasis placed on the Indigenous facet of Hispanic identity that was central to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This itself was a reaction to the earlier racialist tendency to reify Spanish identity and erase and deny *mestizaje*, an attitude prevalent in Mexican culture in the decades leading up to the Chicano Movement. The emphasis on Spanishness was meant to align Mexican identity with European identity, marking in the process those sites of cultural mixing—from religious practice to the literal mixed-blood nature of a population derived from both Native and Spanish roots—as inferior. In fact, the use of Aztlán as a symbol for the Chicano movement was a direct acknowledgement of Native American culture, history, and mythology as part of Chicano identity, serving as a bridge to an Aztec pan-nationalism. Seen this way, the presence of Native American cultural influences in the Sonny Baca novels is simply part of the continuation of a decades-long project by Anaya of rewriting the history of the Southwest to include voices that have been neglected by the intrusion of Anglo modernity and its attendant metanarratives of progress and cultural homogeneity. But the Native American trickster themes, figures, and stories embedded in these texts also represent a different approach to cultural crossing, one that is firmly and fundamentally postmodern and multicultural.

Anaya acknowledges this conscious elevating of the Indian aspect of Chicano identity,

and a broad view of his body of writing reveals a gradually increasing emphasis on postcolonial concerns. From the discussion of Anglo American cultural imperialism through the educational system in *Bless Me, Ultima* to the more overt emphasis of Chicano identity in *Heart of Aztlán* and the rewriting of the myth of cultural purity in *Albuquerque* and the role of Coyote and Raven in the Sonny Baca novels, Anaya's novels demonstrate a growing interest in cultural diversity and the intersections of multiple traditions. This trajectory culminates in scenes such as the one in *Zia Summer* when Sonny, discussing the points of intersection between his Hispanic culture and Akira Morino's Japanese one, refers to New Mexico as "a colonized nation," to which Morino replies, "All nations are products of colonization [...] A new migration comes and a new culture is layered on the old" (270). This exchange marks a heightened and pronounced interest in the issue of cultural hybridity in the Southwest, an issue that underlies all of Anaya's works. But this use of Native American figures and images carries with it some of the same sorts of insidious and problematic traits of other forms of appropriation. This is certainly unintended and benign, as Anaya's perspective and motivation for writing Indianness differ drastically from those of traditional Eurocentric novelists, anthropologists, and historians; Anaya is not dehumanizing indigenous peoples to promote his own cultural heritage or identity, but rather, by working from outside Native traditions, he presents the worldviews of American Indian populations of the Southwest incompletely and, at times, unethically.

This happens primarily because instead of real contemporary Indian characters, Anaya relies on the arena of myth and legend, and the Native American characters in his novels

tend to be incomplete, static, and marginal to the plot, accessories more than real people. As Caminero-Santangelo points out, the figure of Jason's Indian in *Bless Me, Ultima*, who is more of an absence in the text, spoken of but never fully present in the narrative, marks Anaya's problematic relationship toward his Native American neighbors and progenitors. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, she argues, Antonio's "Indian heritage [...] is actually so obscured that the characters understand 'Indian' as alien" (119). This denial of the existing hybridity of Indian and European becomes the point of departure for Anaya's emphasis of mestizaje. This reading of a Native American presence in Anaya's work highlights the complexity of representing cultural diversity from within a hybridized cultural landscape in which this diversity is subsumed in various ways by a centuries-old tradition of intermarriage and cultural blending.

Part of this challenge comes from the very nature of the ontological category of hybridity, in which difference and sameness intersect in ways that often challenge not only the officially sanctioned histories and metaphysics of hegemonic structures, but also the daily lived existence of entire populations. To define oneself as being culturally liminal is to recognize the interstices of culture and identity, but by so doing, one must first delineate and demarcate the contrasting and competing affiliations. That is, hybridity undermines the impulse to assign people and groups to distinct and different categories, but only after admitting and in some ways perpetuating the existence of these categorizations. As Cristina Beltran puts it, the question is "How do we remain attentive to difference yet maintain the capacity to challenge and critique the experiences of those whose identities are not necessarily our own?" (595). These are the very questions that are raised when

Rudolfo Anaya writes Native American cultural elements, cosmography, and characters into his novels. A prime example of this problematic intercultural exchange is found in the character of Joe Calabasa in *Albuquerque*, who embodies a number of stereotypes of American Indians, from the silent warrior and sidekick to the drunken Indian and trickster. These issues indicate a slippage in Anaya's efforts to write Native Americans into his texts, underscoring in the process the tensions that exist, often beneath the surface of the contemporary multicultural Southwest. These tensions are in many ways the same as they have been since the moment of contact between indigenous populations and European explorers, centering on questions of power and wealth, centrality and marginalization. In Anaya's work, this is part of what Caminero-Santangelo, in her critique of *Bless Me, Ultima*, calls "the cultural pressures that caused Mexican Americans to deny their Indian heritage in the decades—and even centuries—before the Chicano movement" (117). Decades later, as part of the Sonny Baca series, these issues still exist in Anaya's fiction—and, if anything, they have become more pronounced and complicated.

A similar discussion emerges in Alex Hunt's "In Search of Anaya's Carp," in which he explores the ecological themes of *Bless Me, Ultima*, focusing on issues such as gender, cultural appropriation, and the inconsistency of symbols drawn from the natural world in which Anaya places his writing. Speaking of his feminization of the earth as a mother figure and the golden carp as universal symbol of precontact innocence, Hunt argues that "Anaya's attempt to construct a harmonious image of Chicano origins becomes an ahistorical and dangerously romantic offense" (184). In the effort to explore what Kelsey

and Carpenter refer to “alternative rubrics of Indigenous identity” (57), Anaya frequently runs the risk of reinscribing the very models of intrusion and co-opting that he critiques, and the Sonny Baca novels, with their intended mainstream audience and reliance on genre practices that align with Anglo-American traditions, increase this tension.

CHAPTER 3

ZIA SUMMER: THE CYCLE BEGINS (AGAIN)

In *Zia Summer*, Anaya opens the Sonny Baca series with a tale of crime and investigation, as Sonny seeks to solve the mystery of his cousin's murder, and, in the process, encounters a much larger mystery, one that incorporates themes of political intrigue, multinational business deals, eco-terrorism, and the looming threat of nuclear holocaust. Gloria Dominic, Sonny's cousin, and wife of mayoral candidate Frank Dominic, is found dead in her upscale home in Albuquerque's North Valley, the blood drained from her body and the sacred Zia sun symbol—a circle with four sets of four lines each radiating up, down, to the left, and to the right—incised around her navel. As Sonny digs deeper into this mystery, he begins to ask questions about the religious cult that seems to be behind Gloria's death, and its shadowy leader, a man known only as Raven, whose charisma attracts a variety of followers, who see him as a restorer of order to a world of economic disparity, violence, and ecological devastation. In the end, the novel serves as both a reflection on questions of identity and reality, and an introduction to the series that traces Sonny Baca's spiritual growth as a mediator between the physical world and the spiritual one; the novel concludes with enough ambiguity to fuel the remainder of the series—Raven is defeated but not destroyed.

Throughout the course of this first novel, Sonny's investigations introduce him to the political world of contemporary Albuquerque, the struggle over geo-political issues of nuclear power and environmentalism, and the spiritual sphere in which the truth of Gloria's murder and those behind it reside. In navigating these spaces, Anaya's

protagonist finds that he must rely not only on the detective skills he has honed during his short career as a private investigator, but also on his relationship to the figure of Coyote, who appears as both a physical presence at key moments in the narrative and as a spiritual presence that guides Sonny through moments of danger. As Carmen Flys-Junquera asserts in her discussion of Anaya's detective fiction, and Sonny in particular “the learning process he undergoes is that of learning more about his culture, traditions and folklore. The most important process is that of accepting his dream-visions, learning to control them and act in them” (“Misrepresenting” 189-90). Sonny's mission then is not only to solve the crime, but to restore harmony by allowing Gloria's soul to rest, and to serve as a conduit for large-scale cultural reformation through the reestablishment of spiritual practice and belief. This blend of traditional elements of detective fiction and the spiritual quest in which Sonny engages is a key component of both the surface elements of the text and the underlying themes that point to Anaya's interest in question of reality, cultural hybridity, and epistemic violence against ethnic minorities, both in the Southwest and across the globe.

An important aspect of how Anaya simultaneously works within and against the generic conventions of the detective novel is the very nature of the crime that Sonny is investigating. While lurid and worthy of the newspaper headlines it inspires, both as a result of the mysterious nature of the murder and the prominence of both the victim and her politically-connected husband, the crime is, from the very beginning, so closely tied to something dark and insidious that it transcends the kind of gritty, earthy violence common to the detective genre. Gloria's murder has the sensationalistic and gruesome

elements characteristic of the genre, the headline-grabbing and befuddling sort of violation of societal standards that marks crime fiction. But the link to something occult pushes against the expectations of the hard-boiled crime genre, moving the site of violence from the physical world to a spiritual plane—thus, Ralph Rodriguez' assertion that Sonny Baca “turns to the mystical elements of New Mexico as he stages his battle between the forces of good and evil” (106), expanding the traditional detective genre to include elements of spiritualism, religious practice, and folk beliefs. While Rodriguez sees this as an escape from the harsh realities of life in an inequitable society, Anaya repeatedly returns to issues of social justice and the disparity between those with power and those without it. But Anaya argues that the solutions to these problems are found on the individual and communal levels, not in the realm of political activism and economic reform, both of which have failed to create meaningful change. Solving the crime becomes more than an exercise in criminal justice; Sonny finds that he is drawn to uncover the truth of Gloria's murder because her “spirit cried for vengeance. [...] Sonny was sure he could hear the anguish of the dead woman's soul” (33). And the process of spiritual healing becomes a model for how Anaya believes the Chicano community can address the injustices of the past in a productive, empowering way.

The details of Gloria's murder baffle both Sonny and the police, as there is no sign of forced entry into the house, no sign of a struggle, and no traces of the murderer, other than two black feathers, which become Raven's calling card throughout the Sonny Baca series, a mark of both his presence and his disappearances, the postmodern sign of the absence, itself a reference to the role of history throughout the four novels, as Anaya is

consciously and deliberately piecing back together narratives that have been fractured, displaced, forgotten, and erased. But it is the manner of Gloria's death that raises the most questions: her blood has been drained completely from her body, and the mark of the Zia sun—four parallel lines in each of the cardinal directions—has been incised into her skin, emanating from her navel. The sign of the Zia sun, which Anaya describes as “the symbol of the Grandfather Sun, the deity of life,” is a sacred symbol among the Pueblo peoples of the Rio Grande valley, and Anaya critiques the ways in which businesses and individuals in New Mexico use it in advertising, street names, and other settings that cut against the deep symbolism of life, rebirth, and the intersection of the physical and the spiritual in human existence. And the location of the mark at Gloria's navel, “the connection to the mother” (29), makes this murder not only the crime of taking a life, but also a desecration of symbols and beliefs important to the peoples of the region, a cultural offense that renders the sacred profane and makes Sonny's task that of restoring wholeness to those cultural values. He is doing more than finding the person who killed Gloria; he is digging at the roots of what caused the abuse, isolation, and pain she lived with throughout her life.

The sign of the Zia sun carved into the flesh around Gloria's navel carries with it a powerful symbolism drawn from the belief systems of Native peoples from the area, a symbol of life and the dependence of an agrarian people on the natural world. But here, that sign becomes something else, linked to Raven's statements about creating a nuclear accident to turn popular opinion against nuclear proliferation: “Only way to wake people up is to shock 'em. [...] Fight fire with fire. To remind everyone that the earth should stay

nuke free” (220). Sonny recognizes in Raven's words that he plans to detonate a truck loaded with nuclear waste on its way from the Los Alamos nuclear laboratory to the underground storage site near Carlsbad, potentially unleashing nuclear fallout on the city. Raven, who his followers refer to as “the Sun King” (143), promises renewal through destruction, an apocalyptic vision of a new world born from the ashes of the fire he will release. And as part of this, the Zia sun is transmuted from its cultural roots as a symbol of life, the connection between the earthly and the divine, to become a marker of death and chaos, an act that Anaya presents as a desecration of the sacred for evil purposes. Similarly, the fact that the crime and its attendant horrors have been inflicted on the physical body further extends the scope of the violent crime that Sonny must face and solve. By marking the flesh of the victim, Raven and his followers have reenacted the legacy of violence, rape, and sexualization of women that lies at the core of colonialist attitudes that legitimize slavery and patriarchal attitudes toward women. The feminine body—object of male gaze and the site of conquest and appropriation—becomes in the text less a fully-realized aspect of human experience and more a simple piece of evidence, as much a part of the murder scene as the black feathers that mark this as Raven’s work.

The other gruesome element of Gloria's death is that her blood—an important symbol of life among the Native peoples of the Southwest as well as the Catholic tradition of the Hispanic population in New Mexico—has been drained from her body. In discussing the case, Sonny and Howard, his friend from the police crime lab, reflect on the symbolism of these two aspects of Gloria's murder, Sonny stating that, “The Aztecs used blood to

feed the sun. They offered blood to the sun to ensure it would rise every day,” and Howard replying, “There's a connection, sun symbol and blood” (34). Just as the Zia sun serves as a means for Anaya to explore the idea of the sun—which he does in each novel by way of the solstice or equinox and the idea of the solar year—the image of blood acts as a marker of racial and cultural identity, and Anaya repeatedly refers to the mixture of Spanish, Indian, Moorish, Asian, Jewish, and African blood in the physical and cultural space of the Southwest as an element of the unique “New World Man” he celebrates. And this focus on identity and the theme of cultural hybridity is central to much Anaya scholarship; Carmen Flys-Junquera, for example, argues that “Anaya's purpose is clear: only by wholeheartedly embracing the Chicano heritage, one of mestizaje of Spanish, Native American and Anglo, can his characters/readers effectively cope in this world” (“Shifting Borders” 111). Viewed from a wider perspective of American Studies, Paul Jay, in “The Myth of 'America' and the Politics of Location,” refers to this as “the syncretic, hybrid, or creolised nature of identity and culture” (184), a theme that lies at the core of *Zia Summer*.

Frank Dominic, who in *Zia Summer* is a rather marginal figure, but who factors importantly in *Albuquerque*, embodies the role of cultural hybridity and the complexities and potential it implies. Very different people in terms of their values and temperament, Frank and Gloria married in part because of convenience; she longed to escape the poverty and pain of her childhood, and he saw in Gloria a way to connect his Anglo background with a Hispanic identity, claiming thereby a legitimacy that he otherwise lacked and that would assist him in his political ambitions. In this respect, Gloria—more

closely than any of the other female characters in Anaya's works—reflects the role of sexual abuse and male oppression of the female body. Her story of physical and emotional suffering echoes what Suzanne Bost says about Gloria Anzaldúa:

In order to understand her work, I argue, we must take seriously the perspective offered by pain and the avenues of thought down which it led her. Her attitude toward pain, in my analysis, emerges from the Mexican cultural frameworks that underlie her writing and is directed toward particular Chicana and feminist political ends. (7)

In this light, Frank Dominic's interest in Gloria—and particularly his interest in claiming access to the Hispanic ancestry she represents for him—can be read as a continuation of the multiple forms of violence inflicted on the mestiza, who becomes for the White, rich, male figure that Dominic embodies a conquest and a means of furthering his ambitions. As Anaya puts it, Frank Dominic “yearned to be connected to royalty, anything that had to do with the Spanish blue blood of the first conquistadores” (12).

The historical context of how *mestizaje* has figured into the popular imagination in New Mexico is significant here, as Anaya is working both in and against a tradition of racism and exclusionary rhetoric and politics. As Nieto-Phillips explains in *The Language of Blood*, “In the Hispanic diaspora, consanguinity determined one's identity and social position” (25). He goes on to assert that:

Following the U.S. invasion of New Mexico, the language of blood gained scientific complexity. Although medieval notions of *casta* were forever abandoned, the concept of *limpieza* was revived, redefined, and redeployed as

Nuevomexicanos tried to explain their racial pedigree amid accusations that they were a 'mongrel race' unfit for statehood. Modern allusions to Spanish blood, then, were by and large a response to Anglo American scientific rationalism (46).

The role that blood has historically played as a marker of both racial and cultural identity—and the nature of Gloria's relationship with Frank Dominic—makes the details of her death an important commentary on the fundamentally flawed nature racialist ideologies and the vacuity and dangerousness of essentialist approaches to ethnic purity.

At the same time, the fact that Gloria's blood—the very thing that made her valuable to Frank Dominic and that gave her the vitality and warmth that Sonny loved—has been completely and clinically drained from her body marks a sense of fear on the part of both Anaya and the larger Chicano community, that of losing a unique and valuable part of a cultural identity through Anglo encroachment. Just as wealthy newcomers building extravagant homes in the North Valley alters the landscape and the community, so do the imported values and the sense of materialism that Anaya sees in Anglo culture threaten the fabric of New Mexico's people. Anaya is ultimately expressing a larger preoccupation with losing one's sense of self, of being emptied out and rendered hollow. This sense of being robbed of a vital source of energy permeates the text, and Anaya links this concept to various social ills in the community, from drug use and violence to economic inequity and political unrest. Anaya's argument is that by losing an important connection to the traditions and practices of the past, with their emphasis on community and heritage, the world—and specifically the Chicano community—has lost its orientation and is limp and impotent, just as Sonny is unable to perform sexually after the *susto* that comes after he

sees Gloria's dead body. As Sonny puts it, "Fear. Fear has gotten into me, it's draining me" (174). The novel, then, is about confronting and conquering that fear.

The image of draining away life symbolized by the method of Gloria's murder is reflected in a moment of introspection late in the novel, after defeating Raven, when Sonny goes to the North Valley home of Tamara, the mysterious and seductive woman who first introduces Sonny to Anthony Pajaro, to confront her about her involvement with Raven. There he pauses, thinking about how the spiritual element of the case he has been investigating has altered his life. As he looks about him, his eye pauses on a spiderweb: "The garden spider moved tentatively toward the fly that had crashed into the web. Then swiftly the spider was on the struggling fly. Arachne feeding on the juices of the fly it held tightly, leaving behind the empty carcass" (326-7). This obvious symbol for how Gloria died also serves as a metaphor for the continuing conflict between Sonny and Raven, as Sonny will, over the course of the next three novels, repeatedly fall into Raven's traps and struggle to escape, both physically as he is tied up and tortured, as well as on the spiritual plane of his own dreams and visions, where Sonny will be forced to take control of his latent shamanistic abilities and become an actor and subject, rather than a passive viewer. Likewise, Anaya is arguing that the ethnic communities about which and to which he writes can only achieve an improved material reality—overcoming economic disparity, subtle racism, and political structures that favor the hegemonic forces that perpetuate inequality—by doing what Sonny is doing, recognizing the complex relationships of capital, power, racial and ethnic identity, and history, delving beneath the surface of daily life to create a link between the individual and the

community, the present and the past.

For Sonny, this connection is most readily apparent in his relationship with Don Eliseo, his elderly neighbor and mentor into the world of spirits. It is Don Eliseo who listens to Sonny and hears in his words the truth of the conflict in which he is engaged, and who recognizes the threat Raven truly poses. One morning, Sonny joins Don Eliseo in his morning ritual of welcoming the rising sun, an act that Don Eliseo compares to the traditions of prayer and worship of the various faiths of the region, linking the sun to the kachinas of the Hopi and the saints of the Catholic Church. As Sonny sits quietly and listens to his neighbor, he feels the power of the dawn fill him with a sense of clarity and peace that contrast directly with the frustration and confusion he feels in his investigation: “His mind was clear, at rest, absorbing light, communing with something primal in the universe, connecting to the first moment of light in the darkness of the cosmos” (183). In this and similar moments in all four novels, Don Eliseo serves as what Jean Cazemajou describes as a mediator, whose purpose is to “preserve an indispensable contact with the world of nature and the supernatural forces inhabiting this universe” (255), forces which empower Sonny as he confronts Raven. This scene thus acts as the first stage in Sonny's initiation into the spiritual world where he will ultimately realize his identity as a shaman and mythic hero.

Another important part of Sonny's growing self-awareness as a spiritual hero whose efforts to achieve justice can also serve to heal a wounded and violated community is the ecological theme of the novel. The sympathy Sonny feels for Anthony Pajaro—who he

later realizes is Raven—at their first meeting derives from Pajaro's zeal in fighting nuclear proliferation and the transportation of nuclear waste from the Los Alamos National Laboratories to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project site in southern New Mexico. In describing what he sees in Pajaro, Sonny turns to religious language: “a man with a mission” (98), “his intense gaze reminded Sonny of the saints he had seen, men burning with the divine spirit” (99), and “a preacher, the chief priest converting those who hadn't yet seen the light” (100-01). Pajaro makes a compelling case, even reaching Sonny on a personal level as he links the cancer from which Sonny's father died to the nuclear waste that had seeped into the South Valley water table from the nuclear arsenal and test sites of nearby Kirtland Air Force base. In this brief meeting, Pajaro is able to kindle in Sonny a sense of camaraderie, which Anaya describes as “the reaching out of brother to brother” (101). This connection between Sonny and Raven progresses in the subsequent novels, as Anaya presents the two as not simply foes, but complementary forces. Later, when Sonny attends Pajaro's anti-nuclear rally, he notes how Pajaro moves smoothly between his two identities, the elegant and charismatic Anthony Pajaro and the elusive and dangerous Raven, the shape-shifter personified in this man who inspires activists to block the WIPP trucks with their bodies while plotting with anarchists to hijack that same truck and release nuclear fallout on the city.

In this respect, Raven fits into the Native American tradition of the shape-shifter as a threat to social cohesiveness and stability, the trickster as disrupter and destroyer. As Kenneth Lincoln explains in his study of American Indian literacies and literatures, “shape-changers challenge the natural ways of things, disruptive of right order and

attitude; they would run the seasons counterclockwise” (294). Given Raven's appearance at the summer solstice and the relationship Anaya highlights between the seasons and Raven's efforts to introduce chaos and violence into the world, this statement takes on added meaning; Raven, who has multiple identities and who pursues multiple ends, is a modern incarnation of the shape-shifter, the non-human threat to human existence. Continuing with Lincoln's discussion is the assertion that “to shapeshift is to change form, perhaps to elude, certainly to baffle or to mystify” (292). Lincoln then links this theme to the specific world of postmodern explorations of the sign and the absence created by that sign: “Shapeshifting implies tracking or being tracked—possibly a hunting, detecting, or divining metaphor” (292). In this light, Anaya's use of the detective novel to work through the conflict between Sonny and Raven becomes a powerful means of exploring the theme of trickster as a manifestation of both the human desire to upset simplistic binaries and the shape-changers threat to the world in which we live.

Lincoln goes on to contextualize this idea in the specific cultural arena of the Southwest, and specifically Navajo traditions associated with shape-shifters, who typically act as disruptive forces in the community, as they lack the wholeness and integrity needed to contribute to the perpetuation of myth and tradition. Describing these figures as “ill-intended meddlers or witches [...who] mess with things as they are or should be” and who “contort and distort, cross nature and change natural forces,” Lincoln explores how selfish and unethical tricksters in Dine culture serve as a warning for the members of the community—failure to appreciate and continue the beliefs and practices of the culture cuts one off from the power of that tradition, a state that ultimately destroys one's

humanity (293). This is why Raven, who first appears as a righteous crusader for environmental causes, embodies what Vizenor describes, in discussing ravens and crows, as “a union of pushy, avian mongrels, trust breakers, thieves, and astute healers” (*Native Liberty* 13). Bent on descending the world into chaos, Raven uses whatever means possible—from co-opting the indignation of the anti-nuclear movement to conspiring with extremist organizations—to gain power, even if so doing means unleashing nuclear holocaust on the world, which for him is simply another arena, in addition to the world of spirits and the world of dreams, for enacting violence.

For Anaya's principal characters, the physical world is only the surface, beneath which moves a spiritual realm in which past, present, and future are intermixed. Linear time and Western metaphysics are presented as being simplifications of a more profound reality, one that figures such as don Eliseo and Lorenza, two of Sonny's guides and spiritual mentors, are able to access, understand, and teach to others. This mentoring relationship is one of the key components of the Sonny Baca novels, and part of the process by which Sonny comes to know himself and understand the reality of the unseen world. In this respect, Susan Sotelo's assertion that Sonny “must commit to an increasingly spiritual outlook in order to solve each mystery” (31) indicates something of how this growth occurs throughout the four novels. The private investigator, whose skills include observation, analysis, and cleverness, must apply those capabilities to a spiritual realm, seeing beyond the material reality of his world, connecting disparate metanarratives to arrive at a fuller understanding of human nature, and outwitting his opponent in the world of dreams and shadows.

In this way, *Zia Summer* presents what Ann-Catherine Geuder identifies as a key theme of all of the Sonny Baca novels:

Each novel has a multilevel plot system. At the first level, there is the detective story, the murder cases that private eye Sonny Baca has to resolve; yet there is always a more complex crime that has national or international significance. At a second level, Sonny's spiritual coming of age is developed. The protagonist, a thirty-year-old Chicano, has lost contact with his cultural traditions and is finding his way 'back home.' Moreover, Sonny is in the process of discovering and accepting his shaman identity: he increasingly realizes that it is his duty to fight evil in the shape of raven, the sorcerer. At a third level, the author offers cultural and historical information about the Nuevo Mexicanos. (82)

These three levels of meaning, while an oversimplification of the novels, provides a useful model for understanding Anaya's project in these texts. The first level is the plot itself, the mystery of Raven's plan to disrupt the world around him, and Sonny's efforts to unearth and discover the truth of the crimes involved. Digger deeper into the novel, we find the plot line of Sonny's spiritual quest for self-definition and his emerging identity as a shaman. And throughout the text, Anaya comments on the complicated history and social patterns of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the American Southwest more broadly. These different levels of hermeneutics guide this analysis of *Zia Summer*, as well as the other Sonny Baca novels.

It is in these three layers of meaning that Anaya's use of trickster figures, themes, and

hermeneutics becomes a valuable avenue for exploring how Sonny Baca represents important cultural values and practices. From the opening pages of *Zia Summer*, Anaya begins to present Sonny as a version of traditional trickster figures. The novel opens with Sonny waking in the middle of a violent dream featuring a beautiful and seductive woman. And in the first few pages of the novel Anaya makes several references to Sonny's trickster-ness: "Too lazy, he admonished himself [...] Sonny prized his freedom [...] a coyote from the hills [...] he had been in his share of fights [...] but he never lost a tooth" (2-5). Even before he begins the process of connecting with the trickster figure of Coyote—his *nagual* and spirit guide into the world of dreams and visions—and being trained by don Eliseo in prayer and dream-shaping, Sonny's character is tightly connected with the traits of trickster. In this respect, Anaya can be seen to be actively pursuing the kind of project that Henry Louis Gates outlines in *The Signifying Monkey*, that of giving voice to a contemporary version Esu-Elegba, the West African trickster figure that Gates describes as embodying the characteristics of "individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture" (6). Gates goes on to argue that the liminality of trickster figures allows them to call into question the foundational assertions of Western modernity, opening a space for the minority writer to proclaim his/her independence from those assertions. Drawing from the post-structuralist move toward looking at signs as a means of pointing toward an abstract signifier, rather than the ultimate and fixed meaning, Gates posits Esu as a mediator between what is and what marks what is.

For some theorists, Gates' model of Esu as a marker of the hermeneutic act connects tricksterism with the emergence over the past few decades of detective fiction by minority writers. In her discussion of Barbara Neely's *Blanche White* novels, Rosemary Hathaway highlights how Blanche, the African American protagonist, subverts racist social structures by "passing." Fitting this act within the tradition of the slave narrative, Hathaway asserts that Blanche succeeds in solving crimes because she has learned to capitalize on the tendency of her White employers to not see her, becoming invisible while in plain sight, thereby hiding her identity as a detective in the disguise of a domestic employee. By framing the novel this way, "Neely suggests that passing can be a much broader metaphor for the many ways in which people subvert or emphasize certain aspects of their identities to serve various purposes" (Hathaway 321). This act marks what Gates refers to as "the figurative difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning" (82). Similarly, Sonny, who works against a different system of racism, aligns with the trickster ethos as he slips into multiple modes of existence, sometimes disappearing entirely, as is the case when he breaks into Dominic's house. Sonny, like Gates' description of Esu, is a complex character, and examining how he serves as site of intersection between cultures, planes of reality, and individual and collective identities.

Ultimately, Anaya presents Sonny as a trickster character as part of an effort to synthesize the various racial, religious, and historical groups that make up the cultural milieu Anaya's of New Mexico. But this is an inherently complicated and difficult undertaking, as Anaya finds himself battling two opposing risks—universalizing and cultural

chauvinism. On the one hand, trickster can become such a broadly-defined category that it loses all culturally-specific value, morphing into what Doty and Hynes warn can be “a universal archetype to be encountered within each of us and in most belief systems” (4), and which lacks any real significance. This risk derives from the need to make the novels accessible to a mass audience, one largely unfamiliar with the specific cultural context of Native American trickster figures such as Coyote and Raven, which requires that Anaya connect those figures to metanarratives his audience is more likely to recognize. This also factors into the generic decisions that drive the plot and characters of the texts, which Anaya makes relatively familiar to his readers. Anaya thus seeks to make tricksterism less alien to a broad audience, a move that threatens to dilute the powerful cultural and spiritual meaning of trickster, robbing the novels' central motif of the very meaning that drives the narrative.

The other pitfall associated with Anaya's project is the trickster who is so narrowly defined within the traditions, values, and practices of a specific group that any attempt to read that character from without the culture is doomed to utter failure. If, as various theorists argue, the epistemological underpinnings of a specific culture encode the layers of meaning for a text, then any effort to depict a culturally authentic version of trickster will succeed only within the context of a readership familiar with that episteme. Even the decision to write in English reduces the effectiveness of a non-Western, pre-modern figure; writing in the colonial tongue removes the narrative elements from the original source of their meaning. Likewise, the Western textual forms of the novel—and particularly those of the detective novel, an essentially modern genre—cut against the

primarily oral nature of Native trickster tales, further divorcing the figure from the sign of its representation. The gap between the meaning and the expression of the meaning is, according to this viewpoint, simply too wide. Thus, Anaya's characterization of Sonny as embodiment of trickster traits—as well as the complications that arise from this gesture—indicates the depth and difficulty of the cultural reconciliation that Anaya is undertaking in this text and the subsequent Sonny Baca novels.

Nevertheless, Anaya is working from a long tradition of artists who find in a trickster figure a voice and outlet for creative—and often transgressive—critiques of the dominant culture and a deconstruction of the values imposed by that culture. In *Zia Summer*, Anaya presents Sonny's *nagual*, Coyote, as this trickster figure, a gesture that coincides with Theresa Melendez's statement: "The coyote figure of indigenous traditions has been a source of considerable symbolic wealth in Mexican folklore, history, and language usage. More recently it has emerged in Chicano literature" (295). The figure of Coyote is a multifaceted one that can represent immigration, hybridity, and transgressing cultural norms. Coyote becomes in the text a sign of the ambiguity and liminality of the trickster figure, whose actions, attitudes, and essence all point to an undoing of binaries and assumptions, the space between hero and fool, creator and destroyer.

Coyote therefore serves as an intermediary, standing at the threshold between the visible world and the spiritual plane in which Sonny must learn to operate throughout the course of the text. In explaining to Sonny why he should visit Lorenza, the healer who ultimately serves as one of his guides into this unseen world of dreams and visions, Rita says, "A

person can fly, or the soul can fly, and it can change into an animal form. In Mexico it's called the *nagual*. Lorenza believes you can change form, you can change into that animal" (242). As Lorenza introduces Sonny into this spiritual space and he learns to control and shape his dreams, Sonny realizes that his task is not simply to solve or prevent crime, but to uncover the hidden truth of human existence, and it is this ontological detective work that drives the underlying action of all four novels. Lorenza's role as a *curandera* provides a link between Sonny, who operates in a modern, rational world, and the mixture of traditional beliefs and practices that rely within a religious context. Melissa Pabón and Hector Perez refer to this diverse set of epistemological models when they explain that "the practice of curanderismo was historically influenced by the medical theories and practices introduced to the Americas by Spanish explorers, who based their knowledge on Greek, Roman, and Arabic customs and practices" (259). Thus, for Anaya, curanderismo is a hybrid system that serves as a model for the kinds of cultural reintegration he proposes as a remedy for social ills.

And by developing this theme of healing through the symbol of Coyote the Trickster, Anaya is able to critique modern Western values obliquely, through the otherworldly moments in the text; as Larry Ellis asserts, "if there is indeed a logic to liminal reality, it is so involved and open-ended that it is perhaps best discerned through symbol, metaphor, and image" (59), a fact that Anaya understands well. Coyote thus allows Anaya a means to explore a range of cultural systems that resist the intrusions of modernity in the lifeways of the people of the Southwest. In this respect, Anaya is enacting a version of what Vizenor has termed *survivance*, which he defines as "an active sense of presence

over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories” (1). Because trickster figures and trickster tales are part of a narrative impulse that defies simple heuristic models, and because the trickster is, as Vizenor puts it, “an elusive, ironic creator, and at the same time [...] a contradiction of creation” (*Native Liberty* 230), Anaya is able to employ trickster themes to resist the kinds of simple, Eurocentric readings that have often dominated the analysis of Chicana/o literature. To see how this is done, it is useful to look at the way Doty and Hynes describe mythical tricksters, which they characterize with the traits of “plurality, plurivocality, and ambiguity” (9). These three forces are key to the development of Sonny Baca as a character in the novels, and they are especially evident in *Zia Summer*, where Sonny is a highly imperfect and flawed hero who often stumbles along unaware of how Raven is manipulating him.

Nowhere is this sense of helplessness and failure more evident than on Sonny's first trip to the East Mountains, where Raven's compound is located. On his way toward Raven's compound, Sonny is fired on by an unseen sniper who pins him down away from cover. As his life flashes before him, Sonny sees images of his loved ones, smells the aromas of the food he has been raised on, imagines the voices of the land and the myths of the people. Anaya explains that Sonny had been careless, “walking confidently, trying to show no fear” (134), but had “waltzed right into the danger” (135). But even in the midst of his mistake, Sonny senses mirror those of the coyote: “He could feel his sweat prickling, and smell the danger, like a coyote can smell the scent of man” (134). In the next chapter, Sonny goes to Raven's compound, where he talks to two of his wives and uncovers key details about Raven's plot to hijack a shipment of nuclear waste from the Los Alamos

National Laboratory. This time, Sonny listens to his coyote instincts as he walks toward danger: “He smelled the air, instinctively search for scents that might warn him of lurking danger” (139). As he digs into the mystery of Gloria’s death and Raven’s plot, Sonny gradually becomes more aware of his surroundings and the spirit of place that serves as a crucial marker of ontological power. As a trickster-in-training, Sonny comes to see the importance of the space he travels through and the history that underlies it.

After visiting Raven in jail, Sonny makes his way back to Albuquerque, frustrated with the lack of clues and intent on seeing Rita again. But as he drives along the highway, he finds himself being run off the road and confronted by two FBI agents, who try to scare him off the case. Angry at himself for being sloppy in his work, Sonny wanders around the area at the side of the road, where “he found a protective spot under a massive granite outcropping. He guessed it was a den of a pack of coyotes” (149). For a while Sonny sits there, letting his fears and concerns about the case subside, entering into a trance-like state as he slowly becomes part of the natural world around him. This obvious allusion to the spirit-state by which practitioners of Native worship connect with the spirit of trickster is one of the most direct references to non-Western spirituality in the text; Sonny, while nominally and culturally Catholic, practices the belief systems of various cultures, and this moment, in which he transcends the physical world and his temporal concerns, marks a significant phase in his progression as a follower of multiple paths of spirituality, a disruption of the typical binary of Christian/Pagan. As Anaya describes it, “the forest had accepted his quiet presence and was returning to normal,” a version of the healing and wholeness Sonny seeks to bring to the world through his investigation, and that Anaya

works toward through his writing. Both are acts of discovery and re-creation of what has been lost.

Because Anaya's employment of Coyote as a trope for trickster characteristics is a key theme of this text, Coyote appears both physically and metaphorically throughout the novel. Coyote comes to serve for Anaya as a representation of the tenuous, undetermined realm that exists along the borders between cultures, histories, and realities. As a liminal character who crosses borders between the various worlds of Anaya's novels—the spaces between reality and the dream-like state of Sonny's visions, the lines separating the different social and ethnic groups of contemporary New Mexico, and the intersections of character's lives—Coyote helps to “preserve an indispensable contact with the world of nature and the supernatural forces inhabiting this universe” (Cazemajou 255). In this respect, the most important element of the Sonny-Coyote bond is that of creating a new identity, one that, as is the case with many of Anaya's protagonists, from Antonio in *Bless Me, Ultima*, to Abrán in *Albuquerque*, blends disparate cultural identities. As Carmen Flys-Junquera explains, “Coyotes are those who help others cross the border, or the mestizos, and also a legendary trickster figure or the animal guardian,” and they often serve to help a person or group transcend or cross a boundary and thereby “integrate their multiple identities and territories into a larger, hybrid one, that of their intersections” (“Shifting Borders” 101).

The figure of Coyote appears again later in the text, this time as a shadow, not seen, but felt. After defeating Raven, Sonny returns to visit Tamara and confront her about her

support for Raven and her role in Gloria's death. As she is arrested by the police for her involvement in the murder, Tamara unwittingly points out to Sonny the secret of what happened to Gloria's blood, which was drained from her body without a trace. Her eyes rest on a vase full of dirt, which Sonny realizes has been mixed with Gloria's blood as a perverse form a ritual of returning the life-giving force of blood to the life-giving earth. He takes the vase and later sprinkles the earth on Gloria's grave, uniting “the earth that holds her body” with her blood, as Gloria's mother, Sonny's Tia Delfina, puts it (339). Just prior to this moment, Sonny surveys the urban sprawl of Albuquerque and sees as “a shadow moved in his peripheral vision. Two coyotes had been surveying the scene, no telling how long, and now they disappeared into the shadows” (338). This trace of the trickster's presence marks the resolution of the novel and the return to stasis in Sonny's life. It is no coincidence that after this scene, Sonny is able to reconcile and reconnect with Rita.

Thus, Anaya is carrying out in *Zia Summer* what Lamadrid, speaking of *Bless Me, Ultima*, calls “a dialectical exploration of the contradictions between lifestyles and cultures” (101), as Sonny moves between the different spaces and reflects on questions of liminality and the complex nature of identity. This exploration of the ways in which a single character can straddle two distinct cultural spaces is one of the main roles that Sonny plays in the text, and it is one of Anaya's primary interests—the question of what makes a person a legitimate member of a cultural group. In their introduction to the collection of personal essays by a variety of contemporary Latina/o writers, entitled *The Other Latin@*, Blas Falconer and Lorraine Lopez argue that “contradiction and dissent

testifies to the undeniable diversity within” the Hispanic community (2). The tension between authenticity—the impulse to include Spanish in the dialogue and descriptions, the emphasis on the history and culture of New Mexico as a unique place—and universality—the desire to translate those Spanish-language episodes, the connections to Greek and Egyptian mythology through the series—is one of the central conflicts of the novel, as Anaya himself straddles both sides of the chasm of identity and essence. As Ralph Rodriguez puts it in his analysis of Chicana/o detective fiction, these mythic tropes and characters are “central to how Chicana/os imagine themselves and their worlds” (2). The question, then, for Sonny is not simply who is responsible for Gloria's death, but who he—Sonny Baca, former school teacher-turned-private investigator, great-grandson of Elfege Baca—is to be. Sonny's place in the world is complicated by the tensions within his life, as he lives in the rural North Valley but frequently moves in the urban space of the modern city, as he is deeply in love with Rita but finds himself attracted to the other women in his life, as he longs for permanence but functions in the highly unstable world of detective work.

This sense of residing on the borders between various cultural territories is expressed nicely toward the end of *Zia Summer*, as Sonny reflects on the events of the novel, and Gloria's death in particular:

His parents had given him a history, a sense of the traditions of the valley, the stories of the Bisabuelo and the heritage of the antepasados, the ancestors. But somewhere along the way, he began to get separated. Getting a degree at the university meant entering a different world, and living in the vast change that

swept over the land meant losing touch. (340)

A similar reflection on this condition of cultural change occurs earlier in the text, as Sonny thinks of his neighbor, don Eliseo, whose sons “had gotten educated and left the valley, married Anglo women, joined the great American dream in a Northeast Heights homogenized culture” (259). In both cases Anaya paints a picture of nostalgia for the loss of a traditional culture and the imposition of Anglo values, which implies a sense of decay and distance from the source of identity and self-definition.

But Anaya is not interested in a simplistic view of cultural identity in terms of purity from outside influences; essentialism is of no real interest to him. Rather, he emphasizes throughout the novel the richness that can come from cultural mixing, the potential inherent in hybridity. Ralph Rodriguez' analysis of the Sonny Baca novels highlights this theme of cultural hybridity: “The history of New Mexico—its Spanish past, its indigenous customs and history, its conquest by the United States—sets forth a series of events that Baca assembles into a particular narrative of New Mexico that renders his identity possible and speaks to the racial heterogeneity of the region” (116-117). And the blending to which Rodriguez refers entails not just the history of New Mexico, but also the particular model of cultural contact that Anaya espouses, one that relies on an ethical interaction between very different value systems. Thus, the appropriation of traditional Indigenous symbols and stories, combined with New Mexico Catholicism and references to the mythology of ancient Greece and Egypt, is less an act of ownership (as appropriation typically functions), and more an act of recognizing the ways in which these systems naturally and commonly bleed into each other. By weaving together

disparate narratives, belief systems, and worldviews—including the Hispanic, Native American, and Euro-American ones that take center stage in the novels, as well as more secondary ones such as the African American or Asian presences—Anaya seeks to both mirror and explore the cultural complexity of the world he writes and writes about.

The physical presence of Coyote occurs in two scenes in the text, both immediately before and after his visit to Raven's compound in the mountains east of Albuquerque. Arriving at the compound, Sonny senses danger, and the description of Sonny here ties him to Coyote metonymically, as Sonny "smelled the air, instinctively searching for scents that might warn him of lurking danger" (139). Later, after his run-in with FBI agents, Sonny slumps under a secluded spot off the highway in coyote den, and, exhausted by his day, Sonny dreams of "the forest [...] come alive with the spirits of animals, [...] and coyotes crossed in front of his path" (151). An early allusion to Coyote in the novel comes when Sonny, researching a series of cattle mutilations similar to Gloria's murder, describes the vast spaces of New Mexico ranchland: "Coyotes cried, and the large and barren landscape of the state became a ghostly moonscape" (44). At this and other key moments in the text, a sign of coyote—a howl, a track, a fleeting image—will appear and foreshadow the emergent relationship between Sonny and Coyote.

The relationship between Sonny and Coyote—a figure portrayed as Sonny's nagual, as explained by the curandera Lorenza (194)—begins early in *Zia Summer*, as Sonny imagines an exchange with Rita, who promises to domesticate the free-spirited bachelor, whom she refers to as "a coyote from the hills" (3); here Sonny's womanizing and

independence are linked to the figure of Coyote, who symbolizes both male sexuality and solitude, two key aspects of Sonny the detective. Sonny and Coyote both resist the domesticating and modernizing influences imposed by their surroundings. This connection between Sonny and Coyote is further elaborated in Sonny's interior monologue on racial hybridity in the American Southwest, as he contemplates his own physiology and states that "all bloods ran as one in the coyotes of Nuevo Mexico" (5), a reference to "coyote" as a multiracial mestizo. Here "coyote" is both the figure derived from indigenous mythology and the Spanish term for a mixed-race individual. This sense of Coyote as a marker of racial hybridity becomes even more important in later novels, as Sonny seeks to retrace—and Anaya to retell—the key historical interactions between Native and European peoples.

Later, when Sonny goes to find Raven's compound in the mountains east of Albuquerque, this idea of racial hybridity is discussed again. After a run-in with two of Raven's men in a bar in the small town of Estancia, Sonny meets with the sheriff, who knows Sonny's extended family. In the course of their conversation, Sheriff Naranjo tells a story of an Anglo cowboy who married into a Hispanic family in Socorro: "One of the best families in Socorro county came from that marriage. Coyotes, part Chicano, part Anglos. They're raza just like us" (214). Anaya is always interested in how such cultural contact and exchange can result in newness and the revitalization of both cultures, as here the idea of *raza* is itself rooted in *Movimiento*-era conceptualizations of multiethnic hybridity. At other times, Anaya presents this sort of cross-cultural interaction as a complex situation, full of both positive effects and potential risks, rather than the simplistic approaches to

hybridity favored by essentialists. While Hispanic-Anglo intermarriage can create something new through the literal hybridization of the children born from the marriage, as well as the symbolic nature of that relationship, there is also the possibility that the minority group identity can be lost through assimilation. For Anaya, this other side of hybridization threatens to rob traditional societies of their link to the past, as is mentioned up later in *Zia Summer*, as Sonny contemplates don Eliseo's sons, who "had gotten educated and left the valley, married Anglo women, joined the great American dream in the Northeast Heights homogenized culture" (259). The movement from the agrarian North Valley to the upscale suburbs of the Heights—with gated communities, manicured lawns, and a lack of history—marks for Anaya the irreparable loss of the roots that sustain community, the very thing that cuts a people off from the power of their heritage.

In this respect, Anaya's concerns regarding the risks of assimilation have played out over the decades since the Chicano Movement. In their qualitative study of a group of Mexican-American women in South Texas, sociologists Emmanuel Alvarado and Daniel Nehring explore the decisions these women make about marriage and parenting, positing a theoretical spectrum of assimilation and divergence. As Alvarado and Nehring explain, decisions that a few generations ago would have been relatively simple are not made in the context of what they call "the dynamic interaction between socioeconomic and cultural assimilation, on the one hand, and the history and cultural traditions of Mexican Americans, on the other" (89). Similarly, part of Anaya's message here is that progress away from a racist and sexist past is necessary, but the wholesale abandonment of the entire cultural construct from which that hegemonic impulse grew is just as dangerous. In

fact, for Anaya, uprooting oneself from history and culture is the most dangerous position to be in. Thus, the trickster mentality seeks to navigate these extremes, blending the advantages of assimilation with those of divergence to create this hybrid identity.

Trickster is also marked by physical desires, including appetite, which, as Steven Hawley puts it, “tend to defy comprehension through the lens of any particular Western mode of critical thought” (95). Another instance of Sonny’s trickster characteristics occurs after Sonny’s visit to the city library, as he heads to Rita’s cocina. Leaving his research for a time and finding himself immersed in the case, he realizes that he has not eaten anything substantial all day, and Anaya describes Sonny in terms of his hunger: “his stomach raw from hunger,” a description that resonates with depictions of Coyote as painfully hungry. This physical hunger is further elaborated when Sonny does eat, and Anaya here relates eating to storytelling: “As he ate, he talked, and the hunger to repeat each incident of the day was as voracious as his appetite” (54). This hunger takes on another aspect later in the novel when Sony recounts to Rita his encounters with Frank Dominic, Raven’s women, and the FBI agents. Rita has prepared a romantic evening, which includes a home-cooked dinner, which Sonny “ate greedily, eager to regain his strength” (175). Physically and emotionally drained, he is then unable to make love to Rita. Later that day, after confronting and being rebuffed by Frank Dominic, Sonny visits a local cantina to settle his nerves. In this scene, as in other moments in the text, Sonny drinks away his problems, an allusion to the role of alcohol in the macho world of Coyote. In describing Sonny’s emotions, Anaya says, “He was going to drink until he could cry, somehow get the grief out [...] He was going to drink until they closed the bar or he got into a fight,

anything to let go” (79). From the opening lines of the text, Coyote appears as a marker of the masculine, wild, untamed nature of both the land and its people. With these sorts of allusions, Anaya opens the Sonny Baca series by presenting the argument that the Chicano population of New Mexico carries the traces of Coyote, a theme that runs informs a reading of the texts.

Sonny’s relationship to Coyote also incorporates into the text an emphasis on dreams, and as Sonny comes to understand and accept his role as a shaman-like figure, these dreams take on more significance in the action of the novels. This becomes especially important in *Shaman Winter*, but as early as the opening page of *Zia Summer*, Anaya weaves Sonny’s dreams into the narrative. The first novel actually opens with Sonny waking from a dream of horrible violence: a beautiful and alluring woman cuts his leg off with a chainsaw, and, as Anaya describes, “the scene in the nightmare had been so vivid [...] A dream like that meant no good” (1-2). This dream then serves to both open the text, with its subplots of violence, blood, and seduction, and introduce the world of Sonny’s dreams. The following night, Sonny again dreams of being attacked violently, but this time images from Gloria’s dead body color his dream of being offered as a sacrifice. Again, a woman—this time an Aztec priestess—cuts at Sonny, but this time the violence is both sexualized and more profound, as the priestess first copulates with the bound Sonny and then “held up the obsidian knife, pressed it against his stomach, opening his chest cavity around the rib cage. She reached in and ripped his heart out” (82). This grotesque scene underlies Sonny’s fears about the symbolism attached to Gloria’s murder as well as his own sexual desires, linked as they are to his fear of commitment toward

Rita.

These nightmares repeat in various forms throughout the text, leading to the climactic scene in which they are embodied in the confrontation with Raven. The day after he meets with Veronica and questions her about the case, Sonny describes in his thoughts a second nightmare, this one incorporating the sign of Raven: “He had spent the night tossing in and out of nightmares in which the sun rose like a gigantic Zia sign, then there was a rain of dark feathers. Crows darkened the sky, swooping in to attack Sonny [...] He awakened, drenched in sweat” (126).

Accepting and understanding the ways in which these dreams lead him to find truths that are both central to his case and indicative of larger social issues is a key part of the Sonny’s growth as a character, a process that Anaya hints at early in the text. After arriving at the crime scene and learning of how Gloria was killed, Sonny listens to his friend Howard from the forensics department describe how he sees Gloria’s murder in the context of ancient blood sacrifice rituals of various cultures. Anaya explains that Sonny “had to find the meaning in the symbols and trace it to the people who inscribed the Zia sign on Gloria” (34-35). This hermeneutic process of gathering and deciphering clues becomes a key part of Sonny’s detective work and a major theme behind the ethnic and cultural concerns Anaya raises throughout the series. Only by learning from the past and piecing together the dismembered tales, according to Anaya, is it possible to achieve racial and cultural understanding and heal the wounds brought on by violence.

In *Zia Summer*, after waking from the first nightmare described above, Sonny reflects on the history of the Chicano community of New Mexico, ultimately coming to the conclusion that “every dream is connected to your life and what will become of it” (84). This statement, while seemingly trite, foreshadows the process of spiritual and psychic maturation and the move away from simple binaries of good and evil that Sonny experiences throughout the series. In addition to blending disparate racial, cultural, and historical identities, Coyote-as-trickster also marks a profound interest in questions of epistemology, part of what is often seen as a common theme of trickster tales and trickster figures: the desire to know more, to solve puzzles and riddles, to uncover what is typically thought of as being unknowable. This fact aligns closely with Kelsey’s assertion that Indigenous peoples possess “unique tribal knowledges, epistemology, and philosophy” that resist the dominant culture (1), and Anaya is clearly seeking here to tap into those diverse ways of knowing in the world. In describing how trickster figures operate in myth, Larry Ellis argues that the logic of the trickster's universe “is so involved and open-ended that it is perhaps best discerned through symbol, metaphor, and image” (59), and this emphasis on symbol is central to both the trickster theme and plot of *Zia Summer*.

Anaya's first expression of this theme comes as Sonny learns from Howard, his friend on the police force, the details of Gloria's gruesome murder. After mulling over the riddle of the Zia sun symbol carved into Gloria's navel and the manner in which the blood had been drained from her body, Sonny looks for a pattern: “Somewhere there was a pattern. He had to find the meaning in the symbols and trace it to” the murders (34). This theme

reemerges the next day, as Sonny begins his investigation by combing through police reports and information at the city library, following the remembered advice of Manuel Lopez, his mentor as a private investigator: “Start gathering the facts” (39). Sonny researches similar murders and mysterious occurrences in the East Mountains to identify a pattern. What Patricia Linton calls the “distinctly Euro-American epistemology” of the detective novel (20) comes to play here, but Sonny's trickster nature makes this more than a simply exercise in gathering facts—he is recreating reality by puzzling out the mystery.

This process of tracing the pieces of the mystery and creating a working model of guilt—both individual guilt for the specific crime being investigated and the broader social responsibility for cultural and epistemic violence—fits with Linton's description of detective fiction: “Detective fiction had traditionally demonstrated that however intricate the web of events, however strained the motivation, however fortuitous the discovery of pertinent information, enough can be known about the relationships between events to constitute a solution” (“The Detective Novel” 20). The idea that Sonny can solve the crime corresponds in Anaya's worldview to his ability to find patterns and threads of truth in the complex and contradictory meta-narratives of racialism, xenophobia, and exclusionary policies. But Sonny is not simply trying to solve a bizarre crime; he is piecing together a vast network of plots to unleash nuclear devastation on the city, a plot that will expand and thicken in the subsequent novels. And the third layer of interpretation identified by Geuber incorporates this theme of knowledge creation, as Sonny's ruminations on history and culture are part of the process by which he comes to better understand the mystery of identity and hybridity. In reflecting on the mixing of

Indigenous, European, African, and Asian cultures in the space of the Southwest, Sonny decides that his interest in traveling to Spain—the return to a source of his identity, where the mixing of Moorish, Christian, and Jewish cultures might serve as a model for life in the multicultural modern city—might be driven by his desire “to know more about the past” (209). As with his efforts to solve the crime, this quest for answers underscore Sonny's trickster nature as one who wishes to have power by knowing.

At the same time, Anaya's references to Sonny Baca and Coyote also imply some negative aspects of trickster, including perceptions of laziness, promiscuity, and self-delusion. The first telling example of this sort of characterization occurs during Sonny Baca's opening interior monologue as he reflects on how little he does for his kindly neighbor don Eliseo, referring to himself as being “too lazy” to go out of his way to help his friend with his yard work (2). Moments later, in his imagined conversation with Rita, Sonny claims that he “like[s] to make love to all the women,” to which Rita replies, “you think you're a big stud” (3). This particular reference is telling, as Coyote is frequently seen as a hypersexualized figure, one whose sex drive is insatiable and whose desire repeatedly gets him in trouble. This side of Sonny-as-trickster takes on a fuller significance in the second chapter, when, after learning of Gloria's death, Sonny falls into nostalgia, remembering his relationship with Gloria, one marked by his first sexual encounter. After his high school graduation, Gloria throws a private party for Sonny, and they make love, an incestuous act that Sonny had for some time desired; he describes his feelings thusly: “He was eighteen, she was twenty-eight, they were cousins, friends, that was all. It was the first time he had felt the way a man would feel for a woman he wanted

to make love to. She was beautiful” (11). His burgeoning sexuality is pitted against the religious and social norms of Sonny’s world, but these mores cannot control his sexual impulses, and, like the figure of Coyote in numerous Indigenous legends, he breaks social taboos related to sexuality.

This theme recurs later in the text when Sonny is at the Fourth Street Cantina drinking away the sorrows and grief of the day. He looks around the bar and notices the women who are there, a scene he thinks of as being “like picking apples: some had slight blemishes, others were perfectly formed, all were sweet to eat” (79). This sort of objectification and commodification of the female is a very real concern with Anaya’s treatment of trickster figures, which are traditionally an embodiment of patriarchal social structures, in which male sexual prowess is celebrated and women are part of the landscape (itself often sexualized): nameless, faceless, disembodied. And this demonstrates the radical extreme to which the parallels between Sonny Baca and Coyote are at times taken, as Sonny—who is in a long-term relationship and has passed his years of youthful promiscuity—clings to some semblance of his fleeting prime; just as he has a failed marriage in the past and has changed careers, trading in the stability of teaching at the high school for the freedom of detective work, his sexuality indicates a tension between the socially-acceptable monogamy of his relationship with Rita and the more transgressive nature of his desire for other women. One additional example of the ambiguous and potentially negative aspect of this characterization of Sonny as trickster in this opening chapter comes as Sonny contemplates his career as a private investigator. In reflecting on his lawman great-grandfather, Elfego Baca, Sonny claims that in his own

“fantasies [Sonny] was always doing something heroic [...] his mind was always active, always creating stories, and he made himself the hero of each story” (3). Sonny’s desire to make a name for himself, acting in competition with his great-grandfather, demonstrates the sense of ego and selfishness sometimes associated with Coyote. In each of these passages, Sonny is related to Coyote, but not in clear or unambiguously positive ways, and it is this ambivalence that underlies and informs Anaya’s project of contemplating and configuring trickster in the contemporary Southwest.

In this respect, Anaya is working within a tradition of minority writers seeking to claim a space in the literary and cultural discourse by simultaneously working within and disrupting the mainstream models of artistic expression. Thus, the ambivalent conclusion to *Zia Summer* reflects the uncertainty of the non-White writer in a predominantly White literary sphere. An interesting parallel exists here between this element of the first Sonny Baca novel and an observation made by Penelope Myrtle Kelsey in *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature*, where she lays out a heuristic model for reading Native literature—both traditional and contemporary—in ways that resist the interpretive strategies of Euro-American theorists. In describing the conflicted views toward early-twentieth-century Native American writer Charles Eastman, Kelsey asserts that Eastman—and his contemporaries—“have often been faulted for the equivocation that they practice: they advocate for Indigenous rights while sometimes apologizing for the demands they make and/or their ethnic and racial difference” (43). This willingness to accept an ambiguous relationship between the minority writer and the mostly White audience informs a reading of these novels, and in particular the conclusion of *Zia*

Summer, which sees the villain vanquished, but his spirit living on, an ominous but uncertain threat that eliminates the possibility of a totally resolved conclusion. Living with this ambiguity as a successful and recognized writer from a background associated with ugly stereotypes and misconceptions on the part of the dominant culture, Anaya inverts that power relationship for a moment, leaving his readers without a clear or comfortable sense of completion or closure.

The novel's conclusion builds on this sense of ambiguity, as Raven is defeat and seemingly destroyed in the raging floodwaters that sweep through the arroyo, but no body is found, and Sonny, upon receiving the Zia medallion from Tamara, realizes that, while he has not become “the new Raven” that she sees in him, he has forged a bond with his enemy, one that allows him to feel that Raven is not dead, and that they will meet again. Obviously this sets up the possibility of a second novel, following the model of the detective novel, leaving a mass audience ready for another installment. But this uncertainty goes farther than the furtherance of the series; it enacts the liminality of the trickster aesthetic. The crime has been solved, but the mystery remains, and easy answers yet elude. Is Raven still alive? How will justice for Gloria's death be meted out in the courts? Will this tale result in a wave of sympathy for Frank Dominic that might lead to his victory in the mayoral race? Just as Coyote resists simple categorizations and definitions, the text itself closes without a complete sense of surety. This echoes in the final symbol of the novel, the seemingly dead tree in Eliseo's yard, an old cottonwood that was threatening to fall and cause immense damage to the neighborhood homes. As Sonny visits Eliseo, he learns that a branch has sent out leaves in response to the rain that

fell as Sonny and Raven fought, bringing an end to the oppressive drought. Reflecting on this miracle, Sonny thinks, “some old trees grew like that, one side would begin to dry out, but the spirit of life was too great to be denied” (345). Trickster emerges again, here in the dead tree that lives again, a sign of the sort of cultural rejuvenation that Anaya believes is both possible and necessary for his community.

CHAPTER 4

RIO GRANDE FALL: THE DETECTIVE WHO FLIES

Rio Grande Fall, the second installment in the Sonny Baca series, opens on the first day of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta and traces the contours of the conflict between Sonny and Raven beyond the localized world described in the first novel. Anaya accomplishes this by using the fiesta, the largest tourist event in the state, as a marker of the commercialization of Otherness and a site of complex geopolitical issues of crime, regime change, and drug trafficking. And at the same time that Sonny's interactions with Raven move from the physical world into a spiritual plane, Anaya explores contemporary concerns related to the nature of the nation-state in a global economy, the role of history in preserving a culture in the face of hegemonic erasure, and the intersection and hybridization of disparate spiritual belief systems. In so doing, Anaya expands the scope of the simple detective novel genre he employs in *Zia Summer* to embrace wide-reaching questions on a much larger scale, and while the novel struggles at times to navigate these various worlds, the end result is a compelling plot that takes the readers from the high-flying world of ballooning to the streets of Juarez, from the mansions of the city's wealthy to the lives of the homeless living in the shadows, underlying which is the fuller sense of Sonny's growing spiritual self-awareness under the mentorship of Lorenza and don Eliseo.

Sonny, believing—or, at least, wanting to believe—that Raven was killed in the flood at the end of *Zia Summer* has spent the intervening months seeking respite from the sense of grief brought on by Gloria Dominic's murder and the shock he felt upon seeing her dead

body. The concept of *susto*, this shock caused by emotional trauma, leads Sonny to revisit the curandera Lorenza, whose healing ceremony introduces Sonny to the spiritual world in which his coyote nagual functions. There he begins the process of healing from this shock, reordering his existence to move toward a long-term commitment with Rita, a sense of confidence in his role as a shaman, and a larger restoration of his community and culture. But looming throughout the novel is the threat of violence, socioeconomic inequity, and the destruction of traditional cultures at the hands of drug cartels and military intervention in faraway places. In the process, Raven evolves from an eco-terrorist and leader of a dangerous cult to a player in the international drug trade and a marker of the kinds of contemporary challenges to the well-being of the community from which Anaya is writing, including the disintegration of familial bonds, individualism over communal identity, and materialism. All of these forces combine in a novel that celebrates the power of individual transformation and calls into question the cultural forces that threaten the traditional practices and relationships of family and community that lie at the heart of Anaya's model of human interaction.

An important part of this process of communal reintegration of the role is healing, both at the personal and group levels, which relies heavily on the work of curanderos and the folk practices of healing that they employ. Throughout the four novels—but especially in *Rio Grande Fall*—Lorenza, don Eliseo, and Rita all play this role for Sonny, and he in turn gradually begins to assume that role for the Chicano community as a whole. The symbol of the healer is a powerful one in the literature and folklore of the Southwest, and Anaya repeated returns to this image; Ultima is a quintessential healer, and it is no

accident that Lucinda in *Albuquerque* is a nurse, a modern version of the curandera figure. As George Hartley defines it in his discussion of Gloria Anzaldúa's work as a form of healing, curanderismo is a "synthesis of indigenous healing practices from Arab Africa, Europe, and the Americas [that] made possible a mode of practical consciousness that offered indigenous peoples (including mestizos) a concrete yet discreet means of resisting the colonizing impact" of both Spanish and Anglo intrusions into the cultural space of the Southwest (137). As Sonny comes to know and develop power with these healing arts, he serves as a powerful marker of Anaya's assertion that cultural wholeness can be achieved through a return to the past, the traditions that underlie the mestizo consciousness and that can remake the world.

Curanderismo as a hybrid practice becomes a central theme in Hartley's discussion, and Anaya emphasizes the role of the healer in bridging seemingly contradictory epistemological systems to arrive at a deeper understanding of human nature. By presenting healers like Lorenza and don Eliseo as individuals who understand that exclusionary models of human existence ultimately fail, Anaya places them in a tradition of resistance to hegemonic values through both syncretism and hybridity. The former occurs when the marginalized epistemological system retains its core identity beneath a surface of conformity. Thus, Eliseo's morning prayer to the Lords and Ladies of Light employs the Christian mode of devotion while retaining what Hartley refers to as "polytheistic tribal-indigenous source" (141). Similarly, Lorenza's healing arts include a sense of Western religious consciousness, but the underlying theme is one of a pre-modern connection with the natural world and the complex pantheon of pre-Columbian

spirits. The latter form of resistance—hybridity—entails the formation of entirely new ontological categories derived from a fundamental mixing of disparate categories, thereby “allowing old and new cultural narratives to complement one another and remain meaningful” in a variety of social contexts (Alvarado and Nehring, 87). Thus, Sonny’s emergent understanding of his identity as a *coyote*, a mixture of Hispanic and Native racial and ethnic identities, marks a powerful form of resisting the dominant cultural narratives of both Anglo-America—which tends to see the world simply as white and non-white, Self and Other—and historic denial of and hostility toward American Indian identity. By embracing his complex identity, Sonny enacts the kind of decolonial reimagining of self and community that Anzaldúa presents as a powerful remedy for the fracturing of self brought on by colonialist violence.

In this respect, images of healing in *Rio Grande Fall* take a central role. These images include Sonny's visits to Lorenza and the overall theme of combating the spiritual malaise that Anaya identifies in people like Madge Swenson, the director of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, whose licentious lifestyle has severed her from the spiritual strength of the land, an act symbolized by her relationship to flying, which becomes not a transcendence of the mundane, but an escape from the realities of a world that disappoints her. In this respect, Anaya's idea of flying becomes a foundational aspect of the text. The intervention of his mentors saves Sonny from this kind of fate, as he learns to fly in order to gain perspective, as when he and Lorenza take a helicopter to find Raven, looking for signs from the sky, thereby gaining a perspective different than that from the ground, enabling them to find Rita after Raven abducts her. Unlike the escapism

of Madge's flying, or the high associated with drug use that Anaya critiques throughout the text, Sonny's experience with flight entails a process of transcending the physical world in order to see more clearly and enact a healing of the community. Healing, in this context, becomes a form of what Vizenor calls "manifest manners," which he defines as "the absence of the real in the ruins of tribal representations" (*Manifest Manners*, 8). These ruins surround Sonny in the novel as he digs into the criminal underworld, uncovering that much of that which is wrong with the modern world is a direct result of the history of violence enacted by various colonial forces, each of which has built its authority on a system of official and implicit discrimination.

For Anaya, this act of healing is deeply rooted in the ceremonies or communal worship and connection. Thus, events such as the burning of el Coco, the boogeyman figure of Hispanic folklore, become moments of community-building and restoration. When Sonny and Rita visit the South Valley festival that culminates in the effigy-burning that is part of many New Mexican celebrations of autumn, they meet Ben Chavez, the writer who stands in for Anaya himself in several of his novels. Chavez warns Sonny that Raven is at the festival, and then disappears, reminding Sonny of the Greek trickster Pan and leading Sonny to the realization that "the writer *was* a brujo" (*Rio Grande Fall* 93). Similarly, later in the novel, Sonny describes the equinox as the time when "the people from the pueblos would pray for the return of the sun; there would be a cycle of ceremonies and dances. Prayers and rituals" (246), all of which serves in Anaya's world to restore to balance the elements of human interaction that have been poisoned by violence and inequality. Through a return to the beliefs and practices of the past, Anaya asserts, the

Chicano community can reestablish a communal ethos of caring for the poor, focusing on family relationships, and ethical treatment of the natural world.

These practices extend beyond the world of Hispanic Catholicism that provides the framework for religious expression in the text, incorporating into the world of the novel a variety of elements and forms related to religious belief and practice drawn from both Western and Indigenous systems through the hybrid nature of *curanderismo*. As Kenneth Lincoln argues, “Native lyricists and tribal narratives are more concerned with how ancestral traditions and ceremonial complexes feed into today's cultural literacy” (10), and Anaya integrates those concerns into the text to create a system in which Sonny succeeds in accessing the power to face and defeat Raven only as he comes to know and respect the diverse means of exercising spiritual power. These include the prayers his mother offers to the *santos* for his safety, the *curanderismo* of Lorenza, the love and affection of Rita, and the songs and prayers of don Eliseo. These multiple influences on his life and spiritual progress contribute to Sonny's understanding of who he is and how his relationship to Coyote empowers him to resist the impulse toward egotism, violence, and destruction that Raven embodies and seeks to inflict on the world. All of these elements come into play in *Rio Grande Fall*, as the plot moves from an individual level—Gloria's murder and the personal issues that raises for Sonny—to a larger-scale emphasis on family dynamics, community relationships, and the macro-level discussions of history and power that pervade the novel.

As part of this expanding vision of how tricksterism plays into both the micro-scale of the

individual and the larger picture of groups and countries, Anaya explores the concept of crossing borders—the political border between Mexico and the United States, the physical borders of earth and sky, the economic borders between the poor and the wealthy, and the social borders between Anglo and Hispanic cultures. In each case, Sonny moves from one space to another—not always smoothly or painlessly—and enacts the trickster heuristic of challenging demarcations and upsetting binaries. Thus, when Sonny is entering a trance-like state during a healing ceremony with Lorenza, he returns to childhood memories and wonders to himself, “When did the senses of the child leave off and the dreams begins?” a question that underscores the fluidity of the boundary between memory and dream, vision and reality (121). As Sonny grows in his understanding of the world of spirits and the role of his own relationship to the trickster figure Coyote in defeating Raven, he learns that his mission is not simply to solve a crime, but to rebuild and restore a community through a return to practices and rituals rooted in history and tradition.

Three months have passed since Sonny defeated Raven, and Sonny has come to believe that his enemy is gone, drowned in the flood waters at the end of *Zia Summer*. But as he returns from the spiritual journey that is part of the cleansing ceremony that Lorenza performs, Sonny sees a vision of “a body falling from the sky” (3), an image that later becomes reality as he learns that Veronica Worthy, the key witness in the state’s case against Tamara Dubronsky for Gloria’s murder, has been found dead near the Rio Grande after falling—or being pushed—from a hot air balloon. This image also serves as an introduction to the book’s twin themes of flying and falling, which recur throughout the

text and mark a departure from the on-the-ground nature of the mystery in *Zia Summer*. Here, both the crime and the underlying motives for it tie in to an otherworldly trope that takes on a new level of importance in *Rio Grande Fall*. As the plot moves along, Sonny comes to realize that not only has Raven survived the raging waters of the flooded arroyo, but he has also tapped into a deeper, darker power that transcends the world that Sonny knows, which in turn requires the hero to go on his own quest into this world of spirits, guided by Lorenza, don Eliseo, and Rita, all of whom save him in various ways throughout the novel.

It is here that Lorenza's role as curandera upsets this reading of Anaya, as she provides an alternate form of femininity that merges these three concepts into a more workable and realistic form of female desire and identity. In many ways, it is here power as a curandera that enables this blending to occur; as Hartley observes in the writing of Gloria Anzaldúa, there is a "decolonizing power of the curandera, the power to heal the open wound of the colonial border by reclaiming the healing and guiding power of indigenous women" (140). It is no accident that Lorenza's healing practices draw heavily from non-Western belief systems, and her training as a curandera comes from Native and mestiza women, not Christian or modern medical sources. She stands as response to and critique of those religious and scientific models of curing, models that Anaya proposes are problematic in and of themselves because of their connection with colonialism. And through Lorenza, Anaya argues that true healing can only be done through a completely decolonial agent. Just as Ultima's curanderismo challenges the modern impulse toward technological advancement represented by the image of the atomic blast at the edge of Anaya's world,

Lorenza's role as spiritual guide to Sonny throughout the novels checks Raven's efforts to use that same technology to drive the world into chaos and darkness.

At the same time, Lorenza also marks a complicated sexual tension in Sonny's mind, and he repeatedly finds himself drawn to her physical and personal attractiveness, a desire that threatens to seduce him, but that ultimately seems to be under her control, not his. And even when Sonny does sexualize Lorenza, deciding at one point that she and Rita could be sisters (and implying something of the desire to break that social taboo), he is always checked by both his commitment to Rita and Lorenza's own power over him. She is clearly not just another woman whom he feels he can use as an object of his gaze; rather, she is a powerful and wise mentor and friend, much like don Eliseo, and Sonny arrives at the point where he views Lorenza—and by extension women more generally—as a fully-realized person. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ways in which Lorenza tells Sonny tales of Coyote and Raven, of the conflict between different aspects of the trickster mindset, and between colonial powers and resistance to those powers. In the end, we can say that Hartley's assessment of Anzaldúa applies to Lorenza: by “engag[ing] in the process of telling this story [...] she continues the transmission of healing knowledge in the face of colonial forgetting and erasure” (140).

It is in this novel that Raven too realizes that Sonny can in fact thwart his plans, and he seeks to not only disrupt the balloon festival and use that distraction to funnel a massive drug shipment through the city's network of cartels, but also to interrupt Sonny's development as a shaman figure. Raven wants to confuse, entice, and frighten Sonny, and

the sense of imminent danger looms more closely here than in the other novels. Sonny truly is in danger, and at several key moments, he is nearly killed, only to be rescued by a shotgun-wielding Eliseo or the timely arrival of Rita or Lorenza. And the novel's culmination, as Sonny is nearly killed by the mad scientist who has been working with Raven, marks a decided departure from the sense of macho individualism of the first novel, in which Sonny often found himself in solitude and introspection. In *Rio Grande Fall*, Sonny is accompanied by his friends and guides, including the image of coyote as Sonny's spirit guide and protector. Throughout the novel, Sonny grows in his ability to channel spiritual energy, but he is also vulnerable, exposed, and at risk. In this respect, *Rio Grande Fall* represents the pivotal turn in the series, as Sonny begins to grow into his role as trickster/shaman, a process that Anaya captures in Sonny's visit to Lorenza; as Sonny recalls a childhood memory, he describes communing with a pack of coyotes in the bosque:

The river was serene, peaceful. The canopy of the cottonwoods was the underworld of his childhood. He had fallen back into childhood, and there on the damp bank of the pond sat the four coyotes. [...] He stepped into the middle of their circle. The coyotes stood around him, east, north, west, south. Quiet sentries marking the sacred directions, and he at the center. Their energy flowed to him, filling him with lightness, exuberation. (121)

The act of placing Sonny at the center and surrounding him with a set of coyotes—representing the Zia sun imagery that recurs throughout the novels—allows Anaya to reconstruct a world, one in which Trickster is not at the edges, but in the center, and the mestizo hero acts as a fully realized self, in opposition to the colonial object imposed by

hegemonic forces. In his memory, Sonny recognizes his inherent power and capability, and this vision guides him to confront and drive off Raven.

Sonny's growing power mirrors Anaya's interest in giving voice to the ethnic minority experience that has been traditionally ignored by the dominant culture, which sees its own specific, culturally-located worldview as normative. In her discussion of *Bless Me, Ultima* as a representative Chicano text in the modern multicultural curriculum, Delia Poey describes how efforts to “re-edify the Eurocentric, white, male, middle-class perspective” serves as an expression of “public anxiety regarding contested definitions of history, art, and culture” (266). In this respect, Anaya is not only entering the space of the detective genre and inserting there a Chicano voice; rather, he is continuing the project of challenging assumptions about the historical and cultural meta-narratives and artistic and hermeneutic models that are valued. By tracing Sonny's development as a self-aware and empowered subject who acts within the specific cultural space of his ethnic background—specifically his hybrid belief system, linguistic practices, and understanding of good and evil—Anaya resists that normalizing and totalizing impulse, arguing instead for culturally-specific readings of human experience.

These culturally-specific elements include the folklore of Hispanic New Mexico, with ominous and threatening figures like La Malinche and El Coco, which represent a range of preoccupations with the dark and unknowable. Tales of these kinds of forces inform a reading of Anaya's fiction, including the Sonny Baca novels, in which Anaya revisits the legend of La Malinche, the consort of Cortez who has been understood alternately as a

traitor to Indigenous cultures and a symbol of hybrid resistance to the demands of colonialism. In his discussion of similar folklore elements related to the diabolic in Anaya's fiction, Clements asserts that “the devil is clearly alive and well in the Albuquerque, New Mexico, of Anaya's fiction” (54). As Sonny comes to realize that Raven embodies a form of evil that extends beyond the relatively simple crimes of *Zia Summer*, he sees that this struggle will encompass spiritual as well as physical confrontation. Raven thus fits into Lincoln's discussion of how “shapeshifters slough in and out of recognizable identity, confusing and tricking and thieving other life-forms” (294). In this respect, Raven's violence entails a lack of wholeness, a tendency to abandon his true identity and assume a variety of masks in order to manipulate those who support him and outmaneuver those who pursue him.

An integral part of this process comes as Sonny learns that, as a shaman, he has the ability to transcend reality and “fly”; he, too, can overcome the limitations of the physical world, using that power to thwart Raven. Anaya presents this image in other places, notably his 2006 short story collection, *The Man Who Could Fly*, the title story of which centers on the legend of the brujo, the magical figure who can literally fly. This idea, which has deep roots in Hispanic folktales from the rural spaces of eastern and northern New Mexico, where a Catholic ethos blends with Indigenous belief to create folk practices centered in a connection with place and the natural world. For Anaya, the power of place enables the person who recognizes that power to transcend earthly reality, overcome the violence of a world imbued with inequality, and create a new plane of existence in which self can reach out to other in respect and concern. And by placing both

Sonny and Raven in the space of brujos who fly in a variety of ways, Anaya explores the emerging theme of both men as tricksters, embodiments of the tension between chaos and order, Self and Other, tensions that Anaya believes are ignored by the dominant culture, to the detriment of entire communities. This healing of the deep wounds of a history of displacement and dysfunction becomes Sonny's true mission, one that ultimately transforms him by bringing him to the depths of loss and sorrow; Sonny's victory over Raven is followed in the novel by the attack in Jerry Stammer's laboratory, in which Sonny nearly dies and awakes to a world of unimaginable pain and disorientation, unable to move or speak.

As Sonny lies unconscious after the debilitating attack at the end of the novel leaves him paralyzed, he hears Eliseo tell him that "Brujos can fly," which then provokes his thoughts:

I am a brujo, Sonny thought. For my spirit to fly is nothing new. I fly in dreams, I fly in love, I fly in the morning when the light of the Señores y Señoras de la Luz fills my soul with clarity. I fly in beauty, the beauty of the land I love, the people, the sounds, sights, and smell of all that I am. I am beginning to find my power.

(332)

Unlike the conclusion of *Zia Summer*, this end signals that inevitability of future encounters with Raven, a fact that Sonny acknowledges before going after Stammer, realizing that "he would meet Raven again" (320). This realization then gives Sonny the strength to "return to the world of pain" (336) after his struggle with death in his confused dreams, a world in which he will be forced to face Raven again, but a world in

which the people he loves wait to support and heal him. In this respect, *Rio Grande Fall* becomes the site of both Sonny's lowest moments and his conquest of the fear that Raven embodies.

The backdrop for the novel—the Balloon Fiesta—provides Anaya with the opportunity to explore the theme of flight, as well as the associated concept of falling. Early on in the novel, Anaya informs the readers that “Sonny loved to fly,” that he has learn to hang glide and pilot a helicopter, and that “flying was part of the release he had sought, perhaps part of the danger, when he was going through his divorce” (9). As the novel moves along, Anaya rounds out more of Sonny's character, making him a more three-dimensional figure than in either *Albuquerque* or *Zia Summer*, in which Sonny appears in much more polarized terms—the shady PI in *Albuquerque* or the heroic fool of *Zia Summer*. As Anaya reveals more about Sonny's past and his ongoing journey into the world of spirits, Sonny becomes a nuanced character, one who can more fully speak for and to the concerns and aspirations of the community for which he is a symbol. And as Sonny comes to understand that “beneath the ordinary world lay the images of the world of spirits” (288), he models for the audience a sense of how transformation is possible, including the ultimate political and social transformation of an oppressed minority into an empowered subject in its own history and identity.

As the *limpieza* ends, Sonny receives a phone call and learns that the image in his vision has was in fact a portent of a real event, and he and Rita leave to visit the crime scene. There they find Veronica's body impaled on a dead cottonwood try in the bosque near the

Rio Grande, along with swarms of police, including the chief, Sam Garcia, who tries unsuccessfully throughout the novel to convince himself, Sonny, and the public that Veronica's death was an accident, and not an act of violence by Raven. Sonny knows better, sensing Raven's presence, both in his vision and at the crime scene, and immediately his thoughts turn to Raven's trickster qualities: "Raven could fly [...] There was death in the sky" (12). As Sonny comes to realize that his premonition served as his first clue, he is able to recognize, appreciate, and act on similar moments of inspiration and intuition, as, a few pages later, when he wanders off into the undergrowth of the river bosque, searching for traces of his foe: "He followed the depressions in the sand, smelling for spoor, like a rive coyote would smell the area of a recent kill, checking for danger" (17). Sonny, who frequently walks into Raven's traps, gradually learns to trust his coyote senses, to see invisible dangers and to avoid them, and, while he still finds himself captured in a Juarez drug ring later on, he succeeds more frequently in outsmarting Raven, as when he flies in a balloon to meet Raven, but not before armoring the basket against what he realizes is the real danger—a shooter on the ground, not one in the black balloon.

Another important moment in Sonny's development as coyote-like trickster occurs in this visit to the crime scene, as he confronts Garcia, with whom he often comes into conflict in *Zia Summer*; the police chief sees Sonny as both an amateur whose involvement with the investigation will interfere with his official procedures and a threat to his official status. Here, instead of directly taking on Garcia, Sonny works circuitously, starting with gradual conversation with Jerry Candelaria, one of the officers that Sonny knows. Setting

up his plan of attack, Sonny realizes that while he “wasn’t in the mood for chatter, but he knew cops. One needed to go around, not straight to the point, to get anything from them” (13). Using this approach, Sonny is able to learn more—both about the facts of the case and regarding the factors involved behind the scenes in the investigation, including the economic impact of the balloon fiesta and the politics of the upcoming mayoral election—than he could have by directly confronting the chief. Sonny the brash PI transforms here into Sonny the wily trickster who can subvert and disrupt the forces around him, including both Raven and the official political and social structures that alternately seek to support and defeat him. And while this visit ends in conflict and power struggles over who will investigate Veronica’s death, Sonny’s efforts to work around the situation lead to valuable insights into the possibility of police corruption and drug smuggling, both of which become central to the plot of the novel.

Sonny's association with Coyote expands in *Rio Grande Fall* as he gradually understands how trusting his coyote instincts and running with the coyotes in his visions and dreams will bring him protection and guidance in his quest to combat Raven. This image first appears as the smoke rises from the candle that Lorenza uses during the ceremony and “take[s] the shape of the head of a coyote” (3). To Sonny, this image is a clear sign that he is undergoing a transformation, and that the spirit of the coyote is a personal sign, a marker of his destiny and spiritual progression toward becoming a shaman. Later, as Sonny and Rita drive away from the scene of Veronica’s death, he recounts to her what he saw during the *limpieza*, as well as memories from his childhood, when he would wander to the river and listen to the coyotes. Even at a young age, Sonny claims to have felt a

kinship with these misunderstood and hunted animals, and a small den of coyotes along the bosque had accepted his visits, allowing him to watch them for hours on end (32-33). This kinship between the reclusive coyotes and the boy who would throughout his life feel separate from others—he eschews some of the partying by his friends, he feels out of place as a school teacher, and his life as a detective entails long days of solitude and introspection—becomes a theme for Anaya, who asserts that spiritual experiences are possible only when one is willing to seek distance from society, whether through pilgrimage, ritual, or immersion in books and the oral tradition. Anaya connects these moments in Sonny’s past to other mystical experiences—out-of-body experiences and times when he felt a sensation of flying—to the overarching theme of Sonny’s spiritual sensitivity and power, what Sonny describes as “times when the power of vision had come upon him” (33). These intimations of Sonny’s evolving role as a shaman mark this text as a transition point from the traditional crime narrative to a metaphysical exploration of history, identity, culture, and mythology, all of which Anaya weaves together to create a tale of rediscovering lost roots and missing belief systems.

The act of tracing the clues—both in solving the crimes that Raven commits and in Sonny coming to understand his own place in the world as a shaman—serves therefore as part of the renewal that Anaya emphasizes repeatedly in his work. The violence of colonialism and discrimination leaves deep wounds that rob a culture of its sense of self-definition. In the absence of that inherent agency, all sorts of ills affect people, from crime to poverty to selfishness. And Anaya is quick to emphasize that not only the conquered, subjugated people feel those effects; the colonizers live under the weight of

that history, recognizing even if unconsciously the injustice of the system that privileges their race or class. By immersing Sonny into the world of spirits, Anaya steps outside of that material reality and invokes an epistemology that Western modernity both ignores and erases. As Byrd puts it, “there is a difference between recovered and having never lost in the first place that stands in the breach still for those of us attempting to theorize the legacies of colonialism within indigenous worlds” (xi). Much of what operates in *Rio Grande Fall*—and much of what falls short—is related to this tension between recreating a lost worldview and overcoming the loss to find what still existence beneath the surface of everyday life.

This transition marks a key moment in the series, as Anaya delves more deeply and directly into the world of Native American belief systems and epistemologies, creating a model of narrative that is heavily influenced by Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In the introduction to the collection *American Indian Thought*, Anne Waters explains that “for Indians, the story conveys knowledge, knowledge does not convey the story, as it does for Western philosophy” (xvii). This concept informs a reading of *Rio Grande Fall*, as Anaya moves us from the detective novel as a site of exploring signs to arrive at a fixed and absolute truth, valuing instead the process by which Sonny participates in constructing truth through the stories he hears, tells, and enacts. Anaya’s presents this implicit critique of Western epistemology and the quest for knowledge at all costs in Sonny’s encounter with Tamara, who again tries to seduce him with promises of “a vision of eternity, eternal youth wrapped up in the orgasms of the flesh” (82). Sonny recognizes in this a very real threat, that by succumbing to Tamara, he would be taking a shortcut to

the spiritual insight he seeks, insight that can only come through the long process of listening to and following the voices of his mentors, his ancestors, and the stories of the past.

In addition to the role that don Eliseo, Lorenza, and Rita play as spiritual guides and mentors to Sonny, another character gives an important soliloquy on the subject of good and evil and the role of healers in battling brujos like Raven: dona Concha, the comical older woman who clings to her waning sexuality with a heavy application of makeup and dialogue rife with bawdy innuendo. After Sonny returns home from dropping Rita off at the restaurant she runs, he meets Concha, Eliseo, and Toto outside Eliseo's home. The three are roasting chiles, and Concha makes several allusions to the chiles as phalluses, a clear reference to the traditional trope of Trickster with a comically long penis and an out-of-control libido. But seeing that Sonny is troubled by the scene he has encountered, the three become supportive and give the detective valuable advice about battling evil. The culminating element of this exchange comes—somewhat surprisingly—from Concha, who tells Sonny about the role that curanderas used to play in healing individuals and communities: “They fought el demonio. They were the only ones who knew how to fight the Diablo” (41). Continuing on, Concha delineates that state of her society: “Look around you, look at what’s happening to la gente. The kids are crazy, and so are their parents. Dope, booze, violence. The Diablo is loose, and there’s no one to fight his brujas” (42).

This exchange, which returns to the idea that Raven is more than a man and can “fly”—

both physically and in a spiritual sense of transcending the normal rules of human existence—also serves to introduce one of the key themes of the novel, that of drug trafficking as a plague that threatens the social fabric of the modern Southwest by enslaving the poor and minorities while enriching the powerful groups—including entire governments—that rule the trade routes, distribute cocaine and heroin, and unleash waves of crime in their wake. The underlying mystery of the novel is a massive cocaine shipment being distributed in Albuquerque beneath the shadows of the balloon fiesta, whose director has a history with drugs and whose participants include several infamous players in the drug trade in Latin America dating back to the 1980s. And while for many of the balloonists, “flying had gotten into their blood, [...] it became their religion, [...] they got their jollies floating up to greet the sun” (56), others seek a different kind of high, as well as the power that comes from the immense profit possible in the drug trade. This intrigue woven through the city, which involves ex-CIA agents, law enforcement, street thugs, and international cartels, is complicated even further by Raven, who seeks both money to finance his plots and revenge on Sonny. In working toward these ends, Raven double-crosses and kills several of his competitors and collaborators, leading to a series of gruesome murders that both alert and confuse the police (and Sonny).

All of this lends to *Rio Grande Fall* a much darker and pessimistic tone than *Zia Summer*, as Sonny comes to find that much of the social system that is taken for granted is in fact implicated in crime, drug use, and conspiracy. His mission then becomes more than simply solving a crime or defeating Raven; it expands to a larger restorative project intended to return his community and culture to a sense of harmony, resisting the

violence and inequity of the modern world. Thus, after returning home at the end of the novel's first day, Sonny finds himself reflecting not on a specific crime, but on philosophical questions: "Maybe in a world of violence it was impossible to retain an inner harmony [...] keeping the soul in harmony was a constant struggle" (69). Echoing the seasonal change that leads to harvest and the impending cold of winter, *Rio Grande Fall* hints at the sense of loss that accompanies autumn, as well as the threat of Raven's increased power over Sonny, who finds himself powerless not only to capture his elusive enemy, but also to protect those he loves from his traps. Thus, the conflict of the novel shifts ultimately from solving the murders and stopping the drug shipment to finding Rita and saving her from Raven. This darker tone also emerges in the theme of economic injustice, which Anaya has previously explored in *Heart of Aztlán*, his most overt criticism of modern capitalism and the power of the wealthy over the poor. In *Rio Grande Fall*, this theme recurs in the form of Diego, his wife and daughter, and their friends, a party of homeless people living in the bosque. Each member of the group has a different story, but all have found themselves cut off from family, employment, education, and mainstream society through no fault of their own. In introducing them, Anaya emphasizes the ways that each person's story represents a part of the failure of the American Dream—Diego, the Vietnam veteran who found himself without a home after the war; his wife, Marta, who married him when he was working and has stayed with him even on the streets; their daughter, Christina, who has never had the chance to attend school; Peewee, the former computer engineer who saw his job outsourced; Busboy, the high school dropout; and Peter, the journalist who was run out after trying to uncover corruption in Los Angeles. Their stories—which are markedly devoid of the stereotypes of drug abuse, crime, and

domestic violence typically associated with homelessness in the American psyche—stand in stark contrast to the debauchery of the high-flying elites in business, government, and law enforcement, figures whom Anaya critiques as being the cause of the suffering among the poor.

Diego and his band also serve as a manifestation of the rootlessness that Anaya sees in modern societies, where the past is neglected and tradition is lost through carelessness and the desire for material possessions. While Diego is in Vietnam, his father dies, and his siblings sell the family home, leaving Diego with nowhere to go when he returns from war, already battered by the pain he endured there. As Anaya puts it, Diego “found his roots severed, and his wandering began” (100), a condition that in Anaya’s estimation always leads to pain, isolation, and suffering. Thus, in Sonny they find not only a friendly face, but an advocate who fights to protect and empower this small segment of the homeless population. Upon deciding to take the job offered by the Balloon Fiesta board, Sonny insists that his payment be used to build a home for Diego’s family and friends. Similarly, he provides a temporary home for each member of the group, and seeks to find employment for as many of them as he can. In the space of just a few days, Sonny has transformed the lives of his new friends and rescued them from the vicious cycle of poverty that they had by themselves been unable to break. In what may be his most impressive feat in the novel, Sonny succeeds in overcoming a deep-rooted sense of purposelessness and shame, battling both the institutional forces that permit homelessness and poverty, and the psychological barriers faced by an invisible demographic that lives on the very edges of society.

And, in the end, this may be the most heroic aspect of Sonny's work in this novel, as he fights off a series of obstacles created by Diego to thwart would-be intruders into their bosque camp, and then earns the trust of the band of these refugees from the modern world of urban sprawl that Anaya critiques throughout the series. Sonny is not just the hero flashing on television screens as he solves high-profile crimes and defeats dangerous villains; he is the everyman capable of mixing with the working class in the bars, arm wrestling a drug dealer to gain information, and care for a family in need. And just as he wins the respect and admiration of Diego, Marta, and the others—some of whom repay that debt by saving his life later on in the novel—Sonny is able to both gain the hearts of the people of Albuquerque and connect with the spiritual elements, particularly his coyote nagual, that guide and preserve him. It is this reliance on his instincts that saves his life when he first penetrates the booby-traps Diego has set, and that allows him to connect with the group, who themselves represent coyotes—shunned, misunderstood, ostracized. Sonny's childhood memories, revisited throughout the novel, include several episodes of encountering, watching, and being trusted by coyotes, animals which, despite being hunted and poisoned by ranchers and feared by farmers, survived through cunning and resiliency, much like Sonny, Diego, and the others (see *Rio Grande Fall* 113).

It is this survival instinct that most defines Sonny as the novel progresses and he finds himself repeatedly escaping from Raven's traps, in the Juarez warehouse fire, the runaway balloon flight, and the climactic confrontation in Jerry Stammer's lab. In each case, Sonny senses—and to varying degrees recognizes and acts on—an intuition that he

is in danger, and this, coupled with *Deus ex machina*-type intervention by don Eliseo, Diego, Rita, and others, keeps him alive. Each encounter with Raven and his allies helps sharpen Sonny's self-awareness as a trickster, what Lorenza observes as "a trickster caught in a dangerous and tangled web, and [who] didn't know what it held for him, but [who] could still laugh. He had the spirit to learn and survive" (119). And as he learns to channel this power and invoke the presence of the coyote, Sonny too learns to fly (see *Rio Grande Fall* 122), giving him the ability to combat Raven on his own territory, becoming a trickster in his own right. This then fits with Lorenza's prediction that Sonny will become a brujo himself, as part of the ongoing transformation he undergoes to become a spiritually empowered agent working outside of the imposed bounds of Western metaphysics to enact moments of tricksterism. Sonny's first experience flying in the novel comes when he and Madge, the director of the Balloon Fiesta, go up in a balloon to draw Raven out into the open. As they ascend, Sonny is filled with a sense of excitement: "the rush of freedom coursed through him" (134), and "One felt exhilaration up here" (135). He also feels a sense of pride when his guess that Raven would shoot at the balloon from the ground is proven right, the armor plating on the bottom of the gondola deflecting the bullet while the black balloon believed to hold Raven proves to be nothing more than a diversion, a trick meant to mislead and confuse Sonny and the police.

Later that day, after staking out the Northeast Heights home of John Gilroy, the ex-CIA operative whose ties to Central American drug trafficking make him a prime suspect in Sonny's eyes, Sonny follows Gilroy to the airport, where both men catch a flight to El

Paso, en route to Juarez, where Raven awaits both men. This impromptu journey both taxes Sonny's resources ("Sonny search his jacket pocket and found twenty dollars [...] His credit card would be at its limit now" [168]) and his luck in escaping death. After trailing Gilroy to a Juarez warehouse, Sonny finds that he was the one being followed and is now to be killed in a blaze meant to convince law enforcement that the drug deal was off, and, facing death, Sonny cries out in prayer, first to God, remembering his mother's devout Catholicism, and then to the Señores y Señoras that don Eliseo invokes in his morning prayers to the sun (178-79). As the smoke fills his lungs, Sonny thinks of the people who depend on him, and it is in this moment that he cries out to the spirits he has come to know from don Eliseo and Lorenza: "I give them my soul! Let them return me to my ancestors" (179). Such prayers become part of Sonny's daily ritual from this point on, and the day after he returns to Albuquerque he wakes just before dawn to greet the rising sun: "Grandfather Sun, bless all of life. Fill us with clarity [...] I wash myself in your light" (189). Sonny is now not just a witness to don Eliseo's faith in the Señores y Señoras de la Luz, but an active participant in the act of inviting light and power into the world, thereby resisting Raven on a larger scale.

Sonny's journey toward spiritual awareness in *Rio Grande Fall* brings him closer to the model of cultural completeness and authenticity that Anaya first proposes in *Bless Me, Ultima*, and which informs a reading of all of his work. Just like Ultima, whom Scott Sanders describes as having "the inclusive timelessness of an integrated culture within her" (44), Lorenza, Eliseo, and Rita each represent an embodiment of spiritual and cultural wholeness derived from an awareness of connections between the mythologies,

rites, and ethical standards of various faith systems. By syncretically linking disparate traditions, these guides lead the novice—Antonio in *Bless Me, Ultima*, and Sonny in *Rio Grande Fall*—to a more fully-developed sense of self as part of the cosmological interplay of the spirit world and the physical plane of existence. After he is rescued by the cab driver who brought him to the warehouse in the first place, Sonny recognizes the parallels between his adventures (and misadventures) and those of his famous great-grandfather and namesake, Elfego Baca, who ran with Billy the Kid and fought unscrupulous ranchers on the New Mexico frontier. This connection with his famous ancestor becomes a theme both here and in *Shaman Winter*, as Sonny learns to take an active rather than passive role in his dreams and take on at times the character of Elfego Baca in them. In *Rio Grande Fall* the bond is less certain, as Sonny simply wonders in his dazed state, “Maybe I am the reincarnation of the Bisabuelo [...] come back to fight on the side of law and order” (180).

Sonny’s next experience with flying comes the next day, but this time it is Raven who flies, marking the complex ways in which the overarching theme of the novel functions. After telling Howard about his experience in Juarez, Sonny pauses: “An agitated feeling coursed through Sonny. He sniffed the air. Raven was about to strike again, close to home” (194). This premonition is verified soon thereafter, when Sonny learns that Raven has taken Rita and Christina, the daughter of Diego and Marta. Lorenza calls to tell Sonny that she has had a vision of Raven flying down to take Rita, and in a later scene she describes the image of the place where they have been taken, a building on the industrial northern edge of town that she has seen from above in a vision. Sonny borrows

a helicopter from the Balloon Fiesta and flies with Lorenza to the spot, located on Infierno Street—Hell (206). The telling thing about this episode is how here—unlike in the other moments of flight in the novel—Sonny is in control, not only flying the chopper, but also guiding Lorenza to recognize and interpret the images of her vision to find Rita; he has gone from being the passive recipient of guidance to acting as the agent of flight, the pilot and navigator who determines what happens next, a transformation that mirrors his spiritual growth as a shaman and brujo throughout the novels, as well as the cultural renaissance that Anaya advocates for among the Chicano community of New Mexico. Flight then becomes the metaphor for escaping the apparent reality of an unjust world and establishing an alternate perspective, one based in assuming the role of subject.

But this triumph is short-lived, as Sonny finds that he must land inside the barbed-wire fence that surrounds the warehouse, alerting Raven and his minions to his arrival and losing the element of surprise. Even though he knows he is walking into a trap, Sonny is driven on by his concern for Rita, a weakness that Raven exploits to trap Sonny, who he then throws, along with Lorenza, tied up, in the basket of the black balloon, which is then set to soar uncontrollably until Sonny and Lorenza run out of oxygen. In setting the balloon off, Raven comments on the fact that Sonny, who is learning to control his dreams and fly, and who just piloted the helicopter to Raven's lair, is now going to fly without any control: "You're going to fly as high as a raven. But you ain't got wings! [...] Let's see if the coyote can fly!" (210). Soaring higher and higher, Sonny realizes that he and Lorenza face several risks—freezing in the thin air, running out of oxygen, and being shot at from the DEA helicopter that buzzes by them. He strains against the ropes that

hold him bound, and comes to the realization that “not sheer strength, but craftiness was what was needed” (212). As part of Sonny’s development as a shaman, he realizes in moments such as this that his ability to survive is not wrapped up in physical strength or the traditional forms of conflict that define the detective genre; rather, he must tap into the spirit of Coyote, outsmarting Raven, unraveling puzzles and traps to find alternate ways of fighting.

But notwithstanding these specific episodes, the most significant form of flight for Sonny is not in a balloon or helicopter; it comes as he realizes his potential as a brujo and takes a leap of faith to enter the world of spirits and become empowered to combat Raven in that realm as well as the physical reality where they have confronted each other. And the primary resistance to this form of flight is internal—Sonny doubts his ability to take this step, and Raven repeatedly exploits this fear to escape and attack Sonny. But with each encounter, the transformation from ordinary private investigator to spiritual actor continues, and gradually don Eliseo’s explanation of a brujo as “a shaman, a man who can fly” (229) inspires Sonny to embrace the trickster traits of Coyote and follow his instincts, which take him to a seedy South Valley bar where he arm wrestles the drug dealer Turco; and then to the ritzy Pyramid Hotel, where he finds the body of the murdered John Gilroy; and finally to a meeting with William Stone, the ex-CIA agent-turned drug smuggler, whose armed body guards threaten to shoot Sonny dead in the middle of the church in Albuquerque’s Old Town Plaza. Each of these episodes follows a similar thread: Sonny hits a dead end in his investigation, feels an unexplainable urge to go off-course to follow a seemingly-unrelated lead, and finds himself in grave danger

before escaping, being rescued, or backing away cautiously and carefully. The “coyote spirit” that Sonny acknowledges as playing a role in his escape from Turco’s thugs is the underlying theme of this fast-paced segment of the novel, as Sonny seeks desperately to recover Rita from Raven’s grasp (240).

After this last flight, Sonny returns to the launch site for the Balloon Fiesta, where he watches the crowd admiring the balloons, before confronting Madge Swenson and Jerry Stammer about Gilroy’s death and the impending drug shipment. In this moment, Sonny considers the traditions of some of the indigenous peoples of the region: “Did the Hopi have a kachina for flight? [...] The gods came to visit the pueblo, and so flight was for the gods, and not for man. It made sense” (257). Coming as it does on the heels of Sonny’s fourth encounter in the text with flight, this thought figures prominently into the logic of the novel and the tension between modern and traditional lifeways and worldviews, a tension that Anaya explores throughout the series, as well as in his other works. Earlier in the novel, after a session with Lorenza, Sonny ponders the role that history and tradition play in his life, and how even before Lorenza explained to him the need to keep alive the connection with one’s past, he had long maintained in his life a bond with his own ancestors, in particular the patriarch, his deceased father and his famous law-enforcing great-grandfather, Elfego Baca; “he honored them, for their work, for the history, for the traditions and beliefs they had passed down” (116). Here, flying a helicopter becomes for Anaya a modern embodiment of the brujo flight he presents elsewhere in the novels, and it is telling that only after coming to see himself as a shaman in training can Sonny take control of a flight and assume the role of pilot, just as he later

comes to control his dreams to confront and defeat Raven. Anaya also presents flight as an aesthetic experience, one that ultimately defies language, culture, history, and metaphysics, entering into the realm of pure beauty that he elsewhere associates directly with the spiritual journey that Sonny has undertaken to connect with his Coyote nagual and obtain power to resist Raven. After Sonny seemingly breaks the case and finds cocaine hidden in a propane tank, the Balloon Fiesta returns to its normal operations, beginning the day with a “mass ascension” of balloons from the field. As hundreds of balloons rise from the ground, Anaya reverts to poetry: “In the dazzling glory of sunrise, the flowers had exploded, blossomed, and were now rising. The beauty of the mass ascension left everyone dumbfounded” (267).

CHAPTER 5

SHAMAN WINTER: ENTERING THE DREAMS OF/WITH THE ANCESTORS

With *Shaman Winter*, the third installment in the Sonny Baca series, Anaya continues to move from localized crime to a truly global struggle between Raven, with his desire to return the world to a state of chaos and violence, and Sonny, who by now has come to realize that he is not just solving crimes committed by Raven, but fighting him in a supernatural contest for the fate of humanity. Under the continued guidance of don Eliseo, Sonny comes to understand that this conflict began long ago, leaving the hero to struggle to tap into his own spiritual strength and become what Eliseo describes as “the main character” in his dreams, and not just an observer of Raven’s crimes (128). As he expands the scope of the detective novel from the immediately discernible physical world to Sonny’s dreams, Anaya not only expands the geographical space of the novel (as in *Rio Grande Fall*), but also distorts traditional Western conceptualizations of time, integrating events from the present into the past, and vice-versa. In short, Anaya is here moving from the basic genre conventions of the detective novel and engaging in a profoundly spiritual discussion of the nature of good and evil, the relationship between communal wholeness and universal truths, and the ways in which the individual soul can affect the world as a whole. *Shaman Winter* therefore complicates and expands the idea of Trickster that Anaya posits in the first two novels—and in his earlier works—emphasizing the fact that the liminality of Trickster includes not just social mores and expectations, but the very nature of human reality and temporality.

As the intrigue behind Raven's attempts to create a nuclear weapon deepens, Anaya moves the narrative away from political instability in Latin America and right-wing extremists in the United States government, and toward an examination of how the post-Cold War world introduces new threats, which, in the end, merely reflect and repeat ancient insecurities about insiders vs. outsiders, group vs. individual identity, and physical vs. metaphysical interpretations of human experience. Ultimately, *Shaman Winter* explores the importance of a world in which "the people remembered their prayers and ceremonies [and...] still kept the sacred calendar of their ancestors, still survived in the essence of their original dream" (102). By connecting the mythic past to the contemporary world, Anaya argues that the cure for many social ills—from economic inequality and racism to crime and war—lies in reconnecting with and honoring the traditions and myths of the past, the heritage of ancient civilizations that was erased and ignored by Western modernity and the Manichean impulse toward simplistic binaries. To do this, Anaya moves the narrative from the physical world to Sonny's dreams, in which he and Raven battle for control of the historical narrative.

The conflict in this novel centers on two main avenues of Raven's attacks. First is the surface conflict; Raven has obtained a radioactive, weapons-grade plutonium pit, and the FBI calls in Sonny as part of their investigation, which in turn leads to the revelation that an extremist organization that has infiltrated the governments of various nations funds Raven's activities, all with the goal of destabilizing democracies and throwing the world into an ethnocentric totalitarianism that feeds off people's fears of growing minority populations. This plot line allows Anaya to critique racism and hegemony, introducing a

general audience to the idea of Aztlán, which Anaya identifies as being located along “the northern Rio Grande valley” (74-5). At the same time, Sonny investigates a series of kidnappings, all of which correlate with the appearance of Raven—in the form of the Bringer of Curses—in Sonny's dreams. There, he abducts women whom Sonny recognizes as his ancestors, all in the effort of eradicating Sonny from existence. These parallel plot lines—the international intrigue, the kidnappings, and the ancestral abductions—converge in the idea of Raven as a disrupter of both past and present, and Anaya consciously presents Raven as a chaotic force in this novel. In this respect, Sonny’s detective work in this novel even more closely aligns with the hermeneutic work of the reader, deciphering the marks and traces in the text. As don Eliseo explains after Sonny wakes from a confusing, nonlinear, temporally displaced dream at the novels outset, dreams—and texts—are filled with “Symbols that needed to be interpreted” in order for a person to fully engage in the work on constructing a reality (4).

Likewise, *Shaman Winter* is the most philosophical of the four novels, and Anaya frequently leaves the plot line—which involves the disappearance of young girls who are being kidnapped by Raven—to reflect on both the spiritual journey that Sonny is on and the postmodern and post-structuralist themes that Anaya is interested in with this text. Again in the preface, Anaya explains that “writing this novel took me into the world of the shaman” (ix), a self-referential statement on the process of writing, one that connects him explicitly to the protagonist. While all of Anaya’s novels are to some extent autobiographical (Benjie from *Heart of Aztlán*—reintroduced in *Albuquerque* and the Sonny Baca novels as the writer Ben Chavez—suffered a life-threatening swimming

accident as a youth, as did Anaya; Antonio in *Bless Me, Ultima* underwent the cultural dislocation of urban migration following World War II), this self-conscious act of reflecting on his role as writer is unique in the body of Anaya's fiction. As Carmen Flys-Junquera explains in her discussion of the first three Sonny Baca novels, in *Shaman Winter*, Anaya presents "a quest where actions in the past affect the present and vice versa" (129), creating a model of temporality into and out of which a person can, with sufficient training and self-awareness, move and act in ways that contradict typical understandings of time and space. This historical interconnectedness lies at the heart not only of the novel, but of Anaya's model of history as both cyclical and spiritual, the past and present part of a matrix of events, rather than a simply linear model. Later in the novel, when Sonny finds that Raven has killed three guards at the Los Alamos National Laboratories and stolen a plutonium pit, Anaya describes the scene in Derridean terms: "the footprints of the assassin were red insignias leading down the hallway. Footsteps of the devil" (79). This image of signs and traces—central to the very genre of detective fiction, in which the main character acts out the process of interpreting clues, the heuristic of analysis and meaning-formation—occurs more in *Shaman Winter* than in the other Sonny Baca novels, as Sonny here dives more deeply into the shadowy world of Raven's dream-stealing, the ultra-right-wing group called the Avengers that finances Raven's activities, and the historical scenes that Sonny visits throughout the novel, moments in which an entire historical narrative is being rewritten and revised.

This process of reconstructing a world in harmony with the spiritual plane of existence that Sonny comes to understand relies on his ability to follow the advice that don Eliseo

gives him midway through the novel: “You have the gift, Sonny. Now you have to develop the power” (128). In this respect, *Shaman Winter* focuses less on Raven's terrorist plots—which figure prominently in the her three novels—than on his targeted efforts to thwart Sonny's development as a shaman and spiritual leader for his people. Sonny here undergoes an initiation into the world of dreams, learning to shape his dreams and act in them, rather than simply watching as Raven carries out his plans. By so doing, he becomes a more fully developed trickster figure, aware of his role in the ages-old conflict that Eliseo goes on to explain as part of the endless struggle between violent reductionism and inclusive ethical interactions. In answering Sonny's questions about Raven's identity as a trickster, Eliseo tells Sonny that:

We have been on earth a long time. We carry the clarity of the Universal Spirit in our hearts. It is our responsibility not to let darkness win. Just like the medicine men are praying to give the sun strength, like the Catolicos pray at the church for the birth of Cristo, like everyone prays to the birth of light, we pray. (129)

By including multiple modes of religious practice and belief in his list of those who resist the spirit of chaos and destructiveness embodied by Raven, Eliseo provides a counter-logic to the exclusionary logic of Self/Other binaries. For him—and eventually, for Sonny—different modes of expressing the human desire to worship can achieve the same goal of leading one toward wholeness and peace. Rather than emphasizing one “right” version of reality, Eliseo valorizes plurality, an emergent theme in *Shaman Winter*, and an indication of how Anaya's model of hybridity extends to address broader images of multiple modes of being and knowing.

A similar idea emerges in Poey's discussion of the role *Bless Me, Ultima* plays as a novel that is widely used in schools as a representative Chicano text. Defining multicultural education as the emphasis on “critical perspectives [that] situate representations of race, class, and gender in contexts of social struggle where meaning is constructed and deconstructed in specific histories and power relations,” Poey argues that Anaya's work resists hegemonic demands toward sameness, presenting instead a model of human experience rooted in the unique elements of different cultures (268). Sonny's role as don Eliseo's apprentice underscore this idea—only by demonstrating a willingness to call into question his preconceived notions of the world around him does Sonny succeed in unearthing the mysteries associated with Raven's efforts to introduce chaos and violence into his world. The ability to question one's own understanding of self, identity, knowledge, and reality lies at the heart of Anaya's configuration of tricksterism. In the end, *Shaman Winter* is a story of how Raven aligns himself with cultural forces that resist racial and cultural diversity, and how Sonny emerges as a voice for the silenced minorities of his community, those who live in the shadows and find themselves ignored by the dominant culture, prey to the drug trafficking, crime, and poverty inherent in Raven's world.

This idea emerges before the novel even begins, as Anaya refers to this as a “unified approach” toward healing the deep wounds of a fragmented culture (ix). The reissued version of *Shaman Winter*, published in 2004 by the University of New Mexico Press, includes a preface that provides insight into Anaya's explicit purpose in writing the novel and expanding Sonny's conflict with Raven to include a form of time travel in which

Raven hijacks Sonny's dream and invades his family history. In the preface, Anaya states that "if we are to truly know ourselves we must know our dreams" (ix), and this process of self-definition through understanding one's dreams—both an echo and a rethinking of psychoanalysis—pervades the text. In *Shaman Winter*, the most dramatic moments come not in a stakeout or fistfight, as per the typical crime novel, but in the dreams that Sonny works to control and shape, becoming in the process the author of his experience, a true "shaman of words." This idea is common in this part of Anaya's career, stretching to the essay, "The Shaman of Words," in which Anaya argues that the writer from an ethnic minority group plays the role of spiritual guide for that community, connecting the present generation to their mythic past and cultural roots through storytelling, an act that he associates with spiritual incantation—by telling a story, the author-as-shaman gives voice to a specific interpretation of the communal identity and empowers the community to assert itself against the hegemonic violence that would seek to silence and erase it.

It is here that the figure of trickster and the traits of trickster discourse emerge in Anaya's writing in new ways, not just as a representation of another reality, but as an actual means of accessing that reality and thereby affecting the physical world. In *Shaman Winter*, Sonny invokes the power and spirit of Coyote as his nagual when he enters his dreams as an active participant, facing Raven on a spiritual plane. But the narrative act bleeds out from those dreams to the novel itself, and Anaya plays the role of trickster, much as Ammons argues in her discussion of minority writers who embody the traits of tricksters as they write against the dominant culture. This act of resistance emerges from what Gruber refers to as "storytelling becom[ing] a communal venture of multiple voices and

perspectives, intertwining in multilayered, heteroglossic narrative” (103). By enacting the process of storytelling as a communal project, one that he contends can ultimately heal a broken social system and lead to wholeness and harmony, Anaya himself serves as a trickster, transgressing the boundaries of the detective novel and introducing into the narrative entirely non-standard elements and symbols. As Anaya explains in a 1997 article entitled “Deep Roots,” the history of Chicanas/os has been elided from the American narrative of progress and expansion, and “the country will be wiser and healthier, when it stops seeing us as the Other and sees us and integral to the land we have lived on for so long.” (10). This argument for integrating multiple cultural perspectives to create a fuller and more equitable history of place informs a reading of *Shaman Winter*; in which Anaya retraces the history of conquest, assimilation, colonization, and resistance dating back to the arrival of Spanish *conquistadores*.

Continuing on, Anaya asserts that this integration and re-creation of history involves recognizing individual people, as well as their cultural legacy, “the history our ancestors created, the stories they brought with them, told, the home life they honored, the faith of their religions, the myth of their many roots, and the richness therein” (“Deep Roots,” 10). The goal of this process—began in earnest in *Rio Grande Fall* and continuing here and through the end of the series in *Jemez Spring*—is what Anaya refers to here is “to provide harmony for that deep essence that is in the soul” (ix), which he contends can only be achieved by transcending the mundane and focusing on spiritual aspects of human existence—ritual, caring for the powerless, and storytelling. This echoes the model of Indigenous scientific thinking that Gregory Cajete outlines: “Indigenous people

are people of place, and the nature of place is embedded in their language” (46). This connection of individuals and the communities to which they belong to a land and its history is a powerful theme throughout the novel, as Sonny’s dreams take him throughout the physical space and historical range of New Mexico.

In this respect, Anaya is carrying out the process of recreating a cultural narrative that rethinks Chicana/o identity from the very moment of contact, in this case the dream Sonny has of Andres Vaca, whose impending marriage to Owl Woman is to mark a new beginning for these two individuals and their respective peoples, Native and Spanish. This act of reconfiguring the moment of creation for a hybrid culture recognizes and works within the concept of identity as “a more complex and dynamic affair” than the typical Anglo-American narrative of cultural identity admits (Kelsey and Carpenter 59). By retelling this story from the very beginning, Anaya both resists and rethinks the ontological categories that define much of modern discourse surrounding ethnicity and history, modeling in the process the means by which contemporary Chicanas/os can work both within and against the dominant cultural framework that divides society according to immigrant/citizen, White/Other binaries. Presenting identity as multifaceted and fluid, Anaya argues that it is in fact possible to escape the trap of determinism and essentialism, and that doing so relies on acts of tricksterism and storytelling, narrative and the undoing of narrative.

The role of storytelling as a curative act places *Shaman Winter* in a rich tradition of fiction that incorporates individual family history as part of an effort to reconcile a

disrupted, fragmented culture. Like African-American novels that include a family tree as a means of retracing the connections between parents and children that were brutally severed under slavery, *Shaman Winter* employs extra-textual elements to create a more complete sense of the history of New Mexico, one that finds its ethos in the connections between generations and in the relationships between individuals from different cultural backgrounds who create through that interaction a new cultural hybrid. Often, that hybridity is literal, in the form of a child born to Native and Spanish or Hispanic and Anglo parents (the plot of *Albuquerque*, with its focus on understanding and accepting hybridity, is a prime example of how Anaya does this), but it also emerges in more metaphoric ways. The bowl that Sonny sees in his dream about Owl Woman is an example; this artifact first appears in Sonny's dream, but it then figures into the physical conflict with Raven. This object holds both the plutonium pit Raven has stolen and the key to interpreting and understanding his plot to unravel Sonny's personal history and the tenuous balance that keeps the universe in harmony. The hybridity of the dream as a trace in the dream, a physical object, and a text indicates another level at which Anaya's model of cultural blending functions.

Such acts of disruption are not exclusive to *Shaman Winter*, nor to the Sonny Baca novels themselves, and even though Anaya criticism often highlights the ways in which he works in the tradition of Western thought and metaphysics, creating mimetic novels that emphasize themes familiar to mainstream audiences, the resistant thread that runs throughout his work pushes back against that tradition, calling it into question repeatedly. As Karai says in speaking of *Bless Me, Ultima*, "the text's treatment of referentiality,

history, and subjectivity are core elements of Anaya's artistic vision and situate it within the broadly interpreted boundaries of postmodernist literature,” a claim that can also be made about *Shaman Winter* (266). In fact, I assert that here we find Anaya operating at his most overtly postmodernist, critiquing not only the social structures that serve to oppress ethnic minorities, but also those that privilege racial essentialism, nationalism, fixed gender roles, and modern models of linear time and three-dimensional space. Doing so, Anaya calls into question both the forms and the underlying structures that define reality according to a Western viewpoint, including the traditional Manifest Destiny historical narrative that is being rewritten throughout the dream-time encounters between Sonny, who thus represents the impulse to connect with that history, and Raven, whose desire is to possess that history and use it.

This historical narrative relies on several competing—and at times contradictory—themes: the idea of European colonization as a noble aspect of the Age of Exploration, the religious zeal of the *conquistadores* as a cover for exploitation and genocide, and the implicit justness of Manifest Destiny and American westward expansion. In unraveling these threads in the various historical moments that Sonny and Raven revisit in the realm of dreams, Anaya gives voice to the gaps in these themes. In researching his family history and the connection to the figure of Andres Vaca, Sonny describes the “rift between the religion of the friars and the religion of the Pueblos,” which was accompanied by “a bitter struggle between the Spanish civil authorities and the church,” with the indigenous peoples of the pueblos “caught in the middle” (56). A complicated relationship between civil and religious authority, colonizers looking for a new life on the

frontier, and indigenous peoples who find themselves in a world that is wholly alien to them. This is not the simple model of hybridity that Anaya elsewhere presents, and this reconfiguring of the key moments in the roots of the complex and interwoven aspects of New Mexican identities demonstrates a willingness to grapple with ambiguity that has often been seen as a shortcoming in Anaya's work. A particularly poignant aspect of this tension is in the moments of conflict that Anaya includes in Sonny's dreams, each of which represents a key moment of cultural conflict in the history of New Mexico. The reader then is forced to approach these historical events ambivalently—is the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 an act of terrorism or an instance of anti-colonial resistance? Was Pancho Villa's attack on Columbus aggression or heroic freedom fighting? These ambiguities—especially when they center on events that are typically read from a dualistic perspective—make this a complex and difficult work.

As in all of Anaya's works, history plays a central role in *Shaman Winter*, but here history is not found just in the texts that Sonny reads from in his convalescence (21), at the library (where he asks the loaded question, "When does the history of New Mexico begin?" to which Lorenza replies in true postcolonial manner, "History belongs to the conquerors" [43]), and as he visits the ruins at Bandelier National Monument (88). These are all sites of history, and of the contested nature of the narrative the drives contemporary life in the face of our interpretation of history. But Anaya understands that he is the recipient of an extensive rewriting of history based on complex power dynamics, and that history is never absolute or static, and that history is complex and multivocal, as he explains in an interview: "We not only have a social, economic, political history. We

have a mythology. We have an oral tradition. We have *cuentos*” (Espinoza, 2). According to this model, history is not a fixed subject found only in the official archives of a civilization, but rather an active force that constantly assumes new shapes and contours according to the interplay of past and present, as well as the cultural forces that record, interpret, and valorize those various perspectives. Thus, Raven’s intrusions into the past—his rewriting of history to unwind the narrative and create chaos both now and in the past—serve to reinforce Anaya’s argument that history shapes the present in profound and powerful ways, that history is never over.

In this respect, *Shaman Winter* is a profoundly postmodern novel, even as many of its plot conventions and characters fall in the mode of the traditional mimetic novel and the generic expectations of detective fiction. By allowing that both Raven and Sonny have an ability to enter the world of dreams and actively shape not just that particular dream, but also the historical moment that the dream represents, and then to reshape—reconfigure in a literal way—that moment, as well as the centuries that follow, Anaya upsets the Western ontological model of temporality. Thus, in *Shaman Winter*, time ceases to act as a fixed, inscribed reality that undergirds reality, and becomes instead a multidimensional matrix into which characters can enter from various points. This temporal disruption echoes the model of time as a variable, rather than a constant, force in human existence that Karai explores in his discussion of *Bless Me, Ultima*. Highlighting the distinction he sees between “profane time” and “sacred time,” he argues that “profane times flows, while sacred time is constant and motionless” (272), which, while it is a gross oversimplification of this complex distinction, makes clear the existence of the different

ways in which time functions in Anaya's work, with moments that involve the spiritual or supernatural slowing down relative to the passing of time in the physical world of the novel. Thus, in *Shaman Winter*, the dreams into which Sonny enters can function as performative scenes in which Sonny and Raven can both move—with differing levels of comfort and ability—to rework the events of those historical moments. Time then functions in flux, allowing Anaya to retell the story of New Mexico from a profoundly Chicano standpoint.

Nowhere is this idea of time as a multiplicity of parallel and competing narratives more evident than in the dream sequence involving that quintessential New Mexico folk hero, Billy the Kid. The dream—in which Sonny aligns himself with Elfego Baca and introduces himself to Billy by connecting himself to Elfego through his family tree (see *Zia Summer*, 202)—is split into three separate parts, spanning three chapters of the novel. In the first, Sonny enters the dream, meets up with Billy, and “set[s] the stage” for the dream (204). The second part of the episode begins when Sonny half-wakes to find Rita, don Eliseo, and Lorenza surrounding his bed, supporting him in his quest to face Raven and undo the chaos he seeks to inflict on the world. Sonny slips back into the dream, where he finds Coyote, the embodied trickster figure that Anaya describes as being “like an old Indian scout ready to lead Sonny into the underworld” (206). But soon Sonny loses track of Coyote and lets slip his control of the dream, becoming a mere spectator as Raven commands the scene, encouraging Pat Garrett to ambush Billy. Finding himself relegated to the margins of the scene, Sonny tries to cry out a warning, only to discover that “in the dream he has no voice” (210). The return to the status of objectified and

colonized spectator—voiceless and powerless to stop the unfolding of violence that threatens his own existence— represents for Sonny the challenge of living as a minority in a society that privileges the Western concepts of identity and temporality as fixed, well-defined categories of reality.

The third part of the dream comes as Sonny, sobbing from the pain of seeing Billy die while he can only stand by observing, returns to the past, where he sees Raven enter the scene to take Rosa, Billy's lover. Finding Coyote again at his side, Sonny knows that he has to act, “to direct his dream” (215). Rising to his feet—a simple act that the paralyzed Sonny is incapable of in the physical world—Sonny faces and ultimately defeats Raven, rescuing in the process Rosa. And while the process of learning to control the action of his dreams is not complete, Sonny has accomplished something important, and Raven is forced to realize that the attempt to eradicate Sonny from history will not be easy.

Rudolfo Anaya's voice, decrying the oppressive hand of racial and ethnic hegemony and calling for a fuller, more inclusive literary canon, one that reflects the histories and worldviews of a broader range of people and cultures, rings clearly in this scene. For Anaya, history is not distant and detached from the present, and Sonny's dreams become throughout the novel a powerful site of enacting that resistance to the powerful universalizing impulse toward sameness promoted by the colonialist mindset represented by Raven.

The image of Raven as colonial agent resonates throughout this novel (and, to a lesser extent, the others in the series—the association with extremists supporting right-wing

Central American dictators in *Rio Grande Fall*, for example), marking both a powerful way of reading Raven and his motives and a significant development in Anaya's willingness to approach difficult theoretical issues in a popular novel. The discussion of the terrorists financing Raven's work earlier in the novel becomes relevant here; Matt Paiz explains the racial motives of these groups, who “claim the country's being overrun by 'the brown hordes from Latin America, the yellow from Asia'” (74), and who, for Anaya, are simply the modern reincarnation of the spirit of greed and fear that drove colonizers and slaveholders throughout history. By directly linking Raven to this political movement, Anaya seeks to place contemporary xenophobia and cultural homogeneity on par with more distant forms of that same impulse. Just as Raven enters Sonny's dreams to rewrite his personal history and erase him from the world, Anaya's retelling of these moments from the history of New Mexico serve to reinscribe the marginalized voices of that historical discourse, making the stories and lives of his own ancestors more real and more relevant in the world of the present.

This model of time as a matrix, an interwoven fabric of people, events, and multiple histories that can be rewritten, mirrors what Anaya himself does by telling a story that emphasizes Native American myths and cultural tradition, rewrites a Western meta-narrative, and upsets easy readings of history as Manifest Destiny. Thus, as Sonny engages Raven in the story of Billy the Kid's confrontation with Pat Garrett, he re-creates the historical event, trying desperately to reconfigure the past and thereby reconcile the historical tensions of the New Mexican frontier. And, finding himself, like many of the Hispanic and Native peoples who lost land and economic influence to the encroaching

Anglos, voiceless, unable to shout out a warning when Raven arrives to manipulate the scene and abduct another of Sonny's grandmother figures, Sonny is forced to act (210). The image of Sonny rising to his feet to confront Raven—an act that surprises Rosa, Raven, and Sonny himself—powerfully marks the striving for selfhood, the colonial subject resisting the violence of the hegemonic system. Similarly, the moment in which Raven shoots at Sonny, only to find that the bullet has struck the Zia medallion that he wears—that Sonny is now “a man who cannot die” (217)—symbolizes for Anaya the crucial moment of self-definition, culminating in Sonny's declaration to Raven: “I'm in control now” (217). Finally, Sonny is able to face and defeat Raven by himself by utilizing the power he has gained to act in his own dreams.

Later, after finally succeeding in blocking Raven in an attempted dream-time abduction, Sonny awakes to find Rita and Eliseo watching over him. As they discuss how Sonny was able to control the narrative of the dream and stop Raven, Eliseo, in response to Sonny's questions about what he is undergoing, narrates a creation story in which Raven and Coyote jointly bring Man and Woman into the world, only to become competitors after the evil sorcerers who accompany humans into the world turn them against each other. The narrative is meant to inspire Sonny and to give him a broader sense of the conflict he is engaged in; Sony is not simply one person fighting Raven, but a representative of the trickster ethos that has since creation resisted the pull toward the greed and violence that Raven embodies. Eliseo ends his story by explaining, “A trickster has special powers. [...] But a trickster is also very proud” (224). This statement serves as both an interpretation of the tale he has just narrated, and a voice of warning to Sonny, indicating

that the power he has discovered has a parallel in the destructive impulse that Raven follows. Eliseo retells the story of creation to arrive at the message that Sonny, in rewriting history, has a moral obligation to act ethically toward those whose pasts he enters into. The process by which Sonny learns to act in his dreams, shaping not only the setting and characters, but the events themselves, mirrors the process of Anaya as shaman means that he—like Sonny—enters dreams, rethinks historical causation, and presents an alternative model of reality that re-centers the discourse.

This act of re-centering also pertains to Anaya's discussion of ethnicity, as *Shaman Winter* emphasizes the role of racial mixing throughout the history of European presence in the Southwest. Rafael Perez-Torres asserts that the idea of *mestizaje* "plays a complex role that signals change while simultaneously marking how institutions, ideologies, and numerous networks of power bound change" (3-4), that the mixing of blood signifies too a mixing of epistemological and ontological systems. Raven's intrusions into Sonny's dreams and his abductions of Sonny's ancestral others enacts this idea of change in the context of racial and ethnic mixing, focusing as they do on pivotal moments of intercultural contact and conflict over the centuries of Euro-American presence in the Southwest. From Owl Woman's marriage to Andres Vaca to the relationship of Soledad and Pancho Villa, the moments that figure in Sonny's dreams are moments of bridges between cultures, of mixing and redefining identity, a project with strong intersections with Anaya's work, dating back to *Bless Me, Ultima*. But here Anaya clearly and poignantly argues against essentialism, positing instead a model of hybridity that values both Native and European, Hispanic and Anglo. For Anaya, New Mexico acts as a

powerful incarnation of this hybridity, as a place where Indigenous, Hispanic, Anglo, African, and Asian cultural influences merge, a rich historical legacy blending with a contemporary, high-tech future, all in the context of a messy, complicated multi-cultural present riddled with psychological and physical violence, all of which Anaya presents as the sign of Raven. Similarly, the discussion between Sonny and Cyber—a biracial teenaged computer hacker who helps Sonny access the Sandia National Laboratory computer network—about the Internet (Cyber: “See, being on the Internet is like an addiction. I don’t do drugs on the streets like some of the kids, but I’m addicted all right. To this.” [251]) mirrors the work Sonny is doing. Cyber tells Sonny about his father’s disappearance while working at the labs, which led him to hack the network and learn of similar disappearances. Like Sonny’s abducted grandmothers, these are people whose existence has been erased.

By presenting this narrative thread—with clear echoes of narratives from Latin American countries of dissidents being “disappeared” by totalitarian regimes—Anaya succeeds in exploding the concept of existence in markedly post-modern ways. Sonny’s place in the physical world is threatened by Raven’s acts in Sonny’s dreams, and the liminal state of the girls he abducts over the course of the novel means that they too exist only as traces—the missing child, the empty bedroom, the black feathers at the scene that indicate Raven’s involvement. The fear that these victims will become Raven’s new wives, with the implicit sexual element of the kidnappings, haunts the parents, who find themselves powerless to do anything except ask for Sonny’s help and pray. The combination of active detective work and reliance on religious belief underlies Anaya’s

assertion that rationality and faith can coexist, and that the combination of these two epistemological systems constitutes humanity's best defense against the violence and chaos of Raven and his backers. Just as Anaya identifies in the history and peoples of New Mexico "a fusion of blood, of memory, of dream" that unites the various demographic groups (115), he presents in the novel a model of resistance to hegemony and the violent objectification of the colonized Other that relies on a valorization of multiple modes of interpreting human reality, including the religious systems of the Indigenous populations of the Southwest, the Hispanic Catholicism of saints and prayers, and the healing ceremonies of don Eliseo and Lorenza. As he comes to integrate these models into his efforts to control his dreams, Sonny overcomes the fracturing of Raven's efforts to destroy harmony and incite war.

In this respect, a brief statement in the text marks Anaya's interest in how New Mexico—its history and people—stands as a site of hybridity. In discussing Raven's plans with FBI agent Matt Paiz, Sonny learns of the right-wing conspiracy to undermine the American government from within—the Avengers—that Paiz believes is funding Raven's efforts to obtain a nuclear bomb. In explaining the group's efforts to infiltrate the federal government, Paiz explains that the Avengers are a worldwide network of individuals and groups, fueled by ethnocentrism and xenophobia, and Sonny replies, realizing the magnitude of what Paiz is saying, "you start at the center" (77). Anaya then editorializes: "This was one of the remaining spiritual centers in the country. The Pueblo Indians knew that. Here where the covenant with the ancestral kachinas had been made lay a great power for the good of mankind" (77). According to this interpretation, the mountains of

northern New Mexico, site of ancient ruins where Native peoples long tracked the movement of the sun throughout the year, house a spiritual energy that Raven sees and seeks to harness. Thus, Raven's quest to acquire nuclear weapons stands in for his deeper desire to control the spiritual power of New Mexican history—with its roots in a range of belief systems and mythologies—to cover the world in chaos and violence, and Sonny's efforts to block Raven find expression in the re-centering of history and the reconnection of a people to its past.

In many ways, this process of connecting disparate histories and traditions echoes what Anaya does in his memoir of the trip he took to China in 1984. *A Chicano in China* came at an important moment in Anaya's career, as he was beginning to assemble his theory of the "New World Man," and the exposure to a totally foreign culture rich in tradition and history undoubtedly affected his worldview. As he explains early in the narrative, "For those of us who listen to the Earth, and to the old legends and the myths of the people, the whispers of the blood draw us to our past. But often the secrets are locked away in symbols we can no longer read, in legends we no longer understand, in painting and in ancient writings that puzzle us" (viii). The time he spent in China, which he describes as a pilgrimage, acts as a model of individual transformation brought about through exposure to a different, distant history that forces an intense reevaluation of one's own cultural narratives, the kind of transformation that Sonny undergoes throughout *Shaman Winter*, as he reconsiders what it means to be a Chicano, a man descended from Native and Spanish, Indigenous and European roots, groups whose histories do not build a bucolic and idyllic syncretism, but on the violence and messiness of hybridity over the

course of generations and centuries. Coming to understand this complexity becomes for Sonny the true challenge, the real mystery to be unraveled, that past to be reconstructed in the present.

This interplay of past and present takes a decidedly literal turn shortly after Sonny and Lorenza leave the Los Alamos National Laboratory facility where Raven has stolen a plutonium pit. Knowing that Raven is looking to attack Sonny, they decide to travel to the nearby canyons of Bandelier National Monument, home to a rich cluster of Ancestral Puebloan ruins, expecting that Raven will be in a place so rich with history and legend. As Lorenza walks off, hoping to lure Raven in by using the wheelchair-bound Sonny as bait, Sonny has a vision of Owl Woman, whom he encountered in the dream that opened the novel, and who was kidnapped by Raven in the dream, setting in motion the series of abductions that frame the action of the novel. This vision becomes for Sonny another powerful moment in which he is able to feel “the spiritual power of the earth permeating his body, filling his soul” (92). As this visionary experience continues, Sonny sees the spirits of the place and the people who for centuries dwelt and worshiped there, descending to earth, bringing the snow that in the spring would melt and fill the *acequias*, feeding the land of the Rio Grande Valley. But, just as in the dreams in which Raven intrudes upon the historical moments at a time of celebration, Raven appears here just as the spirits faded, attacking Sonny. The juxtaposition of the spiritual power embodied in the light of the vision and the darkness of Raven’s attack and plot to steal Sonny’s very existence through the abductions of his ancestral mothers fits with the precariousness of the winter solstice, a moment that Anaya describes as holding the world in the balance as

the sun teeters at the edge of the horizon.

This balance between the deepening dark of winter, with its lengthening night, and the return of the sun marked by the solstice indicates something of the delicate nature of Anaya's project in *Shaman Winter*. By taking his readers back to pivotal moments in the post-contact history of New Mexico, Anaya is confronting deeply-embedded narratives of exploration, conquest, territorial expansion, and hybridization, none of which is as simple or tidy as the dominant narratives would suggest. The myth of Manifest Destiny, for example, is one of Anaya's prime targets, and he posits the arrival of Kearney's army as a moment of military conquest, a colonial act of appropriation and violence (see *Shaman Winter*, 165). Thus, when Sonny prepares for and enters his dream of the moment of American intrusion into New Mexico in 1846, he flips the issue of immigration, positing the Anglo world as the border-crossers: "They come to ruin our way of life! Why can't they stay where they belong! a farmer shouted. We should build a fence to keep them out, his vecino added" (169). By appropriating the rhetoric of anti-immigration voices in the contemporary discourse, Anaya refigures the westward expansion of the United States, and the complex history of the Mexican-American War in particular. Anaya continues, positing the differences between the invading Anglo forces and the existing population of Hispanic farmers and villagers: "For many years we have seen the Yankees come to our land. They speak a different language. They refuse to learn Spanish. Soon they will want us all to speak only English. And...they are Protestants" (170).

By employing the language of neo-colonialists who defend a culturally-monolithic

version of Americanness and thereby deny the history of cultural blending in the American Southwest to critique Manifest Destiny, Anaya succeeds in altering the terms of the discourse and re-centering the historical narrative. Taking this process one step further, he deconstructs the binaries he has just laid out, humanizing the invading other as a group of “weary and thirsty volunteers [...] young men far away from home” (171). The abstract idea of a foreign army is replaced by the reality of ordinary people caught up in large-scale conflicts between governments and cultures, much like Sonny. In this context, the acts of kindness by the people of the village toward the soldiers, giving them “gifts of cool water, meat rolled in tortillas, combs for their hair” (172) signify the kind of resistance that Anaya argues for, not armed conflict that is doomed to fail, but an emphasis on the humanity that connects people and ultimately leads to the hybridity foreshadowed when the soldiers’ “eyes flirted with the young Mexican women” (172). Such hybridity for Anaya is a form of resistance to the impulse toward homogeneity and insularity that he identifies in the colonial mindset, and retelling the history of the Southwest allows him to emphasize that hybridity and imagine Sonny's ancestors at the center of that historical narrative.

However, Anaya's rewriting of history is firmly grounded in the practical realities of the power dynamics of those moments. The people of New Mexico do not repel Kearney's army; Anaya makes clear that the military advantage of that moment was considerable (see 169-170). Similarly, he resists the nativist approach to consider a history in which Europeans arriving in the New World do not conquer the Indigenous peoples. That rewriting of history is possible in the post-modern moment, one in which the author can

deconstruct the logic of the dominant narrative and thereby privilege a pre-contact world, one devoid of the violent interplay of the colonial system. But the easy stereotypes of an idyllic pre-Columbian past are just as problematic for Anaya, whose revisiting of history has no room for facile representations of such simple binaries. Thus, in discussing the collision of weather fronts that produce winter storms in the mountains and down the valleys of New Mexico, Anaya digresses to explore the cultural mixing of Hispanic and Native peoples in the region, including “Comanches, Navajos, Utes, Apaches, Mexicanos, farmers and hunters, Catholics and converted Jews, peninsular Spaniards and criollos, mestizos and genizaros” (213). Here, Anaya contends, these diverse groups came to “mix, produce the mestizaje”, but also to “make war on each other” (213). The multicultural mix of modern New Mexico that Anaya here celebrates is rooted in both hybridity and violence, a fact that need remain at the fore of any discussion of history, and which Anaya consistently links to the image of Raven as Bringer of Curses, the dangerous and unpredictable impulse toward chaos.

As Sonny races to find the missing girls in the present and the abducted grandmothers in his dreams, learning in the process to become an actor in his dreams instead of a witness to the chaos that Raven creates, he finds that he must rely on the spiritual rather than the physical. In *Shaman Winter*, this is underscored by the fact that Sonny, whose neural pathways were jolted in the final confrontation of *Rio Grande Fall*, is wheelchair-bound in this novel; the physical reality of his life as an active crime fighter has been shattered, and he struggles to cope with both the limitations of a body that refuses to respond to his mind and the feelings of depression attendant with that condition. This seemingly simple

plot element serves as a subtle but powerful critique of colonialism and the inherent power dynamics it imposes between the ruling power and the oppressed population, the latter often being physically enslaved, cut off from its history and language, and denigrated through a rhetoric of deficiency. Similarly, physical handicaps act as a marker of incompleteness, and Sonny, as a paraplegic minority becomes in the text a doubled-marginalized figure, one that nevertheless resists the limitations imposed by his body and the dominant culture. By placing Sonny in a state completely foreign to the life he has known, Anaya highlights the novel's message that mere physical power—the might of the colonial power with its sanctioned and implicit violence toward the colonized Other—stands in contrast to the cultural power of history, myth, legend, and ritual, the elements of Hispanic and Indigenous life that he argues can and must resist the encroachment of Western modernity. And this act of resistance is echoed in Sonny's stubborn attempts to walk, his battle against what Anaya describes as “the depression that came with the paralysis (20), and his commitment to struggle against Raven, even when he is bound in his chair, unable to stand and fight his enemy.

Sonny's struggle to regain the ability to use his legs—and the accompanying sense of worthlessness that haunts him throughout the novel—becomes an additional source of conflict and pain, as well as a powerful site of the kind of empowerment that Anaya points to as a possibility for any colonized people. In the preface to *Shaman Winter*, Anaya explains:

In the previous novel, *Rio Grande Fall*, Sonny is injured. I choose to have him in a wheelchair because the person who is physically handicapped has also been one

of my themes. So often we think of 'getting well' as only a physical challenge. But getting well also involves the psyche. Both body and soul seek a harmonious existence. (ix)

The fact that Sonny is cut off from the use of his legs—symbols of independence and strength, two of the primary traits of a detective—serves as a potent trope for how an oppressed group whose history has been ignored and obscured finds rootedness both a challenge and a goal. Thus, in a pivotal dream confrontation with Raven, as Billy the Kid has been killed and Raven is set to steal Rosa, his grieving lover, “Sonny struggles to stand” (215). While it is still some time before Sonny will find the use of his legs in the physical world, the fact that, as Coyote explains to him in this dream, “Dream and waking, it's all the same” (215) indicates that Sonny's progress in becoming an actor in his own dreams is a precursor to regaining the ability to stand as an independent and fully-defined human agent before long.

In this light, the car crash that occurs later in the novel as Lorenza and Sonny chase Raven through the streets of Albuquerque becomes a transformational moment. After their van crashes and Sonny is sent flying into the ditch by the side of the road. There he lies for an indeterminate time, thinking he is dead, until Lorenza comes to him. After the police arrive on the scene and make sense of what has happened, Sonny stands up and takes a tentative step. Anaya's description of Sonny's growing self-surety—the knowledge that his body will respond to the commands from his brain—becomes a powerful metonym for the Chicano community about which and to which he writes: “Sonny stood up, unsure of his strength for a moment but aware that a change had taken

place during the crash” (307). The trauma of the accident also serves as a catalyst for the healing that Sonny’s body required, and in the moment of crisis his nervous system responds by righting itself, a process that Anaya repeatedly calls for his people to embrace, acting in response to the trauma of discrimination and social injustice by standing up as a collective group and taking a tentative step toward self-actualization.

This process of assuming the role of agent in his universe lies at the heart of the climactic conflict of the novel, as Sonny enters his dream ready to face Raven, who has now abducted four of Sonny’s ancestors, threatening to steal all four sources of his existence, as well as four present-day girls, his new wives. With the guidance of don Eliseo, Sonny creates his dream, ordering the events so that he can find the women Raven has taken, and there faces his enemy, freeing the grandmothers he had stolen and driving Raven off into the darkness. But the fight is not without its costs, as don Eliseo had battled Raven at a key moment and been killed. Sonny awakens to find his neighbor dead, a loss that, coupled with Rita’s miscarriage, leaves Sonny feeling deeply wounded, a feeling that continues into *Jemez Spring*. Sonny has blocked Raven in his attempt to destroy both Sonny and the underlying harmony of the world, but he has paid a dear price, and this depth of despair—mirroring the darkness of the winter solstice and the cold of the winter weather—carries into the final novel, with its contradictory impulses toward life and death. While the struggle with Raven has taught Sonny to harness his spiritual power, it has also cost him the playful exuberance of the earlier texts, rendering him harder and more focused in his determination to fight Raven.

A significant part of Sonny's efforts to resist Raven and uncover the motives behind his actions in the physical world and Sonny's dreams centers around the role of place. Throughout the first three novels of the Sonny Baca series—and in other places in his writing—Anaya explores issues related to environmentalism, but more importantly, a deeper spiritual connection between people and the world they inhabit. Alex Hunt, in analyzing ecological themes in *Bless Me, Ultima*, argues that this is “is a novel of the earth” (182), both in the concern Anaya expresses for the natural world in the face of the dawning nuclear age and in the connection between people and the spiritual power of the land. In her discussion of the theme of ecological concerns in the Sonny Baca novels, Carmen Flys-Junquera explores the role of cyclical time in *Shaman Winter*, which she identifies as a key aspect of how Anaya links people to place. She argues that in this text, Anaya “bring[s] out the voices of the past and present, illustrating a dynamic and encompassing concept of time much like that of the Plains tribes' sacred hoop or medicine wheel” (“Nature's Voice” 129). Continuing on, she refers to “the nonlinear and nonhierarchical concept of time exemplified in the sacred hoop” (129), an idea that becomes even more meaningful when Sonny confronts Raven in his final dream, armed with the power of the shaman and the dream catcher that don Eliseo has provided for him. The dream catcher is a powerful symbol drawn from the Indigenous peoples of the American Southwest, especially the Dine, for whom it represents both the uninterrupted cycle of past, present, and future, and the lineage between the physical world of humanity and the world of spirits and dreams. Replacing the Western meta-narrative of time as a linear progression with this model of cyclical time allows Anaya to rewrite both communal history and the personal family narrative of his protagonist as he strives to achieve a deeper level of self-

awareness and spiritual power.

This growth—and the pain and loss that accompany it—transform the tenor of the series, from the relatively simply detective story of *Zia Summer* and the more involved but still straightforward conflict of *Rio Grande Fall* to the wide-ranging feel of the last two novels. Having tapped into his spiritual power as a shaman, Sonny now functions on a radically different plane of existence, and the cost he pays for this knowledge changes him; don Eliseo's death, the loss of his yet-to-be children, and the lingering psychological effects of three months of paralysis exact a heavy toll on the hero. And so this emergence of Sonny Baca as a master of his own dreams, capable of confronting and defeating Raven, carries into the final novel. Whereas *Zia Summer* and *Rio Grande Fall* could function as independent texts, *Shaman Winter* relies on both the set-up of the first two novels and the denouement provided by *Jemez Spring*. Fittingly, the series cannot end in the depths of winter, but must now continue on to the rebirth promised by spring.

The conclusion of *Shaman Winter*, then, leaves us with a sense of closure that is missing from the first two novels: Sonny has recovered physically from the paralysis brought on at the end of *Rio Grande Fall*, he has successfully faced and defeated Raven in both the physical world and his dreams, and don Eliseo's sacrifice has given Sonny a sense of connection to the traditions that don Eliseo had kept alive, a fact that Anaya poignantly highlights as Sonny welcomes the dawn of the morning following his dream-battle with Raven. Finding don Eliseo's body seated outside, Sonny chants his own version of the prayer that he had learned from his neighbor and mentor: “Receive the soul of this Señor

who honored you and honored life. Come and bless all of life. This was his prayer” (336). In many ways, *Shaman Winter* can be seen as a conclusion to the Sonny Baca series; in fact, during the time between its publication and the publication of *Jemez Spring* it appeared that this was the end of the series, with *Albuquerque*, set as it is at Easter, serving as the Spring installment (Flys-Junquera, for example, proposes this model in her 2002 article on the Sonny Baca novels). There is here a sense that Raven, while not destroyed, has been defeated and driven away, and that Sonny has accomplished his work in becoming a shaman and realizing the importance of history, family, and ritual in his life and his relationships with others, particularly Rita. When Rita tells Sonny that she is pregnant, and then later when she loses the babies, Sonny Baca begins to see himself as a father, and even when Raven robs him of that, Sonny has been changed in a profound way. When the conflict resumes in *Jemez Spring*, Sonny is a different man, and he approaches his enemy in a markedly different manner.

CHAPTER 6

JEMEZ SPRING: THE END AND THE BEGINNING

In *Jemez Spring*, Anaya completes the seasonal cycle that underlies the Sonny Baca novels and presents Sonny as having achieved closure in his efforts to tap into the spiritual powers he has been developing since *Zia Summer*. In many ways, this final text feels very familiar—the action begins on the vernal equinox, and Sonny is shaken awake from a strange dream—this time the Cyclops has been blinded and screams at Odysseus—to find that his own world has been disrupted again by violence and mayhem. And, as with the first three novels, Sonny soon realizes that he is not simply trying to solve a crime, but is also working with the complex machinations of a foe who can travel between the physical reality of modern-day New Mexico and the spiritual plane in which Raven seeks to alter the past, disrupt the present, and plunge into chaos the future. This theme of time is crucial to reading *Jemez Spring*, as linear time repeatedly comes to a stop and the circular time of the annual cycle of life and death is brought full-circle. Throughout the text, Anaya builds on his project of following Sonny through the process of becoming a trickster and controlling his dreams in order to become an active agent in resisting and combating Raven, who has become a more menacing figure throughout the novels, and who here embodies the forces of chaos and violence. Here this conflict continues to move from the overtly geo-political and become a spiritual journey from indecisiveness and confusion (Sonny's hesitation and doubt in *Zia Summer* and *Shaman Winter* have given way to a confident sense of self) toward clarity of purpose, and Sonny's role as a liminal figure standing between the everyday reality of observable existence and the world of spirits and the dreams that empower a shaman becomes deeply

interwoven with the novel. Like *Shaman Winter*, *Jemez Spring* incorporates Sonny's dreams into the narrative arc of the text, and, as with the other Sonny Baca novels, the story begins with Sonny waking from a dream. This dream, like the violent image that opens the pages of *Zia Summer*, confuses and bothers Sonny, who seeks meaning in the scattered images of his dream. This time, Sonny has dreamed that he had only one eye, an image that frames the theme of blindness to the unseen world, a theme that underlies the novel—and, to some extent, the entire series. But here, Sonny's dream is quickly replaced in the narrative by the question of whether dreams are an inherently human activity, and what such questions might mean.

Immediately after waking up, Sonny turns his thoughts to the topic of conversation in bars and diners throughout the city—Sonny's dog, Chica, and her purported dreams. An idea he had floated weeks earlier with a group of friends. The idea spread through town “like an unchecked virus” (4) and had incited talk-show radio arguments, town hall debates, and a firestorm of protest at the university. Anaya plays with this plot angle for several pages, using it to introduce several of the novel's key themes, including dreaming, sight, cultural mixing, and rebirth. Each of these themes connects to patterns from *Zia Summer*, *Rio Grande Fall*, and *Shaman Winter*, and elaborates on the model of tricksterism that Anaya lays out, one in which Sonny emerges as an actor in his story and a marker of the kind of cultural empowerment that Anaya argues is central to meaningful social change. As he takes control of his dreams and develops his ability to see beyond Raven's illusions, Sonny succeeds in leading, in some small way, the drive to rethink the history of the Southwest and its diversity of cultures, values, and lifeways. The opening

scene of the novel also reintroduces the theme of tricksterism, this time placing Sonny in a tradition that includes not only the trickster figures common to the cultures of New Mexico and the American Southwest, but also ancient trickster figures from classical times.

After recalling his dream of having only one eye, Sonny reflects on the myth of Cyclops, with whom he momentarily associates. The image of Odysseus escaping from the Cyclops by clinging to the sheep after having blinded the monster highlights the kind of playing with observable reality and identity-shifting that marks Sonny's confrontations with Raven throughout the series. Anaya also uses this mythic trope to emphasize his long-standing interest in the role of storytelling in developing and sustaining community. Sonny had taught literature at Valley High School years before, and his interest in the stories from different traditions mirrors Anaya's own belief that the world's mythic traditions share a common bond that, if understood and valued appropriately, can lead to ethical appreciation for the Other. This then becomes the model for *Jemez Spring*, as Sonny moves more quickly from surprise at the day's events to action, traveling from the city to the villages and pueblos of the Jemez Mountains. In each episode we encounter a different Sonny than the one in the earlier novels, one who must assume the role of shaman for himself in the absence of don Eliseo. Understanding himself and his place in the drama that is unfolding around him, Sonny moves to face Raven and defeat him completely.

Then, after reflecting on the idea of seeing ("The trick was to see beneath observed

reality, and for that one needed to develop a new kind of sight” [2]), Sonny begins thinking about the ancient Egyptian figures of Isis and Osiris. Osiris’ death, rebirth, and role as god of the underworld all place him in the tradition of a figure who stands between the worlds of the living and the dead, and whose very body is both whole and dismembered. Each of these different versions of trickster contributes a different facet of the narrative theme of Sonny’s growing realization that if he is to achieve his potential as a representative of his people and as a mediator between the various cultural influences that collide in the American Southwest, he must more fully understand how his *nagual* of Coyote relates to the trickster tropes of other traditions; only in synthesis can Sonny supplant Raven’s destructiveness. And throughout the novel, Anaya returns to the various trickster figures from different cultural traditions as a way of connecting Sonny to a pattern of heroes who renew a group of people by reconfiguring the communal sense of identity. Anaya continues on to connect myth and legend with history, and in particular the competing historical narratives of the dominant culture and the minority voices that exist on the borders of that hegemony. This idea is expressed concisely in this couplet, expressed by the voice of don Elise as Sonny reflects on the runaway growth of modern cities in the desert Southwest: “Money talks; those who want to hang on to the old ways walk” (18). A cynical and defeatist response, this also becomes a rallying cry for Anaya as he encourages the Chicano community to defend its traditions and heritage.

The first direct reference to the role of tradition and community in the novel comes as Sonny leaves his house to embrace the morning and pauses to reflect on this place where he lives, the rural North Valley area of Albuquerque where he has lived and started to set

down roots. As he notes the demographic shift of the region, with new-comers who settle into the area and import a new set of cultural values and displace the families that have a history in the place, Sonny expresses through an interior monologue this sense of nostalgia. “A way of life was dying for the old Hispanos of the valley. The fertile lands the Españoles and Mexicanos had settled during those terribly cold years at the end of the sixteenth century now belonged to people who did not know the land’s history” (16). For Anaya, the greatest loss is the distancing from history, here seen in the inhabitants of a place not knowing—and, perhaps worse, not caring to know—the history of the place, being separated from the power that Anaya argues comes from an intimate connection. Interestingly, this is not simply a minority voice bemoaning the theft of land by encroaching colonial forces; Anaya is also concerned with the effects of this historylessness on the Anglo arrivals in New Mexico. Without a history in the place, they cannot see clearly and understand deeply the beauty of the land, nor can they truly enjoy the rich cultural legacy that for Anaya goes beyond kitsch and representation. The sense of loss and longing that seep into the first three novels expands in *Jemez Spring*, with a greater emphasis on how these changes affect the cultural makeup of the region, ultimately resulting in a population divorced from the landscape and history of the place. By so doing, Anaya enacts the process spoken of by Holly Martin:

Landscapes are reconceived, respatialized, and given added or alternative meanings. A landscape may seem to be a stable, fixed category, a topographical reality that everyone can agree upon and that can be observed objectively as being a mountain, a valley, a lake, a forest, etc.; but landscape goes beyond the physical and can be used to present a variety of cultural and political meanings, some that

conflict with each other, within the one physical space. For some ethnic minority groups, the land cannot be separated from the people who inhabit it. (132-3)

Anaya again returns to the theme of history, which he imagines as the key to restoring a people's sense of identity, worth, and destiny against the intrusion of modern and colonizing economic and political systems, systems that ultimately sever individuals from a community, and a community from its land and past. The violence inflicted on a people when that communal history and connection to a physical place are lost is an important theme throughout Anaya's writing, as much of his creative efforts center on the role place and history play in forming the identity of a group of people. In his 1979 essay, "Cuentos de los Antepasados: Spanning the Generation," Anaya posits the "deep relationship between the old people and the children," a bond that "forms a vital part of our culture and history" (211). And in his landmark essay, "Aztlán: A Homeland Without Boundaries," Anaya lays out the importance of the Chicano movement and argues that in that is found an impulse that is universal, as "the need for a homeland is inherent in the collective memory of any group" (239). This reuniting of a people to its land and history becomes part of Sonny's mission, to resist Raven's destructive urges and, in their place, foster an ethic of communal inclusiveness and respect for the past. Only by so doing, argues Anaya, can the "vulgar" versions of his culture's stories—the illusions and images that Raven presents—be replaced with the "holy" images rooted in that collective past (*Jemez Spring*, 227). In this respect, *Jemez Spring* serves as the culmination not only of the Sonny Baca series, but, in many ways, of Anaya's career and creative work.

An important echo of that earlier work is how—like *Albuquerque* and *Shaman Winter*—*Jemez Spring* centers on the hero leaving the urban space of the modern city to find his connection to a premodern and non-Western past, one that is connected to an Indigenous ethic in ways that Anaya argues the city is not, and where spiritual renewal can occur. This inversion of the urban migration of the post-World War II era comes to represent for Anaya the sort of rejection of Anglocentric epistemologies the privilege homogeneity and order, a rewriting of the meta-narrative of westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, and urbanization, returning to a rural and agrarian worldview, one in which economic and political power matter than spiritual wholeness and respect for one's cultural roots. By leaving the city and traveling to the Jemez Mountains, Sonny succeeds in shedding the limiting vision of himself that marks his identity in the earlier novels. And as he returns to the modern city, he takes something of that wildness with him, in this case a turtle that he saves from the side of the road, and which he will take to Rita. In so doing, he is brutally reintroduced to “the city's continual, painful growth,” marked by urban sprawl that encroaches on the volcanic escarpment at the western edge of the valley (*Jemez Spring* 180).

By leaving the modern city and then returning to it after his time in the wilderness, Sonny becomes part of a tradition of heroes and tricksters who find their spiritual and social power from an encounter with evil—and the attendant introspection and self-analysis that Sonny undergoes—away from human society. There Sonny is able to push aside the insignificant concerns about the debate over dreaming dogs and instead reflect on fundamental questions of human existence:

There is one eternal question: whence came we? Why? Even if we rose from the mud of ancient lakes, the ooze, the hidden waters, the question remains. What spirit penetrated the mud to create the first cells, a throbbing of life that millennia later would raise its arms to the sun, praising the light of creation? That is our human history, the seeking after the light. (55)

Such ontological questions aim both to probe issues of our nature and to reconcile the typical gap that is imagined between scientific models of human evolution and spiritual and mythic origin stories. By admitting Darwinian thinking into the religious dialogue about creation, Anaya himself acts out a trickster ethos, playing in the margins between two systems that are generally viewed as being separate. He returns to this concept of bridging religious belief and scientific thought later in the novel; as Sonny contemplates the destruction that would result from a nuclear bomb in the Valles Caldera: “a gaping hole will appear on mother Earth [...a]nd a large part of Father Sky will cave in [...]Everything will be contaminated with radioactivity” (180). While Sonny knows “this wasn’t science, but it was a way of relating to the natural order of the cosmos” (180), he also sees in that perspective the potential to make sense of the chaos of the modern world. And in highlighting the beauty of scientific questioning and the flexibility of theological thinking, Anaya sets up a model of hybridizing not just ethnic identity of historical narrative, but also the intellectual framework for understanding human experience.

This act of rethinking the tensions of multiple discourses and epistemologies as a means of retracing an originary cultural space unfolds in *Jemez Spring* more fully than in the other Sonny Baca novels, echoing in Sonny's growth as a shaman the process by which

Anaya contends the Chicano community can claim a voice, a history, and a sense of agency in respect to the dominant culture. In this effort, Sonny neither villifies nor acquiesces to the forces of hegemony, but circumvents the trap of essentialism by emphasizing hybridity as an alternative to the binaries relations of Self and Other. By so doing, he carries out what Byrd suggests is necessary too for Native peoples: “there must be the possibility of the originary in the new world, [...] located within the historical experiences of new world colonizations, genocides, and violences” (xiv). Neither ignoring nor defining the self exclusively in terms of these historical realities, the Indian voice—and its corollary Chicana/o voice, which Anaya presents as a hybrid of both Indigenous and Spanish—emerges resisting the totalizing gesture of erasure. Byrd's model of Indian literary theory mirrors the very act of re-telling the past, re-seeing the present, and re-imagining the future that Anaya carries out by creating connections between disparate cultural systems and social structures.

An important purpose of this attempt to bridge such gaps is to help heal ethnic and cultural communities that have suffered both physical violence and the spiritual damage of being displaced from a land and a history. The displacement of both the Native peoples and then the Hispanos from their traditional lands underscores much of the sense of nostalgia of all of Anaya's works, and in *Jemez Spring* that loss moves from political injustice to a sort of spiritual starvation, as a people cut off from their past loses their way in the modern world. Storytelling is part of this process of healing, as it empowers and validates a mythos that has been elided from the historical narrative of the dominant culture, and in this respect, both Sonny and Anaya are cultural shamans whose mission is

to unearth and retell stories; Sonny describes “read[ing] books until the early hours of the morning, devouring the many volumes, searching for the revelations the past had once offered seekers after truth” (17), while Anaya posits that he “came to be a shaman of words” after the debilitating injury suffered as a youth when he dove into the irrigation ditch and broke his neck (“Shaman of Words” 55). Both men—the writer and the character he brings to life—undergo a spiritual transformation that results in their emergence as a voice for their community, a link to the past.

By so doing, Anaya enacts the process of cultural reintegration that Byrd posits in *Transit of Empire* by returning to the foundational narrative of Western modernity—scientific rationalism, historical progression, success through individualized economic endeavor—and identifying in those metanarratives the underlying logic of colonization and conquest. The silences and gaps in the historical text thus become fertile sites for examining the Indigenous trace; as Byrd puts it, “it is through the elisions, erasures, enjambments, and repetitions of Indianness that one might see the stakes in decolonial, restorative justice tied to land, life, and grievability” (xiii). This is precisely what Anaya does when he takes Sonny to the Jemez Mountains, where he stumbles upon Naomi, another old flame from his past, and a group of men who push him to the ground, disorienting him while they swing a dead snake through the air. Sonny stands, bruised but unhurt, to see a Zia symbol appear in the rocks of the Cliffside. The image fades, but it leaves Sonny to reflect on its meaning, and Anaya fills two pages with Sonny’s thoughts about the intersection of the earthly and the divine, what he refers to here as the “relationship to a higher, creative power” (54). In the gap of the stone Sonny finds the history of the Zia glyph and the

peoples who venerate it as sacred.

Anaya uses the concept of the Zia Stone, a mythical piece of rock inscribed with a petroglyph, but unlike the other features of the volcanic escarpment of Albuquerque's West Mesa, as it serves as a spiritual talisman. As Anaya describes it, the Zia Stone is "a large meteorite on which the ancestors of the Pueblos carved a symbol of universal truth, a unifying sign of being and harmony" (19). With no basis in myth or history outside of the text, the Zia Stone becomes a self-referential trope that Anaya can employ to critique the intrusiveness of Anglo culture on the landscape and social fabric of New Mexico. The spirit of don Eliseo tells Sonny that the Zia Stone "holds the meaning of life," and that "if bulldozers plow up the West Mesa they will bury the Zia Stone forever" (19), which will further divorce the people from their land and history, their very sense of self. Anaya contends that if unchecked development among the ancient petroglyphs eventually displaces or destroys the Zia Stone, a profound disconnect between the present-day inhabitants of the region and the rich heritage of the ancient peoples whose stories and myths underlie the place that has grown into a modern city would result. Elsewhere in the novel, Anaya—again through the voice of don Eliseo—refers to "the promise of the Zia Stone" (41), whose symbolism of the cardinal directions, the universe extending out from its center, the four seasons of the year all intertwines with the cosmology Anaya lays out in the Sonny Baca series. This image of the Stone, ancient, lost, unknowable, yet also precarious and delicate, threatened on all sides by the encroachment of alien values and practices, social, religious, and economic structures that contrast those of the pre-modern inhabitants of the land, becomes a powerful response to Western hegemony and

colonization. Nowhere else in his writing is Anaya more pointed in his assertion that reckless capitalism and the amoral dependence on modern science can utterly destroy the entire foundation on which community is built, and it is this—not the asides on terrorism or drug trafficking—that marks Anaya’s work as truly morality-driven.

This disconnect between the traditional peoples of the area and the influx of different lifeways borders at times on parochialism, a critique of Anaya’s work that has been made several times. Coupled with Anaya’s tendency to romanticize a pre-modern and mythic past that bears little weight on the contemporary world, this binary threatens at times to undo the novel in a tangle of mushy spirituality, as when Sonny ruminates on how the nuclear age resulting in humanity “stepp[ing] outside the great chain of being” (20). But each time he verges on something dangerously simplistic, Anaya pulls back with a gesture toward hybridization, as when, in the same moment of reflection, Sonny seeks to connect the worlds of science and spirituality: “a quantum spirit move[s] in the material world, atoms seethed with activity, and the energy itself was the consciousness of the universe” (20). And it is in that impulse toward synthesis—finding connections between disparate traditions and histories—that Anaya makes perhaps his most important contribution to 21st-century discussions of multi-culturalism, a theme he has explored for four decades, and which has seen drastic changes from the early days of the Chicano Movements, through the canon wars of the 1980s and the developmental of cultural studies programs. As such programs come under politically-motivated scrutiny and are in places dismantled, Anaya’s message emphasizes not just uniqueness, but also correlations and overlaps.

In this respect, Anaya's use of Meso-American, Spanish, Egyptian, Greek, Christian, and Buddhist myths and tropes becomes the defining trait of his argument for an inclusive, pluralistic society that welcomes difference and values multiple worldviews. His assertion that when "new laws came, new courts, new police, [...] the land slipped from one hand to another, and the way was lost" (21) entails not only the loss inherent in intercultural conflict and violence, but also the potential for reconciliation and rebirth, a theme that Anaya has long focused on. For example, in his 1995 essay, "The Spirit of Place," Anaya, in discussing the Native American traditions of the Southwest that have been lost through the encroachment of Western modernity, argues that through cultural genocide, "we have not only destroyed each other, we have destroyed stories [...] that carried the history and soul of the people [...] Until we acknowledge the genocide of people and their stories, we cannot make peace with ourselves" (156). This concept reemerges as being central to the action of *Jemez Spring*, particularly as Sonny confronts Raven at the novel's close, as the hero thinks "With the help good and honest people mankind could resist the ancient call that threatened to overwhelm the world's soul" (269-70). That destructive impulse is not just Raven's tricksterism, but also the history of colonization, discrimination, genocide, and cultural displacement that Anaya eulogizes, both here and throughout the corpus of his work.

This drive to rejoin the disparate worlds into a greater harmony relies heavily on the role of the storyteller, and in *Jemez Spring* Anaya once again emphasizes the role of narrative in connecting people, cultures, and epistemological models. Just as Sonny comes to see

his interconnectedness with Raven, and the similar interconnectedness of the past and present, Anaya argues that telling stories— especially stories that empower a culture and renew its traditions—allows people with vastly different life experiences and worldviews to bridge that gap. Anaya refers to this concept when Sonny ponders the idea of *plática*, which he asserts continues in new forms in the wake of innovations in communication technologies: “The oral tradition was alive, gone digital, buzzing through telephone wires and cell phone frequencies up and down the valley” (27). In this respect, the story—and the act of storytelling—becomes the bridge that Anaya refers to later in the novel, “a bridge that separated different worlds” (72), but also the bridge that connects those different and distinct places. Speaking and storytelling make the world, as Hawley indicates in discussing Native views of orality: “Many tribal epistemologies adhere to the belief that the world is rendered intelligible—in some ways created—by the spoken word” (100). By connecting the oral tradition with the modern world and its communication technologies, Anaya links Raven’s attack on cell phone networks to the colonialist attack on language, identifying Sonny’s foe with the cultural forces that insist on a monolithic and homogenous linguistic standard for the United States.

Sonny thereby reaches a sense of closure by completing the annual cycle of conflict with Raven, replacing the linear narrative of Western epistemology with the cyclical Native worldview, telling a story that connects to the various cultural traditions from which Sonny himself (and Anaya as the storyteller outside the story) is descended, and conquering Raven’s destruction with a restorative magic that builds community and bridges the diverse value systems of Hispanic, Anglo, and Native cultures in the

Southwest. It is this theme of storytelling as a means of restoring harmony to a broken and violent world that undergirds the entire Sonny Baca series, and is especially significant in the context of *Jemez Spring*, where every action made by both Raven and Sonny is part of a performance, from Sonny's role as a local celebrity to Raven's theatrics in the auditorium at the novel's close. As Sonny makes his way back to the city after visiting the crime scene and the suspicious device that has been found in the Valles Caldera, he thinks about how "the day gathered many stories on its journey" (130). In this respect, Sonny the trickster is the medium through which the stories unfold and intertwine, and Anaya as the storyteller blends those stories into a narrative that moves from the governor's death to the threat of a nuclear attack to the strange story of Santa Fe Woman, an entirely fictitious account of a Caucasian skull found near Santa Fe that was discovered to predate all known inhabitants of the region, thereby throwing indigenous claims to historical primacy and its accompanying rights to land and water. Each of these stories forces a reexamination of reality, science, politics, crime, and community. And as in the first three novels, characters emerge over the course of the narrative as mini-episodes: Naomi re-entering Sonny's life and prompting a story of their youthful encounter, Augie Martinez' story of family tragedy, Jose Calabasa from *Albuquerque* appearing as Sonny leaves the Jemez mountains and makes his way back to Albuquerque. Each of these figures has a story and plays a brief role in the narrative Anaya unfolds, reconnecting their lives with Sonny's.

After telling the story of the city-wide debate over whether dogs can dream, Anaya returns his attention to the seasonal focus of the series, and the role that the vernal

equinox plays in *Jemez Spring*. As Sonny notices the sunlight on his wall, he reflects on the moments of conflict with Raven over the past year—the summer and winter solstices and the autumnal equinox. On each of these days, Sonny has faced and vanquished Raven, only to see his nemesis return three months later with a new plot to destroy the world in fire and chaos. This cyclical pattern has been evident to Sonny from the beginning of *Zia Summer*, and each encounter with Raven has solidified in Sonny’s mind—and in the narrative structure of the novels—the role that these moments of seasonal transformation play. Thus, Sonny is not oblivious to the possibility that Raven will strike, and the first sign of something unusual alerts him to Raven’s presence. This stands in stark contrast, for example, to the surprise Sonny felt the previous year when Raven returned after being seemingly killed at the end of the first novel; now Sonny—a creator of dreams and a spiritual force capable of confronting Raven without the guidance of don Eliseo—know what to expect, and he relishes the opportunity to defeat Raven, a challenge that this time has as much to do with personal revenge for the death of don Eliseo and the loss of his unborn children as it does with the larger-scale threat that Raven poses to New Mexico, the nation, and the world. Ultimately, *Jemez Spring* is a novel about change, and Sonny’s complete transformation from a simple private detective to a trickster character and shaman marks the most compelling change, the sort of personal reinvigoration that Anaya contends every person must seek for, and which every culture needs.

The fact that the series concludes with the spring equinox—the time of rebirth and renewal—is not accidental, as Anaya once again invokes religious themes of

resurrection—whether from Christian mythology or from Egyptian and Greek tales. The return from darkness to light serves as a model for the remaining path that Sonny must take: he has gained power, but lost innocence, and he must now defeat the darkness of his own despair and self-pity, rediscovering the light of his love for Rita, his connection to his community, and his own belief in a power greater than himself. Thus, the springtime becomes a marker of the personal transformation that Sonny has yet to experience, and the equinox marks the moment of that transformation. Anaya describes these moments as being “in between, sacred space” (6), and the trickster theme of liminality again reemerges here; Sonny is standing on the precipice of something significant. Here, however, there is a difference. Whereas the first three novels focus on the sun hanging in a precarious place relative to the earth—the longest and shortest days of the year marking the sun’s halt in its progression, and the fall equinox being associated with the waning of life and the image of death—here the theme is one of rebirth. Anaya describes it as the “time of earth’s renewal” (6), and images of life and vitality fill the text. This day will test Sonny and the people for whom he is a representative, but the underlying theme is one of hopefulness and possibility, standing in contrast to the more despondent tone of both *Rio Grande Fall* and *Shaman Winter*.

In fact, the very idea of “spring” thus becomes meaningful, signifying not only the season of the vernal equinox, but also the idea of rising up, regenerating, and renewal, and Anaya repeatedly emphasizes themes of rebirth, both in a biological sense, as animals emerge from hibernation and plants come into bloom, and in a spiritual sense, as individuals and groups undergo a process of understanding their identity and history.

Anaya asserts that only in history can we find the answers to gnawing ontological questions, and in this respect, *Jemez Spring* serves as his most profound expression of hope for the future; even with a long legacy of violence and social inequality, people from different cultural backgrounds can embrace that difference and find meaning in an existence that does not rely on the objectification of the Other. Rather, Anaya presents in *Jemez Spring* a model for cultural reintegration, literally making whole something that has been deeply fractured. In the aforementioned essay, “Shaman of Words,” Anaya recounts his experience convalescing in the hospital after his diving accident, a period during which he “learned that each person [...] was on a journey through life [...] We were like snakes sloughing away the old skin, being born brilliant and new” (58). As with the rebirth of the individual after trauma has ruptured the contours of a previous life, Anaya argues that the conflict of the Sonny Baca novels—and the threat of nuclear holocaust in *Jemez Spring* in particular—opens up a space for cultural rebirth and definition.

Spring also has a biological impulse, and Anaya reflects repeatedly on the idea of reproduction and the creating of new life. Sonny serves an ideal vehicle for this theme, as he embodies the virility celebrated by corridos and other forms of folk and popular culture in the Southwest; he is the macho, independent, sometimes reckless individual whose physical strength and protective impulses toward those he cares for make him an attractive mate, but whose go-it-alone mentality renders him unattainable as a long-term romantic partner. As Olmos puts it, “Attractive to women [...] Sonny has played the field but is now involved with a woman with whom he fears he may be falling in love” (106).

Sonny is also attracted to a variety of women throughout the series, sometimes wondering why he has settled down with one woman when he is still young enough to “play the field” and carry on romantic relationships with several women at once. This is complicated by the obligation Sonny feels to Rita, whom he intends to marry and with whom he intends to raise a family; the loss of their unborn daughter at the end of *Shaman Winter* deepens this bond, as that trauma links Sonny to Rita in a way that her attractiveness, her cooking, and her personal strength alone cannot do. Sonny—the once-young bull—has found a lifelong companion, and the ensuing transformation from wild young bachelor to mature, responsible mate and potential father is as jarring to him as the cultural and ethnic conflicts recounted throughout the series.

Notwithstanding this challenge to Sonny’s individual sense of masculinity and the cultural norms associated with machismo, the theme of fecundity drives the *Jemez Spring*, as the rhythms and natural cycles of springtime appear frequently, both in human interactions and in natural settings. Animals that wake from hibernation seek mates, trees and flowers begin to bud, and the people of the villages and cities are outside, often looking for love. These moments of mating, romance, and reproduction become the site of Sonny’s internal struggle to keep his sexual impulses in check, manifesting a sense of commitment to Rita that transforms and deepens their sexual and emotional relationship. Such moments occur throughout the series, but their frequency in *Jemez Spring* is meaningful, as Sonny’s transformation from wild bachelor to settled mate marks a significant departure from the archetype of Coyote as libidinous and unable (or unwilling) to keep his sexual impulses in check. When Sonny runs into an old classmate

at Civic Plaza, he notices her physical attractiveness and recalls memories of her from high school, but ultimately the most powerful part of the interaction is not sexual, but rather emotional, as she tells her story and the two of them reconnect as people, leading Sonny to note that “we don’t notice the beauty in people until they touch us” (192).

In particular, his visit to Tamara toward the end of the novel, as he seeks answers to the riddles of Raven’s plot, marks a key moment in the individual text and the series as a whole, as it is in this moment of temptation that Sonny finds a balance between desire and commitment. Tamara Dubronsky, who first appears in *Zia Summer* as a mysterious and seductive foreign woman of uncertain origins, haunts the narrative of each successive novel, a sign at the margins of the plot, a marker of the contemporary need to mystical phenomena in the modern world. In *Jemez Spring*, she makes but one appearance, toward the novel’s conclusion, first as a silhouette at the window of her downtown loft apartment (231). Sonny recognizes her and feels the need to meet with her to uncover the secret of Raven’s plot, knowing that her desire for him gives him the opportunity to learn the key to defeating Raven. After initially pushing Tamara for whatever information she might have about Raven’s whereabouts, Sonny changes course, opting to listen when “his coyote sense told him to play” Tamara’s game, to “be wily” (238). By so doing, he reverses the roles that he and Tamara typically play—she the seductress, him the resistant object of desire. Here, Sonny alters his speech, emphasizing the spiritual element of his mission to defeat Raven; instead of shouting “Raven wants to end it!” (236), he states that he and his opponent have “moved onto a new plane” (239). This shift is significant, as it allows Sonny to control the conversation. As he allows Tamara to continue her seduction

and begin a yogic chant, Sonny is able to catch her off guard and find out when and where Raven will be. He slips away to find that his truck has been returned and he is able to leave the site of temptation and return to his mission.

At the same time that they reinforce themes of birth and fecundity, images of reproduction and sexuality are, throughout the novel, counterpoised with scenes of death, both real and potential, both physical and psychological. The turtle that Sonny pulls from the side of the road had just emerged from its hibernation, in response to the fact that “Spring had dug its fingers of renewal beneath the skin of the earth” (175), but in responding to that call, the creature had been badly wounded and nearly killed. And earlier, as he drives north toward the Jemez Mountains, Sonny finds the body of a dead snake that had been run over on the busy highway. Sonny is stung by the tragedy of nature being sacrificed to man’s desire for speed and convenience, symbolized by the four-lane expressway through the mesas and mountains. Just as the development along Albuquerque’s West Mesa threatens the Zia Stone, the burgeoning suburbs of Rio Rancho to the north—which Anaya describes as “spreading like a fire out of control” (43)—threaten wild spaces as high-traffic freeways and housing construction upsets the natural world. Development in both areas is to Anaya an act of altering the balance of man and nature, distancing human existence from the untamed world around it. And in this moment, when he is preoccupied with Raven and hurrying to solve the mystery of the governor’s death, Sonny makes a crucial decision, one that indicates his priorities and values: he stops, mourns the snake’s death, and takes its body so that he can bury it later. The crow nearby—sign of Raven—watches, but cannot get to the body of the dead

animal, and, as he drives off, Sonny sees a Coyote—his own *nagual*—watching, as Anaya puts it, “as if approving” (47). In this scene, Sonny inverts the assumptions of the crime novel, pausing from his work to solve the apparent wrong in order to rectify a deeper but less obvious one, the intrusion of the human world into the natural one, the Anglo into the Hispanic, the European into the Indigenous.

Spring as a category also implies a rebounding and lifting, similar to the theme of flying that emerges in *Rio Grande Fall*, although here this concept relates more directly to organic elements that reach for clean air and sunlight. Sonny repeatedly gazes at mountains, cliffs, clouds, and the sky, his vision being drawn from the pedestrian concerns of his urban life to contemplate the spiritual matters that underlie his conflict with Raven. In the Jemez Mountains, Sonny is knocked to the ground and surrounded by a group of men from the pueblo, locked in the middle of their circle for having “interrupted their ritual” (53), and immediately after returning to his feet he turns his sights toward the cliffs. There he sees—or imagines to have seen—the Zia sun symbol in the rock, the lines pointing to either side, the sky, and the ground below. Anaya uses this moment to reiterate the symbolism of the Zia sign: “the blazing Zia sun, sun of movement traveling across the four quadrants, now moving into the spring equinox. Four seasons, four spaces, four dimensions, four times in the year the earth circled the sun, and the movement through space became a sacred journey” (53). Later, as he arrive at the pueblo of Jemez, Sonny looks first at the river that runs through the valley, and then up toward the mountains, which, in keeping with the novel’s theme of fecundity, Anaya sexualizes as being “female, its rounded caldera soft breasts [...] the crater itself—a

womb opening” (71). This description continues on to hint at the eternal nature of the mountain, a presence that, through geological time, outlasts all of the efforts of humanity to leave a mark. The permanence of nature in resisting human incursions stands in stark contrast to the threat of nuclear holocaust hinted at in the first three novels. Even the strange device discovered in the caldera north of Jemez Springs—which may or may not be a nuclear weapon of some sort—is largely peripheral to the storyline, and the ultimate unmasking of this fraudulent threat serves as a sort of denouement to the novel and the series, a false fear that pales in comparison to the danger of cultural loss occurring on an ongoing basis. And after he returns to Albuquerque, Sonny, sitting by Sophie, his former classmate, stares off at clouds (again sexualized, this time as Sophie’s body) that “rest luxuriously supine over the skies of Albuquerque” (193). In each case, Sonny shifts his gaze from the quotidian concerns—significant as they are—related to his investigation and pursuit of Raven, finding above him in the natural world a marker of hope and rejuvenation, something that can sustain him as he battles his nemesis.

Similarly, the theme of flight, which in the earlier texts—and especially *Rio Grande Fall*—is tightly associated with the crash that is inherent in any takeoff, in which flying is always tinged with a sense of fear, as bodies fall from hot air balloons and Anaya invokes images of September 11, reemerges in *Jemez Spring*. Here, however, the dominant image is that of rising, life springing from the earth, death being vanquished in various myths of resurrection, and the people of the city rising from the illusions of Raven’s performance to return to their relationships with family members and neighbors at the novel’s close. This act of returning of the missing story to the historical meta-narrative is a central part

of the story of *Jemez Spring* as well, as Anaya brings together myths and legends drawn from Native American traditions to complement—and at times supplant—the stories favored by the hegemonic forces of Anglo America. A fitting example of this gesture comes as Sonny returns to Albuquerque after his encounter with Raven near Zia Pueblo, when Sonny stops to save a turtle that had been wounded on the side of the road. As he reflects on the fragility of life, Sonny hears the disembodied voice of don Eliseo as the older man tells him a story of the turtle that holds up the sky and is transformed into the Sandia Mountains. This origins story—which reflects numerous tales of animals transforming into geographic features in Native traditions—centers on the idea of life being possible only because one being was willing to fight the chaos of primordial existence and create—literally—a space in which life could emerge (see *Jemez Spring* 178-79). Similar myths and legends abound in the text, each displacing familiar stories that often embody the Manichean, binary system of Western metaphysics; in their place, Anaya seeks to tell stories that synthesize differing worldviews, valuing divergent ways of understanding human experience and interaction.

Throughout *Jemez Spring*, the theme of life returning, both physically—as plants bloom and animals begin their mating rituals—and symbolically—as a people awakens to discover their own past—lies at the heart of the plot. The ominous tone of the two previous novels, with their hints at right-wing extremists controlling the American government and international cabals plotting to destroy entire nations, is replaced with a hopeful tone with a local focus and that seeks to reconcile the various cultural traditions that Anaya identifies in the Southwest. Even when Sony finds himself hanging

precipitously from a helicopter (a scene that echoes the hot air balloon flight in *Rio Grande Fall* that nearly brings the detective to an untimely end), the fear of death is wrapped up in a feeling of “[e]xhilaration and adrenaline” that make Sonny think more of flying than falling (108). And unlike other moments in the four novels in which Sonny is saved by a friend or lover who arrives at the last moment, here Sonny is pulled to safety by Augie Martinez, the state police officer who first calls Sonny about the governor’s death, and who might have pushed Sonny out of the helicopter in the first place. This sense of ambiguity regarding the heroes and villains lies at the heart of the novel and the final stage in Sonny’s growth as a shaman, as he comes to realize that the lines between good and bad are more complicated than he had imagined earlier, or than Anaya had previously portrayed. As Sonny explains in a confrontation with Raven toward the end of the novel, “we’re in this together. Why split ourselves in two? Why continue the old duality?” (266). This is echoed a few pages later, after Sonny has challenged Raven’s destructive impulse with an incantation of light: “Man’s soul, composed of chaos, was also composed of light. There were those, call them the saints or good people or helpers, who could help the sick and tortured unto a Path of Light, a Path of Hope” (269). In this instant, this culmination of his training as a shaman and his work journey toward understanding, Sonny becomes one such person and succeeds, finally, in vanquishing his foe, who falls moments later.

Anaya emphasizes this ambiguity by bringing together Sonny and Raven, not only physically, but also thematically, highlighting the similarities between the two men more overtly than in the previous novels. The opposition between Raven as a harbinger of

darkness and Sonny as an acolyte of don Eliseo and the “Señores y Señoras de la luz” fades in this text, and in its place are assertions that the very nature of Trickster is to complicate simple binaries and resist categorization. In place of the direct physical confrontations of the earlier novels, here Sonny and Raven face off in what are frequently battles of wit and wisdom, as they argue about culture, history, epistemology, and philosophy; thus Sonny’s realization that, in the midst of one of these confrontations, “he was dealing with a brujo, an entity that had the power to drive him mad and bring down the seven seals. He had to think, to be cautious like coyote, to plot his way” (162). This same confrontation includes Raven making assertions about reality and illusion, dream and waking: “mythic imagery is universal, it lives in the elusive state of being called the psyche” (159-160), and “every dreamer is a storyteller” (160). Similar statements throughout the novel underscore the tension between the traditional detective novel—with its straightforward conflict between heroes and villains—and the complex, uncertain nature of the trickster tale, in which a clear delineation between good and evil forces is not as easily achieved.

The renewal of a communal sense of identity, which figures prominently in all of Anaya’s work, expands in *Jemez Spring* to include not only the Chicano community to which Anaya belongs, but also the Native American communities that surround Albuquerque. As he drives to the village of Jemez, northwest of the city, Sonny reflects on the intrusion of Anglo society even here, outside of the urban space. The cynicism in Sonny’s thoughts is telling: “To assimilate a culture you don’t go to war, you provide low interest rates” (43). This process of economic displacement and disruption, what Anaya describes as

“the aggressive Anglo world meeting the once bucolic Indo-hispano world of the valley” (43), threatens the very fabric of the indigenous cultures that have been displaced by the encroachment of Anglo values and cultural structures. In this respect, Anaya is both working within the legacy of postcolonial theory he espouses in other places (including *Albuquerque*, *Heart of Aztlán*, and essays such as “The New World Man”) and resisting the tendency in Chicano studies to bypass the complexities of Native-Hispanic relations. There is a clear interest in issues of economic and discursive power in the novel, and Sonny’s thoughts turn frequently to the question of inter-cultural conflict as a source of suffering and social inequity.

At the same time, *Jemez Spring* also highlights the cultural and religious hybridity of much of his writing, and Sonny’s musings often lead him to reflect on the blending that occurs in the colonial space, and how the act of hybridity counters the hegemonic impulse toward homogeneity by fostering mixtures of belief and practice. After catching a ride to Jemez with Naomi, an artist who grew up in the village before leaving for fame in the art galleries of New York, herself a blending of traditional art reimagined in the modern world, Sonny thinks about how “both the Pueblo way and the Catholic way were paths of the sacred, for as long as men and women could pray and believe in its efficacy, dance, beat the drums, and sing, the ceremonial song of life would continue” (80). This inclusive model of cultural mixing contrasts sharply with the fundamentalist messages, both of the colonizing Spanish and Anglo cultures that left their imprint on the region, and of Raven, who seeks to overthrow the modern world through a violent act that echoes with contemporary preoccupations regarding terror and cultural extremism. Raven serves

here a somewhat different role than in the first three novels, moving beyond the almost playful nature of his acts of violence in *Zia Summer*, *Rio Grande Fall*, and *Shaman Winter* to become a more menacing figure, one who is not just willing to spill toxic waste to point people's attention to the risk of nuclear power or smuggle cocaine to fund a radical political movement; here Raven is seeking nothing less than the complete overthrow of the universe: "The end of the world! A doxology of chaos! [...] My need to return to chaos, the formless ocean before God spoke, a swirling mist that can dream or nightmare, the cosmic sea before the planets were born." (267).

This final installment in the Sonny Baca series builds on these themes of tricksterism, flight, and dreams, but departs in several important ways from the narrative patterns of the first three novels, distinctions that mark both Anaya's growing experience with the genre of detective fiction and an enriching of the plot and characterization of the novel, relative to the first three in the series. As the novel begins, Sonny awakes to hear news that the governor has been found dead and a strange device—suspected to be a nuclear bomb of some sort—has been located in the mountains of northern New Mexico. Throughout the novel, Sonny finds that he is again struggling to avoid Raven's distractions to focus on the real threat at hand, and the lessons he has learned from their earlier confrontations allow him to eventually unearth the true meaning of the events. This is again an ontological journey for Sonny, as he comes to understand who he is in relation to his community, his ethnic identification, and his nemesis, a self-awareness that will ultimately enable him to face Raven with the confidence needed to defeat him.

The first major point of distinction between this and the earlier texts is the timeframe; *Zia Summer*, *Rio Grande Fall*, and *Shaman Winter* all unfold over the course of several days leading up to the solstice or equinox associated with that novel, but the action of *Jemez Spring* occurs in one day, the vernal equinox. This results in a faster-paced novel in which Sonny travels from Albuquerque to the Valles Caldera near Los Alamos and back, finally returning to the Barelmas neighborhood of Albuquerque for the final confrontation with Raven. At times this pace feels forced, as Anaya must move Sonny from place to place—in the midst of a regional crisis and the attendant chaos and confusion—quickly, almost miraculously. As in *Rio Grande Fall*, Sonny flies from place to place, and the idea that he is able to traverse so much physical space so quickly heightens the theme of Sonny as trickster, capable of transgressing the normal bounds of time and space imposed by Western metaphysics. The pace of the novel also allows Anaya to keep this text more tightly focused than the others, with fewer plot diversions and philosophical musings. Whereas the other novels tend to pause for a chapter at a time for Sonny to reflect on questions of ethnicity, class struggle, or corporate greed, here these moments of reflection are limited, and as a result more meaningful.

Jemez Spring also presents a plot that is more focused on the tension between Sonny and Raven, rather than geo-political intrigues. While the external events—the murder of the governor, the suspicious device found in the caldera, and the cell phone network outage across the region—drive the plot forward, much of the action of the novel centers around Sonny's internal struggle to confront and conquer Raven. Without the aid of Don Eliseo, his guide and mentor from the earlier novels, Sonny must decide for himself how to

harness the shamanistic powers he has developed and attack Raven without falling into his circle of power, a state in which Sonny reacts to Raven's actions and loses control. As the novel unfolds, Sonny comes to realize that he must stop being "a surviving fool" and instead create the scenario in which he battles Raven (*Jemez Spring* 266). This focus on Sonny lends the novel a more personal, character-driven feel than the earlier installments, and mirrors the sense of *bildung* found in Anaya's earlier works.

This reimagining of the bildungsroman model he first explores in *Bless Me, Ultima* acts as Anaya's most impressive triumph throughout the Sonny Baca series. Not only does he rework the detective genre to include trickster themes and hermeneutics; he also posits a model of self-actualization that simultaneously works within and against the expectations of the coming-of-age story, which Poey describes as being "deeply rooted in the convention and formulas of a patriarchal and individualistic society" (270). By describing Sonny's process of gradually understanding who he is and apprenticing under don Eliseo's guidance—only to then be forced to act independently after his mentor's death—Anaya presents his protagonist as an older and more world-wise version of Antonio or Abrán, both of whom more closely fit that traditional generic demand that the hero be young and impressionable in the face of his crisis of identity. Anaya's 30-year-old detective-turned-shaman resists the demands of the bildungsroman, but his development echoes the modes of growing self-awareness of that narrative form. Similarly, Poey's discussion of the bildungsroman as functioning within "a patriarchal and individualistic society" breaks down here, as Anaya emphasizes throughout the novels—but here in *Jemez Spring* especially—the role of community and female forces in that process. While

the central character is still a singular male, Sonny's relationship with Rita, the tension of his attraction to both Lorenza and Tamara, and his past with women like Naomi all complicate the model of the self-contained male protagonist; Sonny loves and needs these women. Similarly, his relationship with a larger community, which he seeks to protect from Raven, to the point that he is willing to accept his own death, pushes the boundaries and expectations of the genre that Anaya is revisiting here.

Additionally, *Jemez Spring* returns the reader to the season in which Sonny Baca first appears during the novel *Albuquerque*, marking a completion of the cycle of transformation he has undergone, from the disreputable private investigator hired to undermine the mayor's reelection bid to the city hero who has defeated the embodiment of destructive and chaotic impulses and freed the city from its self-imposed hysteria. It is no coincidence then that *Jemez Spring* ends at the National Hispanic Cultural Center south of downtown and the Barelás neighborhood, the site of Frank Dominic's political implosion in *Albuquerque*, a scene that echoes Raven's final public act of showmanship in the final novel. After the crowd disperses and Raven disappears into the night, Sonny tracks his foe to the bosque alongside the river just steps away from the auditorium. The Rio Grande, which figures prominently in each of the Sonny Baca novels, becomes here the site of Raven's final defeat and Sonny's complete self-actualization. Anaya describes the scene thus: "The presence of the river felt complete in the heavy dusk, a curtain falling to envelope the witching hour" (258). And it is after this final confrontation that Sonny reflects on what has now become a four-part series, a number rich in symbolism for the various cultures that intersect in the novels:

[Sonny] had gone into the four seasons in search of Raven, explored the four quadrants, entered the fourth dimension and learned that in other universes there might yet be eleven or twelve or more dimensions to explore, depending on who did the defining. But for now, four was the parameter, the cosmology that maps a man's life, his heart, his humors, his family, his neighborhood, the city, the country, the universe. (281)

This final stage in Sonny's evolution marks another key departure from the first three novels, in which Sonny played the role of the trickster-as-fool as much as (or more than) he did the shape-shifter/narrative driving force. Contrasting the ways in which Sonny bumbles through Raven's schemes in *Rio Grande Fall* with the way in which he confronts Raven more directly in *Jemez Spring* presents a very different version of the protagonist, one that embodies a more fully-defined sense of self. In this respect, the process of finding oneself has now arrived at a new stage, one that relates to the contemporary Chicana/o experience of finding meaning in the ancient myths and figures of both Hispanic and Indigenous identity, as Alex Espinoza describes in his essay, "Coyotes": "And this is who I become, the negative, the positive, even the ambivalent characteristics of this figure, this trickster, this shape-shifter" (30). This powerful image of Coyote as trickster and ethnic hybrid, as border-crosser and storyteller, speaks to the lived experience of many Chicanas/os who find themselves as outsiders in a country that values whiteness and categorizes ethnic minorities into singular, compartmentalized categories, empowering individuals to claim a hybrid identity, a liminal space. As the novel comes to its climactic scene, Sonny finds himself in a movie theater in downtown

Albuquerque, lured there by Raven, who has assembled an impressive laser-light show, the modern version of a game of shadows that he uses to create illusions that can be passed off as reality, a theme that runs underneath the plot of the novel. The interior monologue that Sonny carries out in this moment points to the process of self-definition that the heart of the set of novels: “Now he had to learn to play Raven’s game. Be Coyote” (222).

Throughout the novel, Anaya returns repeatedly to the theme of Sonny finally becoming the person he is capable of being, overcoming his self-doubts and fears to tap into a confidence and power that have been latent throughout the first three installments of the series. The first time Sonny encounters Raven in *Jemez Spring* marks a key part of this transformation. Lured into a trap, Sonny returns to consciousness after being clubbed to find himself face to face with Raven, who then toys with his prey and outlines his plan to detonate a nuclear device and send the country into panic, fears of terrorism blinding the nation to its own injustices and shortcomings. As he struggles to control his anger, Sonny thinks to himself, “the strong emotion he felt wouldn’t solve his predicament. He was dealing with a trickster [...] He had to think, to be cautious like a coyote” (162). But unlike his other confrontations with Raven in *Zia Summer*, *Rio Grande Fall*, and *Shaman Winter*, this time Sonny succeeds in out-talking and outsmarting Raven, tricking him into sparing his life long enough for help to arrive and free him from Raven’s trap. When Sonny and Raven do face off at the river’s edge in the final climactic moment of the series, this transformation to an empowered trickster acting of his own accord instead of reacting to Raven’s scheme comes to fruition. Raven raves at Sonny: “My need to return

to chaos, the formless ocean [...] And I will take all human perception with me!” (267). But Sonny resists, clinging to the image of the daughters he lost to Raven and the hope of rebirth after the death that comes from the conflict, and by so doing is able to ward off Raven’s attack until he is thrown into the river and is lost as Sonny looks on. The theme of rebirth, connected both to the spring equinox itself and to the religious symbolism that emerges throughout the text, is particularly poignant in this final scene.

As Ralph Rodriguez argues,

Baca territorializes a general Chicana/o identity on his own personal formation. His attempts to imagine himself as a metonym for Chicana/o identities render the governing historical discourses of the series problematic, for these interwoven discourses, through which a highly complex set of Chicana/o identities form, are reduced to the consolidation of one Chicano’s *Bildung*, namely Sonny’s.” (115)

This process is most evident in *Jemez Spring*, as Anaya ties up some loose ends related to the plotline of the series (Raven’s interest in overthrowing Western governments, for example), while leaving others unresolved (the right-wing movement introduced in *Rio Grande Fall*). History is, as Rodriguez puts it, rendered problematic, non-linear, and not always clearly interwoven with traditionally-accepted versions of history. But this problematizing of traditional historical narratives is itself part of Anaya’s project of rewriting the history of New Mexico and its complex social composition; the mixing of various ethnic, religious, linguistic, and economic groups throughout the history of the region makes for something much less tidy than the traditional tri-cultural southwest often referred to. In this respect, *Jemez Spring* becomes the site for self-definition, if not

full closure. As Ralph Rodriguez argues, Anaya demonstrates “how spiritual, mystical, and mythic beliefs could be recuperated and synthesized to bring to realization a distinctive, self-empowered Chicana/o subject that was deeply invested in making claims on indigenous and Spanish culture as it forged a unique ‘New World’ identity” (106), a process that has both political ramifications for the Chicano/a subject and personal ones for Sonny. By the novel’s close, Sonny has learned to become an active agent in the plots that Raven weaves, rather than a passive object of his nemesis’ destructive impulses. Arguably, it is this transformation of his own role in the action of the novel, more than anything else, that enables Sonny to confront and ultimately defeat Raven along the banks of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER 7

A CONVERSATION WITH A TRICKSTER AUTHOR

When I first encountered Rudolfo Anaya's writing as a graduate student, I had been to New Mexico once; at the end of my first year of college in Utah, my father and sister drove from Pennsylvania, where my family lived, to pick me up. Instead of driving the route we typically took across the country, we decided to follow a southerly path along Interstate 40, stopping in Albuquerque one night. I distinctly remember as an 18-year-old how different this place was from where I had grown up, both physically—the distant horizon of the desert was alien to a boy who grew up in the forests and cities of the East Coast—and culturally. I saw in the faces around me a history I had not learned, a language I barely understood (my three years of high school Spanish seemed woefully inadequate here). For a young White boy, being something other than part of the majority group can be discomfiting, but also eye-opening, and I recall the tension I felt for that short time. There was in New Mexico something that challenged my understanding of the world and pushed me from my privileged place in the center of the world.

Years later, when I returned to Albuquerque, I found myself one evening on a bus home from work, realizing that I was the only Anglo on the bus full of people—Hispanic, Native American, Black, Filipino, Korean—and that I had found a home in a place where I could immerse myself in histories and cultures that I could not understand, but that I longed to appreciate more fully. And while I recognize in the ten years I spent living, working, and studying in New Mexico the continual thread of white privilege that I enjoyed, I am grateful for the de-centering that I experienced, the times I found myself

unable to understand a conversation in Dine or Spanish or Chinese. That sense of disruption is ultimately what brings me back to the novels of Rudolfo Anaya, to the character of Sonny Baca and his efforts to thwart Raven, and it is that desire to know—in some small way—the history of people whose ancestors were here centuries before mine came here from Europe that drives me to revisit the questions of colonization, appropriation, and violence that Anaya raises. It is what brings me back—again and again—to the land and people of New Mexico.

On a sunny September morning in 2008, I had the opportunity to visit Rudolfo Anaya in his home on Albuquerque's West Mesa, overlooking the Rio Grande valley where the fictional Sonny Baca lives. I was there to interview him about his model of tricksterism and how the Sonny Baca novels function as a form of trickster aesthetics, and I had come prepared with a range of questions that I felt were thoughtful and insightful. As we began talking, however, Anaya quickly inverted my expectations for the interview, asking me the probing questions, questions that over time have helped me understand what Rudolfo Anaya the author, critic, activist, and man has in common with his literary creation, Sonny Baca the investigator, neighbor, friend, lover, and shaman. Here is the first exchange recorded in the interview:

Roy Turner: I'm writing about your Sonny Baca novels and the role of tricksters in those works.

Rudolfo Anaya: What is a trickster?

Roy Turner: It's either a figure or a theme or a presence that you can't pin down. It's different than Western metaphysics. It's not definable and it's always

changing and doing things to you. And some of those things are definitely positive and some of them are definitely negative, and a lot of them you can't pin down.

Rudolfo Anaya: Where do you believe it occurs, in a person or in a place?

Roy Turner: I'm not sure. It seems to occur most in a story. And it could work its way through a person, and it could be a manifestation in a person or in a place.

Rudolfo Anaya: So you're thinking trickster is kind of like a spirit that roams around?

To me, this exchange—in which the interviewer is forced to answer the kinds of fundamental, theoretical questions that would be traditionally directed toward the interview subject, and the very act of interrogation is turned on its head—embodies the trickster spirit that Anaya presents in the Sonny Baca novels. The marginalized image of trickster is reinscribed as a central motif, one that—if respected and approached ethically—can renew a world riddled with violence, discrimination, and inequity.

But the most interesting part of the exchange comes moments later, after I reply to Anaya's question about trickster as a “spirit that roams around.” Sensing that I had nearly exhausted my ability to speak articulately, and wanting to turn the interview into a teaching opportunity (Anaya is, in my mind, a consummate teacher), he begins to answer his own questions: “I always thought it was just in nature, in the animals, and because of the oral tradition of the animals that pull trickster-like happenings. And then, if it's in the animals, it can be in humans too. It can have that kind of spirit.” Moving the discussion of trickster from the two-dimensional plane of academic discourse and theoretical

pondering, Anaya places the concept squarely where it belongs—in the real world, in the intersection of the human and the natural. Yet even in this moment of interrogation-as-instruction, Anaya refuses to pin down the myth in neatly compartmentalized terms, and moments later he qualifies the answer he just gave: “Maybe it’s just a spirit that can inhabit animals or people.” The idea of *maybe*, the potential that exists in the very act of existing, expresses as clearly as anything I can think of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of trickster, of Sonny Baca, and of Rudolfo Anaya himself.

As we spoke, I was reminded of the interweaving of history, politics, and mythology that mark the Sonny Baca novels, all of which employ the standard tropes of detective fiction, and none of which rely exclusively on an entirely terrestrial conflict. The liminal space that Anaya inhabits—one in which the writer engages in a spiritual act of creating characters, stories, and ultimately worlds that become meaningful for the reader—between the physical world of the present and the intangible world of spirits, in which one’s ancestors and heritage are as central as the lived experience of the quotidian, bursts forth on the pages. One of the most interesting moments in the interview comes as I ask Anaya about how he writes. His response indicates something of this spiritual component to storytelling:

One time I was telling my wife, “How did I get into the world of spirits?” And I don’t know, but that’s the world that I was supposed to write about. And sometimes I look back and think, “Why didn’t I do some other kind of writing—something safer and a bit more congenial to the public, or conventional? Do they really want to know about this whole world of spirits?” Who knows? That’s kind

of what I explore in my writing, and I'm still at it. [...] Thankfully, I've lived long enough to get into it and explore it. [...] But, it's always been a challenge to keep exploring, to keep going, but that whole world of spirits that I grew up with and that's part of me, I think, becomes a central theme.

Even in the mundane setting of a normal Friday morning in his living room, Anaya turns the conversation quickly and easily to the topic of “the world of spirits,” a phrase that for him is clearly a normal part of his life and work. The past—the traditions, culture, and legacy of ancestors long departed but not forgotten—imbues his worldview and affects every facet of his work. Writing then acts as the means by which that remembered past interjects into the present and shapes the imagined future for which he works.

The discussion continues for nearly an hour longer, and we touched on several themes in his novels, and throughout I was impressed with Anaya's graciousness, his thoughtful and quick responses, and the depth of his commitment to the idea of creative energy in his work. In discussing the role of the novelist in telling the untold and neglected stories of a culture, Anaya waxed rhapsodic for a moment, listing the names of friends and colleagues whom he saw as being influential in marking out a space for Chicano studies to emerge over the course of his career. The names became a form of litany, the personal and professional histories merging into the communal. And then, at the very end of the interview, perhaps intentionally, and perhaps as a slip, he said “It could be a trickster talking.” The entire conversation could be seen as a trickster talking—not maliciously, but with a deep concern for getting things right, even if that means playing with the stories. I saw a playfulness in the smile, realizing that I had just witnessed something

special, a true artist at work, weaving words masterfully, teaching me throughout the visit. It is an experience I will never forget.

Much has changed in the world, the literary and critical landscape, and in our lives since that meeting, most notably the death of his wife, Patricia, in 2010. Since then, Anaya's writing has slowed, in part because of his age, and in part because of the loss of his personal muse and inspiration. In describing the trip he and his wife took to China, Anaya speaks lovingly of her companionship:

Over the years my wife Patricia and I have traveled many places, and generally our way as pilgrims is to wander, to let our sense of adventure and intuition lead us into back streets, museums, mercados where the people buy and sell their goods, and especially into the ancient ruins of lost civilizations. (*A Chicano in China* vi)

In his life—as in the Sonny Baca novels—Anaya privileges this sense of “adventure and intuition,” creating a space in which exploration and discovery can occur and ultimately reshape our understanding of the world and our place in it.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH RUDOLFO ANAYA

FRIDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2008

Roy Turner: I'm writing about your Sonny Baca novels and the role of tricksters in those works.

Rudolfo Anaya: What is a trickster?

T: It's either a figure or a theme or a presence that you can't pin down. It's different than Western metaphysics. It's not definable and it's always changing and doing things to you. And some of those things are definitely positive and some of them are definitely negative, and a lot of them you can't pin down.

A: Where do you believe it occurs, in a person or in a place?

T: I'm not sure. It seems to occur most in a story. And it could work its way through a person, and it could be a manifestation in a person or in a place.

A: So you're thinking trickster is kind of like a spirit that roams around?

T: I think that's one way that people understand it. But I don't know that it's necessarily a spirit in the way the Western world would conceive of it.

A: I always thought it was just in nature, in the animals, and because of the oral tradition of the animals that pull trickster-like happenings. And then, if it's in the animals, it can be in humans too. It can have that kind of spirit. It would be interesting to either compare or align it to what we call the *duende* in Spanish. Somebody from Spain wrote me once and said, "You have the *duende* in one of the novels." And I said, "Yeah, because that's the spirit that seems to be part of the culture that I know, this northern New Mexico culture, with its blending of cultures and of

place. Maybe it's just a spirit that can inhabit animals or people.

T: So it seems like there's something very ancestral about trickster too then. You're saying it's part of that culture.

A: Well, yes, if you look at it, especially in the Native American, you would imagine that you would have many stories, if that's what you mean by ancestral. There would be a history.

T: What are the American Indian traditions that most informed your work? When you write about Sonny and Raven, and Coyote comes into place, which traditions come into play, or are you most relating to there?

A: I don't know. I do know that there's the so-called stories of Raven and Coyote in perhaps many of the Native American cultures, but I don't know that I took from any one in particular. It seemed like it just worked out that way, that in the process of understanding these two characters, Sonny became related to the coyotes and Raven, because of his name, related to raven, and they both come out of the Native American oral stories. But I wouldn't say that I went to anyone in particular, or even, at that point, read a book that I could point you to that might have influenced me.

T: Well I assumed that you weren't going to the works of anthropologists, but that this was that cultural inheritance.

A: There was enough background, either in terms of heritage, culture, stories, or readings, or the proximity of, say, the Pueblo world.

T: Along those same lines, I've heard you mention before that characters like Sonny and Raven come to you. Could you talk a little bit about how these figures entered

into the novels, how that began?

A: I was thinking about it. I was at the Rockefeller Center in Bellagio, Italy. I had a fellowship to write, and every morning I'd go to this little cabin out in the woods, this little stone house. I had just finished *Albuquerque*, and I started writing about Sonny Baca in that place. But it was a very different story and it didn't work out. But it was that someone named Sonny Baca was trying to have his story told. And I just needed time to let him seep in and begin to understand that the reason the first story I was writing was that I didn't know him well enough. And also that he had to be connected to the history of this place. And then when I came back, I think that's when he kind of popped out full grown out of my forehead. I had used the name in the novel *Albuquerque*, and that wasn't the Sonny Baca of these novels at all. That was just some name that came to me, and he was a private investigator, and he was kind of sleazy. But when the real Sonny Baca appeared, he's the one that becomes the main character in the novels.

T: You talked about the importance of names, both Sonny's name, how the character in *Albuquerque* had that name but wasn't the real Sonny Baca, and Raven's name.

A: And it's like the one I started in Italy wasn't the real Sonny Baca, and therefore the novel wouldn't work for me, because the character wasn't working.,

T: You almost give the sense in the four novels about Sonny that he's going through that same process of finding out who he is.

A: It's an incredibly learning process that he goes through., from being a PI that kind of keeps saying, "I just want to be normal," to the process he's led into, to learning about himself and some of the mysteries he goes through.

T: To become that shaman figure.

A: The shaman of words at the end.

T: Along those same lines then, in talking about the four novels together, what was the importance for you, in planning those out, about the seasons, about the solstices and the equinoxes?

A: There's wasn't a plan, in terms of a structure. I didn't sit down and say, "There are going to be four." I think what happens is that what we call symbols or archetypes or whatever the energy is in creative, dictates more to the writer than the writer dictates to himself. So that if I start with summer, then the unity of four, which becomes the four seasons, comes into play, and then I begin to know that there has to be four. But it's not like I sit down and say, "I'm going to write four novels about the four seasons."

T: So the story began and then you saw the pattern in that?

A: Right. You see, as I see, somehow the strength of symbols begins to dictate where you should go. So the strength of four and four seasons leads me to say, "Well, if there's a Zia Summer, there's going to have to be a fall." And by that time, of course, you're kind of hooked into four. But not at the very beginning.

T: I wonder why then it would have started with the summer. What do think is the impetus behind that?

A: Well, because the sun symbol is so strong. It's just a very strong symbol.

T: what does that symbol mean to you? It's so broad and permeating where we are.

What's its importance to you?

A: It's very complex. It's the life-giver. So principally, the sun is the life-giver. All the

cultures of the world have had a sun symbol. Certainly, whatever little I know of the Pueblo traditions here, it's a very important symbol. So I began to start calling the sun "grandfather." I think that aligns a little bit with the Native American tradition in terms of the importance given to the sun. Not as deity as we would say in the way the word is understood in Western culture, but more as life-giver. And it's very complex. Then, if you're Christian, you have the allusion of the sun to the son of Christianity, and you just go on and on. But the symbols are just very hard to tie down, I think. You can say it means this, but I would say it's just complex. And that's why they're so rich in meaning.

T: I'd like to switch now and talk a little bit about how these novels fit within the larger scope of your work. I think you've answered this question before in other settings, but what was the reason for a detective novel and that genre shift?

A: I don't know. It was certainly happenstance that the first Sonny Baca occurs in *Albuquerque* as a private investigator. But then, I don't think that it was a decision. It was a decision that when Sonny Baca does appear, he's a private investigator, and I say "I've never written stories like that." And then the answer is, "Well, it doesn't matter. You're going to jump into it." And then, particularly, in *Zia Summer*, I have a great deal of fun doing it, and learning, because here I am in what's called the genre, and people see it more as writing that uses a specific formula. And you kind of just go through it. And for me it wasn't that at all. I just had to force it to be my way of writing into that genre. So, the manuscripts that I did over and over and over again, and I try to find out that you've got to end the chapter on a cliff-hanger. Well, that's obvious. Who doesn't know that?

T: But to actually do it...

A: But to do it and at the same time try to write the way I write was just really interesting and a learning experience.

T: You mention this idea of the “way you write.” How would you define that?

A: One time I was telling my wife, “How did I get into the world of spirits?” And I don’t know, but that’s the world that I was supposed to write about. And sometimes I look back and think, “Why didn’t I do some other kind of writing—something safer and a bit more congenial to the public, or conventional? Do they really want to know about this whole world of spirits?” Who knows? That’s kind of what I explore in my writing, and I’m still at it. Even these two young adult novels I have done—the ChupaCabra novels—are very much in that same world. And also exploring and writing. The one that just came out, *The ChupaCabra and the Roswell UFO*, gets into what some might call sci-fi. Way back in my beginning, when I began as a writer, I thought, “I’d like to write some sci-fi someday.” But that wasn’t me at that point when I was doing *Bless Me, Ultima* and *Heart of Aztlán* and *Tortuga* and *Albuquerque*. But, thankfully, I’ve lived long enough to get into it and explore it. There’s another area that I always thought I’d like to write—I’d like to write baseball stories about young kids. In this case, Gary Soto beat me to it. He writes really well about young kids, and he’s written, I think, a couple about young kids playing baseball and hanging out around the block. But, it’s always been a challenge to keep exploring, to keep going, but that whole world of spirits that I grew up with and that’s part of me, I think, becomes a central theme. So, if I wrote a baseball story, the ChupaCabra winds up as

pitcher, and the catcher would be hitting mudballs or something. See, I would twist it, I would make it fit my world. And the kids would say, “That’s dumb.”

T: I’m really interested in those new novels and the role the ChupaCabra plays there.

What is that? That’s certainly not a trickster-like character like Raven, but there’s still something that you can’t pin down about ChupaCabra.

A: I can’t pin it down either. This is the second novel, and I’m working on another one, and I’m trying to decide what it is. And I was giving a talk and Enrique LaMadrid—he’s a professor at UNM—was there, and I was talking about the Cocui, because the Cocui’s been mentioned in my stories. I wrote an essay about the Cocui, and I started that project in the South Valley about constructing the effigy and burning the Cocui. I was talking to the people about what I thought the Cocui was, and I said, “Now I’m writing about the ChupaCabra.” And I turned around to Enrique and said, “Maybe the ChupaCabra’s just a new form of the Cocui.” And he nodded, whether he agreed or not. These come out of the oral tradition. The Coco, La Llorona, scary characters are part of that oral tradition of stories, which gets you back to the trickster. Same thing—oral tradition that people try to explain phenomena or dreams by projecting these characters into story. So maybe the ChupaCabra is just a new concern that we have, and we’re projecting it into story. And it’s got something to tell us, as other figures, may be ambiguous. Like you said about the trickster, you haven’t pinned it down. I’d love to be able to give you a one-sentence definition.

T: I’ve got one more question, just to kind of wrap that up. We’ve talked about the ancestral nature of the trickster, we’ve talked about how ChupaCabra and Cocui

have to do with that tradition. What do you think about history? It's a very focused question: What does the rest of America have to learn about history from Albuquerque?

A: A great deal. That is one of my interests or themes. That is to incorporate into the novel, even as it deals with the world of the spirits, it may get beyond the comprehension of people that don't share my culture. They can still grasp the history. So I'm very conscious of putting in the history of this part of the world. Sonny Baca's ancestors, going back to Elfego Baca and, in one novel, Andres Vaca. People can follow the history of the coming of the Espanoles, the Mexicanos, and, I guess, part of that has to do with the fact that our history hasn't been told. By that I mean the Mexicano, Mexican-American community history is very scant when you look at it. And so it's one of the themes that I follow, as part of when it write. It's important for people to know their history. And if they're reading a novel they might enjoy because of all the machinations that I put in it—Is Raven going to get Sonny? Is Sonny going to get married? Is he ever going to recuperate for this problem? Why can't he learn?—at the same time they may be getting a basis, a center from which to view the novel. “Oh. This people, this community, is not like me. This community is not like East Coast, the South, the Midwest. It's different. But they do have a history, and they do have an oral tradition. And so now I'm getting parts of it.”

T: As sort of a follow-up to that. What sort of progress have you seen in the last 40 years in that process of telling that story? When *Bless Me, Ultima* first came out, you were making this entrance into telling that history. What kind of progress have

you seen over 40 years in that endeavor, for the community as a whole?

A: There is progress. But the progress has come when we, from within our community, our scholars have had to dig it out and tell it and write it. Here's an example, if you read this, it's very interesting stuff. But very little from the viewpoint of the Hispanic. So now if you go and read some of the historians we have right here—Gabriel Mendez or Enrigue LaMadrid and some of the other historians, Manuel Garcia from Santa Barbara, Acuna from Northridge—we then have had to tell our own history to get it told. It just simply was not incorporated into what we call the Anglo-American historian point of view. And in my own case, I think the growth in 40 years of writing has kind of been the same as the growth, say, in academic presentation of our history, our trained historians telling our history. The father of history, Euripides, the definition of history is to write about anything. The Greeks would write commentaries about animals, about a war that happened, and that became history. So history is almost anything, and anything that you write about. And the one thing you learn about history is that if you're writing it, you get to tell your viewpoint, and then you can tell as much truth and as much lies as you want, because it's your history.

T: Then we go back to the trickster.

A: Right, the trickster will tell his history the way he sees it. So, there's one account when I use different historical moments and try to keep them more or less in the realm of what we're told is the truth—although there is no such thing—but then I say, “What is that truth from the viewpoint of my community?” and then I write those stories. And so the novel is also history. In fact, probably, we know more

about history from novels than from history books. I guess that's nothing new, but it is new to me, in the sense that it's one of the themes I like to cover.

T: And the way that, for example, to go back to the discussion of genre, this detective novel teaches history is, I think, a unique sort of thing.

A: Yeah, almost any novel can do that. It may also be part of what we call a Southwest way of writing that, if you study the writers from any one of the cultures you will find that they seem to include the history of their place a lot. And again, that may not be anything new. You may go to the Southern writers and say they do too, or you may go to the beginning of writing in *Moby Dick* and say it's there too. I don't know.

T: But it seems that it would be done differently.

A: It has to be done differently because of the nature of the pace. Our tricksters are different from Eudora Welty's trickster, or Hawthorne's. The headless horseman is very different from Raven and Coyote. And I think the broader public, the world, kind of appreciates that because they're getting a view into cultures. And probably the real essence of culture comes out of that folklore, out of that tradition, out of the stories that are really kind of boiled in the land and the place and the people.

T: And it seems like you're trying very conscientiously to not have that simply be what you call, in Jemez Spring I think you use the phrase, "diversity by the teaspoonful." That you're really looking for something that's richer and more of that sense of *mestizaje*, than just, "here are everyone's stories," but that richness to it.

A: Well, I think that's what we have to do as writers.

T: Let me ask just one finally question that doesn't really relate to the novels directly.

I'm seeing Albuquerque in your work as this city, and you critique it and you praise it. What do you love the most about this city?

A: The most about Albuquerque? It's beautiful women. Isn't that obvious? Didn't I put that down somewhere?

T: Something like "God put us too close to Texas, but to make up for it, He gave us beautiful women." Is that the phrase?

A: Did I do that? It could be a trickster talking. I think places become home, and I have two homes. One is my hometown where I was raised, in Santa Rosa, and then moving here and spending my life here—I wouldn't say my second home, but my other home. And I'm always thankful that as a teacher I didn't have to travel to go look for work, that it worked out that I was able to stay in teaching here in this place, because it just means a great deal to be able to get into that essence of the place and its rhythms and its people and its food, and its way of being. And then to try to capture that in writing, which I'm sure I do poorly, but I attempt.

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