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The Mythic Matrix of Anaya's *Heart of Aztlan*

Paul Beckman Taylor

"As to the Spanish stock of our Southwest, it is certain to me that we do not begin to appreciate the splendor and sterling value of its race element. Who knows but that element, like the course of some subterranean river, slipping invisibly for a hundred or two years, is now to emerge in broadest flow and permanent action?"

— Walt Whitman, *November Boughs*

"Nota: his soil is man's intelligence."

— Wallace Stevens, *The Comedian as the Letter C*

Rudolfo A. Anaya is a Chicano writer, teacher of writers and cultural critic. The epithet "Chicano" pertains to Americans of Mexican origin, both north and south of the Rio Grande; and Chicano literature is the writings of those people — whether in Spanish or in English or in a mix of the two languages — which record Chicano culture and experience.¹

¹ Raymond A. Paredes offers a helpful characterization: "Chicano literature is that body of work produced by United States citizens and residents of Mexican descent for whom a sense of ethnicity is a critical part of their literary sensibilities and for whom the portrayal of their ethnic experience is a major concern" (74). I would add that "Chicano" identifies a view from the *inside* of that experience; as such, a non-native Chicano could produce Chicano literature if integrated into the Chicano cultural milieu. Tatam and Leal and Barrón survey the development and characteristics of Chicano literature. Espinosa displays particularities of the Spanish dialects of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. In distinguishing between Latino, or Spanish-American, and the Indo-Hispanic, Anaya draws attention to the importance of the Chicano's American Indian blood strain (1986, 118). In José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho*, a clear distinction is made between the rural Mexican's native ancestry, and the urban Spaniard's European blood strain.

Anaya's standing as a writer derives largely from the extraordinary success of his first novel, *Bless Me, Ultima*, whose current sales number over a quarter million copies. He is important as a teacher and promoter of Chicano writing, and his voice is prominent in disseminating the culture of *la raza*, the people whose bond to indigenous myths remains intact despite half a millennium of abrasive contact with European culture. Anaya's writings recall that bond for his own people and extend it across cultural borders to those like me who have lost touch with mythological centers in the complex maze of our migratory movements. Anaya opens a door to a fecund cultural heritage which, according to the traditions of native Americans, we once shared with the Chicano and which we are destined to share again.

Anaya's first three novels — *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlán* (1976) and *Tortuga* (1979) — comprise a trilogy which traces inter-related, yet distinct, Chicano experiences during a period bridging the mid-forties and the mid-fifties of this century. *Bless Me, Ultima* is a first-person recollection of early childhood in east-central New Mexico during which a small boy struggles to harmonize within himself several rival influences: contending blood strains of maternal and paternal character, native Spanish with the English of the educational establishment, and the traditional mystical lore of the land with the religious indoctrination of the Anglo church. *Heart of Aztlán* records the displacement and progressive destabilization of a family from the same town after they move to Albuquerque. *Tortuga* is the first-person narrative of the healing of the broken body and dislocated consciousness of the youngest son of that family in a hospital for crippled children in south-central New Mexico. That healing involves the retrieval of physical and spiritual connexions with the animate landscape. In all three novels, the well-being of the Chicano is associated with the health of his bonds to the land and its lore. *Heart of Aztlán* identifies that lore within a corpus of myths which pertain to Aztlán, a nation whose geographical area stretches, roughly, from present-day Texas, Colorado, Utah and California in the north, to the Rio Grande in the south. This nation was peopled in its early stages by speakers of Tanoan and Uto-Aztec dialects, and later by immigrants into the area, first the Athabaskan Navajo and Apache, then the Spanish and finally, one hundred and fifty years ago, the American.

The Chicano novel is noted for three inter-related characteristics that set it apart from Anglo fiction: use of the Spanish language, significant

presence of Mexican history and culture, and criticism of Anglo indifference, if not hostility, to Chicano cultural aspirations (Leal and Barrón 27–28). Anaya subordinates both social and linguistic concerns to the location and characterization of the territorial matrix of Chicano culture. Anaya's narrative framework for his novels is English, but an English which does not appear as a transparent form of an underlying Spanish.² Though, as Anaya elsewhere declares, "Aztlán has been a Spanish-speaking nation for over four hundred years" (1986, 139), he does not insist on a preferential status for Spanish in authenticating Chicano myth. Centuries before the absorption of indigenous myth into Spanish, its linguistic matrix was Nahuatl. If the Spanish language is of primordial importance for Anaya it is because, first of all, it is his own native tongue, and, secondly, it is the native tongue of those who share those myths with him now. The bond between language and myth is contingent rather than absolute, and Anaya's epistemic choice of English validates that language as a transmitter of Chicano lore. Anaya is, quite simply, giving the old myths a new home.

Similarly, though the Anglo dispossesses the Chicano of his land and his ethnic centrality in order to expand his own mobile socio-economic ideology, his technology is not in itself deleterious. It is destructive, however, when it intrudes its demands upon the values with which the Chicano has invested his land.³ If the Chicano as well as the Native American are accused by the Anglo of failing to compete sufficiently for their share of the social and economic stakes in America's manifest destiny, it is because the Anglo fails often to recognize the value these

² A transparent form is one which shows typical characteristics of the language being represented. In *Pochto*, for example, Villarreal will use non-English syntax to signal that the language being spoken is Spanish. A young girl will say, for example, "I have fifteen years" instead of "I am fifteen."

³ Elsewhere Anaya has commented: "The creative forces which the mythical dimensions for my region inspire in me also compete with the political reality of the region. . . . The old relationships of the mythic West need not be reduced to formula. Technology may serve people, it need not be the new god. If we flee to the old communities in search of contact with the elemental landscape and a more harmonious view of things, we can return from that visit more committed to engaging the political process. We can still use the old myths of this hemisphere to shed light on contemporary problems" (1988, 195–98).

peoples accord to the precious threads, including the Spanish language, which hold together in one web the people, their land and their history.

I put these issues in such terms because, it seems to me, *Heart of Aztlan* exposes them this way. To set their context I must briefly summarize the plot. Clemente Chávez is forced, with his family, to leave his debt-ridden rancho to seek a home and employment in Albuquerque, where his eldest son has found work. The novel traces a double experience and strategy of adaptation to the urban barrio. First is the son Jason's, who moves vaquero-like through the city maze of school and street. He resembles the heroes of the old corridos, a fearless fighter, a protective brother, and a courteous lover. Though his exceptional self-control seems to be a gift of character, we know that he has been taught by an old Indian how to collaborate with and profit from the materials of his physical environment. His younger brother Benjamin, however, becomes trapped in gang drug-dealing and ends up being shot down from a water tower. Second is the story of Clemente, who finds a job in the Santa Fe railroad shops, but loses it after a scuffle with the Anglo union boss. Meanwhile his family center falls apart. His sons and daughters find other centers of activity in the city. With his sense of honor weakened and his authority destroyed, Clemente drinks heavily and almost loses his life when he collapses in the street on a cold evening. He is found by an old blind singer of the barrio, Crispín, who revives him and tells him the myth of Quetzalcoatl, who fell from grace through drink before leaving his people with a promise of return. Crispín encourages Clemente to assume the leadership of the Chicano workers in their protest movement. He leads Clemente to La India, the ancient *bruja* who possesses *la piedra mala*, the lapified vestige of Quetzalcoatl's burning feathers. Though she uses the stone's power for her own evil purposes, Crispín is able to convert its power to lead Clemente on a visionary journey to the sacred source of *the people* in the heart of Aztlan. After his return and recovery, Clemente takes on Chicano leadership and, after he fails to win support for their cause from the local Chicano priest and the local political manipulator, he and his wife Adelita lead a march of love out of the barrio.

The novel features successive movements from the familiar to the strange and, as strange becomes familiar, old and new values become more complementary than contrastive. Linguistic complementarity is made explicit at the beginning of the novel when Jason and Benjamin first

exchange words, to which the narrator comments: "Sometimes they spoke in Spanish, which was the language of their people, and sometimes they spoke in English, which was the language they adopted in school, and so they moved in and out of the reality which was the essence of each language" (2). Though English is the core language of the narrative, Spanish is central simply because it is the language of the family circle and the ethnic community. It is, in Anaya's representation of the barrio, the language of prayer, oath, wonder, fear, joy and despair. In short, Spanish is the language of the heart, while English is the language of social structures which lie at the periphery of Chicano values. In an almost imperceptible strategy of deployment, however, Anaya shifts English toward the imaginative center. At the beginning of *Bless Me, Ultima*, he introduces this strategy in recalling Gabriel Marez's conversation with the narrator's mother concerning Ultima's imminent arrival: "Esta sola . . . ya no queda gente en el pueblito de Las Pasturas," to which the narrator adds: "He spoke in Spanish, and the village he mentioned was his home" (2). So the reader is advised that each time Gabriel speaks in a domestic context, he can understand that English read is a Spanish heard. Anaya's English is twin to his Spanish.⁴ The same is true of *Heart of Aztlan* when the scene is domestic, and it does not shock us to read Clemente railing against English in English.

Heart of Aztlan makes a major issue of making the strange familiar, but Anaya is able to make the strange yet stranger. The Anglo looking in and the Chicano looking out of the barrio see strangeness, but alterity involves the Chicano looking into his own cultural legacy. Though there is everywhere in Anaya's writing a sense of salutary relief in seizing upon old myths as buffers against the clone culture of greater America, the old myths are as strange to many Chicano as is Anglo culture. In José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho*, the father of the hero looks backward nostalgically from the chaos of this century and declares: "Our ancestors

⁴ Gingerich draws attention to Anaya's "aggressively bilingual mode of presentation," by which he means Anaya's refusal to compromise his Spanish with translations, a strategy that Gingerich feels blocks reader assimilation of its "fictional image" (215-16). Dasenbrock argues that context provides meaning even when the Spanish is "unintelligible" to the Anglo. If the fiction in Anaya's *Yóces* (1987) is indicative, he has his writing students experiment with a variety of strategies in mixing English with Spanish.

were princes in a civilization that was possibly more advanced than this one" (8), but then commits his energies to becoming an American. There is no such wistful speculation in Anaya's view. He surprises us by bringing the old myths, tamed in their textbook context, into the context of our daily lives, as if they were never absent, but just hidden. They surprise, and even shock us, not only because they look strange in the accoutrements of long-past conventions of dress, architecture and activity, but because they impose on us moral values that seem out of place in the present-day scramble for economic and social survival.

Those who live on the land need not rehearse old lore, for the rhythm of life on the llano is an unheard performance of the myths attached to the land. Physical presence on the land is the surest way to possess the myths.⁵ Certain sensitive and wise persons, curanderas and poets preserve and transmit the old myths that figure the rhythm of the land. They use the myths as they use their other arts, to cure the disease of alienation that is caused by dissociation from the land. Clemente, in *Heart of Aztlán*, must learn the myths, letter and spirit, in order to retrieve his lost rhythm. This primal and essential connexion between myth and soil is the major topic of the novel. As Clemente prepares to quit his rancho, he is consoled by his wife who fills a coffee tin with earth from her flower garden, saying: "Our land is everywhere. . . . We will journey across the earth but we will never leave our land," and in his thoughts Clemente "wished he could carry in this can, filled with his beloved earth, the spiritual connection he felt for the llano and the river valley. But just as he was sure the love for the land could not be transferred on a piece of paper, he knew he could not carry his attachment in the canful of simple, good earth. He was afraid of being separated from the rhythm of the

⁵ "It is man's relationship to his tribe and his response to the elements of sky, earth, water and the cosmos that gives shape to our inner consciousness" (Anaya 1988, 197). Paredes notes the extent to which folklore is the building block of plot and character for the Chicano writer (35). A revelatory Anglo view of mythic or folklore backgrounds is provided by Willa Cather in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which contains sympathetic observations of New Mexican native beliefs like "religion grew out of the soil, and has its own roots" (147-48); and, the Indians "seemed to have none of the European's desire to master nature, to arrange and recreate" (234); but, nonetheless, "the Mexicans were children who played with their religion" (211).

heartbeat of the land" (7). Clemente is wrong only in failing to see that soil can symbolize as well as give life. So, in a futile gesture, he adds the earth to the yard behind his barrio house: "His hands dug into the earth as he sought some reassurance from the dark web of his sleeping mother" (18), but there is little nourishment in the moribund soil of Albuquerque.⁶ Detached from the land, Clemente faces the alterity of a world of shapes and properties alien to him. In short space he becomes like the other alienated Chicano of the barrio who recall bitterly when "la crianza was in the land. . . . The earth was like a mother that provided us everything we needed. . . . We were dispersed from our own land, our way of life was destroyed, we had to recreate our pueblos in the slum-barrios of the cities" (103).⁷ Loss of land causes loss of *crianza*, the centripetal force of the lore of the land. "To be a leader," Clemente realizes, "one must know the traditions of his father" (102), and so of his father's father, etc. Without land, there is no faith to pass on to the children, who are then forced to survive only by anglicizing their being. Bit by bit, however, Clemente is nourished by the songs of Crispin's blue guitar, which impress upon Clemente the fact that there is both a land of history and a land of the imagination that contains it. "We are the fruit of the people who wandered from the mythical land of Aztlán," Crispin tells Clemente, "the first people of this land who wandered south in search of a sign. . . . It is a simple story . . . a burning god fell from the sky and told the people to travel southward. The sign for which they were to watch was a giant bird in whose claws would be ensnared the poisonous snakes which threatened the people" (83-84). It is easy to recognize typological reflections of the barrio plight in this account, but besides forecasting the

⁶ *Web* is a nucleate text in itself, alluding to the Toltec earth-goddess Coatlicue, known to the Hopi as *Gogyeng Sowilit* ("Spider Woman"), agent of the sun-god Tawa, and grandmother of the human race. It is she who guides man out of his third-world underground home, and divides him into tribes for migratory wanderings. One tribe is, in Hopi lore, the *bahana*, the white who made the mistake of emerging from the third-world with a *powaka*, or witch. Nonetheless, the *bahana*, like other tribes, is destined to return and reunite with the others, and will bring with him gifts, arts, and peace (Courlander).

⁷ The charge Gingerich brings against the Anglo is his "dispossessing power" to emasculate Chicano men (218-19). We need not see an Anglo buyer of Clemente's land to appreciate the banking system which has drawn him into debt.

tightening stranglehold of the Anglo establishment upon the Chicano, Crispin's myth links the migration feature of mythic cosmogony with an eschatology of return.⁸ The path of return is not only across the land but across a map of imagination. Crispin tells Jasón the story of the blue guitar: "*When the flutes of the poets and priests were broken then the blue guitar was carved from the heart of a juniper tree. . . . It was a new instrument, a subterfuge, passing from poet to poet it wove the future out of things as they are. . . so nothing could be destroyed, so everything could be created anew. . . . I was apprenticed forty years to the man who handed it to me. . . . and some day I will pass it on. . . . I moved north from Mexico in search of the land the ancients called Aztlan. . . . I crossed the burning desert where the sun burned away my sight. . . . To travel back in time, I learned, is really only to find a spot where one can plumb the depths*" (27–28). Clemente is a new instrument. It takes him some time to learn the lesson resident in the myth, but he seems to realize, finally, that man cannot hold the land interminably as soil, but he can as story. Song, better than old coffee tins, carries the earth that contains the myths; and, dispossession is but a way to a new and surer possession of the land, not its natural elements, but its mythic forms. If, in the old lore, the map of migration had elemental signs such as the old petroglyphs, in the lore of the Chicano, signs are fashioned in the texts of new songs that "translate" the old lore. Translators such as Crispin are the teachers. To make his point, Crispin takes Clemente on an imaginative migratory journey back to the beginnings of his race, to the source, the sacred mountain whose lake center contains the *sipapu*, the emergent passage from the underworld. Clemente dives to the bottom of the lake and seizes its heart, achieving in the act a latent identification with the totality of his kind. In a passionate ecstasy he cries out:

My heart is the heart of the earth!
I am the earth and I am the blue sky!
I am the water and I am the wind!
I walk in legends told today and turn and recreate
the past. . . .

⁸ Anaya names the three stages in the mythic process "creation," "return" and "resting place" (1986, 5). In his novel, *Lord of the Dawn*, he offers his own version of the myth of Quetzalcoatl. J. M. G. Le Clezio elaborates the myth as a failed model for Mexican social and political aspirations.

I pause and give the future time to grow.
I am the image, and I am the living man!
I am the dream, I am the waking. . . . (130)

Attaining a chthonic identity is tuning oneself with the rhythm of the moveable center, the metonymic web potential in each one of us. Clemente carries the *crianza* with him, having found a way to carry the "land" within him. Clemente becomes the agent of Crispin's myth, though not its transmitter. Jasón is better fitted for that role, though the blue guitar will find its new player later, in *Tortuga*.

My own impression is that Anaya is not arguing a typological hierarchy for his myth, but displaying the original and still viable myth at work in one of its myriad guises in order to unsettle the banality of a spiritless social organization. As Godzich has said recently of one emergent literature: "Whites must be challenged to know that they are white in a noncasual way and to associate this challenge, and knowledge, with blackness, on one side, and the fact that the consciousness of sameness and therefore of difference is not only consciousness but a locus from which a reinscribing as consciousness of black-and-white relations can be launched" (30).

Anaya makes his challenge by posing mythic frames atop a realistic view of urban Albuquerque. Crispin is a reflection of Quetzalcoatl the teacher; but, more to the horrific point of the situation of the urban Chicano are the numerous reflections of the ancient blood sacrifices which Quetzalcoatl opposed. Clemente finds a job in the railroad shops only after another worker, Sanchez, has his head crushed by a chain which snaps loose from a hoisted car. The accident is attributable to a lack of safety features, but Anaya does not hesitate to enter his story to align the death with the wasteful blood sacrifices of the Aztecs. A more telling emblem of sacrifice is the death of a simple-minded boy, Henry, who is feared by his neighbors. He breaks loose from the chains that attach him to a tree and runs to the Rio Grande where, singing a wild chant to the moon, he wades ever deeper until the current swallows him up.⁹ Henry is an emblem of Chicano society, estranged within his own

⁹ In *Bless Me, Ultima*, there is senseless waste in the deaths of Lupito, Narciso and Florence. In *Tortuga*, the Indian boy Geronimo escapes from the hospital to work his way home over the frozen mountains where he perishes. This act, however, turns to profit when the search party comes across and rescues an adolescent victim of an automobile accident.

group, maligned and mistreated. His death is an ecstatic liberation from an insufferable social identity into a reunion with natural elements; but no symbolic reading can redeem the tragic waste of his death.

Anaya puts into relief the brutality of contemporary urban life through a rhapsodic and lyric prose in a sort of supratext which is signalled on the page by italics, in its tone by a rhythmic cadence, and in its matter by mythological imagery. There are, by my count, sixteen such passages, some as short as a sentence, and the longest — recounting Clemente's voyage to the sacred lake — three pages. The supratext links the narrative to a mythological mould in such a way that current actions appear as cyclic repetitions of acts recorded in the old lore. When Adelita fills the coffee tin with earth, for an example, the supratext comments: *Centuries before, the brown hands of an Indian woman had scooped the earth of the heartland into a clay vessel. . . and the people had carried that sacred urn as they wandered . . .* (7). Such texts are understood occasionally as a character's own linking of the present with an enduring past. Jason, waiting to board the truck which will take the family to Albuquerque, muses: *. . . the sky was like a turtle, the old Indian had said, and the sun a red deer that raced it every day* (2). Throughout the novel, the deer image, a prominent glyph on the Aztec calendar, functions as agent of time. The golden deer of the moon sips the blood of the drowned Henry. Clemente's march of love is accompanied by a final lyrical utterance: *The golden deer stood still. He pawed the fresh earth of eternity, sniffed the fathomless space of his journey, then he leaped northward into a trail of blazing glory that would take him to his people* (201). This voice floats free of any physical body. As such, it is superimposed upon character and action, unattached to any particular time. This is an important point, for one of the alienating effects of the city is its reduction of the sharpness of seasonal and meteorological alterations. The same point is made by the glyphs from the Aztec calendar which head each chapter division. They mark natural temporal flow, while opposed by the unsettling sameness about seasons in the city. In the urban landscape, man's activities are no longer bound to the clock and colors of nature. Anaya's disconnected voice contains a vision attached to and emanating from an appropriate physical presence, a fecund temporal context such as Adelita's earth. There is another point made by these passages, for in transgressing frontiers of time they suggest dreams, visions and thoughts unbound to any particular occurrence. Like Crispin's songs on the blue

guitar, they are privileged glimpses of the universal roadsigns that lead, one hopes, to a common union in a return to timeless values.¹⁰

The city, however, is full of deceptive signs, misleading signifiers. The legendary figure of La Llorona, the earth-goddess crying across the land for blood sacrifice, her voice heard in the winds of the llano, is heard by the vatos on the streets in the siren of police cars (49). The towering water tank in the railroad yards is inscribed SANTA FE, but the workyards are felt as the devil's workshops (22). The name of the railroad is an ironic reflection of the *crianza* of the land. The industry of Albuquerque itself is an ironic inversion of the love that Clemente feels will spark a harmony of worker-employer relations, for the industrial base of the city, then as now, is weapons of war and military presence. The Air Force jets that scream daily into the sky from Kirtland Airforce Base recall La Llorona; and, the fire they thrust behind them is an ironic reminder of the burning tail-feathers of Quetzalcoatl.

Another strategy that calls for notice is Anaya's daring appropriation of fragments of Anglo-American literary lore which he weaves into the mythological matrix of his text. Just as the curandera Ultima does not hesitate to reach for a jar of Vicks Vapor Rub when nothing as efficacious is at hand in her own pharmacopoeia, Anaya reaches into the repository of Anglo letters to use what is profitable for his text. The "trail of blazing glory" into which the golden deer leaps is a well-worn cliché which Anaya reinfuses with purpose in context. More remarkable are the intertextual links which draw into his fiction something of his received tradition. The title of the novel inevitably recalls Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*, all the more so since the barrio of Albuquerque has some resemblance to the Edinburgh prison at the center of social unrest. More central is the intertextual identity of old Crispin, who sings new songs out of the old lore on his blue guitar. He is, of course, an emanation of Wallace Stevens's "Comedian as the Letter C," who travels the migratory route north from the Yucatan. He is also a reflection of Stevens's "Man with the Blue Guitar," whose songs shape reality. Clemente's ecstatic self-identification with *la raza* joins him to Walt Whitman, who in "Song of Myself" joins his own identity to the material

¹⁰ N. Scott Momaday's Kiowa grandmother tells him: "If dreams are unreal, then so are the dreamers." Native American insistence upon thought, vision and dream as signs of truth are well attested (Lincoln 99–102).

and process of American democracy. These are but a few of Anaya's expropriations, all of which merge cultural ideologues.¹¹ Anaya is quite pointedly, it seems to me, weaving the largest web imaginable about the core of his own ethnic myth. Clemente does the same when he rejects the idea of *cada cabeza es un mundo* (every man for himself) to assert *el alma de la raza* (147); but, at this point in the novel, *la raza* is everyman.

Heart of Aztlan, like Crispin's song and the American Indian's petroglyphs, is a road sign for the journey of return and reunion.¹² It contains the music of the flutes of the Toltec priests as well as the lore that resides in the land. Literary possession of the myth is surer than the land's, for imaginative exile from territorial center is not irremediable alienation as long as the myths can be performed. The earth that Clemente carries to Albuquerque is soil become sign, as soon as Clemente learns its lore. In realizing the myth, Clemente achieves his name's sense. The myth, then, moves with the mover; and, as long as man

¹¹ There are many other intertextual allusions in the novel. The singer of *alabados* at Henry's wake is named Lazaro. The supratextual observation that *the sun hung like a gold medalion in the blue sky* echoes Stephen Crane's line "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (*The Red Badge of Courage*, chapter 9), and the Chicano war-council's debate over strategies recalls Milton's fallen angels arguing in *Pandemonium* (*Paradise Lost*, Book II). It is probably only a coincidence, but the names in Henry's family — Henry, Willie and Rufus — are identical to the names in the first ruling Norman family in England — William the Conqueror, his son known as Rufus, and his son Henry. His daughter's name Adela echoes Adelita.

¹² "I hope to teach others to see into the soul of things, to make that simple, human connection which unites us all" (Anaya 1986, 202). He is capable of making boisterous fun of the same mission. In his parody of epic, *The Adventures of Juan Chicaspatas*, two Chicano boys travel back in time to confront their mythical backgrounds. The poem concludes:

And so Juan Chicaspatas and AA Penco
 Became folk heroes, traveling across the
 Land of the Chicanos, helping those in need,
 Singing the songs of *la raza*
 and reminding the people of their history
 and the covenant with the earth
 of Aztlan.

moves "naturally," the center of the mythic web moves. So the "heart" of Aztlan shifts from the llano to the barrio to the *sipapu* and into Clemente's being. The center is where the text is. Anaya's art is an assault on our complacent assurance as to where the truths of thought and feeling lie. Like the townspeople in *Tortuga* who are shocked by the "freaks" from the hospital for crippled children, Anaya's readers are forced to face the reality of otherness, and thus, of their own human bonds to ontological alterity. We are all, perhaps, Chicano and Anglo alike, still a certain distance from the mythic matrix Anaya's fiction embodies, and, Chicano and Anglo alike, we have a common interest in the strands of its webs.

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The Curious Room

Angela Carter

Introduction

The following piece of speculation in the form of a short story starts thus:

"Alice said: now you're going to read a story."

This opening is based on the way that Jan Svankmajer, the animator of Prague, begins his film based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (Switzerland, 1988). The Alice in my story, with her frail teeth, flaxen hair, stern expression and pink frock, looks like Svankmajer's Alice, at the moment, not like Tenniel's, but she may change. At the beginning of Svankmajer's film, Alice says: "Now you're going to watch a film," describing the formal parameters of what is going to happen. Similarly, my Alice defines the formal parameters of what is to follow, which is in some sense a sequel to Svankmajer's film because this Alice, no longer in wonderland, has gone through the looking-glass and found herself in Prague, the city where Svankmajer lives and works, though she has not found herself in the Prague of our time nor of her own time but that of the time of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II, that is, the late sixteenth century. It is also the Prague hymned by André Breton, the city where "the clock whose hands, cast in the metal of desire, turn ever backwards."

Alice was invented by a logician and therefore she comes from the world of nonsense. Literally. From the world of *non-sense*, the opposite of *common sense*, from the world constructed by logical deduction, the world which is both created by language and in which language shivers into abstractions. (That is why the carnival figure, "Summer," is comparcd