

THE POWER OF ULTIMA, PRESENCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL, AND SYNCRETISM OF RELIGION IN *BLESS ME, ULTIMA* AS IT RELATES TO CHOICE AND DESTINY

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19 NOVEMBER 2012

1. Rudolfo Anaya's classic tale of magical realism, *Bless Me, Ultima*, is one that deals with a number of important themes: the ideas of lost innocence, the usefulness and purpose of the supernatural within the text, religion (both the newer, adopted religion of Catholicism that resulted from assimilation and the more traditional pagan religious elements still in use, though less popular in the region), and the idea of fate and destiny and how it relates to the opportunity to make choices about one's own life. This is especially true of the book's protagonist, Antonio Marez.
2. *Bless Me, Ultima* has a "rich cultural past and heritage, taking joy in myth and in the spiritual quest" (Klein 26), and the novel ultimately "laments man's weakened connection to the past and to the myths that reveal the proper balance of the cosmos" (Kanoza 159). There is a major focus on religion within the text, as it is "set in a sacred place imbued with a spiritual presence and long inhabited by indigenous peoples" (Kanoza 160) and there are even elements of syncretism between these two completely different and yet remarkably similar doctrines; this had a huge impact on young Antonio, helping to form his ideas of choice and making his own destiny, as opposed to the one already planned out for him. This is also seen in the distinct presence of the supernatural and the power it has within the book, which is truly the crux of this bildungsroman, and leads to Tony finding his own identity by opening his eyes to a whole new world and leading him to believe that he himself can make the choices in his own life, not just those around him.
3. Tony's being exposed to supernatural elements and occurrences in *Bless Me, Ultima* are significant because it helps lead him down the path of self-discovery, eventually causing him to come to the conclusion that he has the power of choosing his destiny. It also greatly impacts his perceptions of life in general and changes his ideas about the world and his very place in it. This is closely related to the fact that the opinions of those around him definitely mold his thoughts and even his own opinions. This especially includes those with a direct connection to the supernatural, like Tony's revered mentor, Ultima. Therefore, it is quite easy to say that Ultima (and the paranormal elements she brought with

her) had a huge impact on Antonio, so when discussing the mystical elements within the work, it is natural that one should discuss Ultima and the world she encompasses first.

4. By seeing the supernatural, "Antonio's eyes have been opened...and he can begin to sense the latent energy in the landscape" (Anaya, "Landscape," 99). Once he sees this great presence of the paranormal that is out there in the natural world, he begins to accept that it can be and is everywhere around him, both within people and the land, and he allows himself to be transformed by the force that resides within the Earth through nature. By opening his eyes to this new world, this leads Tony to the conclusion that he is in charge of his own destiny, not those around him, and he himself has the option to choose what will happen to him, because he sees the world in a different way now. This existence of the supernatural is seen throughout the entirety of the text: presence of witchcraft, prophetic dreams, and the power of the supernatural elements seen in nature, to name but a few, but it is mainly seen in the presence and power of *la Grande, Ultima*.
5. Antonio learns a great deal about himself, the choices he has in his life, and even his religious convictions, from learning about the supernatural elements that surround him. By witnessing these paranormal acts, Tony has "changed and has moved from initial innocence to adolescence" (Klein 22). He has grown because of exposure to this, and his innocence is lost; because of this, he has been able to come to the conclusion that neither his mother nor his father nor even Ultima should make the decisions about his life for him, but only he himself should. This discovery of the supernatural and the choices that it leads to is the thread that links the novel together. However, by confronting things like this, which he cannot easily explain away (and facing some things that he cannot explain at all), Tony is forced to make some realizations, both brutal and harsh, about his life, the people in it, and the world around him. Antonio's main problem with this whole situation is that even though he respects, admires, and loves Ultima, he cannot reconcile the person that she truly and actually is with the conception that he has of her, which is the questioning spirit that leads to his personal self-discovery.
6. The presence of the supernatural is seen from the novel's beginning and leaves a distinct impression on the characters, mainly young Tony. While it does get a bad reputation, in both our time and during the time period in which *Bless Me, Ultima* is based, it should be noted that the presence and use of the supernatural within the book was not always a bad thing. When bringing up the idea of the paranormal within the text, the most obvious target for investigating is the character of Ultima, who

syncretizes both good and dark magic within her, and is the most otherworldly of all the characters or elements mentioned here. This is significant because the ambiguity of the supernatural elements within and around Ultima is a great cause confusion for Antonio, and it makes him question the goodness of Ultima and other aspects of his life, including religion, among other things.

7. Elements of the supernatural are seen by the presence of witchcraft that is infused within the text. This concept, obviously, is seen primarily in the characterization of Ultima, though also in the three Trementina sisters, "who are legendary for practicing black magic" (Kanoza 162). When it comes to the orientation and primary role of Ultima, mainly the idea of whether she is inherently good or bad, there is definitely some level of ambiguity within the text. This is because Ultima "encompasses dualities...she is part saint and part witch. Her ability to cast out demons and remove curses derives from her own acquaintance with evil" (Kanoza 165).
8. The principal question is that of Ultima's actual identity is. Is she is a *bruja*, or a witch that "seeks revenge...[and] represents cosmic and human forces of evil" (Garcia 84-85), as the townspeople and others who are not close to her claim, or is she is a *curandera*, a medicine woman "who uses herbs to heal, [and has] powers which surpass those of priests and parents" (Garcia 85). Or, as Antonio comes to realize, maybe it is more complicated than that—maybe "the power of good and evil [is] the same" (Anaya, *BMU*, 55), and she could be one or both, choosing to syncretize the good and the bad, but she also could be neither. Antonio, who is the closest to her of all the people she knows during the events that take place in the book, is unsure as to which exact category she belongs to, just as he is unsure where exactly his life is taking him.
9. Though he is definitely aware of Ultima's magical presence, Tony is still unsure of her actual orientation, something that makes him question her and the supernatural in his life. Tony's Marez relatives "understand that all of Ultima's considerable knowledge is devoted only to good cause" (Wilson 194). However, it should be noted that during all name calling of *bruja* or slandering of her name, Tony is convinced that she would never use her powers for evil or to harm people, but rather only to help those around her. She teaches Tony about the "awful presence...[and] soul of the river" (Anaya, *BMU*, 15) and informed him that his "spirit shared in the spirit of all things" (Anaya, *BMU*, 15), something he know an evil person would not bother with knowing or caring about. Tony is not the only one who recognizes the good of Ultima-- even his father Gabriel tells him that "Ultima has sympathy for people, and it is so complete that with it she

can touch their souls and cure them" (Anaya, *BMU*, 248). Antonio knows she is inherently good, but when confronted with the elements of the supernatural that encompasses Ultima and the raw power, good and evil, that she possesses, he becomes unsure as to how he should feel about her, and changes his view of the world and his and even Ultima's place in it, the confusion of which certainly affected his ideas of destiny and choice.

10. Throughout *Bless Me, Ultima*, Tony asks "bold questions about the nature of good and evil as [he] examines [his] role within families and church that circumscribe their lives" (Kanoza 160). The goodness of Ultima's supernatural powers is seen in how she chooses to go about using them, though this does not change the fact that she does indeed have some form of dark power within her as well. For a large portion of the book, she spends her time picking a variety of plants from the land of the *llano* for magical cures. She even goes about teaching these methods and ways to young Antonio, instilling in him the value that a person's "relationship to the Earth and its power...make us well and cures our souls" (Anaya, "Landscape," 101).
11. Tony can tell from what she is doing and how she is doing it, such as apologizing to each and every plant she uses for all the harm and damage that she inflicts upon them that she must have goodness within her; she goes so far as to treat them with dignity and reverence that many people do not even give to their fellow man, showing that she is using the supernatural powers she possesses for good rather than evil. Her compassion is evident by the way she treats the plants and the spirit of the Earth, and the goodness of Ultima is seen by these actions. Ultima uses these plants, gathered in a certain, specific way, to brew concoctions that will ultimately help those around her: whether it is giving someone a respite from the common cold, the curing of a serious illness, or the removal of a curse, everything she does is to better those around her.
12. Ultima even goes so far as to use her mystical powers to cure Tony's Uncle Lucas of a curse placed upon him by Tenorio Trementina's three daughters, all of whom are considered to be witches by the town and surrounding areas, a thought that even reaches Antonio in the seclusion and desolation that comes with living on the *llano*. Tony has to be present at the lifting of this curse because of the purity that he possesses, which is a magical trait inherited from his youth, and the strength of his Luna blood. This is also because there is a goodness within Tony's heart, and, as Ultima taught him, "good is always stronger than evil" (Anaya, *BMU*, 98). This experience gives him a first-hand perspective into the world of the supernatural and the magic that resides within the soul of

Ultima, and this type of exposure and perspective on her ultimately changes him in a way that he did not expect. At this point, he is just being introduced into the world of magic and power that Ultima and the supernatural provide, which causes him to realize that, by being exposed to such things, there is a different path he can take in his life; he does not have to be a farmer or a *vaquero* as his parents wish, and that he can make the choices in his life. His eyes are opened to a whole new world, a new life, by the presence of the supernatural, and he sees that he can "take the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp, and make something new" (Anaya, *BMU*, 247). He can choose to be either one or both, or even neither, but the point is that now he knows he is in charge of his destiny and can actually choose for himself.

13. While this respectful and inherently good use of the supernatural shows the goodness in Ultima, there are problems and conflicts with her identity as it relates to her supernatural abilities as well. Tony does not see Ultima as those around him do, and at first he does not question Ultima's basic identity, whether she should be labeled as "good" or "bad" because of this. Eventually, though, he begins to hear whispers from those around him bringing up the idea that Ultima may not be exactly what she seems, and this makes Antonio question her and the life he himself leads. When his friends begin to make fun of him for spending time with her and even learning a little about her ways, and especially later on when Tenorio accuses her of being an evil *bruja*, Tony begins to question the world around him, especially as it relates to Ultima and the otherworldly powers that she has. It is this questioning of life that leads to Tony's self discovery and causes him to challenge the idea that his future should be chosen by others and not himself.
14. The most confusing moment of the book for Tony, and thus the one raising the most questions, must certainly be the passage about Ultima finally being put to the test to determine whether or not she is actually a witch. This causes more questions about Ultima than anything before ever had because of the ambiguity of the results. The test for a witch consisted of the accused person walking through a door with some form of a cross on it. This was done because, according to the superstition, "a witch cannot walk through a door so marked by the sign of Christ" (Anaya, *BMU*, 133).
15. What bothers Tony so much about this whole situation is that he is unable to ascertain whether or not Ultima actually passed the test that was set in place. This was because in the end, while Ultima made it through the door, the pins that made the symbol of the cross upon it were knocked

upon the floor; Antonio was the only person who noticed this, but the ambiguity of the situation, the idea that he does not know “whether someone had broken the cross they made or whether they had fallen” (Anaya, *BMU*, 135) on their own, is what causes Tony to be troubled. As a result of what happened, the test itself became void and the results were nullified, making Antonio unsure as to what to classify her as, what she *is* exactly. This is significant because if Tony is unsure about Ultima, there is not much else he would not question, including his own religious convictions and the idea that his life should be planned by others and not by himself.

16. While she is seen primarily in a positive and decent light, the darker, more sinister side of Ultima is seen specifically when she feels that she is confronted or attacked. Ultima “possesses other, seemingly magic, shaman-like qualities: an owl and the power to deal with the evil witches” (Klein 24). It is also seen that Ultima’s “understanding of evil enhances her capacity for goodness” (Kanoza 165). This concept can be seen most clearly with the situation with Tenorio. Though she is genuinely kind and compassionate and uses her powers for good rather than evil, once she is directly confronted by Tenorio, Ultima’s direction changes, and she sends her owl as a rebuttal to attack him, and it viciously gauges out his eyes. While she is good, she also has darkness within her, and this merging of the two gave Tony the idea that he, too, could meld his beliefs and different aspects of his life into one cohesive whole.
17. Another glimpse into the dark side of Ultima is seen when she is found in possession of voodoo dolls that are eerily reminiscent of the three Trementina sisters, which she was obviously using to harm them. This contrasts with the view that Tony had of her, which was that she was pure and used her powers only for good. However, it should be noted that this was done out of provocation and that she was, essentially, evening the score between the families and trying to make things right out of the evil these three had brought in.
18. Quite simply, these were countermeasures of an attacked woman, but the importance is seen in the fact that Ultima does indeed possess evil or dark magic and can and does use it at her discretion. While she does have darker aspects to her, it is clear that the supernatural powers within Ultima are both light and dark, good and evil. She is both good and bad, a syncretism of sorts on the idea of her as a whole, united person. Perhaps it is this example of combining these two opposing forces that shows Antonio the way to do so for himself, causing him to choose to unite the differing forces in his life rather than having to choose between them.

19. While the majority of the emphasis on the supernatural in *Bless Me, Ultima* is centered around the character of Ultima, she herself is not the only paranormal presence in the novel. The otherworldly concept of premonitions is one that is important to the novel's theme and is seen several times throughout the novel as it is incorporated through the presence of prophetic dreams. These dreams are "just as important as Antonio's waking life...[as] these Jungian dreams help Antonio across the thresholds of transformation" (Klein 24). These dreams reveal a great deal to Tony, both about himself and those that live around him.
20. These prophetic dreams are uniquely significant for the simple fact of what they offer Tony. Metaphors and important symbols are imbedded in these dreams, allowing Tony insight and opportunity to interpret information he might otherwise not have access to. These dreams also show him situations and memories from his past that he would have no way of seeing or even knowing about if he had not been shown through his premonitions. This exposure to this new (at least to Tony) information gives Tony a different view on the situation at hand and helps him to better understand his family dynamic, the choices they have made for him, and himself as a person as well.
21. Many of Tony's dreams were completely prophetic in nature, allowing him a glimpse of the future. They show Tony the "pattern of death and rebirth, decay and regeneration" (Klein 25) that is present within the world. The presence of these dreams shows that the power of the supernatural is not simply around Antonio, but rather within him as well, showing him that he has some innate power that he was never truly aware of before. It is important to note that these mystical dreams began happening to Tony only after Ultima's presence in his home began, as if she helped to waken some primitive and primal part of him that he never knew existed.
22. Some of these otherworldly dreams simply alluded to what had happened or what was going to happen, giving Tony an idea of the situation but not showing a definite and specific memory of an event. An example of this is seen with the dream Tony had about his brothers returning home. This is much more abstract and mystical in nature, and not really concrete at all, like some of Tony's other dreams. In this particular dream, "mother and Virgin both assume the mournful aspect of *la llorona*" (Rogers 65), and he also saw his brothers as "giants, spectral figures" (Anaya, *BMU*, 61) coming back into his life. While it was abstract in nature, it both predicted their unannounced arrival, proving and validating the supernatural elements of the dream and thus, Tony's powers, showing their symbolism and significance in his life while also

shining a light onto the paranormal creature of *la llorona*. These dreams give him a glimpse of information that he might not get otherwise, which causes him to realize that he himself is gifted supernaturally, and shows him that he is different than what his parents want him to be, giving him the idea that this (or whatever else he wants to do) is and could be acceptable for him in his future once he has to actually make a choice about it.

23. Tony's dreams also sometimes give him access to information that he could otherwise not have. Some of these dreams are actual memories and quite literal, as opposed to the abstractness mentioned above. This can be seen with the fact that some of them show Antonio things from a first person, personal perspective of events that have already happened and he had no foreknowledge about. This can be seen from the very first of his prophetic dreams, the one which chronicles his arrival into this world.
24. This first dream "helps him with the anxiety he feels about the conflicting expectations of his parents" (Klein 24). He sees the situation as it actually happened—his Luna and Marez families are fighting during what should have been an extremely happy event. It then brings up the fact that even as far back as then, Ultima had some idea as to what his future, his destiny, held for him, because "she understood that as [Tony] grew, [he] would have to choose to be my mother's priest or my father's son" (Anaya, *BMU*, 41).
25. From this dream, Tony learns that "he must not be destroyed by guilt or the expectations of either family, but with Ultima he must find his one way in the world" (Klein 24). These dreams are significant because they teach Antonio a great deal about life and the world around him, including formidable insight into the person teaching him about all of this and how to harness the powers he did not know he even had, *la Grande*, his Ultima. They also show him quite obviously that he has power as well, making the matter much more personal, and that because of this power and subsequent exposure to the supernatural that resides within the world, he is being shown the different choices and options he has in how he wants to live his life and in what he wants to do with it.
26. Ultima's powerful abilities and Antonio's prophetic dreams are examples of the supernatural in *Bless Me, Ultima*, but it is also seen in the power and presence that nature has in the text. Ultima is the one who teaches Antonio about the latent and inherent power of the natural world. While it can be sinister at times, like Ultima herself, the presence of nature can also be good and wonderful. She teaches him about the power that lives in "plants and flowers, trees and bushes, birds and flowers; most

important, [Tony learns] from her that there [is] a beauty in the time of day...a peace in the river and the hills" (Anaya, *BMU*, 15). She also teaches Tony other things, such as how to listen for "the mystery of the groaning earth" (Anaya, *BMU*, 15) and to "feel complete in the fulfillment" (Anaya, *BMU*, 15) that the Earth provides.

27. The Earth, and nature, are pictured here as being alive, given to emotion and having a spirit, personified by the power that lives within them, at least according to the legends of old and the world of Ultima. While the concept is mysterious, it is also comforting and relaxing to the few who actually can harness this power and be in tune with the world of nature that surrounds them, which Tony is learning he might be able to do. This learning about the supernatural elements in nature is significant because it helps Antonio to accept the many different forms of unearthliness and it also helps to open his eyes to the world of paganism that is also out there, giving him the option and choice to explore this new world as opposed to the one he had known based around Catholicism.
28. As Antonio grows under the influence of Ultima, he comes to respect and learn about "the pagan awesomeness of the natural world" (Klein 22). Tony is "seeking to understand the complexities of life, [so he] tracks...the golden carp, the avatar of an Aztec nature god" (Kanoza 161). The power of nature is seen most obviously and evidently by the fact that there is a pagan religion based on the idea of a magical Golden Carp. This is a more traditional religion that has thrived in the past and is based on reverence for nature and the beauty of the world, which is exemplified by the majestic grace of the god in fish.
29. This is something that "seems more possible for Antonio to believe in the carp than in the Catholic God...[as] God permits evil...[and the Golden Carp] is beyond good and evil" (Wilson 194). The presence of this pagan religion is significant because it shows the existence of the supernatural within the sacredness of religion, something Tony holds dear, and shows him that not everyone believes the same things that he does, and that that is in itself acceptable. Also, while Tony's "journey into paganism is an exhilarating quest...[it is] one which induces guilt and anxiety as he breaks the first Commandment of his Christian faith" (Kanoza 161). It opens his eyes to the fact that there are indeed other religions out there, which in turn causes him to question his own religious faith in the Catholic Church, leading him further down the road of choice and leading up to the fact that he would have to make one for himself one day.
30. The supernatural elements of the Golden Carp are somewhat theoretical, as any religion can technically be called supernatural in nature, depending on the perspective. This is just as true of Christianity as it is of

paganism. While the religion of the Golden Carp is mostly seen in a positive light, it can be seen throughout the text that “Anaya handily debunks the merits of dogmatic Catholicism in the cold and ineffectual Irish priest” (Kanoza 163). As a result of this, “worship of nature...is an attractive alternative to the Catholicism” (Kanoza 163) as it is presented in the book. In Tony’s quest for “experience, knowledge, and mastery, the protagonist...breaks religious taboos and push[es] the limits of human awareness as [he] tries to fathom the unknowable mind of God” (Kanoza 160). Tony comes to the conclusion that he must “look beyond differences to recognize transcendent parallels” (Kanoza 164) between the two, and that he can take the good from both and make something new because, in actuality, “Christianity and native mythology are compatible” (Kanoza 166). At the novel’s end, “Antonio joins together diverse and discordant beliefs, temperaments, and values” (Kanoza 167) in order to combine these world views and make peace within himself and his idea of destiny and choice.

31. In a more literal sense, examples of the supernatural in nature can actually be seen or personified in some instances. The presence of the eerily languid and bottomless lakes that exist around the *llano* are known for drawing people in to their doom, something that an inanimate object simply cannot do. These lakes also house the ethereal mermaids, who are similar to the *la llorona* characterization seen in Mexican folklore of “the wailing woman of the river who seeks the blood of boys and men to drink” (Rogers 64). These mermaids are known for calling young boys and men to their doom, to drown in the watery abyss of the “haunted” (Anaya, *BMU*, 115) lakes. There are many unexplained episodes that occur in proximity to these lakes, which causes those around them to come to the conclusion that “there’s a strange power [that] seems to watch” (Anaya, *BMU*, 115) them when they come near. While nature is good, there are some mysterious and unexplained instances like this. The presence of the *la llorona* archetype within the novel is significant inasmuch as it “emerges in [Tony’s] relationship with his mother and the imagery of women in the novel” (Rogers 65).
32. This unexplainable presence of the paranormal in nature is significant to Tony for several reasons. It illustrates to him the power of the natural world, which Ultima has been telling him about for quite some time. However, it shows the harshness of nature, not the goodness that she claims, which is something that causes him to question the teachings of Ultima and the elements of paganism that he was beginning to adopt. The drowning of Florence in these very waters is what is most significant; he realizes nature can be beautiful *and* sinister, bringing up the syncretism that is also seen in religion and in Ultima as well. It also

makes Tony realize that the God he believes in is not inherently fair or just, as he once thought. This presence, this force that he can see and feel in the natural world around him causes Tony to question the world he thinks that he knows and the religious convictions that he holds so dear.

33. While *Bless Me, Ultima* spends a great deal of time on blatantly supernatural elements, such as witches, prophetic dreams, and above all Ultima, these religious convictions are especially important to Tony. This leads to the questioning of his faith, which is one of the hardest things he has ever done, but it shows him a great deal about the compromises and syncretism that has to happen and the choices that have to be made in his life. Antonio's Hispanic culture is at a crossroads because of this realization that a choice has to and needs to be made in regards to what to believe.
34. Tony and his family have assimilated towards the "mixed pleasure of schooling in English and Catholic catechism classes" (Wilson 193), which is something that was relatively new to the Hispanic culture at that time, at least compared with the traditional religions of old, which in *Bless Me, Ultima* would be the Golden Carp. Though Catholicism dominates, the past traditions of paganism and the supernatural are still very much present and influential in the world that Tony lives in. Christianity is trying to repress this and push it into the darkest recesses so that it cannot challenge it as a religion, but it is like a constant presence in the background, having influence over much more than Tony realizes.
35. However, Tony's culture is still somewhat accepting of the magic that is present in their world, even if some are scared or skeptical of the presence of the supernatural in religion and life in general. This is because, in this culture, superstitions and the supernatural were often seen as a somewhat natural extension of the world in which they lived in, but it was something that must be denied, a choice that must be made, in order to live a new life in a new world with a new God and organized religion.
36. These seemingly different religions have much more in common than they would like to admit, mainly that of the key tenant of kindness that is supposed to be present in both. It would seem that, because of this, the syncretism of these two religions would be seamless, or at least an easier process than it actually is. However, the difficulty of melding these two into one is exemplified by Tony's struggle to go about reconciling the two within himself. The main problem with these two religions becoming at least somewhat syncretized, or even tolerant of each other, is that the newer of the two, Catholicism, is monotheistic and tends to think that people belonging to other religions are sinners and are wrong in their

convictions. This tends to leave little room for these older, more traditional beliefs in this brand new world that is coming to fruition, and the old tends to get pushed towards the side, as do those who practice them.

37. The presence of the Catholic Church is much more dominant in this area, which is why the pagans, like Ultima and Jason and Narciso, have to hide their religions and worship a little more secretly than the Catholics do. The stigma associated with not being part of the Church is why Antonio's friends, especially Ernie, treat him differently once they find out that he has become close with Ultima, a witch and a pagan, who is the furthest thing from a Christian. It is also why there is such a problem with people calling on Ultima for help—the people are intimidated by the Catholic Church into thinking her beliefs are wrong and that asking for her help is inherently bad, and therefore, many refuse to call on her until the last second, which is exactly what happened with Tony's Uncle Lucas. Tony is living in a town where all of these conflicting religious elements are coming to a crux, and as someone who is flirting with both religions, unconsciously trying to mesh the two together, it really causes him doubt and conflict in his life, pushing him further towards making a choice that he is hesitant to make.
38. The Golden Carp is the pagan religion that is discussed in *Bless Me, Ultima*. Though it does not seem to have a great deal in common with the Catholic faith besides the tenant of kindness that is in both, there are other surprising similarities. The Golden Carp legend ties in with the idea of Christianity and the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. This is represented physically by the garden of Narciso, who was a worshipper of the Golden Carp, which was a veritable paradise on the dusty New Mexico plains. More theoretically, it is similar because in Eden, Adam and Eve are told specifically not to do one particular thing, something that comes with accepting the idea of the myth of the Golden Carp as well.
39. By comparing these two religions, it is easy to see that both are technically supernatural in basis, as one requires a man to rise from the dead and the other believes that a god willingly transformed himself into a fish. Tony is confronted with theoretical doubts about the validity of both religions, causing inner turmoil and misgivings, helping to lead him to the conclusion that he must choose to take from one and the other and make something entirely new with it. When Cico tells Tony about the myth of the Golden Carp and the transformation from god into fish, he has trouble fully believing this story, though he wants to. However, after seeing the Golden Carp and all that he represented, Tony admits to

himself that “this is what [he] wished God would do in [his] first holy communion” (Anaya, *BMU*, 114), but after many catechism classes without much luck, he has doubts that his Catholic God will speak to him as directly as the Carp did. As a result of this, Tony is rattled to his core because “the roots of everything [he] ever believed in seemed shaken” (Anaya, *BMU*, 81) by what he is learning about the world through the supernatural and what that actually means for him in relation to his life and the choices he must make.

40. A major problem with Tony is that he has is the misconception that God would literally talk to him through the act of his taking holy communion; he “sought understanding” (Anaya, *BMU*, 248) of God and the questions he had about the world through communion. Though he had “a thousand questions pushed through [his] mind, the voice within [him] did not answer” (Anaya, *BMU*, 221), proving the fallacy of Tony’s faith in this particular idea. He also comes to realize that “God has power...but God was not always forgiving” (Anaya, *BMU*, 44). The crucial aspect that made him doubt his own religion and perhaps influenced his turning towards another was what happened to Narciso and the fact that he had to, once again, give someone their last rites, something that he felt that he should not have to do as he was not a priest. After this, Tony began to see that “somehow everything had changed...[and that] religion could be made to change” (Anaya, *BMU*, 247), which led him to the realization that maybe “a new religion could be made...a religion different from the religion of the Lunas” (Anaya, *BMU*, 247). By including these similar yet opposing religions within the text, Anaya shows Tony the way to move on with his life—he must choose to take the good and the bad and choose to make something new from it, otherwise, he will not get to be his own person, living his own life.

41. Like usual, there were other plans in store for Tony that he particularly did not have control over nor did he want or have a choice about, only this time it was ordained by his God and not his parents or others around him. Tony doubts his God after this because he begins to see the flaws in his religion as it is compared to the more traditional religion he is being exposed to. This is seen by the fact that he says “you would have a God who forgives all, but when it comes to your personal whims, You seek punishment for Your vengeance” (Anaya, *BMU*, 173). Antonio wants desperately to understand “why Narciso, who did good in trying to help Ultima, had lost his life, and why Tenorio, who was evil and had taken a life, was free and unpunished” (Anaya, *BMU*, 186). This conflicting view of the God he thought he knew and the reality of the situation are partly what lead Tony to his crucial choice of making new from old and old from new, combining both but becoming like neither.

42. Tony must reconcile these contradictory views he has of his world: the Luna and the Marez, the Christian and the pagan, the "normal" and the supernatural. He has to do this in order to create and reconcile his personal and spiritual identities. In the novel's beginning, Antonio sees the magic of his faith in Catholicism, but Ultima soon teaches him about the magic of the universe and the supernatural presence in the world. Tony's dilemma comes in the fact that he has to reconcile each of these separate versions of reality, be they perceived as good or bad, with each other. As the book comes to its conclusion, it becomes apparent to Tony that he "cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new" (Anaya, *BMU*, 247). Tony comes to the conclusion that he does not "have to be just Marez or Luna, but perhaps [he] can be both" (Anaya, *BMU*, 247). He realizes that he can put aspects of both together as one, meld them together through the idea of syncretism, though he does not realize what exactly he is doing, and therefore it gives him the chance to make a choice, something he has not been able to do up until this point.
43. The entirety of this book is essentially about choices and decisions that Tony has to make. There is a definite presence of destiny and fate and the idea that Tony has his future planned out for him by those who are around him; however, he comes to realize that it is indeed up to him to make the choices in his own life. The major choice in the novel comes with the idea that he may choose his own fate, what he wants to be, and especially what he wants to believe in. He does not have to be a Catholic or a pagan just because someone told him that that was the right thing to do. One way or another, he has to make a choice about what to believe, but he eventually sees that he is like both, but like neither; rather, he is simply Tony, only now he has a voice.

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