

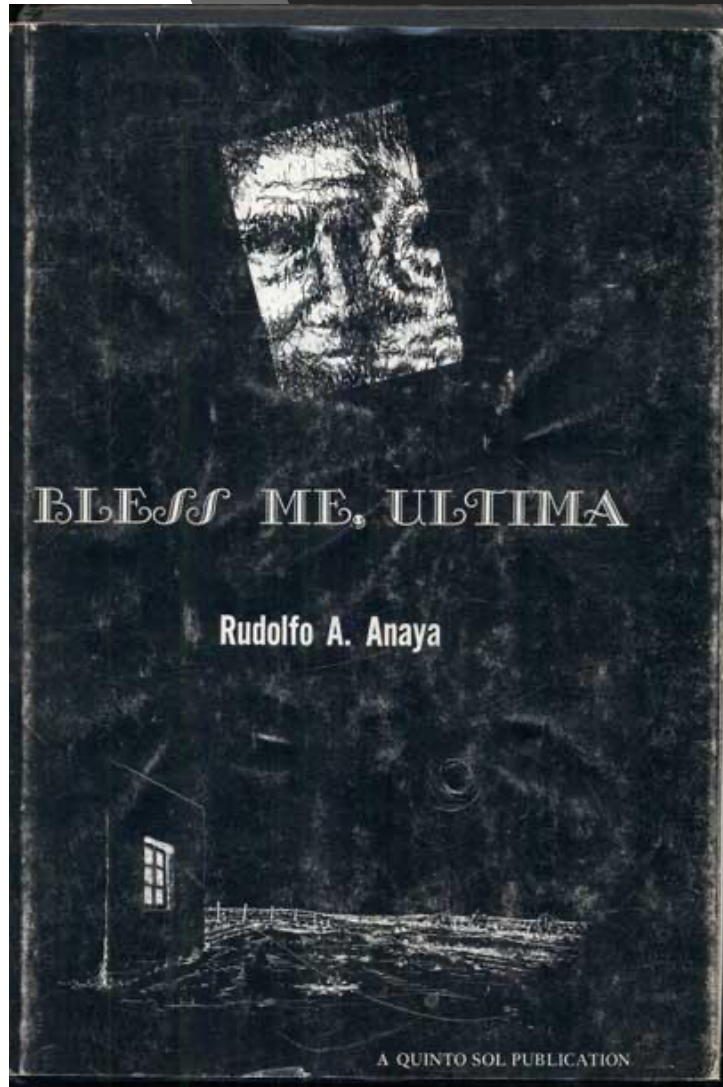


SPAN322: “North of the Río Grande” US Latino/Chicano Literature

Bless Me, Ultima I
March 10, 2020

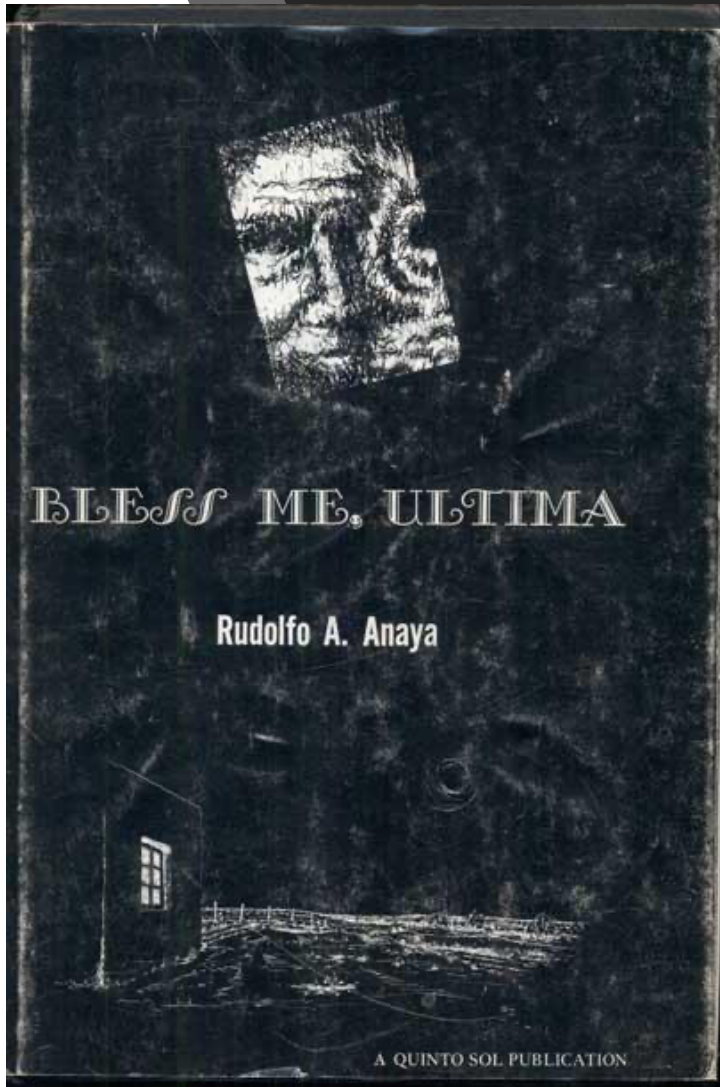
BLESS ME, ULTIMA

Bless Me, Ultima



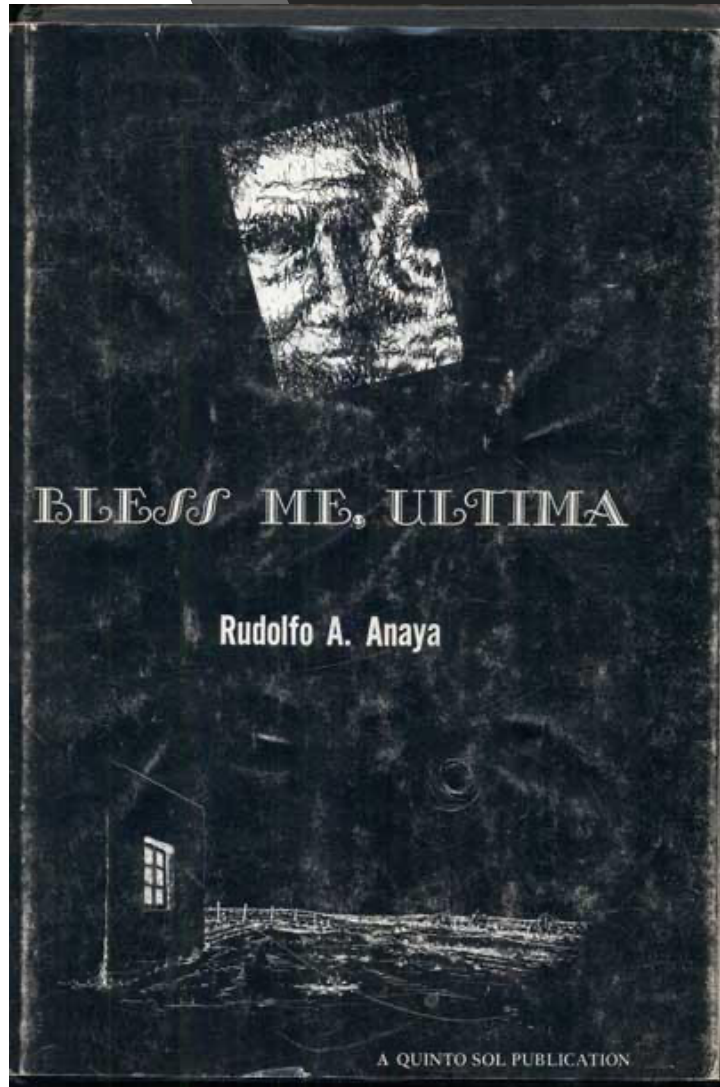
- By Rudolfo Anaya (1937-)
- An autobiographical coming-of-age novel set in rural New Mexico in the 1940s; published 1972
- The best-selling Chicano novel of all time, but also controversial and subject to censorship
- An “eloquent presentation of Chicano consciousness in all its intriguing complexity”

Bless Me, Ultima



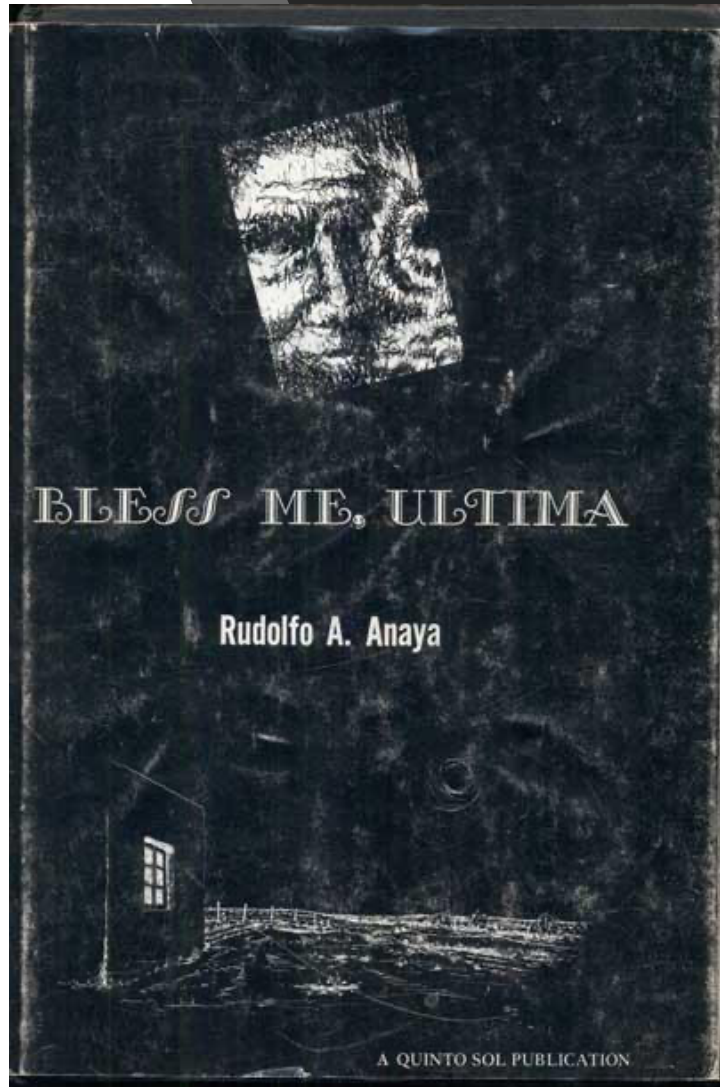
- What does a child's perspective give us?
- What are its narrative possibilities?
- How is identity constructed in this book?
- How are mother and father opposed?
- How does Ultima complicate that split?
- What are the gender politics here?
- How is Antonio like/unlike his classmates?
- What is the role of belief? Faith? Religion?
- What is the role of dreams?
- How are destiny and agency presented?

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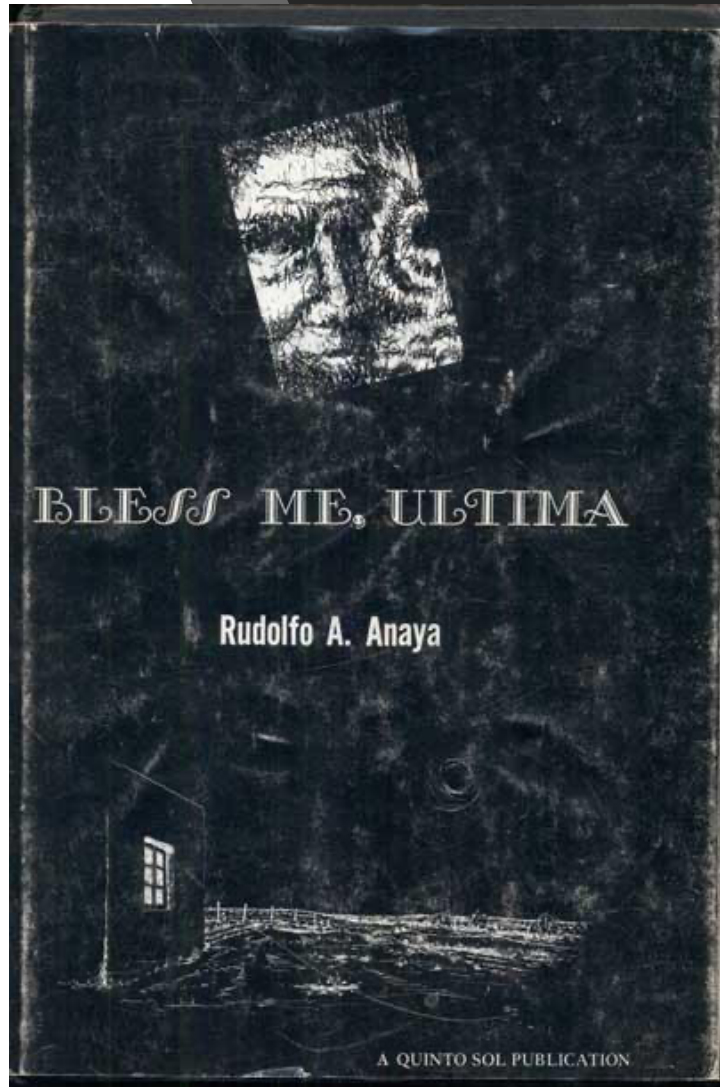
- What does a child's perspective give us?
- From the point of view of a child, everything is new, surprising. Always asking "why?"
- We see the adult world from a distance, slightly obscured.
- This perspective then enables defamiliarization: making strange what is everyday.
- Children are trying to figure the world out.
- A child is naïve, and prepared both to believe and to doubt.
- The child's journey enacts a process of acculturation.
- But the child is also faced with choices: to repeat the past, or to forge a new path.

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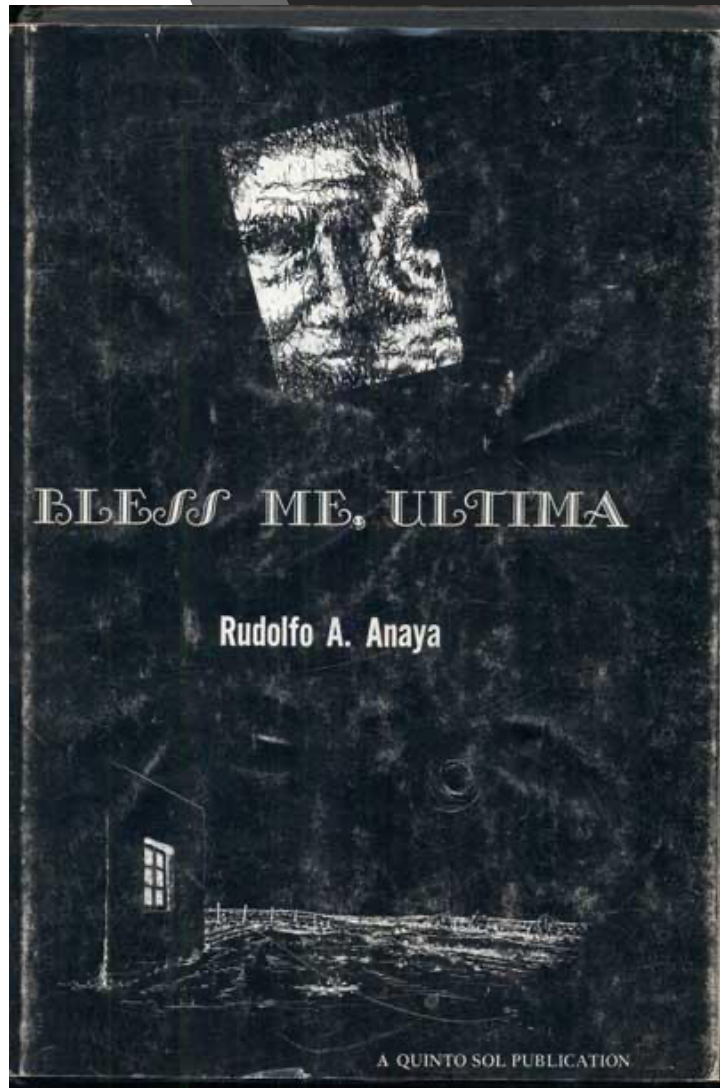
- What does a child's perspective give us?
- Combining a child's perspective with autobiography also gives us a kind of history.
- But this is a history defined by memory, trauma, and wonder.
- What is important for the child, in his/her memory, is not necessarily what is important for others.
- We get then a different form of history: a history "aslant" (or kinked?).
- It is up to the reader to reconcile these two forms of history, to see how they interact.

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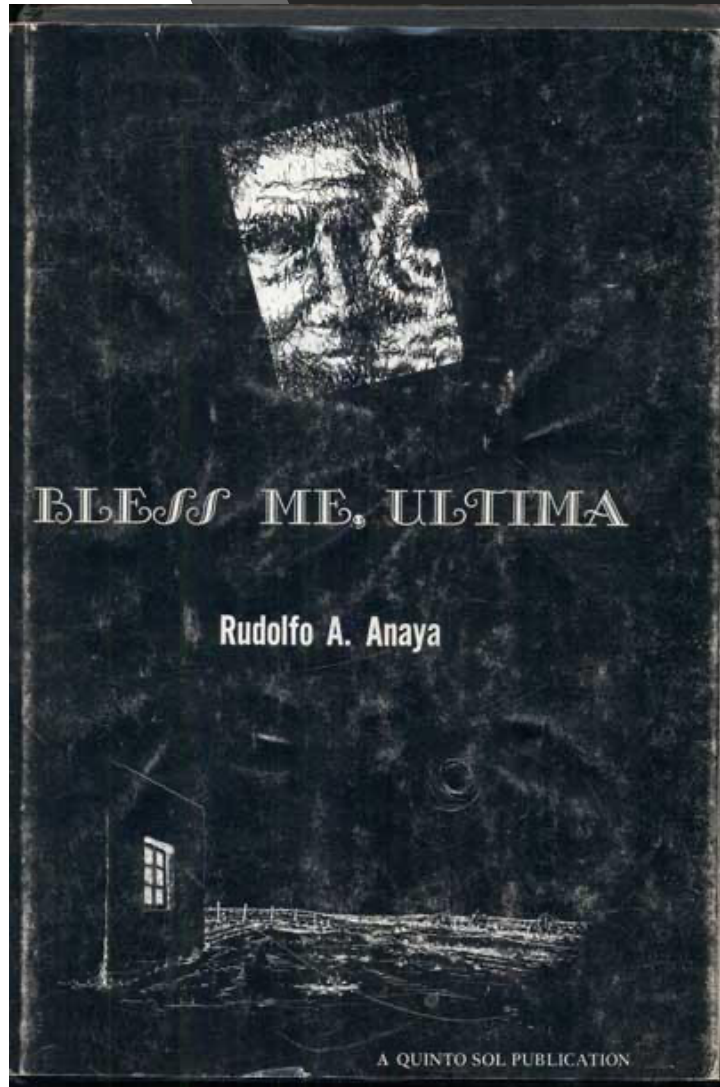
- How is identity constructed in this book?
- As always, there are many aspects to identity: race, ethnicity, class, gender etc.
- Here, however, Anaya stresses two (three?) lineages within Chicano / Latino culture.
- These lineages, and their constituent tension, are what help to define Chicano identity.
- They are already marked by gender as well as by ethnicity and history.
- Note that there is much less attention to a “constituent outside,” an opposition with the non-Chicano.

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- How are mother and father opposed?
- How does Ultima complicate that split?
- Antonio's parents incarnate two aspects of the Hispanic heritage.
- Also two facets of the Spanish colonial process.
- Organized religion and settlement...
- ...versus a more nomadic (and more violent?) impetus to roam and explore.
- The priest and the warrior; farmer and hunter.
- These are two different relations to territory.
- Ultima offers the perspective of the colonized?

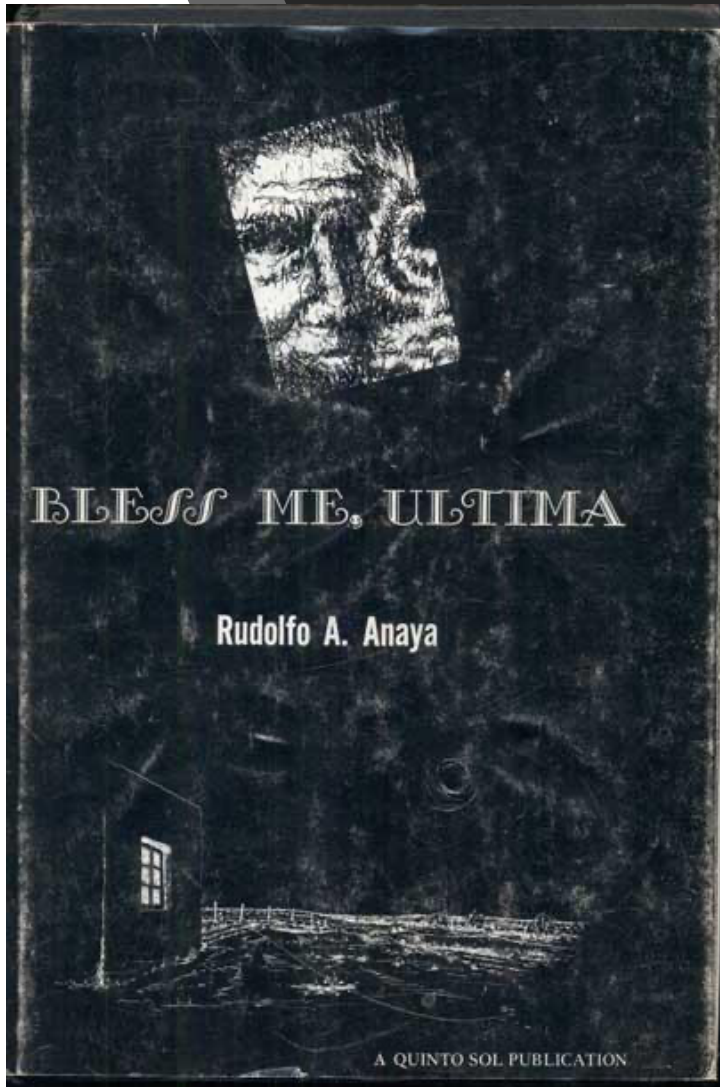
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- How does Ultima complicate that split?
- Ultima is also in some ways childlike.
- She offers the wisdom of age, but also a distance from the “adult” world.
- Hence her bond with Antonio.
- She, however, is able and entitled to intervene in ways in which Antonio cannot (yet).
- She is neither Catholic/farmer nor Nomad/hunter, but a supplement (or corrective?) to both.
- Her ties are to nature, magic, dreams, and indigeneity (as well as childhood).

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- What are the “kinks” in this book?



NEXT STEPS

For Thursday

- Bring laptop (if you have one) to class.
- Make progress on Wikipedia.
- NB: Wikipedia nomination now due *March 19*.
- Write brief comments on two of your classmates' blog posts. Especially on Blogger, make sure you sign them.