

Traces of Hegel's Logic and Heidegger's Identity and Difference in Anaya's Novel "Bless Me, Ultima"



Mr. BENADLA Djamel (Université de Saida)

Mr. HADJOUI Ghouti (Université de Tlemcen)

Abstract:

This article examines the confluence of some concepts of two outstanding philosophical figures Hegel's "Sameness and Difference" and Heidegger's "Identity and Difference" that are embedded in Anaya's fictitious novel Bless Me, Ultima, published in 1971. The traces of these concepts are widely apparent, especially, when Anaya debates his protagonist's identity and his quest of becoming mature and self fulfilled. In fact, a concomitant scholarly focus has been put on this subject matter of identity construction, yet either adopting the concepts of the former theorist or the latter divergently. Nevertheless, in this article, I argue to bring the concepts of both theorists together so as to overcome potentially the limitations of each. The key concept I propose to achieve from this study is self-identity development in Anaya's Bless Me, Ultima through the lens of Hegel's logic and Heidegger's identity and difference.

Key Words: Sameness and Difference, Identity and Difference, self-identity, Dialectic of becoming, Other, trace

الملخص :

المهدف من هذا البحث هو تبيان بالدراسة و التحليل و بإسهاب إلى بعض المفاهيم التي تلتقي في مضامينها نحو "التشابه و الاختلاف" للفيلسوف هيغل و "الهوية و الاختلاف" للفيلسوف هايدغر و التي هي جزء لا يتجزأ في رواية أنايا و يبارك التي نشرت سنة 1971. آثار هذه المفاهيم واضحة على نطاق واسع وخاصة عندما يحلل أنايا هوية البطل و رغبته في تحقيق النضج الذاتي. في الواقع لقد تم التركيز على هذا الموضوع من بناء الشخصية بعد اعتماد مفاهيم الفيلسوفين بشكل تبايني. و مع ذلك أردنا من خلال هذا المقال تبرير تحطى الصعوبات و التغلب على القيود التي تحتويها كلتا النظرتين فلهذا أفرح مفهوم جامع لتحقيق تطوير الهوية الذاتية في رواية أنايا من خلال رؤية منطق هيغل و هايدغر.

Introduction:

The protagonist characters in Anaya's fiction are, most often, seized in the endless flow of becoming mature and self fulfilled. In their fluxional and numerical quests for feasible identities, they must make terms within the native/inherited and the non-white contradiction. Their explorations into their roles and identities are often deflected and distorted because that ubiquitous and obstinate difference motivates the displacement of additional differences and oppositions between becoming "Americanized" versus loyalty to one's ethnic group. His characters' lack of adequate relationships with one or more others, such as parents, family, neighborhood, community, and/or society, makes it difficult for them to develop fulfilled selves.

These postmodern trends are more eloquent and manifest in Anaya's novel *Bless Me, Ultima* published in 1972. The difficulties of the characters, especially the main ones in *Bless Me, Ultima* are related to their lack of satisfactory connection to their heritage i.e. their past. They are constantly attempting to redefine themselves within the larger society from the standpoint of their own distinct ethnicity. They are always conscious of their cultural heritage, (though sometimes questioning it as well) and venture to mill some type of reconciliation with the larger society while maintaining a distinct identity.

Such tendencies, however, would require a variety of theoretical concepts to understand Anaya's fiction. Hegelian concepts as "Sameness and difference" and Heideggerian "identity and difference" are especially of outstanding utility in understanding the development of the protagonist character in *Bless Me, Ultima*. Tony's existence, for example, has been entirely associated with the presence of La Grande. Being delivered to her by his parents, Antonio relies thoroughly on Ultima as his immanent mentor. He learns from her wisdom and the secret of nature. She assists him to move from innocence into awareness, and thus settles his inquisitive thirst about the importance of self. Ultima, on the other hand, though she is a less developed character than Antonio, her crucial roles are, nonetheless, very emphasized. In fact, she does not support Antonio alone to get out of *la tristesa de la vida* (the sadness of life), but the whole community as a whole. Being a symbolic mother representing the mysteries of life, death, and transformation, Ultima may also be suggested to represent the past. She is the good residue, or in some sense, the trace of the past that permits the present consciousness to exist. Jacques Derrida seems to have suggested something about this point. He said, "The self of the living present is primordially a trace"ⁱ

Strange enough, Anaya's philosophical concerns to pair Antonio with Ultima throughout the novel is outstanding. Although, "other" appears in the list of antonyms of "same" alongside "contrary," "distinct," "diverse," and so on, Anaya propounds an intimate degree between Antonio and Ultima to the extent that one cannot be thought without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms. This is not by all means to suggest that Antonio and Ultima are the same.

It is significantly important to note that these descriptions of identity make allusions to identity as a complex construct, influenced by a variety of factors. This may lead us to observe and probably suggest that a single definition of identity and one theory of identity development do not exist.

The Mutual Recognition between Sameness and Difference: A Prominent Issue in Bless Me, Ultima

Anaya seems to work out his protagonist's self-identity drawing on Hegel's philosophical and speculative ideas that identity may be conceived as developing from, and essentially constituted through, the mutual recognition of samenesses and differences through relation to the other. In other words, difference may be thought to be logically involved in the constitution of identity. Such an understanding of the constitution of identity is thus highly problematic. ii

In so doing, Anaya starts his novel with the coming of Ultima, a wise old woman and long-time family friend, to live within Antonio Marez's family. She is a curandera, a woman who is able to heal the sick through her knowledge of herbs and ancient cures. She can even lift curses laid by witches. Antonio is excited by her arrival, and when he meets her he knows that she holds the secret of his destiny. Antonio speaks:

Ultima came to stay with us the summer I was almost seven. When she came the beauty of the llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood." (Bless Me Ultima, p. 1)

So, Antonio's existence is always identified in association with the presence of Ultima. His mother told him that he was saved by La Grande who was there to help in the delivery as he had been born with his umbilical cord tied around his neck. (Bless Me, Ultima, pp.5-6). Tony begins to learn wisdom from Ultima. She teaches him the secret of nature. Ultima even settles Antonio's conflicting and disturbing questions about gods. Throughout the novel she assists him to travel on his passage from innocence into awareness. Although she is a less developed character than Antonio, Anaya emphasizes her crucial roles nonetheless. In fact, She does not support Antonio alone to get out of *la tristesa de la vida* (the sadness of life), but the whole community as a whole. Despite her never having married or having had children of her own, she is a symbolic mother figure representing the mysteries of life, death, and transformation.

It is very interesting to notice that unity between Ultima and Antonio which is represented through their continuous being together. She assists him during his birth while he assists her during her death. They are inseparable. She is there present in every instance of Antonio's life offering help and support. During his first school day she is there to present her special blessing to Antonio to meet Maria's request, that her son will "be a man of learning." (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 55-56). She is there with the presence of her owl to calm his fears and dispelling his anxieties in his encounters with the tragic deaths he will witness in a brief space of time. The first experience of death is that of Lupito, a disturbed man whose mind has been traumatized by war. (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 24-25.) The second death concerns Narciso, a friend of Antonio's family. (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 168-170) The third death experience concerns Antonio's friend Florence, the unbeliever, in a tragic swimming accident in a forbidden section of the blue lake. (Bless Me, Ultima, P. 239). Although these death scenes are tangibly and concretely displayed by the author at different places throughout the novel, they are a land mark of irritating, embarrassing, disturbing, and tormenting nightmares and "pesadilla", where Ultima's presence is more than a necessity.

In my dreams that night I saw three figures. ...First I saw Narsciso. He held his hands to the gaping, bloody wounded at his chest. Behind him came the mangles body of Lupito, jerking crazily to the laughter of the towns-people. And finally I saw the body of Florence, floating motionlessly in the dark water. These are the men I have seen die! I cried. (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 243). Ultima is always there to solace and comfort his worries. "She was at my bedside, holding me in her arms. My body was shaking with choking sobs that filled mu throat. ...She crooned and held me until the convulsions left me."(Bless Me, Ultima, p.144)

On the meantime, Ultima strives perseveringly to transform her knowledge and worldview to Antonio. The reader may easily observe that the whole story revolves around this transference of know how and learning to Antonio. Ultima starts first by answering Antonio's tormenting questions about the presence of the river, the owl as a protecting spirit, and some notions about nature. As a fascinating woman who embodies the combination of indigenous traditions, ancient beliefs, and shamanic healing, Ultima, with careful pace, moves to enlighten Antonio's mind with the importance of herbs and their great role in medicines. She spoke to me of the common herbs and medicines we shared with the Indians of the Rio Del Norte. She spoke of the ancient medicines of other tribes, the Aztecas, Mayas, and even of those in the old, old country, the Moors." (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 38-42)

What is worth noting here is that gradation in Ultima's phases of teaching. As if respecting the age of Antonio, she is patiently moving from theory to practice. Once she has terminated with the explication of the herbs and their healing roles (the theoretical side), now she insists that Antonio will be the only one to stay with her to witness the curing scene of his uncle Lucas, who had been cursed by the three brujas daughters of Tenorio Trementina, the town barber and owner of a run-down saloon (the practical side). In fact, the whole novel appears to serve a pedagogic function in that it presents an ethnographic portrait of New Mexico, where Anaya keeps a careful balance between information and action. She orders Antonio's grandfather to get rid of all those who are present and to clear the room with the exception of Antonio. She refuses to be accompanied by anybody else, except Antonio, when she sets to do the talk with Tenerio. (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 88-94) Antonio still wonders:

And why Ultima had brought me? I want to help, but how I was to help? Just

because my name was Juan? And what was it about my innocent Luna blood that

was to help the curse from my uncle? I did not know then, but I was to find out.

(Bless Me, Ultima, p.91)

The answer to Antonio's question is very soon provided by Ultima when she said, "We shall test the young blood of the Lunas against the old blood of the past--" (Bless Me, Ultima, p.97)

Strange enough, Anaya's philosophical concerns to pair Antonio with Ultima throughout the novel is outstanding. Although, and as has just been noted in the first chapter, "other" appears in the list of antonyms of "same" alongside "contrary," "distinct," "diverse," and so on, Anaya propounds an intimate degree between Antonio and Ultima to the extent that one cannot be thought without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms. This is not by all means to suggest that Antonio and Ultima are the same. If they were totally the same, one character would be enough to carry on the different phases and events of the novel. This would immediately lead us to mention what Heidegger has noted in his lecture *The Principle of Identity* when he writes: "For something to be the same, one is always enough. Two are not needed, as they are in the case of equality."ⁱⁱⁱ

Hegel's Dialectics and the Question of Becoming in *Bless, Me Ultima*

Thus Ultima represents the origins and the beginnings. Interestingly, Antonio's story begins and ends with her. So the strong link and the unseparatedness between Ultima and Antonio can be illustrated deeply through the implications Hegel's dialectics of becoming which is the unseparatedness of being and nothing.^{iv} In other words, Antonio's identity is constructed via the unity of Ultima and Antonio much the same as becoming forms the unity of being and nothing. Thus, Hegel asserts that "being and nothing, each unseparated from its other, is, each is not."^v

It is pertinently important to mention here that in this sense, Being and nothing is the "Same." This is one of the most paradoxical and extremely complex propositions that any wise would dare to formulate, for being and nothing are undoubtedly antithesis in all its immediacy. However, this unity holds the following determination or "double determination" to use Hegel's exact words. "The one that is the Same in both...But correct as it is to affirm the unity of being and nothing, it is equally correct to say that they are absolutely diverse too—that one is not what the other is."^{vi} Let us then consider the last few words of this quotation "that one is not what the other is," and try to imply them on the unity of Ultima and Antonio. Obviously, though *La Grande*, marks the beginning, the origins and or the "essence" in the Heideggerian sense, she fails and collapses of being into nothing which is represented by Antonio. Thus being and nothing are both absolutely the same and absolutely different. If Ultima and Antonio can not be separated, they must be related, and the category that relates them is becoming. With this idea in mind, it becomes apparent that "becoming", as Williams Robert puts it, "is the unity of being and nothing."^{vii} Ultima, as a type of spiritual or magical encounter, featuring the deep roots and the cultural heritage of the indigenous, Hispanic, Indian, New-Mexican identity, now by the end of the novel steps from being to nothing. In other words, her death does not symbolize the end, to avoid over generalizations, but a transformation and or a change from being into nothing. This would be explained through Ultima's request from Antonio to bury the owl, Ultima's spirit, whose death comes just a few times before Ultima. Now as all her wisdom and knowledge is cast away into a new light, and passed over to Antonio, Ultima asks him to do her a favor. "Tomorrow you must clean out my room. At sunrise you must gather my medicines and my herbs and you must take them somewhere along the river and burn everything." "Being" is vanishing into its opposite "nothing" to borrow Hegel's terms.^{viii} It is at this level that Anaya works out the issue of identity by recognizing the existence of its other which is difference. For if there in no other there will be no transition or whatsoever. Drawing on Hegel's philosophical views, identity is in this

sense in a double determination. “In the one, nothing is immediate, that is, the determination starts from nothing which...changes into being; in the other, being is immediate, which changes into nothing: the former is coming to be and the latter is ceasing to be.” ix Thus with the death of Ultima, “being” ceases to be and “nothing” is coming to be. This may be illustrated by Ultima’s last words before she passes away. Ultima says, “meddling will be done with, and harmony will be reconstituted.”(Bless Me, Ultima, p.260)

It is interestingly crucial here to notice that the same versions of logic that governs the unity of being and nothing are adopted in Hegel’s logic of essence when he discussed identity and difference. Hegel, in the logic of essence, indicates that all the categories (identity and difference) of essence are relative. Therefore, what seem initially to be pure and absolute differences, collapse and undermine themselves. What Hegel suggests here is that as categories of essence neither identity nor difference can be considered apart from each other but only through and by means of each other. He affirms that any attempt to isolate difference from identity would certainly break down.

Surprisingly enough, it is through this philosophical rhetoric that Anaya displays the mutual relationship between Ultima and the young Antonio. Although each is an independent being existing for itself, their divisibility seems extremely impossible. Their differences would, in fact, help them to negotiate their relation and determine their identity through mutual recognition. This would remind us of Hegel’s phrase “the being- for- itself and being-for-another” when he analyzed the concept of recognition.x Thus with these ideas in mind one can venture and affirm that absolute or pure difference must differ from itself, hence, absolute difference “is not itself but its other.” xi (Otherwise it would be identical to itself.) If pure difference differs from itself, then it can differ from itself only by being other than itself. “But that which is different from difference is identity. Difference is therefore itself and identity. Both together constitute difference; it is the whole and its moment.”xii

It is highly important to mention that within the Chicano literary tradition, Bless Me, Ultima is often referred to as a “novel of identity” where the main characters must identify and redefine themselves within the larger society from the supremacy and seeded position of their own distinct and diversified ethnicity. It is no surprise, therefore, to notice that in such type of novels (identity novels) the character is always conscious of his or her cultural heritage. He or she often questions his/her cultural heritage attempting to form or forge some kind of reconciliation with the larger society while maintaining a distinct identity. In this context, the reader cannot escape the crucial figure of Ultima in Bless Me, Ultima. Throughout the novel, Anaya emphasizes her big teaching role not only bring young Antonio into contact with a mystical, primordial world but also with his own Hispanic/Indian culture. Being a guide and a mentor of Antonio, Ultima insists that he learns to appreciate his culture if he is ever to truly understand himself and his place within society. Anaya once writes, “The pathway to that process was opened up to him by Ultima’s “appearance.” “That strong, old curandera . . . came to me one night and pointed the way. That is, she came to me from my subconscious, a guide and mentor who was to lead me into the world of my native American experience. Write what you know . . . learn who you really are.”xiii

Antonio, on the other side, is coming to be. He represents the present and the future. Anaya works out Antonio's coming to be through different scenes in the novel. This can be illustrated through the boy's strong inquisitiveness to find out what is really going on outside when Gabriel, Antonio's father and Chavez, the brother of the assassinated Sheriff, have taken their arms to fetch Lupito down the river. (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 16). In spite of the danger of being accidentally shot in the dark, and his father's anger if sees him there, Antonio slips out the kitchen door alone into the night. Antonio does not know the reasons for his being there, but, perhaps, this is how the author wants to illustrate his hero's be coming by making him feeling some concern towards his father. Antonio says: Perhaps this is what drew me out into the night to follow my father and Chavez down the bridge, or perhaps I had some concern for my father. I do not know. (Bless Me, Ultima. p. 17) Though, very young, the author makes Antonio's trials and first doubts of conscious extend by witnessing Lupito's murder by the river. Antonio keeps questioning himself: Did God listen? Would he hear? Had he seen my father on the bridge? And where Lupito's soul winging to, or was it washing down the river to the fertile valley of my uncles' farms? (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 23) Again La Grande is always there to answer Antonio's questions. Ultima says, "You will learn much, you will see much," (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 25)

Another scene of Antonio's coming to be is displayed by the obligatory leaving of his mother's warmth and comfort to cross alone the bridge into the wide world of the town, with its perils and challenges to join school. Throughout his to and fro school journeys, Antonio starts feeling the changes or he just wishes some changes. Antonio says speaking to his brother Andrew "I don't know—sometimes I get the feeling that I will come home, and it will all be changed. It won't be the same any more—" I could not tell him that I wanted the goat path and the hill to learn that things wouldn't always be the same." (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 143) Anaya stresses this passage of separation to assert his young protagonist's becoming. This is made obvious through Antonio's active participation in his uncle's ritual exorcism, during which he sacrifices himself for the sake of another. The blood of the youngest Márez is tested to resurrect his youngest uncle, Lucas Luna, from certain death at the hands of the Trementina sisters. For three days the innocent Antonio suffers in a semiconscious state and eventually through magical sympathy heals the bewitched Lucas. These events of the hero as donor, scapegoat, and savior show up for the reader not as an undisplaced religious belief but as a semantic component intrinsic to the romance when Ultima tells Antonio that life is never beyond hope because good is always stronger than evil. (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 91)

After three days of agony he will emerge as if reborn, a new, more mature boy who can reconcile himself with his father and mother and the world around him. Ultima provides him with the symbolic tools (her pouch of herbs) and the spiritual power to resolve his disturbing and irritating questions. Thus what Antonio cannot face or understand on a conscious level is deciphered in his dreams. His doubts and uncertainties are echoed on the subconscious level and occasionally resolved there as well.

Having considered the philosophical perspectives and views of some outstanding thinkers about the nature of identity, that the unity of identity forms the characteristics of "the Being and beings" (cf. Martin Heidegger), the distinction between the unity of identity at any given time and identity across time (cf. David Hume), identity and the

notion of indiscernibility of identical (cf. Leibniz), identity as a process connecting diverse representations i.e. identity considered in the epistemological mode (cf. Wittgenstein), and the notion of “differance” (cf. Jacques Derrida), it becomes obvious that is almost impossible to speak about identity without simultaneously speaking of difference. To put it differently, without much verbosity, difference is a sine qua non prerequisite for the construction of an identity. Charles Taylor seems to insist on this necessity and advocates that recognition of difference is not only a moral but a vital human need in that it is tied up with the process of identity-construction. Drawing on symbolic interactionism as well as dialogism, he writes:

In order to understand the close connection between identity and recognition, we have to take into account a crucial feature of the human condition that has been rendered almost invisible by the overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream modern philosophy. This crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. xiv

Although each of the aforementioned philosophers may have theorized and conceptualized the relationship between identity and difference from different positions, they all agree that the unity between identity and difference offers an adequate space to develop interesting readings about these two baffling concepts. Thus, some may conceive identity as a practical matter of achieving separation from the different, and or as “categories each of which is nothing in and for itself, but only in relation to its opposite, and they cannot therefore be separated from one another.” xv

Interestingly, in some other context, identity is conceived as a matter of identity of the object with itself i.e. without logical connection to the other. (cf. Hegel). Others may see identity as developing from, and essentially constituted through, the mutual recognition of samenesses and differences through relation to the other. In other words, difference may be thought to be logically involved in the constitution of identity. There is a necessary connection of the one with the other. (cf. Martin Heidegger). Yet it should be stressed here that it took Heidegger a great deal of time to understand the relationship between identity and difference. He may have followed the same principles adopted in *Being and Time*. However, as a philosopher who is always conscious that truth and knowledge are but justified through different enquiries, in *Being and Time*, he begins

his inquest of the meaning of man (Dasein), then he moves to the understanding of Being; whereas, in *Identity and Difference*, he investigates that very “relation” itself as the relation of man and Being. He does not probe into the “components” of the relation, but the relation as a relation. xvi Yet he realizes that Being and man can only be investigated from the nature of identity itself.

It is precisely at this point that things can become rather thorny. For the concept of “sameness” may denote a variety of controversial philosophical meanings. Heidegger, drawing on Parmenides’ statement that thought and Being are the same, comes out with an interesting interpretation that “Being belongs—together with thought—into the same.” xvii To make it more explicit, Heidegger digs deeply in Parmenides’ statement and questions many outstanding thinkers such as Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, who are not content with the simple unity of a thing with itself, but with the mediated syntheses of subject and object, and of subjectivity and objectivity. What is new about Heidegger’s understanding, however, is that identity simply means the unqualified and uninterrupted self-sameness of A as A. Thus The principle of identity xviii $A = A$ has become A is (transitively), A i.e. used with in a grammatical sense, and the “is” now admits the meaning of belonging together. According to Heidegger, the logical formula $A = A$ conveys only the belonging-togetherness of A with A. Therefore, to say $A = A$ is first to presuppose that there is a distinction between the first A and the second A, and then to assert that they are alike. That is to say there is an anterior step which must be taken into account before one can be able to affirm that two things are identical. This anterior step is the presupposition, one of the most basic insights of Heidegger’s thought. Heidegger thus understands the principle of identity as A with A, which enables him to say that there is difference anterior to either unity or sameness. At the heart of identity, in other words, there is difference.

What is significantly important about this understanding of identity as a relation is that the relation first determines the manner of being of what is to be related the how of this relation and the who i.e. who does the acts of identification by saying that two things are identical. In Heidegger’s lexicon, “A is A.” The principle of identity relies on the word “is,” or the verb to-be. To make it more explicit, the identity of beings have precedence over their difference; whereas, the difference between one being and another forgoes the fact that beings are. Consequently, it can thus be concluded that that the identity of any two beings precedes their difference, and that the meaning of any and all beings presuppose their existence. Surprisingly, it would be difficult to show how this thought, in all its radicality, manifests itself in Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*. Antonio inadvertently sets forth lot enquiries about his existence and self-identity. Who is he? Is he more like his father? Is he more like his mother? He kept wondering: “Then may be I do not have to be just Marez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both—” he continued, “It seems I am so much part of the past—” “Ay, every generation, every man is part of his past. He can not escape it, but he may reform the old materials, to make something new—.” (*Bless Me, Ultima*, p. 247). This is also confirmed by Anaya himself in one of the interviews when he says: “Only the wise Ultima is able to help solve this dilemma. Tony had it wrong, and forgot that the rhythm of earth is the processes that are all around us; each new generation builds new things of the old material.” xix According to Heidegger, however, difference is another name for the sheer existence, the beingness, of all beings. xx Presupposed in the most elemental function of experience, this beingness is the ultimate horizon for all meaning. As a concept, it is also the placeholder for the claim that difference is anterior to identity.

In Tony inadvertently dreams of his questions of self-identity. Who is he? Is he more like his father? Is he more like his mother? The salty waters of the ocean are associated with the Márez family, as they are what the Luna family calls “freethinkers”, as wild as the waves of the ocean. The water of the moon is associated with the Luna family. That water comes from the divine heavens and down to the earth in pure form. Only the wise Ultima is able to help solve this dilemma. Tony had it wrong, and forgot that the rhythm of earth is the processes that are all around us; each new generation builds new things of the old material. This is where Tony identifies the problem more clearly. Now that he knows that the waters are mostly the same, maybe he can find a way to live harmony with the two equally useful metaphors of life. “One thing— “[Ultima] cautioned, “Yes?” I asked. “Be prepared to see things changed when you return--” I thought awhile. ‘Andrew said things had changed when he returned from the army— do you mean in that way?’” She nodded. “You are growing, and growth is change. Accept the change, make it a part of your strength--” (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 245)

The late Richard P. Feynman once said, “that which I cannot build, I cannot understand.” This is a very similar example of this, though applied to mother nature. By attaining strength from changes, one can build more and put to rest former questions, much like Tony’s excess number of questions. “Ay, every generation, every man is a part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new--” “Take the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp— and make something new,” I said to myself. That is what Ultima meant by building strength from life. “Papá,” I asked, “can a new religion be made?” “Why, I suppose so,” he answered. “A religion different from the religion of the Lunas,” I was again talking to myself, intrigued by the easy flow of thoughts and the openness with which I divulged them to my father. ` (Bless Me, Ultima, 247)

Earlier, Ultima had said, “You are growing, and growth is change. Accept the change, make it a part of your strength--” (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 245). In a sense, Tony builds his own strength from the materials of life that he has been presented: the religion of the Luna, the thinking Márez, the sacred golden carp. Throw all of these ideas together, Tony realizes, and he can still be one with his mother and father’s dreams. Priesthood is translated into sacred honoring and education of the beauty he has discovered, while the respect for the Márez blood in his veins is just as an important part. As Ultima said in Tony’s dreams, Antonio ... You have been seeing only parts, she finished, and not looking beyond into the great cycle that binds us all. (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 121)

The Notions of Time and Space in Bless Me, Ultima

Pursuing a similar vein, it is extremely important to point out here that one cannot identify one thing with another or with a single thing with itself, as Heidegger suggests, unless the one who identifies them would experience them in time and space. This would certainly compel us to dig deep into the meaning of these two concepts, however, for the lack of space; it is a vantage point for the moment to leave them aside. Meanwhile, it is philosophically convenient to distinguish three main perspectives on time: the objective or cosmological perspective (concerned with the time of nature); the subjective, lived or phenomenological perspective (related to the duration or individual time-consciousness); and the intersubjective or social perspective (linked with a historical multiplicity of forms of time-consciousness which together compose the time of history or “historical time”). xxi

To tackle these concepts from Heidegger's ontological views would require then a great body of literature because of their diverse connotations and complex meanings, especially, in his attempts to bring in the issue of spatiality to the question being. Although, Heidegger's philosophical views may find direct relevance to the analysis of chora in Plato's *Timaeus* xxii and of topos in Aristotle's *Physics*, xxiii nobody denies that there is a great difficulty in finding a language that engages these aspects of thought, because each perspective or kind of time is identified with a particular canonic literature. Indeed, Life, bodies, communities, things, words, numbers, thoughts, feelings and states of mind, our imagination—all these occur not only temporally but also spatially. Nevertheless, these senses are never reducible to presence. They are almost hardly understandable by accounts or measurements. They are not explained by any thinking fixed on the infinite production of things, quantities, feelings, or images, as is the case in our age of technological production.xxiv

It is pertinently significant to recall here that meaning, according to Heidegger, takes place through an act of identifying, and identifying anticipates a difference between instances of the phenomena identified. Thus identification, for Heidegger, is based fundamentally on lived experience. To make it differently, identification cannot occur without experience. The identity of A with A, for example, cannot happen without mediation by concrete experience and, since all experience is shaped by a pre-existing context, this mediation involves history. Thus, in this context, "sameness implies the relation of "with", that is a connection, a synthesis: the unification into a unity." xxv The reader can easily fathom Heidegger's debt to speculative idealism when he claims that the argument for difference anterior to identity is an argument for the dependence of abstract meaning on concrete and historical context.

Putting this argument into the context of our research would compel us to ask the question how can a boy of six or seven years may identify things without having that prior experience? To find an adequate answer to this question, it would be necessary to investigate Anaya's artistic talents. To bridge the gap of experience of his protagonist Antonio, Anaya has attempted to work out his novel with philosophical, psychological, and mythological details. Presented as a process that is the expression of a creative force, the main character must develop the faculty gradually to arrive at self-fulfillment. However; it is very important to remember here that Antonio's self-fulfillment is contingent upon his symbiosis and union with Ultima's knowledge of herbal knowledge, spiritual healing, and magical rituals. The fulfillment of Antonio's "destiny" is strongly linked to the omnipresence of Ultima. It is worth to observe here that Ultima's presence is but an artistic framework to cover and hide Antonio's lack of experience which is fundamental in the process of identification. This is broadly apparent in Antonio's dreams and spiritual messages, which are forms of inner dialogues and conversations. The reader can not miss Anaya's great emphasis on Ultima's presence which actually makes of Antonio that human subject who is robbed of agency and presented as being at the mercy of the inexorable logic of destiny.

The Primacy of Time over "Topos" in *Bless Me, Ultima*

Although spatiality constitutes a fundamental element in Heidegger's thought, particularly in the articulation of the question of Being, temporality also gains a great focus and attention in his later thinking. In *Being and Time* the discussion of being is fundamentally directed to its temporality. Heidegger affirms in the first page of *Being*

and Time that his project is “the interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being.”^{xxvi} The purpose from bringing the term of temporality here stems from the belief that much of Heidegger’s ontological occurrences of beings—in their temporality and finitude, strongly conjure up with Antonio’s consciousness and conception of time. Needless, to recall here that the passage of time in Anaya’s novel is limited to the main character’s experiences from ages six to eight, much briefer than in the traditional bildungsroman. Consider what Anaya says through his protagonist character: “Some time in the future I would have to build my own dream of those things which were so much a part of my childhood” (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 248). So Antonio Márez looks back to the pending cuentista or storyteller he has now become and who will write that childhood into being. For the reader of Bless Me, Ultima would certainly raise the question how can a boy of a seven-year-old express profound insights and complex ideas? The answer is very simple: the task of Bless Me, Ultima is to accomplish an extended flashback. Right from the very beginning the reader is assured that the events described, although seemingly occurring in the present, in fact occurred at an earlier time. The narrator is, therefore, by implication, an adult. Anaya is able to maneuver this tension of the older implied narrator and the younger voice of the child-protagonist Antonio Ma´rez by carefully re-creating the reactions of a small boy. Antonio’s comments reflect the expected limitations of a child of that age. The note is typical, one of memory, respect, the novel as an unfolding series of panels in which time-past seams utterly into time present, the actual into the imaginary, and the teller into his own tale. “Time stood still, and is shared with me all that had been, and all that was to come...”, (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 1), says Antonio at the outset. He repositions himself to as the seven-year-old raised in Spanish-speaking New Mexico who finds himself pulled between the vaquero or herdsman Márez clan on his father’s side and the farmer-cultivator Luna clan on his mother’s. But he also acknowledges the writer-in-waiting who will learn to appropriate into the art of word the shamanism, the brujería, of Ultima as anciana or curandera invited by his parents to spend her last days with the family.

The novel, throughout, unravels this play of accurate event into a drama of inner fantasy and imagining. If the two family dynasties are to be caught in history between a Mexican past and U.S. future, so, in Ultima--whose shaman’s skill protect and educate Antonio--the story takes on other lines, the sheen of fantasy. New Mexico can be invoked as modern border state yet also magical, in which, as Antonio testifies, “new experience and dreams strangely mixed in me” (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 26). The event makes the judgment of Bless Me, Ultima not a little Proustian, a childhood offered specific time and place yet also, and at the same time, sacral and steeped in its own contemplative intimacy.

In a certain interpretation, experience for the boy takes the form of his adult recollection of his ill-matched parents, his sisters Deborah and Theresa, and the three absentee big brothers with their eventual disruptive return from the wars in Europe and Japan and drift into the easy pleasures of Las Vegas. It looks back to the Spanish home, the English of school, the latter which anglicizes him from Antonio to Antony. It summons back to him his parents’ wrestling and outrivaling hopes for him: his father’s dream of a new beginning in California and his mother’s hope that he will enter the priesthood. He sees, too, as he could not have in childhood, the irony of his father as one-time horseman and cattle-driver in the Llanos (flatlands) now asphaltting the New

Mexico highways as if to seal in, to insume, the very tierra his family once proudly herded.

It is not by chance, therefore, that Anaya overloads his novel with ten dreams, starting by Antonio's birth to Ultima's death. As suggested before, the purpose from these dreams, perhaps, is a kind of camouflage of Antonio's short experience. The critic Vernon E. Lattin seems to share the same opinion. Apart from Antonio's first dream which is about his birth, (Bless Me, Ultima, pp. 5-6) the remaining dreams, Lattin suggests, reflect concerns that reveal the path to Antonio's destiny. The tenth dream, though filled with the terror of death, the disappearance of Ultima and her owl, the reader can not escape Antonio's preparation to accept and understand the realities of life. One can even venture and say that these dreams may have foreshadowed Antonio's lack of experience and young age. It is from this cosmic nothingness that Antonio develops his powers and strength. His growth from infancy to maturity and his reconciliation with his mother, father and the world around him is reflected through his dreams. They illustrate past events and suggest future conflicts. Having by now witnessed so much of Ultima's healing power, the messages of her teachings and of his own dreams have revealed themselves to him. This is obvious in Antonio's reflections by the end of the novel when he says: "And that is what Ultima tried to teach me, that the tragic consequences of life can be overcome by the magical strength that resides in the human heart" (Bless, Me Ultima, p. 249).

The reader may not easily understand Anaya's injection of these amounts of dreams unless he/she considers some of Freud's theories about dreams. In many occasions, Freud has attempted to show that the individual's mind could work without logic. For the unconscious mind works without the syntactical conjunctions which are logic's essence; It recognizes no because, no therefore, no but; such ideas as similarity, agreement, and community are expressed in dreams imagistically by compressing the elements into a unity. The unconscious mind in its struggle with the conscious always turns from the general to the concrete and finds the tangible trifle more congenial than the large abstraction. Freud discovered in the very organization of the mind those mechanisms by which art makes its effects, such devices as the condensations of meanings and the displacement of accent.xxvii According to Freud, dream is a disguised fulfillment of a repressed wish. This would certainly conjure up with Antonio's state of mind. Antonio says, "And when we dream it is usually for a lost childhood, or trying to change something and that is not good. So, in the end, I accept reality--" (Bless Me, Ultima, p. 248)

Mindful the setting in New Mexico just after World War II, the novel deliberately maps the ways in which a community responds to cultural change. Antonio Marez is a boy who represents liminality, cut and torn as he is between the two different subcultures – the plains and the farmland –from which his parents come. Throughout the novel, Anaya includes italicized passages which depicts the dreams of the young Antonio, whose boyhood is profoundly influenced by his friendship with the old curandera (folk healer) Ultima. Through Ultima, Antonio learns about pre-Christian forms of spirituality and knowledge that do not supersede or supplant but instead increase, augment, thrive and supplement the Christian teachings that he learns in school and at church. What the novel ultimately suggests is that the fusion of spiritual traditions will make it easy for Antonio not only to negotiate and mediate conflicts within his

community but also to help that community sustain, preserve and maintain its sense of identity and coherence in the face of a consuming Anglo culture.

In effect, it is through the young boy's consciousness that Anaya seeks to explore and explain his protagonist's identity. The boy's continuous questions and preoccupations about (the Golden Carp) and white magic (Ultima's owl/familiar are but examples of an inexperienced boy's quest of the origin of his identity. Already torn by the colonizing restlessness of his father's blood, Antonio's soul can only be brought into balance by Ultima's healing ministrations. It is her *curanderismo* that appears as the deconstructive supplement of Christian spirituality, inverting the odd Christian ritual with of her rich *brujería*. Anaya, therefore, intentionally insists to represent her as the power of the forgotten mother. The writer continually reminds the reader of Ultima's resurface and her restorative force while haunting the New Mexican Llano. Her self sacrifice is but part of her mission to foreshadow Antonio's growing experience. *Bless Me, Ultima*, then is a novel where the theme of reconstructing identity is predominant. However, this time the central character, Antonio, must decide between the Spanish heritage of the plainsman/rancher and the Indian heritage of the farmer. Ultima intervenes again in Antonio's reconstruction of identity advising him to build strength from life by taking all the ingredients he may find. "Take the Llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the Golden carp—and make something new." (*Bless Me, Ultima*, p. 247) It is for this purpose that Anaya has insisted on La grande's help.

Strange enough, to maintain the identity of Antonio's community through an inexperienced boy, Anaya has deliberately and consciously inserted Ultima at the very beginning of the novel. To make it clear, Anaya is very aware of the constitutive role of difference in identity itself and that difference does not only presuppose identity but it is ubiquitous to its meaning. This would certainly imply that Identity requires difference in order to be. xxviii Thus, it is very important here to recall that identity is relational and collective. Antonio's personal identity, for instance, is defined through the collective constituencies with which he identifies or is identified by others (as a school boy, Marez, Catholic, Mexican, American, and so on). It is further specified by comparison to a variety of things he is not. Identity, then, is always connected to a series of differences that help it be what it is. Thus Anaya is wise enough to identify Antonio, the inexperienced boy, with Ultima, the experienced to create a unity.

Works Cited

Books

- Bishop, Bryan, Dialectical Journal for "Bless Me, Ultima" Summer, 2006
 - Derrida, Jacques, Speech and Phenomena, Trans. D. B. Allison, Evanston, Northwestern UP, 1973
 - Hegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)
 - , Encyclopedia Logic, §88R1
 - Heidegger, Martin, Being and Time. Tr. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996
 - , Identity and Difference, Trans. by Joan Stambaugh, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1969
 - Luckhurst, Roger and Peter Marks, edits, Literature and the Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present, New York, Pearson Education Inc., 1999
 - Taylor, Charles "The Politics of Recognition," Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition," ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 32.
 - Trilling, Lionel, "Freud and Literature." The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society. London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1951
 - Vallega, Alejandro A., Heidegger and the Issue of Space: Thinking on Exilic Grounds, The Pennsylvania State University Press University Park, Pennsylvania, 2003
 - William E. Connolly, Identity /Difference. University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, U.S.A., 1991
 - Williams, Robert R. Double Transition, Dialectic, and Recognition , in Identity and Difference, Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics (Ed.) by Philip T. Grier, State University of New York Press, 2007
- Articles and Journals
- Aristotle, Physics, vols. 1-4, tr. Wicksteed and Cornford (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989)
 - Lensink, Judy Nolte, Ed., Essay "An American Chicano in King Arthur's Court." In Old Southwest/New Southwest: Essays on a Region and Its Literature, Tucson, AZ: Tucson Public Library, 1987
 - Plato, Timaeus, tr. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989)
-