

# Hispanic american literature honors english literature essay

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Alessa BartonMs. MizaniHispanic American Literature HonorsRudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me, Ultima* tells the story of the protagonist Antonio Marez, a young boy who grows upon a diminutive, parochial, Catholic community and how his life completely metamorphoses when Ultima, a curandera, comes to reside in his home. Upon meeting her, he almost instantaneously forms a special connection with her. Through the duo's bond, Ultima exposes the child to a form the healing that is reminiscent of the native culture. The main character notices that the that the curandera's is almost magical and he begins to suspect Ultima possess greater powers than others around him; the town also envisages the potential terror that could come from Ultima's anomalous abilities. Simultaneously, his cohort Cico, who no longer believes in the Catholic faith introduces him to the golden carp - a forgiving god. Through his knowledge of Catholicism, which he had been taught all of his life, and the two new discoveries Antonio starts to think philosophically. He questions who/what is the correct God, and why the gods/God allow(s) abhorrent tragedies to befall upon the innocent instead of the guilty; in addition he realizes that nothing, not even religion is black or white, nor is anything purely commendable or despicable. To begin, Antonio lives in a secluded and tiny community. His mother, Maria Luna is a devout Catholic, who raises her progeny in the faith. As a result of the protagonist being indoctrinated in Catholicism, his faith is staunch. This is most evident when the priest tries to emphasize that eternity is infinite, by telling them a story of moving a pile of sand across the ocean by picking one grain of sand at a time. He describes the fear as petrifying and expresses to the reader his vision of " One person ... haunted my nightmares ... It was Florence ... whom

I saw burning into the roaring inferno of eternal damnation," (Anaya 215). Florence is a friend of Antonio's who has been born into an unfair situation, and as a result he believes in no god, or if the Catholic God does exist he believes God has sinned against him, as Florence has done nothing to deserve his life situation. As stated in the above reference to the text Antonio fears for Florence's afterlife. More importantly because God punishes Florence with his living situation for no legit reason, the reader can infer that Antonio potentially views God as evil for the cruelty He shows towards His people. Yet the reader can also infer that he still sees good in the religion, as he admires Mary, Christ's mother. In contrast to the Almighty, Antonio worships her because she shows mercy. In the Catholic religion, Mary is the intercessor who will deliver one's prayers to God. She also forgives, unlike God who holds grudges as a man does. Both of these details enable the reader to believe that Antonio still sees beauty inside the Catholic church. In contrast, Ultima is a native healer who the conservative community fears, because of her social status as a curandera. She uses herbs and her knowledge of old traditions as a means to heal both the body and the spirit. When one of Maria's family members is sick, Ultima is summoned to attempt to save his life, because a priest had failed to cure him. Ultima explains to Antonio that, " The church would not allow your grandfather to let me use my powers. The church was afraid," (Anaya 101). Antonio is literally in awe that she succeeds and he questions why the event had resulted in the outcome of Ultima succeeding. This contradicts everything he has been taught because he has been brought up to believe that God has total power and that a priest is given special abilities by God. Yet

Ultima was able to cure him. This shows that nothing is absolute and the authority to ward off evil is not solely in the hands of the Church, which Antonio has been brought up to believe in. Perhaps the author is emphasizing that the solutions of problems are not often found in modern society themselves, but ones past. Shortly after the life of Maria's brother is saved, Tenorio, a vindictive man from the brother's town rallies a mob of men to try to seize Ultima, because he accuses her of witchcrafts since she killed one of his three daughters. The reader could potentially assume that Ultima is in fact a witch because of three clay dolls that are on a shelf in her room; one doll is wrinkled. They could represent Tenorio's daughters, and Ultima might actually be a witch. To further affirm Tony's belief, when Ultima is accused, Narciso, a man who care deeply for Ultima's welfare suggests she walk through a door with holly needles pinned upon it' a witch cannot walk through a doorway with the holy artifacts. However, the needles have fallen either before, after or during when Ultima gets through the door. The reader must decide for his or her self. Like the reader, Antonio is confronted with a severe philosophical question. Ultima could be a witch. Yet at the same time she is so kind it seems impossible to the reader that she might be a witch as she is portrayed a woman " *mujer que no ha pecado*,"(Anaya 109) . This translates as " the women with no sin." This is a correct comparison, as throughout the text the reader never views Ultima doing anything sinful or any completing actions with malicious intents. Perhaps maybe being a witch is not as necessarily bad. Ultima uses her healing (magic) for positive purposes and although she might be a witch she might not be one like the evil brujas. Finally, Cico tells Antonio the story of the

golden carp and Antonio is intrigued by the idea. The carp is a God that turned himself into a fish to guide and govern the people. He loves that fact the Carp is protective and forgiving. When the main character sees the presence of the carp he for the first time feels a spiritual awakening, and he feels it is almost more real than Catholicism. This is most evident when expresses his adoration and desire to pay homage to the mystical being, " I could not have been more entranced if I had seen the Virgin, or God Himself ... I knew I had witnessed something miraculous," (Anaya 119). However even this perfect carp is not idea. Florence drowns in the water. Florence is innocent, yet he dies. The carp is also an example of evil in everything. He could have saved Florence yet he did not. Finally, the carp story as the end of the world will result in the llano overflowing with water. It sounds horrific, but the good is still in the carp, as Cico says he is excited for the end of the world, which shows the ultimate beauty. Thus the reader can assume that the perhaps the end of the world will be a " bittersweet" time, filled with both anticipates happiness and terror, not one or the other. Events unfold around the time Ultima comes to stay with the Marez family. The characters of Ultima, and Cico teach the boy to religious which he has never imagined and this influences his Catholic beliefs that used to be unwavering. At first the new concepts seem abstractions because he is indoctrinated with the faith, but later he realizes that several parts of all the religions seem plausible. In conclusion, through the introduction of new religious concepts Antonio realizes that nothing is a simplex matter, and that good and bad resides in all situations.