

# Bless Me, Ultima



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RUDOLFO ANAYA

Rudolfo Anaya was born in Pastura and raised in Santa Rosa, New Mexico. Like Antonio Márez, Anaya had a *vaquero* (cowboy) father and a mother from a farming family, and he was also greatly influenced by the beauty of the New Mexican flatlands. Anaya's family later moved to Albuquerque, where he attended high school and the University of New Mexico. He got two masters degrees there, and he married Patricia Lawless in 1966. *Bless Me, Ultima* is his first novel. Many publishers rejected it for its blend of languages and its Chicano subject matter, but once it was published the book became extremely popular through word-of-mouth. It is now considered part of the canon of contemporary Chicano literature and American literature as a whole. Anaya's best known other books are *Heart of Aztlán*, *Tortuga*, and *Albuquerque*. He still lives and writes in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The cultural setting for *Bless Me, Ultima* is New Mexico, where Spanish colonists mixed with Native Americans for many years, blending indigenous mythology with Catholic Christianity. The novel is set during World War II, and mentions the testing of the atomic bomb in the New Mexican Desert. The isolated rural towns like Guadalupe were also forever changed when their young men returned from the horrors of war.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Anaya struggled to find other works that spoke to his Chicano experience, so *Bless Me, Ultima* is one of the first of its kind. An earlier related work is Josephina Niggli's *Mexican Village*, which was published in 1945. Other major Chicano writers include Sandra Cisneros, author of [The House on Mango Street](#), poet Luis Omar Salinas, and poet Lorna Dee Cervantes.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Bless Me, Ultima*
- **When Written:** 1963-1971
- **Where Written:** Albuquerque, New Mexico
- **When Published:** 1972
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Chicano Literature
- **Genre:** Magical Realist Fiction, *bildungsroman*
- **Setting:** Guadalupe, New Mexico
- **Climax:** Tenorio kills Ultima's owl and then is shot

- **Antagonist:** Tenorio Trementina
- **Point of View:** First person limited, from Antonio's perspective

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Trilogy.** *Bless Me, Ultima* is actually the first book in a series of three, but the next two, called *Heart of Aztlán* and *Tortuga*, are not nearly as famous as their predecessor.

**Censorship.** Because it is taught so widely in schools but also contains strong language, violence, and a positive portrayal of the occult, *Bless Me, Ultima* has been challenged by many advocacy groups and is on a list of the most frequently banned books in America.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Antonio Márez is a six-year-old Chicano boy living in Guadalupe, New Mexico in the 1940s. He has a perceptive, questioning nature and vivid, sometimes prophetic dreams. His father Gabriel is a *vaquero* (cowboy) from the llano who prizes freedom and wandering, while his mother, María Luna, comes from a family of farmers and devout Catholics. Because of their conflicting personalities they have different dreams for Antonio's future. They take in Ultima, an old curandera (healing woman), and she and Antonio grow very close. Ultima teaches Antonio about herbs and the spirits of nature, and with her comes a watchful, comforting **owl**.

Antonio's trials begin when he witnesses the death of Lupito, a man driven mad by his experiences in World War II. After seeing death Antonio begins to wonder about punishment and hell. He starts school, where he has to learn English and is made fun of by the other kids, but his mother hopes he will be a "man of learning" and a priest. Antonio's brothers Andrew, Eugene, and León return from the war and seem changed. Gabriel wants to move to California with them, but they no longer feel at home and soon leave again.

One day a friend tells Antonio about the **golden carp**, a pagan god that lives in the river. Antonio also starts to feel more attached to the **Virgin of Guadalupe** than to God, who seems harsh and unforgiving. Tony's religious doubts grow when Ultima heals his uncle Lucas from a witch's spell after the priest failed to help him. The spell was cast by the daughters of Tenorio Trementina, a saloon owner who hates Ultima. Later Antonio actually sees the golden carp, and he feels a religious experience similar to what he had expected for his first communion. Then he learns that the carp also plans on punishing sinners with death, and he becomes more conflicted,

as the carp seems like just another punishing god.

Tenorio threatens Ultima, and the family's friend Narciso, the town drunk, defends her against accusations of witchcraft. Ultima's owl tears out Tenorio's eye and he vows to kill both Narciso and Ultima. Tenorio's daughters get sick and he blames Ultima for that as well. On the way home from a Christmas pageant Antonio sees his brother Andrew at a brothel, and then he watches Tenorio kill Narciso and go unpunished. Antonio prays for Narciso's soul and is again disturbed by seeing death so close.

Antonio is excited about learning the catechism and taking his first communion, as he hopes for answers to his religious questions. His friend Florence is an atheist and raises many doubts about the unfairness of Catholic doctrine. Antonio finally has his first communion but is disappointed that no divine knowledge comes.

Ultima dispels spirits from the house of one of Gabriel's friends, again succeeding where a priest failed. Antonio sees the golden carp once more and decides to show it to Florence, but Florence drowns in a swimming accident that same day. Antonio is disturbed by the death and goes to learn farm work with his uncles, the Lunas. He grows and gathers strength there, but one day hears that Tenorio is pursuing Ultima again. Tenorio tries to kill Antonio, who narrowly escapes, and Tenorio reveals that he plans to kill Ultima's owl, which is the embodiment of her spirit. Antonio runs the ten miles home to warn her, but just as he arrives Tenorio kills the owl. Antonio's uncle Pedro kills Tenorio. Antonio goes to Ultima on her death bed and she is able to comfort and bless him before she dies. Antonio buries the owl as she requested, and he knows he is really burying Ultima. He realizes he must choose from the dreams of his childhood or else build a new dream for himself, and he resolves to create a new life and religion from the blend of cultures and beliefs that are a part of him.

shares a deep connection with the earth. She befriends Antonio and becomes his mentor and guide. Ultima symbolizes the mysterious powers of the indigenous peoples as well as the spirit of the land itself, although she is misunderstood by many to be an evil witch. Her **owl** acts as a protector and is also the embodiment of her soul, so she dies when it does.

**Gabriel Márez** – Antonio's father, a former vaquero (cowboy) of the llano. Gabriel prizes freedom above all else, and is often bitter against the town and his wife for taking him from the llano. He drinks whiskey, especially when dreaming of moving to California, but he is also a strong and level-headed presence in the face of danger.

**Tenorio Trementina** – The antagonist of the novel, Tenorio owns a saloon in El Puerto. It is implied that he practices witchcraft, and his daughters are brujas (witches). When Ultima turns their own curse against them he vows to kill her. He has no moral qualms and seems to thrive on his own hatred. He kills Narciso and **Ultima's owl**, but is finally shot by Pedro Luna.

**Florence** – One of Antonio's friends from town, a blond boy who doesn't believe in God. Florence perceptively points out the flaws in Catholic doctrine, and is bitter against God (or the lack thereof) for his harsh life and the evils of the world. He drowns before Antonio can show him the **golden carp**.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**María Luna Márez** – Antonio's mother, a devout Catholic from a family of farmers. She dislikes Gabriel's llano friends and wants Antonio to become a priest and lead the Lunas. María is very emotional and prays to the **Virgin Mary** in times of both trouble and happiness.

**Narciso** – A friend of the family from the llano, Narciso is a huge man who is usually drunk. He has a special power of making plants grow and is a force of goodness in Antonio's world, protecting the family and defending Ultima until he is killed by Tenorio.

**Cico** – Another friend of Antonio, Cico seems kinder and wiser than the rest. He is the one who shows Tony the **golden carp** and tells him the prophecy of the flood that will destroy the town.

**Andrew Márez** – Antonio's brother who remains at home when the other two leave. Andrew still seems lost and depressed because of his experiences in the war, and spends most of his time at Rosie's brothel.

**Eugene Márez** – Another of Antonio's older brothers, the leader of the three and the one who has the idea to leave home after they return from the war. He seems to argue the most with his parents, especially Gabriel.

**León Márez** – Antonio's third brother, who also fought in World War II and returns feeling depressed and displaced.

**Lupito** – A man from town driven mad by his experiences in the



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Antonio Juan Márez** – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, a young Chicano boy growing up in Guadalupe, New Mexico. Antonio (or Tony) has a great desire for knowledge and wrestles with many difficult questions about life and religion. The novel follows his experiences facing tribulations and growing up, and also his relationship with Ultima. Tony sees death, has religious experiences, goes to school, and must choose between the conflicting dreams of his parents. The story is essentially Antonio building his own identity from life experiences, the cultures he comes from, and the beliefs he is exposed to.

**Ultima** – A kind, elderly curandera (healing-woman) who comes to live with the Márez family. Ultima has strange powers and

war. He shoots the town's sheriff and then is hunted down and killed by a group of men. His is the first death Antonio sees.

**Samuel** – Antonio's wise friend who likes to fish and first tells him about the **golden carp**.

**Father Byrnes** – The priest who teaches the catechism class and delivers a terrifying sermon on the eternity of hell.

**The Trementina Sisters** – Tenorio's daughters, brujas (or witches) who curse Lucas and then are punished by Ultima. Two of them die, fueling Tenorio's rage against Ultima.

**Pedro Luna** – Antonio's favorite uncle, María's brother, and the most talkative of the silent Luna farmers.

**Lucas Luna** – Another of Antonio's Luna uncles, Lucas is cursed by the Trementina sisters and saved by Ultima.

**Juan Luna** – The third Luna uncle, also a quiet farmer and Catholic.

**Prudencio Luna** – Antonio's grandfather, friends with Ultima and head of the Luna family.

**Télez** – Gabriel's friend from the llano, whose house becomes haunted by ancient spirits controlled by the Trementinas.

**Horse** – One of Antonio's friends from town, a wild and violent boy who looks and acts like a horse.

**Bones** – Another boy from town, even wilder and more unpredictable than Horse and unafraid of punishment.

**Ernie** – A boy who seems to especially dislike Antonio.

**Abel** – Another member of the gang, who urinates during the pageant.

**Red** – A boy made fun of for being a Protestant.

**The Vitamin Kid** – A member of the gang of Antonio's friends who is famously fast and always races people across the bridge.

**Lloyd** – A boy who likes to remind people they could be sued.

**Deborah Márez** – One of Antonio's older sisters, she likes to play with dolls and speak in English.

**Theresa Márez** – Antonio's other sister.

**Chávez** – Jasón's father and the sheriff's brother. His appearance and drive for revenge against Lupito begins the conflict of the novel.

**Jasón Chávez** – One of Antonio's friends who is friends with an Indian despite being forbidden to see the Indian by his father.

**Jasón's Indian** – One of the last Indians, who apparently first told Jasón the story of the **golden carp**.

**Miss Maestas** – Antonio's first schoolteacher, who understands Spanish and knows the family.

**Miss Violet** – Another teacher, who is kind but doesn't understand Spanish.

**Rosie** – The owner of the town brothel.

**Vigil** – The town policeman.

**The Flying Man** – Ultima's legendary instructor who taught her magic and gave her the **owl**.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### GROWING UP

The story of *Bless Me, Ultima* is built around Antonio's early coming-of-age experiences. The book is an example of "*bildungsroman*," or a tale of the growth of a character, though Antonio has to deal with issues that most six-year-olds don't have to, like magic, existential religious doubts, and murder. His largest childhood influence is his parents, and each parent has a specific dream for his life path; his mother, a Luna, wants Tony to become a farmer and a Catholic priest, while his father, a Márez, wants him to be a vaquero (cowboy) of the llano or help him move to California. Beginning with this inner conflict, much of the book deals with Antonio deciding what kind of adult he wants to be. There is also a recurring theme that growing up means a loss of innocence, or that adulthood is something inherently sinful. Antonio's mother wants him to remain a child forever, and even Ultima says "life is filled with sadness when a boy grows to be a man." His many painful experiences certainly destroy his innocence in many ways, but by the end of the novel Tony is wise beyond his years.



### PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS

Much of the plot is powered by different characters' desires for revenge and punishment. Chávez wants revenge against Lupito, Tenorio wants revenge against Ultima and Narciso, and even Ultima wants to punish Tenorio for tampering with fate. It seems that the gods also have a similar human need for punishment – at first it is only the Christian God with his horribly eternal Hell, but even the **golden carp** plans to drown all the sinners someday. The briefly-mentioned **atomic bomb** also represents a real-life cataclysmic punishment that echoes the apocalypses of the gods.

In the end, Ultima and the **Virgin of Guadalupe** are the only compromising, forgiving alternatives. The Virgin Mary is a Christian symbol, but Antonio sees her as a mother-figure willing to listen and forgive, unlike the strict male gods. Ultima is also a mother-figure, and though she punishes Tenorio for his crimes, she also asks that he be forgiven, and accepts her own death to balance out his.



## KNOWLEDGE

The story of Antonio's coming of age is intertwined with his quest for knowledge. He is always asking questions, and is most excited about Communion

because it will mean gaining knowledge of God. Ultima is a symbol of a different, mysterious kind of knowledge, as she knows people's fates, the ways of the earth, and healing herbs and magic spells.

Throughout the book knowledge is also associated with growing up and losing innocence. Florence points out that Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden was wanting to gain knowledge of Good and Evil, and the **atomic bomb** is condemned as humans competing with God's knowledge. Tony's dreams and experiences with Rosie's brothel also imply that when he learns certain things he will lose his innocence and become a man.



## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

*Bless Me, Ultima* is an example of Chicano literature, and one of Anaya's primary goal in writing it was to fashion a cultural identity for himself and his

community. Much of Antonio's experience is based on a meeting of cultures and a search for identity among the Spanish, Native American, and English-American societies. Ultima is a symbol of indigenous influences and the supernatural, pre-Christian world, while Antonio's school represents the English-speaking society. The Luna and Márez sides of his family are also a meeting of cultures – Antonio's father is a restless vaquero of the llano, while the Lunas are quiet farmers and Catholics. Tony's religious struggle is also connected to his culture, as he vacillates between Spanish Catholicism and the **golden carp** of the indigenous people.

The format of the novel echoes this clash of cultures as well, as it is written in English with many Spanish words interspersed, and some characters (especially Antonio/Tony) are referred to by both Spanish and English names. When Antonio resolves at the end of the novel to create a new set of beliefs and dreams, it is clear that *Bless Me, Ultima* itself represents a fulfillment of that intention. The reading experience mirrors Anaya's own cultural experience, and the novel becomes a tale of Chicano identity.



## CHRISTIANITY VS. THE SUPERNATURAL

*Bless Me, Ultima* is written in the magical realist style, where fantastical elements are treated as a part of daily life. Ultima's powers, the brujas

(witches), and the **golden carp** all create a dreamlike feeling that emphasizes the blend of new and ancient cultures. Only Christianity seems free from the supernatural, which plays a major role in Antonio's doubts. Catholicism condemns magic as evil, but the priests fail at stopping Tenorio's curses, and Antonio's vision of the golden carp is contrasted with his

anticlimactic first communion. The divide is most present in Tony's interior struggles. His mother wants him to be a priest, and throughout the novel Tony says blessings for Lupito, Narciso, and Florence, but at the same time he dreams prophetic dreams and is a part of some of Ultima's spells.

One of Antonio's biggest revelations at the novel's end is that it does not have to be "Christianity versus the supernatural" at all, but that he can take elements of Catholicism and indigenous myths and make a new set of beliefs for himself. This new Chicano myth for Antonio is based more on the forgiveness of the **Virgin of Guadalupe** and Ultima's healing powers.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### ULTIMA'S OWL

Ultima has an owl that follows her everywhere and becomes a symbol of her mysterious power. At first Antonio is afraid of it, but soon he regards the owl as a comforting, watchful presence. The bird calls out warnings when danger approaches and rips out Tenorio's eye when he threatens Ultima. By the novel's end it is revealed that the owl is magically linked with Ultima's soul, and when it dies, she dies. Its powers remain mysterious to the end, like the supernatural myths of the indigenous peoples.



### THE GOLDEN CARP

Antonio discovers the golden carp at a time when he is starting to doubt his mother's Catholicism. The golden carp is supposedly a god sent to guide the other carp, who were once ancient people who sinned. Tony can actually see the carp and feel a sense of enlightenment, as opposed to the seeming ineffectiveness of the Christian God. The carp at first represents the ancient Native-American ways and an alternative to Catholicism (and so another half of Tony's religious struggle), but later Tony learns that the carp also plans on drowning the town's sinners, so it then seems like yet another unforgiving male god.



### THE ATOMIC BOMB

The atomic bomb is discussed only briefly, but it resonates with the punishing apocalypses of the different religions – the Catholic Hell and the **golden carp's** destructive flood. That humans could create such a weapon is seen as a sign that they have acquired knowledge meant only for God, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The mention of the bomb also seems to bring the outside world into the

small, isolated communities where the novel takes place, and so symbolizes the ominously encroaching modern world.



## THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

The Virgin of Guadalupe is a Christian figure, but one with a special meaning for the Mexican and Chicano people. The legend goes that Mary revealed herself to a man in ancient Mexico and asked him to build a church. Antonio sees the Virgin as something separate from the rest of Catholicism – a mother-figure who is willing to listen and forgive, unlike the strict, punishing God. Even though she is a Catholic symbol, for Antonio the Virgin symbolizes something of that "new religion" he resolves to build at the novel's end – she has aspects of several cultures and religions, and feels truer and more comforting to his identity.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Warner Books edition of *Bless Me, Ultima* published in 1994.

### Chapter 1 (Uno) Quotes

●● 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.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Ultima

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 1

#### Explanation and Analysis

These lines, which open the book, briefly introduce many of the novel's main themes, and do so in vivid, almost fantastical language. Antonio, the narrator, is looking back on his childhood from a vantage point of greater age and maturity, and he reflects on the summer he spent with Ultima while mentioning several themes that will come up again later: the power of the land and the connection of Chicano culture to the landscape, the "magical" qualities of both childhood innocence and nature itself, and the idea of growing up and accepting the unstoppable passage of time. This passage also is a reminder (important in hindsight) of just how young Antonio is when all these events are happening.

●● "Ay, how true," my mother said and clutched me tightly, "and what a sin it is for a boy to grow into a man--" It was a sin to grow up and be a man.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, María Luna Márez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 31

#### Explanation and Analysis

It is the day after Antonio's first real traumatic experience—witnessing the death of Lupito. As the family prepares for Mass, Ultima calls Antonio a "man," only for María to contradict her and say that Antonio is still a "baby."

Throughout most of the book, Antonio is faced with conflicting forces pulling him in different directions, both regarding what he will grow up to be and whether he will grow up at all. María, as we see here, consistently clings to Antonio's childhood innocence, and wants to keep him from being corrupted by the world and becoming a man. She connects this innocence with the perceived innocence of the priesthood, and so (later) wants Antonio to become a priest when he gets older—she knows she can't keep him from aging and maturing, but she does want to keep him innocent. Here she explicitly connects "becoming a man" with "sin," and Antonio immediately internalizes the message by repeating it to himself. This particular worldview will later conflict with others Antonio experiences, and be the cause of much confusion and inner turmoil for him.

●● "But I want to know, there are so many things I want to know," I insisted.

"A curandera cannot give away her secrets," she said, "but if a person really wants to know, then he will listen and see and be patient. Knowledge comes slowly--"

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, Ultima (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 34

#### Explanation and Analysis

Antonio is very curious and eager for definite answers, at this point particularly about Lupito's death and the idea of the afterlife. While María, in her Catholic worldview, has associated gaining knowledge with sin, Antonio can't help

but continue to want that knowledge—and in his immaturity he wants it *now*. Ultima, however, teaches Antonio that knowledge comes best with experience, and so one must be patient. This is a good example of Ultima's role as a mother figure and spiritual guide for Antonio—encouraging his growth but also protecting him, allowing him to experience the world for himself but also giving him the strength to endure it.

## Chapter 4 (Cuatro) Quotes

☞ "It is the blood of the Lunas to be quiet, for only a quiet man can learn the secrets of the earth that are necessary for planting – They are quiet like the moon – And it is the blood of the Márez to be wild, like the ocean from which they take their name, and the spaces of the llano that have become their home."

**Related Characters:** Ultima (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 41

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes one of the fundamental disparities, or inner contradictions, within Antonio's identity—the conflicting pull of his mother's nature and his father's nature. Here Ultima lays out that disparity in clear terms: the Lunas (María's family) are quiet and diligent like the moon ("luna"), and they tend to be farmers or priests. The Márez (Gabriel's family), however, are wild and unrestrained like the ocean ("mar"), and they tend to be vaqueros (cowboys). Each parent wants Antonio to grow up and follow in their family's footsteps, but clearly Antonio cannot grow up to be only a true Luna *or* true Márez—he is both.

It's worth noting here that although the Luna and Márez seem irreconcilable, they already have been united in Antonio's parents themselves. As he says elsewhere, "their blood and their ways had kept them at odds, and yet for all this, we were happy." Furthermore, both of their natures center around the land itself—whether it is farming its soil, or riding across its plains.

As usual, Ultima doesn't force Antonio to choose here, but only describes both sides of the "argument." This is an early hint of one of the crucial lessons Antonio will ultimately learn: that he must embrace all the disparate parts of his heritage and build upon them.

☞ God was not always forgiving. He made laws to follow and if you broke them you were punished. The Virgin always forgave.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

Here Antonio ponders Catholicism and its tenets, as he understands them. Antonio still thinks with the simplicity and literalism of a child, but he is also, as usual, very perceptive and thoughtful. He knows that as a good Catholic, he is supposed to love God more than anything else, but Antonio can't help finding God harsh and unforgiving, an aloof figure who demands perfection and punishes those who break his laws. However, Antonio sees the Virgin Mary—particularly the Virgin of Guadalupe—as a kinder, more forgiving, and more relatable figure.

On one level this seems to be just the young, sensitive Antonio finding comfort in a loving mother-figure rather than a judgmental father-figure. But the Virgin of Guadalupe is also unique in her special connection to Antonio's Chicano identity. She is a Catholic figure, but also one intimately connected to the indigenous peoples of Mexico, and so not wholly connected to the religion of the white colonizers. In this way she symbolizes the kind of blend of cultures that make up Anaya's vision of Chicano identity.

## Chapter 6 (Seis) Quotes

☞ "Ay! My man of learning!" my mother smiled when I entered the kitchen. She swept me in her arms and before I knew it she was crying on my shoulder. "My baby will be gone today," she sobbed. "He will be all right," Ultima said. "The sons must leave the sides of their mothers," she said almost sternly and pulled my mother gently.

**Related Characters:** María Luna Márez, Antonio Juan Márez, Ultima (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 53

**Explanation and Analysis**

Again María makes it clear that she doesn't want Antonio to grow up and lose his innocence, but if he must, she wants him to be a "man of learning" and become a priest. This desire obviously comes from María's strong Catholic faith, but also from her family's tradition of priesthood and her idea that becoming a priest means staying innocent and avoiding the sin of "becoming a man." (This idea becomes confusing for Antonio later, as being a "man of learning" is associated with becoming a priest and receiving divine knowledge, but elsewhere knowledge is associated with sin, pride, and corruption.)

Ultima, then, again acts as a figure of gentle but firm wisdom, encouraging Antonio to grow up but also to make his own choices and grow up in the way that is best for him. It's also interesting to note that Ultima's quote at the end of the passage is seemingly a reference to a Bible verse from Ephesians: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." That verse refers to marriage, and so isn't wholly applicable in its entirety here, but it is surprising that Ultima—the figure usually most connected with the supernatural and paganism—seems to be so comfortable quoting from the Bible (if indeed she is).

**Chapter 8 (Ocho) Quotes**

☝☝ "And, they still have Tony," Gene said and looked at me. "Tony will be her priest," he laughed. "Tony will be her farmer," León added. "And her dream will be complete and we will be free!" Gene shouted.

**Related Characters:** Eugene Márez, León Márez (speaker), Antonio Juan Márez, María Luna Márez

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 68

**Explanation and Analysis**

Antonio's brothers have returned home from the war, and they seem to have been greatly changed by their experiences. In this passage we see how they, too, have faced pressure from their parents about what kind of men they will be. Clearly María has given up on Eugene, León, or Andrew becoming a farmer or priest, and so she now pins all her hopes on Antonio—and in this scene, the brothers pin *their* hopes on him too, trying to rid themselves of responsibility and the pressure to please their mother (and

their father, who wants to work alongside his sons and "be free" with them). In general, this passage shows Antonio being further weighed down by familial expectations and differing cultural and religious influences.

**Chapter 9 (Nueve) Quotes**

☝☝ *You are innocent until you understand, the priest of the church said, and you will understand good and evil when the communion is placed in your mouth and God fills your body.*

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 71

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote comes from one of Antonio's vivid, sometimes prophetic dreams. This particular dream is very thematically important, as it brings up ideas of sexuality, the "corrupting" force of knowledge, and also the kind of divine knowledge that supposedly comes with one's First Communion (according to the dream-priest, at least). Anaya uses "dream logic" to connect ideas in a compelling manner, and here he makes an intriguing association—using language that typically describes Adam and Eve and the Biblical "Fall of Man" to instead describe Holy Communion.

Antonio looks forward to his First Communion, hoping that when he receives the wafer (the body of Christ, according to Catholic doctrine) he will get some answers to his many questions. Yet here the dream-priest compares this divine knowledge to a loss of innocence, and also uses the language of the Biblical book of Genesis, where Adam and Eve are cast out of Paradise because they ate the fruit that makes them "understand good and evil"—punished for seeking forbidden knowledge. This suggests that there is no way to gain *any* kind of knowledge or understanding and remain innocent, but also implies that an ignorant innocence is perhaps not something worth clinging to anyway.

☝☝ "The golden carp," I said to myself, "a new god?" I could not believe this strange story, and yet I could not disbelieve Samuel. "Is the golden carp still here?" "Yes," Samuel answered. His voice was strong with faith. It made me shiver, not because it was cold but because the roots of everything I had ever believed in seemed shaken. If the golden carp was a god, who was the man on the cross? The Virgin? Was my mother praying to the wrong God?

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, Samuel (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 81

### Explanation and Analysis

Samuel has told Antonio about the golden carp, a kind of pagan god who supposedly lives in the river surrounding the town. The golden carp becomes a crucial symbol in the novel after this, representative of a kind of naturalistic, indigenous alternative to Catholicism, but also a god who shares many characteristics with the Christian God. (What Antonio first learns is that the god *became* a carp to protect his people, similar to Christ's sacrifice—but later Antonio will learn that the carp, too, plans to harshly punish all sinners just as the Christian God does.)

Antonio learning about the golden carp is a good example of how gaining knowledge shakes his innocence, making him more mature but also more troubled and confused. Antonio is learning that simplistic world-views rarely hold the entire truth, but he also suddenly has complex, seemingly contradictory information to process.

Christian God—while also wondering if the Christian God is the "wrong God" altogether. In this moment Antonio contrasts the seeming reality and power of the carp (and Ultima's magic, which is associated with the carp in his mind) against the seeming ineffectiveness and aloofness of Catholicism. Antonio is seeing things literally, observing life through the eyes of a child, but because of this literalism he draws perceptive conclusions: he has actually *seen* the carp, and has *seen* Ultima perform miracles, but he has yet to see any evidence of the power (or even existence) of the Christian God. The vision of the golden carp, then, is a kind of epiphany or granting of divine knowledge, but one that Antonio still feels is somehow improper or sinful.

☞ "But it's not fair to those who don't sin!" I countered. "Tony," Cico said softly, "all men sin."

I had no answer to that. My own mother had said that losing your innocence and becoming a man was learning to sin. I felt weak and powerless in the knowledge of the impending doom.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, Cico (speaker), María Luna Márez

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 118

### Explanation and Analysis

Previously, the golden carp had seemed like an alternative to the Christian God, a more "natural" and forgiving deity (and also one more connected to the indigenous peoples of the region, instead of the white Christian colonizers of the past), but here Antonio learns that the carp, like God, plans on punishing all the sinners of the town with death—and everyone sins, so no one will escape punishment.

This passage, then, connects to Antonio's learned belief that growing up and gaining knowledge means losing one's innocence and sinning—and sin must always be punished. Furthermore, Antonio now learns that this isn't just a Catholic idea, or just his mother's idea, but is a pagan idea too.

## Chapter 11 (Once) Quotes

☞ "The golden carp," I whispered in awe. I could not have been more entranced if I had seen the Virgin, or God Himself... I felt my body trembling as I saw the bright golden form disappear. I knew I had witnessed a miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god... And I thought, the power of God failed where Ultima's worked; and then a sudden illumination of beauty and understanding flashed through my mind. This is what I had expected God to do at my first holy communion!

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Ultima

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 114

### Explanation and Analysis

In the company of Cico, Antonio actually sees the golden carp: a magnificent, fantastical, and seemingly holy creature. Antonio is awed at the sight, but then he again feels conflicted, and wonders if he has sinned against the

## Chapter 12 (Doce) Quotes

☛☛ Ultima and I continued to search for plants and roots in the hills. I felt more attached to Ultima than to my own mother. Ultima told me the stories and legends of my ancestors. From her I learned the glory and tragedy of the history of my people, and I came to understand how that history stirred in my blood.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Ultima, María Luna Márez

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 123

### Explanation and Analysis

Ultima continues to act like a mother figure and guide for Antonio as he grows up, as here the narrative briefly speeds up to cover a time of idyllic peace and learning. The majority of Antonio's time spent with Ultima emphasizes the healthier parts of growing up for him—not always witnessing death or experiencing religious crises, but rather gaining knowledge of the land and his own heritage and culture. It is arguably this kind of knowledge—learning the "glory and tragedy of the history of my people"—that is most useful to Antonio as he matures, and that also informs Anaya's project in the novel itself.

innocence. Thus Antonio is shocked to see his brother in such a "sinful" state, but is even more appalled at what this might mean for his own soul.

Antonio continues to connect "innocence" with both the idea of childish ignorance and Catholic doctrine, and so sees the loss of innocence as inherently being sorrowful and sinful. Furthermore, he then sees anything that seems to contradict Catholicism as perhaps being the cause of his loss of innocence—not just his tragic experiences of death (Lupito's murder and Ultima's near-murder), but notably his witnessing of Ultima's magic and the golden carp. Antonio is distraught, and fears that he has condemned himself with his actions—immediately looking past Andrew's perceived loss of innocence and worrying about his own possible sinfulness.

☛☛ *You foolish boy, God roared, don't you see you are caught in your own trap! You would have a God who forgives all, but when it comes to your personal whims you seek punishment for your vengeance. You would have my mother rule my heavens, you would send all sinners to her for forgiveness, but you would also have her taint her hands with the blood of vengeance - Vengeance is Mine! He shouted, not even your golden carp would give up that power as a god!*

## Chapter 14 (Catorce) Quotes

☛☛ And I remembered my dream. Andrew had said that he would not enter the house of the naked women until I had lost my innocence. Had I already lost my innocence? How? I had seen Lupito murdered... I had seen Ultima's cure... I had seen the men come to hang her... I had seen the awful fight just now... I had seen and reveled in the beauty of the golden carp!

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Andrew Márez, Lupito, Ultima

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 165

### Explanation and Analysis

While following Narciso, Antonio sees his brother Andrew at Rosie's brothel. Antonio then remembers his dream (described in a previous quotation) about Andrew not entering the brothel until Antonio himself had lost his

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 173

### Explanation and Analysis

Antonio has seen Tenorio kill Narciso, and, traumatized, he has fallen into a fever. In his feverish state Antonio has more vivid and fantastical dreams, and it is from his dreams that this quotation is taken.

Antonio wants God to forgive Narciso, as he knows that despite his flaws, Narciso was a good man at heart and certainly didn't deserve to die as he did. The God of Antonio's dream, however, calls Antonio out on his hypocrisy—if God forgives Narciso, then he must forgive Tenorio as well (something Antonio protests against). And if God punishes Tenorio, then he must punish Narciso as well. The dream-God then brings up the Virgin of Guadalupe, suggesting that his "mother" isn't the easy way out Antonio had hoped—she cannot be inconsistent either, forgiving those Antonio wants to be forgiven and punishing those he

wants punished. The dream-God then goes further—even the golden carp, he says, who is an even more drastic alternative to Christianity, would not give up the power of punishing sinners.

In his dream, at least, it seems there is nowhere Antonio can turn to find the kind of understanding that he seeks. At the same time, he is starting to realize the more difficult aspects of a worldview based on empathy and forgiveness—if he is truly to embrace his instinctual beliefs, then Antonio must learn to forgive even people like Tenorio.

## Chapter 16 (Dieciseis) Quotes

☝ I could not 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. It didn't seem fair. I thought a great deal about God and why he let such things happen.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Narciso, Ultima, Tenorio Trementina

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 186

### Explanation and Analysis

Antonio is still troubled by Narciso's death, and with it the perceived unfairness of Catholicism and God's punishments and "forgiveness." In his feverish dreams Antonio recognized the difficulty of embracing either total forgiveness or total justice, yet here he still longs for a God who would better conform to his own experiences and new knowledge of life's complexity. By now Antonio has grown disillusioned with both the Christian God and the golden carp, and has only the Virgin of Guadalupe left as a last hope for an empathetic and understanding (but also just) deity.

At this point Antonio has also just returned to school after Christmas vacation, and he feels more removed from his peers than ever—because of the violence, death, and magic he has seen, but also because his intense questioning of life, death, and religion makes him an outsider.

## Chapter 17 (Diecisiete) Quotes

☝ "The atomic bomb," they whispered, "a ball of white heat beyond the imagination, beyond hell - " And they pointed south, beyond the green valley of El Puerto. "Man was not made to know so much," the old ladies cried in hushed, hoarse voices. "They compete with God, they disturb the seasons, they seek to know more than God Himself. In the end, that knowledge they seek will destroy us all - "

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 190

### Explanation and Analysis

The atomic bomb appears only briefly in the novel (indeed, only in this passage), but it still acts as an important symbol. Here the people of Guadalupe discuss the rumored testing of atomic bombs in the New Mexican desert—part of the U.S. war effort during World War II (when the novel is set). On one level, this is a rare reminder of the larger outside world beyond the borders of Antonio's home region, and the ominous kind of cultural encroachment that is associated with that world—it is a place of war and danger. The idea of the bomb also connects to the book's common motif of apocalyptic punishment, like the Hell of the Christian God and the flood of the golden carp—a kind of universal punishment from which no one can escape. Lastly, the way the "old ladies" discuss the bomb testing ties it to the theme of forbidden knowledge, especially within a religious context. The scientists developing the bomb are seen as "competing with God" and pursuing knowledge that "man was not made to know." This is a direct echo of the Biblical Adam and Eve story, and the idea Antonio has often heard reinforced, that gaining too much knowledge can only mean sinfulness and punishment.

☝ There seemed to be so many pitfalls in the questions we asked. I wanted answers to the questions, but would the knowledge of the answers make me share in the original sin of Adam and Eve?

"And if we didn't have any knowledge?" I asked.

"Then we would be like the dumb animals of the fields," Florence replied.

Animals, I thought. Were the fish of the golden carp happier than we were? Was the golden carp a better God?

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, Florence

(speaker)

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 197

### Explanation and Analysis

Antonio has been going to Catholic catechism class, preparing for his First Communion and hoping for answers to some of his existential questions, but he only feels more conflicted the more he learns. Here he talks with his friend Florence, who is an anomaly among Antonio's peers—he is an atheist.

In this passage knowledge is again associated with sin, and with the "sorrow" of growing up and losing one's innocence. This is also reinforced by the Adam and Eve story, in which their "original sin" was essentially seeking knowledge that was forbidden to them. Antonio wants to avoid sharing in this sin, but he is also insatiably curious, and furthermore wants to take Communion precisely so he can gain knowledge—but, presumably, knowledge of divine origin that is somehow not "sinful." This seeming contradiction is, of course, confusing to Antonio, and Florence's defiant defense of Adam and Eve's sin only adds to his inner conflict. Lastly, this conflict again makes Antonio consider the golden carp, and wonder whether it would be a "better god"—here not because the carp is more merciful or natural, but rather because the carp is a "dumb animal," neither offering nor forbidding any kind of knowledge at all.

## Chapter 19 (Diecinueve) Quotes

☝☝ I closed my eyes and concentrated. I had just swallowed Him, He must be in there! For a moment, on the altar railing, I thought I had felt His warmth, but then everything moved so fast. There wasn't time just to sit and discover Him, like I could do when I sat on the creek bank and watched the golden carp swim in the sun-filtered waters.  
God! Why did Lupito die?  
Why do you allow the evil of the Trementinas?  
Why did you allow Narciso to be murdered when he was doing good?  
Why do you punish Florence? Why doesn't he believe?  
Will the golden carp rule - ?  
A thousand questions pushed through my mind, but the Voice within me did not answer.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Lupito,

Tenorio Trementina, The Trementina Sisters, Narciso, Florence

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 221

### Explanation and Analysis

Here Antonio finally receives his First Communion. He has been hoping that with the wafer will come divine knowledge and answers to his many questions about God, life, and death—but Antonio feels and hears nothing, and is devastatingly disappointed. According to Catholic doctrine, Jesus is actually physically present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and so Antonio assumes that because he has eaten the wafer, "He must be in there"—God must be inside of him now, and thus he should be getting some answers. Antonio then gives a brief list of some of the questions that have been tormenting him the most, offering a good encapsulation of many of the book's plot points and themes up to now.

Ultimately, this moment creates an increased sense of disillusionment with Christianity for Antonio, but it also allows him to articulate some of the larger themes behind his questions—why sometimes good people are punished and bad ones "forgiven," how seemingly contradictory cultures and religions could be reconciled, and even why death itself exists in a world supposedly created by a benevolent God.

☝☝ The lonely river was a sad place to be when one is a small boy who has just seen a friend die.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 242

### Explanation and Analysis

Antonio has made the decision to tell Florence about the golden carp—assuming that his thoughtful, kind friend would be able to understand and properly appreciate the river deity—only to find that Florence has just tragically drowned.

Overwhelmed by this latest and most devastating tragedy, Antonio hides next to the river to cry and be alone, and the adult narrator—Antonio looks back on himself as a "small boy

who has just seen a friend die"—a tragic moment of stepping back and simply describing the sad realities of life. For Antonio, growing up is about gaining knowledge and experience, but often it seems that it's mostly about death, sadness, and disappointment, and learning to accept the tragedy and unfairness of the world.

## Chapter 22 (Veintidos) Quotes

☝ "Ay," she tried to smile, "life is filled with sadness when a boy grows to be a man. But as you grow into manhood you must not despair of life, but gather strength to sustain you – can you understand that."

**Related Characters:** Ultima (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 245

### Explanation and Analysis

After experiencing so much tragedy in such a short amount of time (and at such a young age), Antonio's parents and Ultima decide to send Antonio to stay with the Lunas, his uncles on his mother's side, for a month, so that hopefully he can rest and regain his strength. As Antonio prepares to leave Ultima, she offers him this "blessing," prefiguring the final blessing that gives the novel its title.

As Ultima acknowledges here, growing up means sadness, pain, and the loss of innocence, but she then reminds Antonio that it also means greater strength and wisdom in reaction to such things. As she often does, Ultima teaches the lesson of drawing on personal experience, knowledge, and heritage to construct one's own individual strength as one matures.

☝ "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?"

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, Gabriel Márez (speaker), Ultima

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 247

### Explanation and Analysis

As Gabriel drives Antonio to go stay with the Lunas, the father and son have an illuminating and important conversation. Gabriel seems worn out, and no longer has his old fierce desire to make his sons follow in his own footsteps—instead, he now recognizes that becoming a man means to "make something new." This, then, is exactly the lesson Antonio needs to hear, as he continues to struggle with inner conflicts within his own identity and the world-views of those around him.

Antonio's mental response to his father's statement then acts as a kind of thesis statement for Anaya's novel. Antonio must embrace all the seemingly disparate parts of his identity, culture, and religion, and use them to make something new and fundamentally his own. This means accepting at once Luna and Márez ("the moon and the sea"), God and the golden carp, Native American, Spanish, and English culture, curanderismo (Ultima's magic and knowledge) and Catholic priesthood, the "llano and the river valley," and using them to make a new, personal "religion"—a project arguably fulfilled in the writing of the novel itself.

☝ 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.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), Ultima

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 249

### Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel and Antonio continue their conversation as they drive to the Lunas' farm. Gabriel expresses a relatively relativistic view of evil, similar to Ultima's—saying that most "evil" is just things people don't understand. Antonio (as narrator, looking back on his childhood) then makes a crucial point: that Ultima's "magic" is, in the end, primarily just understanding and empathy. This is not a belief system critically tied to either Christianity or paganism, but is instead about the "magical strength that resides in the human heart." This is a crucial lesson for Antonio as he grows up and tries to reconcile both his belief systems and

the seeming unfairness of life—notably why Tenorio is still allowed to get away with his "evil."

☞ The thundering report of the rifle followed the flash of fire. That shot destroyed the quiet, moonlit peace of the hill, and it shattered my childhood into a thousand fragments that long ago stopped falling and are now dusty relics gathered in distant memories.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 258

### Explanation and Analysis

Tenorio has just shot Ultima's owl, having figured out that the bird is some sort of life force or "familiar" for her, and that killing it will ultimately kill Ultima as well. At this climactic moment, however, the narrator (adult Antonio) suddenly steps back, placing the present sound of the rifle shot in the larger context of Antonio's entire childhood history.

In a way, this narrative decision shows Antonio already acting on Ultima's and Gabriel's important advice—he is drawing strength from his memories and experiences, even the painful ones, and using them to create something new (the story itself). Antonio does not react to Tenorio's murderous act with rage, but neither does he offer forgiveness. Instead he simply offers understanding, and an acknowledgement that this act has deeply affected his entire life, including the very narrative he is relating now.

☞ "Take them to their room," I said to my mother. It was the first time I had ever spoken to my mother as a man; she nodded and obeyed.

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez (speaker), María Luna Márez

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 259

### Explanation and Analysis

Tenorio has just killed Ultima's owl and tried to shoot Antonio, but then Pedro Luna has shot Tenorio and killed him. Everyone is confused by the scene, and Antonio here responds with authority, telling his mother to take his sisters inside—speaking "as a man." This shows Antonio growing up in a definitive way, strengthened by his past experiences of tragedy. He is now facing death yet again, but has learned to respond to it with courage and calm. It's also worth noting the nature of his "command"—he wants his mother to take his sisters inside so they don't have to witness the tragedy that he has seen. In a way, this shows Antonio trying to preserve his sisters' innocence while he can, despite the fact that his own innocence has been lost.

☞ "Bless me, Ultima --"  
Her hand touched my forehead and her last words were, "I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enters your heart, look for me in the evening when the wind is gentle and the owls sing in the hills. I shall be with you --"

**Related Characters:** Antonio Juan Márez, Ultima (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 260-261

### Explanation and Analysis

It is from this passage that the book takes its title, and the scene also acts as both a tragic climax and a kind of "moral" to the story. Ultima's final blessing echoes the many priestly blessings (whether fake or real) in the novel, but her blessing doesn't mention God at all, or even magic—instead it focuses only on Antonio's own inner strength, his memories and experiences and hardships, and the land itself. There is nothing explicitly supernatural or Christian about it, and the "power" Ultima invokes to bless Antonio is merely "all that is good and strong and beautiful." As Antonio has come to realize over the latter part of the book, Ultima's greatest power and wisdom is rooted in empathy, understanding, appreciation of nature, and inner strength.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1 (UNO)

Antonio Márquez remembers when he was six years old and Ultima came to live with his family. He begins the story as a child lying in bed and listening to his parents discuss Ultima. She is from Las Pasturas, the village in the llano (flatlands) where Antonio's father, Gabriel Márquez, comes from. Gabriel was once a vaquero (cowboy) of the llano and enjoyed the freedom of the open spaces there. Antonio's mother, María Luna, is from a farming family, and she made Gabriel move away from the llano to the town of Guadalupe. Now they live on the outskirts of the town, just at the edge of the llano. This move wounded Gabriel's pride, and now he drinks often and laments his sons who are off fighting in World War II.

They talk about how Ultima has helped them in the past and tended to María when her sons were born, and how it is wrong for her to be alone on the llano at her age. Antonio has heard that she is a curandera, a magic healing woman with knowledge of herbs and ancient remedies. Some people think she is a bruja, or witch. Antonio's parents decide that she will come and live with the family.

Antonio starts to fall asleep and he prays to the **Virgin Mary**. María wants him to become a priest someday, but she does not know about the vivid dreams he sometimes has. He sleeps and starts to dream of a mud hut in Las Pasturas, the site of his own birth. He sees an old woman in black deliver a child (which he realizes is himself) and bite off the umbilical cord and save it with the afterbirth.

In the dream the Lunas and the vaqueros both try to claim the baby Antonio as their own. María's brothers want him to become a farmer like them, and they smear him with earth and surround him with vegetables, but the restless cowboys replace the plants with saddles and whiskey. They want him to be a free vaquero like they are. The families start to fight over who will receive the afterbirth until the old woman stops them, saying she will bury it herself – she will be the only one who knows the child's fate.

*The novel begins by setting up the opposing cultural forces that will influence Antonio's coming of age. The Márquez way of life is restless like the sea that they are named for (mar means "ocean" in Spanish), while the Lunas prefer to stay in one place and work the land. The family's physical position – between town and llano – is symbolic of the marriage between María and Gabriel, and also of the state of Antonio's childhood at this point—he is in-between.*



*Curanderas use healing practices of the indigenous peoples and are often accused of being witches. The fact that María, who is a devout Catholic, also respects Ultima so highly is an example of the mix of cultures and religions in the Chicano culture where Antonio grows up.*



*Antonio's dreams add to the plot's narrative and also enhance the magical realist elements of the story, as he seems just as "magical" with his dreams as Ultima will be later. María's specific dream for Antonio's priesthood will be a huge influence on his development.*



*This dream is a physical representation of the struggle already going on inside Antonio. His mother's family wants him to become a farmer or priest like them, and his father's family wants him to return to the llano as a vaquero. But neither are given the final word – only Ultima knows his fate, but she does not choose one way of life over the other.*



Antonio wakes up and thinks apprehensively about leaving his mother and going to school for the first time soon. His sisters, Deborah and Theresa, giggle and ask rude questions about Ultima before she arrives. María gets angry and demands that they respect Ultima and call her "La Grande." Antonio asks about the details of his birth, and his mother unknowingly confirms that the dream was true, and Ultima really did bury the afterbirth herself. María then complains a bit about the drunken, wandering vaqueros and predicts that Antonio will be a true Luna, and maybe even a priest someday. Antonio wonders who will hear his confession if he is a priest, but his mother doesn't hear his whispered question.

Antonio goes to his friend Jasón's house, one of only three on their side of the river. Everyone around only speaks Spanish – Antonio won't learn English until he goes to school. Jasón's mother says he is away talking to an Indian who lives in a cave in the hills. His father has forbidden Jasón to speak to the Indian, but he keeps going back.

Antonio leaves and goes to work in the garden. The land of the llano is too rough for farming, but his mother wants him to try and it makes her happy, so he does it. Soon the family's truck approaches: it is Gabriel returning with Ultima. Theresa is afraid, but Deborah, who speaks only English now, reassures her. María scolds them and warns them to be respectful.

Ultima steps from the truck and the children greet her formally, but when Antonio takes her hand he feels a sudden whirlwind and a rush of the power of Nature. He calls her by her real name and María rebukes him, but Ultima says she knew they would have a special connection, as he was the last child she delivered to the family. Antonio knows that Ultima is only one who knows his fate. Ultima says she has come here for the last days of her life, but Antonio protests that he will protect her and never let her die.

Ultima enters the house and Antonio smells the fragrance of many herbs surrounding her. An **owl** arrives that night and starts to hang around near the house. At first Antonio fears it and thinks it is a bad omen, but soon he realizes Ultima's owl is a comforting, watchful presence. That night he dreams of the owl and the **Virgin of Guadalupe** gathering the children in Limbo and flying them to heaven.

*Ultima is about to arrive at a stressful time in Antonio's life – he is leaving home to go to school for the first time soon. This is a very concrete step in growing up, and Ultima will appear to guide Antonio to resolve the conflicting cultures acting upon his development. María confirms the differences between the family's wishes. That she venerates both priesthood and curanderismo (Ultima's powers) in the same breath shows the blend of culture and religion even in this small household.*

*Again Anaya keeps introducing juxtaposed elements of Spanish and indigenous culture – he reminds the reader that all the characters are speaking Spanish, which is emphasized by the many Spanish words scattered through the text. At the same time Jasón is drawn to the Indian in the hills, a representative of the indigenous culture.*



*The garden seems symbolic of Antonio's own growth – caught between town and llano, an attempt at farming on a place meant for riding horses, trying to please both farmers and vaqueros at once – its growth is arduous and slow. Antonio's sisters are more influenced by the English-American culture of their school than the rest of the family seems to be.*



*Antonio and Ultima share an immediate connection, and Ultima evokes images of nature and magic, the whirlwind of the llano and knowledge of Antonio's destiny – these are unexplained supernatural powers that Antonio has not experienced before. He instinctively trusts Ultima though, showing that perhaps what Ultima symbolizes has been lacking in his mostly Catholic home.*



*Ultima's herbs recall the incense of a Catholic priest, and the owl is first introduced as a symbol of Ultima's presence. Its immediate association with the Virgin Mary in Antonio's dream shows how seemingly opposing ways of life are already blended together in Antonio's mind – he can already encompass the conflicted multiple cultures of the Chicano identity.*



## CHAPTER 2 (DOS)

Ultima quickly assumes the family's routine, helping with the chores and listening to Gabriel's frustrated dream of moving to California with his sons and working in the vineyards. Sometimes Gabriel cries when he thinks of how the war and the town have ruined his ambitions. Antonio walks through the llano with Ultima and learns about the beauty of the earth, and the names of herbs and animals, and to no longer fear the presence of river.

One night the **owl** cries a warning and Chávez, Jasón's father, enters the family's house. He rambles wildly, and then finally calms down enough to say that his brother, the sheriff, has been killed. The murderer is a man named Lupito who was driven crazy by his experiences during the war. The sheriff was sitting and drinking coffee when Lupito walked up and shot him in the head. Chávez wants Gabriel to help him kill Lupito, as Chávez must avenge his brother. Gabriel tries to calm him down but Chávez insists, and they get their rifles and leave. María tries to lock the children in but Antonio slips out and follows the men.

Men are gathered on the bridge and Antonio hides in some brush. He sees Lupito crouching at the edge of the river with a pistol, and Lupito glances at him briefly with wild eyes. The men spot Lupito and he starts to scream and yell about Japanese soldiers, and then runs towards Antonio and disappears in the dark reeds.

Vigil the policeman shows up and the men say they have to kill Lupito. Vigil argues that he has to deputize them first, but they shout him down. Gabriel argues against them as well, and his friend Narciso agrees – Lupito is not an animal to be hunted, but a man driven mad by war. The men call Narciso a drunk and shoot into the water.

Narciso tries to yell down to Lupito with comforting words and encourage him to give himself up without more bloodshed. Lupito shakes sadly and fires his pistol into the air. The men on the bridge think he is shooting at them, and they shoot together and kill him. Lupito looks at Antonio as he dies, and cries out for his blessing.

Antonio runs away through sharp branches that cut him, repeating the Acts of Contrition – the prayers of a priest for Lupito's soul. He starts to cry, but is soon comforted when he hears the song of **Ultima's owl**. He thinks about his family, and the town, and river now stained with blood. This is the first time Antonio has seen someone die. He thinks about Lupito's war madness and prays for his brothers, who are still away fighting.

*Ultima's natural role as Antonio's guide begins. She teaches him to no longer fear the river, which shows that he is already breaking away from his parents' protection – but the river also divides town from llano, and so perhaps this is also a symbolic move beyond fearing the separation between town and llano. Gabriel seems to already know that his dreams have failed, but still he clings to them.*



*The ever-looming specter of World War II comes to symbolize the harsh modern world imposing itself upon the secluded rural societies of the novel. The theme of punishment and revenge is also introduced here, as Chávez is driven to act by his culture's masculine emphasis on vengeance – he is almost forced to hunt down Lupito and avenge his brother. Antonio secretly following the men here begins both his ordeals and a more active role in his own life.*



*Lupito's post-traumatic hallucinations here prove that he cannot be held responsible for his actions. This fact makes the vigilante manhunt seem more unjust, and also presents a complex and ambiguous moral issue that Antonio must process.*



*Gabriel and Narciso appear as voices of reason among the townspeople. Despite both of their flaws (mostly alcohol-related) they show themselves to be men of character who are willing to deal subtly with matters of humanity, punishment, and revenge.*



*Antonio sees his first death, which is a pivotal point in his childhood. The fact that Lupito asks for Antonio's blessing also thrusts the role of "priest" upon his shoulders in a much more sudden and even desperate way than María's fervent dreams for his future do.*



*Lupito's death sets off Antonio's conflict over sin, the fate of the soul after death, and the punishments decreed by religion. Antonio acts as a symbolic priest for the first time here, though he does not yet understand the significance of his prayers. The owl also appears as a symbol of Ultima's comforting presence.*



Antonio enters the house and Ultima greets him gives him some medicine to drink. She tries to soothe his questions about Lupito's soul, and says he will learn the strange ways of men someday. She washes his cuts with a potion, and Antonio falls asleep.

*Ultima is there as mentor and healer immediately after the traumatic event, but again she passes no judgments, only saying that Antonio will learn the strange ways of adulthood eventually, but leaving him to discover these for himself.*



He dreams of his brothers, and they speak about the llano and the Márez blood which is restless like the sea. They want to gather around Gabriel and go west to build a castle in the hills. Antonio wants to go too, but they mock him for being too young and submitting to his mother's dreams of priesthood. La Llorona ("The Wailing Woman") appears, seeking Antonio's blood and soul, but then changes into Lupito seeking Antonio's blessing, and finally becomes the presence of the river itself. Antonio calms the river so his brothers can cross and go to build their castle. María weeps because Antonio is growing older.

*The dream again highlights the conflict between Luna and Márez and how they mirror the conflicting indigenous and Spanish cultures in New Mexico. The figure of La Llorona shows that this novel is part of a whole new genre, a Chicano literature with different allusions and a different mythology. La Llorona is a folktale figure of a woman who killed her children. Sometimes the story goes that she went mad, and often it is told to frighten children into obedience. The aspect of an insane (but sympathetic) murderer relates to Lupito, and La Llorona's appearance shows that witnessing death is linked to this traditional childhood terror in Antonio's mind.*



## CHAPTER 3 (TRES)

Antonio wakes up to the white sun and finds that Ultima's potion has healed his cuts. He thinks about Lupito's soul and wonders if it is in hell, Purgatory, or wandering like la Llorona. Lupito committed a mortal sin, so he is probably in hell. Antonio hopes that God would forgive him, but God doesn't forgive anyone. He wonders if his father fired at Lupito.

*Antonio's preoccupation with sin and punishment takes full hold here. He is still processing the world through a Catholic framework, and so he sees the rules of life as strict and unyielding.*



It is Sunday morning, when his parents always argue, as Gabriel drinks Saturday nights and argues about religion. He curses the town that took him from the llano and makes fun of priests as wearing skirts. There is a rumor that once Gabriel beat up a priest for preaching against something his father had done. María believes that farmers led by a priest is the rightful order. The Lunas were once led by a priest, and she hopes that the people will turn back to the earth and Antonio will be their priest once more. Antonio wonders how such contradictory people got married, but the family remains a happy one.

*The conflict between María and Gabriel again shows the culture tension within Antonio. María's religious outlook imposes a clear order on the world – she wants Antonio to continue and fulfill that order by becoming a priest and farmer. Gabriel, however, idealizes independence above all else, and has a special aversion for priests. The fact that these two opposite people got married—and despite their arguments that the marriage is largely stable—symbolizes the "marriage" of cultures within the Chicano identity.*



They get ready for church and Ultima asks how Antonio is doing. María scolds him for not greeting Ultima formally enough, but Ultima says that last night was hard for all the men. María says Antonio (she calls him Tony) is still a baby, but Ultima says he will soon be a man. María argues that it is a sin for a boy to grow up, but Gabriel responds all his experiences will build him up into a man. María hopes aloud that Antonio will become a priest and so avoid the corruption of the world. Antonio feeds the rabbits and tries not to think about Lupito.

*Ultima, like Gabriel, wants Antonio to become an independent person and make his own moral choices. She sees a sense of independence and identity as more important than what that identity turns out to be. María, on the other hand, clings to Antonio's youth and wants to both save his soul from corruption (by making him a priest or keeping him from growing up) and keep him by her side forever.*



They get ready for mass and María and Ultima wear black because so many families are mourning sons and husbands lost in the war. Antonio realizes that the war also took Lupito and the sheriff. As the family walks down the road people whisper about Ultima, and someone calls her a bruja, or witch.

Antonio asks Ultima about his father's soul and how he can take communion if he killed a man last night. Ultima responds that she doesn't think Gabriel fired at Lupito, but also that Antonio must not presume to know what God forgives. Antonio asks many questions but Ultima says he must be patient. They pass a brothel owned by a woman named Rosie, which Antonio has heard is an evil place, but evil in a different way from witches. The bells ring for Lupito as they approach the church.

Antonio goes around the side of the church to wait with some older boys from town. Ernie, Horse, Bones, the Vitamin Kid, Abel, and Florence argue about Lupito, curse, and fight. Horse and Bones are wild and unpredictable, the Vitamin Kid is unbeatably fast, and Florence is blonde and an atheist. Horse tries to wrestle Antonio but Antonio knows his tricks and flips him on his back. He is afraid Horse is going to beat him up, but then Horse laughs and welcomes Antonio to the group.

## CHAPTER 4 (CUATRO)

Ultima and Antonio gather herbs in the llano together every morning, and Ultima teaches him about the spirits of plants and tells stories of the ancient people. She is happy and at home in the llano.

One day they sit by the river and eat prickly pears. Antonio asks about his family and Ultima explains how the Márez are loud and wild like the ocean, while the Lunas are quiet like the moon (in Spanish *luna* means "moon" and *mar* means "sea"). Antonio wonders which side he will choose. For a moment he feels the presence of the river all around him. Ultima tells more stories of medicines and the ancient Indians.

*The war again encroaches on the secluded community of the novel. This is the first time Anaya shows Ultima among the outside world, and the prejudice against her mysterious powers is rampant.*



*Ultima does not force Antonio into any set of morals or tell him what to think, but instead shows him how his father made a complex moral decision. Antonio is still preoccupied with the Catholic rules of punishment, but Ultima begins to instill a sense of moral independence in him. Antonio's insatiable curiosity is answered with Ultima's far-reaching wisdom in saying that knowledge comes only from experience (which is somewhat at odds with Catholicism, which locates the source of knowledge in Catholic law and the Priest as opposed to in individuals).*



*The gang of boys acts as comic relief throughout the novel, but also serves as a prism for their society – here they are preoccupied with the violence of Lupito and the sheriff's death. They also represent the kind of mindless rowdiness expected in adolescence, and so they contrast with Antonio's thoughtful inner struggles and desire for answers.*



*Ultima continues to act as a mentor for both Antonio and the reader, explaining the history of the Chicano identity to pave the way for the future.*



*Ultima explains fully the conflict in Antonio's blood. She often advocates both sides of an issue, or sees the bigger picture, and does not force Antonio to choose sides between his mother's and father's dreams. This will lead to her lesson that Antonio must embrace all his heritage and build upon it. The spirits in Nature come alive around her.*



María is pleased that they will soon be going to El Puerto to help her brothers with the harvest. After dinner they pray to the statue of the **Virgin of Guadalupe**, Antonio's favorite saint. He imagines that she is a real person who is quiet and forgiving, as opposed to God, who is powerful but punishes those who break his rules. He imagines the Virgin pleading to God on people's behalf. That night Antonio dreams of the Virgin, and hears his mother's prayers for her sons. She wants her older sons to come home from the war and for Antonio to become a priest, but the Virgin stands draped in mourning for Antonio. Antonio cries out in his sleep and Ultima soothes him.

*The Virgin of Guadalupe is a symbol of the blend of cultures that make up Anaya's vision of the Chicano identity. She is a traditionally Catholic figure, but for the vision in Guadalupe she appeared to a Native-American and spoke in his language, and so she represents a kind of resolution of the cultural conflict Antonio experiences. She also introduces the idea of forgiveness into Antonio's musings on punishment – the Virgin becomes a more human, compromising figure than the strict God – similar to Ultima seeing the big picture and refusing to judge. In the dream her mourning cloak could symbolize either Antonio's death or the fact that becoming a priest will not save him from losing innocence.*



## CHAPTER 5 (CINCO)

Antonio's favorite uncle Pedro arrives to take them to El Puerto, the home of the Lunas. El Puerto is only ten miles from Guadalupe, but it is the only trip the family ever takes. Ultima goes with them this time. María gets very excited when they reach her hometown, but everyone is off farming. They stop first at her father's house, the largest in the village.

*The smallness of Antonio's world is emphasized by the short distance to El Puerto. The character of the Lunas is expanded here and María's attachment to their fundamentally ordered way of life.*



Antonio's grandfather is named Prudencio. María greets him excitedly and then Ultima hugs him like an old friend. They discuss the boys away at war, and Lupito, and how the war has reached even the safety of their small community.

*Ultima again bridges divides in her friendship with Prudencio – he represents a very strong Catholic, Spanish-influenced tradition, but even Prudencio has been helped by the curandera.*



They work and cook and tell stories, and Antonio overhears his mother talking to her brother Juan about him. They hope he will choose the Luna way of life and come stay at El Puerto one summer soon, before he is "lost" like the other Márez brothers.

*It seems Antonio's older brothers chose the Márez way of life over the Lunas – Antonio is María's last hope, which is why she smothers him so heavily with her dreams.*



Antonio thinks about the brujas dancing with the devil across the river, but then he hears **Ultima's owl** and thinks of the **Virgin** and feels comforted.

*Adult Antonio (who is telling the story) steps back here with knowledge from later in the novel, creating a sudden ominous tone with the witches.*



## CHAPTER 6 (SEIS)

It is the first day of school that Antonio has been dreading. As they get ready, his father complains that he and María should have gone to California when they were still young, and he makes a reference to the first Luna priest that offends his wife. She starts to cry when she thinks about Antonio growing up, but Ultima reminds her that all sons must leave someday.

*Antonio begins this huge symbolic step with his parents arguing again over his destiny. The first Luna priest will become important later. Once more Ultima does not push any specific fate upon Antonio, but only reminds María that he will inevitably grow up.*



Antonio thinks of what Jasón told him about the magic in written letters, and how Ultima cannot protect him at school. Deborah uses English slang and her father disapproves. María goes on about Antonio's future as a scholar and a priest, while Gabriel reminisces about the beautiful freedom of the old llano.

*Antonio's dread of leaving home begins to be replaced by his insatiable desire for knowledge – a sign that he is growing up. Deborah foreshadows the kind of Anglo-American influences he will soon experience at school.*



They are finally ready to go and María asks Ultima to bless the children. When she places her hand on Antonio's head he again feels a whirlwind, and thinks about the dust devils of the llano, which are supposed to be evil spirits. He wonders if the spirits of good and evil could be the same. María begs Ultima for a prophecy about Antonio's future, and Ultima admits that he will be a man of learning.

*Antonio is faced with another morally ambiguous dilemma – he has heard that whirlwinds are evil, but he knows Ultima is good. Ultima's concept of "man of learning" is different from María's – Ultima does not necessarily mean he will be a priest, but only gather wisdom through experience. This is Ultima's first blessing, leading to a recurring theme.*



Antonio starts walking and is comforted by the daytime singing of **Ultima's owl**. As he crosses the bridge the Vitamin Kid challenges him to race and beats him easily, even though Antonio had a head start. He reaches the school and is amazed by all the other children. He gets immediately lost until an English-speaking boy guides him to the right classroom.

*The race with the Vitamin Kid becomes a symbol of Antonio's youth and the parts of childhood that seem lasting. At school Antonio is suddenly introduced to a third culture that he must try and integrate into his identity – the Anglo-American, English-speaking society of the school.*



Antonio finds his teacher, Miss Maestas, and admits he can't speak English. He sits in the corner and practices copying his name. He does better than the other students but they still laugh at him for speaking Spanish, and at lunch they all laugh at him again for eating tortillas instead of bread.

*The most concrete example of the Chicano loneliness among the English-speaking world of most of America. Antonio has been sheltered from these prejudices in his home life, but now he encounters a new cultural conflict, this one rooted in language.*



Antonio leaves the room and starts to cry. He wants to go home but he knows he must stay and be a man, and not disappoint his mother's dream. He hides behind the school building to eat. He meets some other outcast boys there, and they come to share a bond in their loneliness.

*Antonio starts to realize the sadness of growing up and experiencing the harsh outside world. He is growing away from his mother and dealing with the kind of societal change inherent in his part of New Mexico.*



## CHAPTER 7 (SIETE)

The war finally ends and everyone is excited. María hears that her sons are returning and she cries and prays to the **Virgin** for hours, until all the children eventually fall asleep.

*María only processes the world through her specific religious framework, but it is still centered around the Virgin, a figure representing the Chicano blend of cultures.*



Antonio dreams of his brothers as giants, and they tell him about the wide world they have seen, and mention the **golden carp**, and ask Antonio to save them. He wakes up sweating and then sees that his brothers are coming over the hill in real life.

*The giant brothers symbolize Antonio's ideas of adulthood, but their frailty in the dream shakes his ideals. Antonio is again asked to save someone, taking up a priestly role.*



Andrew, León, and Eugene return and the whole family is overjoyed. María starts crying again and makes them all pray one more time. Gabriel asks the boys about California, and repeats that he wants to go there with them soon. They are reticent about both California and the war. The house feels complete with everyone home. Meanwhile at school Antonio keeps learning his letters, and Miss Maestas sends a note home about his good progress, which pleases María.

*The war brings harsh external modernity to the family through the change in the Márez brothers. They have seen many places and had terrible experiences, and can no longer process the world through their parents' narrow dreams. Antonio begins to fulfill his promise as a man of learning.*



## CHAPTER 8 (OCHO)

Spring comes, and with it the restless blood awakens in Antonio's brothers. They are almost never around, and they ignore Gabriel's talk of California. They spend all their money on alcohol and women. Their parents are worried that they have the "war-sickness," and León does have terrible nightmares that Ultima helps him with. The brothers talk about how suffocated they feel in Guadalupe after seeing the world, and decide they don't want to be tied down to their father's dreams anymore – they are men now.

*The brothers offer an example of the quest for identity that Antonio has begun to face – but they are also afflicted with post-traumatic stress, and so can only try to escape the horrors of war. The old, narrow worldviews of Gabriel and María do not relate to them anymore – they have become lost to their parents, to their former way of life, and to an extent to themselves by being changed.*



The brothers decide to leave Antonio to be the farmer-priest for his mother, and then grow excited and wild at the thought of leaving and being free from their parents' dreams. Antonio fake blesses them as they wrestle around, but then they go off, joking about the girls at Rosie's. Antonio feels that they are lost to him again, and he wishes he could bless them for real.

*Antonio acts a symbolic priest again, and he is weighed down with even more of his parents' hopes as his brothers try to shrug them off. His brothers' internal conflict shows the struggle for identity in a different way than it has manifested in Antonio.*



## CHAPTER 9 (NUEVE)

Antonio dreams about his brothers and Rosie's house of sin. Eugene and León enter, but Andrew says he will wait to enter until Antonio loses his innocence. Antonio wants to keep his innocence, but his mother and the priest say innocence only lasts until one gains knowledge, and when he takes communion Antonio will know about good and evil. Then Ultima appears and says that innocence exists in the llano, among nature.

*This dream encapsulates a lot – the idea that growing up, gaining knowledge, and disappointing María's dreams are all inherently sinful, and the idea of communion as a receiving of divine knowledge. The Márez brothers represent lost innocence and the kind of adult knowledge that Antonio both desires and is afraid to gain. Ultima again offers an alternative to the strict Catholic rules Antonio fears.*



The brothers argue with their parents about leaving. Gabriel wants them to help him go to California, and María wants them to stay and farm, but they insist that they are men now and must lead their own lives. Gabriel realizes his own restless Márez blood has turned against him and defeated his dream.

*The Márez brothers respond to their parents' conflicting dreams and their confusing society by running away – this then appears as one alternative for Antonio, but for now he is still young and bound to his parents.*



Eugene and León leave the next day, but Andrew stays to finish school, and he gets a job at a market. Antonio asks if he wants to become a farmer or a priest, but Andrew says it is too late for him, the war made him grow up too fast. Antonio worries that he is also growing up too fast, and wonders how he can please both his father and mother when their dreams for him are so contradictory. He hopes taking communion will give him wisdom.

*Andrew has moved beyond the narrow ideals of Márez and Luna, but Antonio still sees his own future as divided between these two paths. Antonio again fears growing up and losing his innocence, but at the same time he desires the knowledge that he hopes will come to him at his first communion.*

Antonio and Andrew race across the bridge but the Vitamin Kid beats them both. The Kid calls Antonio a "giant killer," which makes him remember his dream about his brothers as giants. Samuel crosses the bridge after them, and Antonio asks him where the Vitamin Kid lives. Samuel says the Kid is his brother.

*Samuel appears as a wiser, kinder figure than the rest of the rowdy town boys. Antonio fears that he is a "giant killer" in that he has made his brothers leave home.*



That year the children at school hear that the world will end on a certain day, and they wait for it, arguing about whether it will be by fire or water. They are disappointed when the day passes and nothing happens.

*This childish rumor reflects Antonio's later religious struggle – the harsh apocalypses of the gods and the different punishments devised for sinful mankind.*



Antonio learns to read and write that year, and the principal tells him that is skipping to third grade next year. He is pleased to have learned the magic in letters. School ends for the summer and all the kids leave joyfully. As he walks home Antonio sees Samuel on the bridge, and Samuel asks him to go fishing. Antonio agrees even though he knows his mother will worry.

*Antonio still finds his greatest pleasure in learning, and Anaya portrays learning to read and write as a kind of "magic," connecting it to Ultima's mysterious knowledge, and the general dreamlike tone of the book and early childhood itself. In going fishing instead of coming home, Antonio makes a rebellious decision.*



They catch some catfish and Samuel asks Antonio if he has ever fished for carp. Antonio says no, because it is bad luck, though he doesn't know why. Samuel tells him a story of the ancient people which he heard from Jasón's Indian. The gods gave the people good land with only one rule – to never eat the carp. Then a great famine came, and finally the people ate the carp. The gods were going to kill them all, but one god argued for leniency, so they turned all the people into carp and made them live in the river.

*Samuel introduces an alternate belief system for Antonio, opposing the Catholic worldview he has grown up with. The story of the carp comes to represent the indigenous culture that is a strong part of Antonio's (and Chicano) identity. The interceding, forgiving god who argues against destruction also mirrors the Virgin Mary.*



Samuel whispers the next part of the story, and tells how the one god who had loved the people transformed himself into a carp so he could take care of them. He became a huge **golden carp**, and he still lives in the river. Antonio is shaken by Samuel's faith in the golden carp, and wonders if he himself has been worshipping the wrong god. Samuel says sometime soon a boy named Cico will show Antonio the golden carp.

Antonio gets home late and his mother is angry, but soon overjoyed that he has skipped a grade. She is sure he will become a priest, and immediately prays to the **Virgin**.

## CHAPTER 10 (DIEZ)

Antonio tries to learn more about the **golden carp** but Samuel is gone for the summer. Gabriel, meanwhile, is sad that his sons have left, and María is unhappy because her youngest brother Lucas is sick. They think a bruja cast a spell on him, and now he is about to die. Even the priest of El Puerto failed to cure him. Pedro Luna arrives and after much ceremony asks Ultima if she will come with him to heal Lucas.

Ultima agrees, but she reminds them of the consequences of tampering with fate. Pedro accepts responsibility. They say the curse is strong, but Ultima has powers she learned from her teacher, the flying man of Las Pasturas.

Pedro tells the story of the curse. Lucas entered an evil cottonwood forest at night, and there he saw the daughters of Tenorio Trementina dancing as fireballs and casting evil spells – performing the "Black Mass," a satanic ritual. Lucas stepped forward to denounce them and then saw who they were. They attacked him but he made a cross out of two sticks and drove them away, though the brujas cursed him as they fled. Since then he has grown deathly ill.

Ultima gathers her herbs and declares her readiness, looking small but dignified. She says Antonio must go with her. He is "a Juan" (his middle name) and has strong Luna blood. María protests but Ultima says it is the only way. She tells Antonio it will be hard and dangerous work, but he still agrees to come.

*The golden carp represents both a sort of Christ-figure (sacrificing himself as one of his people) and also an opposing god to the Catholic God. This is one of the major revelations for Antonio – the religion of his mother could be wrong, and he must therefore choose what to believe and make his own decisions.*



*María is oblivious to Antonio's inner doubts and continues in her faith that he will be a scholar and Catholic priest.*



*Antonio is further disturbed by the knowledge that a priest failed to cure Lucas, and this knowledge increases his doubts about Christianity planted by the golden carp. The Lunas asked the Church for help first, as that is most socially acceptable and the Lunas are Catholics foremost, but they still respect Ultima's curanderismo enough to put their last hope in her.*



*Ultima reminds them of the responsibility involved in passing judgment on someone, which relates to her advice about seeing and accepting all sides of an issue.*



*The novel truly becomes a piece of "magical realism" here, as the brujas' magic is condemned but still accepted as a reality of life. The Trementinas are introduced as antagonistic, vengeful characters, but Anaya only gives the Luna side of the story.*



*People named "Juan" were thought to be especially resistant to witchcraft. Antonio is revealed to be somehow necessary for Ultima's cure – he has a kind of magic inside himself as well. Ultima asks Antonio for his own decision, as she treats him like an adult.*



They drive to El Puerto. On the way, they see an omen of the horned moon, which Ultima says is good luck for the Lunas as they live and farm by the cycles of the moon. They approach Prudencio's house, which is filled with women already dressed in black and mourning Lucas. Ultima tells everyone to leave and instructs Prudencio to prepare a room with food and water, and to not shoot the coyotes that will approach that night. She says she must speak to Tenorio first, and no one may come with her except Antonio.

They enter Tenorio's saloon, and at first he will not look at them. When he finally turns to Ultima his face is dark and cruel, and he makes the sign of the cross and calls Ultima a bruja. Ultima says she is a curandera come to undo his evil work, and she asks his daughters to undo their curse. She knows they gathered Lucas's freshly cut hair for their spell. Tenorio curses Ultima for accusing him and threatens to kill her, but cowers before her strength. Ultima says his daughters have tampered with destiny and so they must suffer the consequences. She and Antonio leave.

In the street they are caught in an ominous dust storm and Tenorio tries to run them over with his horse, but Ultima pulls Antonio aside just in time. The mourning women hurry away from the Luna house and Ultima enters at last. The house is quiet and empty. Lucas is on a bed looking like a corpse, but Ultima says there is still hope.

Antonio wonders if Ultima can succeed where the Church failed. Ultima bathes Lucas and prepares an herbal remedy. They eat atole, which was a sacred food to the Indians. Antonio still does not feel afraid, and Ultima says it is because good is stronger than evil.

Coyotes howl outside the house but then **Ultima's owl** appears and attacks them. Antonio slips into a dream state and Ultima feeds Lucas more medicine. Antonio feels he is struggling with his uncle Lucas against the curse. Time dissolves into incense and the owl's hooting.

Antonio wakes up and Ultima says they have defeated the death spirit, but the evil spirit remains. She makes another potion and then forms three clay dolls in the shape of women. Lucas breathes on the dolls and then Ultima sticks them with pins. Lucas drinks the potion and screams from the strength of it. Afterward Antonio falls asleep again.

*Ultima has specific and strange instructions but Prudencio respects her powers enough to obey them without question. Ultima truly comes into her own here, and shows herself as a sure and forceful presence with her own strict code and set of ceremonies, which are totally different from the ways of the Church, but no less powerful.*



*Tenorio appears as the antagonist of the novel, but his main quarrel with Ultima at first seems to be that he thinks she is a witch. Ultima shows her fairness in warning Tenorio what she is going to do and giving him the chance for repentance. Ultima acts as a balanced, forgiving presence similar to the Virgin of Guadalupe.*



*The image of the evil dust storm appears again, and is here associated with Tenorio's reckless rage. Antonio does not realize his danger, or fully understand the powers he has involved himself with.*



*Ultima is a part of ancient rituals and indigenous ways. She has her own strong moral code, though it is more practical than dogmatic – Antonio does not need to be afraid because evil will not defeat them.*



*A supernatural process that is never explained, as the source of Ultima's powers and the world of her curanderismo remain mysterious to both Antonio and the reader. Antonio takes up the suffering of his uncle like a sort of priest.*



*The dolls add a suddenly sinister aspect to Ultima's magic – even she is not immune from the need to punish evildoers. The dolls are also associated with witchcraft, adding to the confusion between the powers of good and evil.*



When he wakes up Ultima feeds Antonio more atole, and says Lucas has been almost healed. Antonio vomits and then feels better. Lucas sits up and screams, and then vomits out a writhing ball of hair. Ultima saves the hair and feeds Lucas, who is already looking better. She calls Prudencio inside and tells him that his son will survive.

Everyone enters the house rejoicing and thanking Ultima, but she tries to slip away. She says maybe the Lunas will save her life one day. People whisper about her as she leaves, but one of Antonio's aunts defends her from the word "bruja." Ultima makes Pedro drive her to the grove where the witches danced, and she disappears into the trees with the ball of hair. Antonio learns that he and Ultima were in Lucas's sickroom for three days. Ultima burns the hair in the grove where Lucas was first cursed. She returns to the truck, and Pedro praises her courage.

## CHAPTER 11 (ONCE)

Some time later Antonio is fishing in the river, and he hears someone calling his name. Cico appears and says he will show him the **golden carp**, but first he makes Antonio swear to never kill a carp. They head off and pass by Narciso's house, which is surrounded by a beautiful garden. Cico makes them go into the garden and Antonio is amazed by the magical place. Cico tells him how drunken Narciso dances and plants things by the light of the moon, and that there is a secret spring somewhere in the garden.

Cico says no one knows about the **golden carp** except him and Samuel, and it is only a feeling that made them trust Antonio. The gang of town boys appears and makes fun of Ultima, and Horse puts Antonio in a headlock. Antonio feels sick from the heat and the boys' cruelty, and he vomits. This surprises them into letting him go, and Antonio and Cico run away.

They walk to a place Antonio has never been before, to a secluded pond on a clear creek called El Rito. They wait for the **golden carp**, speaking only in whispers, and Cico takes out a spear to hunt the evil black bass of the pond, the fish that eats other fish.

Cico points and then salutes, and the **golden carp** appears. It is bigger than Antonio and covered in golden scales. Antonio feels like he is beholding the **Virgin** or God, and he trembles at the miracle. He realizes this experience is what he has been hoping to happen at his first communion, and he suddenly feels that he has sinned. The golden carp circles back once and then disappears.

*Ultima succeeds where the Church and doctor failed, but her power remains unexplained and mysterious. The ball of hair adds to the tone of the supernatural and macabre.*



*Even in her victory people still fear and condemn Ultima's power. The people she actually helps (now the Lunas, like María and Gabriel before) are able to appreciate and defend her, but those who do not understand Ultima's power will always remain prejudiced. She burns the hair to punish the Trementinas. Antonio returns to the "real" world, as he has been just as much a part of the magic as Ultima.*



*Narciso is condemned by the townspeople as a drunk, but a few compassionate people (like Cico, or the Márez family) can see that he has his own magic without judging him. Anaya again advocates looking past strict rules for the spirit within, and trying to see the bigger picture. Narciso is an alcoholic, but he has a magic of agriculture shared by no one else.*



*The gang of boys again acts as a mirror of society in general, as they fail to understand Ultima and so mock her as a witch. Antonio is left with the harder, more complex duty of defending something unconventional but morally right.*



*The secluded place acts like a church, and Cico's faith in the carp has a great effect on Antonio. This experience will mirror his first communion in the Catholic church.*



*Witnessing the carp is a tangible religious experience that contrasts with the seeming invisibility and ineffectiveness of the Christian God. Antonio can't help processing the world through the lens of Catholic sin and punishment, and so he feels like he has betrayed God just by seeing the carp.*



A huge black bass leaps from the water and knocks Cico's flung spear aside. Cico is disappointed but says it is only a game between him and the fish. They wait and the **golden carp** returns. Antonio worries that a fisherman will catch and kill the carp, but Cico says only a few special people can see him. He explains that the carp swims up to the Hidden Lakes in the hills, where there is a strange power or a mermaid. People who go there hear a singing that calls them to leave the cliff and enter the deep water. A shepherd had drowned there the summer before.

Antonio is amazed at all the strange and magical things he has learned. Cico tells the prophecy of the **golden carp**. After the old people were turned into carp, new people came to the valley who were just as sinful. The carp decreed that if they kept sinning, their sins would sink the land into the water and everyone would drown. Cico says the town is totally surrounded by water already.

Antonio is distressed by this. It seems unfair to him, but Cico says that everyone knows and keeps on sinning. Antonio remembers that becoming a man is learning to sin, so no one will be safe when the time comes. He leaves with a heavy heart.

Antonio asks Ultima about the **golden carp**, and she smiles and says she cannot tell him what to believe. When he grows up he has to discover his own truths.

That night Antonio dreams of all the dead people in the waters of the **golden carp**. His parents have been spared, but they argue about what water flows in Antonio's veins – the moonlit water of the **Virgin**, or the salt water of the ocean which binds him to the golden carp. The apocalypse begins, but then Ultima appears and calms the storm. She lectures Gabriel and María that the waters of the moon and the sea are the same, and only different parts of one cycle.

## CHAPTER 12 (DOCE)

Antonio spends the summer thinking of the **golden carp** and Ultima's cure of Lucas. Gabriel starts drinking more and often complains about how his sons have betrayed him, and how their own Márez blood has driven them away. Antonio grows more attached to Ultima, and feels even closer to her than he does to María.

*Like Ultima, Cico opens up a new world for Antonio and provides new and terrifying knowledge that sometimes opposes his parents' beliefs. Cico and his mythology represent the religions of the indigenous peoples, so they act as a counterpoint to Spanish Catholicism and are another necessary part of the Chicano identity.*



*The golden carp seems like a kinder, more naturalistic alternative to God, but Cico's legend reveals that the carp also can't resist punishing those who disobey him. Both religions include a disapproval of the perceived increase in sin that has occurred in Guadalupe in modern times.*



*Cico reiterates María's sentiment – becoming an adult is learning to sin, so every adult has sinned. Antonio feels the unfairness of universal punishment but also fears its inevitability. He sees no way out for himself, or for others.*



*Ultima again offers knowledge but wants Antonio to choose his beliefs for himself. She continues to treat him as an adult.*



*Antonio processes his inner conflict through the image of water in his blood and the old divide between Luna and Márez. In the dream the two families represent Catholicism and the carp, but Ultima appears and shows the harmony of the bigger picture. The lesson again is that Antonio doesn't have to choose from his heritage, but must embrace all its contradictory aspects together.*



*Antonio starts to learn that change is a sad but inevitable part of growing up. Gabriel cannot seem to accept the changes in his own life, as he still laments the fact that it is his own love of freedom that inspired his sons to pursue their own lives apart from the family and not to follow Gabriel's dream.*



One night Antonio asks about the three dolls on Ultima's shelf, especially one of them that seems twisted with pain. Ultima won't let Antonio touch them, and she warns him to be careful if he sees Tenorio Trementina. She gives Antonio her scapular necklace with protective herbs in it to keep him safe.

*The dolls are a reminder of Ultima's dangerous and sometimes frightening powers, though a moment later she gives up something of herself to protect Antonio. A scapular is usually associated with a religious order, so this is like Ultima giving Antonio her own protective icon.*



People come for supplies from Las Pasturas and they stop and reminisce with Gabriel about the old llano, before modern times and the railroad took away their freedom. They are loud and wild, and very different from the people of El Puerto. María does not like anyone from the llano except Ultima and Narciso, both of whom helped her in times of great need.

*The llano parallels Antonio's own growth as it loses its old, idealized innocence when influenced by the modern world. Antonio starts to realize that the vaquero life Gabriel idealizes is already dying out, and his dreams are mostly futile by now.*



One night Narciso suddenly bursts in to the family's house, yelling that Ultima must hide. He rambles about Tenorio, and the owl gives a cry of warning from outside. Narciso says Tenorio's daughter died that day, and Tenorio has come to accuse Ultima of her murder and kill her as a witch. Tenorio claims to have found Ultima's bag of herbs under his daughter's bed. Antonio steps forward and reveals that he has the scapular around his neck.

*Narciso shows himself as a friend of Ultima – they are both originally from the llano. The fact that Tenorio's "proof" of Ultima's witchcraft is false confirms him as an unjust and spiteful antagonist. Tenorio plays on the dormant fears of otherwise normal people who do not understand Ultima's power.*



Narciso and María want Ultima to flee, as the men pursuing her are drunk and don't need proof that she is a witch to kill her, but Ultima refuses to hide from the truth. Soon men with torches and guns arrive at the house and call for Gabriel to give up Ultima. Gabriel and Antonio step outside and face the mob. Gabriel asks who speaks but everyone is ashamed to identify themselves. Finally Tenorio steps forward and accuses Ultima of murdering his daughter with witchcraft.

*Gabriel again shows himself as a man of integrity and courage, and Antonio steps outside with him like an adult. Tenorio speaks for the condemnation of society, but he also has an understandable reason to hate Ultima, as she probably is responsible for his daughter's death. At the same time, Tenorio embodies the spirit of vengeance, which leads only to cycles of violence.*



Gabriel yanks Tenorio's beard and throws him to the ground. The other men are armed with makeshift crosses, and they start to chant for the witch. Narciso comes out with a rifle and tries to shame the men by naming them. He insults Tenorio and his daughter, but then offers a test of proof before they act rashly. One man has come with his lips pierced by needles that were blessed by a priest to guard against evil magic. Narciso takes the two holy needles and makes them into a cross over the door. All the men agree that no bruja could pass through such a door, and that this is a true test if Ultima is a witch. Ultima appears and Tenorio accuses her to her face. Suddenly the owl swoops down and tears out one of Tenorio's eyes, and when everyone looks again Ultima has passed through the door. The men shrink before her power, but they admit she cannot be a witch.

*Narciso defends Ultima once more, and is a voice of reason just like on the bridge with Lupito. Gabriel and Narciso show that their vaquero spirit is about courage and independence, not just nostalgia for lost freedoms and a lost past. The men of town still trust the power of the Church over Ultima, though they fear her. Here Ultima's owl acts as a vehicle of her punishment for Tenorio's wickedness. She is not always as merciful as she seems – she has turned the Trementina sisters' curse against them and now torn out Tenorio's eye.*



Tenorio is enraged and vows to kill both Ultima and Narciso one day, but finally the men pull him away and go. As the family recovers from the terror of the ordeal, Antonio notices that the crossed needles have fallen from the door, and he never discovers if they just fell or if the cross was broken.

*Tenorio's desire for vengeance powers much of the rest of the plot. Antonio sees that Ultima's power is again ambiguous – it might not be so dissimilar from the brujas after all, though her soul is good. It is the spirit that matters, not the nature of the magic.*



## CHAPTER 13 (TRECE)

Pedro Luna comes the next day to bring the family to El Puerto, and it is the first time Gabriel goes with them to help the Lunas with the harvest. There is a rumor in town that the priest will not let Tenorio's daughter into the church for mass because she was a bruja. They drive through Guadalupe and Antonio thinks about the **golden carp's** punishment of water and God's punishment of fire. He wonders if there is any god that doesn't always punish people, but would forgive them in their lostness and confusion. He thinks the **Virgin Mary** could be a god like that.

*Antonio continues to fear the apocalypse and question the fairness of punishment that both gods seem to demand. The Virgin of Guadalupe is proposed as an alternative but also a synthesis of the Catholic God and the golden carp, as she has aspects of both Christian tradition and New-World culture. Her forgiving, understanding nature is most similar to Ultima, however, and because he is so young, Antonio still feels closest to mother-figures.*



As they drive Antonio asks his uncle Pedro why the Lunas did not warn them about Tenorio coming from El Puerto, since Ultima had saved Lucas's life. Pedro says their father forbade them to disrupt the town's harmony by passing judgment on the Trementinas, but it was still a cowardly act and he is ashamed. If another time of danger comes he swears to do his duty. Antonio thinks about Tenorio and his unjust attack against Ultima, and he feels he can understand how God would not forgive certain people if God holds grudges like men do.

*The Lunas are compared unfavorably with Gabriel and Narciso here, as they neglected to stand up for Ultima and instead favored a civilized "harmony" that was really just a screen for staying out of harms way. This behavior shows even more flaws in the adults Antonio most looks up to. Antonio's realization of his own grudge against Tenorio gives him a very mature epiphany, and he is able to empathize with the punishing gods, or at least with the humans who worship such punishing gods.*



As the Lunas work at the harvest they whisper rumors about the Trementinas and the devilish "Black Mass" they will perform over the dead daughter. That night Antonio dreams of the same Black Mass, but then in the coffin he sees Ultima. The dream awakens him and Antonio sees Ultima watching a funeral procession for the dead Trementina daughter pass.

*Ultima is again associated with the brujas, as Antonio struggles to decipher what is good and what is evil in both the supernatural and "real" worlds. Such situations of moral ambiguity are some of the hardest parts of his coming of age.*



The procession tries to enter the church but the priest blocks their path. Tenorio and his daughters are angry, but the whole town has seen their excommunication. They have to bury the daughter in unholy ground now. The Trementinas pass by, wailing, and Tenorio gives Ultima the evil eye. When the work for harvest is completed Antonio's family prepares to return to Guadalupe, but as they depart Juan Luna asks that Antonio come stay next summer and learn their farming ways.

*Society condemns the Trementinas as brujas now, which seems satisfying except for the reminder that they condemned Ultima as well – and the people's rejection of the Trementinas might be just as unfair. The Lunas continue to hope that Antonio will follow in their footsteps as he grows.*



## CHAPTER 14 (CATORCE)

The first day of school arrives. As Antonio and Andrew walk to school, Andrew says that when he came back from the war his home seemed different and smaller. They meet the Vitamin Kid and Samuel and race across the bridge, and the Kid beats them as usual. Andrew hangs back and Antonio tells Samuel how he saw the **golden carp**. Samuel is pleased, but he warns Antonio to watch out for the other kids, especially because of Ultima and her encounter with Tenorio, which they won't understand.

The other town boys are rowdy as usual, and make fun of Antonio's brother for "whoring," which Antonio doesn't understand. One of the boys, Ernie, calls Ultima a witch. Antonio starts to fight him and the other boys all pile on. The fight is quickly broken up, but no one teases Antonio about Ultima after that.

A harsh winter comes to the llano before Christmas. The last thing before the school's vacation is a Christmas play, but on the day of the play there is a huge blizzard. Antonio decides to go to school while his sisters stay home, and Andrew comes along to get his check from work. On the way they run into Samuel, who tells them that Narciso and Tenorio fought drunkenly the night before. Andrew laughs at the story, but Samuel says their feud will end in blood.

The gang of boys is at school but no girls show up, so the teacher, Miss Violet, decides the boys will play all the parts themselves. Bones refuses to play a girl and climbs onto a ceiling beam and won't come down. Horse screams and fights until he is finally convinced to play the **Virgin**. Abel tries to leave for the bathroom the whole time but Miss Violet won't let him. The practice goes horribly wrong, and Bones especially is beyond Miss Violet's control.

The pageant starts immediately afterward (the audience is just other grades and teachers) and quickly degenerates into a huge farce. Abel starts peeing on the stage, Horse punches Antonio (who is playing Joseph), and the head of the baby Jesus doll falls off. It ends in a big fight. When it is over all everyone runs away, as school is over for the holiday. Antonio is one of the few who stay behind to help clean up. When he is done he realizes how hard it is snowing outside, but he still resolves to walk home through the storm.

*Andrew confirms how the outside world changed him too much to feel at home in Guadalupe again. Samuel gives Antonio courage to be different, and defend his unconventional beliefs, particularly concerning Ultima's goodness. Samuel has experienced more of the prejudice of society.*



*The boys are once more Antonio's window into society. Antonio learns that adulthood is about fighting for his beliefs as much as choosing them, and in this he has had a good example from Gabriel. He is able to gain the boys' respect.*



*Samuel has respect for Narciso, but Andrew treats Narciso like a joke. He has not yet learned to find the humanity in everyone. The snowstorm from the llano echoes the harsh dust storms of the summer, and implies that supernatural elements will come with it.*



*The group of boys acts as comic relief here, and Anaya shows the way adolescents can relate to each other in a way that is very different from Antonio, even though he is somewhat part of the group. Horse as Virgin is a cruel but hilarious parody of Antonio's beloved figure.*



*The disaster of the Christmas pageant serves as a lighthearted parody of religion, but also is an example of the Chicano boys making Catholic religion their own – even if that means turning it into a farce. Antonio proves one of the most responsible ones, and again an outsider, when he stays to clean up afterward.*



The town is empty and eerie as he walks, and Antonio comes upon Narciso and Tenorio fighting savagely and cursing each other outside a bar. Finally the bartender pulls them apart. Tenorio says another of his daughters is dying, and again accuses Ultima. He threatens Narciso with death and then disappears.

Narciso is distressed and intends to go warn Ultima that she is in danger. Antonio is also worried, and he follows Narciso. Narciso looks for Andrew first, and turns towards Rosie's house. Antonio doesn't understand until Narciso starts knocking on the door and yelling for Andrew.

Rosie comes out and Antonio smells perfume and hears laughter from inside. She mocks Narciso but then Andrew emerges from the house, and Antonio feels sick to see him. He remembers his dream where Andrew promised not to enter the brothel until Antonio lost his innocence. Antonio wonders if he has already lost his innocence somehow, and if it is because of the **golden carp**.

Andrew stands with his arm around a girl. He downplays Narciso's warnings and invites him to come inside. Narciso gets upset and begs Andrew to come with him, but Andrew finally shuts the door on him. Narciso laments that the whores have corrupted Andrew and that now he must travel on to the stormy llano alone. Antonio feels feverish but keeps following after Narciso.

As he walks Antonio worries that he is no longer innocent, and his communion is still far away, and he wonders if his father can protect Ultima. He slips into a reverie and then hears a gunshot. He comes upon Narciso and Tenorio fighting again, and realizes Narciso has been shot. Narciso keeps fighting but Tenorio shoots him again and then curses at Narciso's fallen body. Antonio screams and Tenorio sees him. He tries to shoot Antonio but is out of bullets. He curses Antonio and then flees.

Antonio is in shock, but he goes to Narciso. The juniper trees make a sort of confessional booth, and Narciso asks that Antonio pray for him, as he is pure of heart. Antonio prays the Act of Contrition like he did for Lupito. Narciso whispers his confession into Antonio's ear, and says he is glad to be here on the llano, and then dies.

*Narciso is drunk again, but he still has the courage and character to defend Ultima, who is a figure of goodness and innocence for him. Tenorio again has good reason to be angry, with another dying daughter.*



*The situation starts to echo Antonio's dream of long ago. He still doesn't comprehend, just as he didn't understand the talk about "whoring," but though he tries to cling to his innocent ignorance Antonio is too curious, and he cannot stop following the action.*



*This scene brings together many of Antonio's anxieties – he fears for his brother's soul, as Andrew has committed mortal sin, and he fears for his own soul because of his supposed lost innocence. There is also the idea here that Antonio sinned just by gaining knowledge, whether knowledge of the carp or the truth about Andrew.*



*Andrew takes the easy way out here, acting like the Lunas did before in refusing to go out of his way to warn Ultima of danger. Antonio realizes another of his idealized family members is flawed, and he sees that there are very few people willing to suffer for the things they believe in.*



*Antonio is still concerned with his own fate and the rules of Catholicism, but at the same time he believes in the power of his dreams, which is a kind of magic. Tenorio might be justified in hating Ultima, but his murder of Narciso comes from pure spite and vengeance. Tenorio shows he is willing to kill a child, and Antonio realizes he has endangered himself by defending Ultima.*



*Antonio acts as the priest again, but this time the death is more real and upsetting than Lupito's, as Narciso is a friend. Narciso's assertion that Antonio is "pure of heart" seems to go against the realization that Antonio just had about his innocence, though perhaps it is a deeper insight than Antonio is yet capable.*



Antonio comes home with blood on his hands and tells what happened. His parents are in shock but Ultima immediately carries Antonio to bed. He falls into a fever and Ultima tends to him while he suffers nightmares of the murder.

In his dreams Antonio asks God to forgive Andrew, but God refuses. God says he will forgive Narciso, but only if he can also forgive Tenorio. Antonio protests and then sees the **Virgin**, who says she forgives everyone, even Tenorio. God says Antonio wants a god who punishes and forgives according to Antonio's whims – but even the **golden carp** would not give up the power of punishment.

The townspeople come to wash in a river of Narciso and Lupito's blood, and then demand Ultima's blood as well. Antonio's brothers appears and ask him to bless and forgive them. Then the Trementina sisters cut his hair and make a curse with it. Antonio withers away and dies. His family dies in a fire, and the people kill Ultima and all the river's carp. Then all the townspeople die as well.

When there is no one left the Lunas gather the ashes and evening comes. The **golden carp** appears. He has decided that everything will be made new, and he has swallowed even good and evil. He ascends as a new sun to shine down on the new world.

## CHAPTER 15 (QUINCE)

Nobody cares much about Narciso's death, as he was the town drunkard, and there is only Antonio's word to accuse Tenorio so the coroner declares it an accident. Antonio has pneumonia and stays in bed for several days. Andrew acts uncomfortable around Antonio and apologizes that he had to see Narciso die, but Andrew doesn't know that Antonio saw him at Rosie's. Christmas comes and Ultima tells Antonio stories about Narciso when he was young and dignified.

María arranges that Antonio will start his catechism in the spring, and then take communion and have knowledge of God. She repeats her dream that he become a priest. She also wants him to stay with the Lunas during the summer and learn their ways. She likes to listen to Antonio read in English, even though he hasn't mastered it yet.

*Ultima takes action as the mentor and mother-figure once more. This is Antonio's greatest trial yet, and he must dream to process it fully.*



*In the dream, God acts as the part of Antonio that is angry with Andrew and the part that wants to hate Tenorio without trying to understand or forgive him. God also points out that even the golden carp could not resist punishing sinners. Antonio wants something in between, but in the dream even the Virgin does not satisfy him.*



*The mob wanting blood is similar to Antonio's blind hatred for Tenorio, and all the desecration and destruction show the pointless violence of hatred and vengeance. This is the first time Antonio has died in his own dream. The dream suggests the cycle of violence, as it inevitably leads to the death of everyone.*



*Antonio realizes in his subconscious that the golden carp does not solely mean more destruction, but that he offers a salvation as well and a sort of all-encompassing harmony similar to Ultima's worldview.*



*The Catholic society of the town condemns Narciso as a drunk, which leads to the coroner ignoring obvious signs of murder. This prejudice and unfairness is so blatant that Antonio's faith in the judgment of society and the church cannot help but be shaken. Andrew feels even more uncomfortable in Guadalupe with his new guilt for Narciso's death.*



*María knows that a good priest must know English now – she accepts the encroaching reality of English-American culture upon the valley, and is able to appreciate and admire bilingualism in a way that some Chicanos do not.*



Eugene and León arrive one day in a police car. They say they had their own car but wrecked it on their way home. That night they go into town with Andrew and Gabriel gets drunk at home. The next day Gabriel is sad and reminds his sons of the old days before the war, when they all used to work together. He starts crying and the boys try to cheer him up. Gabriel immediately goes out to fix the windmill, which is a very dangerous job. The brothers feel worried and guilty as they watch him work, but Gabriel returns looking more satisfied with himself. The next day all three brothers leave – Andrew goes too and drops out of high school. Antonio wonders if his brothers will always be lost to him.

*The tension grows between Gabriel and his older sons, as Gabriel still has difficulty accepting the changes in his family and longs for his idealized version of "the old days." He is able to find strength in his own individual work, however, as he is still a vaquero at heart. The brothers are truly lost and alienated from both Anglo-America and the culture of Guadalupe by now. They do not return for the rest of the novel.*



## CHAPTER 16 (DIECISEIS)

Antonio returns to school after Christmas vacation ends, but he feels he has changed and loses touch with his friends. He is troubled by how unfair it was that Narciso should die and Tenorio should live. Antonio starts praying after school for answers, and he prays to the **Virgin** more and more often. He hopes to meet the Virgin of Guadalupe just like the man Diego did so long ago.

*Antonio can now truly appreciate the unfairness of both the town's Catholic society and the seeming injustice of God's punishments. Even as he grows more dissatisfied with Catholicism he starts praying more to the Virgin, showing that, for Antonio, Mary is something separate from the Church.*



One day on the way home from school Antonio sees Tenorio under the juniper tree where he killed Narciso. Tenorio sees Antonio and curses at him, and again he vows to kill Ultima. He says his second daughter is dying now.

*In the novel, juniper trees are associated with the people of the llano and ancient supernatural powers, particularly Ultima's. Tenorio brings back the ominous tone.*



When Antonio gets home and tells Ultima what happened, she makes sure Tenorio didn't hurt Antonio in any way but assures him that she is not afraid of Tenorio's threats. Antonio still worries about her safety and checks on her at night. They grow closer than ever.

*Ultima demonstrates more quiet strength and courage, which Antonio begins to see is more important than empty words or shallow beliefs.*



## CHAPTER 17 (DIECISIETE)

Antonio and the other children his age begin their catechism lessons with Father Byrnes that March. Antonio is very excited to learn about God and prepare for his first communion. Meanwhile, there are dust storms on the llano and the townspeople suspect that they are caused by the hellish **atomic bomb**, which is being tested out in the desert. The people condemn the bomb as man competing with the knowledge of God, and fear it will destroy everything. Antonio is frightened by the all-encompassing knowledge of God, but he still can't help desiring it.

*Antonio still hopes for quick answers from communion, and his desire for knowledge grows. The atomic bomb symbolizes a real-life version of the apocalypses of the different religions, but also an example of the terrifying knowledge of God. When man wants too much knowledge it leads to destruction – this idea will later be connected to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.*



When Antonio reports these rumors of the **atomic bomb** to Gabriel, he laughs and says the dust storms are just the way of the Ilano, and the land showing that people have mistreated it.

*The Ilano is losing its innocence, too. Gabriel, like Ultima, can see past clear-cut definitions of right and wrong – the dust storms do not have to be wholly good or evil.*



On the day before catechism, Florence asks Antonio difficult questions about sin and fairness. When the other boys arrive, they ask why Florence goes to catechism class since he is an atheist, but he says he just doesn't want to be left out.

*Florence seems to give voice to all of Antonio's doubts, and Antonio has no answer for his questions. This makes Antonio put even more unrealistic hope in his first communion.*



Florence discusses his sad past and how if God existed he must be cruel and unfair. Both his parents are dead and his sisters work at Rosie's brothel now. God could have made the world a kinder place, and the only sin of Adam and Eve was wanting more knowledge. Antonio's faith is shaken, and he proposes that maybe God comes in cycles, and maybe when God is gone the **Virgin** or the **golden carp** rules in his place. There is a thunderclap as he speaks and Antonio fears that God is condemning him for blasphemy.

*Antonio's doubts grow when he learns that Florence shares his sense of God's unfairness. Antonio's hesitant proposal here hints at his resolution to come, as he tries to reconcile and combine the religions of his culture. The sin of Adam and Eve – wanting knowledge of good and evil – relates to the idea that gaining knowledge means losing innocence, but also adds to Antonio's confusion, as he wants to receive such knowledge at his communion.*



Antonio and Florence are late to catechism class and Father Byrnes warns Antonio about talking to Florence. Antonio goes unpunished, but the priest makes Florence stand in the aisle with his arms outstretched. In the sunlight, blond Florence looks like an angel. The class starts to recite the catechism, though some of the other boys whisper jokes. The class discusses mortal and venial sins and Antonio is frightened to think that you could die after missing just one mass and go to hell.

*Even the priest is unfair in his punishments. Florence, with his angelic appearance and outstretched arms, is portrayed as an ironic Christ-figure here, since the Priest is punishing Florence because he knows Florence is a non-believer. Meanwhile, the other boys again parody Catholic solemnity with their antics, but go unpunished. Antonio is still preoccupied with the seemingly unfair, arbitrary rules of heaven and hell, and how small mistakes could have eternal repercussions.*



Father Byrnes tells a story to emphasize how long an eternity in hell lasts. He talks about a huge mountain of sand being carried grain by grain across wide oceans by a single bird, and the time to move the whole mountain is just the first day of eternity. The children are shocked by the horror of this image, but Florence remains standing, unafraid.

*Father Byrnes teaches them to fear God instead of to understand him, and in this the priest acts as a foil for Ultima, who advocates knowledge without judgment. The horrible punishment of eternity heightens Antonio's fears.*



## CHAPTER 18 (DIECIOCHO)

It is Ash Wednesday, and Antonio thinks of his body's mortality and his soul's immortality. He finds school boring compared to catechism class, although the knowledge he gains about hell in catechism is terrifying. He begs Florence to confess and take communion so he will be saved from hell, but Florence refuses. Samuel thinks the **golden carp** might be a better god for Florence, and he and Antonio decide to show the carp to Florence when summer comes.

One Friday the catechism class attends the Stations of the Cross. The other boys make jokes again, but they are worried about the catechism test the next day. The priest prays near them and his incense is suffocating. Horse passes out onto Antonio.

As the boys wait to give their first confession they start to make fun of Antonio for wanting to be a priest. They suddenly grow cruel and hit him and drape him in sweaters and make him pretend to be a priest and hear their confessions. Horse confesses to peeping through a hole into the girls' bathroom. Antonio feels sick under the coats and thinks of the sins weighing down the land.

Bones is excited that he has a bigger sin, which is watching a couple having sex by the lake. The kids make Florence confess next, but he says he doesn't have any sins. This enrages the rest of the group. Florence says it is God who has sinned against him by making life so unfair. The other kids are shocked and ask Antonio to give him a terrible penance, and say they will even stone or kill him for his blasphemy.

Antonio realizes what he must do, and he declares no penance for Florence, and that he is absolved. The children turn their rage towards Antonio and beat him up pitilessly. Then they run off when the priest calls them in. Florence says he is not going to confession, but Antonio covers up his bruises and goes on. Florence says Antonio could never be the priest for that group.

Antonio waits outside the booth, praying and thinking of his sins in the darkness of the church. He goes in and thinks of all the sins revealed in this place, and makes his first confession.

*Antonio fears for the safety of Florence's soul and wants him to have some hope in a god, so he is excited by Samuel's suggestion. Florence would not have to choose between gods like Antonio must do, since he already doesn't believe in the Catholic god. Knowledge of such intense subjects as they discuss in catechism class is both exciting and scary for Antonio.*



*The boys undercut the solemnity of the church again. The priest's incense recalls Ultima's herbs, but his is suffocating instead of comforting.*



*The scene is a grotesque parody of Antonio as a priest. This time he must tend to his rowdy "congregation" instead of to dying souls. The children keep robbing Catholicism of its purity and power in Antonio's mind. He realizes for the first time that he might not like being a priest, feeling the "weight" of all those confessed sins.*



*The other kids do not fear sin and punishment like Antonio does, but instead find it exciting and treat the false "confessional booth" as a sort of voyeuristic activity. Florence again appears as a Christ-figure, threatened and persecuted by the judgmental other boys.*



*Antonio accepts the punishment for another like a true priest or savior would. Florence implies that it is not some fault in Antonio that makes him unable to be a priest for the group, but that the kids would not understand the kind of priest Antonio would be.*



*The confessional booth recalls Narciso beneath the junipers. This too is a kind of initiation rite for Antonio.*



## CHAPTER 19 (DIECINUEVE)

It is Easter Sunday and Antonio is excited about his first communion. The other kids joke about eating God but Antonio feels solemn and excited about finally gaining knowledge of God. He takes and eats the wafer and waits for divine knowledge, but just gets pushed to keep the line moving. He asks God all the questions about unfairness and death that have been troubling him, but no answers come. He looks at the church's statue of the **Virgin** and feels empty.

*Antonio's disappointment in his communion shows that he had built up the event too much, hoping for a divine inspiration that would somehow answer all of his difficult questions about life, culture, and religion. This naïve hope is a reminder that he is still a young child, for all his maturity and experience.*



## CHAPTER 20 (VEINTE)

On the last day of school Antonio is still unsatisfied with communion and he still struggles to navigate between the different dreams his parents have for him. On the way home he challenges the Vitamin Kid to race as usual, but the Kid refuses and instead keeps walking with a girl. Antonio feels melancholy that things are changing.

*Antonio's faith is shaken by the disappointing communion, and he connects his conflict between religions to the conflict between his parents – and both are indeed part of his struggle for a Chicano identity. Antonio feels some of Gabriel's nostalgia.*



Antonio spends more time with Ultima and worries that Tenorio is still after her. Téllez, one of Gabriel's old friends, comes to visit and complains that his house is haunted by devils, and his family is miserable and can't eat or sleep. Stones fall from the sky and their pots and pans crash against the walls. They asked the priest to help but he failed to banish the ghosts. Gabriel is skeptical but Téllez says to come and see, and Gabriel agrees. Gabriel returns that night and says that it is all true.

*People continue to trust in Ultima's powers, even though they go to the priest first, as this is more socially correct. Antonio cannot help but notice that once again a priest has failed at banishing evil, and Antonio wonders if Ultima's powers will prove greater than the Church's once more.*



Ultima explains the situation – the house is haunted by the spirits of three Comanche Indians that Téllez's grandfather left unburied. Brujas have awakened the spirits and made them do evil things. Gabriel formally asks Ultima and she agrees to go banish the spirits if Gabriel will accept the responsibility for tampering with fate. Antonio comes too.

*The story returns to the world of the supernatural, where Ultima is a commanding figure. The introduction of ancient Comanches emphasizes Ultima's association with Native American heritage.*



They drive out to the llano and Gabriel and Ultima share their love for the freedom and beauty of the land. They reach Téllez's house and Ultima enters. A darkness fills the sky and rocks fall from nowhere onto the roof. Everyone is terrified but then they step outside and everything seems normal.

*Gabriel and Ultima have both taught Antonio to find peace in Nature and from the earth as much as in God or religion. Undeniable supernatural activities return, putting everything else in perspective.*



Ultima has them build a platform and cover it with juniper branches, and places three bundles onto it. They light it on fire and Antonio wonders if the bundles are the Indian spirits. Gabriel says that this is the way Comanches used to bury their dead. That night **Ultima's owl** sings and cheers them up. Ultima says maybe she would like to be buried this way when she dies, and she tells Téllez the curse is lifted, but to stay away from Tenorio. Téllez remembers that Tenorio had insulted him a while ago, but did not realize the extent of his evil grudges. He thanks Ultima.

That night, back in his bed at home, Antonio dreams of his brothers, and they beg him for relief from their restless Márez blood. He uses their livers for fish bait and they ask him to use the power of God, Ultima, or the **golden carp** to help them. He casts their livers into the river and they all find rest.

## CHAPTER 21 (VEINTIUNO)

It gets warmer and Antonio and Cico go to see the **golden carp** again. Antonio is still unsure about God, as he failed to heal Lucas or help the Téllez family, and he still receives no inspiration at communion. Cico says he disbelieves but goes to church to please his mother. He says Antonio has to choose between God and the golden carp, "the beauty that is here and now." He says that there are many gods, but only the Christian God is jealous and refuses to have any equals.

The **golden carp** appears and Antonio feels peaceful and happy at the sight of it. He wonders what god he will choose to be the priest for, God or the golden carp. Cico decides to show Florence the carp, and Antonio is excited. They go to find Florence where the other boys are swimming, in the Blue Lake next to a huge concrete wall where swimming is forbidden.

The kids wave at them frantically and look upset, and Horse says that Florence hasn't come up from the water. They are all afraid he has drowned. Cico is about to dive in when Florence's dead body floats to the surface. They pull him out, horrified. Antonio considers praying the Act of Contrition, but he knows Florence never believed so it would do no good.

*Junipers are again associated with Ultima and death (the tree where Narciso was killed), but here it is explained that they were also part of ancient Comanche burial rites. Ultima speaks of her own death and in doing so reminds Antonio (and the reader) that she came to the family's house to spend the last days of her life. Tenorio's far-reaching vengeance and hatred manifests itself again.*



*Antonio must save his dream-brothers again in a quasi-priest role – this might be an example of the kind of "priest" he would be for the golden carp. The powers of God, Ultima, and the golden carp are finally lined up as equal.*



*Antonio starts to realize that he can accept multiple religions at once without invalidating any of them. This is an important part of his quest for a cultural identity. It is only the jealous Catholic God and doctrine that makes Antonio feel guilty for witnessing the golden carp or trusting Ultima more than a priest.*



*Antonio's sense of peace in the presence of the golden carp is contrasted with his anticlimactic communion. It feels similar to Ultima in Nature, among the plants and animals, or Gabriel's love of the llano.*



*Antonio reprises his role as priest once more in the most tragic situation he has experienced so far, but he has no hope in either the prayers or Florence's belief. Florence's death fulfills his portrayal as a Christ-figure earlier in the novel, which is significant as Florence is a non-believer. By making Florence a Christ figure the novel prioritizes Florence's goodness over his religious belief.*



The lifeguard arrives and is angry that they were swimming by the wall, which is not allowed, and that Florence has ruined his "perfect record." Horse and the other boys lie and say that they tried to stop Florence from swimming there. Antonio is in shock, and he watches two hawks circling in the distance. Suddenly he starts to run, crying, and hides in a thicket by the river as the church bells start to toll.

*The moral depravity of the other boys and lifeguard is contrasted with Florence's graceful intellect and tragic death. Antonio experiences his worst trauma yet, and he reminds the reader (as the grownup that he is as he tells the story) that he is still a very young child to be experiencing such loss.*



## CHAPTER 22 (VEINTIDOS)

That night Antonio dreams of three people. At first he thinks that they are his brothers, but actually they turn out to be Lupito, Narciso, and Florence, the three people he has watched die and said Acts of Contrition for "in his innocence," even though they were outcasts. Antonio begs to know why he has to see so much violence, and a voice answers that creation is born from violence. Antonio watches as a priest defiles an altar by pouring pigeon blood on it, Cico defiles the river by spearing the **golden carp**, and Tenorio murders Ultima by killing her "night-spirit." Antonio cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" The three dead figures tell him that they live only in his dreams.

*This last dream portrays Antonio's inner religious doubt in the form of the people he has acted as priest for, as he wonders if his prayers had any effect at all. The voice speaking about violence relates to much of the novel's plot – violent acts have been a part of most of the major changes in Antonio's life, and his biggest experiences have involved witnessing death or frightening magic. Ultima's "night-spirit" foreshadows her death and the owl's role as her spirit. Antonio cries out with Christ's words from the cross, and capture Antonio's own confusion at the seeming invisibility and absence of the Catholic God.*



Antonio wakes from the nightmare and Ultima gives him a potion. She says he has seen too much death for his age and perhaps he should go stay with his uncles, the Lunas. His parents agree, and they all decide that he will go to El Puerto for the month. He is sad to leave Ultima, but she says sadness is part of becoming a man, and he must gather strength from his experiences. He must also expect things to be changed when he returns, as he is growing up fast. María and Ultima both bless Antonio and he leaves with Gabriel. He realizes he will never see his home the same way again.

*Ultima's advice here is also Anaya's advice for his readers – change and tragedy are inevitable, but one must accept them and make them a part of one's individual strength. Growing up is about gathering experiences and an understanding of both good and evil. The blessings here echo Antonio's blessings as "priest" and the novel's title. Antonio starts to accept change and can step back and see that he is growing up.*



Gabriel and Antonio talk on the drive to El Puerto. Gabriel says it is good for Antonio to be on his own, and that Gabriel left at that age to live alone in the llano. He tells Antonio that he must choose from all the old dreams or make something new. Gabriel admits that the old llano and vaqueros are dying out, so perhaps Antonio should follow the Lunas, or at least give up the conflict between wind and earth, sea and moon – but Antonio wants to be both Luna and Márez. He wonders if a new religion could be made from the old ones. Gabriel says the first Luna priest had a family (forbidden for priests). This gives Antonio hope that religion could change.

*Gabriel and Antonio have both grown and can look past rigid worldviews and accept the inevitable changes of life. Gabriel is still proud of his heritage, but he now sees that it is not the only way. Antonio's questions and resolutions here are basically Anaya's thesis for the novel – he must embrace all the aspects of his culture and childhood—Luna and Márez; Native American, Spanish, and English; Catholic and pagan; curanderismo and priesthood – and build his own identity out of them, accepting them all as valid in their contradictions.*



Antonio asks Gabriel about evil, to which Gabriel responds that most evil is just things people don't understand. God does not give understanding – only experience does. He adds that much of Ultima's magic is just great empathy with other people and the earth. Antonio is not sure he understands, but he will never forget that conversation with Gabriel.

Antonio has a good month working with his uncles and his nightmares do not bother him during this time. He enjoys learning the Lunas way of life, how they are silent and loving towards the earth. As the month passes, Antonio gets a letter that his parents will come and get him soon. His uncle Pedro, meanwhile, is pleased with Antonio's work and also with his learning. He says Antonio will have a place among the Lunas if he should so choose.

As Pedro is speaking to Antonio, Juan approaches with the news that Tenorio's second daughter has died, and that Tenorio is again drunk and after Ultima's blood. The Luna brothers decide to help Ultima this time, despite their father's wishes, as they owe her for Lucas's life. They decide to drive with Antonio back to Guadalupe after dinner. Antonio feels less anxious and starts off to Prudencio's house to pack his things.

Antonio is walking Tenorio suddenly rides up, cursing, and tries to run him over with his horse. Antonio grabs the reins and the horse throws Tenorio, and Antonio flees and hides. Tenorio looks for him in vain, but curses him aloud and hopes Antonio is dead. He vows to avenge his daughters, and says he has discovered Ultima's secret – the **owl** is Ultima's spirit, so it is the owl he must kill. Antonio hears this and it suddenly makes sense. The owl is the spirit of the night, the llano, and the moon – it is Ultima's soul. He is terrified for her.

Antonio starts to run the ten miles to Guadalupe, and he thinks of Narciso's last rush to save Ultima. Antonio knows he must defend her because she is a symbol of good overcoming evil. After a few miles it gets dark and he is exhausted. He thinks more about the **owl**, and remembers how it had protected and watched over them.

Antonio runs and thinks about the moments of beauty and grief he has experienced, and wonders if he is becoming a man, and what dream his life will follow. He reaches his home and everything seems calm, but then Tenorio appears with a rifle. He points the gun at Antonio, but Ultima commands the **owl** to attack him and Tenorio shoots it. The gunshot seems to shatter Antonio's childhood.

*Gabriel's relativistic view of evil is similar to Ultima's, and directly relates to Antonio's view of Tenorio. Antonio still hates and fears Tenorio, but he can now begin to understand that what he sees as evil is just a lack of understanding and empathy, which is both the opposite of Ultima but also not so dissimilar to how the rest of society acts towards Ultima.*



*Antonio begins to live out Ultima's advice, gathering strength from the earth and processing all the experiences of his life so far. The Luna brothers do not try to force their way of life on Antonio either, but simply offer it as an option if he wants it.*



*The Lunas have grown as well, as now they decide to stand up for Ultima against Tenorio in the same way that Gabriel and Narciso did. Antonio has gathered his strength and advice, and now it is time for his last and greatest trial.*



*Tenorio's rage and desire for vengeance makes sense considering the death of his daughters, although his attempts to murder Antonio show his total lack of moral sense. The importance of Ultima's owl is finally explained, and Antonio's description of its spirit – night, llano, and moon – seems to encompass both Luna and Márez, and represent a harmony of the two.*



*Antonio acts like an adult here (although his long run is rash and perhaps misguided), as he has plenty of time to think and reconsider and still he decides to put himself in danger for Ultima's sake. The owl has been like Ultima, watching over him as he grew up.*



*Antonio already starts to act on Ultima and Gabriel's advice as he thinks about his experiences and how to build strength from them. The gunshot is another act of violence that means a huge change for Antonio's life.*



Tenorio finds the owl's body and holds it up triumphantly, howling that he has had his revenge. Then he aims his gun at Antonio again, but Pedro shoots him in the stomach and he falls, dead.

*The cycle of vengeance and pointless punishment ends with Tenorio's death, although Antonio cannot yet appreciate the harmony of it.*



Antonio sees the **owl** is dead and looks frantically for Ultima. The others don't understand what the owl means, so they think the danger has passed. Antonio orders his mother and sisters inside, like a man.

*Even at his young age Antonio acts like a man in this situation. These simple instructions are symbolic of the maturity he has gained.*



Antonio enters Ultima's room and sees she is dying. He pleads with her to live, but she accepts her fate. She tells how the flying man gave her the **owl** as her spirit. She has done good in the world, but also meddled with destiny just like Tenorio. Now that they are both dead it will bring balance. She asks Antonio to burn her medicines and bury the owl under a forked juniper tree.

*Antonio is understandably grief-stricken, but Ultima again sees the larger cycle of life, and in her eyes death does not have to be an evil. Like the Virgin of Antonio's dream, she asks that Tenorio be forgiven, and Ultima sees that her death and Tenorio's bring about a kind of harmony and balance.*



Antonio kneels and requests a blessing. Ultima asks that he have "the strength to live," and she says she will be there in the hills when he is in despair. Antonio runs out and buries the **owl** beneath a juniper, crying.

*Ultima's last blessing echoes the many priestly blessings of the novel, but she asks only that Antonio find his own inner strength. The juniper tree appears for the last time as a symbol of ancient burial rites.*



As he buries the owl, Antonio looks at the moonlit town and thinks about building his own, new dream out of the dreams of his past. Later they will bury Ultima with a Catholic mass, but Antonio knows he is really burying her here and now.

*This burial is Antonio's own, more personal version of the Catholic ceremony that will take place later. In this last action he is already beginning to build a new identity and system of beliefs from the influences of his past.*





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