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The Texas Observer

**WINTER
BOOKS**



The Texas Observer

DEPARTMENTS

DIALOGUE	2
EDITORIAL	3
Winter Libros	
BOOKS & CULTURE	
ALL THE NEWS THEY FORGOT TO PRINT	4
by Molly Ivins	
PASS THE PESTICIDES	6
by James E. McWilliams	
MY ANCESTORS' VIOLENCE	8
by Patrick Timmons	
WITNESSES TO HISTORY	12
by Barbara Belejack	
THE HUMMINGBIRD'S GREAT GREAT-NEPHEW	20
by Gregg Barrios	
RINGSIDE SEAT TO A REVOLUTION	24
by David Romo	
TRUTH OF THE MATTER	28
by Debbie Nathan	
ELEGY FOR THE LIVING	32
by Carrie Fountain	
WEDDINGS	34
by Ruperto Garcia	
AFTERWORD	38
The Kindness of Strangers	
by Gregg Barrios	

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by Rodrigo Moya

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by Rodrigo Moya

Dialogue

EL PASO, NEW MEXICO?

Interesting piece ("Far Out Far West Texas," December 16, 2005). Tiresome to read another slam about El Paso midway through it, but as the source of the quote is a Dallasite, I can understand. I wouldn't want to live in Dallas either. Maybe we El Pasoans should revive the idea of joining New Mexico and spare Texas the burden of El Paso way out there even beyond the fringe, where nobody wants to live, and hardly anyone, even the *Observer*, has anything good to say about it.

Marshall Carter-Tripp
El Paso

OPEN FORUM

I found the article, "Letter from Ft. Benning" (December 16, 2005), through Google News. I think that Katherine Jashinski is very brave and admirable. It's not easy to commit to something and then find that you have changed to such a degree that the commitment becomes a heavy burden. I would just like to extend my sympathy and support to Ms. Jashinski. I admire her attitude and the approach she is taking and I know things will work out just fine.

Dave Buchta
Phoenix, AZ

NOT ON THE RADAR

My sister sent me a link to the article "A Death in McAllen" (September 23, 2005), and I had to respond by letting you know that my father was in the care of that facility and was finally moved to a hospice center (Comfort House) in McAllen where he passed with dignity. The care at McAllen Nursing Center was almost sub-human. Only a few people were truly compassionate. I know it is a challenging place to work, but it seems that the quality of care could be improved. It is a most unfortunate situation and clearly screams that the system needs major reform. Unfortunately, it just isn't on the radar—or politically viable—to talk about care for elders.

I appreciate that Dave Mann took

the time to investigate the situation and write about it.

Scott Ballew
Austin

FROM PICKLES TO ART

In her column, "Exiting the Pickle Factory," (November 18, 2005), Molly Ivins asked how the United States could work toward a goal of investing more toward education "than on stuff to kill people." She asked for suggestions. Here's one: more art. This country is art starved. There is simply no good reason for so much mundaneness everywhere. The arts are disciplines of "safe" risk taking.

People who develop a taste for art are too busy, too interested, to be easily diverted by Consumerism (the religion) or Militarism. One of the side effects of playing and/or working in the arts is the impetus to pursue and discover Truth. Not an iron clad dogmatic Truth but the personal liquid Truth that is central to each person. "What do I really like?" People who become acquainted with a personal truth very often develop a capacity to perceive other types of truth. Familiarity with the arts in general, and a specific art form in particular, also develops what the writer Alice Walker calls "an eye to see with."

How? Free art supplies are the most inspirational, fun, challenging toys for human beings. The high cost of art supplies limits the ability of many people to make art. So, provide free art supplies to community centers, churches, after school programs, schools, senior centers, or anyplace where people gather regularly. Just the art supplies (this includes musical instruments, dance shoes, ballet bar, dictionaries, etc.). That's something that could easily be done; it's less complicated than fixing the education system. And it's certainly less expensive than missiles, bombs, guns, prisons, etc.

Melanie Hickerson
Austin

Winter Libros

Readers Marshall Carter-Tripp writes that it's "tiresome to read another slam about El Paso" ("Dialogue," this issue). No one, she explains, not "even the *Observer*," has anything good to say about her hometown.

We have no way of knowing for sure what Carter-Tripp will think of the current issue, but one thing we do know: El Paso, Juárez, and the border in general loom large. Among the highlights is an excerpt from the prologue and several chapters of *Ringside Seat to the Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923* by "micro-historian" and occasional *Observer* contributor David Dorado Romo. After years of archival research and random wanderings, Romo discovered a wealth of information about underground trails, forgotten ancestors, lost photographers, and music he had never heard before. As he confesses, although he was raised in both Juárez and El Paso, he spent a large part of his life trying to get away from both of these cities, determined to live "some place where things were happening, where matters of significance occurred." Yet something kept drawing him back to "this place that so many consider nothing

more than a vast cultural wasteland." We know the feeling.

Perhaps the best-known chronicler of life and death on the border these days is Luis Alberto Urrea, a novelist-poet-professor who was featured in several panels at last fall's Texas Book Festival in Austin (two panels on border violence—one in English, one in Spanish—along with a terrific one-man show, a conversation moderated by author and journalist Jan Reid).

Urrea hails from the other end of the border, as we like to say in Texas: He was born in Tijuana and grew up in San Diego. His latest book, *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, belongs on an updated list of Great American Novels. Twenty years in the making, the book is based on the life of an intriguing young woman who briefly lived in El Paso at the end of the 19th century, influenced the course of Mexican history, was a media celebrity in her day, and whose story is included in Romo's *Ringside Seat to the Revolution*. (She was also, not so coincidentally, Luis Alberto Urrea's great aunt.)

San Antonio journalist and playwright Gregg Barrios interviewed Urrea for this issue. He also wrote the Afterword, which reveals a little-known border connection behind Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*, one of the great plays of the 20th century.

Other border and Mexico-related articles include Debbie Nathan's review of *Trail of Feathers*, about the 1998 disappearance and death of *San Antonio Express-News* Mexico correspondent Philip True; James E. McWilliams' review of the updated edition of *The Death of Ramón González*, a beautifully rendered examination of agribusiness and pesticides in the Mexican countryside; and "Witnesses to History," a photo essay based on the eponymous exhibit at the Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern and Mexican Photography at Texas State University in San Marcos.

With our first issue of 2006, we welcome back our loyal readers. If you received a holiday subscription and you are new to the magazine, welcome to the *Observer*. We'll be back in two weeks with our January 27 issue, featuring our consistently fine reporting on the nefarious activities of state and national politicians, political columns, and more Books & the Culture (including our regular Poetry Page).

Finally, one more thing: Long live border rats—people attracted to an area that so many "consider a cultural wasteland," and who write about its possibilities as well as its pain.

¡Y qué viva El Paso! ■

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All the News They Forgot to Print

BY MOLLY IVINS

Censored 2006:

The Top 25 Censored Stories

by Peter Phillips and Project Censored

Seven Stories Press

834 pages, \$18.95

What we need in this country—along with a disaster relief agency—is a Media Accountability Day. One precious day out of the entire year when everyone in the news media stops reporting on what's wrong with everyone else and devotes a complete 24-hour news cycle to looking at our own failures. How's that for a great idea?

My colleagues, of course, are persuaded that every day is Pick on the Media Day. Every day, the right wing accuses us of liberal bias and the liberals accuse us of right-wing or corporate bias—so who needs more of this?

I have long been persuaded that the news media collectively will be sent to hell not for our sins of commission, but our sins of omission. The real scandal in the media is not bias, it is laziness. Laziness and bad news judgment. Our failure is what we miss, what we fail to cover, what we let slip by, what we don't give enough attention to—because, after all, we have to cover Jennifer and Brad, and Scott and Laci, and Whosit who disappeared in Aruba without whom the world can scarce carry on.

Happily, the perfect news peg, as we say in the biz, for Media Accountability Day already exists—it's Project Censored's annual release of the 10 biggest stories ignored or under-covered by mainstream media. Project Censored is based at Sonoma State University, with both faculty and students involved in its preparation.

Of course, the stories are not actually "censored" by any authority, but they do not receive enough attention to enter

the public's consciousness, usually because corporate media tend to underreport stories about corporate misdeeds and government abuses.

The No. 1 pick by Project Censored this year should more than make the media blink—it is a much-needed deep whiff of ammonia smellingsalts for the comatose: Bush Administration Moves to Eliminate Open Government.

Gene Roberts, a great news editor, says we tend to miss the stories that seep and creep, the ones whose effects are cumulative, not abrupt. This administration has drastically changed the rules on Freedom of Information Act requests; has changed laws that restrict public access to federal records, mostly by expanding the national security classification; operates in secret under the Patriot Act; and consistently refuses to provide information to Congress and the Government Accountability Office. The cumulative total effect is horrifying.

No. 2: Iraq Coverage. Faulted for failure to report the results of the two battles for Fallujah and the civilian death toll. The civilian death toll story is hard to get—a dearth of accurate numbers—but the humanitarian disaster in Fallujah comes with impeccable sources.

No. 3: Distorted Election Coverage. Faulting the study that caused most of the corporate media to dismiss the discrepancy between exit polls and the vote tally, and the still-contentious

question of whether the vote in Ohio needed closer examination.

No. 4: Surveillance Society Quietly Moves In. It's another seep 'n' creep story, where the cumulative effect should send us all shrieking into the streets—the Patriot Act, the quiet resurrection of the MATRIX program, the REAL ID Act, which passed without debate as an amendment to an emergency spending bill to fund troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

No. 5: United States Uses Tsunami to Military Advantage in Southeast Asia. Oops. Ugh.

No. 6: The Real Oil for Food Scam. The oil-for-food story was rotten with political motives from the beginning—the right used it to belabor the United Nations. The part that got little

MEDIA DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

CENSORED 2006



THE TOP 25 CENSORED STORIES

Peter Phillips and Project Censored

INTRODUCTION BY NORMAN SOLOMON | CARTOONS BY TOM TOMORROW

attention here was the extent to which we, the United States, were part of the scam. *Harper's* magazine deserves credit for its December 2004 story, "The UN is Us: Exposing Saddam Hussein's Silent Partner."

No. 7: Journalists Face Unprecedented Dangers to Life and Livelihood. That a lot of journalists are getting killed in Iraq is indisputable. I work with the Committee to Protect Journalists and am by no means persuaded we are targeted by anyone other than terrorists. However, Project Censored honors stories about military policies that could improve the situation of those journalists who risk their lives.

No. 8: Iraqi Farmers Threatened by Bremer's Mandates. It's part of the untold story of the disastrous effort to make Iraq into a neo-con's free-market dream. Order 81 issued by Paul Bremer made it illegal for Iraqi farmers to reuse seeds harvested from new varieties registered under the law. Iraqi farmers were forced away from traditional methods to a system of patented seeds, where they can't grow crops without paying a licensing fee to an American corporation.

No. 9: Iran's New Oil Trade System Challenges U.S. Currency. The effects of Iran's switching from dollars to Euros in oil trading.

No. 10: Mountaintop Removal Threatens Ecosystem and Economy. A classic case of a story not unreported but underreported—a practice so environmentally irresponsible it makes your hair hurt to think about it.

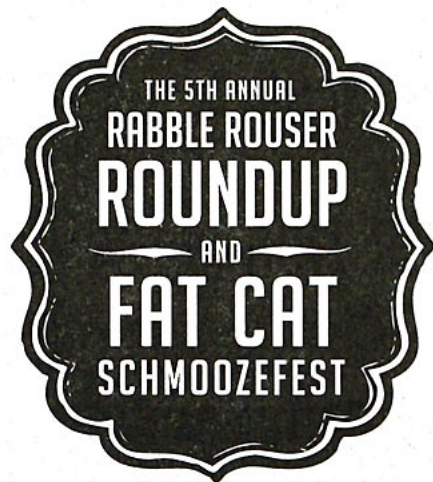
Most journalists manage to find a quibble or two with Project Censored's list every year, but mostly we just stand there and nod, yep, missed that one, and that one and...

But here's a wonderful fact about daily journalism—we don't ever have to get it all right, because we get a new chance every day. ■

Molly Ivins is a nationally syndicated columnist. Her most recent book with Lou Dubose is Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America (Random House). For more information about Project Censored, see www.projectcensored.org.

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Pass the Pesticides

BY JAMES E. MCWILLIAMS

The Death of Ramón González: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma

By Angus Wright
University of Texas Press
416 pages, \$19.95

Sometimes it's a seemingly random sentence in a book that makes the deepest impression. It's often a line that could easily have been tossed by a sloppy editor, or even self-edited as superfluous window dressing. But really, for the attentive reader, it's a line that—in all its evocative detail—is unexpectedly critical to the story and quietly emblematic of the whole. For me, in Angus Wright's *The Death of Ramón González*, that rare sort of line hit suddenly, forcefully and with clarity.

It read: "Magdaleno picked loose threads from a seam in his jeans as he continued to talk."

The observation is poignant. On the surface, it suggests nervousness, as if Magdaleno was perhaps uncomfortable talking to an Anglo about the abuse he had endured as an agricultural laborer. On another level, though, there's the important reminder that Wright's vivid condemnation of agricultural modernization is based not on an ivory tower analysis of impersonal data but on looking the oppressed in the eye, hearing their stories, speaking their language, and observing them closely enough to notice them fidgeting with loose threads on worn clothing. This choice detail, in other words, captures the book's spirit, intentions, and methodology.

Symbolically, there's also the insinuation that the Culiacán Valley of Northwest Mexico, where Magdaleno worked, was itself coming apart at the seams as capitalists commercialized

what had once been a peasant-oriented agricultural system. Magdaleno's tic also suggests that the economic transition that placed him in the midst of pesticide-choked fields unraveled not just his pants but his personal sense of human decency. And there's even the distant hint that Magdaleno might have been unwillingly complicit in his own demise—a victim who's been forced in the position of pulling apart his own security.

Here's what Magdaleno goes on to say about working in the Culiacán fields:

A lot of people died that season, especially the children. They said it was the cold or the flu. It was very difficult for the mothers to take care of them. The women had to awaken at one in the morning to prepare the lunch that would be all the men had to eat in the field. The outhouses were locked up at night. There were no beds, just whatever blankets or clothes we had to put on the ground. The company store charged very high prices, and we were given scrip for some of our wages that was only good in the company store.

The fact that Magdaleno said this while picking "loose threads from a seam in his jeans" makes Wright's book much more than a timely analysis of an environmental problem. It makes it a riveting narrative of human suffering, corporate greed, and, as such, a clarion call for political reform.

Wright's book, originally published in 1990 and recently re-released with a new "Afterword," pivots on the fate of Ramón González—the fictionalized name of a tomato picker in the Culiacán Valley who very likely died as a result of direct pesticide poisoning. González worked very closely with toxic chemicals that were illegal in the United States. He lacked protective equipment or training in dangerous pesticide use. Frequently he bathed in water contami-

nated with pesticide runoff. Why were González and his exploited co-workers thus exposed? Why were his and his family's suffering tolerated?

Wright answers this question by effectively placing González' working conditions in the context of late twentieth-century geopolitical change. Beginning in the 1940s (with an emphasis on the Green Revolution) and culminating in the early stirrings of globalization in the 1980s, industrialized nations led by the United States sought cheaper ways to produce food. This quest to boost agricultural productivity in the name of national health and wealth, Wright notes, had measurable outcomes. It undoubtedly increased the GDPs of poor nations, and it certainly enriched the corporations that capitalized agricultural industrialization. But—largely as a result of intense pesticide use—increased agricultural output also destroyed (and continues to destroy) local environments, men such as Magdaleno and González, their wives and children, and a way of life that was once more stable, equitable, and proudly provincial. Technological progress, as it always has, came at a human cost.

Back to the question: Why were González and his exploited co-workers thus exposed? The answer, as Wright convincingly portrays it, is both obvious and discomfiting: so that we here in the United States (and yes, we here in Texas) could get more vegetables, cheaper vegetables, vegetables on a year-round basis, and vegetables grown through methods that are illegal on this side of the border. Oh yeah, and so a few people could get really, really, really rich.

It's simple enough in this day and age to expose greed. But Wright's brilliance is his ability to complicate an idea as basic as wealth. The concept of "wealth," he contends, varies across time, place and culture. González' family, for example, who came from Oaxaca,

were agricultural workers, too. But they knew a radically different world of work, and they entertained broader and more humanitarian conceptions of wealth. Resisting the temptation to romanticize subsistence agriculture and peasant culture, Wright describes in some detail the traditional Mixtec system of agricultural production in Oaxaca. It's a system that stressed stability and community, as well as very different ideas about "the improvement of human life than those held by the elites."

Under Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), peasants enjoyed the state-protected opportunity to "sink their roots deeper into the countryside." Tied to their land, they nurtured "relatively autonomous rural communities" within a "closed natural system," and they enjoyed the dignity that came from feeding themselves. Wright's explanation for the transition from traditionalism to modernization—a transition cynically justified with the rhetoric of the Green Revolution and its promise to feed the world—exposes the hidden pitfalls of not just pesticide-intensive agriculture, but of the entire project of globalization as a development driven largely by unregulated private corporations. (One positive aspect of the Green Revolution, Wright notes, is that "crop development was done by public institutions" that could not patent their seeds.) All in all, Wright shows, a rather blunt conception of "wealth" has been foisted upon the quieter corners of the earth.

His book is hard to ignore if for no other reason than anyone who eats is involved in the development he documents. The next time you grocery shop, notice the melons from Mexico, asparagus from Peru, and snow peas from Guatemala. Then notice their price compared to the local organic options. Cheap. And they're cheap because corporations that claim they're feeding the world are in actuality growing crops in places that offer inexpensive land, abundant labor, and no regulations against "lavish quantities of hazardous pesticides to deal with the difficult pest problems of the tropics and semi-trop-

ics." In short, they're indulging in a Monsanto-inspired wet dream.

To wit, in Wright's afterword to the 2005 edition, he notes a depressing milestone. In 2004, for the first time "in recent history," the United States imported more food than it exported. This despite the fact that "[t]he United States is generally thought to have the best natural agricultural endowment of soils and climate of any nation on earth." Why, then, the trade imbalance? Absentee agribusiness conglomerates, Wright concludes, have recognized the financial benefits of developing "Culiacán Valley-style agriculture throughout the world." In other words, the inequities he highlights through the personal stories of González and Magdaleno have only intensified since he published his book in 1990. All in the name of one very narrow version of "wealth."

Wright knows better than most academics (he's an emeritus professor of environmental studies at Cal State-Sacramento) that books don't change the world. His answer to the problem of irresponsible agricultural modernization is thus old fashioned, class-driven, get-your-ass-out-there-and-protest-the-WTO political change. "[I]gnorance and unregulated promotion of dangerous technologies," he insists, "are intimately tied to the political relationships and the ideological assumptions that determine how a nation is ruled." These relationships, he writes, must be contested. As a great singer-songwriter once observed, "You've got to bust up a sidewalk sometimes to get people to gather around." And so Wright is swinging his sledgehammer, arguing for conventional political opposition as the solution to the problems he describes.

That focus on conventional political opposition may be the only dated aspect of this fertile book. What may have also changed between now and 1990 is America's attitude toward food. Although by no means mainstream, a kind of cultural awareness

about food and food production—due in part to Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* and the investigative literature it spawned—has become increasingly popular among young American consumers. A broader focus on sustainability, organic produce, and fair labor practices has encouraged otherwise politically lukewarm Americans to make political decisions in the grocery stores they frequent and the food they bring home to cook. Wright may be right—the answer to agribusiness and the abuse it perpetuates may have to be strictly political. But, now that food is finally about more than food in the United States, it's never been easier for the average citizen to bust up a sidewalk. ■

Contributing writer James E. McWilliams is the author of *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (Columbia University Press).



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My Ancestors' Violence

BY PATRICK TIMMONS

The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916

By William D. Carrigan
University of Illinois Press
308 pages, \$35

The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP

By Patricia Bernstein
Texas A&M University Press
264 pages, \$29.95

Clive Weldon Timmons, my paternal grandfather, was born on November 11, 1906 in Prairie Hill, Limestone County, Texas. His parents, Joseph and Elizabeth Timmons, hailed from Georgia—not too far from where I currently teach college history classes. Five of my grandfather's siblings were born east of the Mississippi. But in the late 1880s for some reason or another—probably economic survival—Clive's parents took their growing family to Central Texas: an area south of Dallas, north of Austin, and west of Houston, soon to be enriched by cotton sales. Clive ended up in Fort Worth, married a Kimbrough, resulting in my father's birth in 1937. I have relatives lying in the Prairie Hill Cemetery in Limestone County.

My father disowned his family—I was born in England—never talked about his relatives, and until his 1993 suicide rendered him incapable of further objections, refused to register his two sons for U.S. citizenship with the embassy in London. I've always been curious about who my American relatives were and why my father became so hostile to his past. Recently I've started to pay more attention to my

family history because Central Texans and Georgians loom large in America's experience of racial violence—a subject that fascinates me as much as it disturbs.

We discuss lynching at length in my classes. I teach in the South, in a British accent. These facts are not significant. But I tell students that my father was the son of Central Texans, and the grandson of Georgians, a strategy that helps me probe the silence that often surrounds Americans who ignore the memory of racial violence.

Late 19th- and early 20th-century lynching postcards collected in James Allen's *Without Sanctuary* force students to confront the devastating effects of racial and gender inequalities. The most shocking images I show in class depict the charred body of Jesse Washington, a young black man tried and convicted for the murder of white, middle-aged Lucy Fryer near Waco in 1916. At the moment the McClennan County jury handed down Washington's conviction, a mob rose in the room, plucked the defendant from the clutches of local law enforcement, dragging him to the square where he was brutally tortured, burned, castrated, and killed. Washington's lynching was distinctive because Waco photographer Fred Gildersleeve took pictures of it as it was happening. As we study his images, I consider it crucial to tell my students that my family was undoubtedly aware of—and perhaps even participated in—the Washington lynching. After all, it attracted a crowd of 15,000.

Historian William Carrigan's *Making of a Lynching Culture* proves that my ancestors would have been familiar with a type of violence that generated a self-sustaining racist and sexist culture. When my great-grandparents left Georgia around 1890, that state's white citizens were mercilessly lynching blacks as they consolidated Jim Crow social practices. By the time my grandfather was born, Central Texans had

80 years of vigilantism behind them. As Carrigan demonstrates, the practice of lynching predates the founding of the Texas Republic; white settlers had turned from lynching Indians, Mexicans, Texas Unionists, and horse thieves and rustlers of all sorts, to the terrorizing of black male residents who faced the furious, fatal indignity of lynch mobs for alleged crimes against white women.

The culture of mob violence that supported the lynching of Jesse Washington was eight decades old in 1916. Central Texans had long justified extralegal killing as a necessary fact of life. In the earliest days of white settlement such violence was administered not by lynch mobs but by citizen posses in pursuit of "encroaching" Native Americans or "invading" Mexicans. As the region became more settled, a tradition emerged of administering justice without recourse to the still-developing court system. During the sectional conflict, vigilance committees sought out suspected slave insurrectionists, abolitionists, and Republicans. After emancipation, whites continued to rely upon mob violence as a means of maintaining order over freemen who had become, in the minds of whites, dangerous murderers and rapists.

Carrigan mines various sources to reconstruct the world view of those who shaped the "lynching culture": newspapers of the time, oral interviews with Central Texas residents, free people and former slaves, local government and court records, and documents from state and national archives. This detailed survey of published and archival sources enables him to grasp how most Central Texans lived within "a culture of violence." Carrigan analyzes how the region's white residents celebrated memories of vigilante vio-

lence, and how these prior instances of violent retribution framed lynching in meaningful ways. In other words, how one generation's memory of lynching helped legitimize its continued practice, even as the targeted victims changed.

Carrigan argues that lynching lay at the heart of the culture, powerfully defining the concepts of public duty and prestige. In 1884 for the first time in Central Texas, a mob lynched a black man, Zeke Hadley, for the alleged rape of a white woman. The Hill County mob surrounded the jail in Hillsboro on June 23, extracted Hadley from a cell, and hanged him. They explained their actions in the *Whitney Messenger*:

We regret the necessity of having to step beyond the limits of the law in the execution of this negro but we have positive proof of his guilt and think the crime justifies the act ... [we] dedicate this precedent [sic.] to the mothers, wives, and daughters of this community, the extreme measures to which we have resorted.

Some three decades and about 30 instances of lynching after Hadley, other Central Texans butchered Jesse Washington in Waco's square. Carrigan explains such acts by looking at the big picture—going back to the founding of the Texas Republic—and paying attention to intriguing patterns, including fairly secretive mob-killings of blacks and whites during Reconstruction. By 1900, he states, such violence had become institutionalized as a “punishment for blacks administered by whites.” His breadth of research and ability to use stories to craft analysis help the modern reader recognize how and why lynching became widely embraced, and how such vigilantism became a tool to enforce a particular set of racial and gendered power relations in the region.

Unlike Carrigan, Patricia Bernstein is not an academic historian, but has delved into a wide range of published and archival primary sources to write her first book, *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse*

Washington and the Rise of the NAACP. The owner of a Houston public relations firm, Bernstein describes herself as a writer who has published articles in *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Texas Monthly*, and *Cosmopolitan*. Like Carrigan, she is a native of Central Texas, and *The First Waco Horror* advances the historical debate about lynching in important ways. But despite her wide reading, Bernstein cannot conceive of lynching as Carrigan does—an integral part of a “culture of violence.” Instead, she asks

... after all the books have been read and all the theories of lynching carefully considered, separately and in combination, there remains an essential darkness at the heart of the lynching epidemic that none of the analyses adequately illuminates: How could otherwise absolutely conventional twentieth-century people living in a prosperous, industrialized society suddenly metamorphose into a wild mob howling for blood and then, within two or three hours—their blood lust sated—revert to being inoffensive, everyday folk again?

Indeed, she does not shy from presenting lynching as an outrageous brutality, a practice seemingly at odds with contemporary Central Texans' belief that they were highly civilized and cultured:

If you had been picked up from wherever you were and dropped into Waco, Texas, on the morning of May 15, 1916, and if you, devoid of all context, had watched the Waco Horror unfold, you would surely have thought you were no longer on earth but had fallen into the bottom pit of Hell. How could such a thing take place? ... Waco was not even a backwoods outpost, peopled with inbred crackers driven mad by moonshine and pellagra. The people of Waco considered themselves to be thoroughly civilized and modern. They were not our ancient ancestors; they were our grandparents and great-grandparents. ...

“How could such a thing take place?” It's a good question, but it's not one that her methodology allows her to answer adequately. Repeatedly, Bernstein refers to how “riff raff” led the lynch mob, how the authorities failed in their duty to protect Washington, how they conspired with Fred Gildersleeve to allow him to take pictures of the lynching from a courthouse window, and how they also failed to prosecute the mob leaders, even though they knew their identities. To be sure, Bernstein documents all of these findings. But she refuses to recognize that conspiring to commit such an act—going back to at least 1836—had defined civilized behavior.

Instead, Bernstein uses Washington's lynching to explore how it galvanized the NAACP. The civil rights organization's anti-lynching campaign referred to it as the “Waco horror,” a phrase that Bernstein repackages for the title of her book. Like Elisabeth Freeman, the NAACP activist who investigated the lynching, Bernstein remains focused on the graphic nature of the Gildersleeve photographs:

Only when you look closer do you see a fuzzy area in the center of the picture, below the tree, like a ribbon of smoke. And then, through the smoke, you can just make out ... a leg, a foot, an elbow. A naked human being lies collapsed at the bottom of the tree on top of a smoldering pile of slats and kindling. Around his neck is a chain, which stretches up over a branch of the tree.

But that focus prompts a series of questions: Were other forms of such violence any less brutal, even if they weren't documented by a photographer? Or protested by the NAACP? Indeed, it's the second part of Bernstein's subtitle that best explains her approach: *the rise of the NAACP*. Her book is less of an exploration of the historical roots of lynching and more a narrative of how Freeman, a militant in the movement for women's suffrage, came to investigate the Washington lynching for the NAACP,

—continued on page 19

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Max Weber reminds us that too often we act like a herd of sheep. We decide we're for something without examining the validity of our conclusion. Let's consider one divisive issue: pro-life v. pro-choice. Women's reproductive rights are a compelling issue. But when we vote for someone based on one particular issue, we could be neglecting our children, ourselves, and the nature of the society in which we live.

There are other issues. For example, we can all agree that health and education are essential to a decent and meaningful life. I'm reminded of one public servant who did. David Bonior was for years one of the leaders of the House of Representatives. He is one of the most intelligent, committed politicians I've known. He is also pro-life. My wife, Audre, is totally committed to the pro-choice position. When David was running for a Michigan House seat, we obviously couldn't vote for him. But we could contribute generously. And we did. When people asked Audre how someone so dedicated to women's reproductive rights could support a "pro-life" candidate like Bonior, she had a simple response. "He's sort of like Ivory soap—99.5 percent pure."

Give or take a percentage point, it was a good assessment of David Bonior, whose career was dedicated to improving the lives of Americans living on the economic margins of our society. To deny him support based on a single issue was to fall into a herd driven by single-issue politics. Or more accurately, a herd driven by right-wing political operatives who have mastered the emotional exploitation of single-issue politics.

I'm not writing to tell you what my personal position on this issue may be, though I certainly believe it matters in the confirmation of Supreme Court justices. But I am more concerned about a society where too few have too much and too many have too little, an issue on which we all should be able to agree. I went to the drug store recently to get pre-

A Herd of Sheep

by
BERNARD RAPOPORT

scriptions filled for my heart condition. The bill was \$1,000! I asked the pharmacist, "What if I didn't have that amount of money?" He said, "Well, you couldn't have them." I said, "You mean in this land of ours, the richest country in the world, that I can live because I have money and someone who doesn't have money won't be able to live? I think that's a terrible injustice." He responded, "I know that, but that's the way it is."

Let's return to Weber's herd of sheep. Rather than focus on a single issue easily exploited by the political right, doesn't it make sense that before we support a candidate, we ask about his commitment to access to good health care for everyone in this country? Doesn't it make sense that we consider a candidate's commitment to quality public education and adequate and equitable taxation to support it? Sure, I support good education, just don't increase my taxes to pay for it. That's the attitude that too many of us have, especially those of us in high tax brackets, favored by a tax code that provides all sorts of machinations to evade paying our fair share.

I think that before each of us considers how we're going to vote, we ask the candidate what her priorities are. And we refuse to accept mumbling about "I'm for health" and "I'm for education." Both have to be paid for. When a candidate says, I support

both of these issues, ask her how she suggests we pay for them.

The answer must be higher taxes. The tax rate has to be based on the ability to pay, as it was before Reagan and the Bushes began rewriting our tax code to favor those of us who can most afford to pay. Those who have more should pay more—considerably more.

As someone who founded and directed the building of a large financial institution, I can tell you that you can get rich, very rich, without stock options, without the CEO earning more than 25 to 30 times what the lowest-paid employee earns (today CEOs make 1,000 to 1,500 times what the lowest-paid employee makes). Or you could get rich before the rules of the game—in particular the tax code—were rewritten. It wasn't so long ago that we were a society in which wealth—and the tax burden—was more reasonably distributed. So we should be mad. But we too often get mad in the wrong way. Or we focus our legitimate political anger on single issues easily exploited by the far right—whether it is reproductive rights or gay and lesbian rights.

Before you decide who you're for, decide what kind of world you want. Don't let a single issue—regardless of its importance—determine the candidate you will support. My own position is clear and unequivocal, as is Audre's, after whom Planned Parenthood's Waco clinic is named. But because I love this country, I have the courage to say that if we succumb to the virus of letting single issues determine our votes or dominate our political discourse, we will have succumbed to an incurable political illness.

I'm an optimist. I believe we can reassess what determines how we cast our votes. I also believe a commitment to a broad range of interests fundamental to a genuine quality of life in this country ultimately allows us to elect the candidates who will advance all the issues the progressive community supports.

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Witnesses to History

BY BARBARA BELEJACK

In the early 1940s, a young man from a rough Mexico City neighborhood called La Candelaria de los Patos, joined the thousands of his countrymen who were traveling north to the United States to fill jobs left vacant and jobs that were created by the onset of World War II. Some worked in factories, others in the fields. Héctor García worked in railway construction.

After the war, he would make other trips to the United States—not as a migrant worker, but as a photographer. During his career, Héctor García traveled the world for Time-Life, documented every aspect of political, cultural, and social life in his own country, and proved to be equally adept at spot news, fashion shoots, and documentary photo essays. Among his images of the United States: a statue of Popeye in front of the municipal building in Crystal City, Texas—the so-called “Spinach Capital of the World”—and a haunting photograph of the Twin Towers of New York’s World Trade Center, taken in the early 1970s.

Now 82, García lives with his wife, María del Carmen—herself an accomplished photographer—in Mexico City’s Colonia Navarte, a neighborhood also known as *la colonia del periodista*, the journalist’s neighborhood. When I met him there last November, he repeatedly told me that “the job of a journalist is to be a witness to history.” Appropriately enough, that’s the title of the current exhibition at the Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern & Mexican Photography at Texas State University: “Testigos de la Historia / Witnesses to History.” From an archival collection of nearly 13,000 images, the Wittliff Gallery has selected 59.

“Witnesses” represents the work of 12 photographers, including Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Nacho López, Graciela Iturbide, and Rodrigo Moya, whose “Fotógrafos de prensa / Press Photographers” and “El garrotero / The Brakeman” grace the front and back covers, respectively, of this issue.

The curators have included such well-known portraits as Moya’s iconic “Melancholy Che” (Havana, Cuba, 1964) and Raúl Ortega’s “Subcomandante Marcos” (Chiapas, Mexico, 1995). Many of the other images are inherently political. Both García and Moya, for example, recorded the repression that occurred in Mexico in the wake of demonstrations

by railway workers and students in 1958—a foreboding of what would happen 10 years later when a university student movement culminated in the massacre of hundreds at Mexico City’s Plaza de Tlatelolco. In October 1968, no newspaper would publish García’s courageous photograph of soldiers toting guns in the Zócalo, the main plaza, of Mexico City. Two years later, cultural historian Carlos Monsiváis chose the image for the cover of his book *Días de guardar* (*Days to Remember*), one of the first books written in Mexico about the 1968 student movement.

But few documentary photographs are as powerful as the images of street kids made by García, who himself was orphaned at an early age and spent time in a Mexico City “correctional institute.”

Not everything, of course, is about politics and social injustice. The curators have also selected images made from the serendipity of ordinary life. Collectively, however, the exhibit documents the great stories of the 20th and early 21st centuries, not only in Mexico, but throughout the Americas: migration from the country to the city; the rise of the modern mega-city, with all of its wonders and horrors; the tension between traditional culture and modernity; and the tension between the haves and have-nots.

A growing number of younger photographers now focus on the northern border, such as Eniac Martínez, who has traveled by foot following campesinos from the Mixteca region of Oaxaca to the United States. Others, such as Antonio Turok, best known for his work during the 1994 Zapatista revolt in Chiapas, continue to live and work in southern Mexico.

As you view the remarkable work of these 12 photographers, there is something important to keep in mind: They are witnesses not only to the history of Mexico and Latin America—but also to our own. ■

Testigos de la Historia / Witnesses to History runs through February 12. The Wittliff Gallery is located on the seventh floor of the Alkek Library of Texas State University in San Marcos. For more information, see www.library.txstate.edu/swwc/wg or call the Gallery at 512-245-2313.



"La Celestina," Héctor García, Mexico City, 1965.

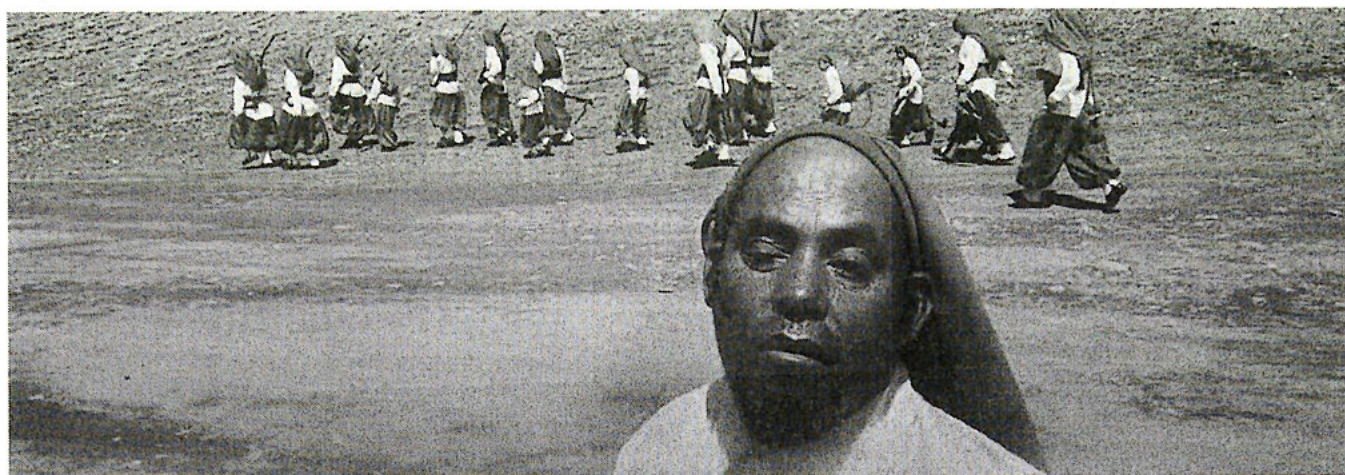
Woman from the barrio of La Candelaria de los Patos, the rough, working-class neighborhood where the photographer was born. García published a photo essay on La Candelaria, documenting the neighborhood before its destruction under the orders of the mayor of Mexico City. The photograph takes its name from a famous character in a masterpiece of early Spanish literature—*la Celestina*, the "go-between," a "repairer" of virgins.



"Mexico City," Héctor García, 1960.

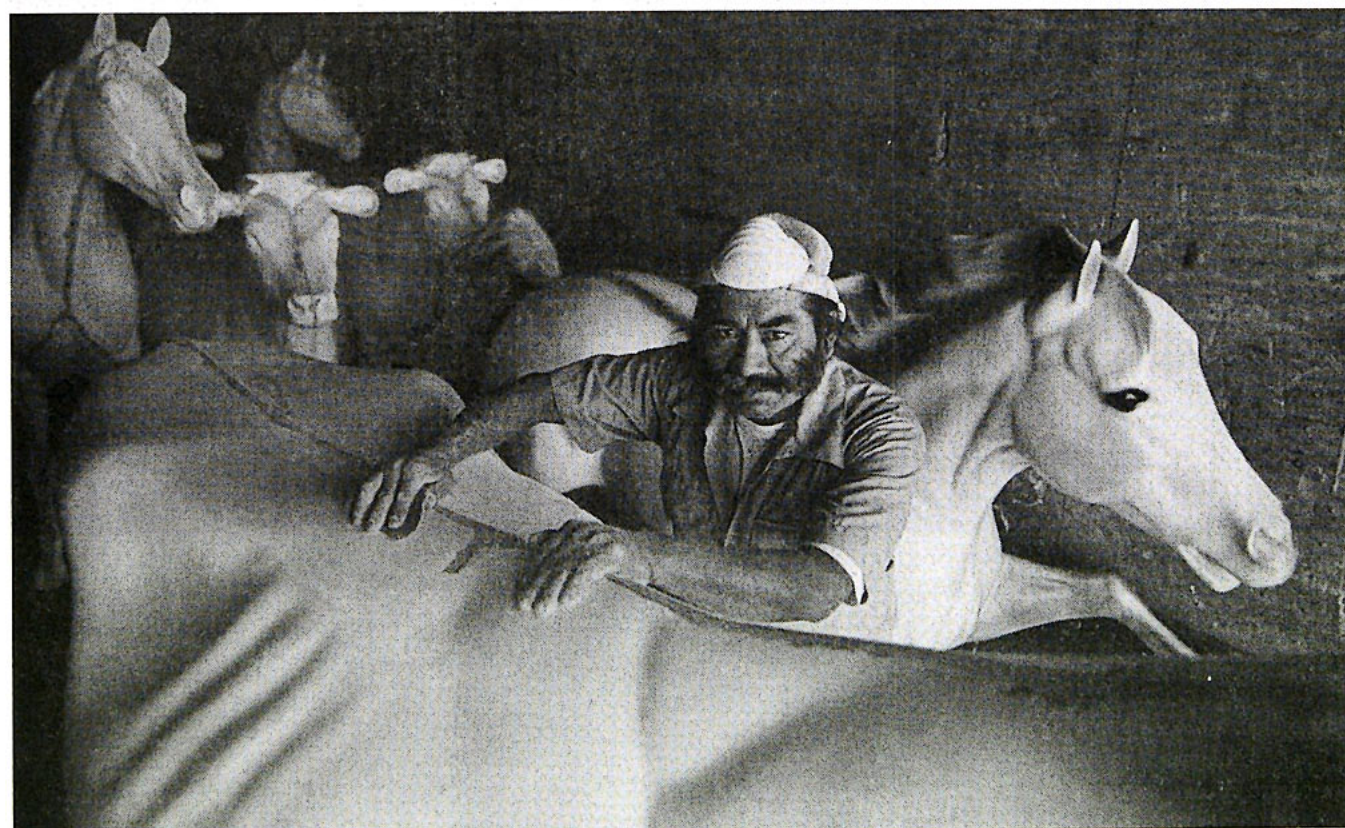


"Tlatelolco, Mexico City, October 2, 1968," Héctor García



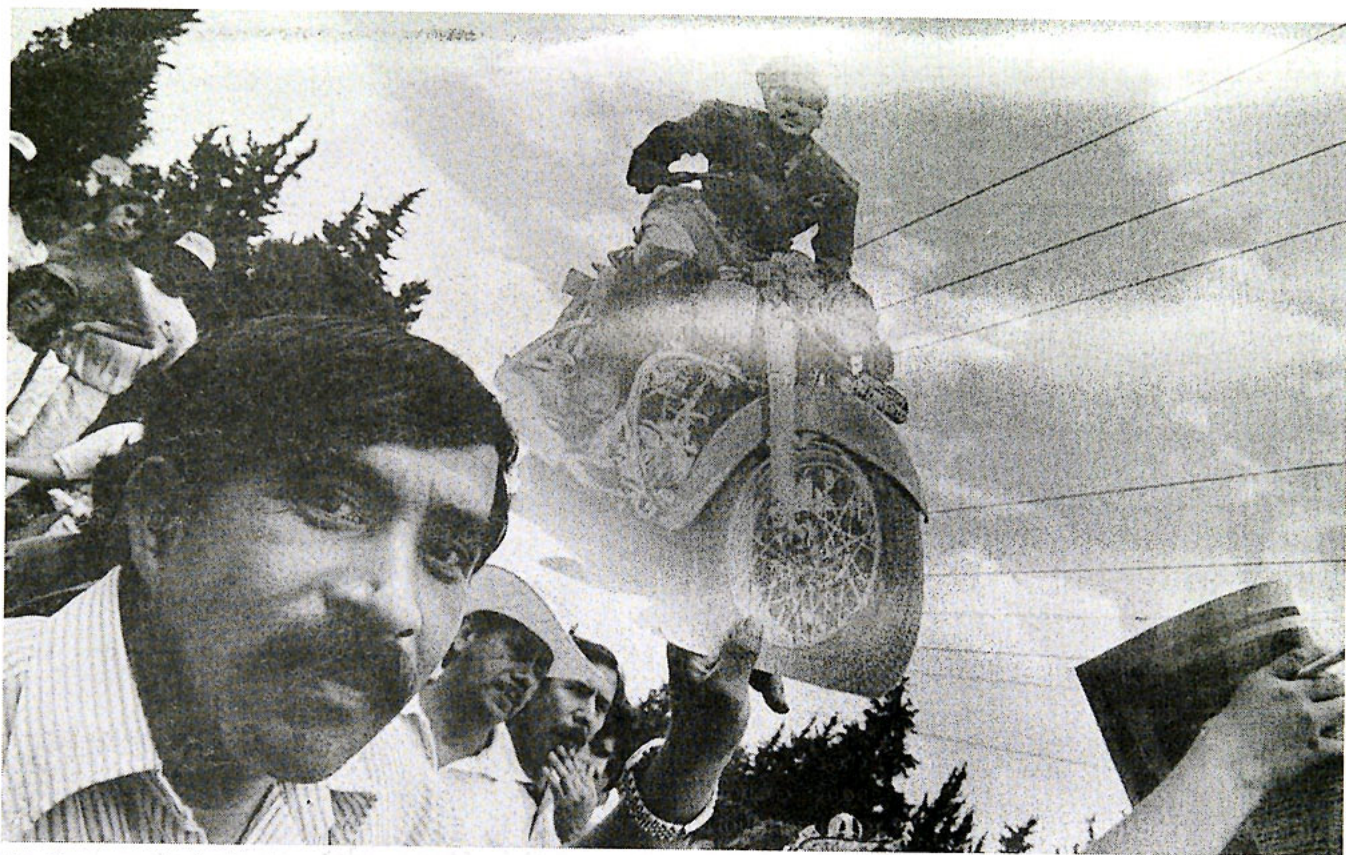
"Morisma de Bracho," Eniac Martínez Ulloa, Zacatecas, Mexico, 2001

Every year in late August, the city of Zacatecas observes a pageant commemorating the battles between the Moors and the Spaniards during the Reconquest of Spain.



"Don Felipe Alvarado y sus caballos," Eniac Martínez Ulloa, San Bernardino, California, 1989

Since 1986, Martínez has been following migrant workers from the impoverished Mixteca region of Oaxaca, and documented changes in the community—both in Oaxaca and in the United States.



"A Pedro con cariño," Yolanda Andrade, Mexico City, 1995
Remembering Pedro Infante, Mexican film star, who died in a plane crash in 1957.



"Semana Santa," Marco Antonio Cruz, Mexico City, 1985
The annual Holy Week pageant in the district of Iztapalapa.



"Monumentos a la Revolución," Rodrigo Moya, Mexico City, 1958

Labor strikes, student protests, and police repression—a precursor to the student movement that culminated in the massacre at Mexico City's Plaza de Tlatelolco in 1968.

—*Violence, continued from page 9*

and how that investigation influenced progressive movements in developing a strategy to chip away at the legitimacy of Jim Crow justice. Bernstein has heroes in this book: Elisabeth Freeman and the progressives, like W. E. B. Du Bois, who supported her.

Carrigan's research provides a more satisfactory answer to questions about how ordinary Wacoans engaged in lynching. While Bernstein sees lynching as exceptional, partly because of its grotesquerie, Carrigan finds lynching to be an inextricable part of the region's history. Go back to the 1830s, he explains, and you'll find that Central Texans were anything but mild-mannered—that they perceived themselves to live on a frontier, without recourse to functioning courts, and deployed extreme violence against those who threatened them. The Washington lynching was hardly the most gruesome, certainly not the last, and unique only for its being photographed in a particular way. Indeed, what happened

to Jesse Washington in Waco in 1916 was more "ordinary" than Bernstein would care to admit. Across the South, as muckraking journalist Ida B. Wells argued repeatedly, the charge that black men raped and killed white women was a fallacy with fatal consequences, violence wrought with the effect of shoring up a particular set of definitions of white manhood.

My ancestors—the Texans and the Georgians—would undoubtedly have been comfortable with the racism behind lynching. Reading these books together substantiates the point that Central Texans defined their "civilization" in racist and sexist ways. But we also know that a "culture of violence" cannot be restricted to one Texas region. Historians of the Texas Borderlands such as David Montejano, Neil Foley, Benjamin Heber Johnson, and James Sandos have documented instances of white extralegal violence against Mexicans, culminating in the

1915 *Plan de San Diego*, a proposed armed uprising of Mexicans in that South Texas town that provoked violent massacres and forced removals of tens of thousands of Mexicans by white authorities. Indeed, Carrigan suggests that Mexicans in South Texas faced a greater threat of lynching than blacks in the Deep South. For East Texas, sociologists James Marquart, Jonathan Sorensen and Sheldon Ekland-Olson have demonstrated the racist vagaries of that region's vigorous support for capital punishment throughout the 20th century. My Texan ancestors would have been a part of all of the processes minutely documented by Carrigan's and Bernstein's fine books. The traumatic effects of lynching reverberate to the present and somehow, in some way, I am still connected to this legacy. ■

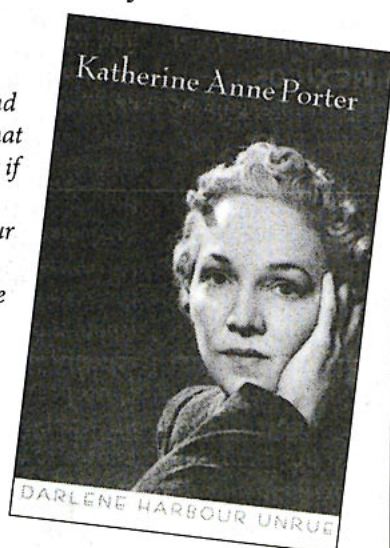
Patrick Timmons is Assistant Professor of Latin American History at Augusta State University in Georgia. He is a 2005 Mexico-North Transnationalism Fellow.

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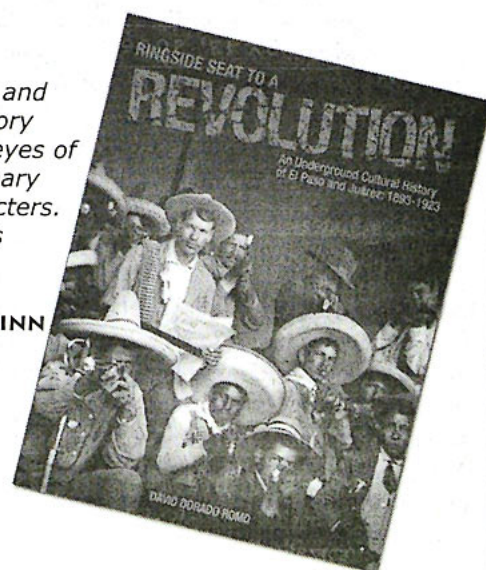
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The Hummingbird's Great-Great Nephew

If there is such a thing as reincarnation, Luis Alberto Urrea predicts, he will be back as Emiliano Zapata. In this lifetime, Urrea was born in Tijuana—"Jewel of the Border, The Great Walled City of the Barbarian Chichimeca Empire"—in 1955. He has lived in San Diego, Los Angeles, Boston, Boulder, Tucson, Lafayette, Chicago, and Sinaloa, Mexico. Currently he is a tenured professor of English at the University of Illinois-Chicago. He is also one of the finest chroniclers of the U.S.-Mexico border—from his nonfiction collection of essays *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border to The Devil's Highway*, his book about a group of 26 immigrants who tried to enter the United States from Sonora, Mexico, in the summer of 2001; 14 of them died of dehydration in the Arizona desert. *Devil's Highway* received an American Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize nomination; production of a film version is scheduled to begin in February. His latest book, *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, is an epic novel about his great aunt Teresita Urrea, a faith healer whose influence touched the Mexican Revolution. Urrea is now working on a sequel. While on book tour last fall, he met with the *Observer*. The following is an excerpt of that conversation:

Texas Observer: *Is la frontera in need of a border brujo to give it a limpia, a cleansing?*

Luis Alberto Urrea: Absolutely. We need somebody, but I don't know anyone who is powerful enough to do the job. The border is accumulating so much bad energy—from Juárez to the killing fields of Arizona. It's heartless and becoming more relentless than when I was growing up as a kid.

TO: *Do you attribute this to one side or both sides?*

LAU: Both sides. When I was hanging out with the Border Patrol for *The Devil's Highway*, they made it very clear to me that they felt there wouldn't be [an immigration] problem if it weren't for the United States giving work to people, drawing them north. They had a realistic political view of what they were doing. It surprised me. But I think if you live in that milieu day in and day out, you know what is going on. The Mexican authorities would tell me the same thing. And so would workers. If there were work in Mexico, if there was some kind of justice, they wouldn't come. They don't want to leave home. But in the process of coming north, the victimization and predation happens.

TO: *Carlos Fuentes recently asked what the United States would do with all the jobs it wouldn't be able to fill if it closed its borders.*

LAU: Well, the United States would be in trouble. Monetary figures speak loudly. The Center for Immigration Studies just released figures that "illegal workers" are putting \$6.4 billion into Social Security that they will never collect. One of the deals with the devil that everybody at the government level has done is turn a blind eye and even encourage it. It's one of the secret formulas that is keeping Social Security afloat.

When I first heard those figures, I didn't believe them. It was a Mexican politician who told me, "Do you know why we're in the U.S.? We're taking care of your retirees. We're keeping Social Security afloat." And I thought, this is propaganda, but then the numbers started coming out, and it turns out to be true.

TO: *On the other side of the border, you have remittances sent to Mexico by these workers.*

LAU: It's \$45 billion to all of Latin America and the Caribbean. But it is

\$17 billion just to Mexico. When I was in Sonora with some of the Mexican immigration cops, we were talking about this. And I asked, what is going to happen? And they said nothing is going to happen to stop this because this is the second-largest source of income to Mexico—petroleum, remittance money, and tourism.

And I asked, what about illegal drugs? And all of the cops looked at each other and started laughing. "Okay, this is the third largest source of income then. First, cocaine and marijuana, then petroleum, and then remittance money or tourism." That's the big secret no one wants to talk about—drug money. I think that what is happening on the level of evil on the border is that the *narcotraficantes'* pattern of criminality is also taking over the *coyotes'* world.

Now, one thing that is hopeful about Mexicans sending money home is that they are now targeting that money to do social engineering that the Mexican government can't or won't do. So you're seeing people with action groups in places like Chicago, where I live, who target their home regions and they are asking that the money be used for infrastructure. You see people—communities—putting in sidewalks, stoplights, rebuilding schools because the *gobierno* won't do it. So they are using that money almost as homegrown foreign policy assistance.

TO: *So if both sides are benefiting from the present situation does that preclude any actual changes occurring on either side?*

LAU: That's why I think on the government level, you'll never see that change. American citizens are panicking. And I always tell people it's no sin to be worried about the security of your nation. People are afraid of terrorists. I think there is a racial component frankly. Some people don't appreciate *mexicanos*.

In my family, we were the first Latinos in our neighborhood. I had never been called greaser before, wetback or taco bender. You look at me—I'm a bubba-looking kid—and they were still calling me those things. So you can imagine people in Arkansas or Iowa with a barrio all of a sudden, and they don't know what to do. Outside of Chicago where I live, Naperville is the whitest town in the world, and there is a Mexican community now. So I think there is a racial component in all this.

TO: From the titles of your border non-fiction, from the first book, *Life on the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* to the more recent *The Devil's Highway*, it appears the situation on *la frontera* has gone from bad to worse. Has this taken a personal toll, burnout?

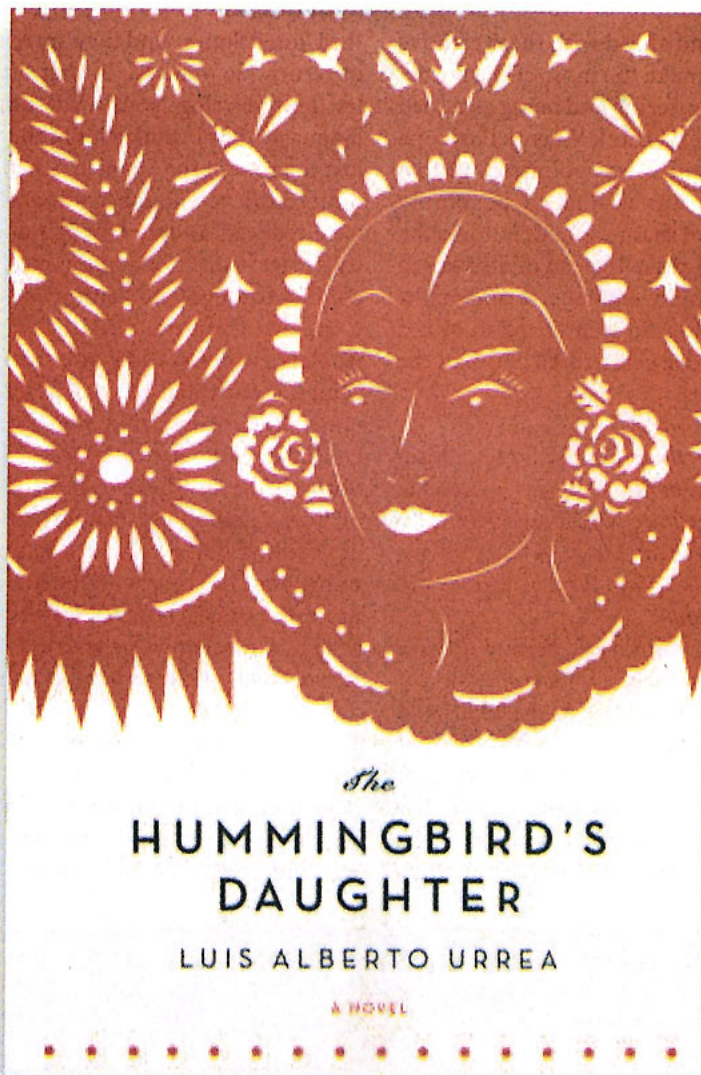
LAU: I told people after *Devil* that I was going to write haiku from now on. You can't focus on that much pain and hopelessness without getting cynical yourself—which I don't want to do. But I also began to see glimmers of hope. When I finished *Devil*, especially, I felt completely hopeless. I was left feeling a humanitarian tragedy that was never going to go away.

[An aspect] of the weirdness of our border policy is that people no longer migrate. They get here and stay because it is too hard to go back and forth. And that is why this remittance money is so big now. It's easier to go to Western Union. And Western Union is making a lot of money every time you wire money. So if they're sending \$45 billion a year, they're getting a share of that; everyone's benefiting.

That's the thing Americans don't understand. It's very easy to point a finger and say, "Look at these people invading your country," while on the other hand, you're making money.

TO: Let's talk about the border itself. It's a place that's *ni aquí ni allá*, neither here nor there.

LAU: [The border] has its culture. It starts in Houston and goes down all the way to Chihuahua City. It is a very wide swath. I grew up in this area in Tijuana—Auntie Jane—but we called it



Tijuanaclán, the Great Walled City of the Barbarian Chichimeca Empire.

Earlier generations in Mexico discounted the border, really didn't like the border. They thought *el norte* wasn't really Mexico; the United States didn't [like it] either. They were embarrassed by it. The border was allowed to just fester. But what it did was it created this active, exciting can-do community.

Look at San Antonio. This is a city that seems to have found a hybrid between the two cultures that works pretty well. I don't know about El Paso, but certainly San Diego, and the area south of it. Chula Vista is a city that has been totally overlooked. People barely even know it exists. It was seen as the poor, ugly stepsister of San Diego, so close to Tijuana, so far from San Diego.

But they realized that there is an immense wave of trade and culture and power in Tijuana and Mexico behind it. So Chula Vista, not being stupid, is building a very elaborate shopping center on *la frontera* with its entrances from Mexico straight into the mall. And they realize they can interdict hundreds of millions of dollars of trade from San Diego. They're building, in cooperation with the Mexican university system, a new campus right on the border. They are also going to have a binational university village. Again, taking hundreds of millions of dollars away from San Diego and taking it back to the border.

It's worth noting that once a forward-thinking community realizes it can work with Mexico you can move

hand in hand ahead with these creative options to make the most of the border instead of suffering and being ashamed of the border. I think Vicente Fox's one stroke of genius was pointing out that the border was a zone of possibility, not a zone of shame, and that it was the future of Mexico. Instead of disowning it, they should embrace it and make the most of it. So what I dream of is a type of border perestroika between the two cultures.

TO: *More than just a geographical marker, the borderland was where the mythical pachuco was born. His influence was seen in Mexican films shown in Spanish-language theaters throughout the borderlands.*

LAU: Well, you know [pachucos] gave birth to *la raza*, *el movimiento*, *chicanismo*. That culture of the 1950s and 1960s degenerated to a certain extent. A lot of my family is *cholos* and *vatos*. But you get in a situation where they feel rejected by Mexico and they reject Mexico. But they also feel rebuffed by

the United States. And they are rebuffed in return. So you stay in that little valley and develop your own amazing language. But I think a lot of the youth lost the root of the Spanish, [then] they didn't achieve enough in English and were reduced to only having slang. But those are transitional moments we're coming through and coming out of.

In the Chicano writing world, a whole new generation of writers has achieved stuff that the old-timers, and even mid-timers, like me, probably couldn't have dreamed of. They've been to the Ivy League now, gone to all these incredible schools. Chicanos are coming out of Alaska who are part indigenous [members of Alaskan native groups], because now we're everywhere. There's a whole new generation of new perspectives. Gay writers can be out and don't have to worry about hiding. They don't have to suffer what [El Paso writer] John Rechy suffered—being kept out of the community. So there is this wave of very prepared, very well educated, very savvy writers. They

represent what's happening with our younger generation.

The media want to focus on the MS-13 gang and gang-bangers, but the fact is we have a wide range of humanity and a whole lot of our people are accomplishing great things. It may have taken an extra generation to stabilize but we're experiencing great success. I always tell people that success is the best revenge. Excellence is the best revenge.

TO: *And for some, repopulating is the best revenge.*

LAU: Yeah, you always hear that *reconquista* argument. When I talk to young kids I always tell them you have to be aware of the way people use language—on you. You're part of a propaganda campaign. So when you hear about illegal immigration, beware. Illegal immigration is not even a criminal act. It is not a misdemeanor. It is a civil infraction. It's civil law. It's akin to getting a speeding ticket. It is not even a misdemeanor crime. So we should take out that term *illegal*. I use it in my book just because it is so irritating that I hope it will irritate the reader too. [At the time this issue went to press, the U.S. House of Representatives had passed legislation that would make illegal immigration a criminal offense; the legislation had not been heard in the Senate.]

And then you have some of the language they use on us: this "browning of America." Doesn't it sound like a detergent commercial? You have something in your underpants you need to wash out? That is not necessarily a complimentary term even if you think it's a euphemism. Think about this: This continent was pretty damn brown before those guys got here. If anything, it has been the whitening of America. This was a brown continent.

TO: *Recent Chicano literature has seen the release of longer novels like Sandra Cisneros' Caramelo, Luis Rodriguez's The Music of the Mill, Ben Alire Sáenz's Carry Me Like Water, and your own book, The Hummingbird's Daughter. But Latin American writers seem to be publishing smaller novels, even novellas.*



Luis Alberto Urrea

photo courtesy of Little, Brown and Co.

LAU: For me, the bulk of my book was dictated by the epic nature of the story. We are the generation who grew up with James Michener and John Steinbeck. Maybe we are going through that tradition of the big American novel. Most of my books had been pretty slender. But there was so much to tell about Teresita that I am doing a sequel, which will also be a fat book. It is dictated by form—by the stories you have to tell.

TO: We have our *Niño Fidencio*, our *Don Jaramillo* and our *Santa Teresita*. What is it with our Chicano latter day, counterculture saints?

LAU: I think it is the same thing with Guadalupe in her day. We need this Mexican sacredness—we need a new world approach. I think it is interesting that Mormonism has been very interesting to Chicanos and *mexicanos* because it offers a new world theology, a new world Christianity. However, our metaphors are different.

One of the *curanderos* I studied with [while researching *Hummingbird*] kept telling me, “You know the missionaries came here and they didn’t understand this continent. And they thought snakes were evil. We didn’t think snakes were evil. They did. So they attributed our belief to some kind of satanic demonic force, whereas the snake was holding the same metaphorical place for me and my tribe as for the Hebrews.”

For me, with Teresita, it’s because it is personal. It is a family story. It is also taking ownership of our history. Learning how to tell our history. I worked on Teresita for 20 years before I could feel that I could write it and do it justice. So I think it is the whole body of work coming to fruition for all of us. I think *Caramelo* is a pretty personal text. And *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* is a personal text for me. Luis’ book [*Music of the Mill*] is a very personal text too. Ben Sáenz and Gary Soto do a lot of poetry and young adult books. We are now everywhere. I don’t know what it means—I think we now have entry into the mainstream, and we will be taken seriously as American authors. I am still seen as a regional writer, but I made my

first foreign sales with this new book.

TO: Our earlier works were marginalized as too regional, while Faulkner, who wrote about a little postage stamp county, was considered universal. It wasn’t until García Márquez started writing about Macondo that a change occurred.

LAU: They didn’t recognize some of the cultural markers. [Chicano writer] Rudy Anaya used to tell me that your personal world is very political. He would come under fire in the old Marxist days of the movement for not being political enough. He told his critics, “What I write is very political. If you can make somebody from another culture think your grandmother is their grandmother, you then teach them something about humanity they hadn’t thought about.” I always took that to heart and I think he is right.

As we move out to a more universal reading public, it’s not a change necessarily in us but in the reading public accepting it. *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*, is a universal book in that it has a connection with anybody—regardless of culture—who has somebody in their recent past who was very connected with the earth even in a tribal way.

I talk about this with my students all

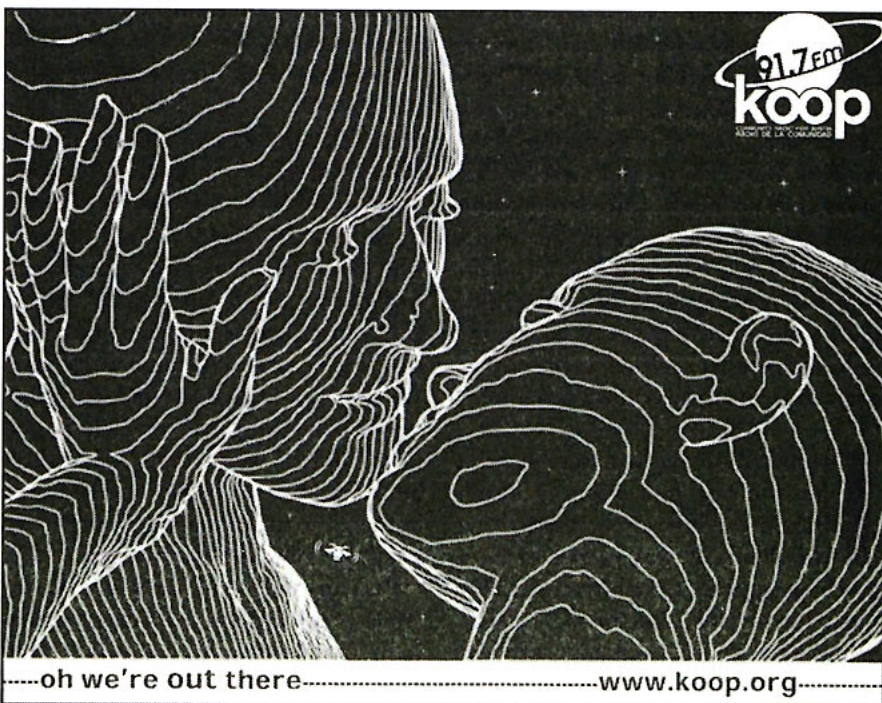
the time. But many say, “We are just white people, we don’t have a culture.” I said that is the strangest thing I ever heard. You have the culture everybody else is ripping off so you better look at it and what you are going to do. And sure enough they had a grandma who healed warts or a grandpa who had a folk remedy. Everyone has a connection to the earth.

TO: That brings us back to healing the border.

LAU: I used to think that the only thing that would be helpful, that the only thing I had to offer, was my art. To that end, we wanted to make a concert on one side of the river with Mexican musicians and gringos on the other side and serenade each other. The only thing that can pass the border without problems is music—art as a symbolic bridge.

I think there is more brotherhood than we understand. We are programmed to think we are in competition. That we are against each other, that we are xenophobes. But the fact is we are often much more accepting of each other and welcoming of each other than we get credit for. ■

Gregg Barrios is a Texas journalist and playwright. He lives in San Antonio.



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Ringside Seat to a Revolution

The following excerpt is adapted from Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923 (Cinco Puntos Press, 2005) by David Romo.

I was raised in both Juárez and El Paso, but I've spent a large part of my life trying to get as far away from both of these cities as possible. If you walk through downtown El Paso after 5 p.m., you'll find that the place is dead. Mostly there's just a lot of loan shark agencies and trinket shops inside neglected old buildings. There's more action in Juárez. But it didn't appeal to me either. There was too much suffering there.

So pretty much from an early age I wanted out. I wanted to go some place where things were happening—where matters of significance occurred. I didn't want to live on the border, on the edge of the world. I wanted a cosmopolitan cultural center, a city with a busy nightlife, museums, bookstores, theaters, lots of history and no Border Patrol. I didn't know back then that the Border Patrol is everywhere. But as soon as I graduated from high school, I split. I spent four years in northern California, two-and-a-half in Jerusalem and five years in Florence.

But something kept drawing me back to this desert, this place that so many consider nothing more than a vast cultural wasteland. My family and friends had a lot to do with me coming back, of course. But there was something else. If geography is destiny, as they say, then I felt I had to come to terms with my own geography.

I've been looking for Pancho Villa for the last four years. I didn't intend to. When I began writing this book, it was meant to be a psychogeography, not a history. In 2001, I was the artistic director of El Paso's Bridge Center for Contemporary Art and had just received a grant to chart

the underground cultural life of El Paso and Juárez. The first rule of psychogeography is to walk through the streets without preconceived notions; just drift and let the city's underground currents take you where they will. The areas that drew me the most at first were the Tex-Mex dives along Alameda Avenue, neglected cemeteries, the Santa Fe International Bridge, the seedy hangouts on Avenida Juárez, and the old buildings around downtown El Paso. Almost everywhere I went, Pancho Villa had been there before me.

I ordered an *elote* and a lemonade near a Korean-owned store on Mesa and Texas Streets where everything costs a dollar. It had once been the Elite Confectionary. Villa and General Pascual Orozco, who headed Madero's troops during the Battle of Juárez, had been there in 1911. Pancho and Pascual didn't like each other very much, but they had posed for Otis Aultman's camera anyway, sitting stiffly next to each other. Pancho, famous for his sweet tooth, had ordered the Elite Baseball, a scoop of chocolate-covered vanilla ice cream, for ten cents. Pascual didn't want anything.

I walked two blocks down from the Elite Confectionary to the First National Bank Building on the corner of Oregon and San Antonio. In 1914 Villa had his Consulado de Mexico there. El Paso Detective Fred Delgado, who moonlighted as Villa's secret agent, worked out of Room 418. When the U.S. recognized Venustiano Carranza in 1915, Pancho Villa shut the consulate down. I looked around the place, maybe something had been left behind. Villa's offices were empty. The whole building was empty. No one had even bothered to at least put up a little sign reading: "Pancho Villa was here."

Pancho Villa had been across the street at the El Paso del Norte Hotel as well. That's where my Latin Jazz band, Fronteras No Más, used to play at the

hotel's Dome Bar every Saturday night for tourists and hip Latinos. Villa didn't like that place too much though. He thought too many *perfumados*—sweet smelling dandies—stayed there, like the Guggenheims (who owned one of the ASARCO smelters Villa threatened to confiscate in Chihuahua), General Pershing, Alvaro Obregón and the Terrazas clan.

He preferred to lodge at the Roma Hotel, on the corner of Paisano and El Paso Street, during his American exile in 1913. It was a more down-to-earth place. Villa and his number one wife Luz Corral stayed there after he escaped from a Mexico City prison. She had a soft spot for El Paso too. Pancho would walk around coddling pigeons in his arms. People thought he was a little eccentric but he told them pigeons were the only thing he could eat, on account of his delicate stomach. The truth was he was using them as homing pigeons, to send messages to his rebel friends in Chihuahua.

Almost every evening, Pancho Villa would walk downstairs to the Emporium Bar, which was also a little strange since Pancho was a teetotaler. He would order nothing but strawberry soda pop, his favorite drink, and hang out with all kinds of characters. One evening, he met with alleged German secret agent Maximilian Kloss at the bar. Apparently, the agent wanted to buy the rights to some submarine bases in Baja California just in case Germany went to war against the United States.

After a few months of walking through the city, I realized my aimless wanderings had transformed themselves into an obsessive, very focused manhunt. I'd somehow entered a zone I couldn't leave. I followed every clue, no matter how insignificant.

I wanted to know about Villa's eating habits: He loved canned asparagus and could eat a pound of peanut brittle at a time.



Pancho Villa, posing with a motorcycle in 1914

photo courtesy of the El Paso Public Library

I wanted to know where his offices and headquarters were: the Mills Building, the Toltec and the First National Bank in El Paso. In Juárez, his headquarters were in the Customs House and on Lerdo Street.

How much money he had in the bank on this side of the line: \$2,000,000.

What kind of jewelry his wife wore to high-toned Sunset Heights tea parties: five diamond rings, a double-chained gold necklace with a gold watch and diamond-studded locket attached, a brooch, a comb set and earrings with brilliants.

Villa's musical tastes: He enjoyed "El Corrido de Tierra Blanca," "La Marcha de Zacatecas," "La Adelita," and "La Cucaracha."

Pancho Villa took me to places where I never expected to go—I traveled throughout the United States and Mexico. But although Villa is everywhere in this book, it's ultimately not about him. He's merely my tour guide. Instead *Ringside Seat to a Revolution* is about an offbeat collection of indi-

viduals who were in El Paso and Juárez during the revolution. Many crossed Pancho Villa's path at one time or another. More often than not, they were both spectators and active participants during one of the most fascinating periods in the area's history.

This book is about insurrection from the point of view of those who official historians have considered peripheral to the main events—military band musicians who played Verdi operas during executions in Juárez; filmmakers who came to the border to make silent flicks called *The Greaser's Revenge* and *Guns and Greasers*; female bullfighters; anarchists; poets; secret service agents whose job it was to hang out in every bar on both sides of the line; jazz musicians on Avenida Juárez during Prohibition when Villa tried to capture Juárez for a third time; spies with Graflexes; Anglo pool hustlers reborn as postcard salesmen; Chinese illegal aliens; radical feminists; arms smugglers; and, of course, revolutionaries, counterrevolutionaries and counter-

counterrevolutionaries. *Ringside Seat to a Revolution* deals not so much with history as it does with microhistory. A surprisingly large number of the events related to the Mexican Revolution took place within a five-square-mile area between downtown El Paso and the Juárez customhouse.

Microhistory at its best is more about small gestures and unexpected details than grand explanations. It's a method of study that focuses more on the mysterious and the poetic than on the schematic. It's like prospecting for gold or exploring underground mazes—those honeycombed tunnels underneath Oregon Street in El Paso's Chinatown that the U.S. customs officials raided during the turn of the century. Elderly Chinese immigrants opened secret doors for them. In one underground chamber the border agents found cans of opium; in another, they found a young man playing an exotic stringed instrument the American officials had never heard before.

Several excellent historical works

about the Mexican Revolution on the border served as my guides. But the one historian who is perhaps the most responsible for getting me to write about my own city is Leon Metz. I've run into him a few times at historical conferences. The former law enforcement officer turned historian is an amiable man. He looks a little like John Wayne and a little like Jeff Bridges. Everybody likes Leon Metz. He's almost as popular as the UTEP football coach. His books sell very well too. If you go to the history section at any Barnes & Noble in El Paso you probably won't find any of the books that served as my guides to the revolution. But you're likely to find more than a dozen books written by Leon Metz about local gunfighters, sheriffs and Texas Rangers—John Wesley Hardin, Pat Garrett, John Selman and Dallas Stoudenmire. Occasionally Metz writes about the Mexican Revolution too from that Wild, Wild West cowboy perspective of his.

Let me give you an example. In *Turning Points of El Paso, Texas*, he is highly critical of the revolutionary Spanish-language newspapers that flourished in South El Paso around the turn of the century. Metz—who doesn't read or speak Spanish—denounces many of them as badly written “hand-bills” full of “emotional, oftentimes hysterical overtones” whose content “sounded impressive only to other social-anarchists.” He expresses displeasure with these publications that “frequently denounced the United States (which protected their right to publish) as savagely as they did Díaz.” One of those anarchistic newspapers he mentions is *Regeneración*, which Metz claims was published out of the Caples Building in El Paso by Ricardo Flores Magón. (I'm not sure how Magón—who established his headquarters in El Paso in 1906—could have published his newspaper out of the Caples Building. The Caples wasn't constructed until 1909.) The Old West historian describes Magón as a friend of “bomb-throwers,” a man with “enough real and imagined grievances to warrant psychotherapy for a dozen unhappy zealots.”

Ay, ay, ay! Talk about bomb-throwers.

Them's fightin' words, as the Hollywood gunslingers used to say. They're the kind of outrageous distortions that would spur any self-respecting microhistorian worth the name to reach for his laptop and write his own version of the past. Which I did.

But I guess I shouldn't be too irritated by Metz' take on things. Historians are like the blind men who touched different parts of the elephant and thought it was either a wall, a snake, a tree trunk or a rope, depending on what they touched. We all have our biases and our limited viewpoints. It all depends on where we stand. Microhistorians, I think, are just a little more honest about it. We tend to believe that there is no such thing as a definitive History—only a series of microhistories.

El Paso probably had more Spanish-language newspapers per capita during the turn of the century than any other city in the United States. Between 1890 and 1925, there were more than 40 Spanish-language newspapers published in El Paso. They provided a counternarrative of the border not found in the mainstream press on either side of the line. The periodicals printed not only news and political manifestoes but serial novels, poetry, essays and other literary works. The cultural milieu created by a large inflow of political refugees and exiles—which included some of Mexico's best journalists and writers—set the stage for a renaissance of Spanish-language journalism and literature never before seen in the history of the border. The first novel of the revolution, *Los de Abajo*, was published in serial form in 1915 in the Spanish-language daily, *El Paso del Norte*. Mariano Azuela, a former Villista doctor, wrote it while he lived in the Segundo Barrio.

Yet politics was indeed most of these publications' bread and butter. Because they were published on the American side of the border, the Spanish-language press could be aggressively anti-Díaz. Many publications were openly revolutionary. Victor L. Ochoa, the

first El Pasoan to launch a rebellion against the government of Porfirio Díaz in 1893, was the editor of *El Hispano Americano*. In 1896, Teresita Urrea was listed as the coeditor with Lauro Aguirre of *El Independiente*. She had moved to El Paso that year and was already called the “Mexican Joan of Arc” because of the various uprisings her name had inspired throughout northern Mexico. In 1907, Aguirre's press also printed *La Voz de la Mujer*. It was a fiery, aggressive weekly, which called itself “El Semanario de Combate,” written and edited by women who had no qualms about denouncing their political enemies as “eunuchs” and “castrados” (castrated men). The anarchist Práxedes Guerrero—who coined the phrase that is often attributed to Emiliano Zapata, “It is better to die on your feet, than to live on your knees,”—published *Punto Rojo* out of El Paso in 1909. Silvestre Terrazas, the black sheep of the Chihuahuan oligarchic family who at one time helped smuggle weapons for Pancho Villa from El Paso, published *La Patria* between 1919 and 1924. It was one of the more successful Spanish language papers in the border city. Silvestre Terrazas had been sued 150 times, imprisoned 12 and had received a death sentence under the government of Porfirio Díaz for his writings. In México, Díaz imprisoned Ricardo Flores Magón various times as well. Each time Magón and his fellow radicals got out of Mexican prison, they would stubbornly republish their old newspaper under a different name—first as *El Ahuizote*, then *El Hijo del Ahuizote* (The Ahuizote's Son), *El Nieto del Ahuizote* (The Ahuizote's Grandson), *El Bisnieto del Ahuizote* (The Ahuizote's Great-Grandson) and *El Tataranieto del Ahuizote* (The Ahuizote's Great-Great Grandson.)

Things were somewhat better for journalists in El Paso. But that's not to say that the U.S. was a paradise for free speech either, as Leon Metz would have us believe. Spanish-language editors were frequently harassed, censored, and imprisoned by the American authorities for what they wrote. Flores Magón was sued and arrested several times

in the U.S. for his articles. Ultimately, censorship ended up being more severe for him north of the border than south of it. He died in an American prison in the 1920s while serving a 20-year sentence for questioning, in one of his publications, the needless loss of life of American soldiers during World War I.

Spanish-language newspapers were suppressed on numerous occasions in El Paso during the revolution. In March 1916, Mayor Tom Lea, Sr., ordered the suspension of four "Mexican dailies" published in the city: *El Rio Bravo*, *La Justicia*, *Mexico Nuevo* and *El Paso del Norte*. Their crime was to report on and give their own version of Pancho Villa's raid of Columbus a few days before. The editor of *El Paso del Norte*, Fernando Gamiochipi, a resident of the American border city for 14 years, was thrown in jail for having written "something of a political nature."

That same month, the El Paso City Council passed an emergency ordinance which stated:

It shall be unlawful for any persons within the city of El Paso to transmit for the purpose of publication any report about the conditions existing in the city of El Paso which would be calculated to injure the general business or reputation of the city of El Paso.

Newspaper reporters who wrote negative articles about the city that the authorities deemed false were to be "punished with a fine of not less than \$25 nor more than \$200."

In June 1919, the editor and business manager of El Paso's *La Republica* were arrested for failing to provide an English translation of their newspaper. They were subsequently deported to Mexico.

Despite this kind of repression, the proliferation of radical journalism in El Paso helps explain why the border city was such a hotbed of insurrection. On the border, journalist and revolutionary were often synonymous. Journalists planted the ideological seeds of rebellion. They held secret meetings in their newspaper offices. They were the first

to call for armed uprising. They drafted the insurrection's blueprints. And usually, the *periodistas* were also the first to take up arms themselves. Yet these *fronterizo* journalists were more than mere agitators. Many lived lives full of unexpected twists and turns; they were often revolutionary beyond just the political sense of the term.

Despite being listed as coeditor of *El Independiente*, Teresita Urrea was not exactly a journalist. She also never publicly called herself a revolutionary. Yet she inspired journalists and revolutionaries in El Paso for many years to come. In many ways, the revolution on the border began with her.

A woman of many contradictions, she defied all the reigning stereotypes of a 19th-century mexicana. She was the illegitimate daughter of a rich Sonoran *hacendado*, Don Tomás Urrea. Her mother, Cayetana Chávez, was a poor Tahueco—part Cahita, part Tarahumara Indian—woman who had once been employed as Don Tomás' maid. Don Tomás impregnated Cayetana when she was 14 years-old.

Teresita dedicated her life to healing the poor. She had been a healer since her early adolescence. While at her father's ranch, Teresita had been the apprentice of a Yaqui curandera named Huila. From her, Teresita learned the medicinal uses of more than 200 herbs and folk remedies, many of which are still used among the Indian communities along Mexico's northern border today. One observer claimed that more than 200,000 people had visited her home in Rancho Cabora, Sonora; she had healed 50,000 of them. Most of them couldn't afford a physician. Yet she intermingled comfortably with high society on both sides of the border although she had practically no formal schooling.

The Catholic church considered her a heretic, and the Mexican government considered her a dangerous subversive. She was opposed to the spilling of blood, yet the rallying cry "Viva Santa Teresa" was heard during several uprisings throughout northern Mexico.

According to a Mexican official quoted by the *New York Times*, Teresita was responsible for the death of more than 1,000 people killed during those uprisings. At 19, Teresita was forced into exile by President Porfirio Díaz.

She first crossed the border in Nogales, Arizona, in 1892, the year that the soldiers of Porfirio Díaz massacred and burned down the entire village of Tomóchic, a Chihuahuan village about 200 miles south of El Paso. Four years later Teresita Urrea passed through El Paso like a comet—a heavenly portent that shone brightly for a brief period then vanished.

In March 1896, hundreds gathered at the Union Depot train station to wait for the 22-year-old miracle worker known on both sides of the line as "Santa Teresa." "But the young lady," the *El Paso Evening Telegraph* reported, "did not come." When she finally did arrive on June 13, 1896, about 3,000 pilgrims camped outside her new home on the corner of Overland and Campbell Streets. They had traveled by foot, wagon and train from all over the U.S.-Mexico border.

Soon the *El Paso Herald* was comparing her to Jesus Christ. "El Paso has the distinction of having a live saint within its borders. It is understood that she has commenced her work of healing, but here comes the rub. Strange as it may seem, dominant religions never welcome one that comes to do good in individual lives. The Nazarene had the experience, and Santa Teresa will find that she is no exception to this rule," the evening newspaper predicted.

The *El Paso Herald's* prophecies weren't far off the mark. Within a year, Teresita would suffer three assassination attempts and be forced to leave the city in search of safer grounds.

The El Paso that Teresita passed through in 1896 was a booming border town. Railroad lines from the four cardinal directions—connecting it to Mexico City, Santa Fe, Los Angeles and San Antonio—had transformed the town into the main gateway between the United States and Mexico and a major center for smelting, cattle, mining and

—continued on page 37

Truth of the Matter

BY DEBBIE NATHAN

Trail of Feathers: Searching for Phil True. A Reporter's Murder in Mexico and His Editor's Search for Justice

by Robert Rivard

Public Affairs

400 pages, \$27.50

In 1998 Phil True, a good-looking, hippie-ish foreign correspondent for the *San Antonio Express-News*, vanished while backpacking alone in the Sierra Madre Occidental north of Guadalajara. This is one of Mexico's wildest, most isolated regions, and if it hadn't been for *Express-News* editor Robert Rivard's search after True went missing, evidence suggesting he'd been murdered might never have been found. True's body was located after Rivard enlisted Mexican politicians and military forces to take him into the Sierra. There he personally helped dig True out of a shallow grave. With his own hands, he touched his reporter's rotting corpse. Hours later, he was in the autopsy room when a coroner determined that the cause of death was homicide.

Few would be able to walk away from such an experience, and Rivard vowed to find the culprits and bring them to justice. Starting just after the murder and continuing for years, he used his power as a Hearst Corp. newspaper editor to exert pressure. He pushed the Mexican government to send soldiers to flush out suspects—who turned out to be two members of the Huichols, a destitute, indigenous group native to the Sierra. They confessed to the crime, but no clear motive was ever established. When the accused Indians were acquitted, convicted, and acquitted again during various legal proceedings and appeals, Rivard continued to press for a guilty verdict. After five years the Huichols were convicted once and for all, though today they're still at large,

presumably in the mountains. Rivard is still offering reward money to nab them: money he's advertised by dropping flyers from airplanes, and by distributing to destitute Huichol children basketballs emblazoned with the logo of the San Antonio Spurs.

All this is recounted in *Trail of Feathers*, which takes its title from the goosedown that seeped from True's ripped sleeping bag as the killers dragged his enshrouded body while searching for a burial place. Hansel-and-Gretel-like, the feathers led Rivard to the site. The feather image has mythic appeal and Rivard provides a protagonist with a mythical, tragic flaw: True's supposed compulsion to go into the wild by himself, even if doing so proved irredeemably dangerous.

Where did this need come from? Three places, according to *Feathers*. One was True's working-class background: When he was young, his father had operated a gas station. That upbringing gave him a yen for leaving the beaten track to report on underdogs—including poor, marginalized Mexicans like the Huichols. More important was his longtime failure to settle down as a responsible adult. Until a few years before he died, at age 50, True had led an "unfulfilled" life, according to Rivard. He'd been a '60s-era campus radical and later a union organizer and college degree-holder who chose wallpaper hanging over white-collar work. He'd attended Marxist study groups in the home of socialist-feminist Barbara Ehrenreich. He'd harbored a Marxist aversion to marriage. His wardrobe invariably consisted of blue jeans and huaraches.

But by the time he hiked into the Sierra, True had become an *Express-News* reporter with a wife, and a baby was on the way. According to Rivard, his trip to the mountains was "the last solo trek in a lifelong journey to leave behind" his pre-newspaper past, "a final walk before embracing his future." That

future included monogamy, fatherhood, and—Rivard implies—a nose-to-the-grindstone loyalty to the paper that presumably would lead True to trade his Levis and sandals for Dockers and sensible shoes.

Why had he waited so long to get with the program? More to the point, why had he left his five-months pregnant wife at home in Mexico City to venture into the hostile Sierra? And why by himself, with no one to watch his back?

According to Rivard, these questions are answered by the third, and most salient, factor in True's life: his rotten childhood. *Feathers'* entire first section consists of extraordinarily sleazy dirt that Rivard unearthed about True's family posthumously. His father was a closet bisexual who photographed himself fooling around with men and who molested Philip's younger sister. The elder True was eventually kicked out of the house; Mrs. True divorced him, then remarried and divorced a string of losers. Years later, we are informed, Philip went to therapy and recovered "memories" (whose truth he apparently didn't question, and neither does Rivard) of himself having been molested: by his mother.

That's why Philip True marched against the war in Vietnam, knocked around the hemisphere on a bicycle, backpacked in the wilderness, hung around Central America in solidarity with revolutionaries during the 1980s, and otherwise rejected the usual trappings of corporate, yuppie U.S. life. (Never mind that millions of young people his age all over the world did these same lefty and artsy things.) Furthermore, explains Rivard, it was psychological damage that kept True so long from journalism. His first mainstream reporting job didn't come until his early forties, when he got hired at the border-rat *Brownsville Herald*. Later, after moving to the more prestigious *Express-News*, he was skeptical of "anyone in power, in government, and even

at his own newspaper"; meanwhile, his clothing was "hardly the uniform of a professional." As Mexico correspondent, he "was not interested in the latest Wal-Mart opening, the growing use of cell phones ... or ... the increasingly active and growing Mexican stock exchange." He preferred reporting from places like Jalisco and Chiapas, where he could write about grassroots people fighting their government's labyrinthine corruption and intrigue. On his periodic trips to HQ in San Antonio, he disliked the institutionalization and politics of the newsroom. They had a name for him in the home office: "Agent True."

I was working at *The Current*, San Antonio's "weekly alternative," when the news hit about True's murder. At first, the *Express-News* intimated that True had been killed in the line of duty, while on assignment to do a story about the Huichol Indians. According to an editor's note published on the newspaper's website, when he died, True "was doing two things he loved: hiking through territory new to him, and pursuing what he knew to be a significant story." Citing it as an example of his dedication and journalistic excellence, the paper published the story proposal that True had submitted months earlier. "A day near a Huichol community is marked by the nearly constant sound of children laughing and playing," he had written in March 1998. "This kind of joy gives them a certain integrity in their being that allows them to welcome in strangers."

True was an amazingly prolific reporter who had won accolades from other publications for his insightful writing about Mexico's socio-economic nooks and crannies. But the language of his proposal was dangerously romantic. It read like the ideations of a gringo Mexicanophile on Valium and headed for trouble. Yet the paper described it as "a classic" that showed "the intensity of [True's] feelings for the Huichol Indians and his enthusiasm for this story."

The *Express-News* later admitted that the proposal had never been accepted. Nonetheless, True had decided to use his vacation time to visit the Sierra and

HE PREFERRED REPORTING ... ABOUT GRASSROOTS PEOPLE FIGHTING THEIR GOVERNMENT'S LABYRINTHINE OF CORRUPTION AND INTRIGUE.

submit the article later without the paper's previously having committed to publish it.

Shortly after the murder story broke, I looked up an anthropologist who'd spent two decades among the Huichols. "True went to their territory alone?" he said incredulously, then noted that the Indians were neither joyful nor welcoming to strangers. On the contrary, they were roiling with anger at being exploited and harassed by peyote-seeking, Carlos-Castañeda-inspired tourists, abusive Mexican soldiers, and an influx of mestizos who were terrorizing them in order to chop down their forests for profit. Here's how bad it was, said the anthropologist: Even though he was a Huichol-approved holy man who'd come and gone freely for years, lately he no longer dared enter the Sierra unless he carried written authorization from community elders and was accompanied by a Huichol guide. If Indians really had killed True, he surmised, they'd done it because he'd come on their land without permission. As well, maybe he'd taken photographs. "That's also taboo. It's serious."

Trail of Feathers would have you believe True was in la-la land and divorced from critical thought processes because he was bidding farewell to the demons of his youth. I think it's likely that instead, he was grappling with a demon of his adulthood: the *Express-News*. Rivard tells us that True was ready to come out of the Sierra and into Oxford shirts and 401(k)s. But he also says that True was making plans for a "showdown" with the home office; he felt that his work was being marginalized. Rivard admits that by 1998, "Mexico simply wasn't generating the kind of headlines it did

when the [Zapatista] guerrilla uprising first broke out four years earlier or when the free trade agreement was signed in the early 1990s." If it wasn't green or it didn't bleed, it didn't lead. True was thus understandably angry at the "decline in front-page play of Mexico and border stories. The clique of bilingual reporters in the San Antonio newsroom ... shared his view."

True was so pissed that in late November 1998, just days before he left for the Sierra, he sent the managing editor and several other editors an e-mail challenging their news judgment. "[I]t seems that the paper's Mexico news hole is closer to page nineteen than page one," he complained. "Thoughtful and provocative project ideas go without response ... little interest is evidenced in longer pieces ... What is wrong with this picture?"

At the end of his e-mail, he mentioned his plan to visit the San Antonio office in December to take up these questions. According to Rivard, all the message did was irritate True's superiors. As for Rivard, he was completely removed from the discussion. Further, "No one ever brought [True's Huichol story] proposal to my attention," he writes. Nor did subordinate editors tell him about True's plans to go into the Sierra solo.

Rivard is known as a smart, charming guy who likes to curry a public image as a respecter of great journalism. Right around the time True died, he was talking about spending whatever money it took to hire good people for the *Express-News*. He assembled a stable of middle-aged reporters and columnists with varied, often bohemian

—continued on page 32

Elegy for the Living

BY CARRIE FOUNTAIN

Pity the Drowned Horses

by Sheryl Luna

University of Notre Dame Press

72 pages, \$15

Reading *Pity the Drowned Horses*, the debut collection of poems from El Paso native Sheryl Luna, I had the uncomfortable sensation I was reading an elegy to something that hasn't quite died yet. Certainly there's a weighty mournfulness to Luna's borderlands, where the stark poverty of Mexico butts against the brash, unyielding sprawl of her American city. Yet things remain unsettled. A grave precariousness hangs over these poems. Bones empty, but don't break. The river, long expired as a metaphor, refuses to die. The El Paso Luna writes about is alive yet wasted, fraught with contradictions, full of wounds and absences. *Pity the Drowned Horses* takes its reader across a ravaged landscape where "...the last few hares sprint across a bloodied/highway" and "there are women everywhere/who have half-lost their souls/in sewing needles and vacuum-cleaner parts." In this world of little comfort, Luna is intent on seeking meaning—however bitter—in the emptiness and meditating on the redeeming power of language. Amidst sadness and poverty, we discover the poet singing, Whitmanesque, holding tight to a smart and stubborn hope that:

*if I sing long enough, I'll grow
dreamlike
and find a flock of pigeons, white
under
wings lifting awkward bodies like
doves
across the silky blue-white sky.*

What's most remarkable in the most

successful of these poems is Luna's ease with her subjects, her ability to capture moments of great weight with a relative simplicity of phrasing. She's good at this kind of poetic maneuver: By maintaining an unimpressed, seen-it-all gaze, she captures the true depth of an exchange, or a silence. Luna imbues her poems with muted tragedy, as in this, the first stanza of "Organ Failure":

*When my grandfather drew his last
breath
he turned to my mother's pink face,
her beehive
prom-hair. He whispered fire,
"There's no such thing
as a friend mijita." His heart then
gave out.*

As well, many of her images achieve a similarly subdued, local magnificence:

*Roosters
pranced across a lawn of shit,
proudly plumed
in black feathers, bobbing before the
gray goats.*

Is it just me, or is there something of William Carlos Williams' white chickens to be conjured up in this fine image, and in the syntax Luna uses to unwind it? I get the sense Luna is cleverly turning Williams' pastoral image on its head. She finds her beauty among dung-covered roosters, and seems to be asking coyly: How much depends on these roosters, covered in feces, beside the gray goats? This unwaveringly exalted view of common, even rotten, things pervades the collection. Luna sings of "the cadence of bees around garbage cans," describes love appearing as "a shot of piss/against the night."

Throughout, Luna juxtaposes the high and the low, and explores other complications, such as the human tendency to feel deeply while, at the same time, recoiling from pain and suffering, our desire to navigate the world

with a working moral compass, even as we succumb to apathy, self-pity, rage, vengefulness, and other human weaknesses. In the luminous last lines of the collection's title poem, Luna snags this thread with great success:

*The moon waltzes with the veil
of night clouds and finally water
gushes and the tree's roots drink
the last waters, the first waters, holy
waters brought down from sky,
and you still may think of Moses and
mist like you did when you
were twelve, and may still imagine
god's waters crashing down
on the heads of your enemies, yet
pity the drowned horses.*

While one of her main objectives seems to be to prove the redemptive power of language—"singing" as she's fond of calling it—Luna's own language sometimes fails to lift off. She's lax in her use of wieldy words like "rage" and "loss" and "beauty." Images of bones and blood and blue mountains begin to run together, and their powers diminish rather than accumulate. Flimsily constructed sentences, rather than adding to the rhythm, are jarring and imprecise. I found myself hung up on fragments such as those that begin "Sonata on Original Sin":

*It was all gone: memory, time, trees.
The sea an imagined. Music
a fog, and although unwhole,
I'm quiet night. No red cauldron,
no lightening eye, no quick Jesus.*

Furthermore, Luna has a tendency to restate certain sentiments within a poem, and in doing so lessens their power. In "Pity the Drowned Horses" the speaker is watering plants:

*The stars hum still & blessed. You
carry the cracked hose
to water the drying tree, & the dead
grass sings a silent hymn,*

*the water's dribble makes you
want to cry, not because the
pipes
are dry like your grandmother's
bones, but because the sky
is still, yet moves like the night
you turned seven.*

This is a lovely set of lines: precise and surprising in syntax. However, Luna undoes the power of these lines with the next couple, which only restate the action and overstate the sentiment:

*Here,
the dry garden hose brings tears
to your eyes, and you weep
your insignificance.*

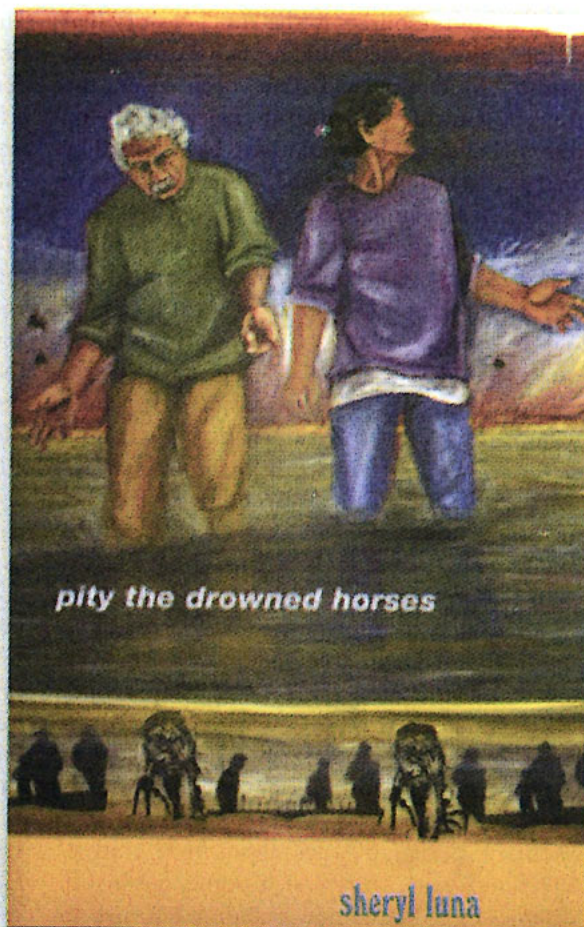
In another poem, "Bayou Trolling," Luna's speaker finds that, after an afternoon trolling the bayou with colorful new friends, her spirits have been lifted, her self renewed. I found myself startled and moved by the last stanza on the page:

*"You're a tough woman." I
should've kissed him after I
jumped
off his boat and later returned to New
Orleans, where a silver-painted
mime strewn in Mardi Gras beads
stood, a statue, winking.
"I see you," the white-faced jester
sang.*

And so I was disappointed when, turning the page, I found the poem continued for two more stanzas, soupy with poetic language, and ending with an overwrought sentiment:

*We are all of such shine,
brandy in the open throat or the
moving white-eyes of a mime
performing. Our word-wounds heal,
burn, as fresh water
meets the salt and magnolias weep
light.*

Luna's linguistic powers are most keen when she resists the inclination to let loose a deluge of language. Her poetic



leaps are best made in poems that are well grounded in time and space. The dazzling short poem "Two Girls from Juárez" begins in just this way:

*Two girls from Juárez hesitantly step
toward my desk.
"Ms.," one says with a paperback of
Plath's Ariel,
corners folded and coffee stained.
"Was she white
or black?"*

Here we find Luna's voice sharpened by restraint. In its neatness of syntax and casual twist of narrative, the poem swings its door open wide. The two students, having read "Daddy," accuse Plath of being prejudiced. Luna's speaker thinks to herself:

*a black man bites a woman's heart,
and all the wit
and the wordplay between darkness
and light shrugs.*

At a loss for an answer, conflicted, the speaker turns swiftly, surprisingly away from the self, to a careful description of the girls:

*One wears an electronic
bracelet around her ankle.
The other's cheeks are red
with too much rouge.
I imagine they live nights
dangerously
in an Oldsmobile near the
Rio Grande,
that they love for real and
they love for love.*

The poem ends with subtle power, with the speaker admitting:

*I lost answers
long ago and the faces of my
colleagues grew ghost-like
and words fell away and the
poetry cancer came
like a priest for the sacrifice.*

Undoubtedly, the best of Luna's poems create this kind of complicated and unresolved tension. Unnervingly, Luna's powers lie in creating landscapes—internal and external—filled with this precariousness, this conflict, where the tables are constantly being turned, and where her reader is forced into uncomfortable contact with a wild, frightening, humanity. ■

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—*Trail*, continued from page 29

careers like True's and stellar writing reputations. Within a few years most had left on their own or been fired.

Like so many mainstream editors these days, Rivard keeps his eyes sharp on the corporate bottom line and the extent to which the contents of the news hole advance that line—or not. "If you are going to be an editor in today's newspaper world," he told a national media conference not long ago, "you have to not only be a journalist, but you have to have a fluency in the language of the business side. We came to this calling because we're people of words, but, in fact, the wars for good newspaper budgets are fought over spreadsheets and numbers."

Obsessive market research is an important component of those numbers, as corporate media outlets continually poll the public about what they like and don't like. Anything deemed unpopular tends to get dropped from coverage—and in most surveys, international news comes in at the bottom. This was especially true in the 1990s, when foreign reporting virtually disappeared from TV and many newspapers. That's when True's Huichol proposal was turned down.

Imagine if, instead, an editor had appreciated his pitch. That editor would have looked at True's flaky descriptions of joyful Indians and known enough about Latin America to see a real story. It's the one described by the anthropologist, and it really is about Mexicans—even Huichols—having their lives turned around by "newsworthy" things like free trade and political change. (More neo-liberal democracy means more tourism and more of those rich, peyote-seeking tourists. Opening markets for export of raw materials means more deforestation of the Sierra, as does the pervasive drug trade.)

An editor who appreciated True's work would have okayed the story after helping him retool the proposal and contact the anthropologists. Is that asking too much of the mainstream media? Maybe so. Ironically, however, in his pursuit of the story of True's death, Rivard ended up devoting time

and resources to the Huichol story that his reporter could never have imagined. Moreover, had True been given the Huichol assignment instead of being ignored, he would have been joined by a staff photographer. When working in a foreign country, Rivard writes, "one rule is that there is strength in numbers. ... People with bad intentions are less likely to act against a pair or groups than an unwary individual." Had True gone to the Sierra with a photographer, it's likely that they would have kept their journalists' wits about them, obtained all the required permits from the leaders of each Huichol community, and True would still be alive. Instead, he seems to have ended up thinking of the trip as a retreat. Thanks to former *Newsweek* correspondent Alan Zarembo, True's journal was later found in a Guadalajara police warehouse. The journal contained virtually no reporter's notes; instead it was filled with love letters to his wife.

So what about that trail of feathers? It points not just to human remains, but also to the heart of Robert Rivard, who seems to feel guilty about how True got treated on his watch. Unfortunately, he responded with a tawdry, pop-psychology number on True's past, while at the same time claiming that he and True were kindred spirits in bohemianism and suffering.

Rivard tells his readers that he was a blue-collar kid like True. Indeed, both were reporters in Brownsville; both worked south of the border early in their journalism careers. But True didn't get his first real reporting job until he was in his 40s. Rivard had entered the corporate media world while still in his 20s. Not only do the parallels not hold up, Rivard's attempts to commune therapeutically with the dead reporter—by casting himself as a fellow casualty of bad parenting—ring embarrassingly false. (When he misbehaved as a child in the 1950s, he writes, his mother whipped him and sent him to his room.)

Feathers serves mainly as an attempt to aggrandize Rivard professionally.

The book narrates tale after tale of his besuited meetings with Mexican presidents and luminaries, and his extensive efforts to have True honored by media organizations as a martyr to journalism. (According to the New York City-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Mexico is indeed one of the world's most dangerous countries for reporters, editors and commentators. Besides True, CPJ counts at least 11 victims in the past decade. Except for True, all of the victims were Mexican journalists. Most of their murders seem directly attributable to their investigations and criticisms of corrupt officials and narcotics traffickers. In other words, they were assassinated in the line of professional duty, and not because of dumb, bad luck on a vacation.)

In a recent review of *Trail of Feathers* that he wrote for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Sam Quiñones, who worked as a freelance journalist in Mexico City for many years, recalls how when Phil True was still alive, he and other foreign correspondents had a habit of meeting each Friday for drinks at a bar called the Nuevo Leon. "It was a vibrant group," Quiñones writes, "one, I felt, that was becoming aware that a historic story of Mexico's change was slowly unfolding before it."

But by the time True died, foreign journalists were already leaving the country due to corporate U.S. media's declining interest in Latin America coverage. The Nuevo Leon salon was further doomed by September 11, which "finished it off as the world's focus turned elsewhere." Quiñones associates True's demise with the end of lively journalism in a place long loved by U.S. seekers who dress in Levis and sandals. Or who, if they favor suits, still love to drink *cervezas* with idealists in huaraches. Despite what *Trail of Feathers* implies, it was probably the decline of this fine sensibility, and not some tawdry psychodrama, that pushed a good reporter irreversibly into the wild. ■

Contributing writer Debbie Nathan lives in New York City.

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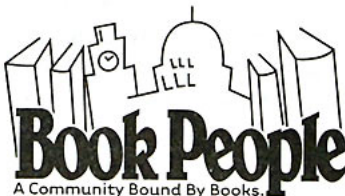
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Weddings

Dorotea Jimenez liked weddings until she died.

She died at one in fact. Not wanting to cause any unpleasantness, she did it only after the bride and groom and most of the others had left the church. When the wedding was over, she went back inside the church and sat in the same place where she had sat for many years—always toward the front and to the right, about the fourth pew. And then she clutched her little bag of wrapped rice—an extra one she had decided to keep for herself—and calmly and quietly died. She was 92.

She had had her own weddings, two of them. It wasn't as if she had been deprived of love and affection from anyone. Both her husbands—the first of whom had been killed in an auto accident in 1968, when the Robert Kennedy assassination was being televised, and the second of whom died of a family illness she didn't know he had until he died—had loved her immensely.

The latter had been with her until almost the year that she died; he was 86. She had married young, she told her friends, for the lovemaking.

"*Esos otros viejitos*," she had told her friends, "*no tienen pasión*." Those other old men have no passion. She had married her second husband in her 60s. He was younger by a few years, but when she spoke of his body in bed she referred to him as if he was in his 20s. "And down there," she added with a gleam, "18."

When her husbands had spoken to women her age, they only said that she never lost her romance. She insisted, both of the husbands had reported, in serving them alphabet cereal at least once a week—not because she thought they would like it or because she was lazy in the kitchen—she was a traditional Hispanic woman who believed she should cook faithfully—but because

she liked to spell their names with the letters in the bowl.

When her first husband died, she approached the coffin quietly with dignity and left him a love letter she had perfumed herself. It was perfume, she explained to her friends who asked her years later, that he had liked when he held her. The lipstick that she sealed the envelope and dotted her signature with was his favorite kind. The envelope, which had been made some time in the 50s, was made of paper soft to the touch and was beautiful enough that the neighbor's children liked to pull the stationery out of the small box where she kept it on her dresser just to look at it.

She had never had any children of her own. No one knew why. They imagined that she would have been a wonderful mother, but she never discussed motherhood with them. Many of the ladies thought that she practiced birth control, contrary to local Catholic teachings, but she herself never explained it.

Dorotea Jimenez liked to describe her private life, but only its positive side. And, as if she perceived that her non-production of children might be considered a negative, she never once mentioned it to anyone or explained herself to anyone she met.

Once, at a church function, a young boy brash enough to inquire brought up the topic. Other young men were present when he had asked. She looked at him with her shiny eyes, lowering her glasses just enough to look at him in front of the others with an amused frown, and told him just loud enough for the others to hear, "*Mira, mi hijito. No es cuando viene el niño, pero cuando viene el hombre lo que me ha interesado*." "It's not the coming of the child, but the coming of the man that has always interested me."

She was 55 then, and the young men who had overheard her had laughed, and the insolent inquirer had shaken

his fingers up and down as if he had just touched a hot stove with his fingertips and was trying to shake it off.

"*Ta bueno, abuelita*," "All right, grandma," he had replied.

Dorotea Jimenez had watched them all walk away laughing, but looking at her with admiration and a new respect. None of them ever asked again. And she knew that the other women she spoke with would never hear of it, but that the young people of the church she attended would all know what she had said by that afternoon.

To the amusement of both of her husbands, who were secure in her love for them, she always introduced herself to all the young men in church who had reached puberty and had begun to develop firm muscular builds.

"Just let me say hello to little Johnny over there," she would tell her husbands. And both of them, when their turn came, would walk faithfully beside her to say hello to the new local football or baseball star. After saying hello, and before she left, she was always sure to grab them with her hand on one side or another of their young, firm waist and utter, "Muscle," followed by a moaning "umm" sound.

Her husbands, always amused by her antics, had rolled their eyes and told the young men not to worry, "*No te va hacer nada. Aquí estoy*." "She won't do anything to you. I'm right here."

Neither of her husbands ever went to weddings with her, at least not after a while.

The first one had gone to five or so, but realized—as much as he liked to go anywhere with her—that a wedding was one place that she really didn't want him to accompany her after all. Having realized that, he contented himself by searching small-town papers within a 30-mile radius—a one-hour drive back and forth—for church weddings. There was almost one every week during certain times of the year. He would then

mention them when they were sitting at breakfast, making it sound as if he was only doing it in passing, and not letting her know that he had scoured the racks of local vendors for newspapers from other small towns located nearby.

"*Se va a casar una muchachita que se llama Elizabeth Montemayor con Luis Placencia en Alice,*" he would say casually over coffee. "A young girl named Elizabeth Montemayor is going to marry a young man named Luis Placencia in Alice." Then he would casually mention the hours and the name of the church. She preferred church weddings, he had realized, and avoided those held in city or other public buildings.

Once mentioned, he always thought she had forgotten the details of time and place until he would notice, some two hours before the wedding was scheduled to begin, that she would start to get dressed and ask him to get ready to take her.

He was her driver during those occasions.

In the beginning, when he used to go with her, he would sit beside her quietly, watching some young couple getting married whom neither had ever seen before, wondering what the family thought of them sitting so close to the front, or of her tears when the young couple exchanged vows.

Dorotea Jimenez had finally told him, alleviating his sense of obligation, that he didn't have to go inside with her anymore. The way she patted his forearm, and the way she smiled at him, made him realize that it was okay—and that she meant it.

Her second husband was given that speech—with much the same delivery—the first time he took her to a wedding. He had bought a jacket for the occasion, and she had stopped him outside, by the car, and let him know it was okay not to go in. He seemed relieved when she smiled at him, patting his arm as she spoke. They didn't know the couple, she explained, and "you look uncomfortable in a jacket right now."

That day he waited patiently in the heat, sitting on the passenger's side and occasionally leaning against the outside of their car, until she had come out beaming. The look on her face had convinced him to do what his predecessor had done—search the newspapers for wedding announcements until the day he died.



Illustration by Mike Krone

"ESOS OTROS VIEJITOS," SHE HAD TOLD HER FRIENDS, "NO TIENEN PASIÓN." THOSE OTHER OLD MEN HAVE NO PASSION.

Both of her husbands had been laborers of one kind or another. Before her, none of them had owned a jacket or a suit, and the one jacket each of them bought had been for her weddings.

When they married her, more because they knew that's the way she would have wanted it, they had each worn a tux. All of the men around them, who had worked and dirtied themselves with field work as much as her husbands, had contributed two or three dollars each to help them rent it.

"For any other woman," they had told them, "you could wear anything you wanted, but this is Dorotea Jimenez, and you should wear a tux. Dorotea Jimenez is in love with you, and you should wear a tux." At the weddings, each of the men who had contributed sat toward the front, each holding hands with his wife, with their children in other parts of the church looking at the rare spectacle. In front of their own children, and in front of the whole church, each husband and wife behaved as if Dorotea Jimenez's weddings brought them love and life again.

Dorotea Jimenez died at 92. When she arrived at her last wedding, she was wearing a smock a young man had given her for her birthday, December 20, the year before. The dress she wore was tastefully and elegantly decorated with a pin—a present from her second

husband. As much as he had tried, and as much as he apologized to her for many years, he could never afford to get her a real diamond wedding ring. Because she had wanted to marry him so quickly, they had used the rings she had had from her first husband. It had hurt him deeply, everyone had said later, but he had told them all, individually and in small groups, "Dorotea Jimenez wants to marry me, and for that, I will swallow anything, including any trace of my pride."

Everyone knew at their wedding where the rings had come from, and no one, not even the other men who could have afforded to help him, criticized any part of it.

"*Se está casando con Dorotea Jimenez, y para eso, uno se puede comer lo que sea.*" "He is marrying Dorotea Jimenez, and for that, one can swallow anything."

At her last wedding, the day she died, Dorotea Jimenez wore her husbands' wedding ring. She was leaning on the end of the pew, all the way to the right, when they found her. One of the older, but still strong, men, carried her out to the car from the wedding, explaining to the people there that she had gone to sleep.

A few of her friends followed him along in their cars to her home, where the women found the keys to her house in her purse. Along with her keys, they found a few small envelopes of the kind that she had always liked, a small

vial of perfume her first husband had given her, and the savings her second husband had kept to eventually get her a wedding band.

He had always tried, he said, because he wanted the best for her. And the little paper bag in which he kept the savings—which Dorotea Jimenez would occasionally carry in her purse without his knowledge—was one that most of the men had already seen.

He had shown all of them his efforts and had asked many of them if he was getting close enough, not knowing the price of a ring himself. (He had been too embarrassed to walk into a jewelry store too early, without enough money, he had explained.)

And Dorotea Jimenez knew all of it—about the savings that he never mentioned to her; about him showing the small bag to the others, at work and elsewhere; about the jackets and the tuxedos; about the heat outside while they waited; about the men holding hands with their wives at her weddings; and about the contributions everyone made.

Until the day she died at 92, when she leaned against the end of the pew after her last wedding, Dorotea Jimenez knew all of it. ■

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—*Ringside, continued from page 27*

other products of binational trade. City boosters claimed El Paso's geographic location made it "the best pass across the Continental Divide between the equator and the North Pole." It was one of the fastest growing cities in the Southwest and had a population—according to the 1896 El Paso City Directory—of 15,568. About 60 percent were of Mexican descent. For the next few decades, El Paso's railroad connections and the concentration of Mexican residents would make the city an ideal location from which to plot a revolution.

Teresita soon became the most famous woman in El Paso. Her name appeared regularly in the gossip columns of the local newspapers. El Pasoans couldn't get enough of her. One postcard salesman did a "hefty business" selling pictures of Teresita throughout the area, as far as the neighboring town of Las Cruces. It wasn't just "Mexican peons"—as the Anglo press called them—who gathered around Teresita. The sick of all races, the curious, the insane, thieves, peddlers, upper-class admirers, anti-Díaz rebels, newspaper reporters, law-enforcement officers and paid government informants from both sides of the border, all hovered around Teresita's Segundo Barrio home. The newspapers kept their readers informed about every new development. They published regular dispatches about her healings, her dress, and about every important guest who stopped by to chat with her—such as El Paso Mayor Richard Campbell or the ex-governor of Chihuahua, Lauro Carrillo.

Reading about Teresita in the El Paso newspapers was almost like watching a modern day soap opera, except with an added dose of international political intrigue. News of the young lady's suitors immediately made the front pages. But Teresita was not just a celebrity at the local level. Her fame spread like wildfire throughout the rest of the United States as well. Newspaper correspondents came to the border from San Francisco, Austin and New York to interview the young Mexican

miracle worker. Later, when she left El Paso and toured throughout the United States, she also made headlines wherever she went. Many of the out-of-town journalists that visited Teresita in the Segundo Barrio reported that they thought some kind of healing was actually taking place, but they all had different explanations for this phenomenon. A news correspondent from Austin, for example, declared that without knowing it, Teresita was using the techniques of some of the best known hypnotists in the world. Many of her healing methods, however, were grounded on the indigenous culture that she had grown up with. When many of her predictions came to pass, the villagers took it as another sign that Teresita was divinely inspired.

In the fall of 1896, when a rebellion broke out in several towns along the U.S.-Mexico border waged in Teresita's name, rumor had it that the young miracle worker had used her powers of astral projection to lead the revolt against the soldiers of Porfirio Díaz. Although she was hundreds of miles away in El Paso, federal soldiers claimed they saw Santa Teresa leading a group of rebels at Nogales, Sonora. They said she was riding upon a white horse that hovered above the ground.

Aclaimed Chicano-Irish-German-American author Luis Alberto Urrea—a fellow research freak whom I consider a friend—sent me an e-mail when he found out that I was going to write about Teresita Urrea's revolutionary activities in El Paso. He's Teresita's great-nephew and was working at the time on a historical novel, *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, that focuses on Teresita's life before her American exile. He heard that I was looking into rumors that Teresita, while in El Paso, not only helped prepare an uprising against the government of Porfirio Díaz but even blessed the revolutionaries' rifles. Luis Alberto didn't believe that Teresita could have ever done such a thing. In Mexico she was all about compassion and healing. She opposed bloodshed. It's just not possible that

she could have ever blessed rifles, he argued. He warned me to be careful of what I wrote. He's seen terrible things happen to people who have written about her in the past. One woman who wrote a fictionalized novel about his great-aunt—with a few passages that weren't entirely flattering—ended up getting kidnapped in Mexico. Others have suffered serious injury. It must be the avenging spirit of the Yaquis, who were devout followers of Teresita during her life, Luis Alberto explained.

With Luis Alberto, it's not always easy to tell how much of his *rollo*—that part-college professor and part-mixed-blood-vato-loco spiel of his—is up front and how much is tongue in cheek. I thanked him anyhow for the warning about the curse of the Yaquis. I assured him that I wasn't about to libel his Great Tía. I told him I thought his Tía Abuela comes off smelling like roses—literally. (People said that during a healing Teresita smelled like roses.)

But at the same time Santa Teresita is a lot more complex than some of the hagiographical accounts that have been written about her in the past. Teresita may have been a pacifist during her Mexican period, but by the time she reached El Paso she was no longer the same woman. It appears that the massacre of Tomochic radicalized her, like it did many other *fronterizos*. There are just too many firsthand accounts—from many different sources—about her underground activities in support of the revolution. It could be that they're mostly just rumors, *puro chisme*. But those historians who completely excise this *chisme* from their accounts leave out an important part of the picture.

With Teresita Urrea, fact and rumor often blend into one. I've explored the zones where Teresita left her mark as carefully as I could, but I must admit that I can't always distinguish clearly between the two. At the risk of life, limb, and incurring the wrath of the Yaquis, I've given it my best shot. ■

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The Kindness of Strangers

After the success of *The Glass Menagerie*, Thomas Lanier Williams, later known as Tennessee, spent time in Mexico in late 1945. "I feel I was born in Mexico in another life," he wrote in a letter from Mexico City. Over the years, other writers—from Katherine Anne Porter to Williams' mentor, Hart Crane—had expressed the same sentiment. But luck was with Williams as he crossed *la frontera* at Piedras Negras/Eagle Pass: He met Pancho Rodriguez, a young Mexican American. The tale of that meeting would later be embellished—with Williams' car breaking down and a border guard's son helping to rescue a manuscript that border guards had confiscated.

The rising 34-year-old playwright was immediately smitten with the 24-year-old Pancho—the border guard's son—and invited him to New Orleans as his live-in muse. The rest, as they say, is history. But the chronicle of their relationship was forgotten and, to a large extent, whitewashed from Williams' life story.

I met Pancho Rodriguez in the mid-1970s, when I was teaching summer classes at Loyola University in New Orleans. I knew that he had been a close friend of Williams, but Pancho and his brother Johnny were more interested in news of relatives in the Eagle Pass/Crystal City area, where I used to live.

Years later, I was a neophyte playwright with a few credits to my name and a fellowship to write Tejano stories for the theater. While exploring the possibility that the Williams-Rodriguez affair had the stuff for good theater, I came upon *My Life*, Elia Kazan's autobiography. Kazan, who directed both the stage and film versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, writes about his difficulty understanding the love-

hate relationship between Stanley and Blanche in a play now considered among the best of the 20th century. But it all became clear when he witnessed an altercation between Williams and Rodriguez: "If Tennessee was Blanche, Pancho was Stanley."

That became my mantra as I traveled to interview those who had known the two during the years they lived together (1945-1947). Most roads led to New Orleans. Coincidentally, their relationship ended when *Streetcar* opened on Broadway. By then Williams had a new muse, Frank Merlo.

At first it seemed I was going nowhere. Regulars at the annual Tennessee Williams Festival in New Orleans shrugged. Some asked if I was confusing Pancho with Merlo. Others felt there was nothing of import to be gleaned. Finally, through friends at Loyola, I reconnected with Pancho's brother Johnny. At first he declined an interview; he had promised Pancho he would never reveal details of the painful affair. Then he warmed up after I reminded him of our Texas connection. We did two short phone conversations, but Johnny died before we could do a sit-down interview.

I did, however, hear from Virginia Spenser Carr, a biographer of Katherine Anne Porter and Carson McCullers. Carr had interviewed Pancho at length about the summer of 1946, when he and Williams entertained McCullers at their Nantucket bungalow, which Williams had dubbed "Rancho Pancho." Both writers worked together during that summer: McCullers on a stage version of her novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, and Williams on a rewrite of *Summer and Smoke*, which now included a Mexican family in Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras named Gonzalez (Pancho's maternal last name).

Even through poetic language, it was easy to identify the play's inspiration. In its final scene, a traveling sales-

man asks Miss Alma Winemiller if she speaks Spanish. *Poquito*, she answers, to which he replies, "Sometimes *poquito* is enough."

Searching in other critical and biographical works proved more daunting: Pancho's name wasn't even listed in the index of *Tennessee Williams: Memoirs*. The playwright informed his readers that he couldn't use his former lover's name for fear of legal action. Nevertheless, he managed to tell their story by renaming Pancho as "Santo." Other writers have also referred to "Santo" and to Williams' other sobriquet for Rodriguez: the Princess.

These clues led me to *Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham: 1940-1965*. I then received an e-mail from Williams collector Joe De Salvo of Faulkner House, the famed bookstore in Pirate's Alley in New Orleans. Johnny left all the materials from Pancho's estate to a nephew. For the most part, the family had been in the dark about Rodriguez's relationship with Williams; the nephew showed little interest. But a sister, whom neither Pancho nor Johnny had ever mentioned, then called. "I have the letters, photos, and other items that might interest you," she said, tantalizing me.

The pieces of the puzzle were beginning to come together. A friend of Windham's informed me that Williams and Pancho had made several cheap, personal recordings at the Pennyland Arcade on Royal Street back in the 1940s—and that they were now part of the New York Public Library theater collection. One featured Williams as reporter Vanilla Williams interviewing the visiting Princess Rodriguez (Pancho) of Monterrey on Decatur Street. "Oh Princess, don't cruise there," Vanilla warns.

"But I thought that was where the action was," the Princess retorts.

Other discs feature Pancho singing in Spanish and Williams reciting



Pancho Rodriguez and Tennessee Williams

photo from the estate of Johnny Rodriguez

poetry. However, the pièce de résistance is a scene from *Streetcar* (nearly two years before its Broadway opening) in which Pancho plays Stanley to Williams' Blanche. My mantra suddenly took new life.

Both Windham and Williams' biographer Lyle Leverich claimed that *Streetcar*'s most famous line, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers," originated with Pancho. According to Johnny, the Mexican street vendor in *Streetcar* who hawks "flores para los muertos" was based on their mother.

Others, including Gore Vidal, recall that Williams would use Rodriguez to create situations that he would later incorporate into his plays and short stories.

Johnny's estate contained a treasure trove of materials: photographs of Williams and Pancho as young men and as middle-aged gentlemen; letters from Pancho to Johnny, written during trips with Williams to Hollywood

and New York; and correspondence from *Streetcar* producer Irene Mayer Selznick, literary agent Audrey Wood, and from Williams himself. The diaries of their trip to Rancho Pancho and of their final visit shortly before Williams' death proved invaluable.

Recently, I found two other Rodriguez sisters willing to speak about their brother, who had remained a muse for Williams until the very end.

During one of their last visits, Williams informed Pancho that he had selected Anthony Quinn and Katy Jurado to star in *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, set on the Texas border in Eagle Pass. Apparently, the news had moved Pancho to tears. Decades earlier, he had argued that the lead character of Stanley in *Streetcar* should have been Mexican American and not Polish, since there were more Latinos than Poles in New Orleans. Moreover, he pointed to the wrought-iron balconies and grand courtyards as a legacy of 40 years of Spanish rule. (Scholars say Williams

named the character after a friend in St. Louis.) Pancho further argued that the part should go to a Latino because Marlon Brando was unknown. The particular Latino he had in mind: Mexican American actor Anthony Quinn (who, indeed, was cast as Stanley Kowalski on Broadway when Brando left to do the film version).

In one of his letters from Hollywood, Pancho had urged Johnny not to abandon New Orleans.

"Don't come to California," he warned. "[H]ere in Los Angeles, we are considered peons like we were in Texas. In New Orleans, we live in an international city, and we are treated with respect and good jobs. Both Tenn and I can't wait to get back to work, to be back home." ■

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