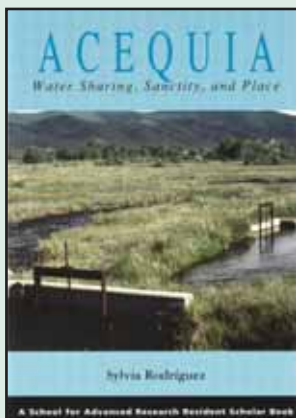


# LIBROS NUEVOS

By Andrew Lovato

***Acequia: Water-Sharing, Sanctity and Place.***  
By Sylvia Rodríguez, SAR Press, Santa Fe, 2006. 187 pages.



Rodríguez's thoughtful study of the *acequia* (community irrigation ditch) system in Taos Valley explores two areas of activity: the *reparto de agua* (division of waters) and the accompanying religious rituals and moral code

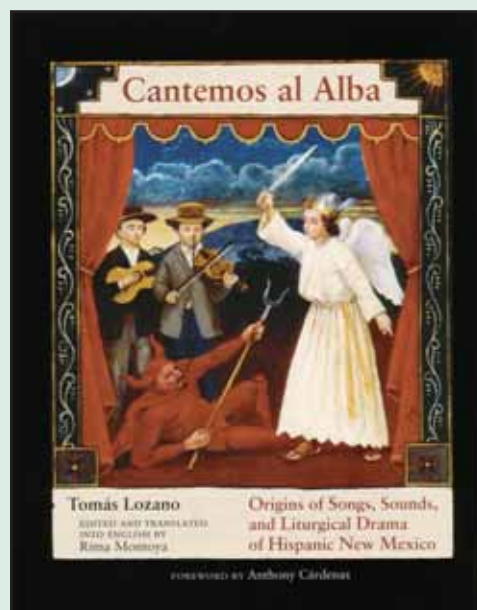
that sanctify it. She discerningly outlines the relationship between "water-sharing, belief and attachment to place" as she enters the world of the *parciantes* (community of irrigators or water-right user-owners) who share the precious resource and maintain, improve and defend their *acequias*.

Rodríguez began her fieldwork for this book at the request of the 74 community *acequias* that make up the Taos Valley Acequia Association in order to document water-sharing customs and the religious significance of water in the community, as well as to assess the potential impact of water loss due to impending water-rights litigation. She chronicles the personal transformation that takes place within her as she interviews and interacts with the *parciantes* from her place of birth, describing the experience as "a re-indoctrination of values I learned as a child. Irrigated landscape becomes sacred landscape through procession and prayer." The concept of *respeto* (respect) is central to the values of the *parciantes*, showing respect for others and earning their respect in turn. This virtue is exhibited in the practice of "moral economy," or a system of principles and values that "support and guide cooperative, interdependent economic [water] practice."

Today these values are being severely challenged in the face of contemporary water issues. The adjudication of water rights involving the claims of Taos Pueblo, the Taos Valley Acequia Association, the town of Taos and federal and state agencies weighs heavily on all parties. Rodríguez notes that the *acequias* "promote a fluctuating balance between cooperation and competition," and Pueblo-Hispano relations also have a history of this same fragile equilibrium.

Rodríguez emphasizes the importance of employing the traditional values of the *parciantes* in resolving water issues. With the pressures of urbanization, population growth and development, competition for water will only intensify. She holds up the *acequia* system as a model of "a workable, even elegant, solution to the age-old problem of dividing water where it is scarce."

***Cantemos al Alba: Origins of Songs, Sounds and Liturgical Drama of Hispanic New Mexico.*** By Tomás Lozano, edited and translated into English by Rima Montoya. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2006. 727 pages, two CDs.



*Cantemos al Alba* approaches a topic that has long been a central question for New Mexico Hispanos but which has not been fully researched until now: What is the link between the liturgical drama, early songs and sounds of folk New Mexico culture and their ancient roots in Mexico and Spain? Lozano's work tracks the evolution of these art forms from medieval Spain to Mexico and eventually to the early settlements in New Mexico.

The publication is beautifully produced and contains more than a hundred songs, with original music notation as well as a comparison of full dramatic exemplars. It is presented in bilingual English/Spanish text throughout. The book also contains two CDs that provide recorded samples of the songs, music and dramas referred to in the text. Overall, it is a wonderfully thorough and well-developed introduction to the material. Lay readers will find the book informative and aesthetically pleasing; scholars will benefit from the comprehensive research and the uncovering of folklore never before presented in print.

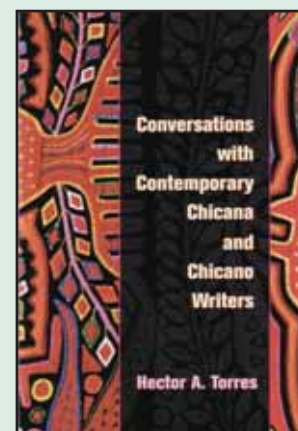
Interestingly, Lozano reveals that the first music schools to be established in what is now the United States came into existence along the Río Grande Valley of New Mexico. There is a great deal more to discover and take cultural pride in within the covers of this substantial volume. New Mexico Hispanos with an interest in delving into the genesis of their culture will find much to be enchanted with in this work.

The author, a native of Spain, is a folklorist and a professional musician. Rima Montoya, who edited and translated the text into English, is a freelance writer. The foreword was written by Anthony Cárdenas, a

medievalist and professor of Spanish language and literature at the University of New Mexico.

***Conversations with Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Writers.*** By Hector A. Torres. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2007. 359 pages.

Hector A. Torres, associate professor of English at the University of New Mexico, has compiled a series of highly informative and compelling interviews with 10 respected and influential Chicana and Chicano writers



who discuss their craft and the creative drive that motivates their art. Torres also provides a brief biography of each writer and a review of their work. This content in and of itself would be a worthy contribution to Chicano literature, since a compilation of conversations of this sort has not been published in more than 25 years.

However, Torres is interested in reaching beyond simply discussing the writing process. He explains that "the politics of the social art of writing are in fact a guiding theme in these interviews." The writers quoted here explain their interpretations of the intersection of politics and creativity in their own careers. They also discuss how their writing has been produced against a backdrop of cultural fragmentation, the emergence of the U.S. as a global empire and the significance of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As Torres states, "These writers remind us that we continue to live under imperial skies."

In the first section, Torres interviews authors Rolando Hinojosa, Arturo Islas and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry. Hinojosa examines the Texas-Mexican experience and its influence on his writing as well as the Spanish language. Islas comments on the limitation of labels and categories in examining Chicano literature, and Gonzales-Berry discusses the influence of the Mexico-New Mexico border culture on her work.

In section two, Torres explores *mestiza* consciousness in his interviews with Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros and Pat Mora. The late Anzaldúa spoke with Torres in a 1990 interview about the difficulty Chicana writers have in gaining acceptance, not only in the world of publishing but by society in general. Castillo talks about the need to hold American society to a more democratic process, and she says that she uses her writing to say to the world, "I exist" as a Chicana. Cisneros

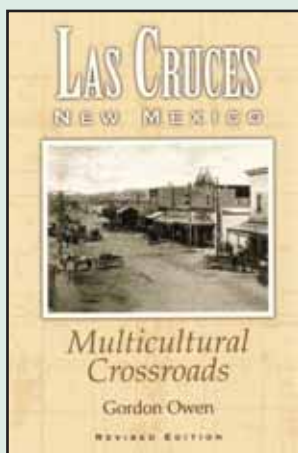
# LIBROS NUEVOS

discusses her evolution as a writer and the influence of the education system. Mora addresses the use of language (English/Spanish) and the role that this plays in her writing.

His discussion with Richard Rodríguez touches on Chicano sexual identity, language and Marxism. Author Demetria Martínez focuses on a global Chicano identity as a citizen of the world. Torres' final interview, with Kathleen Alcalá, speaks to history as an important aspect in Chicano writing.

The book points to the inevitable conclusion that discourse is ultimately an exercise of power. As Torres writes, "Chicano and Chicana writers know that too much politics can spoil the story, but so can too little." He makes it clear that for these writers, the social act of writing is to "repeat or carry forward the issues that have concerned Mexican America since at least 1848."

**Las Cruces, New Mexico: Multicultural Crossroads.** By Gordon Owen. Cultural Society of the Mesilla Valley, Las Cruces, N.M., 2005. 244 pages.



It would not be an overstatement to declare that New Mexico's southern region has not received the attention it deserves. While many books and substantial research have focused on Albuquerque and Santa Fe and their important roles in our

state's history (and deservedly so), precious few pages have been devoted to the rich and colorful story of Las Cruces in defining the character of New Mexico.

This deficit has been partially remedied by the publication of Gordon Owen's book. Owen, an emeritus professor of communication studies, taught at New Mexico State University for 27 years. This is a revised edition of the original, which was published in 1999 as part of the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Las Cruces. Owen traces the history of the city and the surrounding region from the Pueblo era to contemporary times. As the title of the book indicates, the cultural diversity of the community is emphasized and includes the stories of Hispanic, Anglo, Native American, black and Asian residents.

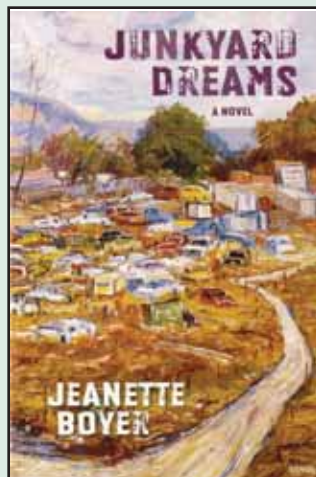
This overview of the city's history proceeds in a generally chronological fashion with occasional detours for important points of reference, starting with the community's humble start when approximately a hundred destitute but optimistic immigrants ventured into the southern New Mexico desert to

draw lots for plots of land in the frontier village. Owen highlights the important issues that shaped Las Cruces over the years, such as the creation of an education system, water concerns and World Wars I and II. He also paints interesting portraits of the individuals and families that inhabited the city, along with their associations, businesses and endeavors.

This is a reader-friendly text that will be enjoyed as much by the casual reader as the scholar.

**Junkyard Dreams.** By Jeanette Boyer. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2007. 234 pages.

Boyer's novel pokes a knowing finger into the painful underbelly of the Santa Fe mystique and will have City Different readers nodding their heads in grudging recognition. The central theme of the book is



summed up by protagonist Rita Vargas when she exclaims, "What's happening to this town? I remember when people respected the land. Now all these rich folk are moving in, thinking they can do whatever they want."

Rita, a single, 41-year-old self-proclaimed "wrench-wielding wench" and junkyard owner, fights to save her land and the surrounding ridge tops from a slick real-estate opportunist, a rich developer and a corrupt city land official. She has inherited her land and beloved junkyard from her father and refuses to allow these men to run roughshod over her.

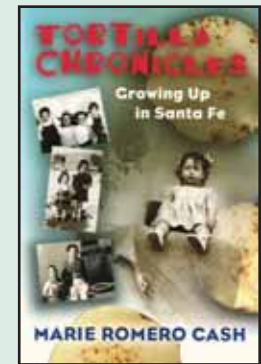
In one sense this story is a feminist tribute to the power of a strong and confident woman who is determined to stand up for her principles. But Rita is not a one-dimensional character; in the midst of her struggles she develops a love interest, runs a business and maintains a relationship with Parker, her 24-year-old artist son.

One of the strengths of this book is that Boyer does not paint her characters in black and white. The couple who builds a house on a ridge top adjacent to Rita's land is not sinister but basically decent, with their own beliefs and morals whose interests just happen to conflict with Rita's.

*Junkyard Dreams* is a fun read. Beyond this, it examines the more serious struggles that take place in Santa Fe and other similar communities that contend with the competing pressures of development and preservation.

**Tortilla Chronicles: Growing Up in Santa Fe.** By Marie Romero Cash. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2007. 181 pages.

Being a Santa Fe native myself, I can't count the number of times one of my *compadres* has said to me, "Bro, remember how Santa Fe used to be? Those were the good old days." Well, we won't have to rely on our faulty memories anymore when we reminisce



about times gone by. Marie Romero Cash has put it all down in her charming memoir, *Tortilla Chronicles*.

She begins her story by recounting her parents' lives in vivid detail up to 1930, when they marry and start a family. Romero Cash's book is brimming with Santa Fe flavor as she relates the story of a typical, hard-working Hispano family in the 1950s, living life to the fullest and trying to make ends meet in her old-time Houghton Street neighborhood.

If you are a Santa Fe native or a longtime resident, this memoir will have you smiling as your memory is jogged by Romero Cash's description of events and places long gone (remember the Yucca Drive-In?). If you are a more recent part of the Santa Fe community, this book will give you a more intimate understanding of what makes the City Different what it is and allow you a peek into the heart and soul of the local Hispanic culture.

Some of the more entertaining remembrances in Romero Cash's book include her mother's technique for making tortillas using a *bolillo*, a rolling pin made from a piece of broomstick, and hanging roasted green chile on the clothesline to dry.

Growing up Catholic meant attending Mass at St. Francis Cathedral and going to school at St. Francis Parochial School until it was time for First Holy Communion. Romero Cash describes many experiences that American youth went through in the 1950s, but with their own unique Santa Fe spin. Christmas, bad haircuts, watching movies at the Lensic, picking *piñón* nuts, teen dating and the Santa Fe Fiesta are some of the adventures she shares with readers. This is not the Santa Fe you will read about in tourist brochures or travel guides—it's the real deal.

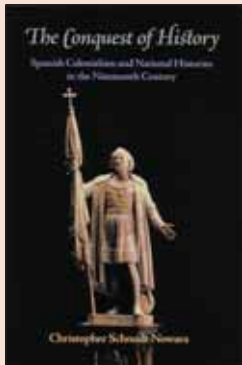
Andrew Lovato received his doctorate in intercultural communications from the University of New Mexico in 2000. He is an assistant professor at the College of Santa Fe and author of *Santa Fe Hispanic Culture: Preserving Identity in a Tourist Town*. He teaches a class on the Southwest at the College of Santa Fe.



# LIBROS NUEVOS

By Nasario García

*The Conquest of History.* By Christopher Schmidt-Nowara. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2006. 278 pages.



Anyone familiar with Spain's history in the 19th century knows all too well that internal strife among various political factions coupled with foreign meddling and invasion (e.g., France) resulted in a country torn asunder. Further complicating matters at home and abroad was the clamor for independence in the 1820s among Latin American colonies. Though Spain lost the majority of her possessions, she clung tenaciously to Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, remnants of a vast empire upon which the sun reputedly never set.

In this well-written and competently researched work, Schmidt-Nowara demonstrates that Spain's problems in the New World did not abate. He cites works—heretofore stashed away in archives or repositories—by historians, archaeologists, literati and religious leaders with dissimilar political philosophies. Hence he enlightens us on the polemics behind the scenes in defense of or critical of Spain's attempts at reshaping its own history and that of its colonies.

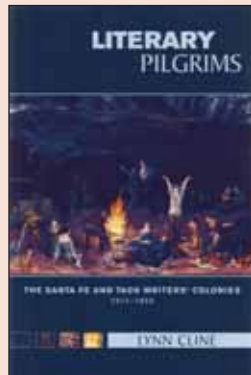
The main focus of Schmidt-Nowara's work is on histories and commemorations in the New World. We learn, for example, that nationalism and colonialism not only have coexisted but also are still alive despite being diametrically opposed to each other. He points out that these kinds of realities are indispensable for understanding Spain's 19th-century vested interest in the remaining colonies even as it strove to understand itself historically. Trying to superimpose its own image upon the colonies, or projecting a preconceived portrayal of the local culture, inflamed the passions of colonial patriots, who also fought among themselves in an attempt to reach some kind of consensus on what should constitute their own national identity.

The debate in and outside Spain in 1892, on the eve of the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World, occasioned still more disagreement: whether to honor Columbus for his accomplishments or discredit him because of his colonizing tactics grew to unbelievable proportions. Bickering, infighting, acrimony and political squabbling took center stage, leaving the celebration plans in shambles.

Schmidt-Nowara's scholarly work is not for the casual reader; it must be read piecemeal to assimilate and absorb its wealth of information. The footnotes and

bibliography alone comprise 68 pages of invaluable sources and data. We often hear about the infamous Black Legend, but how many people know that it was Julián Juderías who coined the phrase?

*Literary Pilgrims: The Santa Fe and Taos Writers' Colonies, 1917–1950.* By Lynn Cline. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2007. 186 pages.



Visitors or newcomers to New Mexico wishing to learn about the literati who established colonies in Santa Fe and Taos during the early 20th century will find this book to their liking. Even students of literature familiar with Mary Austin, Willa Cather, D. H. Lawrence, Oliver La Farge and Mabel Dodge Luhan (she changed Luján to Luhan so easterners could pronounce it), are apt to learn something fresh and exciting.

Spearheading this elite group was the inimitable Luhan, a socialite turned writer whose magnetic personality—and wealth—lured prose writers, poets, playwrights and essayists to the Land of Enchantment. She inspired them to study the landscape and the sky against the backdrop of indigenous peoples and Hispanos. Provocative and controversial issues surfaced, among them women's rights, ecology and cultural pluralism. Mabel Dodge Luhan and her compatriots were well ahead of their time.

A second tier of writers whom Cline labels "significant others," like Paul Horgan, Haniel Long and Fray Angélico Chávez, were no less important, though today names like Long's are but a footnote in literature. But Chávez, a native son and a creative writer in his own right, is more renowned as a historian.

To learn about the Santa Fe and Taos authors, biographical entries accompanied by black-and-white photographs take the reader on an exciting journey through the lives, talents, idiosyncrasies, sexual orientation, jealousies and rivalries of these colorful residents. At times conflicting information pops up that can be distracting. Alice Corbin Henderson, for example, is mentioned as having arrived in Santa Fe in 1916, and then in 1917, both first-time visits; and Lamy is projected to be 18 miles from Santa Fe in one place and nine miles in another. Los Gallos, Mabel Dodge Luhan's estate, is translated as "The Chickens" instead of "The Roosters."

A brief and useful literary history of New Mexico precedes the corpus of the book. And for those who are curious about where some of these authors dwelt and hung out in

Santa Fe and Taos, a walking/driving tour, complete with maps, is described. What a perfect way to end a marvelous journey with these talented and creative writers of yesteryear who left their mark on the Land of Enchantment!

*Public Education in New Mexico.* By John B. Mondragón and Ernest S. Stapleton. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2005. 256 pages.

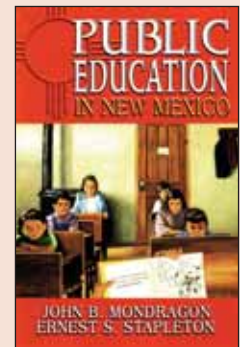
Whether you are an educator, legislator, school-board member, community activist or a parent with an abiding interest in public education in our state, this book is a must-read. Providing by far the most comprehensive and up-to-date treatment on the subject, Mondragón and Stapleton enlighten the reader in unsuspected ways because of the breadth and scope of their work.

Both authors are native New Mexicans and products of the state's public schools, with graduate degrees from the University of New Mexico where they finished their distinguished careers in the department of education. In the more than 30 years in public education, each one rose through the ranks, holding numerous positions, including classroom teacher, counselor, principal and superintendent (an elementary school today bears Stapleton's name).

Despite the complexity of public education, Mondragón and Stapleton succeed admirably in presenting a clear picture on the subject, at the same time striking a balance between historical events, folklore, public opinion and personal experiences. In doing so they tackle a broad range of issues that include school financing, education reforms, curriculum, public versus higher education, cultural diversity, bilingual education and governance.

Along the way we learn that paramount among proponents of education is to educate all students irrespective of ethnicity or socioeconomic background. We are also reminded that some things remain essentially unchanged after more than 100 years. Political haggling, inadequate funding, unbalanced distribution of funds in rural versus urban schools, a scarcity of teaching materials in the classroom plus poor pay for teachers continue virtually unabated.

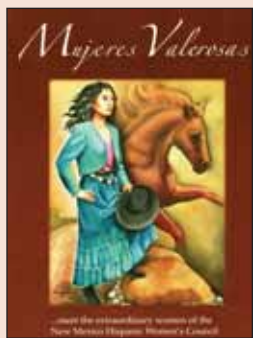
But public education, as the authors caution us, is never at a standstill. They offer their study as a work in progress, but they also put forth a number of concrete and well-thought-out recommendations central



# LIBROS NUEVOS

to the improvement of the quality of education in public schools. Coming from two highly respected and seasoned professionals who are well versed in public education, this book is one that every parent, educator and policy maker would do well to pay close attention to.

**Mujeres Valerosas.** By Vangie Samora, editor. Hispanic Women's Council, Albuquerque, 2006. 142 pages.



*Nuestras mujeres*, the forerunner of *Mujeres valerosas* published in 1992, also from the Hispanic Women's Council (HWC), is a tribute to Hispanas who were instrumental in shaping New Mexico's history.

*Mujeres valerosas* honors the contemporary Hispanas who have excelled in various professions—the diplomatic corps, the business world, education, healthcare, the performing arts and jurisprudence.

The book is composed of two main parts: "*Mujeres valerosas*" and "*Comadres*." The women featured in the first segment have been affiliated with HWC in one capacity or another. "*Comadres*," on the other hand, comprises individuals who, although not allied with HWC per se, were deemed worthy of inclusion because of their professional accomplishments.

The credentials of these remarkable women, both native and non-native New Mexicans, are impressive, not only because of their achievements or accolades but also in many cases because of the adversity they overcame en route to their capstone careers. Most of them were not born with silver spoons in their mouth—they come from modest or poor families.

These pages come alive with black-and-white photos, short biographical sketches and essays, testimony to these women's successes. Their triumphs and how they became successful may vary, but they have one thing in common—their status as pacesetters, as movers and shakers.

Some readers may find their strengths somewhat surprising, but to others like this reviewer who grew up surrounded by bright, strong and independently minded women, such attributes merely reaffirm what many of us have long known. There is no denying that women today, regardless of ethnicity or economic base, have countless more opportunities than did, say, my own mother, who never attended school, or her mother before her.

If *Mujeres valerosas* teaches us one thing, it is that the contemporary Hispana has finally shaken loose the shackles of tradition. She no longer sees herself as a shadow peering over the shoulder of her father or her husband. On the contrary, she has seized the

opportunity for advancement by stepping forward and carving out her own niche in the workforce alongside her male counterpart.

Whatever position the Hispana currently holds or has occupied in her career is a tribute to her intellectual acumen, motivation and hard work—at no time expecting a free ride because of gender.

**Antonio's Gun and Delfino's Dream: True Tales of Mexican Migration.** By Sam Quiñones. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2007. 318 pages.



Packed with startling accounts of immigrants' heartbreaks, sacrifices, discrimination and successes, Quiñones' book merits more than a scant few words in a review. But perhaps his pronouncement, "Farther from Mexico City, closer to God," on the dilemma

confronting Mexican immigrants to the United States is the most fitting summary; this powerful expression encapsulates why Mexicans seek a better life in the United States.

But it also serves to lay bare the corruption and abuse of power among Mexico's politicians and the wealthy, both of whom are doggedly determined to keep the majority of her citizenry mired in poverty to protect their own greed. Despite Mexican officials' outcries of racism and ill treatment of immigrants in the United States, they ignore the exploitation of child labor in the construction business that's right under the halls and noses of Congress in Mexico City. No wonder Quiñones contends that poor "Mexicans are treated better in the United States than in Mexico."

Immigration, as we learn in this revealing and provocative book, is a multifaceted issue that has been reduced by opponents to two words: illegal aliens. This cryptic analysis fails to look objectively at the total picture. Instead, those opposed to immigration, both legal and illegal, embrace xenophobic tendencies, cast aside human compassion and civil decency and malign people for leaving their country in search of the American dream when their own government has failed them.

Most immigrants are faced with a barrage of challenges—learning English, racial discrimination, alienation, split loyalty between this country and Mexico. Divorce, alcoholism, broken families, death and drug peddling add to the immigration mosaic. But Quiñones also teaches us that the German Mennonites in Chihuahua, who literally chased him out of Mexico, his home for years, have their own drug cartel.

His book is perfect for anyone interested in the controversial issue of immigration. It

may not change attitudes or sway people's opinions, but it is bound to open a few eyes.

**Descansos: El sacro paisaje de Nuevo México/The Sacred Landscape of New Mexico.** Photographs by Joan E. Alessi, essay by Sylvia Ann Grider. Fresco Fine Arts Publications, Albuquerque, 2006. 79 pages.

New Mexicans have grown accustomed to the *descansos* that adorn our landscape. The artistic features of these memorials, poignant in the messages they convey, are modest to elaborate.

Complementing the colorful images is Grider's insightful essay on the genesis and evolution of roadside crosses. She provides an abundance of well-grounded information on honoring the dead outside cemeteries and how the idea journeyed from Europe via Mexico to the Land of Enchantment.

Although Grider mentions liquor as one of the causes, she only hints that many of the *descansos* are symbols of victims whose demise was brought about by drunken drivers, a seemingly incurable cancer on New Mexico's roadways. These religious commemorative sites attract our attention, but we must bear in mind that a mournful story lurks behind each one.

No book is perfect, and *Descansos* is no exception. A more diversified geographic distribution of sites would have been desirable. A quick glance shows that of the 37 images, a preponderance (16) comes from Santa Fe and its environs.

But, alas, what mars this wonderful book, in addition to its non sequiturs, is the Spanish translation. Examples: "average resident" is rendered as *residente promedio*, "colorful" as *colorido* and "is not spoken widely" as *no está extendido*. Words like *sepelio* (burial) and *fehacientemente* (reliable), though correct, come across as pedantic and are likely to be incomprehensible to the average Spanish reader.

Reaching out to Spanish speakers, especially in New Mexico and the Southwest, is commendable, but this effort must be tempered with intelligible, flowing, cohesive translations that make sense in Spanish and do justice to English. 🐿️



*Nasario García is a native New Mexican. He received his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh in 19th Century Spanish literature. His latest book, Brujerías: Stories of Witchcraft and the Supernatural in the American Southwest and Beyond, has just been published.*

