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Review of *Land of Enchantment, Land of Conflict: New Mexico in English-Language Fiction* By David L. Caffey

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Land of Enchantment, Land of Conflict: New Mexico in English-Language Fiction. By David L. Caffey. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999. Illustrations, works cited, index. xiv + 235 pp. \$29.95.

Nearly seventy-five years ago, in *The Phantom Herd*, novelist Bertha Bower summed up the tension between the presentation of the West and its reality. A movie director and crew are sent out from Hollywood to New Mexico to film a western. Halfway through, the director's disgusted crew demands more realism. The director complains that the problem isn't his but the audience's: the only West he can tell is "served hot and strong and reeking with the smoke of black powder." These images still plague us today in the West—in television dramas and in sometimes dangerous school yards.

David Caffey has crafted a handsome and valuable book tracing the development of such images in New Mexico's English-language fiction. This is a book every general library in New Mexico should own and every class on New Mexico's literature should welcome. Caffey examines New Mexico's history between the twin poles of enchantment and conflict, in the tradition of Southwestern literary studies by Frank Dobie, and New Mexico's own T. M. Pearce, Mabel Major, and Tom

Lewis. The author states his task as "literary archaeology," analyzing approximately thirteen hundred novels set in New Mexico.

Many of the earliest writings about New Mexico were by Anglos who had never approached the region. Timothy Flint, author of the oldest fiction set in New Mexico (*Francis Berrian; or, the Mexican Patriot*, 1826) never ventured west of the Mississippi Valley. Yet he set in place clichés and fixed images that persist 175 years later: "The imposition of American values on an alien society; the westering hero's romantic conquest of a desirable Spanish girl; the hero's triumph over wild Indians and natural hazards; and the presence of such stock characters as the American hero, his Spanish rival, the delicate heroine, and the conniving priest." Over the next two hundred pages, the author traces the development of such stock characters in a natural sequence of heroes: the trapper gives way to the frontiersman; the frontiersman to the soldier and cowboy on the Plains. Caffey suggests that in this transition from outlander to cowboy, the westerner lost sovereignty and became a hired hand. Presently, when much English-language fiction concerns middle-class Anglo immigrants, "The contemporary immigrant . . . suffers not from spears and arrows of a hostile people, or from exposure to hazards of climate and wild animals, but from his own neuroses. . . . He is not looking to tame a wilderness or take on an antagonistic rival, or even necessarily to commune with nature. He would be satisfied just to get himself centered." (69)

How accurate have New Mexico's portrayals in fiction been? Of the early westerns, Caffey concludes, "They [readers] didn't mind being kidded; they just didn't want to be bored." As any folklorist will tell you, the accuracy of what is told about a time and place is not so important as how such fabulous tales are spread, or how they are believed.

From Beadle's dime novels in the 1870s to the present, Europeans have been eager for Western fiction and American exotica; writing at the same time as Timothy Flint, Chateaubriand had monkeys swinging in the

trees overlooking the Mississippi. Later, German author Karl May attributed fantastic customs to the Southwest's Native Americans.

In New Mexico's fiction, along the trail from trapper to cowboy and rancher, one finds incidents quite as improbable as Mississippi monkeys. Though this book never challenges New Mexico's most persistent stereotypes, or pauses in its narrative to examine related questions (just what is an Anglo, anyway?), Caffey has nonetheless done New Mexicans an invaluable service. And if "the once mighty Anglo hero takes a horrendous beating in the literary western of the 1990's," it is also true that women, Hispanic, and Native American characters have found increasingly realistic self-portraits in our fiction.

The careful reader will find considerable information about the western Great Plains in this work. In the nineteenth century, the westering hero customarily left Bent's Fort or St. Louis to follow the Comanchero paths—some, such as the Old Fort Smith wagon road, preceded Route 66. Early fictions, such as *Prairie Rifles* (1869) and *The Lone Ranch* (1871), discuss the Llano Estacado or the Staked Plains, a region covering the eastern third of New Mexico, north to south. The interest in this region continued in the 1940s with the novels of John L. Sinclair, and in the 1960s with Max Evans's *Hi-Lo Country* and Frank Tolbert's *The Staked Plains*. The Plains material continues into the 1990s in Cathryn Alpert's *Rocket City* (1995), where a California expatriate lands in Artesia until driven crazy by a howling dust storm: "His ashes would mix with hers and blow forever over the plains of New Mexico."

Two principal topics seem to come up in New Mexico Plains fiction: this dusty wind, which even civilization's paving cannot suppress, and the famous expeditions from the Republic of Texas that invaded New Mexico to reconquer what Texans considered their rightful portion of the state. New Mexicans resisted, and continued to hold together a land of high mountains to the north, river-watered farming in the center and the south, and those high desert Plains which slope downwards

toward Texas—a land of much time and wind
and little rain.

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