Territorial Documents and Memories: Singing Church History

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This article gathers together four New Mexican Hispanic folk lyrics, each of which treats a well-known French or Italian priest who lived, worked, and died among the Spanish-speaking Catholics of New Mexico or southern Colorado during the Territorial period (1848–1912). The death of a priest generated extensive coverage in the form of ecclesiastical documents, newspapers, diaries, and personal letters. Simultaneously, Hispanics in the local community composed folk poetry both to remember the event and to interpret it in such a way as to help define themselves. Our comparison of official documentary history with folkloric history will reveal the different features of these two methods of recording history during those years.

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Together, Rivera and Steele are the authors of Penitente Self-Government: Brotherhoods and Councils, 1797–1947 (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1985).
Since these poems were collected relatively soon after composition, they were probably not transmitted orally. But the very fact that they were composed within the New Mexican Hispanic musical and poetic tradition indicates a largely oral consciousness. The folk sifted and processed information so as to craft an account meaningful to themselves. This orality is not archaic or primary, of course, for the Hispanics of the New Mexican colony were always part of a society far larger than a tribe. Spain and Mexico were early modern nations governed by literate bureaucracies and ministered to by a literate clergy. As a territory of the United States during the time these verses were composed, New Mexico had moved even further into the orbit of literacy. Our four folk authors probably all composed with pen and paper, but they participated in orality by using the techniques of the fairly fluid song genres of traditional Hispanic New Mexico, an agrarian society and culture which had been strongly oriented toward the oral tradition during its earlier history.

At the time these poems were composed, New Mexico relied both on documentary records and on folk memory. Each method of information storage encoded all four events, and each sought a different sort of knowledge. The documentary records such as letters, diaries, and newspaper articles emphasized the precise prose notation of a unique event, writing down the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of an occurrence which would certainly never be repeated in all its uniqueness.

By contrast, the oral memory searched for recurrent patterns. Even if a newspaper was the poet’s sole source of information about an important event, his or her oral mentality sought out or imposed a controlling paradigm. Such processing did not necessarily occur over a lengthy period, starting with documentary “truth” and then somehow going awry over the years. The oral mind, working with the oral imagination and memory, begins by perceiving the event—even while reading a newspaper article—in such a way as not to note mere unique facts and mere particular details for their own sakes. Instead, it creates a literary account of any event that transmits timeless beliefs, community values and self-definitions, and standards of practical conduct.

For each of the four lyrics we will present the historical background, the literate record in brief, and the Spanish text with an English translation. We will then comment on the differences between the oral composition and the literate record in such a way as to illustrate some facet of their fundamental difference.1

1. An article about José Rómulo Ribera’s “En la Llegada de Su Señoría Ilustrísima
I. "The Death of Father Avel"

This Catholic priest's death by poisoned sacramental wine remains one of the most lurid mysteries of New Mexican history. Father Etienne M. Avel was born in 1822 in Cabezat in Puy de Dôme and ordained in 1847, and he came to New Mexico with Bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy in 1854, serving four years at the cathedral before taking over the Mora parish, where he died on August 3, 1858. A mere four days later, the [Santa Fe] Weekly Gazette used the sparse information at its disposal to run this brief and objective account:

Death of Father A.M. Abel

Intelligence reached here one day of this week that Padre A.M. Avel, Priest at Mora, was dead. The general impression prevails that he was poisoned—the poison being in some wine used in the religious services of the church. He drank but a very small quantity, and remarked [noticed] at the time that it had a singular taste. In less than fifteen minutes thereafter he was a corpse. 2

Vicar-General Joseph P. Machebeuf was in charge of the diocese when Avel's strange death occurred, and in a letter written the next spring to the French Societe pour la Propagation de la Foi, he described the events as he knew them:

On 5 August, a courier arrived posthaste to bring me the deplorable news that one of our dear confreres had been poisoned and that the crime had all the marks of a terrible sacrilege. Fr. Etienne Avel . . . was sent [to Mora] to repair the scandal given by a wretched priest and to destroy the disorders which resulted from it. . . . 3

Don Juan Bautista Lamy a Santa Fé” of 1914, a self-aware and sophisticated romantic-revival production rather than a folk creation, will appear in Thomas J. Steele, S.J., Folk and Church in Nineteenth-Century New Mexico (Colorado College, forthcoming). 2. [Santa Fe] Weekly Gazette, August 7, 1858, 2. An Avel obituary appeared in The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1859), 248. Although “Abel” is the correct written form, “Avel” is the common oral rendition. In actual usage, they are interchangeable, which explains the inconsistencies in the documentary record. 3. The “wretched priest” was Pieter Jan Munnecom, a native of Holland. On January 26, 1856, shortly after his ordination in Santa Fe, he was sent to Mora. Father Gabriel Ussel’s “Memoir,” Colorado Heritage Center Library photostat, 1:79–80, notes that when Munnecom had returned to Mora and Avel had died, he immediately sent a courier across the mountains to Santa Fe on the best horse to be had. Bishop Lamy was in St. Louis, so Machebeuf was in charge; Ussel had come to confer with the Señor Vicario, possibly about the situation in Arroyo Hondo four months after the excommunications of Cura Don Antonio José Martínez in Taos and Cura Don José de Jesús
[Avel] was absent one day to go visit a large village some leagues from the principal parish church. The next day after his return, 3 August, the Feast of the Finding of Saint Stephen, he heard some confessions, commenced the Holy Sacrifice—and was unable to conclude it; for at the moment when he took the chalice to receive the Precious Blood, he realized that he was poisoned. His first reaction was to raise his eyes to heaven, doubtless to offer the sacrifice of his life to God; after he passed a few moments in prayer, he ordered the sacristan to go find some pure wine. During the interval the venom produced its fatal effects, and he scarcely had time to consecrate again, give Holy Communion to the faithful, and purify the chalice before his strength failed him. He walked back trembling to the sacristy, and after removing his vestments he returned to spend a minute before the Blessed Sacrament, went to commend himself to the Blessed Virgin at the foot of her altar, and left the church saying to some persons who were present, "Pray for me; I am dying of poison." . . . Full of resignation, he besought those about him, "Pray not for me for I am happy to die on the feastday of my patron saint; 4 but go to the church," he said to them, "as worthy sons of Saint Stephen, and pray for those who are the cause of my death." He took his crucifix in his hands, pressed it against his lips, and died a few moments later amid the most lovely sentiments of confidence and acceptance. 5

Aurelio Macedonio Espinosa collected the following poem from Juan Chavez y García (c. 1856–1926) of Puerto de Luna and published it in his 1915 article "Romancero nuevomejicano": 6

Lucero in Arroyo Hondo.

Munnecom was indicted for the murder of Avel in the September term of the Second Judicial District, but at the trial in November he was quickly found innocent; [Santa Fe] Weekly Gazette, December 18, 1858, 2. Munnecom served later as the pastor of Trinidad. Ussel’s hypothesis has gained general acceptance: Munnecom broke up an affair between a dying Hispanic woman and an Anglo named Noel, so Noel tried to poison Munnecom and poisoned Avel by mistake (Ussel, 1:76–77, 80–83).

4. Etienne is the French form of Stephen. On the feast of the finding of the protomartyr’s relics, August 3, the gospel (Matthew 23:34–39) speaks of “the blood of the just Abel all the way to the blood of Zachary son of Barachias whom you killed between the temple building and the altar.” The Biblical Abel was killed by his brother, Cain, who thereupon, like Noel, became an accursed wanderer.

5. Joseph P. Machebeuf to the Paris Society for the Propagation of the Faith, May 13, 1859, pp. 7–8, photostat in the Horgan Collection, Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

The Death of Padre Abel

Abel, while dreaming,
Dreamt a revelation
That they were killing him
With a most inexplicable treason,
He not knowing the how or the when,
Only that they awaited the occasion.

What is this that has happened to us,
Sad, unlucky people?
Who has killed the pastor
Here in the sacred temple?
What an unfortunate people!
What sorrow and affliction!
Where can there be a reason
For such a passionate deed?
Avel, so long a time before,
Had dreamt a revelation.

Cowards, what have you done?
How cunningly you have worked!
They gave him the fatal poison
In that sacred chalice.
Forever will they be accursed
For their wicked treachery,
Since for no reason
They did so evil a deed.
The innocent Abel died
Without knowing the how or the when.

Who was so vengeful
As to persecute you so
That on the very day of your patron
Your death came to you?
The whole world suffered so
Seeing you in agony,
Your life already draining,
Yet listening to your gentle voice
When you stood there preaching
Begging God's help

La muerte del Padre Abel

Abel estando soñando
soñó una revelación
de que lú estaban matando
con muy curiosa traisón,
sin saber como ni cuando
validos de l' ocasión.

¿Qu'es lo que nos susedió, 
triste pueblo, desgrasiado?
¿Quién al párrroco mató
dentro del templo sagrado?
¡Qué pueblo tan desgraciado!
¡Qué tristesa y afinión!
¿Donde estará la rason
para tanto sentimiento?

Abel con bastante tiempo
soñ' una revelación.

Cobardes ¿qu'es lo qu'hisieron?
¡Con que cautel' han obrado!
El cruel veneno le dieron
en aquel vaso sagrado.
Siempre serán desgraciados
por su maldita traisón,
pues sin ninguna ocasión
gran maldá jueron [á] haser.

Murió 'I inosent' Abel
sin saber como ni quando.

¿Quién jé 'I que si apasionó,
que te persiguieron tanto,
que 'I mismo di' [d]e tu santo
la muerte se te yegó?
Todo 'I mundo te sintió
verte 'star desesperando
ya con tu vid' acabando;
más di 'ir tu aspible vos
cuando 'stabas predicando,
pidiéndolj ausiliú á Dios

The ü in lines 3, 34, and 36 signifies a back mid oral vowel like English "but"; the
i in lines 25, 27, 34, 36, 46, and 51 signifies a front mid oral vowel like English "him."
Aurelio M. Espinosa, Studies in New Mexican Spanish: Phonology (Albuquerque: University
of New Mexico Press, 1909), 59–62. The fourth stanza contains an extra line, as Espinosa
noted.
When they were killing you.

God said in His scripture
(And this is said truly)
That whoever sheds another’s blood
Will have his blood shed in turn,
And the occasion had come.
But God is looking at them,
And now they start their excuses
Before the tribunal of justice
Those who killed Abel
On the very feast of his patron saint.

"And this is the parting,"
Says God in his power,
"When from the poisoned wine
Died the innocent Abel."

cuando te 'staban matando.
Dijo Dios en su escritura,
y 'est' es verdad declarada,
40 qu' el que derram' otra sangre
sera la d'el derramada.7
Y 'est' ocasión jué yegada,
mas Dios los está mirando
y ya s' irán disculpando
ant' el justo tribunal,
quí Abel jueron á matar
el mero di' [d]e su santo.

"Aquí va la despedida,"
dise Dios con su poder;
50 "que con el vino mesclado
murió 'l inosentj Abel."8

"La muerte del Padre Abel" relates a story and meditates on it, so it embraces both the objective and narrative function of the corrido and the subjective and lyrical tone typical of the décima. This poem shows the protagonist like a mythic and archetypal figure sensing his approaching death. Another corrido motif in this composition is the narrator’s lament that the hero was unjustly treated by some or all of the members of his own in-group; in the Avel poem, the rhetorical question "Qué es lo que nos susedio,/ triste pueblo, desgraciado?” speaks to the community who have witnessed the murder.

Rather than providing information as the Weekly Gazette and Father Machebeuf’s letter do, “La muerte del Padre Abel” illustrates particularly well the process that creates many folk songs. One commanding scene dominates the entire event: the dramatic tableau of the priest’s death at the altar after drinking the consecrated wine, which is life itself. All other events, both prior and subsequent, are omitted. The wider community spreads the news of this unusually shocking event; a poet then takes this well-known information when it is still fresh in

7. The phrase “sera la d’el derramada” is an allusion to Matthew 26:52.
8. With many variations from the strict form, “La muerte del Padre Abel” is a décima, an example of a sophisticated literary genre in the folk repertoire of Spanish-speaking people throughout the world. By encoding and imparting the people’s religion, philosophy, folk wisdom, morality, and political protest, the décima focused and communicated the group’s most serious reflections and most fundamental concerns.

The first line of the first stanza and the last lines of each subsequent stanza offer strong evidence that the planta, due either to the composer’s inexperience with the traditional décima or to later erosion, may have been a six-line stanza much like this: Abel estando sonando/ Soñ' una revelación/ Sin saber como ni cuando;/ Cuando lú 'staban matando/ El mero di' [d]e su santo;/ Murió 'l inosentj Abel.
popular memory, meditates on its deeper meanings, and crafts the results into this song. The emotional impact of the song is central, so the narrator shifts disturbingly from one focus to another, turning to the shocked community, to the killers, to God, and back to the killers, often returning for a few lines to address Avel, describing his death before the people’s eyes and reminding him of the meaningfulness of its happening on his saint’s day. Etienne Avel the innocent, passive victim is St. Stephen, the protomartyr in the Acts of the Apostles, and he is Abel, the first man murdered in Genesis.

II. “Farewell to Father Bianchi”

Raffaele Bianchi was born in Consentino in the Province of Abruzzo, Kingdom of Naples, December 19, 1836. In 1867 he came to New Mexico with Bishop Lamy and the other first Jesuits, surviving a harrowing journey across the Santa Fe Trail. In December 1868, Bianchi and Father Donato Gasparri went to preach a parish mission in Mora. Gasparri’s entry in the official Jesuit diary describes Bianchi’s death:

8 [December 1868]. The Mora mission began in the afternoon with exercises for the children which lasted until the 12th. Then the full mission for all the people. On the 18th, Fr. Bianchi lay sick, and then, having received all the sacraments, he died of a short and violent pleurisy on the 28th at 4:30 in the morning. He was buried on the 29th in the parish church of Santa Gertrudis in Mora, on the epistle [right] side, a little inside the communion rail.

Jesuit accounts claimed that Bianchi foresaw his imminent death and prophesied it in his final sermon.9

Manuel Berg of Albuquerque filed this song, a sort of combination of décima and cuando, with the New Mexico Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, having collected it from Juan Martínez of Truchas.10


10. New Mexico Works Progress Administration Writers’ Project, Museum of New Mexico History Library Collection 5.5, folder 1, 4-5, 19-20. Juan Martínez told Manuel Berg that “The members of his family have sung or recited these verses and songs ever since he could remember.”
Farewell to Fr. Bianchi

In well-known Lo de Mora
This episode occurred:
What a crowd of people
Had gathered with us!

Now so forgotten
Is Bianchi among us.
Glory has no ending
For him who desires it
Yes there may be missionary priests,
But it’s doubtful when
There will be another Bianchi.

It was November twenty-eighth
That his death occurred; only to God
He committed his soul, with one part
[of the rite] in Latin. Glory has no ending
For him who desires it.
Yes there may be missionary priests,
But another Bianchi—when?

Born in Italy, our missionary
Father: ah the happiness of that motherland
Which gave us such a great favor!
Of your troubles I know nothing, except that
He is crying only to God.
Yes there may be missionary priests,
But another Bianchi—when?

In the cathedral of Heaven
Bianchi is seated
With one part [of his plea] in Latin
Pleading for us.
Yes there may be missionary priests
But another Bianchi—when?

Saint Peter, give him the keys
Since he earned them in the world;
While he was in the world
He converted many souls.
[Yes there may be missionary priests
But another Bianchi—when?]
the faithful departed and because the twenty-eighth of December, the feast of the Holy Innocents (the male infants Herod killed in Bethlehem while the Holy Family fled to Egyptian sanctuary), serves in practice as the Hispanic April Fools' Day. Thus, though this prayer-song offers little enough factual data about Bianchi, a mere visitor to the Mora parish, it exemplifies how some motifs of Mexican religious art migrated from simple woodcuts in inexpensive novenas and prayer pamphlets into New Mexican religious poetry. As the visual often became the verbal in religious compositions, so in the present lyric we have "the crowd of people," "the cathedral of Heaven," and the image of Saint Peter with the keys.

For that portion of the folk who remembered Bianchi favorably, this song serves as a prayer probably recited in a church or family setting. The archetypal past and the relative lack of specific documented details about Bianchi's life and death lent themselves well to the panegyric quality of the cuando.

III. "The Deaths at Walsenburg"

Political boss Silverio Suaso and Father Louis Merles died almost simultaneously though in unrelated incidents. The song shows how folk interpretation relies upon mythical pattern: the destinies of the two most prominent and important men in the Huérzano Valley in southern Colorado must have been deeply related either by fate, by a mutual death-pact, or by both factors.

The Plaza de los Leones, settled by the León family of which Tomás León was a member, was renamed Walsenburg; and Colonel John M. Francisco's rancho became La Veta, a temporary boomtown and a very tough place indeed when the railroad built its way up the valley, arriving in Walsenburg and pushing on to La Veta during July 1876.12

The killing of Silverio Suaso resulted from a long night of drinking and cards in a La Veta saloon. About 6:00 A.M. on Sunday, September 3, 1876, Suaso accused one of the other three players of cheating. When Eulogio Perea came close enough to him, Suaso struck him with a pistol butt, then turned and went after the other two men, whereupon

Perea took a grubbing hoe from the ground where it lay and hit Suaso a fatal blow.  

Louis Merles was born in 1829 in Le Puy. After being ordained and gaining a reputation as a very good preacher, he joined the Marist Fathers and came to New Mexico in 1863; in 1871 he took over the Walsenburg parish.

On Sunday morning, September 3, 1876, he was bound for Trinidad to meet the Vicar-Apostolic of Colorado, Bishop Joseph P. Mač-ebœuf, who was conferring confirmation at the Jesuit parish there. The September 5, 1876 issue of the weekly Huérfano Independent carried this:

Father Louis Merles, Catholic priest of this parish, was on Sunday morning, the third, going to the Apishapa in a buggy, accompanied by a Mexican named Tomas Leon. When about two miles from Walsenburg, the horses going at a sharp trot, the front wheels of the buggy struck a rut, washed out by recent rains, causing the springs of the buggy to rebound with such violence as to throw both inmates out of the buggy. Father Louis in the fall struck the ground head first, dislocating his neck. He was brought back to Walsenburg as rapidly as possible. Dr. Rothe was summoned and did all that medical skill could devise to save the life of the reverend gentleman, but to no avail. Father Louis never regained consciousness from the time of the accident until his death, which occurred yesterday about two o’clock in the afternoon—the fourth instant.

So Father Merles died of his broken neck the next day, Monday, September 4, 1876, about two hours after Suaso—who also lingered about a day—had died.

The near-simultaneity both of the fatal injuries and of the deaths of these two extremely prominent and important members of the Cucharas Valley community was purely coincidental. In the poem, the connection between the two men established through their “promesa,” with the guardian angel acting as “testigo,” is a folk projection; by contrast, oral history accounts which Monsignor Howard L. Delaney, longtime pastor in Walsenburg, collected during his first years there state that Merles and Suaso “had had words—quite an argument—a short time before their troubles, and quite a bit was made of the fact that they both died the way they did.” Monsignor Delaney has generously shared with us the text of this *indita* which he collected in a

13. [Pueblo] *Colorado Daily Chieftan* September 5, 1876, 1, 4; September 6, 1876, 1, 4; September 7, 1876, 4; September 12, 1876, 4.
cuaderno belonging to the Hernández-Córdova family. The author identifies himself in the last stanza as Santos Trujillo of Rito de la Gallina, about five miles northeast of Gardner.

The Deaths at Walsenburg

I ask God's permission
To tell this story
Of two men who died—
An event already notorious.
They said goodbye to the world;
May God raise them to his glory.

Again, I begin
Describing it step by step,
Stating their names,
For I have no hesitation:
One was Don Luis Merles,
And the other, Silverio Suaso.

These were two friends
Who had lived a fine friendship.
One day, in conversation,
While chatting, they proposed
To meet before God's tribunal;
To this they pledged themselves.

Both of these two loyal friends,
Seeing their time running out,
As they had committed themselves,
They'd named a faithful witness,
Their own guardian angel.

On the twenty-seventh of October,
This was in seventy-six,
Everybody saw them
For the very last time.
They said goodbye to the world
Between the hours of nine and ten.

When some time had elapsed
After their promise to each other,
They went to appear
In the place they'd agreed on—
To give an account to the Creator
Before the divine tribunal.

Las Muertes de Walsenburg

A Dios le pido lisencia
pa publicar una istoria
del mundo se despideron
Dios se los lleve a su gloria

De nuevo comensare
hablando paso por paso
por que no tengo ebaraso
el uno era Don Luis Mel
y el otro Silverio Suaso

Estos eran dos hamigos
que en buena amista vivieron
un dia estando en consultas
platicando propucieron
berse en el juicio de Dios
y aci se compromitieron

Hanbos dos fieles hamigos
ya su tiempo no se tarda
como estan comprometidos
el uno al otro se aguarda
pucieron á un fiel testigo
que fue el angel de su guarda

El 27 de optubre
esto fue el setenta y seis
todas las jentes lo vieron
alli por ultima vez
del mundo se despidieron
entre las nueve y las diez.

Haviendo pasado un tiempo
que esto havia susedido
fueron á copareser
donde se has comprometido
adar cuenta a su criador
en un tribunal divino

14. Monsignor Delaney, letter of November 13, 1987. The indita variation of the corrido was introduced into New Mexico at about the time of Mexican independence. It typically is a narrative using realistic language and introducing many proper names.
On the Rio de las Cucharas
Nothing is ever quiet;
In the new town,
A place known as La Veta,
They killed Don Silverio
For some hidden reason.

Having accompanied
Don Silverio on that day,
They entered a house,
He and all of a gang,
To enjoy themselves a while
With Heraclio in their company.

They began their diversion,
According to their plan,
They took advantage of the game
Throwing the dice
To kill him treacherously.
Oh what an unfortunate man!

Having thrown the dice
The doomed man caught someone [cheating],
He was claiming his winnings,
But his opponent denied it.
This was how the chosen man
Hurled himself into death.

Gentlemen, take note:
The problem began
When from one of his companions
He grabbed a pistol—
That unfortunate man
Who threatened them all!
His misfortune was so great
And his luck so bad
That in full view of the plaza
His enemy killed him.
All relate this disaster
What can we do if that was his fate?

Señor Francisco Espinosa
Took him by the hand—
He was his loyal friend—
And removed him from the fight;
The unconscious man
He carried to the plaza.

Let us explain the name
Of the aggressive evildoer:
With a hoe that he carried,
From behind, from ambush,
En el río de las cucharas
ninguna cosa esta quieta
en la mera plaza nueva
donde le disen la veta
mataron á Don Silverio
por una cosa secreta
Haviéndose acompañado
[A] Don Silverio en este día
se metieron a una casa
el y toda una pandilla
para devertir un rato
y oraqio en su compania
Comiensan su devircion
de lo que tenian trasado
se valieron de ocacion
por un albur que han echado
lo mataron a triacion
aque hombre tan desgraciado
Haviendo echado el albur
el finado lo caso
iba sobre su enteres
el contrario lo nego
el finado precisado
á la muerte se arrojo
Señores pongan cuidado
la cuestion se comenzó
que á uno de sus companeros
la pistola le quito
aque hombre tan desgraciado
que á todos amenaso
Fue tan grande su desgracia
y tan infelis su suerte
que a la vista de la plaza
le dio el contrario la muerte
cienten todos la desgracia
que haremos ci fue su suerte
Señor francisco espinosa
de la mano lo tomo
como era costante hamigo
de la bola lo saco
perdido de su sentido
á la plasa lo llevo
Esplicaremos el nombre
del mal echor ensestido
con un cabador que allo
en un detras escondido
He dealt him a violent death, Him who did not deserve it.

Heraciio is his given name, Córdova his family name. His brother accompanied him— The aggressive José Córdova— Committing this heinous crime Against a man who gave no cause.

I’ll begin to relate to you The death of the priest Two miles from Walsenburg, Where they went to encounter The hour which they had set, The two of them in company.

He left Las Cucharas, He was on his way to the Apishapa, And nearing Las Santas Claras He found himself forced To fulfil his promise With full formality.

Tomás León accompanied him On this so-called day; All is suffering. O Holy Virgin Mary— Do not let them die In their last agony.

On coming to a little arroyo Ill fortune did befall him. Even though the driver is capable, The buggy nonetheless overturned. To God we will give thanks That death thus overcame him.

The worried driver Fell to one side of the buggy, And is so shocked That he faints from the blow; Yet with the striped sarape He was wearing he covered him.

The driver ran

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15. Two Santa Clara creeks drain the north and northeast sides of the east Spanish Peak, and the little plazuela of Santa Clara below their confluence lay on the road to Apishapa and Trinidad.

16. "Tomás Lion" was probably a descendant of Miguel Antonio Leon, whose family founded La Plaza de los Leones, later renamed Walsenburg.
To notify the town.
The people were appalled
Upon seeing this misfortune,
Witnessing what had happened
In this horrendous event.

Five priests arrived,
For he was a good pastor,
And they gave good example
In front of the people.
Thus his friends came to his aid,
Thanks to the Almighty.

The priests decided
To help this beautiful soul;
They checked his wounded body
And felt his weakness.
Behind the sacred temple
They built his sepulchre.

The deceased Don Silverio
Was kept with great care;
They brought him by cart,
And in the Temple they were reunited.
Their friends came to their aid
Accompanying the two.

The grief-stricken sister,
When the shocking news befell,
Like a sad dove
Found herself abandoned.
Weeping, the unfortunate lady
Came to a priest.

One of the priests
Took her by the hand
Saying, "Here is your brother.
You grieve as I do."
For all humankind
Was bathed in tears.

The people shuddered,
The earth trembled.
The county is lost
Now that the priest is dead.
"My children, I bid you farewell":
These were his last words to them.

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17. *Triste tortolita solita* is a common nineteenth- and twentieth-century New Mexican Hispanic literary formula to indicate a mourning woman. See John Donald Robb, *Hispanic Folk Music of New Mexico and the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 398, verse #3.
"Let us pray to Heaven
On this sad occasion.
Alone, sad, and unconsolled
Will my heart weep,
Yet I have the consolation
Of sending you my blessing."

I myself do not hesitate
To relate with clarity of mind
This sorrowful event
The town has undergone.
Silverio Suaso has now died,
Saying, "I bid you farewell."

Gentlemen and Sirs,
Today I invite you all
To experience this event.
Don’t let it fall to oblivion.
Silverio Suaso has now died.
Pardon the inexpert way this story
has been told.

The man who composed this story
Has very little schooling.
I will give you his name,
For he was self-inspired.
He is Santos Trujillo
From El Rito de la Gallina.

Though the poem changed names (that of Suaso’s killer) and dates (the month, perhaps because October is dedicated to the angels), the strong structure of this long corrido suggests that it was copied into the Hernandez-Cordova cuaderno in just about its original form. The thirty-one stanzas divide into six segments: two stanzas provide an introductory summary, four speak of the men’s promise, nine (lines 37–90) narrate Suaso’s death, eight (lines 91–138) narrate Merles’, five describe the double funeral and remind the reader of the promise, and three identify the author. This structure gives warrant for the death-pact, that the men are alike in so many ways: they have been friends, the poem says; they are the two most prominent men in the Cucharas Valley; each dies of a totally unexpected blow to the head; each lies unconscious for slightly more than a day; each has a special friend to assist him in his last moments, perhaps the earthly equivalent of a guardian angel; the death of each receives extraordinary publicity both in written (especially printed) accounts and in folk accounts.

Yet there are important differences in personality and life-style. The feisty gambler Suaso receives his fatal blow while in a drunken rage; the priest Merles dies while in the performance of his pastoral
duties. Merles and Suaso are almost Jekyll and Hyde, two opposite aspects of the one common humanity, a universal theme in literature. The folk projection of the death-pact suggests that there were not two distinct deaths so much as one double death.

Santos Trujillo notes in this long poem's last stanza that he does not have much formal education. This very statement implies the author's recognition of a gap between the newspaper accounts which he had probably read and the oral-world discussion and interpretation of the events as they came to be known and understood and remembered. In this mixed context Trujillo created his residually oral ballad. The oral mode of remembering is not neutral, "objective," and competent to deal with everything, as literacy seems to be. The oral world tends to flatten out the events it canonizes; it loses the particulars, the "who, what, when, where, why, how," in which newspaper writing delights.18

IV. "Farewell to Vicar Pierre Eguillon"

Pierre Eguillon was born in Bussières, Puy de Dôme, Clermont, France, on February 12, 1820. Bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy recruited him for New Mexico. He soon became Vicar General and pastor of the adobe cathedral in Santa Fe and made a career in the capital city, supervising the unending construction of the present cathedral, serving as chaplain of the convent and school of the Loretto Sisters and as chaplain to the Charity Sisters' hospital, aiding the poor, and generally assisting the archbishops. He died on July 21, 1892, widely beloved despite his apparent austerity; a newspaper article noted his nobility of mind, mercy, generosity, wisdom, and ability to stop feuds.19

18. A fifth song and sixth might have been added to this article. "Indita del 1884," a corrido on a Rio Grande flood, mentions Padre Juan Bautista Rallière of Tomé in passing. Consult the song text in Florence Hawley Ellis, "Tomé and Father J.B.R.," New Mexico Historical Review 30 (April 1955), 206–7; John Donald Robb, texts, University of New Mexico Fine Arts Library, #2189, 3–4; or in Robb, Hispanic Folk Music, 454–55, giving the musical notation; see Rallière's account of the flood in Revista Católica 10 (July 20, 1884), 337. Revista carried other brief accounts of the flood, Revista Católica 10 (June 15, 1884), 278, and Revista Católica 10 (July 27, 1884), 350.

The sixth song, a lost lampoon attacking Rallière for misappropriating relief supplies during the flood, was probably suppressed by the folk themselves: "Pablo Jaramillo composed a poem telling of the distribution of the relief supplies, and he narrowly escaped a sound beating. Pablo promised to send me a copy of that poem"—Florence Hawley Ellis and Edwin Baca [Berry], eds., "The Apuntes of Father J.B. Rallière," New Mexico Historical Review 32 (January 1957), 22–23.

19. Fray Angelico Chavez, unpublished notes, Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe; James H. Defouri, Historical Sketch of the Catholic Church in New Mexico (San Francisco:
The song, which derives from the same WPA source as the Bianchi song above, is in *corrido* form with a couple of stanzas running to six lines:

**Farewell to Vicar Pierre Eguillon**

On the twenty-first of Santiago
All of us mourned
The death of the Señor Vicar
Of the parish church.

Feel it with soul and life
And your heart will know
That the Señor Vicar has died,
Blest Pierre Eguillon.

**Adios del Vicario Por Pedro Gillon**

El veinte uno de Santiago
Sentimos en general
que murio el Señor Vicario
de la iglesia parroquial.

Sentilo con alma y vida
Y veras del Corazon
que murio el Señor Vicario
Bendito Pedro Gillon.


20. The title may originally have been something like “Adios al Vicario Padre Pedro Eguillon.”

21. The feast day of Saint James the Apostle, military protector of Spain and patron of horses and riders, is July 25, so “the twenty-first of [the month of] Santiago” is a convenient shorthand. The funeral was very possibly deferred until Tuesday the twenty-sixth to avoid the fiesta.
Toll the sad bells,
Decorate the church in mourning,
For the Good of the Poor has died,
And the Treasure of the World.

"Farewell O Church my spouse,
Farewell each of the people.
You will pray for my blessings,
Each of my parishioners.

"Farewell O Church my Spouse,
Farewell each of my people
Farewell each of my little girls,
Pray for your pastor."

Until noon of that day
We had the comfort of the wake.
Lift your gaze to heaven
And all cry out, "Farewell."

Say your farewell to the Vicar
Forever farewell, farewell.
There were fifty lights
Illuminating his catafalque
And to us all the church seemed
Sad and dark.

I do not criticize any priest

Dovlen las tristes campanas
Ponganle luto a la iglesia
que murio el Bien de los Pobres
y del mundo la Riqueza

Adios la Iglesia mi esposa
Adio toditas gentes
Reseran mis bendiciones
toditas mis feligreses.

Adios la Iglesia mi esposa
Adios toditas mis gentes
Adios toditas mis ninas

Rueguen por su presidente.

Hasta las doce del dia
lleven la vista al cielo
todos clamemos adios.

Despidance el Bicario
para siempre adios, adios.
Cincuenta luses habia
Aluminando su tumba
Y a todos se nos hacia la Iglesia
Triste y obscura.

No desdoro a ningun padre

22. *Doblar*—to toll—is to ring a pair of strokes for each of the eight verses of Psalm 129, "De Profundis—Out of the Depths," and then to strike a measured stroke for each year and part of a year of the dead person’s life. The [Santa Fe] *Daily New Mexican* for July 22, 1892 (p. 4) wrote, “The Very Rev. Peter Eguillon, vicar general of Santa Fe, breathed his last at St. Vincent’s sanitarium at 6:15 yesterday afternoon, and soon after the bells of the cathedral announced to the city that a great and good man had gone to his reward.”

"Luto" is the decoration of personal clothing or a building to indicate mourning. The [Santa Fe] *Daily New Mexican* for July 26, 1892 (p. 4) wrote, “Arrayed in sacerdotal robes of rich purple and white silk, the body of the distinguished dead rested on a bier draped in white that stood in the main aisle in front of the grand altar. The building was appropriately decorated. Festoons of white and black hung from the massive stone columns, and just over the bier was a huge mitre in white and black.”

23. As the entire Church is the Spouse of Christ (Ephesians 5), so the particular church—the *parroquia* of San Francisco, in this case—could be called the spouse of the particular pastor.

24. "Toditas mis ninas—each and every one of my girls” would seem to refer to the pupils of Our Lady of Light, the Loretto Sisters’ convent school of which Pierre Eguillon was for many years the chaplain.

25. The funeral began at 9:00 A.M. on Tuesday, July 26, 1892 and lasted for three hours—see [Santa Fe] *Daily New Mexican*, July 22, 1892, 4, and July 26, 1892, 4—so the lines must refer to noon on the day of the requiem Mass and burial.
They are all good enough for me
But another Vicar will never be born,
Nor another Bishop Jean Lamy.
Six priests and an archbishop
Praising the Most Holy:
May there rise to heaven in triumph
The soul of your Vicar.
Whoever reads this hymn
Or whoever hears it sung
Should pray the Our Father
And the Hail Mary in general
On behalf of the Vicar
And the parish church.

While the Mexican *corrido* was mainly secular throughout the nineteenth century, New Mexicans put the genre to religious uses especially at times of death. It narrated biography, extolled special virtues, and mentioned survivors, particularly those who seemed most distraught. "Adios del Vicario" is a standard *corrido* in having the hero speak from the dead, bidding farewell to his friends (including here the personified cathedral church clad in mourning) and asking the assembly to bury him.

Though the author of this song surely had access to many sources of information, he probably knew and used accounts from the Santa Fe *Daily New Mexican* since there are so many tallies of particular facts, as the footnotes have suggested. There is heavy emphasis on the emotional state of the speaker, who tells his listeners how they in turn should feel and what they in turn should say.

This lyric resembles "Adios a del Branquino" in functioning as a prayer, as the informant Juan Martínez of Truchas suggested when he told Manuel Berg that for as long as he could remember his family had sung the two songs as hymns or recited them as prayers. They embody history in the form of ritual texts that serve not merely as entertainment but as devotions within a family or community context.

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26. The [Santa Fe] *Daily New Mexican* for July 26, 1892 (p. 4) stated that "the casket was lowered and placed in the right of the sarcophagus which contains the remains of the lamented Archbishop Lamy." This physical juxtaposition may have elicited the poetic juxtaposition of Eguillon and Lamy in lines 33–34.

27. The [Santa Fe] *Daily New Mexican* for July 26, 1892 (p. 4) named the clergy: Archbishop Salpointe was the *gran Obispo*, and the *seis padres* also in the sanctuary were Bishop Chapelle and Fathers Defouri, Ussel, Coudert, Rallièire, and Fayet.

28. Line 39 suggests that the composer of this hymn is equally aware of its potential as a literate object ("El que leyere esta diosa") and as an oral event ("el que la oyera").
Literate persons render the world from a position of relative power, believe in objectivity, and trust that since meaning is "in" the event, such objectivity will reveal its true meaning; they then couch their conclusions in prose. On the other hand, when the folk have sifted and interpreted the events of their world, they frequently preserve their interpretations in song and poem, concomitantly verbalizing the abiding myths of their culture and their abiding sense of themselves. They proceed from the unexamined premise that these received patterns of their tradition embody fundamental value and meaning.  

In addition to vocabulary, spelling, and grammar many times incorrectly considered nonstandard, these four lyrics show their oral-culture roots in repetitiousness, in verbal-formula constructions, in the exclamatory and dialogic character of many of the lines, and in the variety of speaking voices and of auditors. In this literary projection of cultural history, the dead priest's voice may speak, and the voices of the various characters in the poem are seldom clearly differentiated from the fluid and undefined narrator's voice. Voices address God, the people in general, the villains, and the listener-reader, and the texts even include various prayers.

The poems contain other preternatural motifs such as foreknowledge of death (Avel, Bianchi) and death-pacts (Merles-Suaso). Further, Bianchi (lines 26–29) even appears in heaven in a verbal correlative to popular woodcuts and engravings; and the fourth poem rather prays to Eguillon than tells about him. By enabling the listener's attention to transcend time, space, matter, and earthly causality, the poems operate in a dimension well beyond the realistic, naturalistic, and natural (the domain of journalism), and thus they attain what the folk consider the ultimately real.

Historical folk ballads like the ones in this study create a special kind of history that overtly presents practical moral models for living and seek strength for abiding human problems of good and evil, fate, and life and death. By perpetuating accepted customs and shared historical experience, folk history not only transmits tradition but creates it over and over again. In this regard, these four poems, probably composed very soon after the deaths of the priests (1858–92), illustrate how New Mexican Hispanic Catholics, in the early years after the United States annexed New Mexico, identified themselves by contrasting their own traditional, ritualistic experience to that of the modern Anglo, predominantly Protestant, society. Whereas New Mexican folk

poetry usually includes a few religious allusions, the oral history that dates from the second half of the nineteenth century, the period of heavy Anglo dominance, is particularly imbued with Hispanic Catholic images and symbols because the majority of New Mexican vecinos of that era were still deeply bound spiritually and culturally to the church.\textsuperscript{30} The very abundance of conventions characteristic of prayers and religious visual art points also to Hispanics’ need to define themselves within their rapidly changing milieu. In the light of the progressive erosion of their traditional life, their social organization, their economic base, and even their language, their last refuge was their Catholic rituals, the most enduring symbol of their past and a realm of experience that belonged only to them. By underscoring their ritualistic life, they could indicate how their historical consciousness differed from that of the group in power.

One might then view official documented history and folkloric history as expressions of two different sets of symbols of the past. Into just this sort of religious experience and folkloric history the New Mexican Hispanos incorporated a few French diocesan priests and one Italian Jesuit by ignoring a great deal of biographical information, by hispanicizing their foreign-sounding names, and by integrating them into their own religious and literary context. As contrasted with a documentary account of a given historical event, the Hispanic folk interpretation transmits the important myths, symbols, paradigms, and rituals of the culture so as to define the group’s identity and ensure its survival during a time of sociocultural dislocation.

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