

Mysticism, Medicines, and the Other: Writing Traditions in Place

Assoc of Writers and Writing Programs Conference
9 March 2006 Austin, Texas
3-4:15pm Hilton, Salon A, 4th fl

For Apache storyteller Dudley Patterson, storytellers and their listeners are “persons seeking wisdom.” As he told anthropologist Keith Basso,
“Wisdom sits in places.
It’s like water that never dries up.
You need to drink water to stay alive, don’t you?
Well, you also need to drink from places.
You must remember everything about them.
You must learn their names.
You must remember what happened at them long ago.
You must think about it and keep thinking about it.
Then your mind will become smoother and smoother.
Then you will see danger before it happens.
You will walk a long way and live a long time.” (Basso, *Senses of Place*)

Four southwestern writers of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry who have drunk deeply from places will read from their works and explore the gifts and challenges of weaving traditions (legends, personal and family stories, beliefs, customs, rituals, medicines, and more) into their writing.

Moderator: Margaret Yocom

Margaret Yocom, folklorist, is Associate Professor of English at George Mason University where, among her courses, she teaches “Living Words: Folklore and Creative Writing.” Assistant editor of *Ugiwangmiut Quliapyuit: King Island Tales*, she has published articles on family folklore, material culture, gender, and ethnographic writing. Now, her major fieldsite lies in the western mountains of Maine where she writes about a family of storytellers, wood carvers, and knitters. Founder of the American Folklore Society’s new section on Folklore and Creative Writing, her poetry and non-fiction have appeared in *Voices* and *Friends Journal*.
<http://mason.gmu.edu/~myocom>

Participants:

Norma E. Cantú

Norma E. Cantú, Professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio, edits the book series, *Rio Grande/Rio Bravo: Borderlands Culture and Tradition*. Author of the award-winning *Canícula Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* and co-editor of *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, she has just finished a novel, *Cabañuelas* and is working on another (Champú, or Hair Matters) as well as ethnography of the Matachines de la Santa Cruz, a religious dance drama from Laredo, Texas. A folklorist, she has served on the Board of the American Folklore Society. <http://colfa.utsa.edu/cantu>

J. Michael Martinez

J. Michael Martinez is an MFA candidate in poetry at George Mason University where he also serves as research assistant in the Northern Virginia Folklife Archive. Winner of the *Five Fingers Review* editor’s prize and the 2005 GMU Completion Fellowship, his poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Colorado Review*,

Five Fingers Review, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, and more. <http://www.jmichaelmartinez.com>

Pat Mora

Pat Mora is the author of the memoir *House of Houses*, a fifth poetry collection--*Aunt Carmen's Book of Practical Saints*, and over twenty books for young readers including *Doña Flor*. Pat is completing *Dear Teacher: Seven Practices for Creative Educators*. Recipient of a Civitella Ranieri Fellowship to write in Umbria, Italy, in 2003, she has been judge and recipient of the Poetry Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of New Mexico. <http://www.patmora.com>

Alexander Parsons

Alexander Parsons' first novel, *Leaving Disneyland* won the Associated Writing Programs Award Series for the Novel. A recipient of a 2004 National Endowment for the Arts Literary Fellowship, a 2004 Pushcart Prize honorable mention, and the 2003 Sherwood Anderson Fiction Award, he has published in *The Colorado Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Mid-American Review*. His second novel is *In the Shadows of the Sun*. An assistant professor of English, he teaches at the University of New Hampshire. <http://www.alexanderparsons.com>

Alberto Ríos

Alberto Ríos, a recent finalist for the National Book Award, has authored poetry, short stories, and a memoir about growing up on the border, *Capirotada*. Ríos is included in several hundred anthologies and many public art installations. His work is regularly taught and translated and has been adapted to dance and music. Ríos is presently Regents' Professor and Katharine C. Turner Distinguished Chair at Arizona State University. His latest book is *The Theater of Night*, published by Copper Canyon. <http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios>

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We are attending to such questions as

- What do traditional materials (legends and tales, personal stories, beliefs, medicine / *curanderismo*, customs, festivals, song, and more) mean to us as writers? How did we learn these traditions?
- What work do traditional materials do in our writing?
- How did we come to include traditional materials in one particular work of ours? What writerly decisions did we make as we did so? How did we change the traditional material, and why?