

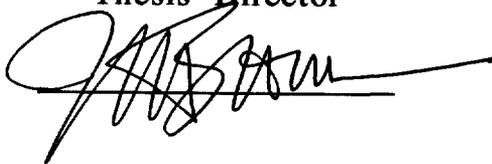
Spanish Folklore of New Mexico

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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Ball State University

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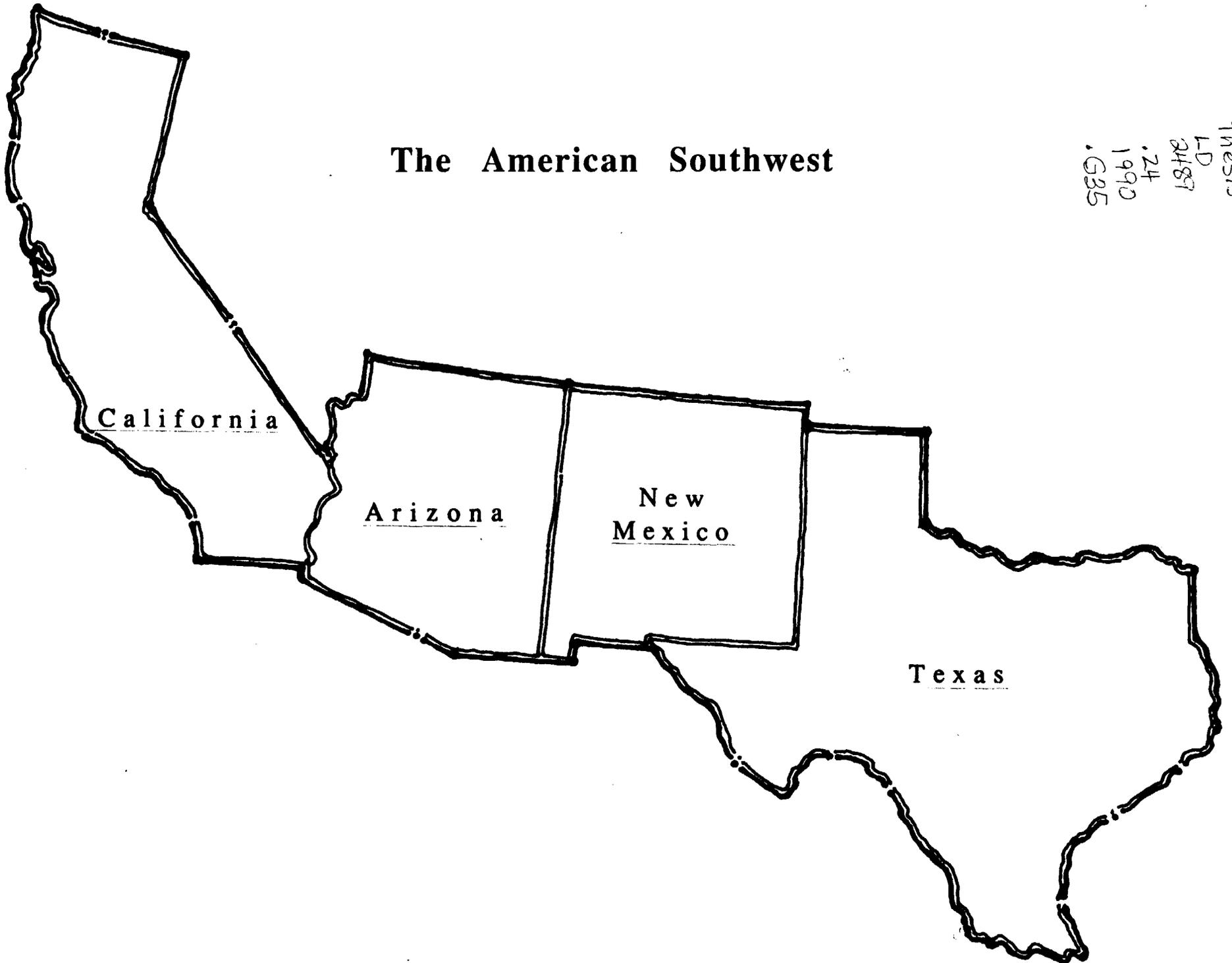
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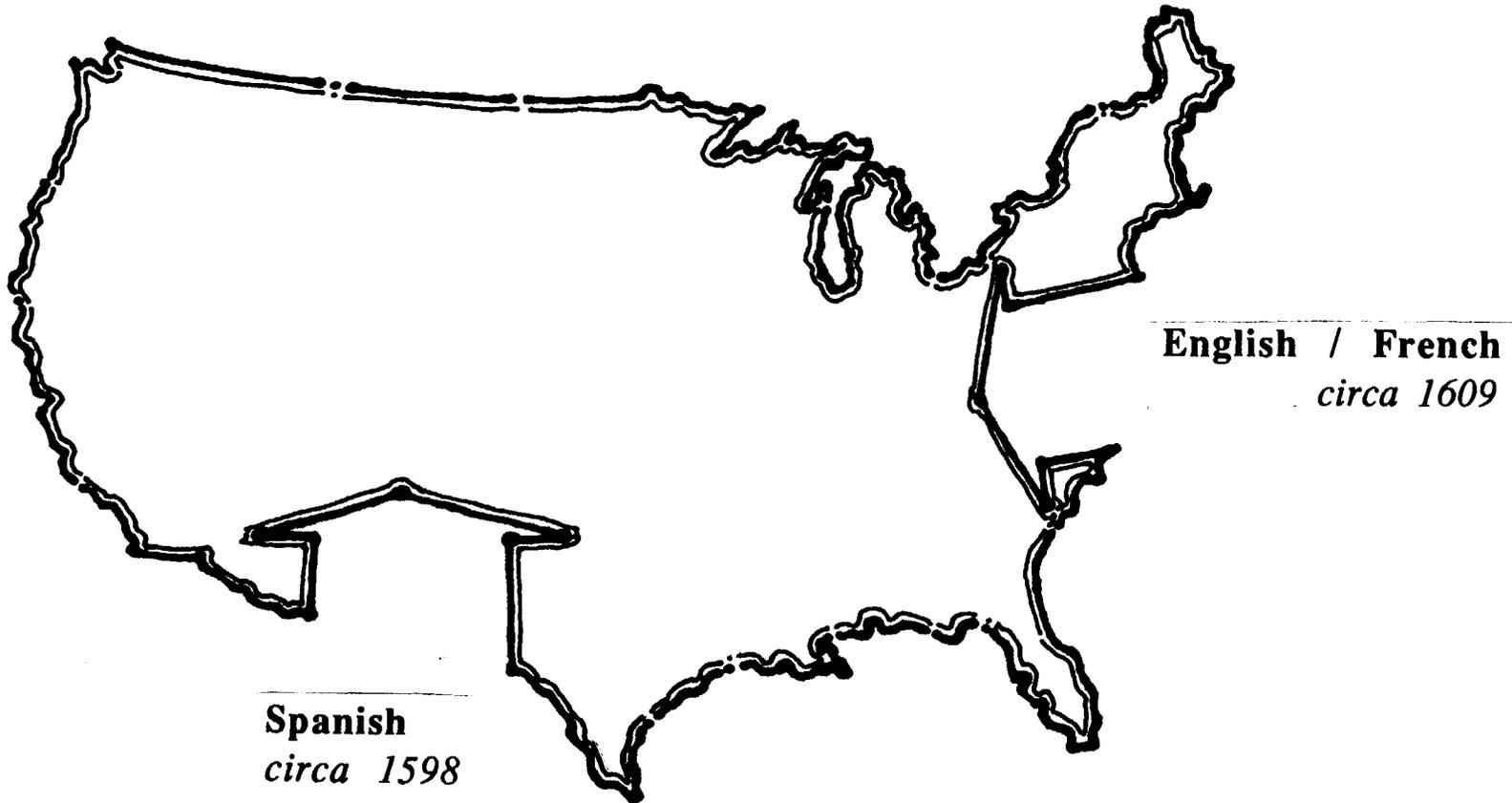
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The purpose of this set of dictionary definitions is to give the novice to folklore a place from which to begin. When first picking up the subject of folklore, and all its sub-groups, it is sometimes hard to know where to start. These definitions by no means come close to the complicated meaning of "folklore." However, when used simply as a step up to the subject of folklore, they do serve a purpose.

Folklore- popular superstitions or legends; the study of traditional beliefs.

Folk- people in general, or as a specified class; one's own family and near relations.

Lore- learning, erudition, traditional knowledge.

Riddle- enigma; puzzling fact, thing, person.

Proverb- a short pithy saying to express a truth or point a moral; an adage.

Tale- narrative; story, false report; gossip.

Tall- excessive; exaggerated.

Ballad- a story in verse, of popular origin, generally patriotic.

Lullaby- a song sung to a child to soothe it to sleep.

Anecdote- a biographical incident; a brief account of any fact or happening (often amusing).

Prose- ordinary language in speech and writing; language not in verse.

Folklore, what is it? What isn't it? To ask these questions is to expect a precise answer. But there is no precise answer or definition to folklore. Folklore is a science, a tradition, a literature. It is also an expression, a gesture, and a way to preserve a culture. Folklore can be collected and put into volumes, but it can never be "pinned down." Folklore is always changing and growing. Many have tried to define folklore. They have set boundaries and limitations. But when the smoke clears from their ambiguous definitions, it comes down to the fact that everyone who writes about or studies folklore must make his or her own definition to follow. W. Edson Richmond wrote " The word folklore is, of course, as abstract a term as are the words *love*, *liberty*, and *literature*. Its precise meaning lies in the mind of its definer, not in the thing itself, which is both as real and as unreal as any of the concepts mentioned above (XI)."

Folklore and folkloric material can express how much alike we all are as members of the human race. At the same time, folklore can show the boundaries between different cultural or regional folk groups (Oring, 42).

One author describes folklore as "popular knowledge." He goes on to say that folklore manifests itself in "...beliefs, customs, superstitions, riddles, proverbs, songs, myths, legends, tales, ritualistic ceremonies, magic, witchcraft, and all other...practices of...the 'common people' in a

civilized society (Espinosa 50)."

Another great folklorist, Richard M. Dorson, defines folklore as "...traditional rituals, customs, observances, celebrations, ...proverbs, colloquialisms, figures of speech, slurs, curses, jokes, greetings (Handbook IX)."

These two definitions are very easy to understand and follow. Espinosa and Dorson have made folklore simple. On the other end of the spectrum we find the definition given by Paolo Carvalho-Neto. The following definition is perhaps the most complicated and limiting definition to be found. Carvalho-Neto argues that folklore must be anonymous and noninstitutionalized, as well as ancient and functional (Concept 25-35). This definition seems to be well over the heads of most "common folk." It is ironic to think that some folklorists complicate the subject to the point that it can no longer be understood by the "folk" who created it.

Taking from these definitions, as well as from a few others that are similar, I will make my own working definition for this paper. Folklore, which can be verbal, partly verbal, or non-verbal, is an expression of the "common people," used and practiced, then passed on from generation to generation. I do, however, agree with the idea of anonymity. Not knowing the creator or genesis of folkloric material adds to its fun and uniqueness.

The authors of Folklore of Other Lands say that "...these forms become folklore when the exact time or circumstances surrounding their birth are no longer known and the people have accepted, absorbed, and transfigured them in an act of truly collective authorship (Selvi et al 6)."

As has been said before, some folklore is now recorded in books. The material has been collected and condensed into volumes on the subject. But this is not, generally, the way folklore is learned or practiced. Folklore just is. We do not learn it exactly, we live it. We, as the "general public", the human race, do not realize that we know folklore. One reason for this is due to the fact that folklore is imprecise. If we do not know exactly what it is, we do not know if we know it. A lot of folkloric material, such as proverbs, jokes, fairy tales, and children's games are learned by just hearing them. We may not consciously make an effort to learn these bits of folklore. We just hear them, we remember them, then we use them around someone else. This next person may be hearing the proverb, etc. , for the first time, or maybe for the one-hundredth. This is how a lot of folklore stays in existence. In fact, some folklore is only a generation away from extinction. If folklore is no longer passed down through the generations it becomes lost forever. Because of this fact, folklorists are now working diligently to record the fragile material.

Folklorists can no longer depend on the "folk" to preserve their own lore. This brings up another interesting question, if folklore is no longer used or practiced, is it still folklore? It may not be current or modern folklore, but then becomes the folklore of our ancestors.

Because folklore is such a broad and diverse subject, this paper will focus on a specific ethnic and regional folklore. The ethnic group and region being discussed is that of the Spanish-Americans in the southwestern United States. And more specifically, we will examine those in northern New Mexico. Arthur L. Campa, a folklorist who has done extensive work in New Mexico, comments on this section of the state:

"Northern New Mexico comprises, roughly, the territory north of Santa Fe. This region may be considered the most representatively New Mexican in that it is composed of the original settlements of the seventeenth century, and in that it was least influenced by Mexico during the colonial period. In many ways it is more archaically Spanish than the central or south portions of the state, where other influences have been at work - English in the former and Mexican in the latter ("Spanish" 6).

At this point it is important to give a brief history of the American Southwest and New Mexico. Before colonists came to the East coast, there were settlements in the Southwest by the Spanish (West 27). Exploration began in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth, colonization began by the Spanish (Handbook 194). The settlers came up from "New Spain" into the area of the southwestern United States. These pioneers came looking for wealth, opportunity, and land on which to build. They came North hoping for a new life, a better life. Among these first pioneers were Spaniards from Spain; criollos, Spaniards born in America; mestizos, those of mixed Spanish and Indian blood; and Indians, those native to the land. The Spanish governed this land of the Southwest until the Mexicans gained their independence from Spain in 1821. This remained territory of Mexico until the lands were ceded to the United States. The Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848, and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 finally made the Southwest into United States territory.

However, the new ownership by no means caused the area to change its culture. It has been said that "...in no part of the American Southwest did Spanish culture take deeper root than in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. New Mexico, first settled in 1598 by Spaniards from New Spain, was for more than two centuries an isolated frontier outpost of the

Spanish empire in America (Espinosa IX)."

As has already been said, the folk group we are following is that of the Spanish-Americans in New Mexico. From the book Los Chicanos, Meier and Rivera explain that these Americans "forman una minoria étnica o cultural con una alto grado de visibilidad racial, religioso, y lingüística en la sociedad (15)." [These Americans form an ethnic or cultural minority with a high level of racial, religious, and linguistic visibility in society.] Many people will call the Spanish speaking people in this area by many different names. They may call them Mexican-American, Chicano, Hispanic, or Spanish-American, to name a few. One could argue on the pros and cons of each. Campa gives us one explanation: "...legally and nationally they are Americans; linguistically, Spanish; Spanish-American, geographically; culturally, Mexican; native by birth; and New Mexican by state boundaries ("Spanish" 15)." I, however, have chosen "Spanish-Americans" as the nomenclature. From research, reading, and personal experience, I have found that the Spanish speaking people of New Mexico prefer to be tied to the Spanish instead of the Mexicans (West 28). From working with several Spanish-Americans in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I have found that they refer to each other, as well as people they know that are from Mexico, as Spanish. The native New Mexican directly descends from the Spanish of

the Old World.

Now that we have the region and folk group defined, we can delve into their folklore. By looking at their lore we can catch a glimpse of the spirit of the people in New Mexico (Espinosa 67).

There are many forms of folklore that exist today. We can study long, drawn out folktales and legends, or , on the other end of the spectrum, very short, succinct proverbs and riddles. We will specifically take a close look at the proverbs and riddles of New Mexico. These two forms are the most numerous and commonly used of this folk group.

Proverbs must be the favorite form of folklore to the New Mexicans, simply because of their number. The list could go on forever of proverbs and their variations, plus variations on a theme. Advice and words of wisdom are the most common subjects of their proverbs (West 39).

The proverbs are called "*refranes* " or "*dichos* " by the Spanish-speakers. Never do they use the word "*proverbios*." These proverbs are used in every day speech and are considered to be the last word on almost any subject. Whatever the situation or occasion, a proverb can be found that will fit. John West put it this way: "...there seems to be a saying to cover - or confuse - almost any of life's concerns (40)."

These short sayings often give us a window into the popular philosophy

of the people who use them. In holding to the definition of folklore being used in this paper, proverbs must be anonymous. To make up a catchy saying and use it simply will not do. The proverbs of New Mexico cover many different areas of life and subjects. Some of the ones you find will sound familiar, others will be very foreign. The latter have not transcended cultural and geographical boundaries.

Proverbs can expose the differences that exist between cultures and folk groups. But they can also exhibit a universality among folk groups. It is not too difficult to find a few proverbs that are cross-cultural. These proverbs show how basically alike we all are in our popular philosophy of life.

Proverbs can be fun and witty. To learn a few catchy sayings can give one the tools to easily and quickly solve a situation. Proverbs can also be sobering. They can put someone in his place and close his mouth as soon as they are spoken. Proverbs can amuse, confuse and console. They can provide solutions as well as deeper concepts to ponder.

Below are a variety of proverbs and their translations from Arthur L. Campa and Aurelio Espinosa. Espinosa, like Campa, is an accomplished folklorist who has done extensive research in New Mexico.

En boca cerrada, no entran moscas.

(A closed mouth catches no flies.)

Más hace el que quiere que el que puede.

(He who desires does more than he who can.)

Quien se levanta tarde ni oye misa ni come carne.

(He who rises late neither hears mass nor eats meat.)

En boca del mentiroso, lo cierto se hace dudoso.

(From the mouth of a liar, even the truth is doubtful.)

Quien busca halla.

(Whoever searches finds.)

La verdad, aunque severa, es amiga verdadera.

(The truth, although harsh, is a true friend.)

La constancia hace milagros.

(Perseverence accomplishes miracles.)

En la tierra del ciego, el tuerto es rey.

(In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.)

Cada loco con su tema.

(Every crazy person has his "thing". [a one-track mind])

Perro que ladra no muerde.

(The dog that barks doesn't bite.)

Caras vemos, corazones no sabemos.

(We see faces, but we know nothing about the heart.)

Cada oveja con su pareja.

(Each sheep with its pair [match].)

El que mucho habla pronto calla.

(He who talks too much is soon silent.)

La mona, aunque se vista de seda, mona queda.

(The monkey, although she may dress in silk, is still a monkey.)

Vanidad y pobreza, todo es de una pieza.

(Vanity and poverty are made of the same cloth.)

Más vale un pájaro en la mano que cien volando.

(A bird in the hand is better than a hundred flying.)

Dime con quien andas y yo te diré quien eres.

(Tell me with whom you associate and I'll tell you who you are.)

Lo que el corazón piensa la boca lo dice.

(What the heart thinks the mouth says.)

No hay mal que por bien no venga.

(There is no evil that does not bring some good.)

A palabras necias, oídos sordos.

(For foolish words, deaf ears.)

Another form of folklore that is very popular in the Southwest is the material of riddles, called "*adivinanzas*." Riddling, in fact, can even be considered an art. Riddles in New Mexico are also very numerous, second only to proverbs. Of all folklore, riddles are especially passed down orally through the generations. Espinosa estimates that of the New Mexican modern riddles, about three-fourths of them have been preserved by oral tradition ("Sayings" 22).

This game of puzzles asks traditional questions whose answers are traditional but unexpected (West 47). Riddling is a worldwide game that

demonstrates the cleverness of the questioner while challenging the wit of the audience. To create a riddle is quite a challenge, but to answer one is even more difficult, at least the questioner knows the answer when he begins. The mystery of riddles depends on an analogy. Observations of nature, such as stages of life, and the evolution of day into night, are often the subjects of New Mexican riddles. Also common to riddles are the subjects of food, such as eggs and onions, and body parts, such as the eyes and the tongue.

There are two different classes of riddles. The first kind is what is called a conundrum, or in Spanish, "*un acertijo*." A conundrum is a riddle with its answer contained within. This kind of riddle challenges your cleverness, as well as your mastery of the language. Often times only native speakers of Spanish can catch these hidden solutions.

The second class of riddle is the enigma. This is simply a riddle that contains the clues to guessing a difficult solution. The answer must be found on your own, it is not provided in the riddle. Below are a few riddles from New Mexico and the Southwest.

What has a tall grandfather and a short father, a black mother and a white child?

(The piñon nut; grandfather is the bush, stem the father, shell the mother, and the nut is the child.)

Oro no es, Plata no es,
adivíname lo que es?
(Plátano)

It's not gold, It's not silver,
guess what it is?
(Banana)

This is the literal translation of the riddle. However, since it is a conundrum, the solution only makes sense in Spanish.

(Plata + no = plátano = banana)

El Diablo tiene una hija,
que nadie la quiere,
y todos la tienen.
(La mentira)

The devil has a daughter,
that nobody wants,
but everybody has.
(Lies)

Soy la redondez del mundo,
Que vale tanto mi voz,
Que sin mi no hubiera mundo,
Ni tampoco hubiera Dios.
(La o)

I'm the roundness of the world,
My voice is worth much,
Without me would be no world,
Nor would there be God.
(The letter o)

Redondo soy como el mundo,
Sin mi no puede haber Dios,
Papas y cardinales sí,
Pero pontífices no.
(La letra o)

I am round like the world,
Without me could be no God,
Popes and cardinals yes,
But pontiffs no.
(The letter o)

Yo tengo una tía que tiene una hermana, y no es mi tía.
(La hermana de mi tía es mi mamá.)

I have an aunt who has a sister, who isn't my aunt.
(The sister of my aunt is my mother.)

Siete padres, siete peras,
Cada quien comió la suya
Y quedaron seis enteras.
(Un padre se llamaba Cada Quien,
y se comió una pera, quedando seis.)

Seven fathers, seven pears,
Everyone ate his own,
And six remain.
(Everyone is the name of a
father, he ate a pear
leaving six.)

Por qué llevan la cruz al calvario?
(Porque sola no puede ir.)

Why do they carry the cross
to calvary?
(Because it can't go there
alone.)

Una cajita chiquita,
Blanquita como la sal,
Todos lo saben abrir,
Nadie la sabe cerrar.
(Huevo)

A very small box,
White like salt,
Everyone knows how to open
No one knows how to close.
(Egg)

En medio de dos paredes blancas,
Está una cuenta amarilla.
(Huevo)

Between two white walls,
There is a yellow bead.
(Egg)

Blanca ha sido mi vestido,
y amarillo mi corazón.
(Huevo)

White is my dress,
and yellow is my heart.
(Egg)

Cajita de Dios bendita,
que se abre y se cierra,
y no se marchita.
(Los ojos)

A little box, blessed by God,
that opens and shuts,
but never wears out.
(Eyes)

Entre un camino están dos hermanos
y nunca se pueden ver.
(Los ojos)

On a road are two brothers
and never do they see each
other.
(Eyes)

De banda en bandas,
Viven dos vecinitos,
Que ni se miran,
Ni se visitan.
(Los ojos)

From side to side,
Live two little neighbors,
That never see each other,
And never visit.
(Eyes)

We have taken a look at only two of the various forms of folklore found
in New Mexico. One could also study the children's rhymes, prose

narratives, ballads, tales, and legends in the Southwest. But to stay within the confines of this thesis paper, we have only examined the most popular and common forms.

The subject of folklore has been shown to be imprecise. There is no clear-cut definition for folklore. Even folklorists, experts in the field, argue about the boundaries and limitations of folklore. It is fairly easy to study such things as the human heart, the growth of plants, or how paper is made. These things are finite, they are easily explained. This is not so with the subject of "popular knowledge." However, after making a personal definition, anyone can study and enjoy folklore.

The ambiguity along with the anonymity of folklore cause it to be unique and mysterious. No other literature can offer the insights into a culture as does folkloric material. The Spanish-Americans in New Mexico are being Anglo-cized at every turn. This in itself is not necessarily wrong or bad. But if folklore can provide them a way to preserve and nurture their heritage, they certainly should take advantage of it. By using folklore and passing it on orally, the New Mexicans will not only perpetuate its existence, but also give the outsider the clearest window into their folk spirit.

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