

From This Wicked Patch of Dust

By Sergio Troncoso

University of Arizona Press: Camino del Sol series (1-800-426-3797)

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*Best Books of 2012 by *Kirkus Reviews*

*Southwest Book Award from the Border Regional Library Association

*Notable Book by *Southwest Books of the Year*

*Finalist for Reading The West Book Award in Adult Fiction, Mountains and Plains Independent Booksellers Association

*Shortlisted runner-up for the biannual PEN/Texas Southwest Book Award for Fiction



In the border shantytown of Ysleta, Mexican immigrants Pilar and Cuauhtemoc Martínez teach their four children to forsake the drugs and gangs of their neighborhood. Over four decades, the family struggles to become American and yet not be pulled apart by a maelstrom of cultural forces.

As a young adult, daughter Julieta is disenchanted with Catholicism and converts to Islam. Youngest son Ismael, always the bookworm, is accepted to Harvard but feels out of place in the Northeast, where he meets and marries a Jewish woman. Marcos and Francisco toil in their father's old apartment buildings, serving as cheap labor to fuel the family's rise to the middle class. Their mother Pilar clings to the idea of her family and tries to hold them together as her husband's health begins to fail.

The terrorism of September 11, 2001 sends shockwaves through this newly American family in Ysleta, New York City, and Tehran. Bitter conflicts erupt between siblings, and the physical and cultural spaces between them threaten to tear them apart. Will their shared history and once-shared dreams be enough to hold together a family from Ysleta, this wicked patch of dust?

Discussion Questions for ***From This Wicked Patch of Dust***:

<http://sergiotroncoso.com/dust/questions/index.htm>

Praise for ***From This Wicked Patch of Dust***:

“Effortlessly, with elegance of style, Troncoso weaves a tapestry of lives, of human beings who by the end of the book feel not just real, not just intimately close, but undeniable, inescapable, a part of ourselves.”

—Miroslav Penkov, Judge for PEN/Texas Southwest Book Award for Fiction

“One reads *From This Wicked Patch of Dust* and can only pause for a moment to say, ‘Yes.’ Sergio Troncoso writes with inevitable grace and mounting power. Family, in all its baffling wonder, comes alive on these pages.”

—Luis Urrea, author of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* and *Into the Beautiful North*

“*From This Wicked Patch of Dust* sweeps through a tumult of time from the mid-60s and through 9/11 and its aftermath. As the novel whirls in and out of expanding cultural identities — Mexican and American, poor, ambitious, and smart, Catholic, Muslim, and even Jewish— and yet stays centered on a family in the borderlands of Ysleta, it details a past that is more the cultural future. El Paso deserves big books, and Sergio Troncoso gives us one here—in a voice that is both his and ours.”

—Dagoberto Gilb, author of *The Magic of Blood* and *The Flowers*

“An irresistible read, this compelling novel explores a family’s conflicted desires: to honor the past that connected them closely to one another and to embrace the future that launches them toward separate destinies—to belong and to be free. Sergio Troncoso delivers a moving and unforgettable story of Cuauhtémoc and Pilar Martínez in search of a better life for their four children, despite the dawning apprehension that pursuit of such a dream might ultimately cost a family much more than relentless self-sacrifice and unflinching toil.”

—Lorraine Lopez, author of *The Gifted Galbadon Sisters* and *Homicide Survivors Picnic and Other Stories*

Book reviews for ***From This Wicked Patch of Dust***:

“Troncoso is clearly adept at his craft, telling a story filled with rich language and the realities of family life.... With its skillful pairing of conflict over religious and familial obligations with the backdrop of a Mexican-American family’s love for one another, Troncoso’s novel is an engaging literary achievement.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



“In a media market where cultural stereotypes abound, it’s refreshing to read a novel featuring Latino characters who are nuanced and authentic. Sergio Troncoso’s latest, *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*, follows a family from humble beginnings in a Texas border town through several decades as its members move beyond their Mexican Catholic culture to inhabit Jewish, Muslim and Ivy League spaces....

These middle spaces have long been fodder for writers, though the El Paso-born and Harvard-educated Troncoso has created new, empathetic characters to explore it. No, the real beauty of

this book is that it mines the rich diversity of tradition and culture among Latinos, as well as the commonalities they share with other Americans — love of family, faith and country.

Latino readers will enjoy a book that shatters the myth of Latinos as a monolithic voting bloc, but the book will appeal to anyone who cares about the issues and contemporary politics that affect families of any color.”

—*The Dallas Morning News*



“Sergio Troncoso's admirable second novel *From This Wicked Patch of Dust* tells the story of the Martínez clan and how it copes when its individual members make decisions that threaten the harmony and unity of the entire family....

Troncoso resists a comfortable ending and challenges readers to envision the Chicano family within a global context because, as this novel illustrates, the safety of home is no longer true in the post-9/11 Americas. That pessimistic sentiment is balanced, however, by Pilar's unwavering belief that the family is always worth fighting for.

From This Wicked Patch of Dust presents difficult lessons about growing up and growing apart, but there's also genuine heart and pride in the depiction of the "four children, four worlds" that spiral out of a single immigrant dream.”

—*The El Paso Times*



“Sergio Troncoso breathes fresh air into the American assimilation story....This story is...wholly universal.”

—*The Philadelphia City Paper*



“*From This Wicked Patch of Dust* is an ambitious book, full of insight into complex American identity.... There's wisdom in these pages and compassion for fragmented families in a mobile, complicated world.”

—National Public Radio affiliate, Arizona's *KNAU*

SERGIO TRONCOSO is the author of *Crossing Borders: Personal Essays, The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*, and the novel *The Nature of Truth*. He co-edited *Our Lost Border: Essays on Life amid the Narco-Violence*. He graduated from Harvard College and studied international relations and philosophy at Yale University. He won a Fulbright scholarship to Mexico, where he studied economics, politics, and literature. Troncoso was inducted into the Hispanic Scholarship Fund's Alumni Hall of Fame and the Texas Institute of Letters. He was born and raised in El Paso, Texas and now lives in New York City.

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