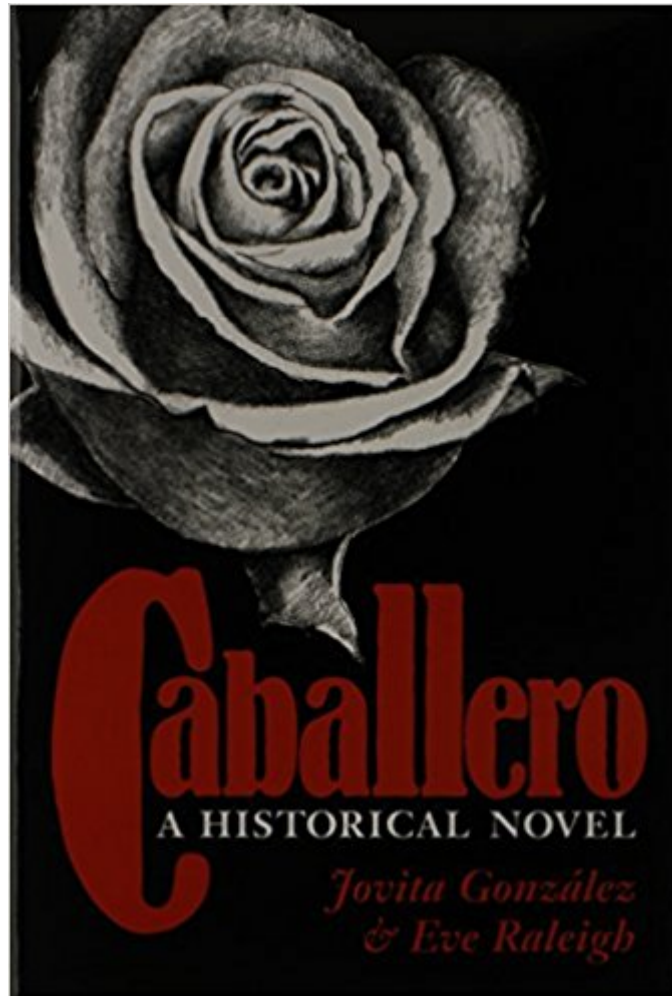




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Caballero: A Historical Novel



Synopsis

Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero: A Historical Novel*, a milestone in Mexican-American and Texas literature written during the 1930s and 1940s, centers on a mid-nineteenth-century Mexican landowner and his family living in the heart of southern Texas during a time of tumultuous change. After covering the American military occupation of South Texas, the story involves the reader in romances between young lovers from opposing sides during the military conflict of the US-Mexico War. The young protagonists fall in love but face struggles with race, class, gender, and sexual contradictions. This work, long lost in a collection of private paper and unavailable until now, serves as a literary ethnography of South Texas-Mexican folklore customs and traditions as well as a feminist critique of rigid patriarchal culture. With an introduction by José E. Limón, epilogue by María-Cotera, and foreword by Thomas H. Kreneck. JOVITA GONZÁLEZ was an educator, folklorist, and historian who received her master's degree in history in 1930 from the University of Texas at Austin. She was a protégé of J. Frank Dobie and a Rockefeller grant award recipient. EVE RALEIGH is co-author Margaret Eimer's pseudonym. She was residing in Missouri at the time of her death in 1978.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Not only is this a historical novel, but it's a novel with some history. Written during the 1930s and '40s by Gonzalez, a protégé of folklorist J. Frank Dobie, and the pseudonymous Raleigh, the book was originally rejected by three East Coast publishers. The manuscripts (some complete, some

partial) remained undiscovered for some 50 years. Now, the edited compilation has been published as a historical romance that chronicles both sides of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-47 and the subsequent ethnic tensions. Clearly, this will be of interest to scholars of Mexican-American history, but general readers will also find this a delightfully romantic story. Set in South Texas and Northern Mexico, the focus is the family of patriarch Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soria. As Don Santiago struggles to maintain a powerful *hidalgo* family devoid of Americano influence, each of his two daughters falls in love with a ranger sent to settle land disputes. The authors handle this merging of cultures realistically, and the early social ramifications of mixed unions are clearly delineated. There are minor omissions (portions of the original manuscripts were indecipherable), yet the flow remains unaffected. The title, as noted by the editors, is inappropriate, however. The English translation of *caballero* is gentleman, and this work is more about the strong women during this important historical period of two neighboring countries. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Written by two women, a Mexican American teacher of Spanish and a mysterious Anglo, this novel about the Mexican side of the 1848 conflict was summarily rejected by three major publishers in the late 1930s and has since languished in manuscript form. While its romance between the beautiful daughter of Mexican patriarch Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soria and a young Virginian seems to argue for assimilationism, the American invaders of Texas are also portrayed as vandals and barbarians. When the patriarch's guerrillero son Alvaro is sentenced to execution by the Americans, his sister Susanita gets her Anglo lover to save him, thereby compromising his honor and embarrassing her own family?"deconstructing traditional male-centered images of resistance," according to the novel's critical epilog. Preliminary commentaries give the publishing history, which is as interesting as the work itself. For academic collections.?Jack Shreve, Allegany Community Coll., Cumberland, Md.Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I purchased this book because it was required for one of my classes but it took so long to arrive that I actually had to miss two quizzes based off of it which was super stressful for me. When the book did finally arrive the class was already wrapping up on it *sigh* but overall it is a great work of literature and I really did enjoy the story. The author has grown to become somewhat of an inspiration to me.

This is a classic must-read for Chicano studies. It's a historical romance with such an amazing plot that will keep you reading. It's also sometimes referred to as Texas's *Gone with the Wind*.

Enjoying it a lot

Great read!

I took a class in Mexican-American literature recently, and the course began with a series of the earlier novels in the body of literature, works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was a time when Chicano/a literature had no well-established aesthetic tradition, and authors had little standing in society or in the education and publishing worlds and had little chance of seeing their works in print. So, needless to say, the best minds were not drawn to and trained in novel writing, and these early, like those in any burgeoning literature (think the American novel until Hawthorne), are maybe interesting, but are not of the highest artistic merit. My classmates agreed. But the novel that stuck out to me as being somewhat above the rest was Jovita Gonzalez's and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero*. The story concerns the Mendoza family of south Texas at the end of the Mexican-American War. The family's ranch is situated between the Rio Grande and Nueces Rivers, meaning that their property is inside the American border after the Treaty of Hidalgo. This sparks a crisis for the head of the family, Don Santiago, whose brother was killed by Texans at the Alamo. Don Santiago (with some good and some simply bigoted reasons) fears and hates the Americans, sees them as contaminants, and is horrified at finding himself as an American. He and his oldest son decide to resist the Americans, even their friendly overtures, and Alvaro, the son, even joins Mexican guerilla forces who are still fighting. The women of the household do not respond in such a way though. The novel is something of a feminist text, and these women, especially the daughters, are frustrated at the parochial life they will live married to one of the uninteresting and paternalistic boys in their social circle. When American soldiers come to town, they see an opportunity, and the youngest daughter, Susanita, falls in love with a gallant captain at first sight. And that's when the real crisis within the family ensues. I won't say that this is any masterpiece. It's unfinished (and wasn't published until about sixty years after its composition), with occasional blank spaces and notes from the editor noting the gaps in the manuscript. It's also a slightly uneven text, in need of one more revision and some cutting at the end. And readers who do not care for melodrama should look elsewhere. This is quite the soap opera. But if you like melodrama, *Caballero* is a fantastic read. It's got plenty of family fireworks, with sons going off to war and children being banished. It's got romance (three couples, in a way, experience love at first sight), plenty of marriage and babies, and heartache (including death by broken heart). It's over-the-top, glorious melodrama that reads very

well. It's also a psychologically astute book. The Don is drawn well, and Gonzalez and Raleigh have illustrated the pressures of life spent attempting to uphold the honor code that he is expected to keep. And the novel makes an appeal for cross-cultural understanding and universal love. And some of the writing--the scene at Midnight Mass at Christmas and of the baptism in the hovel--is simply beautifully written. Caballero may not be a fully realized novel, but it is a good one.

The book caught my attention because (1) I like historical novels, (2) my last name is Mireles but no relation to author and (3) the fact that it's written by a woman. It's amazing how this manuscript remained hidden out of fear of what the "gringo" community would do/say mainly because the book addresses what it was like for Mexicans/Mexican Americans of the period and well into the 70s. Being a Chicana this book also told me a lot about how the *mujer* was treated but in spite of it how brave Jovita was and finally finding the courage to release her manuscript. It proves the courage that *toda mujer* finds.

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