

mate cousins, sixteenth-century Spaniards and Mexica alike were capable of extreme violence, but often tempered their aggression with acts of benevolence.

Wedded with Alves's narrative, however, the theory tells us little that we did not already know. For example, scholars have long noted Cortés's establishment of the Hospital de Jesús in Mexico City and the role that such charitable gestures played in solidifying Spanish domination. The fact that Cortés's behavior bears a striking resemblance to that of food-sharing dominant male chimps at a Dutch zoo is interesting but does not advance our understanding of colonial Mexican society. Moreover, Alves promises that this exercise in comparative ethnology will yield new insights on the importance of gender in the creation of a new Mexican cultural synthesis. In fact, he delivers little more than conventional treatments of La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe. His brief discussion of the role played by indigenous women in preserving traditional material culture will be familiar to readers of Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru's work, while those interested in his observation that "the aspects of Amerindian cultural tradition that most readily survived . . . were not those associated with male games of dominance and display" (p. 96) will find a much more satisfying treatment of this phenomenon in Irene Silverblatt's studies of colonial Peru.

These criticisms aside, historians would do well to consider Alves's suggestion that sixteenth-century Spaniards and Mexica understood one another more fully than we might expect. Before going into battle both sides engaged in aggressive and far-from-subtle display not unlike that of male primates. Alves therefore argues that "contemporary cultural constructionists should be less than certain that culture and language serve as insurmountable barriers" (p. 74), and that we may have overestimated the incidence of "double mistaken identity" in sixteenth-century Mexico.

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*Holy Wednesday: A Nabua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico.*

By LOUISE M. BURKHART. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Photographs. Plates. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xii, 314 pp.

Cloth, \$42.95. Paper, \$18.95.

Around 1591, a Nahuatl writer translated a play about the passion of Christ and the Virgin Mary's role in it for performance before native audiences in Mexico. This play, termed "Holy Wednesday" in the translation, had been written less than a decade earlier by a bookseller in Valencia, Spain. In her impressive study, Louise M. Burkhart examines the significant modifications and additions that the translator made in the text to render it more comprehensible to the native audience. But, as Burkhart well knows, he did so without simplifying the concepts or subtleties found in the original work. He even added four new speeches at the end, two for Mary and two for Christ. The translation is in high classical Nahuatl.

In this, the earliest known play in an indigenous language, Mary has more author-

ity and knowledge than in the original Spanish. Likewise, Christ is presented as a dutiful and obedient son, lacking the drive to disobey his parents and ancestors, which undercuts the crucial Christian concept of free will. In accord with Nahua culture, the translator downplayed the individual's moral decisions to emphasize the salvation of the larger community and the person's duty to be an obedient member. Furthermore, time repeats itself in the new version, as Christ's passion parallels or fulfills parts of the Old Testament, instead of moving inexorably forward to the Last Judgment called for in Christian doctrine.

Christianity, as presented, is made ancient and predictable in indigenous cultural terms. The natives sought to reconcile Christianity to their cultural beliefs, thus giving their own history and culture continued meaning and elevating their moral standing, though still within a colonial framework. While the Spaniards and their regime may have remained foreign and imposed, the natives saw the Church and Christianity as arriving separately and naturally to redeem them and their societies.

Burkhart affords a full history of the composition and provenance of this translation. She also presents the play as an example of a dramatic genre within both Spain and Mexico. The author demonstrates her sophisticated knowledge of Christian thought and of the history of drama, besides her command of Nahuatl culture and linguistics.

After slightly more than 100 pages of such history and commentary, Burkhart provides a side-by-side English translation of the Spanish and Nahuatl versions of "Holy Wednesday" encompassing some 50 pages. Her impressive annotations to these two versions take up another 90 pages. A useful appendix offers five selections from other sixteenth-century Nahuatl texts on the same themes treated in the play. On the final page of the book, the University of Pennsylvania Press advertises that an electronic version of both the original Spanish and Nahuatl play is available for sale separately.

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*The Legal Culture of Northern New Spain, 1700–1810.* By CHARLES R. CUTTER. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. Plates. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xii, 227 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.

According to Charles Cutter—and contrary to what is commonly posited by Borderland scholars—typically justice on the northern frontier of colonial Mexico was not abusive, arbitrary, and corrupt. As over 600 criminal and civil cases from New Mexico and Texas repeatedly demonstrate, defendants had several opportunities to state and recast their positions in the course of a trial; the courts systematically provided legal counsel; defendants successfully challenged the acceptability of potential witnesses; magistrates aggressively sought out the "facts" of the case; and they seldom called for corporal and capital punishment, relying instead on sentences that generally sought compromise and conciliation. How could this be, particularly in that region of New Spain in which the local judiciary had no formal training? Such judicial practices, asserts