Heim’s own flesh and blood, a choice that nearly costs John his life and his soul—but a choice that enlightens John about his quandary concerning his ties to his real father’s land.

Structurally, Geyer’s novel functions as a swirling mixture of cultures, languages, landscapes, characters, extended metaphors, and realities as fluid as his consistent use of water imagery. The two central characters, John Hauser and Heim Ulson appear rich in their psychological complexity, while other characters work from the anchor provided by the relationship portrayed between these two men. Geyer experiments with the prose in this narrative by infusing John’s first-person perspective with occasional asides from John’s subconscious (or his “dreams that aren’t dreams”). Readers who enjoy novels with a supernatural element will enjoy the suspenseful twists leading up to the uncanny resolution of this thoughtfully constructed examination of human nature.

Angelo State University

Julie Gates


The Flamenco Academy, Sarah Bird’s sixth novel, opens with a short lesson on flamenco; however, the subject is unexpectedly dropped after the third chapter, not to be mentioned again until a third of the book is already complete. The first third of the book is dedicated to the development of the friendship between Rae and Didi, the novel’s main characters. Brought together because of the deaths of both their fathers, the girls develop an unlikely camaraderie: Didi is the “bad girl” of the high school and Rae is the nerdy newcomer from a small farming town in Texas, who is flattered by Didi’s attention. Didi’s lifetime goal is to become famous, and Rae becomes her overshadowed sidekick and assistant in this quest. As both their mothers fade almost to nonexistence after the deaths of their fathers, Didi and Rae develop an all-encompassing friendship.

Although she is at first completely spellbound over Didi, Rae’s attention shifts when she meets Tomás Montenegro, a flamenco guitarist. Rae falls in love instantly, and although she does not see Tomás again for years, she develops a deep obsession, digging up as much information
as possible about him. As a result, her obsession extends to flamenco, in which both she and Didi enroll when they enter college. At the Flamenco Academy, they meet the vibrant but stern Doña Carlota, a flamenco legend and Tomás’ great-aunt. As the novel continues, both Didi and Rae emerge as potential stars in the surprisingly popular Southwestern flamenco scene, finally competing for the same man. Rae must then decide if she can finally be her own person and survive without Didi.

Although this work is fictional, I learned as much reading it as I may have learned by reading a textbook on the subject. I learned that flamenco originated with the Gypsies in Spain, who were usually cave-dwelling outcasts. Even in the Southwestern flamenco scene, it is generally regarded that to be a true flamenco master, you must be gitano por cuatro costaos (Gypsy on four sides), meaning that each grandparent is pure Gypsy. I learned that flamenco is not just a dance but begins with a singer and guitarist, both of whom have equally important solos and are possibly even more important than the dancer. The suffering of the Gypsies is evident in the lyrics and expression of the art. As Tomás says, “Tragedy in the first person…That’s the best definition I’ve ever come across for flamenco.” The Flamenco Academy lives up to its title as the reader is educated on its history, its methods, the plight of the Gypsies in Spain’s Civil War, and about the flamenco revival in the New World.

Stylistically, Sarah Bird’s skill is not most evident in her prose or her accurate portrayal of the Southwest, although both of these are very good. Instead, her talent lies in her ability to write interesting, well-developed characters and weave together their story lines to create an intriguing plot. The reader learns about Rae and Didi’s friendship and their difficult home lives, Tomás’ struggle with his heritage, and Doña Carlota’s childhood as a Gypsy in Andalusia. All characters are deeply obsessed with something, whether it be another person, stardom, flamenco, or the Gypsy bloodline. The aspect of this novel that I enjoyed the most was Bird’s use of the dramatic and enticing dance of flamenco to convey these obsessions and the inner emotions of the characters. The first line of the book is “Flamenco has Ten Commandments. The first one is: Dame la verdad, Give me the truth.” From this first moment onward, the purpose of flamenco in the characters’ lives is evident: they must use it to learn the truth about themselves and about each other.

However, The Flamenco Academy is not without its flaws. Much of the first third of the book before Tomás and flamenco enter the plot could have been shortened. The deaths of Didi and Rae’s fathers serve the purpose of introducing the two young women but do not come into play very often in the rest of the novel. Too much of the beginning of the novel seems to be simply background information that aids in the development of the characters of Didi and Rae. The important, well-written, page-turning section of the book comes later than it should and seems like a different novel completely because the tone and focus change drastically. However,
this is not the first book that I have thoroughly enjoyed despite extraneous material, and I am not sorry that I picked it up. If you get through the first part of the novel that seems like a run-of-the-mill coming of age story, you will be rewarded.

**Texas State University—San Marcos**

Jessica Scheider

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Once upon a time, “The Southwest” existed as a literary concept, even as the region itself remained vaguely defined. Southwestern writers may have chafed at being classified as regionalists, but they helped foster a cultural cohesiveness that owed more to the imagination than to geographic actualities.

“The Southwest” is still embraced by marketers seeking to conjure up sun-baked images of adobe, cactus, and golfing oases. Yet contemporary literature has largely left the region in the dust. Writers once considered Southwestern have splintered into a multitude of postmodern categories, reflecting America’s on-going dispersal into micro-markets. Recent Southwestern-based anthologies give evidence of this fragmentation, with compilations that focus on Texas Mexicans, women environmental writers, mystery fiction, and writings about the American cougar.

The appearance, then, of a book titled *New Stories from the Southwest* seems almost a neo-traditionalist, even reactionary concept. What, one wonders, could distinguish this grouping of stories from any other anthology of contemporary American writing? Does the “spirit of place” in the Southwest remain powerful enough to challenge the new, more precise genres that have risen to supplant it in the collective literary imagination?

Editor D. Seth Horton consulted nearly 200 print and e-journals in selecting the nineteen stories for inclusion here, and, significantly, the publications include not only *Southwestern American Literature* but also the *New England Review* and the *South Dakota Review*. Writing about the Southwest is no longer confined to the region.

The stories vary from two to sixty pages, and, somewhat curiously, the arrangement is simply alphabetical, by author’s last name. This results in
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