



The Wittliff Collections

Southwestern Writers Collection

Southwestern & Mexican Photography Collection

Alkek Library, Texas State University-San Marcos

A Guide to the Sergio Troncoso Papers

1975-2020

Collection 143

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Sergio Troncoso
- Title:** A Guide to the Sergio Troncoso Papers
- Dates:** 1975-2020
- Abstract:** The Sergio Troncoso Papers span 1975-2020 and are divided into six series: Personal, Published Works, Magazine and Journal Contributions, Publicity, Student Letters, and Digital Objects. The bulk of the collection is drafts of his early work, including *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*, *The Nature of Truth*, *Crossing Borders: Personal Essays*, and *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*. Also of note are his academic essays from his graduate school studies at Yale.
- Identifier:** Collection 143
- Extent:** 16 boxes (approximately 8 linear feet)
- Language:** English
- Repository:** The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Open for research

Preferred Citation

Sergio Troncoso Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University

Acquisition Information

Gift of Troncoso, 2020

Processing Information

Processed in 2020 by Susannah Broyles

Notes for Researchers

Access to computer files and digital materials are handled on a case-by-case basis. Please contact the archives staff for access.

Biographical Note

Sergio Troncoso (1961-) was born to Mexican immigrants in the Ysleta neighborhood of El Paso, Texas. The family lived in a *colonia* near the border in a house that Troncoso's parents built, but without electricity or running water for their first two years in Ysleta.

His family had a long history of writing and storytelling. Troncoso's paternal grandfather, Santiago Troncoso, was the editor and publisher of *El Dia*, the first daily newspaper in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Santiago was arrested multiple times, and even had his office firebombed several times, for reporting on government corruption. Sergio's maternal grandmother, Dolores Rivero, was a gifted oral storyteller who would tell him stories of being a teenager during the Mexican Revolution.

From an early age, Troncoso loved reading. On weekends he would often ride his bike the 15 miles to El Paso Public Library to check out books for the week. Troncoso attended Ysleta High School, and following in his grandfather's footsteps, he became the editor of the high school newspaper, the *Pow Wow* (full issues can be found in the collection).

In 1979, Troncoso began his studies at Harvard College, which he describes as a complete cultural and linguistic shock. It was there that Troncoso became profoundly aware of his Mexican roots in a way that hadn't been possible in El Paso. As he puts it in a 2004 profile in the *Houston Chronicle*, "Suddenly I was brown against this white background." After never feeling like a minority in El Paso, he used this new outsider status to delve into Latin American and Mexican history. In 1983, he graduated magna cum laude with a degree in Government, with a Latin American Certificate. After he graduated, he received a Fulbright Scholarship to Mexico where he studied economics, politics, and literature.

From 1985-1992, Troncoso earned graduate degrees in International Relations and in Philosophy from Yale University, where his interests included questions of the self, philosophy and psychology, and philosophy in literature. But before he earned his doctorate, he realized that his

academic work was isolating, and that while he couldn't necessarily discuss the details of what he was learning with his family, he could tell stories. His first published short story "The Abuelita" (1987), was a fictionalized account of the intersection of the knowledge that he was learning at Yale with the people and places of Ysleta. This exploration of deep philosophical questions in a border setting is a theme that runs throughout his career.

Troncoso's first book of collected work, *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories* (1999) was published by University of Arizona Press, and includes "The Abuelita." It won the Premio Aztlán Literary Prize for the best book by a new Chicano writer, and also the Southwest Book Award from the Border Regional Library Association.

Troncoso's debut novel, *The Nature of Truth* (2003), was first published by Northwestern University Press and later revised and re-released in 2014 by Arte Público. In this philosophical thriller, a Yale graduate student finds out that his boss, an internationally renowned German professor, is hiding a Nazi past.

Crossing Borders: Personal Essays (2011) contains sixteen autobiographical essays, exploring how Troncoso navigates a life full of literal and metaphorical borders. It won the Bronze Award for Essays from *ForeWord Reviews*, and Second Place for Best Biography in English in the International Latino Book Awards.

From This Wicked Patch of Dust (2011) is a novel that chronicles the lives of the Ysleta-based Martinez family over the span of forty years. It won multiple awards and was named as one of the best books of the year by Kirkus Reviews, and was shortlisted as runner-up for the biannual PEN/Texas Southwest Book Award for Fiction.

On July 29, 2014, the El Paso City Council voted unanimously to rename the Ysleta public library branch in honor of Troncoso. At the dedication ceremony, he announced the creation of the annual Troncoso Reading Prizes to encourage students in the Ysleta area to read.

In 2019, Troncoso published a collection of linked short stories on immigration, *A Peculiar Kind of Immigrant's Son* (Cinco Puntos Press) to critical acclaim. In 2020, it won First Place in the category of Best Collection of Short Stories (English/Bilingual) at the International Latino Book Awards.

In 2020, Troncoso was elected President of the Texas Institute of Letters. Other honors include being inducted into the Hispanic Scholarship Fund's Hall of Fame as well as serving as a judge for multiple literary awards such as the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.

As of 2020, Troncoso lives in New York City with his wife Laura and their two sons. He teaches writing at Yale Writers' Workshop.

Scope and Contents

The Sergio Troncoso Papers span 1975-2020 and are arranged into six series: Personal Papers, Published Work, Publications, Publicity, Reader Correspondence, and Digital Objects. The bulk of the collection is drafts of his early work, including *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*, *The Nature of Truth*, *Crossing Borders: Personal Essays*, and *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*. Also of note are his early writings, especially his academic essays from his graduate school studies at Yale. The collection was donated by Troncoso, and many items in the collection have a handwritten note by him explaining its significance.

Series Descriptions

Series I – Personal Papers, 1975-1992, undated Box 1 and Oversized

This series includes a medal Troncoso won in grade school, a full year run of *Pow-Wow* (the high school paper he was editor of at Ysleta High School), and name badges from Harvard reunions. Of particular note are Troncoso's handwritten college application essays and academic papers from his studies at Harvard and Yale.

Series II – Published Work, 1987-2014 Box 1-11

This series contains drafts of Troncoso's published works and makes up the bulk of the collection. The series is arranged chronologically beginning with *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories* (1999) and ending with *From This Wicked Patch of Dust* (2011). *The Nature of Truth* (2003; 2014) is particularly well-represented with multiple drafts, many with Troncoso's handwritten edits. Also of note is the 1987 copy of the short story "The Abuelita" which later appeared in *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*.

Series III - Magazine and Journal Contributions, 1989-2019 Box 11-13

Many stories in *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories* and *Crossing Borders: Personal Essays* were first published in these publications. It is arranged chronologically.

Series IV - Publicity, 1975-2019, undated Box 14 and Oversized

This series is separated into three subseries: Appearances, Clippings, and Magazines.

Appearances (1999-2020, undated) contains flyers, programs, and brochures of Troncoso's many appearances at festivals and events. Of particular note is a souvenir from the 2003 Hispanic Scholarship Fund Alumni Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony that includes a video of the event where Troncoso won the Brilliance award.

Clippings (1975-2011, undated) predominately contains newspaper articles both about and by Troncoso and are arranged chronologically. The articles range from a 1975 piece about Troncoso winning a math competition (the medal he won is in the collection) to later reviews of his works and opinion pieces penned by Troncoso. There is one work of fiction included in the series: a story co-written with Christine Lehner in the October 2, 2003 issue of *The Journal News*.

Magazines (1997-2008) includes full magazine issues with articles about Troncoso and his work. These are also arranged chronologically.

Series V – Student Letters, 2003-2020

Box 15

Reflecting the impact his writing has had on young readers, these are primarily thank-you letters written to Troncoso from students whose schools he had visited. The letters from Bon View Elementary School in Ontario, California are particularly poignant due to Troncoso's aunt, a longtime teacher's aide at that school, having recently passed away.

Series VI – Digital Objects, ca. 1965, 2003, 2010-2020, undated

Box 15

This series contains both computer disks with drafts of Troncoso's work and also the contents of a USB drive (113 digital photographs, 2 videos, and 4 documents). This material requires additional archival processing. Access is on a case-by-case basis.

Container List

Series I: Personal, 1975-1992, undated

Box	Folder	
1	1	Medal from junior high math competition, 1975 (with note from Troncoso); Badges from 20 th and 35 th Harvard Reunions
16	1	Ysleta High School Pow Wow Newspaper issues, September 1978 - May 1979 (16); with note from Troncoso, July 24, 2020
1	2	Drafts of college applications to Harvard, Princeton, Rice, Columbia, Yale; with note from Troncoso, July 29, 2020
1	3	Academic papers, 1983-1992 “Recent Trends in the Mexican Labor Movement: Economic Deterioration and Increasing Conflicts.” Harvard, May 4, 1983 “Why is Erotic Madness Important for the Philosophical Life? Love and Philosophy in Plato’s <i>Phaedrus</i> .” Qualifying Paper. Department of Philosophy. Yale University, October 31, 1990 “What Does Wittgenstein Mean By the forms of Life? The Experiences of Being Guided (section 172-178) in the Philosophical Investigations.” Second Qualifying Paper. Department of Philosophy. Yale University, October 31, 1991 “Reason and Desire in Aristotle’s Theory of Rational Choice and Practical Wisdom.” Prospectus Draft. Department of Philosophy. Yale University, September 7, 1992

Series II: Published Works, 1987-2014

The Last Tortilla and Other Stories (Published 1999), 1987-1999

[Working titles “The Abuelita” and “Angie Luna and Other Stories”]

1	4	“The Abuelita” 1987. Print outs, 21 pages, uncorrected. (Photocopied reference copy included)
1	5	“Angie Luna and Other Stories” Original manuscript, 1998. Print outs, 204 pages, Uncorrected

Series II: Published Works, *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*, continued

Box	Folder	
1	6	“Angie Luna and Other Stories” Desert Editorial edited manuscript, 1998. Print outs, 201 pages, heavily corrected. Includes correspondence and style sheet
1	7	“The Last Tortilla and Other Stories” University of Arizona page proof, 1999. Print outs, 222 pages, minor corrections with cover letter; note from Troncoso, July 20, 2020 and handwritten label from original box
1	8	Cover proofs (2); Flyers, 1999 (3)

***The Nature of Truth* (Published 2003 and 2014), 1994-2014
[Working titles “Murderous Thinking” and “Truth and Murder”]**

2	1-2	“Murderous Thinking” Version A, 1994. Print outs, 331 pages, uncorrected; with note from Troncoso, July 20, 2020 and handwritten label from original box (2 folders)
2	3-4	“Murderous Thinking” Version B, 1994. Print outs, 342 pages, uncorrected (2 folders)
2	5-6	“Murderous Thinking” Version C, 1994. Print outs, 344 pages, uncorrected (3 folders)
3	1-2	“Murderous Thinking” Version D, 1994. Print outs, 331 pages, uncorrected; with note from Troncoso, July 20, 2020 (2 folders)
3	3-5	“Murderous Thinking” Version E, 1994. Print outs, 388 pages, corrections and notes in pencil; 8 pages of holograph notes (3 folders)
3	6	“Truth and Murder” Version F, 1998. Print outs, 551 pages; corrections in ink; 2 pages of holograph notes; with note from Troncoso, July 20, 2020 and handwritten label from original box (1 of 3 folders)
4	1-2	“Truth and Murder” Version F, 1998, continued (2 of 3 folders)
4	3-6	“Truth and Murder” Version G, 1998. Print outs, 645 pages; corrected (4 folders)
5	1-4	“Truth and Murder” 1999. Print outs, 645 pages, uncorrected (4 folders)

Series II: Published Works, *The Nature of Truth*, continued

Box	Folder	
5	5-6	“The Nature of Truth” Version H, 2000. Print outs, 554 pages, minor corrections; with note from Troncoso, July 20, 2020 and handwritten label from original box (2 of 3 folders)
6	1	“The Nature of Truth” Version H, 2000, continued (1 of 3 folders)
6	2-4	“Truth and Murder” Version H, 2000. Print outs, 580 pages, heavily corrected in red ink. Copy 2 (3 folders)
6	5	“The Nature of Truth” Version I, 2001. Print outs, 519 pages, uncorrected with note from Troncoso, July 23, 2020 and handwritten label from original box (1 of 3 folders)
7	1-2	“The Nature of Truth” Version I, 2001. Continued (2 of 3 folders)
7	3-5	“The Nature of Truth” Version I, 2001. Print outs, 553 pages, heavily corrected in red ink. Copy 2 (3 folders)
8	1-2	“The Nature of Truth” Northwestern University Press copyedited manuscript. Printouts, 323 pages, heavily corrected in black ink. Includes cover letter and handwritten label from original box (2 folders)
8	3-4	“The Nature of Truth” Northwestern University Press copyedited manuscript. “Compare MS” Print outs, 413 pages, heavily corrected. Includes correspondence (2 folders)
8	5-6	“The Nature of Truth” Northwestern University Press final version page proof, 2003. Print outs, 261 pages, uncorrected. Includes correspondence (2 folders)
9	1-3	“The Nature of Truth”, 2003. Print outs, 519 pages, uncorrected (3 folders)
9	5-6	“The Nature of Truth” Proof of final version by Arte Público Press, 2014. Print outs, 261 pages, corrected; with note from Troncoso, July 23, 2020 and handwritten label from original box (2 folders)

Hit List: The Best of Latino Mystery (Published 2009), 2010

10	1	“Nuts”, 2010. Print outs, 21 pages, corrected
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Series II: Published Works, continued

Crossing Borders: Personal Essays (Published 2011), 2009-2011 [Working title “The Wicked Patch of Dust: Essays”]

Box	Folder	
10	2	“The Wicked Patch of Dust: Essays”, 2009. Print outs, 114 pages, heavily corrected; with note from Troncoso, July 23, 2020 and handwritten label from original box
10	3	“The Wicked Patch of Dust: Essays” 2009. Print outs, 124 pages, minor corrections
10	4	“Finding Our Voice: Latinos in the Cultural and Political Debates of the United States”, 2010. Print outs, 22 pages, uncorrected (originally a speech for the White Memorial Lecture, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, but turned into essay and was included in the published version of Crossing Borders)
10	5	“Crossing Borders: Personal Essays”, 2011. Print outs, 198 pages, uncorrected

From This Wicked Patch of Dust (Published 2011), 2009-2011 [Working titles “Ysleta: The Promise Land”]

10	6-7	“Ysleta: The Promise Land”, 2009. Print outs, 253 pages, minor corrections; also includes a plot outline and a synopsis. With note from Troncoso, July 23, 2020 and handwritten label from original box (2 folders)
11	1-2	“Ysleta: The Promised Land”, 2010. Print outs, 247 pages, uncorrected (2 Folders)
11	3-4	“From This Wicked Patch of Dust”, 2011. Print outs, 247 pages, uncorrected. (2 folders)

Series III: Magazine and Journal Contributions, 1989-2019

11	5	<i>Rio Grande Review</i> , Volume 8, Number 2. “The Abuelita” Spring 1989.
11	6	<i>Blue Mesa Review</i> , Number 6. “A Rock Trying to Be A Stone” Spring 1994.
11	7	<i>American Way</i> , Volume 27, Number 22. “The Gardener” November 15, 1994.
11	8	<i>Blue Mesa Review</i> , Number 7. “The Snake” 1995.

Series III: Magazine and Journal Contributions, continued

- 12 1 *Other Voices*, Volume 27. “Remembering Possibilities” Fall/Winter 1997.
- 12 2 *Hadassah Magazine*, Volume 80, Number 5. “Jalapeños with Fresh Halla” January 1999.
- 12 3 *Tierra Adentro*, Numero 117-118. “Una Piedra Tratando de Volverse Roca” August-November 2002.
- 12 4 *Hadassah Magazine*, Volume 85, Number 6. “Crossing Borders” February 2004.
- 12 5 *MultiCultural Review*, Volume 16, Number 2. Review Essay of The General and the Jaguar: Pershing’s Hunt for Pancho Villa. Summer 2007.
- 12 6 *Pembroke Magazine*, Number 40. “Apostate of my ‘Literary Family’ – to the memory of Sandy Taylor” 2008.
- 12 7 *The Westchester Review*, Volume 2. “The Father is in the Details” 2008.
- 12 8 *Literal, Latin American Voices*. “A Third Culture Literature and Migration” Spring 2010.
- 12 9 *Literal, Latin American Voices*. “The Loss of Juárez. Has the Violence in Juárez Changed Border Culture?” Winter 2010-2011.
- 12 10 *The Packinghouse Review*, Volume 2, Number 3. “New Englander” 2011.
- 12 11 *The Packinghouse Review*, Volume 2, Number 4. “Harvardiana Latino” 2011.
- 13 1 *The Blair Review*. “Blair Academy and the Border” Summer 2014.
- 13 2 *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, Volume 47, Number 2. “Yamecah” November 2014.
- 13 3 *Prime Number: A Journal of Distinctive Poetry and Prose*, Volume 4. Interview with Troncoso by Brandon D. Schuler 2014.
- 13 4 *Texas Monthly*. “The Good Son” April 2015.
- 13 5 *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Volume 56, Number 1. “Library Island” Winter 2017.
- 13 6 *The Yale Review*, Volume 106, Number 3. “Eternal Return” July 2018.

Series III: Magazine and Journal Contributions, continued

- 13 7 *The New Guard*, Volume 7. "Fragments of a Dream" 2018.
- 13 8 *New Letters: A Magazine of Writings and Art*. Volume 85, Number 4. "Life as Crossing Borders" 2019.

Series IV: Publicity, 1975-2019, undated

Appearances, 1999-2020, undated

- 14 1-2 Flyers, programs, and brochures of public appearances 1999-2000, 2003, 2007-2008, 2010-2014, 2019-2020 (24) (2 folders)
- 14 3 Badges and nametags from events, 1999, 2003, 2009, 2019, undated (5)
- 14 4 Post-event correspondence, 2014

Clippings, 1975-2011, undated

- 16 2 1975, 1978, 1999-2000, 2003-2005, 2008, 2011, undated (21); with note from Troncoso, July 24, 2020

Magazines, 1997-2008

- 14 4 *Hispanic*. January/February 1997. Review of *New World: Young Latino Writers*, edited and with an introduction by Ilan Stavans.
- 14 5 *Texas Monthly*. November 1999. Profile.
- 14 6 *Hispanic*. December 2003. The Hispanic Scholarship Fund Alumni Hall of Fame Advertisement
- 14 7 *Harvard Magazine*. May-June 2008. Identity Seeker.

Series V: Student Letters, 2003-2020

Bon View Elementary School. Ontario, California, 2003

- 15 1 Note from Troncoso, July 24, 2020; Correspondence from Cristina Anderson, librarian (2); Note from Mrs. Kitching's class
- 15 2 Correspondence from Kate Cerda-Nunez, with enclosure and pictures of the event (13)
- 15 3 Letters from Mrs. Bartosh's 4th grade class
- 15 4 Letters from Mrs. Mitchell's 4th grade class
- 15 5 Letters from Mrs. Kelly's 5th grade class
- 15 6 Letters from Mrs. Bell's 6th grade class
- 15 7 Letters from Mrs. Ferguson's class
- 15 8 Letters from Mr. Bradley's class
- 15 9 Unknown class letters (possibly Mr. Olive's 4th/5th grade)

Series V: Student Letters, continued

- 15 10 Rancho Alamitas High School. Garden Grove, California, 2012 (includes note from Troncoso, July 27, 2020)
- 15 11 4th Grade Class Howard Burnham Elementary School. El Paso, Texas, 2020 (includes note from Troncoso, July 27, 2020)

Series VI: Digital Objects, ca. 1965, 2003, 2010-2020, undated

Computer Files

- 15 12-14 3.5-inch disks (32) and 5.25-inch disks (3) with electronic versions of Troncoso's work (3 folders)

USB contents: 113 digital photographs, 2 videos, 4 documents