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Nevin's History: A Novel of Texas by Jim Sanderson (review)

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Nevin's History: A Novel of Texas. By Jim Sanderson. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004. Pp. viii+278. Editor's note. ISBN 0-89672-518-9. \$27.95 cloth).

This novel of Borderlands violence and romance is an enjoyable read for anyone, especially those interested in Texana. The author, writing as if he is the main character, Andrew Nevin, gives a sense of authenticity in his first-person account. One could hardly miss parallels between an impending second war with Mexico following a Texas Ranger invasion into Mexico and the current war in Iraq. The consumption-ridden Texas Ranger, Captain McNelly, who is also a Baptist preacher, when home from his campaigns, believes he is on a crusade and that God is on his side, so whatever happens on the border will somehow turn out well. A young newspaper reporter and college-educated journalist from back East, Andrew Nevin is less complacent and vows to do all he can to stop the impending war.

Much of Nevin's story is contained in an unpublished manuscript in which he remembers the formative period in Texas Borderlands history during and after the Civil War, 1864–1897. Nevin is a self-professed coward who happens to be the nephew of Texas's legendary "Rip" Ford. Ford's nephew shirked service in the Civil War and joined his uncle's family on the Rio Grande in Brownsville, Texas. The culturally refined Nevin, in his work for the *Brownsville Sentinel*, sees the opportunity for a great story and manages to convince McNelly to allow him to join his band of Texas Rangers as they moved south to try to recover stolen cattle belonging to Richard King. On "el otro lado del río" stands the mercurial Juan Cortina, former Brownsvillite, general in the Mexican army, and currently mayor of Matamoros, who is not directly involved in this rustling operation, but neither does he attempt to stop it. Cortina is Nevin's friend, who generously provided asylum for Uncle Rip's young wife Addie when her Confederate husband was fighting and defeating Union forces in the final battle of the Civil War. What the aging warrior, Rip Ford as a cuckolded husband, does not know is that his nephew has fallen in love with Addie during Ford's absences from Brownsville. The second war with Mexico did not come, and Nevin left the valley to become a San Antonio entrepreneur and man about town.

The book's best character development is Nevin, who reveals that even a professed coward with scruples can display violence and even bravery when his own life is in the balance. However, a life devoted to philandering and reporting on other lives provides little long-term satisfaction. His last chance to make his mark is to write the true story of South Texas, but it too, like his love for Addie, manages to elude him.

The author could have avoided Hispanic stereotypes by character modeling after old Mexican American families, such the Velas, who provided present-day Brownsville with a federal judge and lady mayor.