

San Jose State University

SJSU ScholarWorks

NACCS Annual Conference Proceedings

2008: 35th Annual: Poesia, Baile, y Cancion -
Austin, TX

Apr 1st, 12:00 PM

Eusebio Chacón's Statist Narratives of Nuevo México

Daisy Salazar

University of California - Los Angeles, daisysa@ucla.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/naccs>



Part of the [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Spanish Literature Commons](#)

Salazar, Daisy, "Eusebio Chacón's Statist Narratives of Nuevo México" (2008). *NACCS Annual Conference Proceedings*. 5.

<https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/naccs/2008/Proceedings/5>

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Archive at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in NACCS Annual Conference Proceedings by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

Daisy Salazar
Department of English
University of California, Los Angeles

2008 NACCS Conference Presentation

Eusebio Chacón's Statist Narratives of Nuevo México

The 1890s in New Mexico were a time of considerable political, cultural, and social upheaval. The question of New Mexican statehood had long been in the minds of many New Mexico Hispanos, especially elite Hispanos who "wanted to gain greater local control over land, resources, and political offices" (Nieto-Phillips, 60). The years leading up to New Mexican statehood, which was formally attained in 1912, were crucial in reaching this long desired goal and resulted in a Spanish- American consciousness that would function to "meet the established criteria (whiteness) for admission into the body politic" (81). Thus, in the years leading up to New Mexican statehood a new social structure had to be re-created in New Mexico one that would transform Nuevomexicanos into Americans (Mitchell, 5). In order for this transformation to take place Nuevomexicanos had to "lay claim to a European heritage," "boast of a 'Spanish' ancestry," and refashion "Spanish genealogy" (Nieto-Phillips, 49). Spanish -language newspapers and the stories they disseminated played a pivotal role in this process (79).

In 1892 Eusebio Chacón's two novellas, *El Hijo de la Tempestad* and *Tras la Tormenta la Calma*, appeared in their entirety in "El Boletín Popular," one of Northern New Mexico's largest Spanish-language newspapers (80). This newspapers' positive stance towards statehood and critical attitude toward those who disparaged Nuevomexicanos, and thus opposed its integration to the Union, offers a political lens through which we might read Chacón's fiction as a proactive instantiation of *nuevomexicano* cultural tradition. Eusebio Chacón was a staunch defender of Nuevomexicanos' "Spanish blood" and was proclaimed to be "an eloquent and fearless defender of the people's honor" due to his position "as a lawyer, author, translator, and acknowledged intellectual" and member of the elite Hispanos in New Mexico (15; 84). In his introduction to the novellas, Chacón denies any Anglo literary influence. This act of eradicating any literary tie to outsiders in turn not only suggests the presence of external social and political forces that are pressing upon the creation of his literature, but more importantly sustains his aimed claim of authenticity to New Mexico (Lomeli, 272). The political and cultural contestation that was occurring within the issue of statehood defined Chacón's societal position in New Mexico, as he fought against the marginality that New Mexico faced within the entire nation (Nieto-Phillips, 49). Considering all of these external forces defining New Mexico in the 1890s, the writing of *El Hijo de la Tempestad* and *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* can be seen as an effort on behalf of Chacón to "sow the seeds" of a Nuevomexicano literary tradition (Chacón, 4). This literary act would prove to the "gabacho" that Nuevomexicanos were capable of "creación genuine," a genuine creation (4). Thus, these two short novels are a type of historical narrative that shows one aspect of an evolving racial and ethnic identity predicated upon the cultural preservation of the Spanish- American heritage.

In *El Hijo de la Tempestad*, the tempestuous night, in which the reader is readily engulfed in, becomes symbolic for the chaotic social condition in which its community is enveloped. The social and political conditions of this community are muddled by corruption, which is indicated by the presence of morally questionable outsiders and a visible absence of a presiding structural order in the novelette. El Hijo de la Tempestad becomes the central character in this short novel, because he is defined by his social surroundings. He is called "El Hijo de la Tempestad" merely because he was born "en las tinieblas de una tempestad" (6). The thunderous and stormy conditions in which he was born directly inform and condition his identity. Thus, because El Hijo de la Tempestad was born with the "genio del huracán" he is destined to be "el azote de muchos pueblos y el terror de la humanidad" (12). The fact that he has no identity other than the one he is socially ascribed makes his life representative of his community' social ills, because it directly conditions his identity. These social ills are a product of both internal and external forces that act congruently due to the blurred social and political realms of the community. The gitana as an outsider effectively permeates society and is the key personage, aside from the "politicastros," that makes El Hijo de la Tempestad the coldhearted miscreant he grows up to be (Chacón, 29).

The physical description of characters becomes important because it indicates the social order present in the novelette's community. The only individuals that possess a detailed physical description

in the novel are la gitana and la casta Susana, which designates who is socially inferior and what is socially desired in a community's citizenry. Furthermore, the fact that certain individuals, like the "turba" or mob of rancheros in the novel, are not described in detail allows for the possible recreation of the community's social structure (6). The "rancheros" that are introduced are not given a racial identity and it is only "la gitana" who is characterized by the narrator as "sucia como todos los de su raza" (4). She is the only individual, along with her accompanying "mono," that is associated with a kind of "dirty race" or that is deemed to be an "extranjera" (6). With the exception of la casta Susana, the characterization of the gitana becomes important because all the other characters lack such detailed physical description. The gitana becomes the person that assumes the role of mother to the child whose mother died from giving birth. She is the person who ultimately names El Hijo de la Tempestad (21).

The fact that little detail is provided in describing El Hijo de la Tempestad and that he has a supernatural name separates him from other bandits and makes his nature impressionable. The narrator uses the words "hermoso" and "tierno" in describing El Hijo de la Tempestad before he even was placed in the arms of la gitana (4). If the child had been evil by nature then the narrator would refrain from using positive adjectives like beautiful and tender when initially describing the child. When the gitana prophesizes the destiny of the child amongst the rancheros she associates the evil nature of the child to the fact that his mother died at birth and that he was born in the middle of storm. These two factors do not condition the child, but rather happen to occur due to the overarching influence of environmental forces. When she bears the child in her arms she becomes reminded of "otra extraña [que] la habia alimentado á ella de la misma suerte, y por eso andaba errante por el mundo" (9). The fact that she is reminded of the other stranger that had nurtured her in the same way when she is carrying El Hijo de la Tempestad in her arms not only explains her role as a wanderer, but also functions to foreshadow his future societal position. Ultimately, la gitana transfers her quality of life to the child, which makes him a vagabond, a social outsider, and a bandit. The fact that El Hijo de la Tempestad is a social construction and has no real race is important, because it eliminates the basis for the prejudicial thoughts that the Americans were espousing during the 1890s in associating the bandits of the Southwest to the barbaric tendencies of Mexicans. The supernatural forces and social influences that make El Hijo de la Tempestad "el capitan de bandoleros," one who destroys pueblos and commits human atrocities, is what directs the reader to what truly matters, which is society itself (Chacón, 13).

When the governmental armed forces accidentally come across the hiding place of El Hijo de la Tempestad, while seeking refuge from the tempestuous weather, they are caught in a circumstance that becomes a metaphor for the ironic situation in which their society subsists. The fact that the image of the "tempestad bramando en el exterior" is contrasted with "el interior [de la cueva] todo era calma" places stress upon the false nature of calmness (27). The tempestuous weather outside is self-evident and metaphorically represents the social chaos that subsists in the community. The governmental armed forces seek shelter in what they believe would be a refuge from the calamity of the outside world and instead find no calmness at all. With this in mind the Capitan's comment in the end becomes much more relevant and disturbing. He nonchalantly declares that the gitana is sweeping the "aposento que deben ocupar ciertos politicastros que traen la patria muy revuelta," which identifies the true source of the social chaos (29). The citizens of "la patria" believe that politicians, like the cueva, would be a refuge from external disorder and yet this calmness turns out to be false (29). The "politicastros," which is a derogatory manner in which to address the politicians, turn out to be aiding the societal chaos that engrosses their community. El Hijo de la Tempestad as a societal creation becomes symbolic for the corruption that hides in the clandestine dark shadows of the governmental body politic.

The only hope for the community is metaphorically possessed in the only figure of morality and virtue in the entire short novel, which is "la casta Susana" (21). Unlike the other "esclavas" who were captured by El Hijo de la Tempestad and his bandoleros when they pillaged a pueblo, "la casta Susana" does not allow herself to be taken advantage of by any of the bandits or by El Hijo de la Tempestad himself (18). Susana and her father are held captive "porque la virtud de la hija y el heroismo del padre habian hecho embotarse los mas feroces impetus del Hijo de la Tempestad" (17). They are held captive because Susana's virtue and her father's heroism act as a ferocious impetus for El Hijo de la Tempestad. Both are "educados en la escuela de la hidalguía" and thus possess all of the generosity and nobility of the Spanish hidalgo. Susana is a virgin who possesses virtue that is made visible in her mere physical presence. She possesses all of those characteristics that a classical "white" beauty would display. Not only is Susana virtuous, but she also is obedient to her father to the utmost extreme. She feeds her elderly father from her "casto seno" or chaste breast and when her father is

near death she obediently accepts to marry El Hijo de la Tempestad in order to preserve her honor and the honor of her father (17). The succeeding allusion to Cordelia and King Lear, places this sacrifice in a literary history that will never be forgotten, as Susana, like Cordelia, is a daughter who remains loyal to her father until the very end (24).¹ Ultimately it is her sacrificial gesture toward her father and honor that sustain patriarchy and social as well as moral order. In the end she does not marry El Hijo de la Tempestad and remains virginal in every sense, which then becomes the only "creciendo luz" that sheds some hope for the continuation of her community's existence as she becomes the means in which cultural preservation is achieved.

In *Tras la Tormenta la Calma*, the title itself insinuates that after the storm there is complete social tranquility. This sense of social tranquility becomes prevalent in the presence of a more intrusive and prodding narrator and thus a more involved community. The manner, in which there is an absence of structured social space that allows for one to linger over matters of love in the *El Hijo de la Tempestad*, reinforces the social chaos that the community was enveloped in. *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* is a short novel that possesses social space that allows for matters of love to be the central issue in its community. Though the "tormenta" that the title mentions itself could be applied to the amorous love triangle between Luciano, Lola, and Pablo, the fact that there is always a sense of calm lingering behind the storm is ensured by the presence of a remaining stable social structure that is meant to resolve the problems left behind. Susana, who in *El Hijo de la Tempestad* is a symbol of nobility and in a sense the cultural preserver of Spanish heritage, becomes the overarching model of honor in *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* that is imposed upon Lola. The intense amount of Spanish literary allusion becomes a manner in which Spanish- American consciousness becomes more visible and welcomed. These allusions contribute greatly to the awakening of Spanish-American ethnic and political consciousness that successfully establishes a community in which, to quote Francisco Lomelí "honor becomes a relative code of social behavior" (163).

The narrator in *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* is much more colloquial in tone and actively participates in both spectatorship, by letting himself be entertained by "las bromas que los muchachos le dan" through the use of Gustavo Adolfo Becquer's poetry, and is emotionally attached as he "laments Luciano's fortune" (Chacón, 32). The manner in which the narrator engages in spectatorship simultaneously forces the reader to intimately engage in the development of the short novel, as we are let in on an inside joke that "los muchachos" from "uno del los barrios de Santa Fe" practice on Luciano (32). The involved temperament of the narrator becomes a mere extension of the engrossed nature of the entire community upon matters of the most personal level. Everyone in the pueblo knows one another and the absence of a foreign presence allows for this kind of intimacy, which is something that stifles the community in *El Hijo de la Tempestad* as la gitana ultimately provokes disorder. The community's gossip directly reaches Luciano in a way that shows that they are trying to match Lola with whom they consider to be a worthy match (38). Lola, like Susana, symbolically represents cultural preservation of the community. She, whose "hermosura la destinaba á ser de las más ardientes amadoras de que la historia de Santa Fé tiene registro," is destined like Susana to be one of the most passionate sweethearts of all history (33). She, like Luciano, must serve the community as a form of entertainment and a continuance of the Spanish literary lineage, which is most symbolically represented in Luciano and his crime.

Luciano's crime ultimately is the misuse of the Spanish literary history, which represents Spanish heritage, and he becomes a redeemable character in the end when he learns his lesson and realizes its correct use. Luciano is presented to the reader as "a joven de gallarda presencia y de gentil linaje" whose only fault was "no saber aprovecharse de la experiencia de otros" (32). His inexperience essentially causes him to be fantastical in his reading of "El Don Juan de Byron, El Estudiante de Salamanca y otras composiciones al estilo" (38). He appreciated these literary works at face value by viewing them "tal cual se pintaban" and thus erroneously wanted to be the next "Don Juan ó Felix de Montemar" (38). Luciano uses golden hypocrisy to seduce Lola, which stresses the valuable nature of the Spanish literary history he alludes to but also the manner in which he is distorting these works into something hypocritical. The manner in which he misuses classical Spanish literature then becomes his Achilles heel, but the way in which Lola succumbs to his advances highlights the power of this rich literary history. Lola becomes powerless under the mesmerizing enchantment of language as she is likened to a helpless "mariposa que se deja facinar por la luz de los faroles" (45). The fact that he has used his knowledge of Spanish literature to deceive someone else

¹ Though Eusebio Chacón's reference to Shakespeare's play *King Lear* may appear to undermine his denial of any Anglo literary influence in his novelettes, he refers to Shakespeare along with other famous Spanish writers in order lay claim to a European heritage.

and thus twist the intentions of these classical works marks the commencement of his misguided path toward misfortune. Nevertheless, Luciano in the end is redeemed because of his appreciation of literature, which becomes an obvious outcome when his fate is compared to that of Pablo.

Unlike Luciano, who is a student "en el colegio de San Miguel" and gifted with language, Pablo "tenía las manos callosas" and was "un sér verdaderamente noble" under "sus toscas vestiduras" (33). The manner in which Luciano and Pablo act as foils for one another highlights the crucial flaw that Pablo has, which is his inability to use language. Education becomes a means of degrading and placing Pablo in a class structure. Lola describes Luciano's words as "la quinta esencia de la miel" and Pablo's words as "groseras" (45). The stark contrast between the manner in which Luciano's words ring sweetly into Lola's ears and Pablo's words ring coarsely and cause repulsion, stress the importance that the command of language has and how those who do not possess such an ability are "humilde" and not worthy of love (45). In the end of the short novel, when he is hovering above the dead body of Aunt Mela and defaming Luciano and Lola for their wrongful deeds, his "largo discurso" is cut short (52). The narrator declares that his soliloquy would have been entered into "el Tesoro de la Elocuencia Española de Camapani," along with the best of Spanish literary history, but his pain intervened and "sejó de un tajo el tierno botón antes que fuera rosa" (52). Pablo is incapable of mastering the art of language as his simple nature allows for his emotions to overpower his ability to control speech. He will never be a rose and will forever remain a mere "botón" or seed, for he lacks the potential that would allow for his growth (52). A lack of education becomes his true demise, which reversibly for Luciano becomes a means in which he can redeem his past wrongful actions.

Pablo in the end is a noble character for he preserves the honor of Lola by forcing a marriage between Lola and Luciano even though he still loves her, but he is doomed to a fate of loneliness. Noble actions are a requisite, but the ability to master language and capture the true meaning and importance of a Spanish heritage through literature is essential. Luciano was able to marry Lola under the code of honor that structurally reveals a hidden impartiality. Luciano in the end, who is of noble lineage and of elegant presence, marries the most beautiful woman in the community. Though there is a hint of irony in the resultant fate of Luciano, who marries for passion and not for love, he nonetheless is able to redeem himself and continue his noble lineage. Luciano in the end marries Lola, has a son named Pepe, and has an opportunity to place his mastery of Spanish literary works to good use. In the nights the narrator hears "una playera ó vespertina de que Luciano tiene un variado é inagotable repertorio" on occasion in order to console "his alma triste" (55). Luciano delivers for his family a "vespertina," which is a sermon but also a literary act that is celebrated during the evening in universities, from an "inagotable repertorio" that translates as a book of gathered selected great theatrical works (56). Luciano ultimately learns his lessons and gathers from his knowledge of literature something that goes beyond its face value. The fact that Luciano takes this knowledge and vocalizes it to his family becomes symbolic for the continuance of the Spanish ancestry in which, like Susana, Lola becomes the means from which this culture is preserved.

El Hijo de la Tempestad and *Tras la Tormenta la Calma* present two different themes, one deals with banditry and the other deals with matters of love, however they are both connected by a greater concern for honor and social order. The manner in which the first novelette, *El Hijo de la Tempestad*, deals with issues of social disorder and the second novelette, *Tras la Tormenta la Calma*, deals with the matter of social order through the imposed structure of honor jointly make an argument for statehood. For both these novelettes the interwoven presence of archetypal Spanish literary allusions additionally functions as an interconnecting element that increasingly becomes present in the second novelette. The literary allusions to a Spanish literary history in the "genuina creación" of a New Mexican "literatura recreativa," functions as a way in which to "lay claim to European heritage," "boast of a "Spanish" ancestry," and refashion "Spanish genealogy" (Nieto-Phillips, 49). These two short novels are a type of historical narrative that shows the recreation of a social order predicated upon the cultural preservation of the Spanish-American heritage.

References

- Chacón, Eusebio. *El hijo de la tempestad: Tras la tormenta la calma: Dos novelitas originales* Santa Fe, N.M.: El Boletín Popular, 1892.
- Lomeli, Francisco and Julio Martinez. *Chicano literature: A Reference Guide*. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Mitchell, Pablo. *Coyote Nation*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Nieto-Phillips, John. *The Language of Blood* . Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2004.