

**The Writings of Eusebio Chacón by A. Gabriel Meléndez and Francisco Lomelí
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**Introductory comments by: Dr. Anna M. Nogar
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- Dr. A. Gabriel Meléndez has accomplished the important work of recovering and articulating the writing of nuevomexicano writers, particularly those from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- His work brings to us readers voices not previously recognized for their importance in expressing and defending the Indo-Hispano population of New Mexico, in Spanish, at a time when the balance of power in the then-territory was in play due to American colonization there, after the region was ceded by Mexico under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.
- The voices of Eusebio Chacón and others, whose works appeared in the Spanish-language press in New Mexico were important in that they expressed the political self-consciousness of the Nuevo Mexicano and worked towards ensuring that the cultural excision that they observed occurring in other parts of the American Southwest, notably Texas and California, would not occur in New Mexico.
- Dr. Meléndez writes in his groundbreaking study of the late 19th and early 20th century New Mexican press So All Is Not Lost, that “Even in the most remote corners of New Mexico, the dialectic of ownership of the documentary record of past events figured squarely into matters of sociopolitical agency” and that “One obvious result [of this dynamic] was that Neo-Mexicano journalist became cognizant of being excised from sociohistorical and literary accounts” [So All Is Not Lost, 103].
- Writers such as Eusebio Chacón, who rose to the historical exigencies of the moment, which they quite clearly recognized, simultaneously ensured that New Mexicans wrote their own histories and political perspectives, but also, as in the case of Chacón’s two novellas Tras la tormenta, la calma and Hijo de la tempestad, both published in 1892, established a canon of autochthonous literary production.
- Chacón’s work established the bases for other works of fiction and poetry drawing from Latin American and American literary traditions forming the body of nuevomexicano literature, primarily in Spanish, that is now being

published and read in the classroom and debated in critical discussions about literature by Hispanic writers in what is now the United States.

- Without their voices, the voice of Eusebio Chacón in particular, defending, and responding to the political, economic and social pressures exerted on the 19th-century nuevomexicano community, and calling for agency among its native inhabitants, it is difficult to say what 20th and 21st-century New Mexico would have become instead, though the fates of Indohispanos in nearby regions were not at all positive.
- As Dr. Meléndez states in an article entitled “Nuevo Mexico By Any Other Name,” which concerns the political attempts during the late 19th century to change New Mexico’s name to either neutralize or exotify it, as well as to diminish the political influence of the territory by combining it with Arizona:

“Nuevomexicanos well studied in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo refused to let themselves be treated differently from other Americans. They were aware that Anglo-Americans, and easterners in general, circulated very damaging views of them; thus, the name-change controversy was a harbinger of larger conflicts rooted in the ethnic and racial makeup of the state” [“Nuevo México By Any Other Name” 153]

- Eusebio Chacón, among other Nuevo Mexicano and southern Colorado writers, editors, and political figures such as Enrique Salazar, Jose Escobar, Camilo Padilla, Benjamin Read, JR Ribera wrote passionately to and for Spanish-speaking nuevomexicanos. Aware of the importance of the historical moment in which they were living, and of the great weight on their shoulders to ensure the continuation of Nuevo Mexicano political and cultural voice, they established and participated in *canjes* or syndicates that circulated their writing in newspapers throughout New Mexico, Southern Colorado and Texas.
- The work of Chacón’s contemporaries, such as that of the pseudonymous author Bonafé, whose “De la Capital. Correspondencia especial al *Independiente*” is a mordant commentary on the cultural changes experienced in late 19th century Santa Fe, can be found in bilingual format in Dr. Melendez’ co-edited volume *Santa Fe Nativa*, released two years ago by the UNM press with the editorial collaboration of august UNM professors Rosalie Otero, Enrique Lamadrid and Miguel Gandert.

Eusebio Chacón Biography:

- I hope that Dr. Melendez will be commenting on more specific elements or selections from the book’s introduction, in particular an event that occurred in 1925 in front of Chacón’s house in Trinidad and that, when Dr. Meléndez related it to me, was a sobering reminder of just how real and present the dangers Chacón faced for his voicing his opinions were.

- Chacón himself was born in 1869 Peñasco, New Mexico, and married Sofia Barela in 1891, becoming part of that family's political tree, at that time headed by Sofia's father, the estimable Colorado senator Casimiro Barela.
- Chacón attended the Jesuit Las Vegas College in Las Vegas New Mexico, where he graduated in 1887, and then received a law degree from the University of Notre Dame in 1889. In 1891 he became the deputy district attorney in Las Animas County, in southern Colorado, and later was appointed to the US Court of Private Land Claims, an important position as many nuevomexicanos had been dispossessed of their properties as a result of changing over to the American government. In 1898 he started the Spanish-language newspaper *El Progreso* out of his home in Trinidad, CO with fellow writer José Escobar. He died in 1949, recognized as much for his legal and political work as for his literary contributions, which he characterized, quoting from Dr. Meléndez' *So All Is Not Lost* as: "The sincere creations of my own imaginations [which] have not been stolen from *gabachos* or foreigners. Upon New Mexican soil, I dare lay the seed of a literature meant for the pleasure of the reader so that, if other authors with greater intellect than mine follow this path, they will be able to look back and point to me as the first to undertake this difficult road" [*So All Is Not Lost* 147].
- Chacón's oeuvre consists of literary works, such as the novellas already mentioned and poetry, political pieces and strong editorial letters, all beautifully laid out, translated and framed in The Writings of Eusebio Chacón. As Dr. Melendez notes in the book's introduction, Chacón was thought of by his contemporaries as "the spear point of the ascendancy of young nuevomexicanos during the 1890's" [The Writings of Eusebio Chacón 8].
- Of particular note in this regard is Chacón's 1901 "Elocuente discurso" or "Eloquent speech," an essay published in Enrique Salazar's Spanish language newspaper, *La Voz del Pueblo*. As co-editor Francisco Lomelí suggests in his translation, the "Elocuente discurso" was a "gentlemanly, but indeed fiery" article. The article which Chacón critiqued had been published in English in the Las Vegas *Review* newspaper, and consisted of slanderous and race-based accusations brought against what was called the "Spanish-Americans" of New Mexico by Protestant missionary Nelly Snyder. In clear and utterly devastating prose, displaying Chacón's extensive knowledge and control of the pen, the lawyer shows the original article for the uninformed and xenophobic tirade it was.
- Chacón says in the conclusion to the "Elocuente discurso" (paraphrasing here from the English translation): "As has now been established, this is not the first time the people of New Mexico have become the target of gratuitous as well as unjustified attacks [...] People of New Mexico, if your destiny is only as a beast of

burden, if you are to remain in the sad tutelage of the of the government you have had thus far, if you do not partake of in the public affairs of this nation which is yours, if your Anglo American brothers see you with mistrust and they envy the small bliss that you can reach by governing yourself, then it is time for you to pack up your goods and take them with your ancestors' remains to another more hospitable country. You do not lack talent or vigor. [...] if the country where your Diego de Vargas sleeps no longer has hope for his offspring, take note that the world is large, the world is good, the world is generous. Look for a country where you may become the master of your destiny" [The Writings of Eusebio Chacón, 192-193].

- Treated by Anglo-centric historians and literary historian as nonexistent, apolitical, pre-modern or, worse, based on the fact that they wrote in lettered Spanish, illiterate, Chacón and others of his generation clearly had a voice that needs to be heard by a much larger audience than that of the archives limited number of readers.
- Dr. Meléndez's and Dr. Lomelí's work has reclaimed Chacón and is an extremely important work for contemporary audiences who should be learning about him and his fellow writers as surely as they do about other Latin American and American 19th century writers. With this volume, Eusebio Chacón's fascinating biography as a proponent of Indohispano rights in New Mexico and Southern Colorado, his legal work, his consistent advocacy in the press and his vital literary production are finally within the reach of the everyday reader, who no longer has to seek such works in archives or in fragmented form in other publications.
- Importance of Dr. Meléndez' scholarship to others who research 19th and 10th century writing by the populations who were living there prior to NM becoming a territory and, much later, a state, of the United States.
- Though the importance of this book to the researcher should by now be clear, the book is vital to instructors as well, as much for its documentation of Chacón's fascinating biography, as for the entrance it grants its readers into his bilingual, bicultural 19th century reality. His writing and his political activism are not to be missed in gaining a comprehensive understanding of New Mexico's history of resistance in the late 19th century.
- And so it is with great pleasure and admiration that I ask you to join me in welcoming Dr. A. Gabriel Meléndez.

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