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# Background of New Mexico Hispanic Literature

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO 87131

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**BACKGROUND OF NEW MEXICO HISPANIC  
LITERATURE: SELF-REFERENTIALITY AS A  
LITERARY-HISTORICAL DISCOURSE**

By

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**University of California, Santa Barbara**



**Southwest  
Hispanic  
Research  
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## ABSTRACT

Title: Background of New Mexico Hispanic Literature:  
Self-Referentiality as a Literary-Historical Discourse

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The present study attempts to present key aspects of the overall ambiance from whence emerged a large and diverse body of Hispanic writings in New Mexico. Socio-cultural factors are emphasized within their respective historical context and numerous examples are provided to substantiate the assertions, including linguistic terminologies influenced by the commingling.

The central focus is to target self-referentiality as a means to reach an early literary consciousness that is at times in opposition with mainstream New Spain or what was commonly known as accounts or crónicas from Tenochtitlan or Mexico City. The articulation of such a consciousness is demonstrated through various texts, thus positing a distinctive narrative position by those who came into contact with the region of New Mexico, and setting the stage for some basic differences. This process of contestatory manifestations (oral or written) is alluded to to indicate the degree of awareness on the part of Hispanic peoples of their circumstance.

Another aspect that receives some critical reflexion is the role of newspapers in general and particularly as they proliferated in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Again, the situation of New Mexico is highlighted and the Las Vegas area is of especial interest. From this, discussion pertaining to the creation of a Las Vegas Renaissance is outlined and the founding of a large number of mutual aid societies is examined. The latter's role in promoting literature is of keen interest. From this social backdrop, a number of brief intertextual observations are made in specific works to underscore the element of self-referentiality.

The last section of the study is dedicated exclusively to one work, Historia de un cautivo by Porfirio Gonzales. Through the analysis of this novella, I attempt to show how its entertaining qualities are coupled with social concerns vis-a-vis the coming of a new century. While the short novel might deal with a romantic subject of captivity, its discursive implications suggest other considerations in preparations for the changing times.

Background of New Mexico's Hispanic Literature:  
Self-Referentiality as a Literary-Historical Discourse

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Bajo tales condiciones tan adversas,  
el mestizaje cultural fue inevitable.

Don Pedro Bautista Pino,  
Exposición sucinta y sencilla de la  
provincia del Nuevo México (1812)

The Southwest is a mosaic, not a  
synthesis.

Albert Guerard

I. Overview: Hispanic Literature as an Endogamous Tool for Cultural  
Identity and Expression

Much unorthodox but prodigious research is currently being conducted among contemporary Chicano literary historians while unearthing forgotten archives and manuscripts from diverse and sometimes unexpected sources. Individual attempts are coming together to form a vast diachronic macro-text of past regional writings which now provides a greater portrait of the Southwest. Partially attributed to the tenets of an informational age, understanding the full scope of cultural identity in New Mexico, like many other regions, responds to the fundamental task of recovering a literary past. Such an objective is tantamount to documenting a people's stature in a given society, demanding that scholars resort to interdisciplinary data to piece together a more authentic picture of events, social dynamics and personalities. From this larger context can be ascertained a number of important criteria for delineating distinctive regional literary charac-

teristics: cultural makeup, participatory agents, interactive politics, competing economies, gender consciousness, perspectives in worldview, class differentiations, language, and of course literary traditions.

New Mexico stands out as a unique case when considering early Hispanic writings, particularly because a vague but definite notion exists among the general populace of possessing a longstanding past. We must remember that the region played a major role when incorporated into the larger context of Spanish folklore and myth barely 48 years after Columbus' encounter with the Caribbean. This is certainly not the case in other regions of a strong Hispanic presence, such as California and to a degree Texas and Arizona. New Mexico offers a series of salient qualities and features not found in other regions, thus permitting a distinctive confluence or convergence of factors that emerged early on during the initial phases of Spanish exploration in the Americas. Although regarded as isolated and remote from pivotal cultural centers like Mexico City or Lima, New Mexico nonetheless attracted early attention as a new crossroads of human migrations where potential was largely fueled by myth, promised but unrealized riches and the complex network of sedentary Native American settlements along a river. These became the foundations of viable social structures where a livelihood was possible within otherwise harsh natural surroundings. The area then became an admixture of Native American and Hispanic lifestyles blending through time, borrowing from each other while transforming their original forms of being. The

literature that developed here reflects a cultural dynamics apart from any other region where the Hispanic presence is in evidence.

The New Mexican enclave developed in isolation from mainstream New Spain as the Hispanic peoples acquired and adapted to their new geographical area, either using Native American pueblos as starting points, social references or by creating parallel colonizations near what was already there. Thus, cultural identity has been shaped by the string of communities along the Río Grande much like Mexico City was influenced and fashioned by Tenochtitlan and Lago Texcoco. From this emerged a regional ethos: the chilero cycle permeates virtually all aspects of life, including view of time and culinary habits; linguistically, a sixteenth-century Spanish (turbina for dress; or coyote for a social caste of mixed bloods) became rooted in a time capsule which developed into a lingua franca with numerous Native American accents and terminologies (cusco; or coyaye, an herb also known as escoba de la víbora); religious worship and iconography conformed to its environment of decentralized institutionalization by forging a sacred mecca, such as the Santuario de Chimayó, or in which Penitentes assumed the role of an ad hoc religious institution; Native Americans' close affinity to the land and Hispanic pastoral ties merged to promote a notable attachment to place; and an architecture, sometimes called Santa Fe-Pueblo, which combines Spanish pragmatism in building techniques and Native American aesthetics offers harmonious spatial representations between nature and human needs.<sup>1</sup>

The singularity of these elements accords New Mexico an



inimitable place in what eventually became Southwestern letters. Although attention to its writings in Spanish has often been perfunctory, even superficial, there is no doubt that its overall production is recognized as occupying a special place in what the Southwest has to offer. The sheer volume of crónicas, memorias, relaciones, diarios, historias and many other trans-generic writings give credence to a people's obsessive inclination toward documenting everything--including incursions into fanciful imagination--for the sake of accountability, and in some cases for self-aggrandizement, but fortunately for posterity-sake. A cognizance of the great magnitude of these writings has gone unheeded mainly due to the materials' dispersion (Mexico City, Madrid, Kansas City and Amsterdam), in many cases their disappearance, their inaccessibility, readers' incomprehensibility, a general void of knowledge about their respective social-historical context, and later the stigma derived from linguistic preference. Perhaps considered startling or mindboggling to many, it must be stated explicitly: quantitatively, Hispanic peoples throughout the continental United States have, by comparison, far exceeded in productivity all other minorities, i.e. African-Americans, up to the end of the nineteenth century. And, New Mexico is without a doubt among the leaders in terms of longevity, variety and abundance.

Literary production by Hispanics in New Mexico also shares another meritorious distinction: it is the first and earliest cluster of Hispanic writings to be dealt with as a corpus unto

itself, despite the deficient methodologies to define it as such in "la tierra adentro del vasto norte". The scant critical treatments have principally been monographic in nature, but rarely have their focus been organic. Nevertheless, there have been numerous instances in which a critical mind reflects on these writings while contemplating their inter-relationship many years before an organized critical discourse existed. For example, it is revealing to find in Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's Historia de la Nueva México (1610) a clear notion of a written literary foundation taking hold in the region, to which he refers to as "nuestro Nuevo Mexico" and of which he feels an intimate part. In one occasion he even compares Aztec writings with contributions by others before him, such as Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and Fray Marcos de Niza, obviously suggesting a body of works with a certain regional focus and common features while distinguishing them from mainland Mexico:

Por aquella antiquísima pintura  
y modo hieroglífico que tienen,  
(...)  
Mediante la grandeza y excelencia  
Del escribir illustre que tenemos.  
Y fuerza y corrobora esta antigualla  
Aquel prodigio inmenso que hallamos  
Quando el camino incierto no sabido  
De aquella nueva México tomamos.<sup>2</sup>

A sizeable number of chroniclers and writers of accounts

thereafter focused on New Mexico with a particular propensity for comparing both Mexicos, oftentimes deviating into either a discourse of disenchantment or embellishments of wishful thinking. But they rarely lost sight of New Mexico as their focal point, as a geographical area and an axis of literary inspiration. The Río Grande region then took on the qualities of an autochthonous natural and human arena while serving as a magnet of critical discussions and fanciful recreations. Don Pedro Baptista Pino and Hernán Gallegos, among many others, effectively demonstrate this in Exposición sucinta y sencilla de la provincia del Nuevo México (1812) and Relación y conclusión del viaje y suceso que Francisco Chamuscado con ocho soldados hizo en el descubrimiento del Nuevo México (1581), respectively. Even Miguel de Quintana in 1732, in his individualistic renditions of semi-mystical poetry, claims a local autonomy in his writings with respect to his coloquios vis-a-vis the standards and impositions by the local ecclesiastics of Santa Cruz de la Cañada.<sup>3</sup> However, other significant literary ventures also emphasized the region's distinctiveness, namely oral tradition and folk theater, both of which were not bound nor limited by the written page. Los comanches (1777?) and Los tejanos (1854?) stand out for capturing local concerns while dichotomizing them with either Plains Indians or Texans. Like much of the oral tradition, they speak to others from the inside out, particularly poignant in corridos and poetry.

Manuel Alvarez as early as the 1830s initiated an embryonic critical appraisal on a specific work, thus continuing the

conceptualization of a distinctive regional literature:

Con esta provincia hacia nuestro polo en altura de más de 30 grados: la tierra fértil, la gente más política que la demás de las Indias, las casas de tres, cuatro y siete sobradas. Tenían de día noticias desde el tiempo de Hernán Cortés....(???) Del (Oñate) dicen de ella y todo el efecto que se hizo, que para tanto ruido corto, el capitán Gaspar de Villagrá que se halló pudente, escribió un libro en metro castellano.<sup>4</sup>

A self-referentiality was in place during the formative years of the territory's traditions, much like a moving mirror to catch impressions and images of creativity in the region, especially in light of the conflict and tension caused by the sudden encroachment of Anglo Americans shortly after 1848. One popular example that metaphorically captures the sentiment is the following:

Nuevo México mentado,  
has perdido ya tu fama,  
adonde yo jui por lana  
y me vine tresquilado.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar occasion, another anonymous poet recited:

Nuevo México infeliz  
Qué es lo que nos ha pasado?<sup>6</sup>

What surfaces, aside from literary sidenotes, is a constant glance backward at a focal point of origins and gestation of a literary expression rooted in New Mexico. Another early assessment of Villagrá's epic poem occurs in 1885 by Mexican critic Francisco

Pimentel:

The Historia de la Nueva México has two laudable features, one in the contents, and the other in the form, to wit: the fidelity with which the facts are related, and the simplicity and naturalness of the style and the language. This is really remarkable in the period when gongorism predominated. (...) The poem can only be appreciated by those scholars who may be looking for obscure or unknown information that they may find there, as they may in any historical chronicle.<sup>7</sup>

Almost immediately in 1887, John Gilmary Shea writes a provocative groundbreaking essay titled "The First Epic of Our Country. By the Poet Conquistador of New Mexico, Captain Gaspar de Villagra,"<sup>8</sup> considered the first indepth discussion of this important text.

New Mexico's place in the literary annals of early Hispanic writings is indeed noteworthy, and even more so because it attracted attention as a locus from whence a legitimate body of literature had flourished. If doubts remained to this regard, they were clearly dispelled by the latter part of the nineteenth century when literary production increased dramatically through newspapers and their respective publishing outlets. New Mexico gained in stature and peculiarity, even leading some historians and politicians to inject into it further elements of myth, thus augmenting its exoticness. Two examples suffice: William G. Ritch in Aztlan: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico (1885) and the editors of An Illustrated History of New Mexico

(1895),<sup>9</sup> who curiously framed the territory's uniqueness within the confines of the mythic homeland of the Aztecs, that is, Aztlán. No other region has caught the romantic fancy and splendor for its cultural composition and richly diverse history, except California for its weather and natural resources. If New Mexico conjured up images of Cibola and Quivira for the early Hispanic explorers, its magic has prevailed to this very day, at times promoted by the chamber of commerce to attract settlers, later the tourist industry, and elements of cultural voyeurism. From this emerged in the 1920s the modern version of what the original explorers sought: the logo 'the Land of Enchantment.'

In spite of the insistence by many to dwell on a glorious remote past, Hispanics struggled to salvage what they could in a society where the balance of power was now tilting against them. By 1878 when the railroad arrived, pastoral life was interrupted by waves of changes and even hostile interests, principally land and minerals. The railroad introduced new products, facilitated greater exchange, and brought on a diversified economy and, as a consequence, material prosperity. Although economically splintered and politically factionalized, culturally, Hispanics made great strides in the field of literature, thanks to the rapid proliferation of the printing press and a growing readership. Hispanic peoples then began to realize their potential as creators of literary expression, making the easy switch from the backdrop of a rich oral tradition to the written medium. If the concept of a New Mexican literature had earlier been more latent, almost

intuitive or amorphous, and heavily influenced by the constructs of history, after the 1880s the notion became explicit and unequivocal, and freer in its fancy. A tradition had not been born; it became a clear case of a renaissance--the first of its kind by any American minority--where socio-economic circumstances and human dynamics permitted a flourishing, almost an explosion. Suddenly, the written word became accessible to a larger number of people, and they coalesced from individual voices into collective congregations, artistic groups and even literary societies, producing an incredible constellation of writers who produced en masse.

The new incursions into literary expression seem to have spurred a renewed sense of identity and purpose. New Mexican Hispanics intimated a recovery and an opportunity to develop their own destiny, despite being a conquered people. Publishing outlets afforded them the vehicle to articulate what had either been repressed since the Mexican-American War, having been made to feel in great part by Anglo Americans as if they were "voiceless and expressionless".<sup>10</sup> This new found freedom of stylized expression, particularly in Spanish, provided the needed impetus to dwell on matters pertaining to the imagination. Newspapers then became larger than life as instruments of cultural-artistic dialogue and intertextual exchange. As Nicolás Kanellos notes:

Besides supplying basic news of the homeland and of the Hispanic world in general, advertising local businesses and informing the community on relevant current affairs

and politics of the United States (often through unauthorized translations of the English-language press and/or news agencies, Hispanic periodicals additionally have had to offer alternative information services that present their own communities' views of news and events. At times this information has had to take on a contestatory and challenging posture vis-a-vis the English-language news organizations and U.S. official government and cultural institutions.<sup>11</sup>

Newspapers assumed the role of a modified traditional crónica as a self-referential text of the times, or modern record, while functioning as a multifaceted medium of cultural and informational exchange. In them we find the transmission of social values, overt and subliminal, plus a forum for public debate through specious editorials and essays. Above all, the newspaper became the meeting ground between the oral tradition of a people and attempts at either experimental or polished writings on a wide assortment of themes and subjects. In a real sense, newspapers negotiated what was in the people's minds or hearts and what could be said in writing. In that sense, they represented an externalization or outpouring of ideas and sentiments that they could now readily express through the written word, thus serving as a modern form for the well-established desire of documenting everything in sight, as evinced in the colonial accounts and chronicles. But the fate of the newspaper's fragility greatly impacted the content's durability and, as a consequence, the Hispanic people's faith in the newspaper



as a viable depository of their expression also befell their ability to collect and compile it as testimony of a body of literature. Begrudged by many as useless and cumbersome, this priceless resource should be viewed as a stock of daily history constituting the legacy of a people. As the editors in New Mexico Newspapers: A Comprehensive Guide to Bibliographical Entries and Locations observe:

Newspapers, although the single largest and most comprehensive source of information recorded at the time of an event, nevertheless are perhaps the most neglected reservoir of historical data, often entrusted to those with little appreciation of their intrinsic worth.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, it is already a well substantiated fact that New Mexico offers the most foundings of Spanish-language newspapers in what became the American Southwest.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most conspicuous highlight of such proliferation is found in Las Vegas, New Mexico, the epicenter of such an enterprise, which usually doubled as infrastructural literary outlets and provided the base for the Las Vegas Renaissance. The city itself experienced an unprecedented boom that positively impacted and cultivated a readership--a situation propitious for producing literature. Manifesting a cultured language, verbalistic wits or ingenious flairs with words were highly prized abilities that received immediate social accolades, prompting a number of literary groups. From this ambiance emerged a conglomeration of mutual aid societies, whose original purpose might have been more community based as a support

network and fringe benefit associations,<sup>14</sup> and which evolved into full-fledged literary societies, or at least literary interests became central to their overall mission. The objectives of the mutual aid societies expanded into a broad umbrella "to investigate and debate questions and subjects of social, literary and moral character."<sup>15</sup> Their multifold functions embraced numerous activities, among them promoting group consciousness, and served as a training ground for politicians, orators, social workers, moral servants and literati.

The Las Vegas Renaissance "tranversed unprecedented social, class and political affinities with the intent to define their own literary map."<sup>16</sup> Unlike subsequent minority groupings many years later, such as the Harlem school, the New Mexican case was literally a native mass movement that intersected Hispanic society in all directions, while promoting published writings of any inclination, whether popular and folkloric or culto. Powerful and influential persons are indeed known for their contributions, but its salient feature is rooted in its generally popular composition from all walks of life:

No one leader stood out nor did anyone in particular direct it. No one was considered the poet laureate who might dominate the scene; it was both a popular and middle-class event. The movement became a happening totally apart and separate from Anglo literary interests (and circles), and it can be interpreted as a show of cultural strength by a conquered people.<sup>17</sup>

The increase in literary expression mirrored the socio-economic conditions, including an emerging middle-class and frequent attempts to internationalize literary tastes while connecting locals with cosmopolitan sources. It became commonplace to find writings by New Mexicans alongside others from various origins, such Mexico, Spain, Germany, Nicaragua, Czechoslovakia, Argentina, France and Mexico. A wide range of moods, themes, experimentations and styles offered variety and sophistication. Hispanic New Mexico by then was overcoming its backwoods image of illiterate folk, but has remained invisible within the confines of Southwestern letters considered by many as a "sagebrush school of literature".<sup>18</sup> In fact, they were much on the move: between 1879 and 1900, 283 newspapers were launched in the state of New Mexico, and of these 44 correspond to the city of Las Vegas alone.<sup>19</sup> Of the 44 total, 16 were bilingual and 13 were exclusively Spanish-language newspapers,<sup>20</sup> many of which were direct outlets or feeders from the literary societies. In terms of these societies, it is documented that in Las Vegas alone in 1892 eight were thriving, thus accounting for an unbelievable state of affairs of cultural activity. A burgeoning center of creative activity found itself in full bloom and the Spanish language benefited greatly while gaining new vitality and importance. In 1881 Revista Católica details the following:

La prosperidad física, moral, artística y literaria de Las Vegas progresa a grandes pasos. El número de edificios va en aumento; el comercio es floreciente; la

población crece y mejora; el orden y la moralidad presente han hecho olvidar las pasadas fechorías de los tramps de hace año y medio. Las escuelas son frecuentadas por muchos discípulos del país y del vecino Estado, siendo considerable el número de los extranjeros. La cantidad de libros y papeles, que entra en Las Vegas, es pasmosa. Aquí se publican periódicos diarios, hebdomadarios y mensuales. El trabajo de las imprentas no tiene bastantes obreros para dar abasto a los muchos encargos que reciben.<sup>21</sup>

Within this cross-national hybridization, New Mexicans nonetheless continued to cultivate an endogamous self-referentiality with the hopes of developing and promoting their cultural agenda. Hispanic writers were juxtaposed with, even compared to, consecrated authors from other lands, thus placing the former in the circles of an exclusive Pleiad. The implication is fairly simple: political and economic marginalization might be their immediate plight within Anglo-America but their intellectual and literary prowess empowers them to transcend social restrictions. To illustrate the point, in La Voz del Pueblo in 1891, a homage for Don Eleuterio Baca highlights his exceptional talents as a poet with a graphic local image:

Don Eleuterio Baca, fiel y digno discípulo de Calderón y Lope de Vega, el primero de los poetas Neo-Mexicanos, estuvo en la ciudad esta semana.... (E)s uno de esos genios que la madre naturaleza da pocos al mundo. El

arte de hacer versos le viene tan natural a él como le es al (Río) Gallinas su corriente de agua.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas socially Hispanics might be experiencing institutionalized forms of segregation and other destabilizing forms of undermining their spheres of influence, literary space permits them full reigns in freedom of expression where they can metaphorically rub elbows with the classics.

The concrete result of this renewed confidence unchains a series of literary manifestations, sometimes imitating established moulds, other times attempting to break new ground in founding local archetypes, and still other times by bridging popular folkloric forms with more purely literary types. In this context, we can better understand Manuel M. Salazar's picaresque rendition in his "La historia de un caminante o sea Aurora y Gervacio" from 1881 or some of the historical cronovelas from the 1890s--or what might be termed today a documentary or 'reportaje-novel'--, such as Manuel C. de Baca's Historia de Vicente Silva y sus cuarenta bandidos, sus crímenes y retribuciones from 1896 and the anonymous Noches tenebrosas en el Condado de San Miguel from 1892. These works have as an objective to create novels out of well-known models, except that their principal concern entails providing local substance and content, that is, adapting a literary form to local reality. Eusebio Chacón, in the Dedicación to his two works El hijo de la tempestad and Tras la tormenta la calma from 1892, captures the essence of his commitment to a literary genre, the

novel, in his region:

They (the novels) are a genuine creation of my own fantasy and not stolen nor borrowed from gabachos or foreigners. I dare lay the foundations or the seed of an entertaining literature on New Mexican soil so that if other authors of a more fortunate ability later follow the road I hereby outline, may they look back on the path and single me out as the first to undertake such a rough road.<sup>23</sup>

If Chacón's first novel unfolds the perils of a region's attempts at ridding itself of the shackles of totalitarianism and disguised forms of social control, his second work resembles an imitative exercise that dwells on deciphering morality and redefining honor. His main concern is to put fiction at the service of social issues but part of his fascination is to deal with recognizable behavioral patterns with some ambiguity. While Chacón blazes the trail, in his mind, to prove a theory on the 'authentic New Mexican novel', many Hispanic writers, particularly in the 1890s, set out to captivate a readership anxious for stories relevant to their social milieu. The mentioned decade offers a number of works that either appeared in monographic form or serialized in the newspapers themselves. A wide range of poetry, coloquios or actos, short stories and literary essays literally impregnated the pages of these spontaneously chronicled publications. Their consistent presence and popularity suggest that they were probably viewed as requirements fixed by literary tastes by contrasting the starkness

of current events with aesthetic intrigue, oftentimes humor and an exuberance in verbal ingenuity.

For the reasons mentioned herein, the decade of the 1890s results in the largest amount of literary experiments and perhaps the greatest surprises stowed away in newspaper columns. The dilemma became how to extract these texts in order to document a viable corpus of Hispanic writings. Production of creativity was at an all-time high, but a full awareness of archiving or collating it hit an unenviable low, thus prompting an astronomical disappearance of authors and their works through carelessness, neglect or indifference. The fate of many potentially worthy texts unfortunately relied on the durability of awkwardly delicate paper and corrosive ink which disintegrated when exposed to the elements. Much depended on the techniques of archiving and storage, but social attitudes, historical stigmas and linguistic biases contributed to the criteria set to decipher their value. Spanish-language newspapers suffered a similar destiny as many of the important documents from colonial New Mexico: they did not seem to figure as priorities and, consequently, massive amounts were destroyed, disfigured or dispersed. Much of the writings became lost or fell through the cracks and only a vague memory seems to remember their mere existence. That is precisely why any endeavor in recovering the bits and fragments of Hispanic literature in New Mexico, from whatever sources and means, is so vital to better recreate comprehensive blocks of a forgotten past of actual human experience that deserves reconfiguration and, ultimately, being

rewritten.

## II. Historia de un cautivo by Porfirio Gonzales: A Turn of the Century Narrative

With the objective of focusing on a single author, many viable options exist well deserving of the critical attention they have been lacking. Porfirio Gonzales (1863-1920), for example, a renowned pioneer educator from the Las Vegas area, suffered a similar fate of many Hispanic writers of his time, postergación, while being passed over as if he never existed. Others worthy of consideration might be Apolinario Almanzares, José Escobar, Vicente or Luis Bernal, Secundino Baca, Josefina Escajeda, Eleuterio Baca, Jesús María H. Alarid, José Inés García, Higinio V. Gonzales, and many more.

The short novel Historia de un cautivo, which appeared in Las Voz del Pueblo in 1898<sup>24</sup> in a ten-part serialized newspaper format, encapsulates much of the sentiments of Hispanics at the turn of the century while their condition oscillated between continuation as an unstable territory and becoming an official state of the Union. The dilemmas and uncertainty oftentimes produced mixed allegiances or positions that bordered on the contradictory, and if not, ambivalences. The plot, like many of this era, seem simple and straightforward, almost 'primitive' or 'naive' in their composition, and an almost nostalgic romanticism confounds the



central theme of granting the person something that rightfully belongs to them. However, its metaphorical value leads us to an allegorical analysis that defies simplicity. The narrative places itself in midstream between fantasy (i.e. inherited riches) and desire (i.e. finding a lost identity caused by undesigned circumstances). The storyline, in one level, may appear to only present the problem of double identities for the adopted son named Esteban Stankiwicks and the Indian maiden Nitate but the interpolation of historical and literary contexts suggest otherwise. The fact that Esteban is believed to be Norwegian, but actually Swedish from the Siegles family, and the Indian maiden is actually the Mexican Margarita Molina, a captive by the Apaches since childhood, turns the story into a Cervantes-type unraveling act of who is who. Esteban's premature death at the hands of his Apache captors creates a chain of events that only a detectivesque mind can fathom.

But the novella contains more: it marks a parallelism between 1898, the historical context or the foreboding turn of the century into modernity, and 1842, the literary context or the old order of the Mexican rule--suggesting a colonial existence--and the premonition of Anglo American domination. Either way, preparations for a changing future must be made in which peoples of diverse origins will mix and commingle. If in 1842 the primary fear is a violent conquest, in 1898 the greatest precaution is intimated in terms of potential statehood. Don Eduardo Pérez de Molina, the main character and patriarch around which the story revolves and by

chance Margarita's father, represents the touchstone of reality who achieves social harmony by bringing the loose pieces together. Not by coincidence, Don Eduardo is a military colonel who weighs events by the Apache threat in the Southwest since he had lost his daughter to them for fourteen years. The process of recovering his Margarita then is equivalent to his retrieval, restitution and possible redemption of his homeland. His regaining a daughter is similar to reclaiming a part of his past and future. In that sense, the novella's title Historia de un cautivo is misleading and ambiguous: one might think that the romantic motif of captured Europeans moves the story within the confines of the indita tradition<sup>25</sup> or that the captivity alludes only to Esteban Stankiwicks' situation. The reference is a generic one, for each character is living out a certain type of relative captivity, or double deception. In other words, with more precision, the novella could be titled "Historia de un pueblo cautivo", caught in a trap of its own making, much the way identities shift and affinities cross over.

Appearance and reality clash constantly in a series of melodramatic relationships of wishful thinking until Margarita manages to convince her lover's relatives with meticulous documentation that she is the true benefactor of his long sought inheritance. Even the relatives are caught in a web of complying with delivering on the original promise. Usually, this might figure as poetic justice, but in this case it seems only coincidence because nothing was consummated between Esteban and

Margarita except their requited love. It turns out to be more convenience and luck when Margarita later marries her lover's brother, thus keeping the family wealth intact and actually consolidating it further. Thus, she completes the cycle from 'primitive' life as an Apache captive to a modern corporate owner.

Gonzales' short work embodies a number of other interesting considerations. For example, the term "historia" can either be history or story, or both as Cervantes might prefer, thus representing a double-edged commentary on the social evolution of the times. Clearly, this work romanticizes social relations with the histrionic techniques of shifting identities to achieve a felicitous suspense but it lacks the gratuitous superficiality of nineteenth-century dime novels and the caramelized content in Ramona (1884) by Helen Hunt Jackson. Narrative perspective is expertly handled by Gonzales as the story unfolds around Don Eduardo, much like a whirlwind of discoveries and revelations. Although Indians cause physical harm and are described as 'savages' and antagonists, facile monolithic polarizations between them and others are generally lacking. Margarita, after all, has become Apache by living with them for fourteen years and she never belittles them. The traditional cowboy and Indian framework is missing, because the characters recognize an implicit process of assimilation and blurring of difference.

The novella, then, serves as a testimony of presentiment regarding changes that are about to take place in the twentieth century, conceived as modernity for a nineteenth-century writer and

analogous to the kinds of changes experienced by Mexicans in the late 1840s. The text contains a prophetic note of sweeping transformations in the near future, even if the ending for now happens to be happy. Despite the latter outcome, a doleful mood permeates the narrative that intertextually relates to Eusebio Chacón's El hijo de la tempestad: Esteban Stankiwicks, found floating in a vicious North Sea storm, earned the title 'niño náufrago' who comes from a family of "intrépidos hijos de la tempestad" (21). The young man may offer a tantalizing love and wealth but the temptations to achieve them are great and the consequences might be worse yet. Therefore, the work presents closure and resolution in this case but it also suggests a crossroads of quandary, misgivings and disputable skepticism.

Porfirio Gonzales, in the final analysis, delivers an ambivalent novel with competing messages: he comments on the tribulations of the past as he intimates radical changes in the near future. Historia de un cautivo therefore encases the discourse of a region's self-referentiality as it comes to grips with its turbulent history and begins to negotiate with elements of the outside world and inevitable influences. In that sense, the work is both entertaining and mildly foreboding.

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## Footnotes

1. Francisco A. Lomelí, "New Mexico as a Lost Frontier: A Cultural and Literary Radiography." La línea: ensayos sobre literatura fronteriza México-norteamericana/ The Line: Essays on Mexican/American Border Literature. Eds. Harry Polkinhorn, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz and Rogelio Reyes (Mexicali/Calexico: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California/San Diego State University, Imperial Valley Campus, 1987): 81-92
2. See Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's Historia de la Nueva México, 1610; A Critical and Annotated Spanish/English Edition. Translated and edited by Miguel Encinias, Alfred Rodríguez and Joseph P. Sánchez. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992: 6.
3. For further information in this regard, consult Clark Colahan and Francisco A. Lomelí's article "Miguel de Quintana: An Eighteenth-Century New Mexico Poet Laureate?" in Pasó por Aquí: Critical Essays on the New Mexican Literary Tradition, 1542-1988. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989): 65-78.
4. Manuel Alvarez. Memorandum Book of Manuel Alvarez. December 24, 1834. Coronado Room, University of New Mexico. Folio 2264.
5. See Arthur L. Campa. Spanish Folk-Poetry in New Mexico. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1946: 526.
6. Raymond Paredes, "Early Mexican-American Literature." A Literary History of the American West (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1987): 1083.
7. Francisco Pimentel, Historia crítica de la literatura y de las ciencias de México. Desde la Conquista hasta nuestros días (Mexico City: Librería de la Enseñanza, 1885): 142-43.
8. Consult the essay in the United States Catholic Historical Society Magazine, New York (April 1887), 4: 1-16.
9. William G. Ritch's book was published in Boston by D. Lothrop & Co. and An Illustrated History appeared anonymously through The Lewis Publishing Co.



10. See Raymond Paredes, 1079.
11. Nicolás Kanellos. "A Socio-Historic Study of the Development of Hispanic Community Newspapers in the United States." Unpublished manuscript with author's permission. P. 1.
12. Pearce S. Grove, Becky J. Barnett and Sandra J. Hansen, New Mexico Newspapers: A Comprehensive Guide to Bibliographical Entries and Locations (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975): XV.
13. For further discussion on other specificities, consult Porter A. Stratton, The Territorial Press of New Mexico, 1834-1912 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), Anselmo Arellano's "The Rise of Mutual Aid Societies Among New Mexico's Spanish-Speaking During the Territorial Period (unpublished manuscript with author's permission), and Francisco A. Lomelí's "New Mexico as a Lost Frontier" in La línea: ensayos sobre literatura fronteriza México-norteamericana/ The Line: Essays on Mexican/American Border Literature, eds. Harry Polkinhorn, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz and Rogelio Reyes (Mexicali/Calexico: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California/San Diego State University, 1987): 81-92.
14. José Amaro Hernández, Mutual Aid for Survival: The Case of the Mexican American (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger, 1983): 3.
15. Arellano, 3.
16. Francisco A. Lomelí, "Hispanic Literary Legacy New Mexico, 1880-1930." Unpublished manuscript. P. 16.
17. Lomelí, "New Mexico as a Lost Frontier", p. 90.
18. See Russel Martin, "Sagebrush School of Literature," Los Angeles Times, April 1, 1990: 4.
19. Stratton, 25.
20. Ibid., 24.
21. See Revista Católica, December 24, 1881: 543.
22. Anonymous from August 8 and September 9, 1891.
23. Eusebio Chacón, El hijo de la tempestad; Tras la tormenta la calma; dos novelitas (Santa Fe: Tipografía El Boletín Popular, 1892): 2.
24. The serialized novel appeared between June 4, 1898 and September 3, 1898.

25. For further explanation on this genre, see Enrique R. Lamadrid's excellent article "Entre Cibolos Criado: Images of Native Americans in the Popular Culture of Colonial New Mexico, Reconstructing a Chicano/a Literary Heritage; Hispanic Colonial Literature of the Southwest," ed. María Herrera-Sobek (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1993): 158-200.