

A Transnational Figure: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and the American Press

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An Influential Voyage: The United States in Gómez de Avellaneda's Political Poetry

On May 21, 1864, after a five-year stay on her native island, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda departed Havana with her brother Manuel on board the passenger ship, *Eagle*, to the United States. Upon her arrival, she visited New York, Philadelphia, Niagara Falls, Mount Vernon, and other typical American points of interest (Kelly, "La Avellaneda's Sonnet to Washington" 235). The impressions of her travels were collected in two poems: "A Washington" and "A vista del Niágara." Gómez de Avellaneda's visit lasted for at least two months, spending most of her time in New York. During the summer of 1864, she took the short trip to Niagara Falls, an experience that became the inspiration for her composition.

It can be said that Gómez de Avellaneda's visit to the United States had a profound impact on both the evolution of her thought and her writings. The two American compositions that the trip to the United States had inspired were both masterpieces, addressing the nature of good government as one that is based on institutions that protect the freedom and exercise of genuine liberty among all of its citizens. These texts—the sonnet she wrote as a tribute to George Washington and the ode to Niagara Falls—are remarkable examples of political poetry, where American republicanism is praised as a model to be followed by other nations. The attitude adopted by Gómez de Avellaneda toward her audience in both compositions is that of a civic poet. As such, she rescues the literary precedent for a woman poet to speak publicly on political

matters, including commenting on both historical events and the most salient political issues of her time. Both compositions, “A Washington” and “A vista del Niágara,” offer a glimpse into a perspective absent from the rest of her writings: her admiration for the United States’ political system.

However, it is not only the effect the United States had on Gómez de Avellaneda’s writing that is of interest in connection to this voyage, but also the effect Gómez de Avellaneda’s travels had on the press in the United States, which extensively covered her visit to North America and her return to Europe from Cuba. The press articles from that time refer to both her literary fame and versatility as a writer, while giving special attention to her novel *Guatimozín*, about the Conquest of Mexico. The author’s arrival in the United States was reported without delay in newspapers on both the east and west coasts. On July 2, 1864, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, published in New York, announced that “Señora de Avellaneda, a Cuban poetess of celebrity, is at present in this city” (“Epitome of the Week” 2). Meanwhile, on July 27, 1864, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* from San Francisco also mentioned the author’s arrival in the United States:

A Cuban Poetess—Señora de Avellaneda, a Cuban poet of celebrity, has arrived in New York from Havana. She has won a distinguished name in contemporary Spanish literature, both by her lyric and dramatic poetry and by her romances, particularly the historical one of *Guatimotzin*, the heroic defender of Mexican independence, against the Spanish conqueror, Hernán Cortez. (“Multiple News Items” 3C)

The presence of Gómez de Avellaneda in the U.S. press on both coasts, in the many English and Spanish Language newspapers that published her poems, articles, and news about the author, indicates that there was a wider circulation of her literary works among the American public than has been hitherto acknowledged. The English edition of her biblical drama *Baltasar* by the publishing house American Book Company was advertised in the papers; her anti-slavery novel *Sab* (1841) appeared serialized in the Spanish-language newspaper *La America* published in New York; as well as the translations of her works into English such as poems, the historical novel *Guatimozín*, and her private letters.

This brief, but significant, interlude of her life and works has been generally overlooked, the relevance of these American writings within a broader transnational context has not been fully examined, and the author’s presence in the American Press and her close ties with the Cuban intellectuals residing in the United States remain to be explored. Such neglect of her ties to the United States extends even to the well-advertised English edition of her biblical drama *Baltasar*. With this special section of this volume, we explore the

influence of the author's U.S. travels on her work, especially her political poetry, examine the intellectual figures whose own work influenced the writings of Gómez de Avellaneda, the contributions of her foundational novel *Sab*, the author's practical efforts that accompanied her ideological contributions to the abolitionist cause and, for the first time, present an overview of the coverage her travels and her writings garnered within the U.S. press. We do so in an effort to illuminate the truly transnational influence of an author whose work, we advocate, must be studied with all of these facets in mind.

Two Versions of the Same Sonnet: "A Washington" 1841 and 1869

The early sonnet to George Washington was published in the first edition of Gómez de Avellaneda's *Poesías* (1841), and also in the second anthology of her poetry of 1850, a volume that was later reprinted in Mexico in 1852. A second version of the poem appeared in her *Obras* (1869) containing major changes and alterations to the previous text, and with a footnote reminding readers that the text was originally written in 1841, and then revised by the author after her visit to the tomb of the American hero. The sonnet was probably composed during the summer of 1864 in the United States, where the writer arrived in May for her extended stay of approximately two months (Kelly, "La Avellaneda's Sonnet to Washington" 235; Williams 32).

In addition to the publication of "A Washington" in the two editions of Gómez de Avellaneda's collected poems, and finally in the poetry volume of her *Obras* (1869), both versions of the sonnet appeared in the U.S. and Puerto Rican presses. The earlier 1841 composition was reprinted in the New York newspaper *La Verdad* in 1852, and again in 1861 in *La Gaceta de Puerto Rico* (May 14, 1861, 4), while the 1869 sonnet appeared twice: in the Texas paper *La Prensa* (San Antonio, Texas) on February 22, 1941 (3), and again on November, 25, 1952 (2). Furthermore, there are several references to the poem in the U.S. press, such as in the *Omaha Daily Bee* (Nebraska) on January 15, 1899, the *Charleston Courier* (South Carolina) on October 7, 1854 (2), and in *The Daily Illini* (a student newspaper from the University of Illinois) on July 8, 1926 (1). The publication of the sonnet in the U.S. press, as well as the many mentions and allusions to it that are found in the newspapers, demonstrates that "A Washington" was a well-known text among the American public and underscores its relevance to the understanding and appreciation of this great figure of American and world history.

The early version of the sonnet "A Washington" was translated into English during the nineteenth century, and again a new rendition of the compo-

sition appeared in print in 1918. The first translation of the original version was published in the anthology of poetry *Mexican and South American Poems (Spanish and English)*, by Ernest S. Green and Miss H. Von Lowenfels (388–389). In the twentieth-century, the second English translation of the original sonnet of 1841 appeared in *Pan-American Poems: An Anthology* (50). Edith Kelly observes regarding this translation of the poem by Agnes Blake Poor, that “the translator . . . has adhered to a definite rhythmic pattern throughout, and is to be complimented for her observance of the technicalities associated with the form of verse peculiar to the sonnet” (“La Avellaneda’s Sonnet to Washington” 241). It is noteworthy that Kelly herself published the first English translation of the 1869 version of the sonnet, which appears in her article, “La Avellaneda’s sonnet to Washington,” published in 1948. The following is the critic’s translation of Gómez de Avellaneda’s 1869 version of the sonnet to Washington:

Thou hast no peer in all the ages past,
Nor will the future generations find
In annals dedicated to mankind
Thy legacy of noble deeds surpassed.
While Europe by a war lord was harassed,
Its victories to blood-drenched soil confined,
America a heaven-sent boon enshrined:
The genius of her future welfare vast.
Though victor bold by martial law succeed,
Convert the world to dreary wastes, and be
The boastful lord of serfs’ unhappy fate,
The nations will in time these truths concede:
He only gathers strength who sets them free;
And he alone is great who makes them great!
(Kelly, “La Avellaneda’s sonnet to Washington” 242)

No en lo pasado á tu virtud modelo,
Ni copia al porvenir dará la historia,
Ni otra igual en grandeza á tu memoria
Difundirán los siglos en su vuelo.
Miró la Europa ensangrentar su suelo
Al genio de la guerra y la victoria . . .
Pero le cupo á América la gloria
De que al genio del bien le diera el cielo.
Que audaz conquistador goce en su ciencia,
Mientras al mundo en páramo convierte;
Y se envanezca cuando á siervos mande;

Mas los pueblos sabrán en su conciencia
 Que el que los rige libres sólo es fuerte;
 Que el que los hace grandes sólo es grande!
 (*Obras* [1869] 77)

As Kelly points out, the author's original dedicatory poem to Washington, published in her poetry volume of 1841, was composed many years prior to her visit to the United States. Beth Miller and Alan Deyermont conclude that the changes made by Gómez de Avellaneda in the major reworking of the sonnet during the 1860s were so drastic that instead of approaching the texts as two versions of the same poem, they should be regarded as "two sonnets with a common point of departure" (154). Therefore, for the critic, the substantial differences between both compositions make the 1869 rendition of the sonnet virtually a new poem. Moreover, Kelly considers the second version of the sonnet that Gómez de Avellaneda dedicated to Washington not only superior to the earlier poem of 1841, but a masterpiece of poetry in and of itself. According to the critic, the author celebrates the "memory of the champion of American liberty" ("La Avellaneda's Sonnet to Washington" 235) while also accentuating "the salient principles upon which American ideals were founded" (235), and concludes "she has left us a masterpiece" (235).

Gómez de Avellaneda's insight is to unveil to her readers, with unusual artistic mastery and technical skill, in a few lines of verse, that the emergence of Washington as leader and statesman in America was a new and unique event in world history. The uniqueness and novelty of George Washington as a political figure is made clear in the opening stanza of the poem. The writer portrays the great American hero, General of the Revolutionary Army, first President of the United States, and one of the founding fathers of the nation as a model of the virtues of a noble leader:

Thou hast no peer in all the ages past,
 Nor will the future generations find
 In annals dedicated to mankind
 Thy legacy of noble deeds surpassed.
 (Kelly, "La Avellaneda's Sonnet to Washington" 242)

No en lo pasado á tu virtud modelo,
 Ni copia al porvenir dará la historia,
 Ni otra igual en grandeza á tu memoria
 Difundirán los siglos en su vuelo.
 (*Obras* [1869] 77)

The tyrant as a "boastful lord of serfs" and a "war lord" is represented

in the poem by Napoleon Bonaparte, offering a sharp contrast with George Washington as the virtuous and noble statesman, whose greatness and strength as a model political figure derives from his unconditional devotion to the ideals of freedom. In a single line of verse, Gómez de Avellaneda conveys the nature of the tyrant who rules against his own people by depriving the citizens of their individual liberties, and turning them into serfs: “The boastful lord of serfs’ unhappy fate,” (Kelly, “La Avellaneda’s Sonnet to Washington” 242). The condition of servitude imposed upon his subjects derives from the excessive pride of the tyrannical ruler, who only brings devastation, ruin, and deep sorrow to his country as the image of the wasteland suggests. A ruined landscape and a barren land, where nothing can grow or give fruit, “convert the world to dreary wastes” (242).

The American hero is depicted as a gift from heaven to his country and the world at large. Washington’s glory and legacy of righteousness has been bestowed upon the Americas and humanity as a divine grace, in sharp contrast with the European tyrant who has only brought war, death, and desolation to the Old Continent. As shown in the following verses: “While Europe by a war lord was harassed / Its victories to blood-drenched soil confined / America a heaven-sent boon enshrined” (Kelly, “La Avellaneda’s Sonnet to Washington” 242).

In both sonnets—the original poem of 1841 and the later composition of the 1860s—Gómez de Avellaneda establishes a pointed contrast between the European Napoleon and the American Washington. As Beth Miller and Alan Deyermond observe, the Washington-Napoleon antithesis of the second text condemns Napoleon’s excessive pride and ambition, while exalting Washington’s role as a wise and virtuous leader in the liberation of his people, and the founding of a great nation (Miller and Deyermond 159). Napoleon Bonaparte is represented as the archetype of the imperial tyrant (Miller and Deyermond 154), while Washington embodies the greatness of the American statesman who is deeply committed to the ideals of freedom. The critic explains that in the last composition published in her *Obras* (1869), Washington becomes not only the model leader for the United States, but an American hero who is also a symbol of democracy and progress for the Americas (Miller and Deyermond 154).

In the final stanza of the poem, Gómez de Avellaneda concludes “that true greatness in a political leader consists not in self-aggrandizement, but in a devotion to the ideals of freedom” (Miller and Deyermond 160). According to Kelly, the last tercet of the sonnet provides a “masterful climax to the whole composition” (Kelly, “La Avellaneda’s Sonnet to Washington” 239). The climax of the sonnet is reached with the last three verses, in which the author conveys with a rhetorical play of a few words the essence and attributes of the great statesman. The last lines of the poem state: “The nations will in time these truths concede: / He only gathers strength who sets them free; / And he

alone is great who makes them great!” (242).

In this masterpiece of political poetry, Gómez de Avellaneda unveils the nature of tyranny through the recurrent Napoleon/Washington antithesis, and captures in the last two lines of the poem the very essence of democracy. The author shows a genuine concern and profound understanding of the problem of tyranny, which she describes as a servile and adulatory obedience to the lord, in contrast to democracy, which rests on the respect for freedom and the exercise of individual liberty by its citizens. Finally, the poet is successful in conveying to her audience the feeling of reverence she wishes to inspire in her readers for the ideals for which America stands, embodied in the figure of the great American hero: George Washington (Kelly 239). This second poem—to be considered as an entirely new piece of literary production, as Miller suggests—for its increased reverence of the figure of Washington, its criticism of the tyrannical style of government represented by Napoleon, and its exaltation of the ideal of individual liberties and freedom, reveals the lasting effect contact with the United States had on the author’s literary production.

“A vista del Niágara”

Now we turn to the second composition about the United States written by Gómez de Avellaneda during the summer of 1864, inspired by her visit to Niagara Falls: the ode “A vista del Niágara.”¹ Like her sonnet to Washington, this poem presents the United States as a young and vibrant nation with a political system worthy of emulation by other countries. The sublime nature provokes the admiration of the poet, who rests her gaze on the landscape of Niagara Falls’ suspension bridge. With an apostrophe, Gómez de Avellaneda addresses the indescribable airborne bridge, praising it as a symbol of industrial progress and freedom; while reminding her audience that the vitality of the American republic is the wonder of the world, and with the phrase “joven pueblo” (young nation) she alludes to this unique and successful experiment in history. In the following stanza the poet evokes the bridge at the Niagara Falls:

¡Salve, oh aéreo, indescrrible puente ,
 Obra del hombre, que emular procuras
 La obra de Dios, junto á la cuál te ostentas!
 ¡Salve, signo valiente
 Del progreso industrial, cuyas alturas
 — A las que suben las naciones lentas —
 Domina como rey el joven pueblo
 Que ayer naciente en sus robustos brazos

Tomó la libertad, y que hoy pujante
 De la marcha comun salta los plazos,
 Y asombra al mundo, que lo ve gigante!
 (374)

(Hail, oh aerial, indescribable bridge,
 Work of man, that emulates intents
 The work of God, next to whom you boast!
 Hail, valiant sign
 Of industrial progress, whose heights
 —To which slow-progressing nations rise—
 Dominate like a King the young Nation
 That yesterday, nascent in her robust arms
 Took liberty, and that today thriving
 From the common march jumps forth
 And astonishes the world, that sees it so great!)

The political message of the poem is made explicit in the concluding lines of “A vista del Niágara,” when Gómez de Avellaneda confesses her admiration for the American system of government, and declares that the greatness of the political model of the United States rests on its democratic institutions:

¡Feliz aquel que debe á la fortuna
 Tener en la region privilegiada,
 Que tan tarde conozco, alegre cuna!

 Tu ambiente aspira, ¡oh pueblo americano!
 Que si tienes—cantando tu grandeza—
 Prodigios como el Niágara en el suelo,
 Para ostentarte en superior alteza
 Cimentarte supiste instituciones
 Que el genio liberal como modelo
 Presente con orgullo á las naciones! (375).

(Happy he who owes to fortune
 To have in the privileged region
 That I’ve come to know so late, happy cradle!

 Your environment aspires, Oh American people
 That if you have—singing of your Greatness—
 Marvels like Niagara on your soil,
 To boast in superior nobility

Knowing how to build your Institutions
 That the Liberal genius as a model
 May present with pride to the Nations!)

Such a political message of admiration for the young nation's political system, along with its industrial advances again demonstrates the influence Gómez de Avellaneda's travels in the United States had on her literary production. As we will demonstrate in the section that follows, this admiration can also be understood as an underscoring influence for her ongoing abolitionist efforts on her native island.

The Abolitionist Cause: Gómez de Avellaneda and the Transnational Network

The first novel that Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda wrote and published was *Sab* (1841), it was also the first anti-slavery work of fiction in the Americas and Spain. This shows an early and genuine concern for the emancipation of the slaves, and is but one example of her lifelong commitment to the abolitionist cause. As Enrique Sosa reminds us, she was already an abolitionist at a very young age: "la autora fue abolicionista desde los primeros años de su vida" (41) (The author was an abolitionist since the very first years of her life).

Gómez de Avellaneda belonged to an informal and transnational network of Cuban writers and intellectuals who promoted the abolition of slavery. As a famous writer and public figure, she would unite these individuals around her novel *Sab*, an anti-slavery work of fiction that was published in three different geographical places throughout the world: Madrid in 1841, New York in 1871, and Cuba in 1883. This "informal network" consisted of a group of interconnected and interrelated persons linked across geographical boundaries by open communication lines (such as private meetings and gatherings), and united by their active collaboration in the transnational press, working to foster the separatist and the abolitionist cause.

Gómez de Avellaneda maintained close ties with this "informal network" whose diverse members were all active in the abolitionist undercurrent: Cuban writers, intellectuals, newspaper editors, journalists, and prominent political figures. In Spain, Cuba, and the United States, she held private meetings with friends like Lorenzo de Allo, and Cirilo Villaverde, among others. Both promoted the author of the first anti-slavery novel by actively associating her name with the abolitionist cause.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's abolitionist activities went far beyond *Sab*'s advocacy against the system of slavery in Cuba. She maintained close

ties and engaged in activities with Cubans residing on the island and abroad who were in favor of the emancipation of the slaves. In Spain, she kept contact with her intimate friend Lorenzo de Allo, José Antonio Saco, and Domingo Delmonte, among others. Additionally, during her five-year temporary residence in Cuba, the author worked behind the scenes with her husband, Domingo Verdugo, to protect the slaves from cruel mistreatment by utilizing the Spanish legal system. As founder and editor of periodicals, Gómez de Avellaneda had close relationships in the United States with Cuban intellectuals who were active in the American Press as collaborators and directors of newspapers. Through these ties, the female writer remained in contact with the most influential Cuban figures in news publishing in New York: Cirilo Villaverde, Miguel T. Tolón, Lorenzo de Allo, and the editors of *La America*, where *Sab* appeared in serial form in 1871.

In addition, Gómez de Avellaneda arranged several private meetings with two of her best friends: Lorenzo de Allo in Madrid, and Cirilo Villaverde in Cuba and New York. They both signed pieces in the bilingual newspaper *La Verdad*, published in New York, using pseudonyms alluding to their female friend: Allo used the same pen name in its masculine version utilized by Gómez de Avellaneda, *El Peregrino*, under his poem “A la memoria del General López, Mártir de la libertad de Cuba” (To the Memory of General López, Martyr to the Liberty of Cuba) (*La Verdad*, January 10, 1852); Villaverde ended the section on “Annexation” of his “Catecismo Político” with the signature *Guatimozín*, evoking Gómez de Avellaneda’s historical novel about the Spanish Conquest of Mexico (*La Verdad*, April 30, 1852, 3–4). She most likely also communicated with several of the creole intellectuals living in exile in the United States during her two-month stay in the country in 1864.

Gómez de Avellaneda was in contact with Cuban writers and intellectuals living in exile in the United States that were active in the American press. At the time of the publication of her two sonnets in *La Verdad*, “A Washington” and “Al partir,” Lorenzo de Allo and Cirilo Villaverde were among the most prominent contributors of the New York newspaper. Both were closely associated with her first work of fiction: *Sab*. Allo arrived in Madrid in 1840, a year before the publication of Gómez de Avellaneda’s anti-slavery novel in the Spanish capital in 1841. Meanwhile, Villaverde wrote a review article about *Sab* in *El Faro Industrial de la Habana* in August of 1842, and it appeared a few months after the novel was released in Madrid under the title: “La señorita Doña Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” (Madame Ms. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda). Moreover, Lorenzo de Allo, an abolitionist and intimate friend and admirer of the author might have been the person who “submitted or suggested” her poems to *La Verdad* (Lazo 117). However, Villaverde was probably also behind the selection of the poems for publication in the bilingual newspaper, since he was the Spanish editor of *La Verdad* from February to

April of 1852, during the period when Gómez de Avellaneda's compositions were reprinted in the paper (on March 20 of that year).²

An Abolitionist Friendship: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Lorenzo de Allo

The friendship between Gómez de Avellaneda and Lorenzo de Allo can be traced back to Madrid, where they met in 1840 and were able to keep in close contact (Escoto 192). As José Augusto Escoto observes, the author was especially fond of the young lawyer: “Entre los cubanos con quienes la Avellaneda cultivó amistad en España, ninguno le despertó tanta simpatía como D. Lorenzo de Allo y Bermúdez” (192) (Among all the Cubans with whom Avellaneda cultivated a friendship in Spain, none awakened in her as much liking as D. Lorenzo de Allo y Bermúdez). Between the two friends there was a sincere affection and affinity: they both shared a genuine concern for the emancipation of the slaves and a mutual commitment to promote the abolition of slavery on the island. As Vidal Morales y Morales points out, the lawyer and poet was an admirer and intimate friend of the celebrated woman writer: “Brillaba a la sazón en la Corte la insigne camagüeyana Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, de la que fue nuestro Allo uno de sus más íntimos y predilectos amigos y admiradores” (42) (At that time in the Court, the famous Camagueyan Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda shined, of whom our Allo was one of her most favorite and intimate friends and admirers).

To understand the significance of the friendship between Gómez de Avellaneda and Allo, we must first understand Allo's significance to the abolitionist cause. Lorenzo de Allo y Bermúdez, one of Gómez de Avellaneda's closest friends, was a lawyer, political economist, and a poet. He received a law degree from El Colegio Seminario de San Carlos, where he was also trained in Political Economy and studied Philosophy under Father Félix Varela, becoming his favorite disciple (Morales y Morales 40–41). The young lawyer departed from Cuba to Spain in October of 1840, where he stayed for a significant period of time. According to Morales y Morales, Allo was forced to leave the island to attend a family legal dispute in Spain: “tuvo necesidad de ausentarse en octubre de 1840 para España, donde permaneció bastante tiempo” (41) (Out of necessity he left in October of 1840 for Spain, where he remained for quite some time).

Allo remained in Madrid until 1845, probably postponing his return to the island due to the events of 1844 when many Cuban abolitionists faced the repression of the colonial government. The intellectuals and political figures residing in Spain at the time were compelled to remain there until the sentenc-

es against the anti-slavery rebels were pronounced and executed:

El estado de cosas que á los liberales cubanos en el país crearon los sucesos de 1844, había de tener en expectación á los residentes entonces en la Península, obligándoles á esperar allí la terminación de la causa que el gobierno formó á los más distinguidos abolicionistas. Razón para que Allo, cuyas ideas anti-esclavistas eran manifiestas, si se encontraba en España aplazarse su vuelta á Cuba hasta 1845, en que terminó aquel asunto político. (Escoto 193)

(The state of things that the events on the Island created for Cuban Liberals in 1844, had to be taken into account by those who resided in the Peninsula at that time, requiring them to wait there until the end of the government's case against the most distinguished abolitionists. For this reason, Allo, whose anti-slavery ideas were well-known, indeed found himself in Spain postponing his return to Cuba until 1845 when the political event had resolved.)

During Allo's residence in Madrid, Gómez de Avellaneda published her anti-slavery novel *Sab* (1841) in the Spanish capital, which helped keep alive and propagate the abolitionist cause among both Cubans on the island and those living abroad, including the exiled U.S. writers and intellectuals. Furthermore, she seems to have been able to use her influence in the Spanish Royal Court to introduce political reforms in Cuba's colonial government; and specifically to bring about measures that would favor the eventual eradication of slavery in the island. As Kelly observes:

While in Spain la Avellaneda was associated with several Cuban leaders working for political reforms. It is hinted that because of her popularity with doña Isabel II, our author encouraged Saco, Lorenzo de Allo, Delmonte, and Olózaga to present to the Queen certain petitions, specially those pertaining to the abolition of slavery." ("La Avellaneda's *Sab*," 315)

Most likely, Gómez de Avellaneda collaborated closely in Spain with her friend Lorenzo de Allo on the drafting and submission of the measures needed to advance the cause of the abolition of slavery in Cuba. Furthermore, Gómez de Avellaneda maintained close ties and met with prominent Cuban political figures and intellectuals who were working in Spain to obtain liberal reforms for the island colony, among them: José Antonio Saco, Domingo Delmonte, and the Spanish politician and diplomat Salustiano de Olózaga, who became the first president of the *Sociedad Abolicionista Española* (Spanish Abolitionist Society) (1865), well known for its moral denunciation of the institution of

slavery (Kelly, “La Avellaneda’s *Sab*” 304).

Due to his participation in insurgent movements seeking Cuba’s independence from Spain, Allo was forced to go into exile in New York, where he died on March 16, 1854. In the United States, he was devoted to teaching, and became a frequent collaborator with the American press, while remaining active in promoting his abolitionist views. As was previously mentioned, his articles and poems appeared in *La Verdad* under the pseudonym *El Peregrino*, a pen name also adopted by Gómez de Avellaneda when signing some of her works as *La Peregrina* (Lazo 117).³ Additionally, Allo was one of the founders of and a major contributor to the abolitionist paper *El Mulato*, and acted for some time as editor of *La Verdad* (Morales y Morales 44).⁴

The two political causes that guided Allo’s life from his early years were the abolition of slavery and the independence of the island from Spain. Morales y Morales explains that the brilliant lawyer was devoted to the pursuit of these ideals since his youth, and that Father Félix Varela (1788–1853), the first creole and cleric to call for the end of slavery in Cuba, became his mentor:

Su dedicación perseverante y abnegada al triunfo de los dos ideales que le atraían y apasionaban, y a los que desde muy joven rindió fervoroso culto: la emancipación de los esclavos y la libertad de su patria; ideales sacrosantos que en su corazón supo arraigar la enseñanza de su queridísimo mentor el padre Varela. (Morales y Morales 43)

(His perseverant and selfless dedication to the triumph of the two ideals that attracted and impassioned him, and to whom from a very young age he had given educated passion: the emancipation of the slaves and the liberty of his fatherland; sacrosanct ideals that the teachings of his beloved mentor Father Varela had ingrained in his heart.)

At the end of 1852, Lorenzo de Allo left New York City to pay a last visit to his teacher and beloved mentor Father Félix Varela, who had retired in St. Augustine, Florida, due to illness, and where he died the following year.

Allo’s Indictment of Slavery: The Abolitionist Undercurrent Goes Public

During the escalating debate over slavery in the 1850s in America and Cuba, Lorenzo de Allo became a powerful voice as a lawyer, professor of political economy at the Cuban Democratic Athenaeum, and frequent press collaborator in the U.S. newspapers. It is important to examine Allo’s lecture in depth

because it articulates publicly the main ideas of the abolitionist undercurrent group made up of the young lawyer, the two Cuban editors Cirilo Villaverde and Miguel T. Tolón, prominent contributors to *La Verdad* like Domingo Góicuria, and the only active woman author of this circle of intellectuals: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. This group of *La Verdad* collaborators played a major role in the prolonged debate leading up to the abolition of slavery by having a sustained impact on shaping public opinion in favor of the suppression of the institution through their work in the press, literature, and lectures.

In his speech on slavery, Allo formulated the political project of the abolitionist undercurrent group of Cuban writers, intellectuals and journalists, gathered around the bilingual newspaper *La Verdad*. Allo brought the views of the undercurrent anti-slavery circle to the public by discussing openly the issue of slavery, placing abolition at the forefront of the national debate. He divulged to the public the political platform of the group, which was to unite the Cuban independence and abolitionist movements into one (and the same) national project. For Allo and the members of *La Verdad*'s anti-slavery circle, abolition and the separatist cause were interrelated in the same political project: against the oppression of the Cuban people. As Nicolás Kanellos points out: "Issues of race and slavery were central to the Cuban independence movement" (13).

Allo's speech was aimed at influencing the views of the public on the question of slavery and mobilized the audience in favor of the abolitionist cause. The lecture delivered at the Athenaeum supported the political project of the undercurrent anti-slavery nucleus of intellectuals built around *La Verdad* by providing an ideological background against the institution of slavery. He advocates for the emancipation of the slaves on the island by applying economic logic against slavery and by exploring the grounds of Christian morality and doctrine, advancing the fundamental truth that all human beings are made and born equal by their Creator and are entitled to the same rights.

Allo's speech, published as a pamphlet, is relevant in yet another way: it shows the similarity of thought that existed between him and his friend Gómez de Avellaneda on the question of slavery. They both based their abolitionist position primarily on Christian morality and doctrine, arguing that the system of slavery is contrary to the teachings of Christianity, and constitutes a violation of divine law. A comparison between Allo's lecture on slavery and Gómez de Avellaneda abolitionist novel, *Sab*, shows an affinity in the line of argumentation they develop against slavery. Parallel ideas are formulated in the texts to denounce and condemn the central institution of nineteenth-century Cuban society.

For instance, Allo as the anti-slavery speaker and Gómez de Avellaneda as the abolitionist author both employed the image of the "tribunal" as a rhetorical trope at the beginning of their texts—the lawyer in the lecture's exordi-

um, and the writer in the prologue to the novel—in order to capture the audience’s attention and benevolence before presenting their case against slavery to the public. Furthermore, the rhetorical figure of the “tribunal,” evokes and imitates legal discourse, which is inextricably related to justice.

In the prologue to *Sab*, titled “Dos palabras al lector” (A Word to the Reader), Gómez de Avellaneda declares that she is submitting her novel, which narrates the trials and tribulations of a mulatto slave, to the people’s tribunal (9). The author utilizes the rhetorical image of the “tribunal” to present the case of slavery to this assembly of the people, who acting as a court of law or forum, will hear the evidence offer in the novel from the perspective of the mulatto slave. The writer confers to the “tribunal” of the people the authority to pronounce a judgment on the system of slavery based on the available facts provided by the text and then proceed to impart justice, which implies the necessity to put end to the institution of slavery. The rhetorical strategy of presenting her work of fiction as a legal case to the audience in the prologue, “Dos palabras al lector,” shows that Gómez de Avellaneda’s intention was to promote a public debate in society on the question of slavery.

As a fictional narrative, *Sab* describes the intimate human experience of a mulatto slave through a sequence of interconnected events. Gómez de Avellaneda presents to her readers the “humanity” of her protagonist Sab as the best evidence against the perpetuation of slavery. The author’s protagonist, the mulatto slave, is a very humane character, since what distinguishes Sab is precisely his profound humanity and deep capacity for loving. This portrayal of the mulatto slave by Gómez de Avellaneda contradicts and defies the prevailing idea of those enslaved as property, treated as objects deprived of their humanity, and as merchandise to be bought and sold.

In a similar rhetorical gesture to Gómez de Avellaneda, Allo recurs to the metaphor of the “tribunal” at the introduction of his speech. He announces in the “Exordium” the subject and purpose of his discourse: to present the case against slavery by addressing his audience invoking the image of a court of justice: “The world sees us proscribed in exile; (. . .) and it hears proclaimed from this tribunal the pure sentiment of our hearts” (4). Allo’s indictment of the system of slavery is based on the principle that it violates divine law and corrupts the soul of society (8). He recurs once again to the rhetorical trope of the “tribunal” at the end of his lecture to allude to the eternal truths revealed to us through divine law: “Humanity is a law of God, and the laws of God always stand as tribunals in every human conscience” (14).

Furthermore, Allo’s speech shares with Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel the idea of a revival of Christianity as the key to the regeneration of society. In both texts, the idea of a Christian regeneration of humanity extends to bring about the change of Cuban colonial society by eliminating slavery as its central institution. In Sab’s letter, written as a testament before his death, Gómez

de Avellaneda gives the mulatto slave the final say. As the closing statement of the work, the slave's letter establishes the distinction between human and divine law, emphasizing the flaws and shortcomings of man-made law and the infallible justice that emanates from God's eternal law. For Sab, it is man-made law that allows the enslavement of other human beings and proclaims legal the institution of slavery. Gómez de Avellaneda's introduces in her protagonist's letter the metaphor of the "Sun of Justice" as an allusion to society's renewal. Humanity's redemption requires the spiritual transformation of society at the individual and collective level through the embracing of Christianity. The following passage summarizes the main points of the anti-slavery argument based on the Christian principle of society's regeneration:

¡Y éstas son las leyes de los hombres, y Dios calla . . . y Dios las sufre! ¡Oh! Adoremos sus juicios inescrutables . . . ¿Quién puede comprenderlos? . . . ¡Pero no, no siempre callarás, Dios de toda justicia! No siempre reinaréis en el mundo, error, ignorancia y absurdas preocupaciones; vuestra decrepitud anuncia vuestra ruina. La palabra de salvación resonará por toda la extensión de la tierra, los viejos ídolos caerán de sus inmundos altares y el trono de la justicia se alzaré brillante, sobre las ruinas de las viejas sociedades. Sí, una voz celestial me lo anuncia. En vano, me dice, en vano lucharán los viejos elementos del mundo moral contra el principio regenerador, en vano habrá en la terrible lucha días de oscuridad y horas de desaliento . . . el día de la verdad amanecerá claro y brillante. Dios hizo esperar a su pueblo cuarenta años la tierra prometida, y los que dudaron de ella fueron castigados con no pisarla jamás; pero sus hijos la vieron. Sí el sol de la justicia no está lejos. La tierra le espera para rejuvenecer a su luz; los hombres llevarán un sello divino. (*Sab* 1976, 316–317)

(And these are men's laws, Heaven is silent... and God allows them! Oh, let us worship His inscrutable judgment! Who can understand it? But no, You will not always be silent. God of all justice! Error, Ignorance, and absurd Prejudice: you will not always rule in the world: your decrepitude foretells your ruin. The world of salvation will resound over all the earth: old idols will topple from their profaned altars, and the throne of justice will rise brilliantly over the ruins of old societies. Yes, a heavenly voice tells me this. In vain, it tells me, in vain will the old elements of the moral sphere fight against the regenerative principle: in vain will there be days of darkness and hours of discouragement in that terrible battle . . . the day of truth will dawn clear and brilliant. God made his chosen people wait for forty years for the promised land, and those who doubted were punished by never setting foot therein; but their children saw it. Yes, the sun of justice is not far off. The world waits for it in order to rejuvenate in its

light: men will bear a divine mark) (*Sab and Autobiography* 145)

The principle of Christian regeneration of society is at the center of Allo's speech on *Domestic Slavery in Its Relation with Wealth* (1855). In his lecture, the lawyer and political economist states that the teachings of Christianity serve as the foundation for the authentic progress and prosperity of nations (5). Allo redefines the concept of wealth as not only material growth, but also encompassing the intellectual and moral development of society (5).

Allo's lecture delivered on 1854 at the Athenaeum deserves to be examined in detail, since due to its circulation as a pamphlet in Spanish (1854) and English (1855), it became a popular document of abolitionist propaganda reaching a wide audience in both languages. The speech that Allo gave at the Athenaeum "La Esclavitud Doméstica en sus Relaciones con la Riqueza," was first published as a pamphlet (in its original language) in 1854, and the following year its English translation appeared under the title: *Domestic Slavery in Its Relation with Wealth* (1855). The circulation of the popular lecture as a pamphlet extended to the abolitionist press, where Allo's speech quotations, anti-slavery arguments, and lecture passages were utilized in the newspaper *El Mulato* on March 11, 1854. Moreover, his lecture was also disseminated by the members of the abolitionist undercurrent group at *La Verdad*: the speech was delivered at the Cuban Democratic Athenaeum, the center founded by Miguel T. Tolón, one of the two main editors of the newspaper; (the other was Cirilo Villaverde).

The English translator of Allo's lecture was Domingo Goicuría, another active member of this circle of intellectuals. Goicuría, a separatist and abolitionist who was also an active collaborator in *La Verdad*, posthumously published Allo's speech on slavery "for the purpose of free circulation in Cuba," making the text available to the American public in 1855 (4). As Allo informs his audience, his friend Goicuría had solicited permission from the Spanish government to replace slave labor with free workers, a project that was also against the continuation of the African slave trade (11).

As an anti-slavery speaker, Lorenzo de Allo shows in the speech delivered on January 1, 1854, at the Cuban Democratic Athenaeum, his ability to influence the public's view on the question of slavery and to articulate the ideas against the preservation of the institution. Allo declares to his audience that the time has come for abolitionists to reassert their commitment to the emancipation of the slaves.

Lorenzo de Allo divides his speech on "Domestic Slavery in its Relationship to Wealth" into three sections. In the first, he demonstrates that the institution is antagonistic to material prosperity. Allo devotes the next part to refuting pro-slavery arguments; and the final section focuses on the measures that he proposes for the abolition of slavery in Cuba. In the talk delivered to the audi-

ence, the professor of Political Economy proved that the only means of creating wealth was through free labor, not the work of slaves. Allo claimed that slavery was antagonistic to wealth, condemned the institution as a violation of divine law, and then proceeded to refute every argument in favor of preserving the system of slavery. He explicitly rejected the fallacy that slavery is justified by natural law, arguing that all human beings are created equal by God, and therefore are endowed with the same nature. Finally, he laid out a plan for the abolition of the institution of slavery in the island (Morales y Morales 45).

Allo presents to his audience the question of slavery as an issue of human rights: that is, the defense of the God-given rights of all individuals, which must be at the center of politics and morality in any society (4). Employing a persuasive rhetorical argument, he argues that the practice of slavery is morally wrong and does not contribute to wealth, since civilization and prosperity can only be attained through the eradication of the institution. In his view, slavery has become the worst enemy of true progress in society, and only free countries can flourish while slave states fall into decadence (4–9).

The first argument that Allo formulates to condemn slavery is that the institution is against Christian doctrines of morality and virtue, which proclaim the fraternity of all human beings. He claims that the system of slavery is morally wrong and socially undesirable. Allo argues that authentic progress depends not only on the pursuit of material wealth but also on intellectual and moral prosperity. He declares:

Jesus Christ taught all the principles which constitute true morality, principles which serve as the foundation of his divine religion, and which have brought to the people wealth, science, progress, and prosperity. Wealth is not merely material; it is likewise intellectual and moral; and material wealth cannot even exist without creating the other two. Therefore, slavery is contrary to the bases of Christianity, whose great doctrines are “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” and “Do unto others what you would have others do unto you” (5).

Allo establishes a contrast between slave and free societies by comparing the decadence of slave states with the civilization and progress achieved by free nations, in order to show that without moral virtues and principles, nations cannot attain prosperity, and that the system of slavery must be eradicated because it destroys morality (8). He presents slavery as a moral issue by declaring: “Without morality there is no prosperity” (9). He goes on to assert that not only the doctrinal teachings of the Scriptures denounce the practice of slavery, but that the institution itself is a violation of divine law, and concludes: “To combat slavery is to second the will of God” (9).

The lawyer underscores the need to discuss openly the question of slavery, since there should always be time to impugn whatever is evil, immoral and “may inflict on Cuba great injuries” (9). Allo promotes a public discussion of slavery to counter any ongoing attempt to prevent people from partici-

pating freely in an open debate on the subject. He alleges that the institution is contrary to nature, and that an inestimable moral benefit will be derived from the abolition of slavery (11–12). Allo counters the central idea of the proslavery thought that the institution was beneficial to society while challenging the assumption that defends the rightness of slavery as naturally based on the master-slave relationship, where the inferior slaves need their masters to act as firm and protective parents. He insists that:

To liberate our slaves is to fulfill the law of God; . . . If we emancipate our slaves, we will be astonished at our physical and moral progress; if we do not emancipate them, we will be doubly parricides . . . That civilization, Jesus Christ, history, and our conscience cry to us against slavery . . . Always by the side of slavery are seen hunger, vices, and serfdom; while the Christian principle of the fraternity of men is ever accompanied by well-being, virtue, peace and happiness. Let us not forget it; there is no prosperity without industry; there is no industry without intelligence; there is no intelligence without virtue; there is no virtue without religion; and there is no religion where there is slavery. . . . All the intellects of Cuba are opposed to slavery, and more than one illustrious Cuban has liberated his slaves. (15)

Allo strives to convince the public that slavery cannot exist forever on the island by warning his audience of the curse of the institution, and continues by presenting the steps to be taken in order to eradicate the vile system. His project for Cuba's independence from Spain is linked to the liberation of the slaves, as can be seen in the following lines of the speech:

In my humble opinion, not to unite the emancipation of our slaves to the independence of Cuba . . . adopting such a plan; . . . is to inoculate in our political regeneration a fatal germ of unlimited misfortunes (. . .) I see, in fine, the misfortune of our land, and of the whole earth, still growing from slavery. . . . because God and nature proclaim the liberty of the human race. (15–16)

Accordingly, Allo outlines several measures to successfully eradicate slavery in Cuba. First, the lawyer proposes the island's political independence from Spanish colonial rule, and the immediate establishment of a republican form of government in Cuba with freedom of the press, commerce, and worship (12). He presents the annexation of the island to the United States as an alternative after independence to guarantee the new nation "her well-being by becoming allied or annexed to the United States" (13). Allo also promotes the cessation of the African slave trade, and rejects the premise of one's being

“born [a] slave” by granting freedom to all the children delivered at birth by slave women, since in the future “there can be no more slaves born in Cuba,” envisioning a nation of only free individuals where all its inhabitants are full citizens (14–15).

The Abolitionist Cleric: Father Félix Varela y Morales

Father Félix Varela y Morales (1788–1853) was a prominent Cuban Catholic priest, philosopher, writer, abolitionist, and newspaper editor, who became “Cuba’s most illustrious intellectual” (Lazo 31). The cleric and theologian, elected as a representative (*Diputado a Cortes*) to the Spanish Courts from 1822 to 1823, was the “first native-born creole to propose an end of slavery in Cuba” (Luis 31); and the founder and editor of the first Spanish-language newspaper in the United States: *El Habanero* (Philadelphia–New York, 1824–1826).

Father Varela was named Professor of Philosophy at the Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio of Havana in 1811, where he distinguished himself as an outstanding educator. During his academic career, the Catholic priest introduced numerous innovations in teaching and defended the right of women to receive equal education, a principle considered unusual at the time. Father Varela was elected to represent Cuba as a delegate (*diputado*) to the Spanish Courts in Madrid, where he presented to the Crown a memorandum and a draft decree aimed at obtaining the abolition of slavery in the island under the titles: “Memoria que demuestra la necesidad de extinguir la esclavitud de los negros en la Isla de Cuba, atendiendo a los intereses de sus propietarios, por el presbítero Don Félix Varela, diputado a Cortes” (in Torres-Cuevas and Reyes, 148–154) (Memory That Demonstrates the Necessity of Eliminating the Enslavement of the Blacks on the Island of Cuba, Attending to the Interests of Their Proprietors, by the Priest Don Félix Varela, Deputy to the Courts) and “Proyecto de decreto sobre la abolición de la esclavitud en la Isla de Cuba y sobre los medios de evitar los daños que puedan considerarse a la población blanca y a la agricultura, por el Presbítero Félix Varela” (in Torres-Cuevas and Reyes 155–162) (Project of Decree on the Abolition of Slavery on the Island of Cuba and About the Ways to Avoid the Harm to Which May Be Subjected the White Population and Agriculture, by the Priest Félix Varela). While the Courts took no action on this plan, it represented the one occasion at the beginning of the nineteenth century when a notable clergyman took an aggressive anti-slavery stance.

When the courts were dissolved, Father Varela was sentenced to death by the Spanish government, and was compelled to seek refuge in the United States. Before he could be arrested, the priest was able to flee to America

where he spent the rest of his life living in exile, from 1823 until his death in 1853. The abolitionist clergyman spent much of this time in New York City, though his last years were spent in the city of San Agustín, Florida, where he had initially studied as a child.

Father Varela was a defender of freedom and an abolitionist, but above all he was an exemplary priest who dedicated his entire life to the service of others, especially young people. As a devoted clergyman, he led his ministry in the Archdiocese of New York City for more than twenty-five years, where he became an advocate for the Irish immigrants; and was appointed Vicar General of the New York Dioceses.

As the founder of the first Spanish-language periodical in the U.S. press, *El Habanero*, Father Varela also established and was the editor of several American newspapers in both Spanish and English. He also published many of his writings in the United States, such as *Cartas a Elpidio*. In this piece, the theologian and philosopher defended the need for a solid religious education as the foundation upon which to cultivate civic virtues in society and to promote the happiness of a nation and its people.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Cirilo Villaverde: The Abolitionist Undercurrent and the American Press

During the long emancipation struggle in Cuba, *Sab* emerged at the center of the abolitionist undercurrent. Gómez de Avellaneda's novel was continuously present in the transnational fight against slavery. Her text was an integral part of the debates over emancipation and reemerged at crucial moments of the long abolitionist movement, which lasted for more than sixty-years. The work of fiction was influential in creating and maintaining an anti-slavery consciousness among the public. Throughout the nineteenth century, *Sab* was the only anti-slavery novel that was published in three separate countries, crossing geographical boundaries, an important fact that has been overlooked by scholars. The text was released for the first time in Madrid as a book in 1841, and later it was reprinted in serial form in the New York press in 1871, and again in Havana in 1883.

Cuban writers and intellectuals found ways to promote Gómez de Avellaneda's novel, work that was done mainly through the press. Through these efforts, her writings appeared in two Spanish-language newspapers in New York City: *La Verdad*, a bilingual publication, where the sonnets "A Washington" and "Al partir" were reprinted as early as 1852; and in *La América*, which made her anti-slavery novel available to a wider American readership by publishing the text in 1871 in serial format. Gómez de Avellaneda's works

were deliberately exposed to a wider readership via the American press by Cirilo Villaverde and other Cuban intellectuals—such as Lorenzo de Allo—in an attempt to shape public opinion in favor of Cuban independence and the abolition of slavery.

Throughout the prolonged struggle against slavery, the abolitionist work was advertised in the “book sales” section in the main newspapers of the island. Additionally, *Sab* appeared serialized in publications in both Havana and New York, thus circulating among a wider audience. Lastly, the text was propagated by creole intellectuals through articles that mention the novel, or through the work of writing reviews about the novel and its author. Such was the case of Cirilo Villaverde, who published in 1842 a review about the writer and her anti-slavery novel in *El Faro Industrial de la Habana*.⁵ Later, in New York (in 1852), as editor of *La Verdad*, he reprinted two of her poems in the “longest running and best known of the papers published by Cubans in the United States in the 1850s” (Lazo 74; Marrero 172).

The publication of Gómez de Avellaneda’s sonnets in *La Verdad* in 1852 indicates that there was an abolitionist undercurrent among its Cuban contributors which was underlying the annexationist platform of the bilingual newspaper. This anti-slavery stance was not always expressed openly, but often took the more simple form of a tacit counter-slavery discourse in the paper. Gómez de Avellaneda, at this time both a famous writer and public figure living in Spain, was known among the Cuban intellectuals as, first and foremost, the author of the abolitionist novel banned on the island for its subversive message against the institution of slavery. Therefore, her poems appeared in the New York newspapers framed within the implicit anti-slavery discourse formulated by some of its collaborators, and editors like Cirilo Villaverde and Lorenzo de Allo, among others. Her name was inextricably linked to *Sab*, and the notoriety she achieved due, in part, to its prohibition in 1844 by the Spanish colonial authorities. The presence of Gómez de Avellaneda in the pages of the New York newspaper in light of the circumstances of the banning of her novel by the colonial government highlights the underlying abolitionist movement within *La Verdad*, which coexisted beneath the surface of the publication’s mainstream, and more visible annexationist platform.

La Verdad was a revolutionary publication founded in New York City in January of 1848 by the clandestine Cuban Council, which maintained contact with the revolutionary delegations on the island. The members of the Cuban Junta created in New York were: Gaspar Betancourt Cisneros, Cristóbal F. Madán Madán, Miguel Teurbe Tolón, José Aniceto Yznaga Borrell, and Pedro de Aguero Sánchez. The newspaper published articles from secret correspondents from Cuba and Puerto Rico, advocated Cuba’s independence from Spain, and promoted the island’s annexation to the United States.

A misinterpretation emerges from the assumption that the newspaper’s

annexationist platform was uniform and fixed, and shared by all its collaborators alike. As Rodrigo Lazo points out the paper was “a multifocal textual production, not a single voice” (75). The Cuban writers and intellectuals who contributed to the bilingual publication had more complex political positions regarding annexation and the question of slavery. However, they all shared a dedication to the freedom cause for the island colony and the majority of them were against slavery—a group within *La Verdad*'s Cuban contributors was either in favor of the gradual emancipation of slaves or promoted the immediate abolition of slavery (de la Cova 6–7). In his study of the nineteenth-century novel, Enrique Sosa goes so far as to assert that all Cuban novelists were opposed to slavery: “Prácticamente todos nuestros novelistas del siglo XIX fueron antiesclavistas” (234) (Practically all of our nineteenth-century novelists were abolitionists).

Parallel to the annexionist platform of *La Verdad*, there was a patriotic and republican discourse in the newspaper focused on a different issue: the founding of an independent Cuban Republic, modeled after the United States' political system of government. As Rodrigo Lazo explains:

Given the presence of Cuban writers at *La Verdad*, a concomitant discourse emerged in which the interests of Cuban people and the terrain of the island were portrayed as separate from Spain (and, ostensibly separate from the United States). That separation, which was part of a patriotic discourse, came to clash with the U.S. expansionist tendency of *La Verdad*. U.S. historians tend to emphasize *La Verdad*'s call for annexation while overlooking the contradictory positions of writings by Cubans. A tension existed from early on, in part the result of the various social backgrounds and political leanings of the parties involved in the publishing of *La Verdad*. In its first five years, *La Verdad* was also edited by Tolón and Villaverde, writers whose interests were more patriotic rather than economic. The tone of the paper was also influenced by various correspondents from different parts of Cuba and by poetry that was more patriotic than annexationist. (Lazo 78)

Under the direction of Miguel T. Tolón and Cirilo Villaverde, *La Verdad* was primarily aimed at promoting the cause of Cuba's independence from Spain (Lazo 79). On the other hand, the annexationist position was best advocated in the New York paper by the journalist Jane McManus Storm Cazneu (1807–1878), who appeared listed on its front page as the only editor of the bilingual publication until 1852, when Cirilo Villaverde was put in charge of editing the Spanish-language section of the newspaper. During its earliest years, the articles written by prominent Cuban intellectuals and contributors that appeared in *La Verdad* did not explicitly oppose its annexationist pro-

gram, presenting it as an option, but usually offering other alternatives for a free Cuba. However, while some writers sustained that as a state of the Union the island could preserve its autonomy, others questioned this argument, and instead embraced the idea of a distinct Cuban republic, modeled after the American political system, but preserving its own culture and language.

The main objective of Cuban creole intellectuals was to obtain the island's freedom from Spanish colonial rule. Annexation was an option for some, but not all agreed. Others preferred an independent republic. However, the second issue underlying the separatist cause was the suppression of slavery, and again there was a lack of consensus around the issue. Some advocated for a gradual emancipation process, while others called for a proclamation of its immediate abolition. Still others preferred to maintain a strict annexationist platform, leaving the anti-slavery cause to the side for the time being.

The influential Cuban political figures that were part of this abolitionist undercurrent as editors or collaborators of *La Verdad* are: Miguel Teurbe Tolón, Domingo Goicuría, Cirilo Villaverde, and Lorenzo de Allo. According to Leví Marrero, all of the prominent Cuban intellectuals mentioned above edited the bilingual newspaper at different intervals of its lengthy circulation. (Marrero 172).⁶ All of these influential Cuban intellectuals addressed the question of slavery on the island: Miguel Teurbe Tolón gave a speech advocating for the participation of women and former black slaves as citizens of the future Cuban society; Domingo Goicuría published the English translation of Allo's lecture against the institution of slavery and proposed the importation of white emigrant workers as a way to end the African slave trade; Cirilo Villaverde belonged to the Del Monte literary circle of anti-slavery writers and intellectuals; and Lorenzo de Allo was an abolitionist lawyer, and the favorite disciple of Father Félix Varela.

The Female Writer: A Transnational Group of Intimate Friends

Before examining each of these Cuban intellectuals, we must understand why their backgrounds are relevant in explaining the "presence" of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda as the only woman writer published in *La Verdad*; the New York bilingual newspaper with circulation in the United States and Cuba, where it was smuggled due to censorship (Marrero 172). *La Verdad* became the most influential and longest-running American paper published by Cubans in New York between 1848 and 1860 (Lazo 74). It was a popular source of news on the island, where it was considered by the colonial government a subversive publication, and circulated through a clandestine network of Cuban distributors.

An undercurrent abolitionist group of prominent cultural and political figures gathered around the New York publication in the 1850s when there was an intense debate underway over slavery in America. The main participants of this unofficial anti-slavery circle of Cuban intellectuals were Cirilo Villaverde, Miguel T. Tolón, Lorenzo de Allo, Domingo Goicuría, and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. The group's most critical role, perhaps, was in its effort to influence public opinion in favor of the emancipation of slaves. The main participants of the abolitionist undercurrent were also among the most active and distinguished leaders of the exiled Cubans living in the 1850s in the United States.

These men of action and thought acknowledged the vital role played by Gómez de Avellaneda as the author of the first abolitionist novel, a work that was banned for posing a threat to the system of slavery in Cuba. As the rare publication of her poems in *La Verdad* shows, the male members of the abolitionist undercurrent considered Gómez de Avellaneda to be a central figure of their group. She was already a renowned writer and an acclaimed playwright, a frequent collaborator in the press, and the editor of a woman's magazine. They all united around her and her "presence" brought a sense of cohesion to this informal nucleus of anti-slavery friends.

The undercurrent anti-slavery group that was unofficially organized around *La Verdad* was also a circle of intimate friends. For instance, Cirilo Villaverde and Lorenzo de Allo, two of the most prominent and active figures of the undercurrent abolitionist group had always maintained close friendship ties with their mutual friend Gómez de Avellaneda. Perhaps, it is no mere coincidence that the most influential anti-slavery works were published by these intimate friends: Gómez de Avellaneda's precursor abolitionist novel *Sab*, Allo's speech's pamphlet (1854); and *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) by Villaverde. In addition, these abolitionist works were published at critical moments in the anti-slavery struggle: the novels about the mulatto slave (*Sab*), and the mulatta (*Cecilia Valdés*) appeared a few years before the suppression of slavery in the 1880s; and the lecture by Allo explicitly condemning the institution was delivered, and later published, during the height of the slavery debate in the 1850s.

As we examine briefly the background of the principal male figures of *La Verdad*'s abolitionist undercurrent, we find a coherence of thought and action between them and Gómez de Avellaneda, the only female member belonging to the group. This circle of intellectuals shares common ideas against the system of slavery, and all of its members were active in the press as editors, writers, and frequent newspaper collaborators. *La Verdad* became the medium through which the group could propagate its abolitionist thought by embedding it underneath the bilingual publication's prevailing annexationist platform.

The members cultivated their political and cultural projects through private gatherings, intimate meetings that remained unofficial, as well as official and public events celebrated at the *Ateneo Democrático Cubano* (Cuban

Democratic Athenaeum), established in Manhattan by Tolón in 1853. At this New York center, members of the abolitionist undercurrent group, such as its founder Miguel T. Tolón, and Lorenzo de Allo, delivered lectures on political topics. As a result, they began to publish works by the most outstanding writers of the abolitionist circle of friends in the pages of *La Verdad*, including the best poems by the most outstanding authors. For example, Villaverde used his editorial position at the New York newspaper to reprint Gómez de Avellaneda's famous sonnets: "A Washington" and "Al partir." By opening informal channels of transnational communication, this nucleus of individuals exchanged news, periodical publications, and private letters from Cuba, Spain, and the United States, transforming the New York bilingual paper into a reference point for the abolitionist undercurrent group.

The two main editors of the Spanish section of the bilingual newspaper were Cirilo Villaverde and Miguel T. Tolón. Villaverde, as a close friend of Gómez de Avellaneda, was a suitable figure to coordinate the work of the circle of anti-slavery intellectuals around the newspaper and to help them utilize it to convey the ideas of the abolitionist undercurrent. Miguel T. Tolón was one of the principal editors of *La Verdad* from 1848–1852, and the founder of the *Ateneo Democrático Cubano* (Cuban Democratic Athenaeum) in New York in 1853. The Athenaeum was established to provide an intellectual forum as the basis for the independence struggle. In 1854, he contributed to the abolitionist paper *El Mulato* with a copy of a speech he gave to commemorate the founding of the French republic. In this article, he declared: "The day approaches when the words 'oppression' and 'slavery' will be forever erased with the debris of monarchy" (qtd. in Lazo 128). In addition, Tolón delivered a lecture titled "A las cubanas" at the *Ateneo Democrático Cubano* (Cuban Democratic Athenaeum) in 1855 on the role that Cuban women should play in the fight against colonial rule. Tolón envisioned an open democratic society where women and slaves would act as free citizens with equal rights and become full and dynamic participants in the new republic.

Another member of the group was Domingo Goicuría, a close friend of Lorenzo de Allo, and one of the most prominent contributors of the abolitionist newspaper *El Mulato* (New York), a publication that explicitly condemned slavery and placed the abolition cause at the forefront of the public debate (Lazo 148). On his return to Cuba, Goicuría joined the incipient separatist movement against Spanish rule over the island and led an abolitionist campaign to liberate the black slave population. In 1844, he presented a plan to the Spanish colonial government to replace black slaves with a labor force composed of white emigrants.

Cirilo Villaverde was an intellectual, an exiled writer, a journalist, and a political activist. He studied philosophy in Cuba at the Seminario de San Carlos, where he obtained a law degree and practiced as a lawyer for a brief

period of time (Luis 102). Villaverde joined the conspiracy led by Narciso López to overthrow Spanish rule on the island. For his involvement in the rebellion, he was convicted and sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. However, he managed to escape from the island in 1849 by boarding a ship to Florida, finally arriving in New York, where he remained until his death in 1894.

Parallel to his insurgent political activities, Villaverde became one of the leading clandestine distributors of *La Verdad* in Cuba and may have been a regular collaborator with the New York newspaper while still living on the island (Portell Vilá 2:45). *La Verdad* was distributed in the United States and smuggled into Cuba aboard ships going to the Spanish colony. Regardless of its prohibition in the island colony, the highly influential publication circulated through a network of clandestine distribution and was widely read by the Cuban people as an important source of news (Marrero 172).

Shortly after arriving in New York, Villaverde again became engaged in political activities as Narciso López's personal secretary and as a frequent collaborator and editor of the separatist bilingual paper *La Verdad*. In August 1851, he joined the failed uprising against the colonial government led by General López, who was betrayed, captured, and executed in September of that year. According to the Cuban historian Herminio Portell Vilá, Narciso López and Cirilo Villaverde's primary goal was the independence of Cuba and, within this plan, annexation was a strategic move meant to obtain the United States' support for the separatist cause (1: 9). Villaverde, like the majority of the Creole intellectuals, admired American republicanism as the best political model and viewed the annexation of the island to the United States as an option for its political future.

In the United States, Villaverde was not only an active member of the separatist group of Cuban intellectuals and writers and a leader of the independence movement, but also a devoted journalist. He was the founder, editor, and collaborator of a variety of American newspapers and magazines. Villaverde wrote newspaper articles and directed publications in support of Cuba's independence. As part of the abolitionist undercurrent in *La Verdad*, he promoted the anti-slavery cause in a veiled manner when he was editing the bilingual paper by publishing the poems of Gómez de Avellaneda and Plácido. As editor, Villaverde used his political journalism as a vehicle to disseminate Gómez de Avellaneda's more overtly political writings, such as her anti-slavery novel *Sab*, and the sonnets: "Al partir" and "A Washington." This unusual appearance of her poems in the paper shows that Villaverde used his position to insert a hidden discourse of abolition within the more visible and prevailing annexationist platform of *La Verdad*.

La Verdad: The Sonnets of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda

On March 20, 1852, two poems by Gómez de Avellaneda, “Al partir” and “A Washington,” appeared in *La Verdad*. They appeared at the top of their page, and were arranged in the same column and directly above the sonnet, “La muerte de Gesler,” by the mulatto poet Plácido. In the newspaper, the three compositions are visually placed together in a vertical position, drawing the reader’s attention to facilitate a simple and logical association between both authors and the anti-slavery cause. The publication of Gómez de Avellaneda’s poems alongside Plácido’s text can be interpreted as an effort by Cirilo Villaverde, as editor, to remind a wider readership of the author’s other work—specifically her banned anti-slavery novel—and shows the underlying abolitionist undercurrent that existed in *La Verdad* under his direction.

The exact location of the sonnets in the paper is intended to remind the public that Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* was forbidden by the censors from circulating in Cuba, the same year that the poet Plácido, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (1809–1844), was accused of being one of the leaders of the slave uprising of 1844, known as the Conspiracy of *La Escalera* (The Ladder Conspiracy). Many slave suspects and creole intellectuals were accused of participating in the revolt, put to death, or punished for no apparent political reason. The mulatto poet Plácido, a member of the Del Monte literary salon, was sentenced to death and immediately executed by a firing squad with ten others on June 22, 1844 (Luis 114). After his execution, the mulatto poet became a political symbol: “a martyr for the abolitionist cause” (Lazo 159).

The same year that *Sab* was prohibited on the island by the censors, and that Plácido was executed after been condemned to death for participating in *La Escalera* uprising, Villaverde addressed a letter to Domingo Del Monte—dated September 9, 1844—in which he openly expressed his outrage with the ongoing political persecution in the island. He confessed to his friend that he could not longer endure the restrictions placed on writers by the censors:

“Me encuentro en tal edad de la vida, tan negro veo el porvenir de este desventurado país, i tan insoportable se hace cada dia la purísima censura a que estamos sujetos, los que escribimos que sería preciso, o cambiar de ideas i de corazón, o reducirse a no decir más que frivolidades de teatros, modas, bailes i á nada de esto me siento inclinado.” (Villaverde, “Villaverde en el Epistolario,” 70)

(I find myself at this stage in life, that so dark do I see the future of this unfortunate country, and every day the censorship to which we are subject becomes more unbearable, it would be necessary for those of us who write, to either change our ideas or our hearts, or reduce ourselves to saying nothing more than frivolities about theater, fashion, dance and I am disinclined to all of it.)

Villaverde goes on to describe the pervading mood of dismay and fear among writers and intellectuals, and adds that the journal he was editing, *El Faro Industrial de la Habana*, has fallen under a new direction that goes along with the government and flatters its high ranking officials:

Tal desaliento i tal pavor se ha difundido entre los pocos que cultivan las letras después de la salida de Ud. y de los sangrientos sucesos de Matanzas, [...] todos andan esparcidos, mudos i cabizbajos; ... *El Faro* yace en manos de Bachiller y Vivanco que han hecho profesión de adular al gobierno i ensalzar los gobernantes. (Villaverde, "Villaverde en el Epistolario," 71)

(Such despondency and such dread has been spread among the few that cultivate the literary arts after your exit and the bloody events of Matanzas, [...] everyone moves scattered, silent, and downcast; ... *El Faro* lies in the hands of Bachiller and Vivanco who have made a profession of flattering the government and extolling the virtues of the governors.)

In Villaverde's denunciation of censorship, the banning of *Sab* by the Spanish officials was implicit, given that the anti-slavery novel had been officially forbidden from circulating in Cuba by the Royal Censor on September 1, 1844, and Villaverde wrote this letter to Domingo Del Monte only eight days later, on September 9, 1844.⁷

The appearance of Gómez de Avellaneda's poems in *La Verdad* was a rare event, since it was uncommon to publish the works of Cuban female writers in the U.S. revolutionary press. Rodrigo Lazo explains: "The publication of those poems is unusual. Quite simply, women writers were almost absent from these publications. ... men almost exclusively put out and wrote for these transnational newspapers" (118). *La Verdad* utilized her two sonnets "to support its anticolonial positions" (Lazo 118), but there was also an underlying anti-slavery message delivered to the public by the press's highlighting of the literary production of Gómez de Avellaneda as the well-known author of the banned *Sab* and its doctrines in opposition to the system of slavery. By featuring this already renowned public intellectual, the press leveraged Gómez de Avellaneda's literary works to exert influence in shaping the public opinion in favor of the abolition of slavery.

The unusual presence of Gómez de Avellaneda in the New York newspaper as a woman writer reiterates that *Sab* has always been a foundational text of the anti-slavery discourse, and an essential manifesto in the long emancipation struggle. Her precursor novel reinvigorated the abolitionist sentiment among the Cuban people, and always played a key role in countering pro-slavery thought. After being forbidden on the island, *Sab* gained renewed popu-

larity and vigor with its audience, becoming an even more powerful weapon by keeping the anti-slavery consciousness alive throughout the long process. The novel's pervasiveness in the prolonged emancipation struggle—from its initial publication date of 1841 until the official abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886—reveals its strong influence not only on public opinion, but also on the final outcome.

Moreover, the sonnets by both anti-slavery writers, Gómez de Avellaneda and Plácido, that appear on the same page of *La Verdad* are accompanied by two news pieces about the colonization of Liberia by former black slaves and people of color, under the titles: “Emigración a Liberia” and “Salida de emigrados para Liberia.” In one of the news columns, it is reported that the immigrants that have embarked to Liberia aboard a ship were former slaves who had been freed by their master:

La barca *Paquete de Liberia* que hace poco tiempo salió de Savannah para la colonia del aquel nombre . . . Llevaba tambien ciento cincuenta y cinco emigrados de color; de los cuales sesenta y dos se embarcaron en Baltimore, y los noventa y tres restantes pertenecen á Georgia y a Tennessee.—Diez de estos últimos han sido libertados por su dueño, la Señora Stevenson. (4)

(The ship *Paquete de Liberia* that a short time ago left Savannah for the colony of that name . . . Also carried one hundred fifty five immigrants of color, of whom sixty-two boarded in Baltimore, and the remaining ninety-three were from Georgia and Tennessee.—Ten of the latter had been liberated by their owner, a Madame Stevenson.)

In the context of *La Verdad*, the news concerning the emigration to Liberia offers a persuasive anti-slavery message, since black slaves must be liberated in order to emigrate to the African nation.

The two brief news reports about Liberia refer to the colonization movement in the United States that began in 1816 with the establishment of the *American Colonization Society* (ACS). The institution was founded with the express purpose of sending blacks and people of color back to Africa. While the society initially concentrated on transporting free African Americans, it would later engage in buying the freedom of slaves and relocating them. The colonization enterprise received varied degrees of support. Some of their supporters were abolitionists who believed that the existence of an independent African nation would eventually encourage Southerners and slaveholders to release their slaves. In the decade of 1830 there were some individuals that “tried to assert an anti-slavery mission for the ACS” (Sinha 239–241).

The ACS published a significant amount of propaganda on emigration

during the decade of 1850, after receiving state funds and money from the federal government to relocate captives rescued from the illegal African slave trade (Sinha 336). During the decade of 1850, many abolitionists viewed the emigration to Liberia of free blacks as a process of gradual emancipation with colonization. They advocated a coming together of abolition and colonization plans to return freed slaves to established African homelands, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia (Sinha 337). Thus, emigration to Liberia appealed to many anti-slavery supporters as a means to pave the way for the total abolition of slavery.

Villaverde, as editor of *La Verdad*, appropriated the emigrationist rhetoric of the ACS after Liberia's independence in 1847 to foster the abolitionist undercurrent of the newspaper, and as an implicit indictment of the African slave trade. With the appearance in the bilingual paper of the two brief pieces about emigration to Liberia, Villaverde assumed an implied anti-slavery colonizationist position. For Villaverde and others, the colonization movement would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery, since black emigration to Liberia was a vehicle for granting freedom to the slaves and underlying the project of a modern black nation was the principle of black equality. The concept of black nationhood and nationality proved that former slaves were capable of a civilized government and self-reliance, disputing the fallacy that blacks were naturally inferior to whites.

In the same issue of *La Verdad* where the two poems by Gómez de Avellaneda appeared, Cirilo Villaverde published the first two sections of his article entitled "Catecismo Político." He divided the essay into four parts: first, an examination of the rights of all individuals; second, a consideration of different forms of government; third, a discussion of republicanism as the best political system; and last, an explanation of the possible benefits of annexation for the island.

Villaverde began the section dedicated to the "Rights of Men" (Derechos del Hombre) with the following proclamation: "Todos los hombres nacen libres é iguales. No deben, por lo tanto, ser esclavizados" ("Catecismo Político" 2) (All men are born free and equal. Accordingly, they should not be enslaved). This opening statement on the principle of human equality alludes simultaneously to the oppression of Cubans under Spanish colonial rule and to the effects of slavery on the black population.

A Female Precursor: Gómez de Avellaneda's Influence on Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*

Gómez de Avellaneda's work of fiction, *Sab* became a literary model for subsequent anti-slavery narratives, but itself represents an innovation in its genre.

As Kelly highlights:

We emphasize rather the fact that *Sab*, viewed as an anti-slavery novel, represents a bit of pioneering. La Avellaneda had no models to follow. The work of Cirilo Villaverde did not appear until 1839 (after la Avellaneda had completed her manuscript); Harriet Beecher Stowe's propaganda novel came out ten years after *Sab* was published. ("La Avellaneda's *Sab*" 307–308)

What sets *Sab* even further apart as an innovation is that even Villaverde's 1839 text is not universally considered an anti-slavery work of fiction (Luis 4), a dispute that we will explore later on in this section. Thus, the author's novel truly stands alone in its uniqueness.

During the time when the members of Domingo Del Monte's salon gathered, there were only two anti-slavery texts in print, and both were published abroad: the autobiography of Juan Francisco Manzano released in England in 1840, and Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* published in Madrid in 1841. *Sab*, which would come to influence Cirilo Villaverde's later text, was published forty-one years before the final version of *Cecilia Valdés* was released in New York in 1882.

The anti-slavery narratives were the first works to introduce blacks and mulattoes as protagonists in Cuban literature (Luis 5). The first time that a mulatto slave becomes the protagonist of a work of fiction was in Gómez de Avellaneda's abolitionist novel.⁸

While the female writer builds her story around the figure of the mulatto Sab, Villaverde focuses his anti-slavery narrative on a mulatto woman as the main character: Cecilia Valdés. Both authors named their works of fiction after their respective male and female mulatto protagonists. The last two novels to be published before the abolition of slavery on the island were *Sab*, which appeared serialized in the Havana magazine *El Museo* in 1883 (numbers 31 to 50); and *Cecilia Valdés* released in New York in 1882. Therefore, the pioneer anti-slavery novel by Gómez de Avellaneda was also the last to be reprinted before the emancipation of the slaves in Cuba in 1886.

The dates of Villaverde's preliminary versions of *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) suggest the extent to which the author was influenced by Gómez de Avellaneda during the initial stages and up through the final completion of the work. His manuscript went through an extended composition process divided into writing stages: first, a two-part short story that was published in *La Siempre-viva*, and, second, a preliminary version of the novel. Both pieces appeared in 1839. William Luis argues that despite the similarity in theme and characters between the different texts, "only the 1882 version contains anti-slavery sentiments," and "offers a complete picture of Cuban slave society" with all its

complexities (Luis 100). According to the critic, the two earlier texts, the short story and the volume, were not anti-slavery works, since they both passed the censors and were published in Cuba in 1839 (Luis 4). On the other hand, *Sab*'s writing process took place between the years 1836 and 1838, and its final publication as a book was in Spain in 1841, without the censorship Villaverde's works passed in Cuba.

A Transnational Friendship: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Cirilo Villaverde Meet Again in Havana and New York

During his long years of exile (spent mostly in New York), Villaverde made only two trips to Cuba. He returned to the island in 1858 under a political amnesty granted by the Spanish government and remained there until 1860 when he departed again to the United States. His last visit to Cuba was in 1888 and lasted only two weeks (Luis 108). His first stay on the island coincided with Gómez de Avellaneda's arrival in Cuba on 1859 accompanied by her husband, Colonel Domingo Verdugo, for a period of residence that lasted five years.

Gómez de Avellaneda and Cirilo Villaverde were both newspaper and magazine editors, and assiduous collaborators in the press. The year that his friend arrived in Cuba, Villaverde was in the process of writing his anti-slavery novel. He was revising the text and outlining in detail a new plan for the work, but this attempt was interrupted when he had to leave the island to return to the United States. As he himself explains:

I undertook the venture of revising, of recasting the other novel, *Cecilia Valdés* (an intermediate version, very incomplete) of which only the first volume existed in print and a small part of the second in manuscript form. I had outlined the new plan to its most minute details, when once again I had to abandon my country. (Luis 108)

After many years without seeing each other, the two friends probably met in private to share memories, recall their past experiences, exchange ideas, and discuss the main topics of the day. The question of slavery was most likely one of the major subjects of conversation, as well as their literary endeavors, such as Villaverde's on-going project to revise his anti-slavery novel, their respective editorial and newspaper ventures, and the political future of the island. One can assume that Gómez de Avellaneda had a lasting influence on the revision process of Villaverde's novel: *Cecilia Valdés*. The second meeting between both writers presumably took place in New York in 1864, when Gómez de Avellaneda arrived there for an extended visit of two months.

Cirilo Villaverde and the Question of Slavery

Similar to his friend Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, who was an abolitionist from an early age (Sosa 41), the question of slavery had a significant impact on Villaverde's life and works. The sixth of ten children, Villaverde was born into a family of modest means in Pinar del Río, where he lived on a sugar plantation with his parents and siblings. His father worked as a physician in the plantation, where there were "more than three hundred slaves, exposing the young Villaverde to the evils of the slavery system" (Luis 101). Some of these "evils" were the atrocities committed by the overseer against the slaves, their generally cruel mistreatment, and the inhuman conditions of their overwork. The writer would recall these first-hand experiences with slavery on the sugar plantation during the formative years of his life in his novel, *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) (Luis 101).

While living in Cuba, Villaverde became a member of Domingo Del Monte's literary circle, a prestigious tertulia (literary salon) that began in Matanzas in 1834, and was moved to Havana in 1835, lasting until 1843, the year its founder left the island. Del Monte had a considerable impact on the Creole writers and intellectuals that gathered at his house, where they formulated a counter discourse to Spanish colonial authority. During their meetings, the question of slavery was a preferred topic of discussion among the members of the salon, and the influential literary critic advised the participants to adopt a more realistic type of literature to describe Cuban society, and to use it to portray the evils of its central institution (Luis 29).

Del Monte also commissioned the intellectuals of his literary circle to write anti-slavery narratives that would denounce the cruelties of the slavery system, and to be on the side of the black slaves instead of their masters. These works included the *Autobiografía* by the slave poet Juan Francisco Manzano—who was accused of conspiracy at *La Escalera*—first published in England in 1840, and later in Cuba in 1937; *Francisco*, the novel written by Anselmo Suárez y Romero, released in 1880; and Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel's collection of short stories, *Escenas de la vida privada en la Isla de Cuba*, which appeared in print in 1925. Anti-slavery writings could not be published in Cuba during the years of the Del Monte tertulia from 1834 to 1843, since the works posed a threat to the alliance between the colonial government, the slaveholders, and the island sugarocracy.

Due to the need "to be cleared by three censors" (Luis 101), early anti-slavery works were published abroad. Such was the case with the first anti-slavery novel, *Sab* by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, published in Madrid in 1841, and the release of Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* in New York in 1882. The manuscript of *Sab* was drafted in Puerto Príncipe, Cuba, its writing

process continued in Bordeaux in 1836, and finally the author completed her manuscript in Spain around 1838.

Although Gómez de Avellaneda did not formally belong to the Del Monte literary salon, she was a friend of Domingo Del Monte, and later remained in contact with the influential literary critic in Spain. As José M. Aguilera Manzano explains, they met in Puerto Príncipe:

The Delegation of the Society in Puerto Príncipe had been one of the first ones to be constituted. However, it was abandoned rapidly until it was revived in 1828. It maintained a permanent and sustained activity throughout the period. Del Monte knew the importance of this strategic city, because of the existence of the Audiencia (a legislative and judicial body) and for that reason, from his arrival on the island in 1829, he tried to establish contact with the intellectual liberal élite in the town. . . . He also knew Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, with whom he began a great friendship. (77)

Gómez de Avellaneda's pioneer novel inserts itself as a forerunner into "(t)he anti-slavery narrative developed as part of a movement to abolish slavery and the slave trade" (Luis 27). Yet, rather than on the margins of the movement, the precursor text appears at its very center by becoming the first and the only abolitionist work of fiction that was published in the decade of 1840. As a ground-breaking text against slavery that condemns the abuses of the system through her mulatto slave protagonist, the novel marked an important stage in the development of anti-slavery fiction as a form of protest, signaling the beginning of a counter-discourse challenging the institution of slavery in the colonial society.

Cirilo Villaverde's association with the anti-slavery group of writers from Domingo Del Monte's literary circle, and the review of *Sab* published in *El Faro Industrial de la Habana*, shows that he was part of the abolitionist undercurrent among Cuban intellectuals. Furthermore, in the United States in 1855, he married Emilia Casanova, a woman abolitionist and an advocate of Cuban independence. In a biographical essay on Villaverde's wife published in New York in 1874, the author writes: "se consagró Emilia a la causa de la libertad e independencia de su patria . . . A compás de su oposición a la esclavitud del negro . . ." (Villaverde, "Prólogo" 51–52) (Emilia dedicated herself to the cause of liberty and freedom of her country . . . in keeping with her opposition to the enslavement of the blackman).

At the outset of the Ten Years' War (1868–1878), Villaverde's abolitionist stance was overtly expressed and he renounced the annexationist option and, instead, became in favor of the establishment of an independent Cuban republic. This position was stated clearly in a document addressed to Carlos Manuel

de Céspedes, the leader of the independence uprising, entitled “La revolución de Cuba vista desde Nueva York” (1869), where he explicitly states his support for the rebels and openly embraces the anti-slavery cause (Luis 107). Céspedes was a lawyer and a sugar plantation landowner who liberated his slaves and declared Cuban independence on October 10, 1868, initiating the armed conflict.

A Long Range Political Weapon: *Sab* (1841) and the Press

One year before the start of the Ten Year’s War (1868–1878), island newspapers made reference to Gómez de Avellaneda’s anti-slavery novel *Sab*. An article from *El Diario de la Marina* dated September 19, 1867, states that the outline of the work of fiction was done by the author while she was in Puerto Príncipe. The piece emphasizes that the abolitionist novel emerged from within the Cuban socio-political context, where slavery was a fundamental institution (2).

The anti-slavery undercurrent culminated with the first official pronouncement on the abolition of the institution in 1869. On February 26, 1869—the year following the declaration of the Ten Years’ War—the first revolutionary decree on the immediate abolition of slavery was issued in Camagüey by a local government junta, which came to be known as the “Asamblea del Centro” (The Central Assembly). The document of the emancipation proclamation appeared under the title: “Decreto de la Asamblea de Representantes del Centro sobre la abolición de la esclavitud” (“Decreto” 220–221) (Decree of the Assembly’s Representatives on the Abolition of Slavery). The Decree of Camagüey became the first revolutionary pronouncement to prescribe the abolition of slavery with indemnization. The first provision of the document declares: “Queda abolida la esclavitud” (Slavery is hereby abolished). Additionally, the second specifies that “oportunamente serán indemnizados los dueños de los que hasta hoy han sido esclavos” (“Decreto” 220) (Opportunely, the masters of those that up to today have been slaves will be compensated). A few months later, On April 10, 1869, the Constitutional Convention of the Guáimaro Assembly drafted a provision for the emancipation of the slaves in the island. Article 24 of the first Cuban Constitution stipulates the freedom of all the inhabitants of the republic: “Todos los habitantes de la República son enteramente libres” (“Decreto” 222) (All the inhabitants of the Republic are entirely free).

Sab was published in serial format in a New York newspaper two years after the first revolutionary decree proclaiming the abolition of slavery in Cuba was released on 1869 in Las Clavellinas, Camagüey. Gómez de Avellaneda’s anti-slavery novel appeared in the pages of the newspaper *La América: Periódico Quincenal Ilustrado* (1871), from May 15 to September 15, 1871.

The editor of the New York publication was Juan Ignacio de Armas. Mary Cruz argues that *Sab* should be considered a long-range political tool, since it was reprinted in the New York newspaper at the outset of the war of independence (Cruz 56). We sustain that Gómez de Avellaneda's work of fiction was significant in the abolitionist cause as its form of literature was the most effective way to spread the message against slavery and to counter the arguments in favor of the institution.

The novel became a far-reaching ideological tool from the time of its publication in 1841 to the final abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886. *Sab* was continuously present in the long struggle to bring about the end of slavery on the island by undermining the central institution of Cuban society. The impact of Gómez de Avellaneda's text as an agent of social change in the anti-slavery movement was acknowledged in the island press, where *Sab* was credited for galvanizing the abolitionist cause and keeping anti-slavery sentiment alive throughout the long emancipation fight. For example, on August 22, 1921 the Havana newspaper *El Mundo* declared: "Miss Beecher Stowe on su *Choza de Tom* y la Avellaneda con su novela *Sab*, han hecho más por la abolición de la esclavitud que todos los discursos de Mr. Willioforce en el Parlamento inglés" ("La mujer y la política" 7) (Miss Beecher Stowe with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Gómez de Avellaneda with her novel *Sab* have done more for the abolition of slavery than all of Mr. Willioforce's speeches to the English Parliament).

When *Sab* was prohibited by the colonial authorities, the subversive and influential work became a sort of abolitionist manifesto. Upon its banning in 1844, the novel's popularity increased with the reading public. Even after its ban, Gómez de Avellaneda's anti-slavery novel was made accessible to the public through clandestine copies of the text that were distributed on the island (Portuondo 212). In addition, the book was sold in Cuba and advertised in the press in 1858, and again in 1881, as well as appearing serialized in newspapers from Havana and New York. With its longevity, Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* fulfilled an ongoing and central role in the abolitionist undercurrent underlying the island colonial society and abroad, particularly among the Cuban exile writers and intellectuals living in the United States.

Law, Fiction, and the Anti-slavery Cause: Gómez de Avellaneda and Domingo Verdugo

Before arriving in Cuba in the company of her husband, Colonel Domingo Verdugo, the press provides evidence that Gómez de Avellaneda's anti-slavery novel was circulating in the island. An advertisement informing the public that the book was for sale at a very affordable price appeared in the major

newspaper of Havana: *El Diario de la Marina* on May 22, 1858. The ad was placed on the front page of the newspaper under the section entitled “Obras ilustradas baratísimas” (Inexpensive illustrated works) where the work’s title, author’s name and price of the book are mentioned: “El *Sab* de la Avellaneda 4 ts. 12 rs.” (“Obras ilustradas baratísimas” 1) (*Sab* by Gómez de Avellaneda 4 tomes, 12 reales). Many years later on January 28, 1881, the same publication advertised on its title page that another edition of the abolitionist novel was for sale in Cuba. Under the heading “Baratísimo” (Very low-priced), the following information appears: “El *Sab* por la Avellaneda, 2 ts. 10 rs.” (“Baratísimo” 1) (*Sab* by Gómez de Avellaneda, 2 tomes 10 reales).

Two important and parallel actions came together to undermine the system of slavery in Cuba: the circulation of *Sab* (with its anti-slavery content) on the island, and the prosecution under the authority of Domingo Verdugo, Gómez de Avellaneda’s husband, of plantation owners that resorted to physical violence as a means of (cruelly) punishing their slaves. While his wife’s abolitionist novel was circulating in Cuba, maintaining a presence in the press and spreading its anti-slavery message among the reading public, Verdugo as lieutenant governor was taking legal action against the slaveholders who mistreated their slaves by actively prosecuting them for their crimes. In this scenario, law and fiction converged toward a common cause: to combat the evils of slavery and, at the same time, to create a favorable opinion toward its abolition.

Gómez de Avellaneda’s Husband’s Conflict with the Slaveholders

Based on archival research on Cuban slavery, Luisa Campuzano argues that we can infer from the documents recording the judicial testimonies of slaves that during the writer’s five-year stay in Cuba (from 1859 to 1864), Gómez de Avellaneda exerted a decisive influence on her husband’s position as lieutenant governor (200). Behind the scenes, she played an active role in the steps taken by Verdugo to advance the legal proceedings involving slaves’ denunciations against their masters, and in prosecuting the plantation owners for their crimes.

Gómez de Avellaneda’s interventions behind the scenes of the abolitionist fight demonstrate that besides authoring the first anti-slavery novel in the Americas and Spain and thus contributing ideologically to the struggle, the author also took direct action to alleviate the ills of slavery and thus, lessen the burdens of the slaves. Previously, in Madrid with the Cuban delegates, including her friend Lorenzo de Allo, she asked for the introduction of reforms to the slavery system in Cuba. Later, through her husband Domingo Verdugo, she worked on the island to counter the excesses of the institution of slavery

through legal actions.

Campuzano insists that Cuban historians must regard Gómez de Avellaneda's husband as the highest-ranking government official of the colonial period who was the most committed and diligent public authority in advancing and expediting legal proceedings against the wealthiest landowners for their mistreatment of their slaves. The critic states:

Tanto la historiadora Gloria García Rodríguez, como Manuel Barcia sostienen que fue Verdugo el alto funcionario de gobierno (teniente gobernador) que más atención brindó, en toda nuestra historia colonial, a las denuncias por malos tratos a esclavos, incoando procesos y dirigiendo investigaciones contra algunos de los más ricos hacendados de su tiempo. (200–201)

(As much the historian Gloria García Rodríguez as Manuel Barcia maintain that it was Verdugo, the highest functionary of the government (lieutenant governor) who showed the most attention, out of all of our colonial history, to the denouncements for mistreatment of the slaves, initiating trials and directing investigations against some of the richest landowners of the time.)

Based on their research, García Rodríguez and Barcia deduce from historical evidence that Domingo Verdugo's frequent transfers as a government official were probably due to his active involvement in the prosecution of the crimes perpetrated by the masters against their slaves.⁹

As lieutenant governor of Cárdenas, Verdugo addressed a letter in February of 1861 to the Captain General, reporting the cruel treatment of his slaves by Pablo Hernández, the owner of several *ingenios* (sugar factories) in Matanzas. In the nineteenth century, the province of Matanzas, where Gómez de Avellaneda's husband was assigned as lieutenant governor, became the center of Cuban sugar production creating a high demand for slave labor. The territory became the major destination for African slaves in the island. In his letter, the lieutenant governor provides a disturbing and detailed account of the cruelties of the institution of slavery. The official document by Verdugo reveals the brutality of plantation slavery: the indiscriminate use of naked violence by the masters and overseers, and the overworking of the slaves. From his position of authority as lieutenant governor of Cárdenas, Gómez de Avellaneda's husband utilizes a condemnatory tone to denounce the excesses of the institution by exposing the routine violence and the sordidness of slavery. In the formal account, Gómez de Avellaneda's husband reports to the Captain General that:

On January 29, an anonymous source informed me that Pablo Hernández was meting out dreadful punishments to his slaves on his *ingenios* Osado, Dolores, San Juan, and San Fernando. This drove several slaves on those establishments to the brink of despair, electing to (commit suicide) by hanging themselves or hurling themselves into wells rather than submit to any further punishment. It also was reported to me that some had succumbed to the ruthless blows dealt at the behest of the owner.

Although the *alcalde mayor*'s (administrator of a provincial division usually smaller than that of a *corregidor* [magistrate]) office was in the process of drawing up an indictment for the death of some slaves on the aforementioned farms, who had been discovered hung days before, I ordered that the *ayudante de plaza* (lieutenant), Joaquín Beltrán, move to initiate the necessary legal proceedings in order to investigate the grounds for the anonymous charges, above. The findings, Excellency, are attached in the dreadful summary, below.

By virtue of this, I immediately ordered Don Pablo Hernández, resident of Matanzas, owner of the *ingenios* in question, detained, and I forwarded the aforementioned judicial proceedings to the office of the *alcalde mayor*. Although, as I have stated, the court was to rule on this matter expeditiously, I did not believe that Hernández should remain for even one minute (at large and) in a position to commit new crimes. (García-Rodríguez 152–153).

Verdugo details in his report to the Captain General the crimes and the inhuman punishments of the master: Pablo Hernández's harsh beatings and lashing of his slaves. Gómez de Avellaneda's husband focuses on the slaveholder's violent behavior by describing how the farm's slaves were frequently beaten in a brutal manner, and as a result many of the victims decided to hang themselves "weary of the continual beatings" (García Rodríguez 154). He also informs of the sugar master's confession that he had never "seen such brutality toward the slaves," and that he was "revolted" by these incessant punishments (García Rodríguez 154). The lieutenant governor includes in his letter the testimony given by a carpenter, who explained that the torments suffered by the slaves in Pablo Hernández's *ingenios* were the result of the "master's depraved nature" (García Rodríguez 154). He added that many slaves died from the severe beatings and lashes, underscoring that excessive punishment was a major cause of death among slaves in the *ingenios* (García Rodríguez 155). Verdugo's intervention on behalf of the slaves was aimed at protecting them from the abuses of their masters, and overseers on the farm. By instigating the judicial proceedings that allowed slaves to present evidence

in support of their claims, Verdugo advanced the recognition of their rights as partially protected under Spanish colonial law.

Verdugo's letter not only offers a picture of the physical violence of the plantation owners and overseers, it also enters into direct conflict with the slaveholders. He did not limit his political authority to the advancement of investigations, nor to merely expediting criminal proceedings against the owners of the *ingenios*, but took action against the landowner by ordering the immediate incarceration of Pablo Hernández so as to prevent any further crimes against the slaves. Gómez de Avellaneda's husband applied regulations and enforced existing legislation in order to protect the slaves from their masters' punishments; and to mitigate the excesses of the system by constraining the abuse of power by the owners of the *ingenios*.

The case against the landowner (*hacendado*) Pablo Hernández documented in Verdugo's letter from a condemnatory point of view creates a favorable climate for the gradual recognition of the validity of the slaves' claims against their masters, while also exposing the physical violence of the slavery system and implicitly questioning the ethics of slave-owning. On the other hand, the circulation of Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* in Cuba, as evidenced in the press, influenced public opinion on the proliferation of abolitionist and humanitarian ideals, helping to put an end to the institution of slavery on the island.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and the U.S. Press

The press coverage surrounding Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in the newspapers of the United States, both in the English- and Spanish-language publications, attests to the fact that she was not only a famous author, but also a transnational figure. Her writings reached a wider audience through the publicity she received in the North American press. She became known to the English-speaking public in the United States not only through the translations of her works, but to a large extent through her "presence" in the periodical press. The publications we will present in this section all work together to reveal how Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was celebrated as the foremost female poet in Hispanic literature by the English-language newspapers from different geographical regions in the United States.

To start, in the New York paper *The Sun*, two brief letters to the editor appeared in which one Boston reader inquired if there was a leading woman poet of the century. Another reader from New York then answered the question, stating that Gómez de Avellaneda was the greatest American Poetess of the era:

To the Editor of The Sun—*Sir*: I was asked the other day who was the

greatest American poetess, and I said there wasn't any. And for that matter there wasn't one in the world. If the answer was not correct will *The Sun* undertake to mention the lady's name? M. N. Boston, Mass. ("The Great Poetess" 6)

To the Editor of the Sun—*Sir*: Will you be so kind as to mention in your valuable paper the name of Mrs. Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, a Cuban by birth, as a great poetess, and perhaps the greatest ever born in America, or in the whole world, for that matter? I see in your editorial page of to-day that Mr. M. N. of Boston makes inquiry of the above name. New York, Jan. 5, D. Sardine. ("The Great American Poetess" 6)

Furthermore, *The New York Times* (1895) and the *Boston Daily Advertiser* (1896) both agree in their pages that she was an unparalleled female poet in the Spanish-language. For example, on August 20, 1895, the *New York Times* states that "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, the great Cuban poetess, is declared by all critics to have no equal in modern times" ("Able to Govern Herself" 12). While the *Boston Daily Advertiser* (1896) concluded that no one can be compared to her in Hispanic Literature. On June 4, 1896, the newspaper reports on the ceremony in honor of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda given by Fidel Pierra:

Fidel Pierra, the chairman of the fair committee, described the life of the foremost Cuban poetess. No one in the whole Spanish, Parnassus said, was to be compared with Gertrude Gomez d'Avellaneda, who was born in Cuba in 1814, and did most of the beautiful work of her life there. Mr. Pierra's appreciative tribute was the first which has been paid in the congress to the genius of a Cuban woman. ("Multiple News Items" 12)

Fidel de Pierra became a media specialist employed by the PRC (*Partido Revolucionario Cubano*) to travel throughout the U.S. Northeast to obtain support among the American public for the Cuban War. He was a businessman who faced extradition upon his return to the island from the United States for having been the publisher of liberal newspapers. Pierra escaped Spanish persecution and arrived in New York in 1872, where he became a prominent member of the Brooklyn emigré community. He became a political activist for the PRC under the direction of Tomás Estrada Palma, who became the leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Party after José Martí's death, and later the first president of the new republic in 1902. During the first years of the war, Pierra toured several states: New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia to promote the Cuban freedom cause. He attended large public gatherings, as well as intimate meetings delivering speeches to foster solidarity for the island's independence. He met often with reporters of local newspapers,

and was successful in generating support for Cuba among Northern Civil War veterans and those who had probably been former abolitionists. The success of his speeches in favor of Cuba's independence can be seen when in "November 1895, the Philadelphia Brigade Association, a veterans organization, mobilized a coalition of Protestant and Catholic ministers who joined them in signing a petition to Congress that demanded immediate recognition of the Cuban Republic" (Guerra 75–76).

According to the *New York Times*, Fidel de Pierra "was a man of profound learning, talent and industry" (Parks 2) who as frequent collaborator of leading magazines wrote many pieces to promote the cause of Cuban independence. He became the Secretary of the Pan-American Congress, which met in Washington D.C. from 1889 to 1890, and was in charge of organizing the Spanish-American Commercial Union to foster trade between the United States and the Hispanic American nations.

An article that appeared in *The New York Times* on August 25, 1900, under the title "Cuban literature" suggests that Gómez de Avellaneda was a female literary genius by emphasizing her precocity as a writer, referring to the creation of her first compositions at a very early age. The author of the piece, Rene S. Parks, portrays her as a dramatist acclaimed by the public, since she attained unusual success as a woman playwright whose dramas (tragedies and comedies alike) were extremely popular with the audience. The author presents Gómez de Avellaneda as arguably one of the greatest poets and playwrights of all time, while also insinuating her unique virtuosity and versatility as a writer. As the newspaper states, the writer was highly praised by the critics who compared her with the Greek poets Sappho and Corinna, and to Melpomene the Muse of Tragedy for her unusual success as a female dramatist. The *New York Times'* article concludes with the implication that she surpassed the expectations of her sex as a woman writer, and alludes to the virility of her genius. The following passage portrays Gómez de Avellaneda:

The highest place among the Cuban writers by common consent is given to Heredia, but the next is awarded with equal unanimity to a woman, Gertruda de Avellaneda, born in Puerto Príncipe in 1814. Her poetic gift found expression at an early age, her first poem having been written on the death of her father when she was only six years old. At eight she wrote a fairy tale in verse; at nine her poems were attracting public comment; at eighteenth she had written a comedy and a tragedy. Not an insignificant record for a Cuban girl in the first half of the century! When sixteen years old, Gertruda de Avellaneda was sent to Spain to complete her education. Returning to Cuba in a few years, she devoted herself to writing novels, poems and dramas. In 1840 she went back to Madrid, where her fame had preceded her and procured her a welcome in the most exclusive circles.

Her plays were produced on the stage with phenomenal success, . . . Her critics exhausted the capacity of the language in admiring epithets: Sappho, Corinna, the Spanish Melpomene, were some of the names applied to her. One writer said: “She has the heart and brain of a man.” (Parks 2)

Another English-language newspaper of the era, the *Morning Oregonian* on August 1, 1898, spoke of Gómez de Avellaneda as a distinguished poet (“The Cuban Legend” 4E). On July 18, 1908, an article titled “Avellaneda, Cuba’s Greatest Poetess and Dramatist” appeared in *The Evening Star* claiming that the author is “one of the extraordinary women of modern times,” and the greatest Cuban poet and playwright (6). Even *The Daily Illini*, a student newspaper from the University of Illinois, on July 8, 1926, mentions the author as one of the foremost lyric poets of Hispanic Literature, using as an example the poem she dedicated to the American Revolutionary Hero, who later became the first President of the United States: “Another of the outstanding Spanish writers of lyrics is Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda who wrote a great tribute to Washington in a sonnet” (Fitzgerald 1). While a daily publication from New Orleans makes reference to the comments on her poetry by two prominent nineteenth-century Spanish literary figures: Don Juan Nicasio Gallego, who considers the author to be the leading woman poet of the Spanish language; and Nicomedes Pastor Díaz who declares that Gómez de Avellaneda is the greatest female poet of all times. The article, published on August 17, 1890, under the title “Female Writers of Spain,” observes:

One famous name stands out among the poets—that of Doña Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda. Born in Puerto Principe, Cuba, March 24, 1814, she published her first volume of poems when scarcely more than a child. Her genius . . . —it was too rare—and her collected works, of the edition of 1869, number but five volumes; they do not include, however, several dramas, and some devotional exercises of hers. She died in Madrid, Feb. 1, 1873. A memorial tablet was erected in 1876 in the wall of the house where she was born. The geniuses of her lyric gift appear to be beyond all question. We may well believe Don Juan Nicasio Gallego when he gives her “the primacy among all the members of her sex who have struck the Spanish lyre in this or any age,” even if we are not prepared to go along with Don Nicomedes Pastor Díaz in declaring her “the greatest among the poetesses of all times.” (“Female Writers of Spain” 16E)

In addition, as can be seen in the excerpt quoted below from the *Wichita Daily Eagle* (1899), the Cuban-Spanish poet is considered a genius and was often compared with one of the most prominent woman poets of the Victorian period: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, The English poet who had pub-

lished three poems in favor of the abolition of slavery: “Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave,” “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point,” and her final abolitionist work, “A Curse for a Nation.” The parallels between the two women poets reinforces the pioneer role played by Gómez de Avellaneda in her denunciation of slavery in *Sab* (1841).

The newspaper article, dated March 19, 1899, goes on to acknowledge the international recognition attained by Gómez de Avellaneda as a prolific writer, whose popular plays were translated into several languages:

Now and then, however, a genius appears, whose light cannot be hid. Such was the poetess Gertrude Gomez de Avellaneda, who has been called the Elizabeth Browning of Cuba. She was born in Puerto Principe in 1814. At the age of twenty she went to Spain, and soon became known in Seville, Cadiz and Madrid through her lyrics, dramas and novels. As prolific a writer as our Mrs. Burnett, she has published a dozen novels, several books of poems, biographies, and essays, and no less than nine successful dramas. Among the latter her “Saul,” “Baltasar,” and “Catilina” have been translated into several languages and long held the boards in France and Spain. She died in Madrid in ’73. (“Amazons of Cuba” 11)

On January 15, 1899, a brief biographical sketch of the author was published at the *Omaha Daily Bee*, a pioneer newspaper in Nebraska founded on May 8, 1871, by Edward Rosewater (1841–1906), a Jewish immigrant from Bohemia who supported abolition and fought in the Union Army. Rosewater arrived in the United States from Bukoven, Bohemia with his family in 1854. He soon became a telegrapher, and as a member of the United States Military Telegraph Corps during the Civil War, he accompanied the Union forces and was responsible for the transmission of Lincoln’s “Emancipation Proclamation.”

The articles in the *Freeland Tribune* from May 1, 1899, and in the Omaha newspaper from January 15, 1899, address José María Heredia’s literary influence on the young Gómez de Avellaneda, and make reference to several of her poems, including the composition “A Washington,” written by the author as a tribute to the American hero. The article in the *Omaha Daily Bee* begins with an English translation of the first stanza of her sonnet “Al partir”:

Pearl of the sea, star of the West!
Beautiful Cuba, thy brilliant sky
Night covers black with her veil
As veiled with my grief am I.

This stanza is from the Spanish of a beautiful Cuban girl, whose poetry has not yet been translated into English, but is certain to interest American readers

of verse when it becomes known.

This girl, who bore the same family name as the famous Cuban general of today, died many years ago, but not before her delicate and exalted talents became known in Paris and in Madrid, where she lived for a number of years. The stanza quoted above is an imperfect quotation from a finished and moving sonnet entitled, "To Cuba at Parting," written at the time Gertrude Gomez was taken by her parents to Spain, apparently to remove her from republican influences. She was always an ardent sympathizer with the struggles of Cuba for freedom.

Gertrude was born in Puerto de Principe, where lived the elder Jose Maria de Heredia (father of the present Paris "Immortal" poet) during his troubled youth. Gertrude was only a little girl of seven when Heredia lived in her native town and not much older when, in 1823, the poet was in New York, exiled from Spanish dominions for working for "Cuba libre." But his influence upon her thought and talent is very marked, although it does not appear that the two ever met. Heredia's impassioned poetic prophecy of a noble future for Cuba "when America should be one country under one starry flag from the equator to the pole," found echo in the girl poet's heart. Her sonnet "To Washington," is not only a fine example of this difficult poetic form, but is good Yankee patriotism, in this latter day sense of Yankee.

The poem of Gertrude Gomez written to the memory of Heredia when "the Cuban troubadour" died in Mexico in 1839, is full of fervor.

She was only twenty when she went to live in Madrid and it is on record that she was much sought after and admired for her charm and personality as well as for her literary talents. She wrote a novel entitled "Two Women," which had a lively vogue and is still held in esteem by connoisseurs of Spanish fiction. Her poems, "Love and Pride," "Music," and "To Youth" were much quoted by the Castilian gallants of her day ("Cuba's Poet" 12).

On October 7, 1854, a periodical publication from South Carolina reproduced a translated letter addressed to General Concha, Governor and Captain General of Cuba, in which Gómez de Avellaneda's name is associated with the figure of George Washington. As we explored previously, the composition she dedicated to this American hero of the War of Independence is an example of the public utility of her civic poetry. The author of the letter not only inserts Gómez de Avellaneda into the national debate concerning the political future of the island under Spanish colonial rule, but also into the ideology of American republicanism. The dichotomy established in the letter between the two opposite pairs of Avellaneda/Washington and Cortes/Cervantes, suggests a difference between two forms of government: the American Republic and the Spanish Monarchy. The correspondence addressed to the Captain General of the island colony states:

Happy are those who look to the New World of the immortality, which

in future days will see the ruin of Europe!—arising to heavens the music of American Bards . . . Does your Excellency understands us? . . . Your Excellency already knows the country—where are any inhabitants more gentle or more sensible? Where a country more worthy of urbanity and honesty? Well then to your Excellency, Heaven entrusts that jewel—that in your hands it may receive new lustre—that there may become a more brilliant light in the Island so fully rich, and that learning and its spread may oblige it to take your name and virtues from the country of Washington and Avellaneda to the place of Cortes and Cervantes . . . (“Havana Correspondence” 2)

The press also reports on other events of Gómez de Avellaneda’s life such as her scheduled coronation in Havana as a poet laureate. The following news appeared at the *New York Herald* on January 19, 1860, in advance of the ceremony to honor the famous writer:

I have been favored with a private view of a magnificent gold crown, manufactured to the order of the Liceo by an Italian artist and goldsmith of this city, named Fermo Campiglio, with which will be publicly crowned in a few evenings, on the stage of the Teatro Tacón, a Cuban poetess, named Gertrudis Gómez y de Avellaneda. This lady is the authoress of several very beautiful dramas and other poems of great merit. She has been twice married. (“Our Havana Correspondence” 5C)

The reporter of a New Orleans daily paper on September 21, 1860, writes about the stage performance of the comedy “La hija de las flores” by Gómez de Avellaneda at a newly built theater on the island. However, what calls the attention of the reader is the next line informing how lucrative the on-going slave trade was in Cuba, which could be interpreted as a veiled reference to her banned anti-slavery novel *Sab* by the colonial authorities. It is possible that the mention of the slave trade immediately below the news of the premiere of Gómez de Avellaneda’s play was intended to bring *Sab*, the abolitionist novel by the same author of “La hija de las flores,” back into the reader’s memory. Such veiled allusion to the work of fiction becomes more plausible if we take into account that this was during the writer’s stay in Cuba, and that censorship regarding the question of slavery was still being enforced on the island. The journalist observes regarding the opening night of the play:

The new little theater, erected immediately in the rear of the Tacon, was opened on Sunday evening. A drama called “The Daughter of the Flowers,” written by the celebrated Cuban-poetess, La Señora Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, was performed. The theater is, I learn, although small,

very elegant. I shall visit it upon an early occasion. The African slave trade prospers amazingly. (“Havana Correspondence: Special” 2)

Finally, several publications announced in their pages the death of the acclaimed writer. The news of Gómez de Avellaneda’s recent passing appeared on March 22, 1873, in *The New York Times*, which mentioned the plaque that would be installed next to her family house to honor her memory: “It is intended to place a marble slab in the wall of the house at Puerto Príncipe, where Mrs. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, the celebrated Cuban poetess and authoress, who has just died in Spain, was born” (“Obituary” 2). Moreover, *Le Meschacébe*, a Louisiana periodical published in French, on March 15, 1873, confirmed the death of the celebrated writer: “Son récemment décédés: . . . En Espagne, la femme-poète espagnole Gertrudis-Gomes de Avellaneda, 57 ans;” (“Some recent deaths . . . in Spain, the Spanish female poet Gertrudis-Gomes [sic] de Avellaneda, 57 years;”) (“Bulletin de la Semaine” 2).

The American Press also carried miscellaneous news about Gómez de Avellaneda related to lectures, events organized by institutions like the Conservatory of Music, or local news from her birthplace. On May 22, 1900, the *New York Tribune* gave notice to the public of a meeting of the group Sorosis at the Waldorf-Astoria, where a lecture on Cuban literature was given in front of a large audience. Sorosis was the first professional women’s club in the United States, established in New York City in 1868 with the objective of promoting the educational and social activities of women, while bringing together representative female figures in art, literature, science, and other pursuits. The invited speaker focused her attention on Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda as a prominent woman writer, who attained international recognition. The New York publication reported:

The last meeting of Sorosis for the season in the small ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria...The lecturer of the afternoon was Miss Parks, whose subject was “Cuban Literature.” ... “Gertrude de Avellaneda” said Miss Parks, “was the idol of Spain during the reign of the Queen Isabella, by whom she was appointed court reader. All the great men of France and Spain did homage to her intellect, and her career was a succession of triumphs.” (“Literature of Cuba” 7)

Furthermore, a newspaper from Pennsylvania on April 29, 1916, advertised a literary soiree organized by the Conservatory of Music and Y.W.C.A, where poems of celebrated Spanish authors would be declaimed, among them compositions by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. The headline “Velada Española. Monday Evening” announces:

The second Velada Española of the Spanish students of the Conservatory of Music and Y.W.C.A. taught by Mrs. Melvin Menges . . . the program follows: . . . Citaciones de célebres poetas españoles (Zorrilla, Moratin, Quevedo, Campoamor), de Gertrudes de Avellaneda por el Señor B. F. Larson . . . de J.M Heredia. (“Velada Española” 2)

Finally, the *Evening Star*, the daily afternoon newspaper published in Washington, D.C., and considered the newspaper of record for the nation’s capital, on April 30, 1902, published an article on the municipal improvements in Puerto Príncipe, Cuba, the birthplace of Gómez de Avellaneda. The publication addresses the progress made in public improvements in the writer’s hometown:

The streets and plazas of Puerto Principe proper, while they reproduce old Spain, are now intensely Cuban, for they are called “Martí,” “Maceo,” “General Gomez,” and so on. An evidence that American friendship is not forgotten is in the pretty little plaza named after Charles A. Dana. There is also the street “Gertrude Avellaneda,” named after the Cuban poetess, who was born and reared in Puerto Principe. This is one of the thoroughfares whose name was not changed, for it was given during the Spanish regime. (“A Few Municipal Improvements” 10)

In addition, the U.S. press often makes reference to Gómez de Avellaneda’s most popular works, such as her masterpiece *Baltasar*, which, as stated by Mary Cruz, was translated into French, Italian, and English (Romero 424). The drama was published in Madrid and Bogotá in 1858, and a New York version appeared in 1908 with an introduction, notes and vocabulary by Carlos Bransby. The New York annotated edition of the tragedy became “one of the early Hispanist versions for the Hispanophiles of the time . . . making this Biblical four-act verse drama an important title for the American Book Company” (Cortina 42). On March 11, 1909, *The Washington Herald* informed the public of a lecture given at the Unity Club Literary Society on *Baltasar*, the biblical tragedy by Gómez de Avellaneda:

An entertaining literary and musical programme was given by the Unity Club Literary Society last night at its regular biweekly meeting in W. C. T. U. parlors, 522 Sixth street northwest. Under the title, “A remarkable theatrical event in Havana,” Prof. Frederick M. Noa gave an instructive talk on a play entitled “Belshazzar,” written by Gertrude Gomez de Avellaneda, of Cuba. (“Entertaining Literary and Musical Programme” 4)

The *New York Herald* informed its readers on May 9, 1858, of the assas-

sination attempt perpetrated against the writers's husband, Colonel Domingo Verdugo, only five days after the opening of *Baltasar* ("Assassination of Deputy Verdugo" 2C). The periodical refers to the immediate triumph of the biblical play, which was staged on April 9, 1858, at the Teatro de Novedades in Madrid. The tragedy had an unprecedented run of almost fifty consecutive performances with a sumptuous stage production combining the best in costume, music, and spectacle. The drama received newspaper reviews that consistently offered high praise for the author and her masterpiece. However, Gómez de Avellaneda's husband's unfortunate incident brought grief to her theater success. Colonel Verdugo's stabbing was not only reported in the Spanish and the Cuban periodicals, but also in the American press as seen in this passage under the heading "Assassination of the Deputy Verdugo" that appeared at *The New York Herald*. The article not only informs its readers of the incident in which he was wounded, but emphasizes the occurrence of the event amidst the triumph of the biblical play, emphasizing the author's success:

...well known Spanish authoress Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, of Cuba, whose last and most applauded composition *Baltasar*; a drama . . . for the dedication of which to the young Prince of Asturias and the Queen had just sent her the present of a bracelet of diamonds . . . ovations . . . her success . . . ("Assassination of Deputy Verdugo" 2C)

The stabbing attack on the street against Colonel Verdugo took place on April 14, 1858, in broad daylight. Gómez de Avellaneda's husband was so seriously wounded that only after a convalescence of two months was he able to recover. However, despite this brief recovery, Verdugo's health continued to decline rapidly, and the Colonel finally died on October 28, 1863, in Pinar del Río during the couple's stay in Cuba.

The periodical publications mention the release of Carlos Bransby's annotated edition of the biblical play, meant for students of the Spanish language and Hispanophiles alike. A daily paper in Nebraska advertised the new edition on November 4, 1908:

The school books received recently from the press of the American Book company include (. . .) "Baltasar," a Biblical drama in four acts and in verse by Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda edited with introduction, notes and vocabulary by Carlos Bransby. ("Books and Magazines" 9)

While the *San Francisco Call* also advertises the book's release in its pages on September 20, 1908:

The American book company has published *Baltasar*, a biblical drama

in four acts and in verse, by Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, edited with introduction, notes and vocabulary by Carlos Bransby, Litt. D., of the University of California. This edition of “Baltasar” had been prepared under the conviction that the play is one of great literary merit and at the same time eminently adapted to the needs of students of Spanish. While it is written in poetry that not infrequently reaches the sublime its language is simple and natural and therefore easy to understand. The author’s work is well known in all Spanish countries and therefore deserves special notice here. (“New Books Briefly Noted” 7)

Moreover, The *Deseret Evening News* (Great Salt Lake City, Utah), the first newspaper published in Utah, announced the release of the English edition of *Baltasar* in New York in 1908. The daily paper on September 5, 1908, states that the reader must: “appreciate the historic setting of the play and to understand how far it conforms to the Bible record” (“Baltasar” 21).

In addition, the turning of the biblical play into an opera did not pass without notice in the American press. On July 2, 1939, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* informed its readers that the opera *Baltasar*, composed by Gaspar Villate (1851–1891) and based on Gómez de Avellaneda’s religious drama, had recently premiered in Havana. The premiere of the opera in 1885 was at the Real Theater in Madrid. The newspaper made known to its public that: “Baltasar, an opera by Gaspar Villate, a Cuban, was given for the first time in Havana not long ago. It was first heard in Madrid in 1895. The Italian libretto is by Carlo d’Ormeville and is based on a tragedy by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Cuban poetess” (“Opera Baltasar” 3).

On the other hand, the Spanish-language daily newspapers in the United States also gave ample coverage to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Full articles devoted to the writer appeared in several Hispanic periodicals in the United States, such as *El Diario la Prensa*, the oldest Spanish-language daily newspaper in New York City (founded in 1913); *La Prensa*, a daily newspaper published in San Antonio Texas from 1913 to 1963; and *Diario de Las Nove-dades*, a daily periodical from New York.¹⁰

Among the articles about the author published in *El Diario la Prensa* (New York) are: “Hispanoamericanos ilustres: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” (Distinguished Hispanic Americans: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda) and “Eco de las Aulas, Figuras de la Intelectualidad Hispano-Americana: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” (“The Classroom’s Eco, Figures of Hispanic-American Intellectualism: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda”). In another instance, *La Prensa* (San Antonio, Texas) published several articles on the writer, among them: “Mujeres célebres: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda o la exuberancia” (Celebrated Women: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda or the Exuberance) by Cristóbal de Castro, “Glorias olvidadas: Gertrudis Gómez

de Avellaneda” (Forgotten Glories: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda); “La Avellaneda” by Antonio Martínez Bello, “Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” by Paulina González, and “Historia de un amor: su recuerdo vivió siempre en la mente de Doña Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” (“A Story of Love: His Memory Lived Always on the Mind of Ms. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda”) by Gerardo del Valle.

The article “Hispanoamericanos ilustres: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,” which appeared in New York in *La Prensa* on May 12, 1923, asserts that the writer was the greatest female poet of the nineteenth-century and of all times (“La más grande poeta de su siglo y de todas las épocas” [The greatest female poet of her century and of all times]). The newspaper concludes that: “No sólo descuella la camagüeyana Tula entre todas las mujeres de Cuba y de su siglo, sino entre todas las que en todo tiempo han cultivado con éxito la literatura castellana. Es el más brillante ingenio que su sexo ha producido” (4) (The Camaguayan Tula not only stands out among the women in Cuba and of her century, but among all those that throughout time have cultivated success in Spanish-language literature. She is the most brilliant ingénue that her sex has ever produced). Furthermore, the piece offers quotes from renowned Spanish authors, and literary critics like Manuel Bretón de los Herreros and Nicasio Gallego, to prove the claim that Gómez de Avellaneda is the greatest woman writer in Hispanic Literature (4). The article transcribes the following lines written by Nicomedes Pastor Díaz about the author: “Fue uno de los más ilustres poetas de su nación y de su siglo; fue la más grande entre las poetisas de todos los tiempos” (4) (She was one of the most illustrious poets of her nation and her century; she was the greatest among the female poets of all times).

On September 7, 1927, another article devoted to the author appeared in *La Prensa* (New York), “Eco de las aulas: Figuras de la intelectualidad hispanoamericana: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” (The Classroom’s Eco, Figures of Hispanic-American Intellectualism: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda). The newspaper piece portrays Gómez de Avellaneda as a strong poet rather than a poetess (poetisa), whose talent consists of combining a vigorous and powerful style with the expression of noble and elevated thoughts. The label of poetess is not applied to her, rather she is described as a dynamic writer renowned for her unusual virtuosity as a master of both form and content: “enérgico estilo, por el varonil empuje de sus versos, flúidos y armoniosos tanto como por la belleza de los pensamientos . . . se ha colocado en el templo de los inmortales y en el más alto puesto de la literatura de su siglo” (4) (energetic style, for the virile force of her verses, fluid and harmonious as much for their beauty as their ideas . . . she has been placed in the temple of the immortals, on the highest pedestal of the literature of her century).

The piece acknowledges the literary immortality attained by this female figure of Hispanic Letters, but also reminds the public that she was considered

one of the greatest authors of her time. The newspaper article depicts the author as a child prodigy, whose poetic genius was revealed at the early age of six when Gómez de Avellaneda began writing poems after her father's sudden death. In keeping with this tone, it also references the obstacles that she had to overcome to assert her artistic talent as a female writer in the Nineteenth Century.

The article states that Gómez de Avellaneda's literary fame as one of the foremost writers of her century was achieved not only as a poet laureate, but also as a successful novelist and playwright. Among the works of fiction it mentions are *Espatolino*, *Guatimozín*, *La baronesa de Joux*, and the novel *Dos mujeres*, which according to the French literary critic Villemain: "es de lo mejor que se ha escrito en español en ese género" (4) (is the best that has been written in Spanish in this genre).

With respect to her dramatic production, the newspaper observes that she was known as "la Melpomene moderna" (the "modern Melpomene") for her unique skill and exceptional talent as a playwright (4). The publication refers to Gómez de Avellaneda as the poet-dramatist, since her virtuosity in lyrical poetry is also exhibited in the plays written in verse form, such as two of her masterworks: *Alfonso Munio* (1844) and *Saúl* (1849). The article states that both dramas were successful stage productions, hailed as triumphs and receiving ovations from the audience. The author argues that in *Alfonso Munio*, poetry recovers the lost splendor of the classic tragedy with lyrical passages of delicate and majestic beauty, and praises the musical sonority of the verse passages in the bible drama *Saúl* (4).

Finally, the piece focuses on the astounding success of *Baltasar* (1858) in the theater, where the play reached more than fifty performances. The play's popularity was immediate, generating a lasting enthusiasm in the public that was unheard of for a biblical tragedy (4).

The newspaper article calls the work "drama-poema" ("a poetic drama") since it is written entirely in verse form; and argues that Gómez de Avellaneda created in her main character, Baltasar, the king of Babylonia, the most perfect biblical type in the history of Spanish Classical Theater (4). According to the article, the vain and egotistical tyrant is masterfully portrayed as a weary and cynical ruler, tired of the vanities of the world and overwhelmed by a tedium and a total lack of will.

The newspaper observes that with *Baltasar*, perhaps her most successful play, the author attained the highest literary glory as the American Sappho: "La gloria de la Safo americana llegó su cima con el gigantesco drama *Baltasar*" (4) (The glory of the American Sappho arrived at her peak with the gigantesque drama *Baltasar*). The article concludes that the fame achieved by Gómez de Avellaneda as the great woman poet, who brought lyric poetry, drama, and tragedy to the pinnacle of literature, will be everlasting: "Su nombre gigante se transmitirá a siglos y siglos como la mujer que a gran altura elevó

la poesía lírica, la dramática y la trágica” (4) (Her gigantic name will transmit itself through the centuries as the woman that elevated lyric poetry, drama, and tragedy to great heights).

The article “Mujeres célebres: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda o la exuberancia” (Celebrated Women: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda or the Exuberance”) by Cristóbal de Castro published in *La Prensa* (San Antonio) on July 29, 1926, draws a parallel between George Sand and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in terms of their intellectual capacity and passionate love affairs; and portrays both writers as determined women of action. However, Cristóbal de Castro explains that in contrast with her French contemporary, Gómez de Avellaneda moderated the depth and intensity of her life and art with an exemplary conduct. Her character and disposition is described by the author as a rare balance between feeling and thought that finds its utmost expression in a compassionate nature guided by an innate sense of justice. According to Cristóbal de Castro’s assessment, the complementarity of feeling and thought, the union between heart and intellect, is what distinguishes Gómez de Avellaneda’s temperament:

esforzada y militante, como “Jorge Sand,” cuyos bríos intelectivos y amatorios iguala, cuando no supera, aunque moderándolos por una conducta ejemplar. Su corazón es un motor de caridad. Su cerebro un tribunal de justicia. Siente y piensa en función de los esclavos, como con su novela “El Mulato Sab,” o en función de las mujeres ultrajadas, como con su drama “Leoncia,” o de los pueblos oprimidos, como con su tragedia “Catilina.” Es la redentora lírica. (7)

(zealous and militant, like George Sand, whose intellectual energies and loves match, when they don’t exceed, although being moderated by exemplary conduct. Her heart is a motor for charity. Her mind a tribunal of justice. She feels and thinks in service of the slaves, like in her novel, *Sab*, or in service of insulted women, like in her drama “Leoncia,” or the oppressed people, as in her tragedy “Catilina.” She’s a redemptive poet.)

The author of the article calls Gómez de Avellaneda a redemptive poet (redentora lírica), alluding to the mystery of poetry as an act of revelation and redemption of the human soul. Through her poetry, she unveils the unseen and the hidden in the spiritual and earthly domains in all its many and diverse manifestations: the joys, sufferings, and struggles of the human heart, and the soul’s exile and separation from its divine source, as well as its longing to return to its origin. In her mission as a poet redeemer, Gómez de Avellaneda serves as an intermediary between heaven and earth, between the sacred, that is the divine and the holy, and the profane, the world with its temporal

dimension. The redemptive act of poetry is to reconstitute the human to its divine source as an instant of poetic revelation, when the union of heaven and earth is perceived as a glimpse of eternity.

In his portrayal of Gómez de Avellaneda, the author of the article underscores the social aspect of her writings in particular with respect to her abolitionist novel *Sab* (1841). William Luis explains that the author's "knowledge of the slavery system in Cuba, her compassion, and a liberal political climate under Regent María Cristina in Spain allowed her to . . . publish her novel" (Luis 5). Cristóbal de Castro observes that the social aspect of her literary works is also evident in her plays, where she denounces the subjection of women in society and the people's political oppression.

Cristóbal de Castro concludes that the social aspect of Gómez de Avellaneda's literary production derives from a compassionate nature, showing a genuine sympathy for the suffering of others. He asserts that the writer is able to identify herself so closely with the slaves to the point where she feels and thinks like them: "Siente y piensa en función de los esclavos, como con su novela 'El Mulato Sab'" (7) (Feels and thinks in service of the slaves, like in her novel *Sab*). By taking the place of the victims of the slavery system, through a genuine understanding and identification with their suffering, Gómez de Avellaneda was able to communicate their plight to the readers.

In her anti-slavery narrative, Gómez de Avellaneda identifies herself with her protagonist, the mulatto Sab, who is portrayed as a tragic figure in order to create a reader's response to the slave's suffering as a human being not as a master's personal property. In her abolitionist novel, the audience is exposed to the plight of the main character, and to his feelings and thoughts as a victim of the slavery system. In the following lines, Cristóbal de Castro brings to our attention the compassionate disposition of the author of *Sab*: "Manos que . . . aún tenían el arte de acariciar y redimir consolando al triste y rompiendo el grillete de los esclavos." (7) (Hands that . . . still possessed the art to caress and redeem, consoling the sadness and breaking the shackles of the slaves).

In the newspaper article published in *La Prensa*, the author praises Gómez de Avellaneda's vitality as a prolific and versatile writer of journalistic pieces, short stories, novels, odes, and dramas. He goes on to conclude that her writings "fluyen con una exuberancia pasmosa" (flow with astonishing exuberance); and that as a prolific writer abounding in vitality her literary productivity did not decline during her mature age, since "en plena madurez, continuo su producción con la misma espléndida exuberancia que en su juventud" (7) (at full maturity continued her production with the same splendid exuberance as in her youth).

In the article "Glorias olvidadas" (Forgotten Glories) that also appeared in *La Prensa* (San Antonio, Texas) on March 22, 1930, J. Muñoz San Román states that such a relevant and prominent writer as Gómez de Avellaneda, the

greatest nineteenth-century female poet in Hispanic literature, cannot fall into oblivion: “no puede quedar en olvido una figura tan excelsa y tan relevante como la de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, la más insigne poetisa en habla castellana de su tiempo” (7) (A figure as excellent and relevant as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, the most famous Spanish-speaking poet of her time).

The author proposes the organization of an event at the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929 to pay tribute to Gómez de Avellaneda, an outstanding figure that had contributed immensely with her poetry, novels, and dramas to the glory of Hispanic letters (7). San Román declares that she deserves an “acto ostentoso a sus altos méritos” (ostentatious ceremony for her high merits) at the Expo, a world’s fair held in Seville, Spain from May 9, 1929, until June 21 1930, focused on the Latin American countries. At the fair, each one of the twenty-three countries participating built its own pavilion in order to publicly display its major cultural accomplishments.

The article also gives special attention to Gómez de Avellaneda’s religious poetry and reproduces a passage by Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo concerning the evolution of her sacred compositions. The critic explains that the religious poems of her youth were based on the scriptures of the Bible, and that these texts are filled with splendid imagery and elevated theological concepts exposed with unusual refinement and rigor. The sacred compositions of her mature years exhibit an inclination toward mysticism, or are mystic poems, since Gómez de Avellaneda’s strong faith and religious fervor developed into a more contemplative and inner experience. In the words of Menéndez Pelayo:

Sección riquísima en las poesías de la Avellaneda constituyen sus versos religiosos; de imitación bíblica los de su juventud, en los cuales no sólo hay extraordinaria pompa de imágenes y grandilocuencia y valentía, sino elevadísimos conceptos teológicos expuestos con rara precisión; místicos o afines al misticismo los de su vejez, en que su fe siempre ardiente y robusta fue tomando carácter más íntimo y abismándose cada vez más en el terreno de la contemplación. (7)

(Her religious verses constitute a rich section of the poetry of Gómez de Avellaneda; the Biblical imitation of the ones from her youth, in which there is not only extraordinary splendor of images and grandiloquence and bravery, but elevated theological concepts explained with rare precision; the mystic or those in tune with mysticism from her older years, in which her faith, always burning and robust, took on a more intimate carácter and plunged with each one further into the terrain of contemplation.)

Finally, the author of the newspaper piece observes that Gómez de Avellaneda possessed an “inmenso corazón” (7) (immense heart) and was endowed

with a “gigantesca inteligencia” (7) (exceptional intellectual capacity).

The third article devoted to Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in *La Prensa* (San Antonio), by Paulina González, was published on October 28, 1851. The essay examines the author’s disappointing love relationships, and claims that Gómez de Avellaneda possessed an “alma profundamente cristiana” (31) (pious Christian soul). After the writer ended her relationship with Cepeda, she moved to Cádiz where she met the poet Gabriel Garcia Tassara. In 1844, she had a daughter out of wedlock with him. He abandoned her after the baby was born, refusing to legally recognize their daughter. The baby died several months later, leaving Gómez de Avellaneda heartbroken at the height of her career. González devotes a section of the article, which appeared in *La Prensa* (San Antonio), to an analysis of the poem “A él” (“No existen lazos ya. Todo está roto” [No ties remain now. Everything is broken]) as a composition inspired by the failed love relationships.

Finally, Gerardo del Valle in his article “Historia de un amor” (A Love Story), which also appears in *La Prensa* (San Antonio) on October 26, 1952, argues that the private life of Gómez de Avellaneda as a single, married, and widowed woman has always been misrepresented. During the author’s lifetime, the account of her intimate life was often distorted by literary figures, and by members of the nobility, the military, and the theater. The newspaper piece makes a brief reference to her two deceased husbands, both well-known political figures: the first, Don Pedro Sabater, Army Major and governor of Madrid, and the second, Colonel Domingo Verdugo, an influential advisor to the King, and the person who accompanied the writer on her return trip to Cuba.

The author of the essay pays particular attention to her long-lasting love affair with Don Ignacio Cepeda y Alcalde, providing details on how the two lovers met in Seville, while he was a law student at the university. Del Valle offers a biographical background on Cepeda’s intellectual formation, pointing to the fact that his European travels contributed to the expansion and consolidation of his encyclopedic knowledge of culture (3a). He concludes that behind the powerful mutual attraction of the lovers that drew them to each other, the driving force of their relationship was the precocity of their remarkable intellects (3a). In addition, Del Valle states that the unknown name of the secret lover to whom Gómez de Avellaneda addressed her poem “A él,” was finally revealed through her private correspondence published in 1907 in Huelva.

The newspaper article does not hesitate to declare Gómez de Avellaneda “la más grande lírica del idioma castellano” (3a) (the greatest female lyrical poet of the Spanish language). Such assessment agrees with Juan Valera’s commentary on her literary production, which states that Gómez de Avellaneda’s poetry is of undisputed excellence, and makes clear that she was eminently successful as both a lyrical poet and a dramatist. He concludes that as a poet, the author has no female rival in world literature, unless we were to

turn back to Sappho and Corinna, or perhaps to the Italian Renaissance figure Vittoria Colonna. However, his preference remains with the Cuban writer over the Italian.

In the article, Gerardo Del Valle describes the precocity of Gómez de Avellaneda's literary genius: at the early age of six, Gómez de Avellaneda composed elegies in honor of her father's memory, at seven she was already writing plays—both comedies and tragedies—that the child staged with her friends; and at eight she memorized entire passages from the Spanish Golden Age authors. In addition, the child prodigy impressed her town of Puerto Príncipe with the composition of the short story: “El Gigante de las Cien Cabezas” (3a) (The 100-headed Giant). In the following lines, Del Valle offers a brief explanation of the early development of her female genius:

quien a los seis años compuso perfectas y sentidas elegías a la memoria de su padre; a los siete escribió dramas y comedias, haciéndolas representar por sus condiscípulas, improvisando tabladros teatrales; asombró a la culta sociedad camagueyana con un bien escrito cuento titulado el Gigante de las Cien Cabezas, . . . a los ocho sabía de memoria modelos de los mejores clásicos españoles. (3a)

(who at six years old composed perfect and heartfelt elegies in memory of her father; at seven wrote dramas and comedies, having her fellow classmates act them out, improvising theatrical scenes; stunned the cultured Camagueyan society with the well written story titled “The 100-Headed Giant,” . . . who at eight knew by memory versions of the best of the Spanish Classics.)

The newspaper piece underscores how Gómez de Avellaneda cultivated her acute and penetrating intellect with the knowledge of several disciplines: “inteligencia entrenada y comprensiva de todas las disciplinas” (3a) (trained and comprehensive intelligence in all of the disciplines). Gerardo Del Valle explains that her broad interdisciplinary knowledge was complemented with the talent of a literary genius, while her physical beauty was accompanied by a deep spirituality. He describes this unusual combination of personality attributes in a woman author: “poder espiritual, el talento ilimitado y sensibilidad ultraterrenal, llevando un acervo de conocimientos, no sólo de literatura, sino históricos, sociales, filosóficos, científicos, humanos” (3a) (spiritual power, unlimited talent and extra-earthly sensibility, possessing an inheritance of knowledge, not only of literature, but historic, social, philosophic, scientific, human). Finally, Gerardo del Valle makes reference to the author's seclusion for several months at La Solitude, a convent in Bordeaux, where Blessed Pierre Bienvenu Noailles became the spiritual director of Gómez de Avellaneda.

In addition, it is common to find poems by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in the pages of the Spanish-language newspapers in the United States. The author's two famous sonnets, "Al partir" and "A Washington" appeared in *La Verdad* on March 20, 1852. These compositions were among her most popular poems in the Hispanic periodicals of the United States, appearing more frequently in the American press than other poetic texts by Gómez de Avellaneda.

The composition "Plegaria" was published on October 25, 1882, in the Los Angeles's newspaper *El Demócrata* (4); and two other religious poems titled "Al nombre de Jesús" and "A Dios" appeared on April 2, 1890 in the Spanish-language weekly *El fronterizo* from Tucson, Arizona. On April 10, 1931, "El tiempo y el genio" was published in the bilingual Texas paper, *El Defensor*. Furthermore, the following are some of the writer's compositions that were made available to *La Prensa's* readership, a well-known Spanish-language periodical from San Antonio, Texas: "Amor y orgullo" and "El tiempo y el genio" appeared on August 28, 1938 (4); "A Washington" on February 22, 1941 (3); "Al partir" on September 8, 1941 (4); "El favonio y la rosa" and "Al pendón castellano" both published on March 15, 1943 (7); "Soneto" on April 9, 1948 (4); and "A Washington" was reprinted again on November 25, 1952 (2).

The American public became familiar with the poetry of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda through the publication of her compositions in the periodical press. However, there were also advertisements in the newspapers promoting anthologies of her poems, such as a list of recently received books that appeared on June 1, 1936, in *Nueva Democracia*. This New York monthly publication announced the release of a book that contained a selection of her poetic compositions, published in Havana in 1936 ("Libros recibidos" 30).

The love letters of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda also became known to the American public through the press. In *La Prensa*, the New York daily newspaper, on December 25, 1928, an article appeared under the headline "21 Cartas íntimas de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda" ("21 of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's Intimate Letters"), informing its readers of the edition of *Diario de amor*, a compilation of twenty-one of Gómez de Avellaneda's love letters gathered with a prologue by the Argentinian writer Alberto Ghirardo. Several years later, another New York periodical, *Americana*, on June 1, 1948, published a selection of Gómez de Avellaneda's love letters from the *Diario de amor* with an introduction by Ghirardo (Ghirardo 64–68).

In other instances, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's figure and works were appropriated by the U.S. press to promote the Cuban freedom cause against Spanish colonial rule. For example, the publication of the poems "Al partir" and "A Washington" in the revolutionary newspaper *La Verdad* in 1852, and the letter to General Concha that appeared in the *Charleston Courier* in 1854, both situate the author within the discourse of American Republicanism, as it

relates to the struggle for the island independence. The *Boston Daily Advertiser's* report on Fidel de Pierra's homage—Pierra was a political activist for the PRC (Partido Revolucionario Cubano)—to the author is another example of the appropriation of Gómez de Avellaneda's position as a prominent woman writer and public intellectual to help the Cuban political struggle to end colonial rule. Moreover, other North American newspapers associated Gómez de Avellaneda with abolitionist discourse as she was regarded the pioneer of the anti-slavery novel in the Americas. For example, the editor of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, Mr. Edward Rosewater, who was himself an abolitionist, published in his periodical a biographical sketch on Gómez de Avellaneda depicting her as an “ardent sympathizer” (“Cuba's Poet” 12) of the struggle for Cuba's freedom.

The press coverage of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in the United States proves that the writer and her works were widely known to an American readership, whether English- or Spanish-speaking. In the American press, she was considered one of the major authors of Hispanic literature. The U.S. newspapers increased public awareness among their readers of Gómez de Avellaneda's influential role as a literary and public figure engaged with the most salient issues of her times. What's more, the U.S. press's coverage of the author, along with the relationships the author maintained with the figures explored in this essay, both in the United States and abroad, her practical behind-the-scenes work to end slavery in Cuba (working with her husband, Colonel Domingo Verdugo), and the dissemination via the American press of *Sab* after its ban on the island, all demonstrate that Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda must be considered by scholars as a transnational figure if her work is to be fully appreciated for its truly substantial contributions.

Notes

1. See María C. Albin, “Ante el Niágara: Heredia, Sagra, Gómez de Avellaneda y el proyecto modernizador;” and Albin, *Género, poesía y esfera pública*.
2. Villaverde would again serve as editor of the publication later that year, for on July 15 of 1852, Tolón resigned as the editor of the Spanish section of the paper (*La Verdad*, July 20, 1852), and Villaverde's name appeared as his replacement from July 30, 1852 until October 20, 1852 (*La Verdad*, July 30, 1852).
3. The relationship between the two authors revealed by this choice has previously been noted by José Augusto Escoto: “Cuando Allo en las discusiones políticas que sostuvo en los Estados Unidos por medio de la prensa se ocultó con el pseudónimo de *El Peregrino* ¿No fué este nombre reminiscencias de aquella *Peregrina* que en España despertó admiración con sus primeros cantos?” (199) (When Allo hid himself by us-

- ing the pseudonym *El Peregrino* during political discussion he had in the U.S. press, wasn't that name reminiscent of that *Peregrina* that in Spain had provoked so much admiration in her first verses?).
4. According to Kanellos: "One of the more interesting revolutionary newspapers was *El Mulato* (*The Mulato*, 1854-?), which was published in New York before the U.S. Civil War and had as its mission uniting the Cuban revolutionary movement with the movement to abolish slavery. Founded by Carlos de Colins, Lorenzo Allo and Juan Clemente Zenea (12).
 5. In the prologue to his anti-slavery novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), Villaverde declares that he was on the editorial board of the periodical from 1842 to 1848: "De vuelta en la capital el año de 1842, sin abandonar el ejercicio del magisterio, entré a formar parte de la redacción del *Faro Industrial*, al que consagré todos los trabajos históricos y novelescos que siguieron casi sin interrupción hasta mediados del 1848" (3) (Back in the capital in the year of 1842, without abandoning the office of the magistrate, I began to form part of the editorial team of the *Faro Industrial*, to which I consecrated all of the historical and novelesque works that followed almost without interruption until the middle of 1848). The publication was under the direction of Villaverde, who acted as the main editor, and Antonio Bachiller y Morales until 1848; and ended in 1851 when it was suppressed by the colonial government. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was a frequent collaborator in *El Faro Industrial de la Habana* under Villaverde's direction.
 6. "Entre los redactores de *La Verdad* figuraron El Lugareño, Miguel Teurbe Tolón, Cirilo Villaverde, Lorenzo de Allo, Porfirio Valiente y Domingo Goicuría" (Marrero 172) (Among the editors of *La Verdad* were El Lugareño, Miguel Teurbe Tolón, Cirilo Villaverde, Lorenzo de Allo, Porfirio Valiente and Domingo Goicuría).
 7. Although steps had already been taken by the Spanish authorities on July 29th, the Royal Censor (el Censor Regio de Imprenta), Licenciado Hilario de Cisneros Saco, pronounced the decree to withdraw Gómez de Avellaneda's novel from circulation on the first of September, after declaring *Sab* objectionable (Cruz 49). He claimed that the work of fiction was subversive and contrary to the existing slave system in the island (Kelly, "La Avellaneda's *Sab*," 306-07). However, as Portuondo indicates, clandestine copies of Gómez de Avellaneda's anti-slavery novel were made available to readers on the island to counter its prohibition (Portuondo 212).
 8. The only early precedent was the character of an African slave that appeared in the seventeenth-century epic poem *Espejo de Paciencia* by Silvestre de Balboa. See Marrero-Fente, *Epic, Empire and Community in the Atlantic World*.
 9. Gómez de Avellaneda's husband was reassigned as lieutenant governor to three different locations during a period of four years (Campuzano 201). Shortly after arriving in Cuba with his wife on November 24, 1859, Verdugo was named lieutenant governor of Cienfuegos. His second assignment was in Cárdenas, where he held the position from August 1860 to September 1863. Finally, he was transferred to Pinar del Río to assume the post of lieutenant governor, but he suddenly fell ill and died there on October 28, 1863, at the age of forty-six.

10. San Antonio's *La Prensa* and New York's *La Prensa* were large dailies serving a diverse readership of exiles, immigrants and U.S. minority citizens. *La Prensa* was founded in New York City by José Campubrí in 1913 "to serve the community of mostly Spanish and Cuban immigrants in and around Manhattan's 14th Street" (Kanellos 28). It became the nation's longest-running Spanish-language daily newspaper, and in 1962 *La Prensa* merged with *El Diario de Nueva York* (Kanellos 51). Ignacio E. Lozano was the founder and operator of the two most powerful and well distributed daily newspapers: San Antonio's *La Prensa*, founded in 1913, and Los Angeles' *La Opinión*, founded in 1926. He successfully published two of the longest-running Spanish-language daily papers with a vast distribution system that included newsstand sales, home delivery and mail (Kanellos 36–37). According to Kanellos: "In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, New York's *Las Novedades* served the interests of all Spanish-speaking groups, including the Spanish, Cubans and Puerto Ricans—even while Cuba and Puerto Rico were waging wars of independence from Spain" (6).

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