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Gender and the Politics of Literature: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda

María C. Albin, Megan Corbin, and Raúl Marrero-Fente

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◆ Introduction

Gertrudis the Great: First Abolitionist and Feminist in the Americas and Spain

María C. Albin, Megan Corbin, and Raúl Marrero-Fente

To the Editor of *The Sun*—Sir: I was asked
the other day who was the greatest Amer-
ican poetess, and I said there isn't one.
And for that matter there isn'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 Sun (New York)
Saturday, January 5, 1899, 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 Gómez
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 today that
Mr. M. N. of Boston makes inquiry of the
above name.
D. Sardine
New York, Jan. 5
The Sun (New York)
January 7, 1899, 6

The Cuban-Spanish writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Puerto Príncipe, Cuba, 1814–Madrid, 1873) was a remarkable woman ahead of her time: a pioneer and versatile author who cultivated all the literary genres with great mastery and success. At the same time, she was also a public figure who used her writings to address the main issues of her century, in particular the emancipation of women, the abolition of slavery, secularization, and the role of religion in society.¹ Foremost female writer of the nineteenth century and one of the greatest poets and playwrights of all time, she was a pioneer of the abolitionist novel in the Americas with her work *Sab*, the first anti-slavery novel, published eleven years before Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). She was a trailblazer of Modern Hispanic Feminism, as seen in her "Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno" (1845), the first major manifesto of women's emancipation in the Americas and Spain. Additionally, her work *Guatimozín* (1845–1846) was the precursor to the *indigenista* (Indianist) novel in Hispanic literature.²

Gómez de Avellaneda is perhaps the only woman writer in Hispanic literature who cultivated all literary genres with great success, producing masterpieces in almost every one of them.³ As an extraordinary writer, she was at the forefront of the revision and renewal of literary tradition; and as an innovator, she anticipated other literary currents with her writings. With respect to drama and poetry, she revived and transformed biblical plays, and was the precursor of the *Modernismo* literary movement.

The vast scope of her subject matter and the sheer volume of her literary production include two volumes of poetry, the first published in 1841 containing fifty-four compositions, and the second an anthology comprising 129 poems. As a famous playwright, she is the author of twenty dramatic works, among them tragedies, comedies, and biblical plays. In turn, this extensive and varied output can be divided into sixteen full-length dramas, of which twelve were written in verse form, three short plays, and one full-length translation from French (Harter 79). The majority of these plays were staged and achieved unprecedented success and popularity with audiences, making Gómez de Avellaneda the only woman to gain celebrity as a playwright in Hispanic Romanticism, as well as one of the few recognized female dramatists in nineteenth-century Western Literature.

Gómez de Avellaneda is also the author of six novels, two of which (*Sab* and *Guatimozín*) are considered pioneer works of fiction. Among her shorter works of fiction there are nine legends/folk tales, numerous press articles, private letters, biographies of famous female figures, autobiographies, and travel memoirs. Her works have been translated into many languages, including Russian, Czech, Italian, French, Lithuanian, and English. Moreover, the extraordinary figure and life of Gómez de Avellaneda has inspired several works of fiction. Among them, four novels: *Niña Tula* (1998) and *Tula* (2001)

by Mary Cruz, *La hija de Cuba* (2006) by María Elena Cruz Varela,⁴ and the recent novel *The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist* by Margarita Engle (2013). She was also portrayed as a fictional character in the novel *El color del verano* (1990) by Reinaldo Arenas. Finally, as a cultural icon, Gómez de Avellaneda's image has appeared on postage stamps, medals, and famous paintings, such as the portrait by Federico Madrazo, held in the Museum Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid.

The lasting impact of Gómez de Avellaneda's works extends beyond the field of literature to other arts, such as music, opera, and film. Two of her literary works became operas: the drama *Baltasar* and the novel *Guatimozín*, while her anti-slavery novel *Sab* was adapted to the big screen in 2004.⁵ The opera *Baldassarre* (in four acts) by the composer Gaspar Villate was inspired by the above-mentioned biblical play by Gómez de Avellaneda. The libretto by Carlo d'Ormeville (1840–1924) was based on the author's religious drama, and the opera's first performance took place on February 28, 1885, at Madrid's Teatro Real. A second opera, *Guatemotzín*, was composed with music by Aniceto Ortega de Villar. Additionally, Gómez de Avellaneda's indianist novel was the source of inspiration for the librettist José Tomás de Cuéllar. The opera's opening night was on September 13, 1871, at the Gran Teatro Nacional de México and, according to Anna Agranoff Ochs, *Guatemotzín* was “considered the first Mexican opera to incorporate the country's indigenous history and music” (24).

Gómez de Avellaneda's significant role as a celebrated woman playwright and as an assiduous contributor to the press—both as an editor of female magazines and through her own journalistic articles—allowed the author to consolidate her position as an influential public figure. The prestige and admiration that she gained among theater audiences and critics brought Gómez de Avellaneda a high degree of visibility, making her works available to a wider public. The newspapers of the time described the ovations and laurels she received during the openings of her plays, while also noting the attendance of the Spanish royal family and the leading figures of the period (Harter 79). Moreover, with her writings (especially the journalistic articles), Gómez de Avellaneda actively participated in the public sphere where she was able to exert a decisive influence in shaping public opinion to bring about social change.

A reassessment and a more in-depth approach to Gómez de Avellaneda's work is essential if we are to grasp the full complexity of such a gifted, challenging, and versatile female writer, who even today has been often misunderstood by some scholars, including feminist critics. Many literary critics tend to trivialize or over-simplify both the socio-political dimension of her writings and her substantial contributions to feminist and social thought. For instance, Gómez de Avellaneda's pioneering anti-slavery stance has often been downplayed—and on certain occasions even totally dismissed—in favor of

reducing and limiting the social content of her writings to the question of the status of women, isolated from society's broader context. At the same time, her role as precursor and founder of modern Hispanic feminism has not been fully acknowledged by some scholars. As a woman of letters ahead of her time, her many outstanding contributions to global culture are still relevant for us today, yet remain to be explored.

Gómez de Avellaneda wrote within the literary tradition she inherited following its conventions and norms, but she simultaneously departed from them by revising and transforming her cultural inheritance to create something new. In other words, her writing was an act of inauguration: a creative process of constant revision and renewal of literary tradition. She was at the forefront of Western literature, reading and responding to her predecessors as an innovator. With respect to drama and poetry, she revived old forms (while experimenting with new trends, thus exploring all possibilities), transformed the sacred plays and was also the precursor of *Modernismo*. The content, form, themes, and style of her poetic compositions were both within the Romantic tradition and beyond Romanticism, anticipating later literary currents.

Gómez de Avellaneda also distinguished herself in the genre of essay with a series of articles on the status of women entitled "La mujer" (1860) (The Woman). The number of journal articles she wrote covering the most relevant aspects on the topic of woman is exhaustive, and remains unprecedented in Hispanic culture even today. Through her press collaborations and her role as the first woman editor and founder of female magazines in the Hispanic world, she reached a broader audience of readers, and was able to disseminate her progressive ideas concerning the emancipation of the female sex in the public sphere. The conditions for political communication contemporary to Gómez de Avellaneda changed as soon as the press opened up spaces for the free exchange of ideas and gave citizens the opportunity to voice their opinions (Osterhammel 29, 32). The press soon became a functioning public sphere and a political force (31). It became a "transformative impulse in every country, creating for the first time something like a public space, where citizens exchanged ideas and asserted the right to be kept informed" (29). With her journalistic writings addressing the condition of her sex in society, Gómez de Avellaneda took advantage of the new force of the press, placing herself at the center of the debate on the woman question.

Gómez de Avellaneda's press articles, written in defense of her sex, represent women as historical, political, and cultural agents. They constitute pioneer texts of women's rights in both the Americas and Spain, and position the author as the precursor and founder of feminism throughout the Hispanic world. Her journalistic articles should be analyzed as the founding texts of feminist thought in Hispanic culture because she used them to communicate a systematic and coherent Hispanic feminism, establishing the foundations

for current expressions of the movement. The solid arguments that appear in her press articles in favor of woman's emancipation are similar to the theories and basic postulates that feminist thinkers use nowadays. Therefore, Gómez de Avellaneda's essays on the female sex stand side by side with fundamental works by her North American contemporaries, as well as by British feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792); the first major feminist work in the United States, Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845); and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

Another "first" for Gómez de Avellaneda is observed in her use of the letter as a form of expression. She was the first woman author in Hispanic literature to fully develop and cultivate the art of letter writing as a literary genre. A large number of letters by the author have survived, such as the correspondence that she maintained with Cepeda for a period of fifteen years, and have been very influential in the development of this literary genre. Carmen Bravo-Villasante acknowledges the primary role she played as a prolific and accomplished writer of letters. She concludes that Gómez de Avellaneda is the first woman writer of letters in Spain, perhaps only after Santa Teresa de Avila, and calls her the Madame de Sevigné of the nineteenth century Hispanic world (Bravo-Villasante 12).

Gómez de Avellaneda was also the first woman to conquer the male-dominated theater of the nineteenth century, since no female figure had ever before achieved success as a dramatist. She became the first and best-known Romantic woman dramatist in Spain and the most famous of all female dramatists of the nineteenth century (Gies 193, 203). She was the first female playwright to achieve unprecedented and consistent success with the publication and stage productions of her plays. Her incursions onto the stage met with a popular reception of her plays (whether sacred dramas, comedies, or tragedies) by the theater-going public that often surpassed many of her male counterparts.

Gómez de Avellaneda denounces in her works all forms of oppression of the Other. Along with her critique of the subjection of women in nineteenth-century society, she is overtly critical toward the institution of slavery. Her social critique of injustice and subjugation appeared early in her literary career and was centered mainly on four representative figures: the slave, the Indian woman, the Indian, and the female heroines of her novels and plays.

The author's prose works dealing with society's underdogs appeared during the 1840s, with only a short time between their publication dates. The first was the pioneer anti-slavery novel *Sab*, written earlier but published in 1841, followed by *Dos mujeres* (1842–1843). In the coming years, Gómez de Avellaneda wrote two subversive journal articles on the question of the emancipation of women: "La dama de gran tono" (1843) and "Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno" (1845), a landmark document of woman's rights. In addition, the

indigenista and historical novel *Guatimozín*, appeared first in serial form in *El Heraldo de Madrid* in 1845 and was later published as a book in 1846.

In these works of prose fiction, Gómez de Avellaneda shows not only an awareness of gender issues, but also an early social consciousness regarding issues specific to America. In the two novels mentioned above, the author rewrites official history from the perspective of those oppressed and conquered, namely the slave and the Indian woman in *Sab* and the indigenous inhabitants of Mexico in *Guatimozín*. Mary Cruz argues that the author presents in her work a social critique against injustice: “Through herself, or through the mouth of her characters, she becomes the voice that protests, that defends denied rights, not only those of her sex, but she also involves oppressed men . . . in order to achieve a transcendental human dimension” (*Obra selecta* xxi). The critic acknowledges the role of Gómez de Avellaneda’s writings as social criticism with a concern for human rights at their center.

Overall, the articles in the present collection show why Gómez de Avellaneda and her work remain relevant today and will continue to have a great significance for the next generations of readers, students, and scholars. The editors and contributors hope that by our collective effort we can inspire the creation of a more extensive body of scholarship (in English, Spanish, and other languages) that focuses on this major literary figure. For example, the relationship between her work and the twenty-first century remains to be explored through the adoption of a transnational perspective that places her writings in a global context. Such broader theoretical approaches would make evident the contemporary relevance of Gómez de Avellaneda as a writer and public intellectual. As a pioneer of the abolitionist novel in the Americas and precursor and founder of modern feminist thought, the writings of Gómez de Avellaneda represent a substantial contribution to the ongoing debate of human rights in our global and changing world.

A Celebrated Poet “For All Time”

Gómez de Avellaneda is among the foremost Romantic writers of world literature and one of the leading women poets of all time. Acclaimed in life as the greatest poet of her sex, she has been deemed the author of two of the best sonnets “ever written in the Spanish language”: “Al partir” (1836) and “A Washington” (1841) (Bransby 12). In addition, the poem “Amor y orgullo” (1860) was selected by Menéndez Pelayo as one of the best lyric compositions of the Spanish Language (*Las cien mejores* 343).⁶ She was a remarkable lyric and civic poet, but she also wrote sacred poetry with mystic overtones, a precursor of Modernism in Hispanic literature. Among her masterpieces of

religious poetry is the ode “La Cruz,” regarded by the French critic Villemain as the best composition ever written about this topic.⁷

Gómez de Avellaneda’s literary career began in Madrid at the early age of twenty-six with her debut at Madrid’s Liceo, where José Zorrilla’s reading of her poetry in 1840 marked the entry of the precocious writer into the literary world of her time. From that moment, her acceptance by the most important writers of her day was unanimous. Among those writers were: el Duque de Frías, Don Juan Nicasio Gallego, Don Manuel Quintana, Espronceda, García Tassara, Roca de Togores, Pastor Díaz, Bretón, Hartzenbusch, among others (Cotarelo y Mori 69). In Madrid, she was in close contact with the major literary figures of her time, such as Quintana, Lista, Espronceda, Zorrilla, Pastor Díaz, Nicasio Gallego, and Juan Valera, among others. Highly praised by these famous authors, Gómez de Avellaneda was considered their creative equal; they refer to her as “the greatest woman poet of all Hispanic literature” (Harter 50). She was even considered to be superior to any of the female writers of the Golden Age as well as to her contemporaries.

As early as 1840, the gifted writer had become a celebrity acclaimed by the public and admired by her peers. A few months after her arrival in Madrid in 1841 at the age of twenty-seven, this young woman with exceptional talent published her first volume of poetry containing fifty-four compositions. A second volume consisting of 129 compositions of varying lengths appeared in 1850 and was reissued both in the first volume of the *Obras completas* in 1869 and in the centennial edition of 1914 (Harter 50). Both anthologies of poetry received many laudatory judgments by her contemporaries.

Gómez de Avellaneda achieved poetic excellence in both form (meter and rhyme) and content, as well as in the social, religious, and political messages of her poetry. She played a central role in the evolution of Hispanic poetry through her constant experimentation, innovation, and original contributions to the poetic tradition. She was always experimenting with new forms and content, as seen in her unique versatility and mastery at utilizing different styles in her compositions; her virtuosity and experimentation in the use of meter and rhyme; the rich imagery employed in her poems; the impeccable fusion of poetry and rhetoric as a central aspect of poetic language; and in the spiritual dimension and mysticism of her religious poetry. Her talent as a poet is evident not only in her undeniable mastery of Spanish versification and technically difficult verse forms, but also in the rhetorical dimension inherent to her poetic language. Any serious approach to her works must take into consideration both the rhetorical density of her poetry and its complex meanings.

In the poetry of Gómez de Avellaneda, we find a synthesis of the old and the new. Jonathan Culler reminds us “that poets themselves, reading and responding to predecessors, have created a lyric tradition that persists across historical periods and radical changes in circumstances of production and

transmission” (3–4). For instance, the rich imagery of her poems derives as much from the classical tradition as from the pantheism of the Romantics, while at the same time anticipating the chromatic materialism and mysticism of the Modernists (Vieira-Branco 13). The author’s propensity toward Modernism was examined by Aurora Roselló who concluded that she is a forerunner of the Modernists. Gómez de Avellaneda was the female poetic precursor of Rubén Darío, whom she would anticipate in metrics, color preference, and in the interpretation of forces of nature and the occult (Vieira-Branco 12). Her poetry, taken as a whole, represents a compendium of the styles in Hispanic poetry from late neoclassicism to Romanticism, thus demonstrating the versatility of her poetic genius. The poet’s experimentation with prevailing fashions of poetry anticipated styles, forms, motifs, and themes of future literary currents. Thus, Gómez de Avellaneda was an exceptional female author ahead of her time who surpassed her own generation’s literary and gender expectations as a writer and as a female poet.

Gómez de Avellaneda developed to the highest level the rhetoric of Romanticism by exploring to the fullest extent the intentional structure of the poetic image in her compositions. With audacity and depth of knowledge, she ventured into the rhetorical dimension of poetic language in a unique way, maintaining a difficult balance between beauty and gravity of expression. In other words, the author elevated poetic language to the highest degree of its rhetorical potential, without sacrificing power of expression.

The author earned a reputation as a first-rate poet, and as the most renowned female poet of the Romantic period. Gómez de Avellaneda’s gift for poetry attests to the fact that she was first and foremost a lyrical genius, as is made evident in her extensive poetic output, and the passages of her verse dramas, especially *Baltasar* (1858). Her technical virtuosity is demonstrated in her unique mastery of the whole range of metrical and rhyme possibilities of Hispanic poetry and also in the rich diversity of themes addressed in her compositions.

Some scholars find it difficult to classify Gómez de Avellaneda’s poetic production as fully Romantic, precisely due to her use of innovative techniques. Her poetic corpus is both within the tradition inherited from her predecessors, which she revised and transformed, and ahead of that tradition by anticipating the next literary currents. While most literary critics have acknowledged her remarkable talent and genius as both a poet and playwright, there are a few exceptions: Raimundo Lazo, Ricardo Navas-Ruiz, and Geoffrey Ribbans. These critics’ blindness is revealed in their futile attempt to relegate the greatest female poet of the nineteenth century to a minor position in the history of Hispanic poetry.

Raimundo Lazo’s study on Gómez de Avellaneda’s poetry, *La mujer y la poetisa lírica*, was published one year before the centennial of the writer’s death. The critic relegates her importance to the minor position of a weak lyric

poetess, disregarding the fact that she was one of the most celebrated mainstream poets of Hispanic Romanticism. Lazo superficially overlooks Gómez de Avellaneda's genius as both a lyric and a civic poet and her many contributions to the development and renewal of the Romantic movement and to the emergence of Modernism. The critic's shallow and superficial assessment of the author's work dismisses her mastery of content and form, including the rhetorical aspect of her language, her technical virtuosity, along with her versatility and poetic experimentation, all of which enabled Gómez de Avellaneda to innovate through a process of constant revision and renewal of the poetic tradition. Lazo also omits the writer's role as precursor of the Modernists due to the originality and innovation in her poetic usage, as well as the themes and the rich imagery in her poems. In addition, Lazo's critical blindness with respect to Gómez de Avellaneda's poetry is based on a literal reading of her poems, which does not take into account the rhetorical dimension of her poetic language. The critic shows a lack of understanding of the intentional structure of the images, tropes, and metaphors employed by the poet to convey the rhetorical dimension of Romanticism.⁸

The literary critic Ricardo Navas-Ruiz, in *El romanticismo español: Historia y crítica*, also depicts Gómez de Avellaneda as a minor figure in the literary scene of nineteenth-century Romanticism (53). In an attempt to remove her name from the canon of the major Romantic writers, his critical blindness dismisses the fact that the female poet was greatly admired by her male peers, who regarded Gómez de Avellaneda as superior to her female contemporaries, and even above any of the women authors of the Golden Age (Harter 50). As Vieira-Branco lucidly points out, Navas-Ruiz "does not even grant her equal standing with the mainstream Romantics. On account of her so-called eclecticism he relegates her importance to a minor position" (12). This marks the beginning of a strategy to exclude one of the greatest Spanish-language female writers of the nineteenth century from the canon of Hispanic Romanticism. This ongoing tendency to displace Gómez de Avellaneda from her position as the foremost female writer of the period and to replace her with the names of other famous Hispanic Romantic authors seems to persist to this day.

Another literary critic, Geoffrey Ribbans also tried to reduce Gómez de Avellaneda's stature from the leading female author of Hispanic Romanticism to a mere Romantic heroine. Ribbans dismisses Gómez de Avellaneda's prominence as a woman of letters by calling her "the sentimental and discursive Cuban poetess." The term "poetess" refers to a "women's poetry that is excessively emotional and lacking in structure" (Vincent xvii). This notion implies that the poetess's art consists of "effusions or poesy rather than poetry proper," and that her feminine aesthetic is viewed by critics and readers as both spontaneous and subjective, requiring a minimum effort on the part of the reader (Vincent xvii). The poetess's craft was generally regarded as

derivative and lacking in originality, a central tenet of romantic aesthetic theory. The nineteenth-century legacy of the concept became synonymous with a kind of poetry that does not present any difficulty, is indulgent and is devoid of imagination. Thus, being classified with this label implies the exclusion of the female writer from the male Western poetic tradition (Vincent xviii).

Yet, despite the aforementioned claims, the poetess phenomenon in nineteenth-century Europe did not apply to Gómez de Avellaneda, since her contemporaries (male literary critics and famous writers) themselves did not employ the poetess label to refer to the author. Her peers refer to Gómez de Avellaneda as poet (*poeta*) rather than poetess (*poetisa*), since they strongly believed that she was talented beyond what the male literary academy conventionally regarded as “normal” for her sex. For instance, Don Antonio Ferrer del Río, in his *Galería de la literatura*, declares that the celebrated woman poet is not a poetess, but rather a poet (309). Such judgment is reiterated by Don Aurelio Fernández-Guerra in his review of *Los oráculos de Talía* (1855), in which he asserts that she was a poet rather than a poetess. Moreover, Hartzbusch wrote a review of *Egilona* (1845) in which he concludes that the play was the creative act of a poet not of a female author. Additionally, in the following passage, Don Nicasio Gallego describes her remarkable talent for poetry as pertaining to a male genius, not a female writer:

It may be said the characteristics of this great woman’s compositions are the gravity and the elevation of her thoughts, the abundance and the propriety of the images employed, and a versification that is even, harmonious, and powerful. Everything in her poetry is nervous and masculine, so that it is difficult to realize that it is not the work of a great man . . . Mme. Avellaneda is essentially a male genius. (180)

Finally, Juan Valera states that Gómez de Avellaneda was unparalleled among the Spanish female poets, and one of the best poets of the nineteenth century (Cotarelo y Mori, *La Avellaneda y sus obras* 78).

As demonstrated by this unusual praise from her male contemporaries, Gómez de Avellaneda is undeniably a strong poet who was able to forge an original poetic vision, which guaranteed her survival into posterity and the attainment of literary immortality among the major authors of Western literature (Bloom 80).

Harold Bloom describes poetic influence as an act of intentional revisionism: “When it involves two strong, authentic poets, [it] always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation” (30). As a strong female poet, Gómez de Avellaneda established her authority by revising the poems of her male precursors in her quest to attain an “assured autonomy” (116, 139) and “to become one’s own Great Original” (64). As one of the strongest Romantic po-

ets, she achieves a style that captures and retains priority over her precursors, giving the illusion that she is the one who has been imitated by her ancestors (141). For instance, in Gómez de Avellaneda's creative process some of her most famous poems, such as "A vista del Niágara," "A él," and the sonnet "Al partir," constitute an act of revision and departure from her male predecessor: José María Heredia (1803–1839). Culler observes that a successful account of the lyric must highlight features that connect the texts in the poetic tradition with one another, while also making "possible descriptions of the evolution and transformation of the genre" (4). At the same time, Gómez de Avellaneda becomes the female precursor of *Modernismo* in Hispanic America, in particular of two major poets: José Martí (1853–1895)⁹ and Rubén Darío (1867–1916).¹⁰

In a similar example, Gómez de Avellaneda's translations of the compositions of renowned poets, which she called "imitations," attest to her incredible skill to transform primary poetic texts in order to forge an original work of her own. Perhaps that is why during her lifetime her male peers lauded her by proclaiming, "that woman is quite a man" ("mucho hombre esa mujer") following a well-known compliment from Hartzenbush; a form of praise that further demonstrates how her male contemporaries, who were among the most celebrated literary figures of her time, considered her a poet and not a poetess.

Gómez de Avellaneda's poetic excellence was also praised by Abel-François Villemain, the most influential French literary critic of the nineteenth century, who referred to the author as the "Spanish Sappho," claiming that her only rival is the Greek lyric poet, to whom she is even superior in force and intellectuality. In keeping with this praise, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and Juan Valera have emphasized the universality of Gómez de Avellaneda's diverse and prolific literary corpus. The later points out that her writings achieved immortal fame not only within the limits of Hispanic lyrical poetry, but also beyond the confines of any specific country or epoch (M. Menéndez y Pelayo, *Antología* xxxix). In addition, Juan Valera explained that Gómez de Avellaneda's everlasting literary fame surpassed all regional boundaries to attain universal recognition.

Furthermore, Nicomedes Pastor Díaz, in his review of the author's first volume of poetry, *Poesías* (1841), compared her compositions with those written by male poets and concluded that Gómez de Avellaneda was one of the most illustrious poets of her nation and her century, as well as the greatest female poet of all times ("Juicio crítico"). He states that no writer was able to surpass her in imagination, talent, or genius, while emphasizing that she is superior to all others in grandeur, elevation, originality, strength, and boldness of expression. According to Pastor Díaz, very few male authors are similar to her in the depth of their philosophical concepts or in the breadth and transcendence of their ideas ("Noticia biográfica" 16).

The worldwide prestige achieved by Gómez de Avellaneda extended to the United States, where several of her poems were translated into English along with her biblical play *Baltasar* (1858). The translations of her literary works into English and other languages reveal how she was able to realize her greatest literary achievements, while attaining international recognition as one of the outstanding writers of the day.

According to Edith Kelly, writers on both sides of the United States made English translations of the famous sonnet, “Al partir.” William Freeman Burbank’s 1915 translation of the poem appeared in San Francisco, California, under the title “Farewell to Cuba.” The previous year, he had also published *Baltasar*. Burbank was associated with the leading authors and press clubs of the nation, and among his friends there were many renowned writers who were also interested in the English translations of Gómez de Avellaneda’s literary works. Burbank’s rendition of the sonnet “Al partir” (Farewell to Cuba) was published with a translator’s note, stating that the English version of the poem was directed at students of the Spanish language and literature, as well as to members of the Congress of Authors and Journalists, the International Press Congress, and his friends (Kelly, “The Centennial” 339–342).

Moreover, there were other translations of Gómez de Avellaneda’s acclaimed sonnet in the United States. For example, Alice Stone Blackwell’s translation of the poem “Al partir” appeared under the title “On Leaving Cuba.” This English translation was published fourteen years after Burbank’s in the anthology of poetry entitled *Some Spanish American Poets*, published in 1929 in New York. Finally, in addition to the English versions of “Al partir,” Ernest S. Green, H. von Lowenfels, and Thomas Walsh all translated several of the author’s poems into the English language.

The praise for Gómez de Avellaneda’s poetry was consistently high among scholars contemporary to the author and continues to be in recent studies. However, as explored above, there have been multiple attempts to undermine the key role that Gómez de Avellaneda played as a central figure of Hispanic Romanticism. Such joint efforts by a group of specialists reveals a strategy of exclusion directed at displacing the author from her standing as the foremost female writer of Hispanic literature. Such removal and replacement strategies have persisted to this day by certain scholars, who want to substitute Gómez de Avellaneda with the names of other female authors.

The paradox surrounding the figure of Gómez de Avellaneda is that although there have been several undertakings to displace her from the indisputable position of one of the greatest woman writers of the Spanish language, she has been neglected but never totally forgotten, as veiled references or hidden allusions to her work are frequently made. The fact that she has been excluded from the canon and recent literary studies to make room for others, but that she always returns to the literary space is another testimony to the in-

fluence Gómez de Avellaneda exerted on other writers, both male and female, who came after her, demonstrating that she had a profound and lasting impact on later generations of writers. This legacy can be appraised when we address her work in interplay with her life and the events of her epoch by looking at the various ways in which she was a female literary and public figure ahead of her time. Her unique versatility in cultivating with success the most diverse literary genres is proof of her remarkable literary genius. To this day, Gómez de Avellaneda remains perhaps the greatest female writer of Hispanic literature, unsurpassed by any other, and one of the most important authors of the Spanish language.

A Dramatist For The Public

Gómez de Avellaneda was the most famous of Romantic women playwrights in Hispanic literature and perhaps the best female dramatist of nineteenth-century Western literature. The author was considered “the greatest dramatist her sex has ever produced” (Zacharie Baralt 181). She was the first female playwright in Spain to publish and stage her works with extraordinary success and the first female writer in the Spanish language whose dramas were deemed worthy of being placed side by side with the male authors’ greatest plays. Her dramatic works were judged to be as good as or even superior to the pieces written by the best-known playwrights of her time, such as the Duke of Rivas, García Gutiérrez, Hartzenbush, and Zorrilla (Harter 78). In her time, there were many descriptions of Gómez de Avellaneda’s extraordinary literary genius in masculine terms, applied to her in an admiring way, like the aforementioned compliment from Hartzenbush that she was “mucho hombre” (quite a man). After Hartzenbush applied the term “varonil” (manly) to describe the work of Gómez de Avellaneda, the adjective became part of the nineteenth-century Spanish critical discourse “as one of the highest forms of praise for a dramatist” (Gies 326). Moreover, Zorrilla remembered her as “una de esas lumíneas, poéticas y celestes apariciones” (one of those luminous, poetic and heavenly visions) who succeeded in challenging the theatrical status quo with original plays that were unprecedented (Gies 193–194). His description of her in masculine terms asserts that Gómez de Avellaneda’s poems contained “pensamientos varoniles” (manly thoughts), which revealed “algo viril y fuerte” (something manly and strong) in a spirit locked in a woman’s body (Zorrilla, *Hojas traspapeladas* 2051).

Thus, the foremost female poet of Hispanic Romanticism also became known as the greatest dramatist in the Spanish language. Gómez de Avellaneda’s dramatic achievements are inextricably related to her exceptional talent

as a lyric poet: she wrote twelve full-length dramas in verse and the short play *La hija de las Flores* (1852). Emilio Cotarelo, echoing almost all the critics of the comedy, places the author “among our first-rank poets” (234). The links that exist between her poems and dramatic works is also evident in the many “passages of delicate and poignant beauty” (Harter 80–81) that appear in her plays, reminiscent of Lope de Vega’s lyric descriptions of instances of joy, plenitude, and abundance. Furthermore, her dramatic works also relate to her poetic compositions in the affinity of themes, among them: love, death, the solace of religion, and the beauty of nature.

Gómez de Avellaneda was the first female dramatist in nineteenth-century Hispanic culture to develop a successful career in a male-dominated theatre scene. In the literary world of Spanish Romanticism and also in most parts of Europe, women were generally excluded from the theatre, except as actresses. Hugh Harter observes, “la Avellaneda was a woman who had invaded a career field that was considered exclusively male” (79). Although a few women might have made significant contributions to the dramatic genre, Harter concludes that it is extremely difficult to find even a brief mention of any of them, since their dramatic works have not survived. For example, in the case of France’s famous female novelist George Sand, though she also wrote some twenty plays, as an author she never attained the success as dramatist that she did as a writer of fiction. Therefore, it is almost impossible to find any female figure in the history of theater “whose achievements are comparable to those of Gómez de Avellaneda” (Harter 78).

Gómez de Avellaneda was able to compete successfully with her male counterparts to have her plays both published and staged. Theater critics favorably reviewed her works and the public audiences responded enthusiastically to her plays. She became the leading and most celebrated of all the female playwrights of the Romantic period, beginning her career as a dramatist in Spain in 1844 with the performance of the historical drama *Munio Alfonso*, which brought the author to the attention of the Spanish theatre-going public in Madrid where the play was first staged. *Leoncia*, her first play, had been performed in Seville in 1840 even before she moved to the Spanish capital. At that time, she had already achieved prestige as a famous poet and novelist, and her incursions onto the stage further consolidated her literary reputation (Gies 193). Her plays had a significant impact on the mainstream of theatrical activity in Madrid, where five of her original works were staged in 1852 alone, three years after the October 1849 triumphal debut of one of her dramatic masterpieces, the biblical tragedy *Saúl*. On October 21, 1852, she staged another wildly applauded hit at the Príncipe Theatre, the three-act verse comedy *La hija de las Flores*.

Gómez de Avellaneda was not only the best-known female dramatist in Hispanic literature, but she also surpassed the male playwrights in terms of

the popular reception obtained by her plays, which consistently received the highest reviews from local and foreign critics. For example, Nicomedes Pastor Díaz praised her as “the Castilian Melpomene” (Bransby 13). The press announced the openings of her dramas and their successful stage productions, usually highlighting the attendance of the leading figures of the period, and describing the ovations and laurels given to the author at each production.

As a prolific author of dramatic works, Gómez de Avellaneda also reached an unusually high level of productivity that was not only equal in volume, but in most cases of a superior quality, to the writings of her male counterparts. She wrote a total of sixteenth full-length plays between the years of 1840 and 1858, as well as several shorter pieces. The fast pace of her writing was often compared to that of her male predecessor Lope de Vega (1562–1635), since both composed their dramas in only two or three days during surges of creative impulse. Gómez de Avellaneda’s expeditious writing is well acknowledged: “According to her own testimony, she wrote *Munio Alfonso* in one week and *Egilona* in three days” (Bransby 18).

The unique versatility of Gómez de Avellaneda becomes evident in the complete edition of her works, where she included thirteen plays ranging from light comedy to tragic drama, among which are two written in prose—*El millonario y la maleta* and *Tres amores* (1858)—and the rest composed in verse.¹¹ Throughout her dramatic career, the author proved that she could attain popularity with both comedy and tragedy, as was the case with the successful stage productions of the plays *Saúl* (1849) and *La hija de las flores* (1852). In his “Introduction” to his English annotated edition of *Baltasar*, Carlos Bransby calls the reader’s attention to Gómez de Avellaneda’s versatility as a playwright:

In *El Millonario y la Maleta* he will find a light comedy abounding in very amusing dramatic situations and in exceedingly witty dialogue. In *La hija de las flores*, another comedy but of a higher type, he will find originality of conception, charming poetry, and a vein of delicate humor running through the play. *Tres amores* . . . the fine delineation of some of its characters, the purity of its diction, the eloquence of its style, and the loftiness of the ethical lessons that it contains. (14)

Finally, Bransby determines that the tragic and historical dramas evidence remarkable tragic works: “In *Munio Alfonso*, *El Príncipe de Viana*, *Saúl*, and *Baltasar* . . . the heights of true tragedy have been reached” (Bransby 14).

In sum, all of Gómez de Avellaneda’s dramatic works are excellently crafted in terms of plot, character development, moral and religious message, as well in the beauty and technical perfection achieved in their lyrical passages. Her plays are especially distinguished for their intricate plots, all skillfully developed by the author. She masterfully handles plot complications,

intrigue and sudden turns of the story whether in drama, comedy, or tragedy (Harter 82). Her plays, distinctive for their poetic diction and scenes, are usually based on historic models, as in her drama *Munio Alfonso* (1844), which recreates the life of Alfonso X. Although Gómez de Avellaneda's dramatic works derive from Spanish Golden Age drama and the author includes in her plays Romantic images and themes, her theatrical innovations and revisions of the inherited literary tradition place her dramas within the "Post-romantic theater to which her works in some ways belong" (Harter 81). As a female playwright, she cultivated her original voice without overlooking the theatrical tradition of the past by incorporating into her plays several aspects of the Spanish dramaturgical tradition, while subverting and deviating from standard Romantic paradigms (Gies 196).

Gómez de Avellaneda's dramatic talent is also revealed in the innovations that she introduced to the theater as a playwright. Among them are the powerful roles assigned to her main female characters as strong heroines. Unlike the previous Romantic heroines, the female protagonists who appeared in her plays were determined women in control of their own lives until they were overwhelmed by forces beyond their power (Gies 202). A second novelty introduced by the author was the development of a series of plays that fall within the new genre of religious Romanticism. In her religious dramas, Gómez de Avellaneda renewed the sacred drama from biblical times to include the conflicts that arise when the individual confronts the norms and exigencies of contemporary society (Gies 194, 245). Thus, this genre of plays filled with religious fervor also contains a profound critique of the moral decay and failures of modern society.

Gómez de Avellaneda's theatrical masterpiece and most successful play was a religious drama: *Baltasar* (1858), which narrates the story of the decline and fall of the corrupt Babilonian empire, and the delivery and restoration of the people of Judah (Bransby 16).¹² Although the author had begun this composition in 1852, the biblical drama was not staged until April 9, 1858. The popularity of the play was unprecedented: it ran for more than fifty performances, receiving unanimous praise from the critics, an unheard-of triumph for a tragic drama, and it also achieved a similar success in Mexico (Gies 199).

The leading character of *Baltasar* is Belshazzar, the king of Babylonia, who has lost all interest in life and glory, suffering the torments of a profound skepticism. For the monarch, who has no faith in the divine nor in humanity, existence becomes a permanent state of boredom and discouragement. Parallel to the main action runs the tragic love story of two Hebrew captives: Elda and Ruben. In contrast with the skeptical and pessimistic monarch, the Hebrew slaves are sustained by their faith in God and by the hope of a final deliverance (Bransby 16–17). With her female protagonist, Elda, Gómez de Avellaneda conveys the value of human dignity and a compelling example of

virtuous conduct. Elda's audacity is unprecedented in the history of Spanish theater (Gies 199). Few female characters in Spanish drama could have delivered Elda's powerful discourse under the threat of a king who was determined to exterminate her people. The play establishes a marked contrast between Elda's heroic courage and the behavior of the despotic and egotistical tyrant, Baltasar, who only discovers faith and love at the end of his life. In the final moment of his death, the king turns to God in an act of genuine repentance and is pardoned of his sins against the Jewish people by Joaquín, Elda's father. Gómez de Avellaneda seems to suggest in her biblical drama that Baltasar's redeemed soul has been granted divine mercy.

Baltasar was a literary and artistic triumph and was immediately regarded as a dramatic masterpiece of Hispanic Romanticism (Bransby 15). Besides acknowledging the deep philosophical thought in the play, critics praise the work's verses of matchless poetical beauty. In the prologue to his English edition, Bransby observes: "It would be difficult to find in Spanish, or, in fact, in any modern language, finer passages than some of those contained in *Baltasar*" (Bransby 17). The pure diction, the elevated thoughts, and the dignified style were also described by Juan Valera in *El Diario Español* in April 1858: "the beautiful situations . . . sonorous and splendid verses, the concise and vigorous style and the pure language in which she has managed to write the play . . . *Baltasar*; one of the most excellent productions of which modern dramatic literature can boast" (qtd. in Bransby 1). Thus, Gómez de Avellaneda's most celebrated biblical play is considered a dramatic masterpiece of world literature. However, despite these accolades, the attempt to marginalize Gómez de Avellaneda continues to this day. For instance, as the only female dramatist mentioned in Díez Borque's *Historia del teatro en España II*—regardless of being the leading female playwright of Hispanic Romanticism—Gómez de Avellaneda inexplicably receives only four slight references in the volume (Gies 191–192).

Indeed, Gómez de Avellaneda has always occupied a difficult position: in Madrid she was an "outsider" from the island colony of Cuba, as well as a woman writer struggling to establish her "intellectual independence" (Gies 195). With her sharp intelligence, determined literary vocation, and strong character, she was able to overcome this double marginalization and develop her talent. Without compromising, she defended the rights and dignity of women authors and the female freedom of expression (Gies 195). However, despite all of these accomplishments, her controversial request to be admitted to the all-male Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy) was denied solely on the grounds of her sex, despite her extraordinary talent, sparking the now well-known controversy surrounding the author and attesting to the difficulty of her position as a female writer.

**“Talent has no sex”:
The Press and the Affair of the Royal Spanish Academy**

The incident of the Royal Spanish Academy unveils the obstacles that Gómez de Avellaneda had to face as a woman writer in her time. A remarkable writer and defiant intellectual, Gómez de Avellaneda was accepted by most of her male peers as an equal earning the distinction of been called a “poeta” (poet) instead of “poetisa” (poetess), a term reserved for females only. Yet, her sex still kept the female author from sharing a seat with the male members of the Academy. It was evident that her rejection from the prestigious institution was not a question of talent: Gómez de Avellaneda was denied entry simply on account of been a woman.

In January of 1853, Nicasio Gallego died, leaving a vacant seat in the Royal Spanish Academy, and Gómez de Avellaneda was advised to apply for the chair left by her deceased friend. However, Luis José Sartorius, Minister of the Interior, also wanted to become a member of the Academy, and in a letter addressed to the author on January 28, 1853, agreed to withdraw his candidacy provided the question of the eligibility of women to the institution was decided in her favor. In her letter of reply, Gómez de Avellaneda declared that she wanted to fulfill the wishes of her friend Nicasio Gallego as his successor, and she explicitly defended the rights of women to aspire to such positions. The writer was applying not for an honorary, but for a full appointment at the institution.

The majority of the members of the Academy were displeased with Sartorius’s withdrawal of his candidacy. A meeting took place after Gómez de Avellaneda presented her request for admission to the institution on February 3, 1853. In a later meeting on February 10, 1853, Manuel Bretón de los Herberos (1796–1873), also a dramatist, in order to exclude Gómez de Avellaneda from the body, raised the direct question: “Son admisibles o no las señoras a plazas de número de la Academia?” (Harter 39) (Are women admissible or are they not, to the seats on the Academy?). In response to the question, fourteen voted against the admission of female writers as members of the Royal Spanish Academy, and only six votes were cast in favor.

Gómez de Avellaneda was considered by the members of the Academy to be notably deserving of election to the vacant seat, since the applicant’s exceptional talent and important literary accomplishments were never questioned. Thus, the decision to exclude the remarkable writer and defiant intellectual, whose boldness and audacity had marked her life and works, was based wholly on her sex. However, she did receive a letter from the male academics acknowledging and praising her unusual literary talent.

The notorious affair between Gómez de Avellaneda and the Royal Academy of Spanish Letters reached Puerto Rico and the U.S. press, beyond the

Cuban and Spanish press. As an example, a brief article supporting the writer's admission to the institution appeared in *Gaceta de Puerto Rico* on March 31, 1853, under the heading: "Academia Española—La Señora Avellaneda propuesta para reemplazar a D. Nicasio Gallego" ("The Spanish Academy—Gómez de Avellaneda proposed to replace Nicasio Gallego"). It was more than an announcement, the author's entry into the Academy was conveyed as a certainty: she was impossible to turn down due to her exceptional talent and many literary triumphs.

The article alleges that due to her extraordinary literary merit, she had earned the legitimate right to occupy the vacant seat left by her friend Nicasio Gallego. Although it was not a common practice for women to aspire to a chair at the Academy, the newspaper invoked two historical precedents of female candidates being named to this body. For instance, at the end of the eighteenth century there was the case of a young noblewoman who received an honorary appointment at the request of King Charles III. The *Gazeta de Puerto Rico* concluded by reiterating that Gómez de Avellaneda should be considered worthy of the high distinction of being admitted as an academic to the Royal Academy of Spanish Letters. The last paragraph is a compelling argument in favor of the author's candidacy based on sound reasoning and evidence:

Esta última circunstancia, aunque fuese inaudita en los fastos de la Academia española no creemos que fuera obstáculo para que se concediese aquella distinción extraordinaria a la mujer que se presenta a pedirla, autorizada con tan extraordinarios títulos como la Señora Avellaneda, porque ningún reglamento prevé casos especiales y rarísimos. Afortunadamente es un hecho notorio que ha habido ya dos damas académicas en tiempos pasados, a las cuales no las abandonaban los triunfos literarios que a la señora Avellaneda, y este antecedente borra hasta los escrúpulos más pueriles, y hace esperar que la Academia se apresurará a admitirla en su seno, premiando así justa y gloriosamente a la que ha conquistado derecho tan legítimo a este puesto distinguido en la república literaria. (*Gaceta de Puerto Rico*, March 31, 1853, 4)

(This last circumstance, although it were unprecedented in the annals of the Spanish Academy, we didn't believe it to be an obstacle to granting that extraordinary distinction to the woman who had presented herself to ask for it, authorized with as many extraordinary titles as Gómez de Avellaneda, because no rule anticipated special and rare cases. Fortunately, it is a notorious case that there had already been two Academic women in the past, upon whom the literary triumphs had not bestowed themselves as they had upon Gómez de Avellaneda, and this antecedent erased even the most childish scruples, and gives hope that the Academy would hurry

itself to admit her into its fold, honored in this way justly and gloriously she who had rightly and legitimately conquered this distinguished post in the literary republic.)

In addition, many years after the denial of Gómez de Avellaneda's admission into the Royal Spanish Academy, another newspaper makes reference to the incident. However, the mention on July 27, 1864, in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco) assumed that the writer was indeed a member of the prestigious institution. After announcing her arrival in New York City from Havana, it explains: "Among other marks of appreciation from literary associations, it may be remarked here that Señora de Avellaneda has been made a member of the "Academy of Spanish Language" (*Daily Evening Bulletin*, July 27, 1864, 3). Apparently, the newspaper never took into consideration that such a major literary figure could be rejected from the Royal Spanish Academy of Letters. The assumption was that such an outstanding and celebrated female author could never be denied entry into the prestigious institution. It was well known that Gómez de Avellaneda was one of the few nineteenth-century poets to have been granted two laureates as a tribute to her exceptional talent: the first laurel crown was bestowed upon her in Madrid by the *Liceo artístico y literario* in 1844, and the second was awarded in Havana by the Cuban *Liceo* in 1860 (Cotarelo y Mori 124, 348).¹³

In her pursuit of the seat left vacant by the death of her friend Nicasio Gallego, Gómez de Avellaneda wrote a series of letters that should be read as feminist documents. This correspondence shows a concern for the plight of the female writer, an awareness of women's literary efforts, as well as an understanding of the obstacles they must confront. Together, these letters represent a bold defense of the woman writer and an indictment of decisions based solely on sex rather than talent. In an earlier letter from February 1843, she seems to be aware of her literary genius, and describes her uniqueness as "eccentric." Immediately, Gómez de Avellaneda alludes to the burdens of the female genius as often misunderstood and misjudged by others, declaring that she only held in high esteem "talent":

Aunque no ofendo a nadie tengo enemigos, y aunque nada ambiciono se me acusa de *pretensiones desmedidas* . . . yo no pertenezco a ninguna clase. Trato lo mismo al duque que al cómico. No reconozco otra aristocracia que el talento. (Cotarelo y Mori 89)

(Although I offend no one, I have enemies, and although I am not at all ambitious, I am accused of excessive pretensions . . . I belong to no class. I treat the duke the same as the actor. I recognize no other aristocracy than that of talent.)

Among the correspondence to present her case for admission to the Royal Spanish Academy is a rhetorical defense of her candidacy. Gómez de Avellaneda demands in a letter dated January 31, 1853, that as a woman poet she is entitled to receive the appropriate distinction and recognition for her talent, regardless of any reservations on account of her sex. The author denounces the fact that she cannot be awarded government grants as the other male academics can be, and recommends the institution find a way to demonstrate that “no es en España un anatema el ser mujer de alguna instrucción; que el sexo no priva del justo galardón el legítimo merecimiento” (*El Correo*, February 24, 1889, 1) (it is not anathema for a woman in Spain to have some education; that one’s sex does not deprive one of proper reward for legitimate merit). In the same letter, she predicts her exclusion from the Academy: “Los que tienen interés en eliminarme, ventilarán antes de la cuestión de merecimiento la de *posibilidad* . . . todavía se vuelve a la objeción del sexo, a falta de otra” (*El Correo*, February 24, 1889, 1) (Those who have an interest in eliminating me will air the question of *possibility* before that of merit . . . still they go back to the objection of sex, since there is no other possible objection). Finally, with irony and humor she boldly condemns the exclusion of women from the Royal Spanish Academy with a hypothetical situation: “Creo que si el ejército de damas que recelan algunos académicos acude a invadir sus asientos desde el momento en que se me dispense uno . . . la Academia y la España deben felicitarse de un suceso tan sin ejemplo en el mundo” (*El Correo*, February 24, 1889, 1) (I think that if it really happens, as some academics fear, that an army of ladies comes to invade their chairs as soon as I am granted one . . . then the Academy and Spain ought to be congratulated for an event so without parallel or precedent in the world).

Three years later, in a letter addressed to Don Leopoldo Augusto de Cueto, dated October 20, 1856, Gómez de Avellaneda openly denounces the plight of the female writer as an “eternal obstacle,” making reference to the difficulties and the unfair treatment faced by a professional woman of letters, while also promoting that role among female authors. She observes: “Soy acaso el único escritor de España que jamás ha alcanzado de ningún Gobierno distinción ni recompensa . . . Mi sexo ha sido un eterno obstáculo . . . y mi amor propio herido ha tenido, sin embargo, que aceptar como buenas las razones, que fundándose en mi falta de barbas, se han servido alegar.” (Rodríguez-Moñino 25–26) (I am perhaps the only writer in Spain who has never obtained from any government some compensation, some award . . . My sex has been an eternal obstacle . . . With wounded vanity I had to accept their reasons as valid, although they are based merely on my lack of a beard).

However, during the last decade of her life before she died on February 1, 1873, another more solemn response came as a symbolic gesture: to donate the six volume edition of her collected works, *Obras Completas* (1869), to

the Royal Spanish Academy of Letters. In her will and testament of 1864, she asks the institution that has caused her much grief during her career as a writer for its forgiveness for any lack of respect or injustice on her part, given its decision many years ago not to admit into its chambers any individual of her sex. Gómez de Avellaneda bequests to the Academy her literary works, as was stated in the nineteenth clause of her testament:

Dono la propiedad de todas mis obras literarias que me pertenezcan, a la Real Academia Española de la Lengua, en testimonio de aprecio, y rogando mis albaceas que al poner en conocimiento de la ilustre corporación esta donación mía, la expresen mi sincero deseo de que me perdonen sus dignos miembros las ligerezas e injusticias en que pude incurrir, resentida cuando acordó la Academia hace algunos años, no admitir en su seno a ningún individuo de mi sexo. (Figarola-Caneda 31)

(I donate the property of all of the literary works that belong to me to the Royal Spanish Academy of Letters, as a testament to my appreciativeness, and beg its executors to make my donation known to the illustrious corporation, to express to it my sincere desire that its dignified members forgive me the flippancies and injustices that I might have incurred, being resentful when the Academy decided some years ago, not to admit into its fold anyone of my sex.)

Once more, the audacious and defiant intellectual reminded the cultural institution of the premise that “talent has no sex,” in order to claim the legitimate right of women to become members of the Royal Spanish Academy. In the initial intention of leaving her works to the Academy after her death as stipulated in the testament of 1864, she asserted her rightful belonging to this body: regardless of their past decision she still considered her writings worthy of being held in the same halls as those of the male academics.¹⁴

The act of donating the volumes containing her poetry, dramas, novels, and other prose writings to the Royal Spanish Academy attests to the immortality of the great works of literature, which transcend the temporal order, and the lifetime of the individual author. At the end of her life, the message that Gómez de Avellaneda wanted to convey was that she would be gone, but her works would remain as a legacy to posterity, preserved in the library of the institution that once closed its doors to her. Gómez de Avellaneda’s boldness in applying for the vacant seat at the Royal Spanish Academy paved the way for other women writers to challenge the exclusion of female members from the prestigious institution, as was the case of Emilia Pardo Bazán thirty-six years later.

More than three decades after her failed attempt to enter the Royal Spanish Academy, the letters that Gómez de Avellaneda wrote to the institution were

published posthumously in the Spanish and the U.S. press. The correspondence appeared in two periodical publications in Spain: *El Correo Catalán* in 1889, and two years later in the *Heraldo de Madrid* in 1891. Notably, this correspondence was also published in the American press, since her letters were reprinted in 1889 in the New York daily *La América*.

The debate surrounding the admission of women into the Academy began with the publication in the newspaper *El Correo Catalán* of the four letters by Gómez de Avellaneda in 1889. The letters were preceded with a note by the lawyer and politician Fermín Vior, addressed to the editor, in which he opposed the admission of women as members to the Royal Spanish Academy. In his commentary, Vior explicitly rejects the idea of the female academic based on the false premise that even learned women are not fitted to occupy a public position that is designed for men, and it is not suitable with the weaker sex's nature and disposition. The lawyer makes clear his opinion:

No sé en qué se fundaron esos señores para rechazar a la Avellaneda: sospecho que habrán pensado como el Rey Sabio, que “ninguna mujer quanti que sea sabidora . . . non es avisada nin honesta cosa que tome officio de varon estando públicamente embuelta con los homes, porque se vuelve desvergonzada, e entonces es fuerte cosa de oyrlas, e de contender con ellas.” (“Las mujeres en la Academia. Cartas inéditas de la Avellaneda” 1)

(I don't know on what basis these men rejected Gómez de Avellaneda: I suspect they would have thought as did the Wise King, that “no woman, no matter how wise . . . is neither an advised nor honest thing that she should take the office of a man, being publicly surrounded by men, because she will be disgraced, and then it's a difficult thing to listen to them, to contend with them.”)

Vior's objective in making Gómez de Avellaneda's letters available to the public was to dissuade Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851–1921) from her candidacy to the Academy, since the writer was aspiring to a vacant chair at the time. The lawyer's intention in presenting through the press the case of the rejection of Gómez de Avellaneda's outstanding nomination to the Royal Spanish Academy was to remind Pardo Bazán and other female authors that it was not possible for their sex to gain entrance to the institution. Vior's implicit message to the writer was that, despite Gómez de Avellaneda's strong candidacy, Pardo Bazán's celebrated female precursor was denied entrance to the Academy because women did not belong in the prestigious institution: it was not an appropriate place for the weaker sex. However, ultimately, Gómez de Avellaneda's application in 1853 paved the way for Pardo Bazán's pursuit of an academic appointment as a woman writer thirty-six years later, in 1889.

Gómez de Avellaneda's campaign for entry into the Academy was a bold and pioneering act, since for the first time a woman writer dared to openly question and challenge (even in writing) the exclusion of members of her sex from positions of full academics at the prestigious institution. Her revolt took place in the mid-nineteenth century amidst an environment that was often reluctant to acknowledge the merit of the professional women of letters. She was among the few female authors and intellectuals that could potentially overcome all the impediments in order to achieve the recognition of her talent, while also obtaining the support of several of the leading male literary figures of the period.

In her own quest to enter the Academy, Pardo Bazán wrote two letters addressed to her female predecessor under the title "La cuestión académica" (The Academic Questions), which appeared in the press in February of 1889: first in the Spanish newspaper *El Correo Catalán* on February 27, 1889, and in *La España moderna*; and also in the U.S. publication *La América*, where Gómez de Avellaneda's correspondence was published along with Pardo Bazán's imaginary response to her precursor. In her first letter, Pardo Bazán states that having heard that her name was proposed to fill a vacant seat at the Academy, at first she had decided to remain silent, and exercise prudence regarding the matter of whether or not women should be admitted to the prestigious institution. However, she immediately confesses to Gómez de Avellaneda that the appearance of the author's letters in the press made her modify the initial attitude of discretion: "La publicación de tus cartas me hizo mudar de parecer" (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 174) (The publication of your letters made me shift my thinking).

In this imaginary exchange with her precursor, Pardo Bazán suggests that Gómez de Avellaneda's correspondence became a model and a source of encouragement for her to voice her views regarding the appointment of female academics. The publication of Gómez de Avellaneda's letters in the press opened up a communicative space where the question of the entry of women into the Academy could be at the center of the debate in the public arena. This free exchange of ideas gave Pardo Bazán the opportunity to express her opinion in writing regarding this issue in the two letters addressed to her predecessor, which also appeared in the newspapers.

This space opened up by the press promoted an imaginary dialogue between the two women writers that would gradually transform public opinion in favor of their sex. As Pardo Bazán states in her second letter addressed to Gómez de Avellaneda, the public opinion favored the admission of women into the Academy against the prevailing opposition of the male members of the institution. According to the writer, for the majority of citizens the only essential requisite for being appointed as an academic was to possess literary talent:

La opinión va por el camino contrario. La gente . . . cree que para entrar

en la Academia el único requisito indispensable son los méritos literarios . . . A mantener el público en semejante error contribuyen los periódicos, y en boca de la Prensa y de la gente es donde adquirió ser real una candidatura que en la Corporación misma juzgo tan fantástica. (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 180)

(Opinion goes in the opposite direction. The people . . . believe that to enter the Academy, the only indispensable requirement is literary merit . . . The newspapers contributed to maintaining the public in similar error, and from the mouth of the Press and of the people is where she acquired a real candidacy that the Corporation itself judged to be fantastic.)

Gómez de Avellaneda established in her letters a model of female protest to be imitated by other women authors in order to demand and assert their right to be appointed as full time members of the Academy. By openly discussing the right of her sex to occupy seats at the Academy, she provided a pioneer example for other female writers such as Pardo Bazán to defend themselves against the prejudices and restrictions imposed on their status as professional authors and intellectuals. Her letters became a source of inspiration for Pardo Bazán, who assures her interlocutor that she will continue the struggle for the entry of women into the Academy by identifying herself as the “candidato eterno” (eternal candidate). The writer explains: “hasta creo que estoy en el deber de declararme candidato perpetuo a la Academia” (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 183) (I even believe that I have the duty to declare myself a perpetual candidate to the Academy).

Gómez de Avellaneda was aware that her aspirations and difficulties were shared by other women, and this common consciousness is expressed in her letters as an outspoken defense of female rights; and in her determination to fight with unusual audacity for the appointment of women as academics. Pardo Bazán agrees with her predecessor’s defiance of the exclusion of women from the institution, and praises her tenacity in the struggle to enter the prestigious institution, while concluding that Gómez de Avellaneda’s failed attempt was a victory for the rights of her sex: “bien hiciste en provocar la lucha, tu derrota fué espléndido triunfo” (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 177) (you did well in provoking the fight, your failure was a splendid triumph).

The female solidarity between both writers becomes evident in Pardo Bazán’s imaginary reply to her precursor, in which she declares that the apparition of Gómez de Avellaneda’s ghost has come back from the past to give her courage to face the long battle ahead: “tú espíritu se ha dignado visitarme, murmurando a mi oído palabras de aprobación; alentada por ellas, te escribiré” (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 178) (your spirit has deigned to visit me, whispering in my ear words of approval; encouraged by them, I will

write to you). The two women are joined together by their affinity as writers, and their shared consciousness: the specter's effect is precisely to insinuate that their friendship as female authors transcends the temporal and spatial limits. Pardo Bazán addresses Gómez de Avellaneda as her "amiga" (friend) and "ilustre compañera" (eminent colleague), while praising the literary talent of her precursor as a great lyric poet and famous playwright (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 175): "Tú, poeta de alto vuelo y estro fogoso; tú, aplaudidísimo autor dramático; . . . tú, a quien Villemain contó entre los grandes líricos" (You, poet of high flight and ardent inspiration; you, applauded dramatic author; . . . you, who Villemain counted among the great lyrics). Finally, she calls Gómez de Avellaneda the "cantor del Niágara" (*La España moderna*, February 1889, 175) (poet of Niagara Falls).

The publication of this correspondence in several newspapers reveals how influential these four letters by Gómez de Avellaneda became as a point of reference in the debate concerning women's entrance into the Royal Spanish Academy. The letters were inserted into the public sphere through the Spanish and the American press, promoting an open dialogue in the public sphere where public opinion could be transformed. Self-consciously aware that she could shape public opinion, even if she was denied admission into the Academy, Gómez de Avellaneda asserted in these feminist documents both the duty of women to speak in favor of their sex and the female right to be admitted into the institution on equal terms as full members.

The Public Intellectual

Gómez de Avellaneda's press articles, yet another genre in which she succeeded as an author, represent women as historical, political, and cultural agents. The numerous essays published in the periodical presses of Cuba and Spain represent the author's spirited defense of women's intellectual capacities and of their long history of achievement. These journalistic writings in defense of her sex establish Gómez de Avellaneda as the founder of modern Hispanic feminism.

Gómez de Avellaneda's journalistic articles are pioneering documents in the struggle for women's rights. She was the first in the Hispanic world to bring the topic of women's emancipation explicitly into the public sphere with her manifesto "Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno" (1845) (Capacity of Women for Government). Gómez de Avellaneda was also the first woman writer in the Americas and Spain to publish a feminist treatise of encyclopedic scope under the title "La mujer" (1860) (The Woman); and the first to propose a feminist global history with her "Galería de mujeres célebres" (1845, 1860) (Gallery of Celebrated Women). In addition, the author founded *Album*

cubano de lo bueno y de lo bello (1860), the first magazine for a female audience directed by a woman editor in Hispanic culture. As editor and founder of female magazines, and assiduous collaborator in the press, on both sides of the Atlantic, she played an active role in the public sphere and was able to influence public opinion to bring about social reform.

Gómez de Avellaneda participated fully in the public sphere through the many articles she wrote for Cuban and Spanish newspapers and journals. Her opinions and arguments in defense of her sex frequently appeared in the nineteenth-century press on a broad range of topics dealing with women's issues and concerning the place of the female sex in society, all of which circulated widely in the periodical press of the colony and the metropolis. Not only did she participate fully in the discursive public sphere advocating for the emancipation of her sex, but her arguments had a profound and lasting impact on the Hispanic society of her time. In sum, her constant and dynamic collaboration with the nineteenth-century periodical press, as well as her active role as founder and editor of female magazines on both sides of the Atlantic, allowed Gómez de Avellaneda to play a significant role in shaping public opinion concerning the emancipation of women in civil society.

Gómez de Avellaneda was a writer of many "firsts." She is the author of the first anti-slavery novel in the Americas, *Sab* (1841), written eleven years before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. In addition, Gómez de Avellaneda and Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) were the first women writers on either side of the Atlantic to publish, at the same time, their pioneer works in defense of the female sex: respectively, "Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno" and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. These landmark texts of feminist thought both appeared in 1845, preceding by three years the Women's Rights Convention of 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, which is generally regarded as the beginning of the international women's movement (Miller, "Gertrude The Great" 213).

Margaret Fuller, one of the most prominent feminist writers of the time and editor of *The Dial*, was a leading female intellectual and author. In 1845, based on her previous essay, she published *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, which became a classic of feminist thought. Between 1840 and 1842, she was co-editor (alongside Ralph Waldo Emerson) of *The Dial*, a literary and philosophical journal to which she contributed many articles and reviews on the arts and literature. She became America's first female foreign correspondent by writing articles for the *New York Tribune* on literary and social topics. In 1844, she became a book review editor and, in 1846, a foreign correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. In 1843, her essay "The Great Lawsuit. Man vs. Man. Women vs. Women," in which she called for women's equality, appeared in *The Dial*. In the same year, Gómez de Avellaneda published the article "La dama de gran tono" in the Spanish journal *Album del Bello Secso*,

denouncing the unfair situation in which man had placed woman.

The emancipation of women first became a theme of public debate in the nineteenth century (Osterhammel 916). Through print culture, nineteenth-century women could gain entrance to the public sphere not only as readers, but also as writers that participated in the public arena to promote their own causes. With the 1845 publication of her journal article “Capacidad de la mujeres para el gobierno,” Gómez de Avellaneda became the first woman in Hispanic literature to openly introduce into the public sphere the topic of the emancipation of her sex and to promote its fulfillment as an essential part of attaining the common good of society as a whole. This feminist manifesto appeared in 1845 in the first issue of the women’s magazine Gómez de Avellaneda directed in Madrid, *La Ilustración: Album de las damas*. Regarding the circulation of this women’s magazine, Susan Kirkpatrick asserts in her influential book *Las Románticas*:

Unfortunately, only one issue of *La Ilustración de las Damas* was ever published . . . But Avellaneda whose infant daughter fell ill and died a short time later, was in no condition to continue directing the journal, and the paper’s financial backers apparently did not consider public response to be sufficiently favorable to try to continue the experiment with another director. (78)

Contrary to Kirkpatrick’s claim that the female magazine under Gómez de Avellaneda’s direction ceased to exist after the first issue, *La Ilustración: Album de las damas* (1845–1846) continued to be published from November 2, 1845, to at least May 3, 1846, producing a total of thirty-one issues.

In this pioneer essay, Gómez de Avellaneda promotes explicitly, for the first time in the public arena, the rational debate of women’s emancipation in an attempt to generate a public opinion in civil society in favor of this cause. Her intention was to promote a free and rational exchange of ideas in civil society, where all its members could begin to deliberate about the common issue of the emancipation of the female sex. Gómez de Avellaneda firmly believed that a rational debate would eventually generate a public opinion in favor of the emancipation of women. She was aware that through the articles that appeared in newspapers and periodicals, an emancipatory discourse could take shape and circulate in the public sphere among all the citizens of civil society.

“La dama de gran tono” (The Lady of Good Taste)

The article “La dama de gran tono” (The Lady of Good Taste), which appeared in the Spanish journal *Album del Bello Secso* in 1843, is Gómez de

Avellaneda's earliest call for the emancipation of her sex.¹⁵ This article was re-issued in Cuba several times: in the *Faro Industrial de la Habana*, July 1844; the *Gaceta de Puerto-Príncipe*, Puerto Príncipe, August 20, 22, and 24, 1844; and *La semana literaria, compañero de las damas: Publicación dedicada a las señoras de la isla de Cuba*, Havana, 1847.

In this essay, Gómez de Avellaneda challenges the female stereotype of docile and decorative womanhood as one that falsifies the true nature of woman. The author examines the idea of woman's nature against the background of Rousseau's theoretical writings, undermining the philosopher's gender discourse by showing the contradictions and inconsistencies of his theory of the social contract between the sexes. Her argument centers on the tension between the principles of equality and hierarchy when applied to the relations between men and women in order to advocate the premise of egalitarian gender relations. She argues that the subordination of her sex is based on a distortion of the true nature of women as intellectually and morally inferior to men. By breaking with perceived prejudices and false myths about female nature and questioning the prevailing models of femininity, the author redefines the true nature of woman as that of a rational being equal to man in terms of her capabilities, implying that reason and talent have no sex. By advancing the idea of the sexless mind, Gómez de Avellaneda cancels out the unfitness of the female sex for certain activities and advocates for equal rights and women's unrestricted participation in the public sphere.

Thus, as early as 1843, she denounces the subjection of women in society with this groundbreaking article's take on the debate over female nature, anticipating John Stuart Mill's influential essay on "The Subjection of Women," written in 1861. She takes the defense of women in a new direction toward the question of sexual equality. In "La dama de gran tono," Gómez de Avellaneda questions the validity of the premises used to justify the subordination of the female sex in society and calls for the adoption of the principle of equality in regulating all the relations between men and women.

"Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno" (Capacity of Women for Government)

Published in 1845, "Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno," the first great manifesto of women's emancipation in the Hispanic world, presents strong and consistent arguments in favor of the female sex's prerogative to enter and fully participate in any sphere of activity, while underscoring woman's superior talent in governing peoples and nations.¹⁶ The article was reissued several times in the Spanish press: it appeared in *El Trono y la Nobleza* in 1850, and

in *El Fénix*, a periodical from Valencia, on May 28, 1848.

In her explicitly feminist argument, Gómez de Avellaneda shows that patriarchal discourse is based on error and commonplace prejudices against women. Through a detailed exposition of a logical argument, and by providing evidence to the contrary, she denies the postulate of women's alleged inferiority, which claims that the female sex is by its own nature weaker and of inferior intellect when compared with men. She not only proves that women's natural abilities were equal to those of men, but goes even further as to proclaim female superiority over the opposite sex.

In general, Gómez de Avellaneda's press article remains a radical, and optimistic, and far-reaching work for its time both in terms of its advanced arguments as an advocate of her sex and its provocative demands. In this major manifesto of female emancipation, the author maintains a firm belief that a gradual gain toward a complete equality and liberty for her sex was inevitable in the course of civilization's progress. Gómez de Avellaneda states:

La revolución moral que emancipe á la mujer debe ser forzosamente mas lenta que la que sentó las ya indestructibles bases de la emancipación del pueblo; porque en este la mayoría era inmensa; la fuerza material irresistible: en aquella no hay mayoría, no hay fuerza material poderosa; todo tiene que esperarlo de los progresos de la ilustración, que haga conocer á sus propios opresores cuán pesadas y vergonzosas son para ellos mismos, las cadenas de ignorancia y degradación que han impuesto á unos séres á quienes, á despechos de sus leyes, los ligan y sujetan íntima y eternamente las leyes supremas de la naturaleza. (*La Ilustración. Album de las Damas*, November 2, 1845, 4).

(The moral revolution that emancipates women should be more forcefully methodical than that which was already felt by the indestructible bases of the emancipation of the people because in that case, the majority was immense, the material force was irresistible. In this case, there is no majority, there is no powerful material force. Everything has to wait for the progress of the Illustration, hoping that it will make the oppressors themselves see how shameful and tiresome they are, see the chains of ignorance and degradation that they have imposed on beings to whom they, at the dispense of their laws, are tying up and subjecting both intimately and eternally to the supreme laws of nature.)

As the first great manifesto of women's emancipation in the Hispanic world, "Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno" is a fundamental text of Western feminism and should be placed alongside the writings of Christine de Pizan, Margaret Fuller, and Mary Wollstonecraft, among others. In

this groundbreaking work, Gómez de Avellaneda writes in defense of women against what she considered a patriarchal discourse based on error and prejudices against the female sex. She answered the commonplace prejudice of women's intellectual inferiority by refuting the argument that women had governed unwisely when they have occupied positions of power. The author concludes that the female sex has a capacity superior to that of the opposite sex for the art of government. Her essential contribution was not only to proclaim the superiority of women, but also to insist that prejudices against the female sex and the uncritical adoption of received facts must be renounced and revised in light of women's historical experience.

“Galería de mujeres célebres” (Gallery of Celebrated Women)

In the two female magazines that she founded and directed in Spain and Cuba, *La Ilustración: Album de las Damas* (1845–1846) and *Album cubano de lo bueno y de lo bello* (1860), Gómez de Avellaneda includes a recurring feature entitled “Galería de mujeres célebres.” This permanent section consists of a series of biographical essays that focus on the lives and achievements of famous women of the past.

As the editor of the two female journals, Gómez de Avellaneda can be considered the author of all the biographical essays on prominent women that were published in the section “Galería de mujeres célebres,” regardless of whether or not the writer's signature appears in the pieces. During the nineteenth century, it was a common practice that articles that appeared in the periodical press without an author's name were written by the editor of the journal.

Thus, given this tradition, with the exception of the few biographies in which she states that the piece is either an excerpt from another work or a translation from French, Gómez de Avellaneda is the author of all of the female biographies in “Galería.” The only exceptions—as stated in the editor's notes—are a piece devoted to the life of Isabel Fry (Elizabeth Fry) (1780–1845) in *La Ilustración* (1845), attributed to a foreign author (December 7, 1845, and December 21, 1845), the two essays published in *Album cubano* (1860) on Semiramis by Julian Saiz Milanés (138), and the piece on Isabel La Católica by Diego Clemencin (266–268).

Gómez de Avellaneda deliberately identifies that the piece on the female monarch is an excerpt from “Semiramis, reina de Babilonia” by Saiz Milanés, which appeared in the *Semanario Pintoresco Español* on February 2, 1851 (33–35): “Extracto de la biografía de esta gran princesa, escrita por D. Julian Saiz Milanés” (*Album Cubano* 138) (Excerpt of the biography of this great princess, written by D. Julian Saiz Milanés). She does the same for the life

account of the Spanish queen, stating that it is an excerpt taken from the biography *Elogio de la reina Isabel la Católica* (1820), written by the Spanish scholar, Diego Clemencin (1765–1834), a member of the Spanish Academy of History (*Real Academia de la Historia*), which was published as the sixth volume of the institution’s memoirs. As the editor’s note indicates: “Extracto del panegírico de esta princesa por Clemencin” (*Album cubano* 266) (Excerpt from the panegyric of this princess by Clemencin).

Gómez de Avellaneda relies on the male writers of the two biographies as authoritative sources, but she revises the existing narratives of Milanés and Clemencin by offering her own version and interpretation of the life stories of these female rulers. In the case of the author of Semiramis’s biography, the editor reproduces certain passages from the original text, but for the most part the essay is a rewriting of the life account by Milanés of the Babylonian queen. In addition, Gómez de Avellaneda appropriates Clemencin’s study on Isabel La Católica by inserting herself as a speaker at the end of the text in order to quote its original author, and then place her signature at the end of the essay (*Album cubano* 268).

On the other hand, two pieces on the Greek poet Sappho and the novelist George Sand appeared as French translations in “Galería de Mujeres Célebres” (1845). The translator of the French writer’s biography is identified with the initials D. E.: “Madame George” (George Sand): “Traducción del francés por D. E.” (February 8, 1846, 3–4) (Translation from french by D. E.). However, the essay on the great lyric poet Sappho only mentions that her life story is a translation from the French without providing any name or reference whatsoever: “Safo” (“traducción del francés”) (November 23, 1845, 5–6) (Sappho [translation from French]). Given this lack of attribution, it is likely that Gómez de Avellaneda herself, a connoisseur of French literature and a translator of French poems and dramatic works, did this translation of the Greek poet’s biography. The essay on Sappho from *La Ilustración* (1845) was reprinted many years later (without any allusion to a French translation) in the collected biographies of notable women that appeared in *Album Cubano* (1860) (“Safo” 41–43). Furthermore, the critics Beth Miller and Carmen Bravo-Villasante both attribute this piece on the Greek lyric poet to Gómez de Avellaneda (Miller 213; Bravo-Villasante, *Una vida romántica* 194).

Gómez de Avellaneda’s “Galería” (1845) offers a comprehensive account of the lives and achievements of female figures from remote to modern times. The famous women that appear in the collected biographies are from diverse national backgrounds representing countries like Austria, India, France, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Spain, and England. The editor of *La Ilustración* (1845) includes subversive examples of womanhood in her survey of the world’s influential women, while advancing the social identity of the female sex and its active role in the public sphere. In the process, Gómez de Avellaneda for-

mulates an early feminist argument for modifying the prevailing view on the female sex and challenges the fallacy that women were by nature inferior to men. She asserts the intellectual equality between the sexes, defends the rights of women, and praises the many abilities of the female sex. The author promotes among her audience a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of women's diverse accomplishments, and contributions to global history and culture.

The permanent section "Galería" (1845) consists of a series of biographical essays that focuses on the lives and achievements of famous women of the past and the present. Among the illustrious female figures that Gómez de Avellaneda included are rulers and queens, renowned writers, and two contemporary women: the French novelist George Sand (1804–1876) and the Quaker abolitionist and prison reformer Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845). The articles on Sappho, Simrou Begghum, and Vittoria Colonna that appear in these collected biographies are also reprinted in the same section of *Album Cubano* (1860), devoted to the lives of notable women in history. One of the striking features of the "Galería" is the "presence" of an abolitionist woman who is portrayed as a Christian philanthropist and a social reformer. The inclusion of Elizabeth Fry, the recently deceased (on October 12, 1845) Quaker abolitionist in a Hispanic female magazine's section of celebrated women, highlights Gómez de Avellaneda's judgment as editor.

The biographies of famous women in *La Ilustración* (1845) can be classified into two main groups. The first (and larger) group of celebrated women in the "Galería" is noteworthy for shaping political history: the women either presided over the government of their nations or reigned over their empires. During their lifetimes, these female rulers exercised political authority by conducting and influencing the public affairs of the state; among them are monarchs, princesses, warrior queens, and consorts of powerful men.

The biographies of women rulers begin in *La Ilustración* (1845) with the Empress "María Teresa de Austria" (Maria Therese of Austria), the only female ruler of the Habsburg Dynasty, and the last of the House of Habsburg (November 2, 1845, 5–6). The biographies continue with the examples of other influential monarchs such as "Simrou Begghum" (ca 1753–1836), regarded as the only Catholic ruler in India, who governed over the Principality of Sardhana in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (November 30, 1845, 5–6). Following is "Maria Antonieta" (Marie Antoinette) (1755–1793), the last queen of France prior to the French Revolution (January 11, 1846, 5), "Cleopatra," the queen and last active pharaoh of ancient Egypt, considered as one of the most famous female rulers in history (March 8, 1846, 5), and "Ingundis," the first Catholic queen of the Visigoths (April 5, 1846, 7–8).

In the second group of famous writers is the Greek lyric poet "Safo" (Sappho) (620 BC–550 BC), renowned and greatly admired in antiquity as the

greatest of poets, often referred to as “the Poetess” just as Homer was called “the Poet”; and hailed by Plato as “the tenth Muse” (November 23, 1845, 5–6). The other two female authors that appear in the “Galería” are among the most celebrated and successful woman writers of their times. The first is the Italian noblewoman and poet “Victoria Colonna” (Vittoria Colonna) (1492–1547), who was the most renowned female writer of her age, widely admired by her peers for her impeccable Petrarchan verses as well as for her chastity and piety (February 8, 1846). The other is Gómez de Avellaneda’s literary contemporary George Sand (1804–1876), the most famous nineteenth-century woman novelist of France, known for her romantic affairs, including her publicized romantic relationship with Polish-French composer and pianist Frédéric Chopin (“Madame George,” December 28, 1845, 5–6).

In this collection of essays on noteworthy women, Gómez de Avellaneda also includes one on a legendary and brave Spanish mother, and another featuring a beautiful and intelligent mistress who rules as consort of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The exemplary and brave mother was “Doña María de Monroy,” known as Doña María La Brava (The Brave), a Spanish heroine admired for her courage as an exemplary mother, who was willing to face any danger and endured suffering to persecute her son’s assassins (December 28, 1845, 4–5). The astute mistress was the Italian noblewoman “Blanca Capello” (Bianca Cappello) (1548–1587), renowned for her beauty and intelligence, as well as her scandalous court intrigues. She was the mistress, and later the second wife, of Francesco I de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who officially made her his consort (January 25, 1846, 4–5).

In order to question and revise prevailing and restrictive notions of female identity, Gómez de Avellaneda’s biographies of celebrated women do not present a homogenous vision of the female sex. The editor includes in her “Galería” women with diverse and distinct personalities, such as the divergent pair of Bianca Cappello, the clever mistress, and Doña María de Monroy, the exemplary and valiant mother, and the contrasting writers Vittoria Colonna, the chaste and pious Italian poet, and George Sand, the famous and rebellious French novelist known for her scandalous love affairs. The selection of female figures that attest to women’s diversity of personalities implies that the editor’s intention was to expand the definition of womanhood.

The inclusion of Elizabeth Fry, the English reformer and abolitionist Quaker, in the section dedicated to the biographies of celebrated women in a Spanish female journal is an unusual occurrence. “Isabel Fry” (Elizabeth Fry) (1780–1845), born in Norwich, England, was a Christian philanthropist, a prison reformer, a member of the Society of Friends, and a Quaker minister. At the age of eighteen, after hearing the sermons of the American abolitionist Quaker William Savery, Fry was inspired to help the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned. The social reformer soon turned her attention to the plight of

women convicts in society. In 1818, she toured the prisons in England and Scotland establishing Ladies' Associations, and in 1825, Fry published a short but influential book on operating penal regimes: *Observations of the Siting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners*. As a prison reformer, she was a major driving force behind new legislation aimed at making the treatment of convicts more humane.

As a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers), Elizabeth Fry was also influential and active in the anti-slavery movement and a strong supporter of abolition. With her brother Joseph John Gurney, she lobbied British and European monarchs and decision-makers. Furthermore, the Quaker William Savery (1750–1804), the fervent abolitionist from Philadelphia who influenced Fry with his preaching in her youth, was the American who petitioned Congress to abolish slavery in 1783. The same year the “London Society of Friends” presented a petition against the slave trade to Parliament, an informal group of six Quakers was created, becoming the pioneers of the British abolitionist movement. The Quakers started the abolition campaign in Britain around 1727, when they began to express their official disapproval of the slave trade and worked toward the introduction of reforms. From the 1750s, the Quakers in the American colonies began to oppose the institution of slavery; by 1761, the abolition of the institution was considered to be a Christian duty among the Society of Friends' members (Quakers) from both sides of the Atlantic, who were forbidden to own slaves.

As the editor of *La Ilustración: Album de las Damas*, Gómez de Avellaneda devoted two issues of “Galería” to the biography of Elizabeth Fry: the first was published on December 7, 1845, and the second on December 21, 1845, with an editorial note referring to the well-written piece as an interesting biography and identifying its author as a foreigner contributor, who is expected to continue his collaboration with the female journal in the future:

Esta interesante biografía escrita con admirable unción, patético y admirable estilo. Se la debemos a la pluma de un extranjero, que deseamos y esperamos vuelva a favorecer alguna vez las páginas de nuestro periódico. N. de la R. (“Isabel Fry,” December 21, 5)

(This interesting biography written with admirable uncton, pathetic and admirable style. For it, we are indebted to the pen of a foreigner, who we desire and hope will return again in the future to grace the pages of our periodical. Note from the editor.)

The editorial note is a rhetorical strategy employed by Gómez de Avellaneda to direct the reader's attention to the specific biography of Elizabeth Fry. Although she does not explicitly indicate her intended didactic and anti-slavery

political agenda, the editor's guidance suggests that the Quaker reformer (and abolitionist) is a subject worthy of women's emulation. Moreover, there is a remarkable coincidence of press publication dates between the appearance of the final part of Fry's biography in *La Ilustración* (1845) on December 21, 1845, and a brief notice that appeared the day before in Havana's main newspaper, the *Diario de la Marina*, informing the public that Gómez de Avellaneda had become the editor of a women's magazine, that had adopted a new title under her direction:

Noticias. España. El periódico que hasta ahora se ha estado publicando en Madrid bajo el título de *Gaceta de las mugeres*, tomará desde el 1 de noviembre el nombre de *Album de las damas*. La señorita Doña Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda será la directora de este periódico, y trabajarán también en él el Sr. Ortiz y otros literatos apreciables. (*Diario de la Marina*, December 20, 1845, 2)

(News. Spain. The periodical that until now had been published in Madrid under the title of *Gaceta de las mugeres*, will take from the the first of November the name of the *Album de las damas*. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda will be the director of this periodical, and Mr. Ortiz and other significant men of letters will work on it as well.)

This striking concurrence of press publication dates without any apparent causal connection brings to our attention the fact that despite the banning of her anti-slavery novel *Sab* in Cuba by the royal censors in 1844, there were frequent references about the author in the island press, and that Gómez de Avellaneda's women's magazine, *La Ilustración: Album de las Damas* (1845–1846) was well known among a Cuban readership.

As the editor of the journal, Gómez de Avellaneda chose to include Fry, a contemporary woman and a Quaker minister, as one of the first prominent figures to appear in her biographies of famous women. The reason behind this unusual selection was that the English social reformer was the best female example to convey an undercurrent abolitionist message to women and to encourage readers to become active participants in the abolitionist movement. It was an implicit call to recruit women through the press into the anti-slavery cause and to encourage her female audience to enter the political scene and become active participants in the fight against slavery.

The editor showed with the exemplary life of this Quaker woman that Christian activists were to be found at the forefront of the anti-slavery movement. Moreover, the example of this good Samaritan, worthy of imitation by other women, allowed Gómez de Avellaneda to promote among her audience her own point of view that to oppose the system of slavery was essentially a

Christian moral obligation and responsibility.

Additionally, Gómez de Avellaneda selected the following eleven notable women for the “Galería de mujeres célebres” of *Album cubano* (1860), representatives from antiquity to the eighteenth century, and encompassing different geographical areas: Simrou Begghun, Sappho, Saint Teresa of Avila, Semiramis, Pan-Hoei-Pan, Victoria Collona, Sofonisba, Queen Isabella of Castile, Aspasia, and the Empresses Catherine I and Catherine II.

This wide-ranging catalog of exceptional female figures constitutes a pioneer attempt in Hispanic letters to present a feminist global history, a recovered past that registered the diversity of women’s achievements, and their many contributions to civilization as social agents. Gómez de Avellaneda’s biographies of notable women articulated a model of womanhood to be emulated by her readers, which dismantled conventional female stereotypes. Moreover, this catalog of exceptional figures also elaborates a narrative of female heroism and distinctive patriotism by citing a long list of women rulers and warriors. The biographies also demonstrate the intellectual and moral equality of the female sex with its many references to learned women, and its acknowledgment of virtuous wives and mothers. As Gómez de Avellaneda declares: “En todos los países del mundo el talento y el valor son la verdadera fuerza, y que no es esta patrimonio particular de ningún sexo” (*Album Cubano de lo bueno y de lo bello* 1:12) (in all countries of the world, talent and courage are the real strength, and this is not the particular birthright of any sex).

By recuperating women’s diverse accomplishments, this revisionist history of the female sex allows the author to depict women as historical agents. That is, as social actors who are independent and autonomous, who have contributed greatly to bringing about social change, and who have promoted the advancement of civilization. Gómez de Avellaneda’s biographies of exceptional women as full-fledged historical actors provide her audience with a multiplicity and proliferation of roles, which compose a different and more expansive model of female power that her readers could emulate. In addition to being the first example of an attempt to create a feminist global history, as a broad-ranging venture, “Galería” not only brought together women from different periods and countries as historical subjects, but also served as a forum for promoting a collective female consciousness among a growing audience of women readers by engaging with the on-going debates over the appropriate place of women in society and their prescribed proper behavior. Due to this dialog, it represents a comprehensive attempt at a defense of her sex.

Gómez de Avellaneda, writing as an advocate of her sex in her “Galería” proves the existence of a global history of women, and then proceeds to re-interpret that past from a point of view sympathetic to the female sex. In her revisionist approach toward historical discourse, she tries to respond to the most common prejudices voiced against women. For instance, the author

refutes the argument that women cannot govern wisely and judiciously by providing biographies of remarkable woman rulers, such as the following list of warrior queens: Simrou Begghum (ca. 1753–1836), the only Catholic ruler in India during the nineteenth century; Semiramís, queen of Babylon and model of military governor; Isabella the Catholic, queen of Spain, the Russian Empresses Catherine I and Catherine the Great, and Maria Theresa of Austria. With the examples of these warrior queens, Gómez de Avellaneda shows the active participation of women in the public sphere at the two highest levels possible: the government and the defense of the national territory.

Furthermore, the author disproves the claim of women's intellectual inferiority by including in her "Galería" examples of learned female figures who excelled in almost all disciplines of knowledge: literature, philosophy, theology, the sciences, and the arts. As evidence of woman's superior intellect, Gómez de Avellaneda shows how the female sex contributed to the progress of reason, that is, how women participated actively in the development of the major discourses of knowledge and also played an important role in the advancement of civilization as historical agents. However, in her defense of the female sex, the author does not fail to also provide examples of virtuous wives and mothers, as well as self-sacrificing heroines, which also serves to demonstrate the superiority of women in the domain of sentiment and the caring for others.

The celebratory tone of the biographical essays, and the careful selection of remarkable women reveal the didactic intention of the author. For Gómez de Avellaneda, these outstanding precursors should serve as role models of female behavior, since these prominent historical figures represent women's infinite potential for achievement. Gómez de Avellaneda wanted to offer to her female audience a global history of famous predecessors and their diverse accomplishments; thus, she reinterpreted the lives of these notable women to illustrate their many contributions to civilization's progress by portraying them as protagonists of history. The biographies of these eminent women were designed to appeal to her female readers, asking them to look into their common past and develop a collective consciousness as a source of strength in their struggle toward the emancipation of the female sex.

Gómez de Avellaneda constructed her systematic argument in defense of woman around outstanding female exempla, powerful female types, which defied and revised the conventional gender stereotypes. The biographical accounts of prominent women—portrayed as learned individuals, heroines, rulers, warriors, and religious figures—provided her audience with different models of female power. With the multiplication of female roles, Gómez de Avellaneda's catalog of famous women depicted the limitless potential for achievement of her sex. Gómez de Avellaneda elaborates arguments in defense of women based on historical evidence that invalidates misogynistic claims formulated in detriment to her sex, but she also insists that such biased

statements presented as truth must be re-examined and discarded in light of the female past and present experience. Her contribution was not only to question the truth of a historical tradition centered on male figures by depicting women as protagonists of history, but also to formulate a call to her sex to cultivate and develop its infinite potential.

“La mujer” (Woman)

Gómez de Avellaneda was the first female author to found and direct two women’s journals in the Hispanic world: the first was in Madrid, *La Ilustración: Album de las Damas* (1845), and the second appeared in Havana, *Album cubano de lo bueno y lo bello* (1860), and became the only magazine under the direction of a woman editor that was directed at a female audience on the island (Miller, “Gertrude the Great” 204; Picón-Garfield 13). She was a frequent collaborator for both the Cuban and the Spanish periodical press, and as early as 1845, she undertook the direction of *Gaceta de las Mujeres: Redactada por ellas mismas*, a female journal in Madrid, becoming the first woman editor in Hispanic literature of a magazine devoted entirely to the female sex. Under her new direction, the women periodical changed its title to *La Ilustración: Album de las Damas* (1845–1846).

Gómez de Avellaneda’s permanent feature titled “La mujer” (Woman) appeared between February 15 and August 12 in the twelve issues of *Album cubano*, the female journal published bi-monthly in Havana during 1860.¹⁷ As Beth Miller states, “In the 1850s Avellaneda published in the prestigious Madrid biweekly the first of the ‘La mujer’ articles and a biographical piece entitled ‘Luisa Molina’” (“Gertrude the Great” 213). On April 8, 1862, her essays on the female sex were also reprinted in the Madrid journal *La América*.

In terms of abstract thought and wide scope of knowledge, the essays comprising “La mujer” formulated a spirited, thorough, and intellectually sophisticated defense of the superiority and talent of her sex. In the articles of the feature, the author demonstrates the superiority of women, defends their achievements against historical exclusion and denounces the subjugation of the “so-called weaker sex.” For its time, this feminist treatise of encyclopedic scope was radical and far-reaching in its demands. Gómez de Avellaneda urges for the establishment of complete sexual equality at all levels in gender relations: legal, political, and cultural in the public and private domain.

“La mujer” was the first detailed examination published by a female author in the Hispanic periodical press to consider nearly all the broad-ranging topics pertaining to the woman question during the nineteenth century. The essays comprising “La mujer” constitute a feminist treatise of encyclopedic scope. The

series, complemented by “Galería de mujeres célebres,” focused on the lives and achievements of famous women of the past. This historical catalogue enumerates examples of women who have made significant contributions to society and history, a rhetorical strategy employed by the author to assert the presence and participation of women in history, culture, and public affairs. Taken together, the series “La mujer” and the fixed section entitled “Galería,” offer a unique framework from which to examine women’s multifaceted role in society, and their many achievements in global history.

“La mujer” appears in three parts in *Album cubano* and its intent, Gómez de Avellaneda declares, is to study the role of women in four areas: religion, history, government, intellectual life, and the arts. The individual articles that appeared in “La mujer” are the sections into which Gómez de Avellaneda divided her feminist treatise. Throughout the different parts of the work, the author makes reference to eminent women and offers systematic arguments in defense of her sex that are reinforced with citations, references to authors (both implied and explicit), and sources derived from the classics, literary works, the Scriptures, feminist treatises, historians, philosophers, theologians, as well as contemporary thinkers and writers.

In this feminist treatise of encyclopedic scope, the author examines almost all the aspects of female existence, from the question of women’s nature and intellectual capacity to her destiny and social role. Her discussion of the role of the female sex in civil society is broad-ranging and multifaceted, covering the fields of religion, history, government, intellectual life, the sciences and the arts, as well as the private domain of sentiment. In “La mujer,” Gómez de Avellaneda offers to the reading public a bold new vision of womanhood that was unprecedented in Hispanic literature at the time. She promotes a female archetype primarily defined by active participation in all spheres of activity, including government and the defense and expansion of the national territory.

In this pioneer feminist work, Gómez de Avellaneda develops a systematic treatise on the woman question that consists of in-depth and powerful arguments employed to prove the superiority of the female sex. These arguments appear intertwined throughout the different sections of “La mujer.” Gómez de Avellaneda is again clear in declaring that her intention is to demonstrate not only the equality of the sexes, but also the superiority of women in relation to the opposite sex. She rejects as invalid the postulate of female inferiority and the role of woman as man’s subordinate by portraying the female sex as superior in both the private and the public spheres.

In “La mujer,” Gómez de Avellaneda especially addresses the arguments about woman’s alleged inferiority formulated in the major discourses of knowledge. These disciplines established a dynamic of control over the subjects they sought to rule by developing strategies of domination. She revises the male-dominated discourse on women and the postulates concerning

female nature from a multidisciplinary background of political theory, philosophy, history, theology, and the sciences. She unveils how the discourses of knowledge addressing the female sex shaped and created definitions, concepts, identities, and practices that, in turn, gained the status of truth.

Gómez de Avellaneda reveals how these major disciplines provided the arguments to legitimize the power relations between the sexes based on the coercion, subjugation, and exclusion of the so-called weaker sex. The author shows how judgments made in detriment of her sex are usually based on common beliefs that in most cases are prejudices, since they are formulated without an adequate basis. First, she identifies the main negative beliefs generally held about women and argues that such beliefs are invalid precisely because they were adopted through custom or negative assumptions traditionally held about the female sex. She attempts to define woman's true nature against the background of these common beliefs and prejudices that must be renounced in order to explore the female character. The author then proceeds to rectify those mistaken views by showing them to be solely based on a premise of women's alleged inferiority. As a response, the author offers a revised definition of female nature that invalidates the postulate of the alleged inferiority of her sex. Next, the author examines women's virtues and achievements by listing examples of notable female figures taken from global history. Her aim is to promote a positive image of woman intended to assert the superiority of the female sex and reject as invalid the assumptions about woman's weakness, lack of heroism and achievements.

In this way, Gómez de Avellaneda demonstrates that there is no evidence to sustain the claim of the alleged inferiority and weakness of the female sex. Therefore, she shows that women's subordination in society is not grounded on truth or factual evidence, but rather is based on false presuppositions, concepts, and customs. Gómez de Avellaneda suggests that those invalid premises against her sex were not guided by a rational approach to the woman question, and that a close examination of the female collective past had never been conducted.

"La mujer," as a feminist treatise, takes the defense of women in a new direction by claiming from the beginning female superiority over the opposite sex. First, Gómez de Avellaneda claims that woman's supremacy in the domain of sensibility, the realm of feelings, provides the female sex with a limitless sphere of action. Second, she changes the focus of the debate from the question on sexual equality to the topic of intellectual equality between men and women ("La mujer" 280). In the debate about the women question, intellect was a central element to the principle of equality.¹⁸ Mental abilities became the primary criterion for establishing a sexual hierarchy of the sexes based on the erroneous assumption of women's inferior intellectual capacity. The notion of female inferiority was used to justify women's subjection, and their limited participation or exclusion from certain activities in civil society. The premise of woman's in-

ferior intellect was used to legitimize her position as man's subordinate, and to advance the claims concerning the unfitness of the female sex to perform certain activities. Hence, the belief of the woman's inferior intellectual capacity became the basis for her exclusion from the public sphere.

Gómez de Avellaneda's defense of her sex takes a new approach in order to depict a positive image of women by uniting two arguments: the first centers around the superiority of the female sex; and the second, asserts the intellectual equality of the sexes, that is, women possess the same rational capacities as men. Her aim is to invalidate the premise that states that the female sex is intellectually and morally inferior to men. The author proclaims not only the equality of the sexes, but also the superiority of women in the most difficult of all tasks: the ruling of countries and the administration of public interests. Gómez de Avellaneda explicitly declares that she will attempt to prove not so much sexual equality as the superiority of her sex in carrying out this noble mission of governing nations and peoples. After an exhaustive catalogue of illustrious women rulers, she goes on to claim that women are capable of governing peoples and administering public interests. In sum, she proclaims the superior capacity of women to govern nations.

In this encyclopedic feminist treatise, Gómez de Avellaneda reveals how the tension between the principles of hierarchy and equality shapes the relations among men and women in society. The implicit conclusion of "La mujer" is that women's actual subjection and dependence to male authority is not based on the female's lack of merit or natural ability, but rather is the result of relations of force. Therefore, the subordination of women is not grounded on actual evidence, but rather on coercion. Moreover, she states that holding women in an inferior position is a detriment to society as a whole. The author calls for the emancipation of her sex as an indispensable requisite for the progress of civilization, anticipating a new era of equality when women will have the right to enter any sphere of activity. She maintains the firm belief that increased equality and freedom for the female sex are inevitable for the common good of society as a whole. The author concludes her feminist treatise by declaring that only in countries where women are honored is there genuine civilization and progress and asserts that places where the opposite is true are condemned to bondage, barbarism, and moral decay.

Let the Cubans Speak: Sab, the Press, and the Public Sphere

Our final point of examination of the author's work will explore the false premise that a legal decree banning *Sab* would be able to erase the anti-slavery novel from the memory of the Cuban people. As we will probe in the

following pages, this was simply not the case. As we will see, Gómez de Avellaneda's anti-slavery novel was published in serialized form in both the Cuban and the U.S. press and persisted in the imaginary of the island inhabitants as a manifesto of rebellion against the institution that permeated all aspects of the nineteenth-century Cuban society.

At the age of twenty-two, Gómez de Avellaneda wrote *Sab*, her first novel. She made a preliminary sketch of her abolitionist novel in her native town of Puerto Príncipe, Camagüey, and later completed the writing between the years 1836 and 1838. An article that appeared in the *Diario de la Marina* on September 19, 1867, confirms that the anti-slavery novel was indeed outlined in Puerto Príncipe ("*Sab* bosquejado en Puerto Príncipe" 2), more than six years prior to its publication in Spain. By claiming that *Sab* was outlined on the island colony before her departure to Europe, the article suggests that the author out of the Cuban context conceived the idea of the anti-slavery novel from a space where slavery was a fundamental institution. Furthermore, Edith Kelly reiterates the author's preliminary outline of her anti-slavery novel in Cuba, making reference to D. Ramón Betancourt's comments in *Prosa de mis versos* (Barcelona, 1887), where he writes: "Su preciosa novela *Sab* primera y más original de sus obras en mi humilde concepto, y que, según ella me dijo, empezó a escribir, adolescente aun, en Camagüey" (Escoto 72) (Her precious novel *Sab*, first and most original of her works in my humble opinion and which, as she herself told me, she began to write, still an adolescent, in Camagüey [Kelly, *Documents: The Banning of Sab*, 17–18]). Thus, the first abolitionist novel in the Americas was a direct product of the socio-political context of the island, and a condemnation by the author of slavery, the fundamental institution of nineteenth-century Cuban society.¹⁹

The composition of the work based on the earlier outline was begun in 1836 during the course of her family travels to Spain, while she was staying in Bordeaux ("Apuntes biográficos" 426). According to Kelly, the major part of the novel was written in Galicia, where the author probably finished the text in 1838 ("La Avellaneda's *Sab*" 304). In the prologue to *Sab*, Gómez de Avellaneda declares that she was devoted to the composition of the work during "momentos de ocio y melancolía" (*Sab*, ed. Mary Cruz 127) (moments of idleness and melancholy), and that the completed manuscript was left abandoned in a drawer for a three-year period, until it was finally published in Madrid in 1841.

During this time, the author maintained relations with creole reformers in Spain, among them were promoters of the abolitionist cause. Gómez de Avellaneda submitted the first ten chapters of the text in 1839 to one of these Cuban friends, who was residing in Seville at the time in order to prepare a favorable reception of the novel on the island and in Europe (Kelly, "La Avellaneda's *Sab* and the Political Situation" 303–304). On August 28, 1839, Gómez

de Avellaneda stated in a private letter addressed to Ignacio Cepeda that:

Respecto a mi novela . . . he sometido sus diez primeros capítulos a la censura de mi compatriota . . . hombre instruido y de gusto, que felizmente se halla ahora en esta ciudad, y he tenido el gusto de que mereciese su aprobación. El ha animado mi tímida pluma, . . . Su bondad le ha hecho propasarse hasta . . . juzgar de altamente interesante el plan de la novela. (*Obras*, VI, 167)

(With respect to my novel . . . I have submitted its first ten chapters to the censorship of my countryman . . . a well-informed and tasteful man that happily is staying at present in this city, and I have had the pleasure of meriting his approval. He has cheered my timid pen, . . . His kindness has made it prosper to the point of . . . judging of high interest the plan for the novel.)

According to Kelly, based on Escoto's study, this creole friend could be any of the following men: José Antonio Saco, Domingo Delmonte, or Salustiano de Olózaga ("La Avellaneda's Sab" 304; Escoto 193, note 2).

Perhaps the most influential work of fiction in nineteenth-century Cuba, *Sab*, has often been misinterpreted by contemporary scholars. In their analysis of the novel, many literary critics neglect to take into proper account the socio-political environment in which the text was conceived, written, and published by its author. The confusion surrounding the misinterpretation of *Sab* can be explained in great part by the failure of many critics to acknowledge that slavery was the most important social institution of Cuba during the nineteenth century (Osterhammel 699). Therefore, the master-slave model permeated all aspects of daily life (including the relations among individuals in the social domain) and determined how society was viewed and defined (699). In this first novel, Gómez de Avellaneda explicitly condemns the system of slavery in her native land. However, *Sab* has caused so much confusion in our day that several critics have downplayed or even denied the anti-slavery content of the first abolitionist novel in the Americas and the enormous influence that this subversive text exerted on the debate about slavery in Cuba.

Sab was always present at the center of the national debate in Cuba, and it became an influential work in shaping public opinion regarding the question of slavery on the island. The abolitionist novel's popularity and its influence as a subversive text can be measured by the constant references to the novel in the periodical press, from the date of its publication in 1841 until the abolition of slavery in the Spanish colony in 1886. In its own day, Gómez de Avellaneda's work of fiction was popular and revolutionary due to its potential to bring about political change by promoting the abolitionist cause in

a nineteenth-century Cuban society that was centered on the institution of slavery. It was precisely the insertion of *Sab* into the public sphere through the newspapers and journals of the island that allowed its anti-slavery message to reach a wider audience.

After the royal censor declared *Sab* and another of Gómez de Avellaneda's novels, *Dos Mujeres*, objectionable, the two novels were banned in Cuba. The reasons given by the Spanish officials for withdrawing *Sab* from circulation were explained in the record of the case ("Expediente"), consisting of a series of documents dated from July 1844 to January 1845. The first letter, from July 6, 1844—quoted in another document dated September 1, 1844—claimed that the unacceptable features of the novel were that it contained subversive doctrines opposed to the system of slavery on the island. It also claimed that *Sab* exhibited tendencies that were offensive to the moral principles and good customs of Cuban society. As stated in the official document: "pr. contener la primera doctrinas Subercivas del Sistema de esclavitud de esta isla, y contrarias á la moral y buenas costumbres" ("Expediente" 103) (for containing doctrines subversive to the system of slavery on this island, and contrary to morale and good manners). However, the official prohibition of the circulation of *Sab* on the island only served to increase its popularity among the Cuban people who saw the subversive potential of the novel's abolitionist message and a document that could be used in their struggle to undermine the slave trade, overthrow the institution of slavery, and as a part of the movement to ultimately free themselves from Spanish colonial rule.

Gómez de Avellaneda's novel was well known in her native land, even before the Spanish officials prohibited it on the island. Although the circulation of the work was officially prohibited in Cuba by the colonial authorities in 1844, there was a time lapse of approximately three years between its publication in Madrid and the novel's banning in Havana. During that period, the anti-slavery narrative was already known to Cubans on the island, as evidenced by the frequent references to the work in the periodical press of the Spanish colony and in the reviews and articles written about its author. The news of the publication of *Sab* in Madrid was immediately released in Cuba by the island press. In its February 26, 1842, issue, only two months after the Spanish newspapers announced that the novel was available to the reading public, the Cuban newspaper *Gaceta de Puerto Príncipe* directly reproduced a paragraph from the December 29, 1841, issue of the Spanish journal *El Movimiento Literario* about *Sab*'s publication in 1841 (quoted in Figarola-Caneda 78–79). In addition, a few months later, a review of the abolitionist novel by Cirilo Villaverde appeared in a well-known Cuban journal, *El Faro Industrial de la Habana*, in August 1842 (quoted in Figarola-Caneda 78–79).

Since it was initially banned from the island, the best measure of *Sab*'s popularity and influence on public opinion lies not in the number of copies sold

or made available to the public, but rather in the novel's immediate insertion into the public sphere through the press. During the nineteenth century, the newspapers molded readers into politically mature subjects while at the same time giving them a forum in which to circulate and mobilize political thought (Osterhammel 30). Thus, the periodical press became a political force allowing the free communication of ideas and opinions among its readers (31–32). Gómez de Avellaneda's anti-slavery novel exercised great influence in the political affairs of the colony through its presence in the press. It was precisely through the newspapers and journals that the novel's message against the institution of slavery reached the Cuban audience. The anti-slavery novel was frequently mentioned in the periodical press of the island: there were constant references—both explicit and implicit (due to Spanish censorship)—to *Sab* in the newspapers of the colony. Furthermore, *Sab* was published twice in serialized form during crucial moments of nineteenth-century Cuban history: first, in the middle of the Ten Year's War (1868–1878) and again just three years before the abolition of slavery on the island. Therefore, *Sab* entered the public sphere mainly—but not only—through the periodical press.

The novel's early inception into the periodical press of the island demonstrates the great impact that *Sab* had in promoting the abolitionist cause in Cuba. From the moment of its instant insertion in the press until slavery was finally abolished in 1886, the abolitionist novel became central to the national debate on the island. *Sab* circulated widely among the reading public in Cuba, regardless of its initial banning by the colonial authorities. Indeed, prohibition made this first propaganda novel against slavery in the Americas even more popular among Cubans. One might imagine how Cubans met informally in houses in private gatherings to read aloud and discuss passages and chapters of the anti-slavery narrative. Besides such gatherings, Portuondo reminds us that handwritten copies of the novel were copied and passed from hand to hand, circulating clandestinely on the island (212). Thus, it can be concluded that there was an underground circulation and distribution of the anti-slavery work among Cubans who considered the novel to be communal property. After being banned, the novel not only became more popular among the Cuban people, but the fact of having been censured on the island increased its subversive potential and transformed the work of fiction into something else: Cuba's first anti-slavery document. *Sab* became something more than a novel. It was a symbol of insurrection, giving the fictional text a different status. In the minds of Cubans, it was a manifesto of rebellion against the institution of slavery.

It is significant that the *Diario de la Marina*, only two years after the 1846 prohibition of circulation of the anti-slavery novel, advertised for two consecutive months the first edition of Gómez de Avellaneda's collected poems published in Madrid, which she dedicated to her creole mother, Doña Francisca Arteaga de Escalada. *Sab* and the volume of her collected poetry—both of

which were announced in the Cuban newspaper—appeared in Madrid in 1841. Therefore, in the minds of the readers, an association between the two works could easily be established, which again brings up a necessary consideration of the banned novel. Although the banning's intention was to erase the subversive text from the reading public's imagination, this tacit allusion to the anti-slavery narrative via advertisements for the author's poetry kept *Sab* visible among the members of the horizontal community of the nation (Benedict Anderson).

The two advertisements for Gómez de Avellaneda's collected poems appeared in the *Diario de la Marina* on two separate days: first on October 31, 1846, and again on November 2, 1846. The public announcements of her volume of poetry were placed under the section entitled "Diccionario" (Dictionary), next to and visually parallel to a series of multiple ads advertising, "Venta de esclavos" (Slaves for Sale) by their masters. The coincidence of date (1841) and place (Madrid) of the publication of *Sab* and Gómez de Avellaneda's volume of poetry allow the reader to easily establish a connection between the slave trade and her abolitionist narrative. Therefore, the veiled reference to the banned work of fiction restores the text to its audience by implicitly asking the readers to remember the anti-slavery novel, making the forbidden work visible again. Although *Sab* was removed from circulation by the Spanish government officials, the abolitionist narrative was never erased from the imagination of the Cuban public.

The circulation of the anti-slavery novel in the island periodical press can be traced in Havana's main newspaper, *Diario de la Marina*. This daily paper announced at different historical periods that copies of *Sab* were available for sale in Cuba. For instance, there were advertisements in 1858 and again in 1881 that announced to the reading public that the anti-slavery novel by Gómez de Avellaneda could be purchased on the island at a very low price, which in turn made the work even more accessible to and easy to obtain by potential readers.

Thanks to its publication and advertisement in the *Diario de la Marina*, Gómez de Avellaneda's abolitionist work reached a wide audience, contrary to the prevailing view among many literary critics. According to the daily paper's book sales ads, the readers were able to obtain the novel without difficulty. For instance, on Saturday May 22, 1858, a public announcement appeared on the newspaper's front page under the section entitled "Obras ilustradas baratísimas" (Inexpensive Illustrated Works), where the novel is listed by title, author's name and price of the book: "El *Sab* de la Avellaneda 4 ts. 12 rs." ("Obras ilustradas baratísimas" 1) (*Sab* by Gómez de Avellaneda, 4 tomes, 12 reales). Furthermore, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, on January 28, 1881, the Havana newspaper advertised on its title page that another edition of the abolitionist novel was for sale at an even lower price than before. The availability of this second edition of the novel appears under the heading: "Baratísimo" (Inexpensive), and includes the following information: "El *Sab*

por la Avellaneda, 2 ts. 10 rs.” (“Baratísimo” 1) (*Sab* by Gómez de Avellaneda, 2 tomes, 10 reales).

Moreover, besides the editions of the novel sold on the island as reported by the *Diario de la Marina*, *Sab* circulated in serialized form in the periodical press of both Havana and New York during the 1870s and the 1880s. First, the anti-slavery work was published in serial form in the New York journal *La América*, between May 15 and September 15 in 1871, during the Ten Years’ War of Cuba’s struggle to gain its independence from Spain. The second release in serial format was in 1883, only three years before the abolition of slavery in the Spanish colony. This release, in Cuba’s *El Museo*, a journal from Havana, was preceded by the publication of comments from the periodical press of the island, such as one that appeared in *El Triunfo* on July 4, 1883, where it was made clear to the reading public that the banning of the novel had actually accentuated its subversive argument against the institution of slavery in the colonial society.

The Havana journal *El Triunfo* announced that *El Museo* would begin the publication in serial form of the novel *Sab* by Gómez de Avellaneda in its thirty-first issue. The announcement emphasizes the abolitionist character of the novel and calls the attention of its readers to the fact that the work was banned in Cuba due to its subversive anti-slavery message. The article implies that Avellaneda’s abolitionist novel is a pioneer work of anti-slavery narrative, since it made clear that *Sab* had preceded by many years the publication of the popular *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe (Figarola-Caneda 79–80).

The fact that *Sab* appeared twice in the periodical press of both Cuba and the United States suggests its influence in transforming the public opinion in the island. Both instances point to the work’s relevance throughout Cuban history and to its subversive potential as a political tool to bring about social change. *Sab’s* presence in the periodical press made it possible to mobilize readers, as mature political subjects, in favor of the abolitionist cause. Mary Cruz concludes that the serialized publication of *Sab* in *La América*, the New York revolutionary journal, during the initial phase of the Cuban independence struggle, points to the fact that the novel was used as a far-reaching ideological weapon in the campaign to put an end to slavery and obtain political freedom from Spain (“Prologue” to *Sab*, 1976 56). This highlights the full extent of the work’s impact to ultimately effect political change in the colonial society of the island. For this reason, the Spanish authorities considered the novel in its own day an extremely dangerous text.

Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel was perhaps the book that contributed most to maintaining the abolitionist sentiment alive and to fostering the anti-slavery cause in the island. Indeed, on August 22, 1921, an article entitled “La mujer y la política” (Women and Politics) appeared in *El Mundo*, one of the major Havana daily newspapers, and credited Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel with

helping galvanize the abolitionist cause in her native land: “Miss Beecher Stone con 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 (sic) en el Parlamento inglés” (“La mujer y la política” 7) (Miss Beecher Stone [sic] with her *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Avellaneda with her novel *Sab* have done more for the abolition of slavery than all of the speeches of Mr. Willioforce [sic] in the English Parliament). *Sab* was an influential political tool for several reasons: first, at its initial stage the work of fiction provided the abolitionists under a system of colonial censorship and repression with powerful moral, legal, and ethical arguments through which the case against the inhuman practice of slavery could be formulated and sustained. Second, it was crucial in maintaining the abolitionist sentiment on the island and the commitment to the prolonged struggle alive and strong.

The work of fiction that contributed most to the anti-slavery cause on the island was present in the imagination of the members of the horizontal community of the nation from its initial release. *Sab* remained at the center of the national debate for five consecutive decades, from the 1840s to the 1880s, until slavery was finally abolished in Cuba by Spanish royal decree on October 7, 1886. The novel’s potential to bring about social change by promoting the abolition of slavery, the central institution that shaped Cuban society during the nineteenth century was finally realized that year, three years after its second serialized publication in the island periodical press.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and the Politics of Literature

The present study pays tribute to this Cuban-Spanish author who has been consistently acclaimed throughout the last two centuries as one of the greatest female writers in the history of Hispanic literature. On the centennial of her birth in 1914, she was compared with the greatest male writers of Spanish literature: in poetry with Fray Luis de León, Herrera, and Quintana, and in drama with Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca (Harter 17, 169). The 1841 and 1850 editions of her poetry and her theatrical masterpieces won her such titles as the “Modern Sappho” and the new “Melpomene” (Kelly, “The Centennial” 343). Emilia Bernal argues that Gómez de Avellaneda was an unparalleled writer, a claim that we can still make today.

Thus, the present volume is a collective effort to reassess the lasting and profound impact of the work of arguably the leading female writer of the Spanish language. This book is the first collection of critical essays in English devoted to the study of the works of Gómez de Avellaneda. The need for this volume is clear in that a multi-authored book in English on Gómez de Avella-

neda that introduces the English-speaking reader, student and scholar to one of the major woman writers in the Spanish language has never before been published. At the present time, there is an urgent need to fill this gap in recent scholarship in order to offer to non-Spanish speakers a broad and comprehensive study of the author's extensive and varied literary production.

This volume is an international endeavor that brings together essays by scholars from Cuba, Canada, and the United States. The essays included here represent diverse theoretical approaches, and offer new critical perspectives on the work of Gómez de Avellaneda, representing the fields of ecocriticism, feminist studies, anti-slavery studies, performance studies, indigenous studies, postcolonial studies, and memory studies. Some of the contributors re-evaluate well-known texts by the author by providing new insights, while others focus their analyses on those neglected writings that have received less critical attention, such as the early play *Leoncia* and the *leyendas* (folk tales). Overall, the essays by these scholars represent an original and fresh contribution toward a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a body of writings that encompasses all the literary genres.

The first section of this volume examines the overlooked period in Gómez de Avellaneda life and works: the author's "presence" in the United States. The relationship of the writer with the American nation is explored by focusing on her U.S. travels and the poetry she composed during her two-month stay in the country, along with her close ties with the Cuban intellectuals and journalists living in the United States, in particular with her two friends: Cirilo Villaverde and Lorenzo de Allo. It also explores her extensive coverage in the U.S. press, both in the English and Spanish language newspapers.

The three essays of the second section, *Sab* (1841): The First Anti-Slavery Novel in the Americas, are devoted to the analysis of *Sab* from different theoretical approaches. In "Nothing to Hide: *Sab* as an Anti-Slavery and Feminist Novel," Julia C. Paulk examines in detail Gómez de Avellaneda's pioneering role in the anti-slavery literature of the Americas with this early work of fiction. Among Cuban anti-slavery writers, Gómez de Avellaneda is the only woman writer to publish in this area and she is noticeably more direct in her critique of slavery than her male counterparts. Despite her important contribution to anti-slavery literature of the Americas, and her direct and explicit denunciation of slavery in *Sab*, critics continue to debate the extent to which the novel in fact presents an anti-slavery argument. The goal of this essay is to contextualize *Sab* within the larger body of anti-slavery literature of the Americas as well as within the Cuban anti-slavery movement to demonstrate the ways in which she was a pioneer of such literature. Moreover, by revisiting the concepts of national allegory and social Romanticism, the essay shows that individualistic ideals of freedom and equality permeate Gómez de Avellaneda's text, making it a novel that denounces all forms of oppression,

rather than masking a feminist argument behind an anti-slavery one, as some critics want to claim.

The next essay in this section, “Picturing Cuba: Romantic Ecology in Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* (1841),” by Adriana Méndez Rodenas explores the tropical ecology and the plantation landscape of the island as it relates to the devastation of its natural environment (natural resources) in the abolitionist novel. Echoing the sonnet, “Al partir,” written upon her departure from Santiago de Cuba in 1836, Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* pictures Cuba as “edén querido” (beloved Eden), an idyllic trope that depicts the island—particularly, its geographic center—as an Edenic landscape. This essay examines the way the novel shapes a “spatial imagination” (De Loughrey and Handley 4), that foregrounds the importance of place, a place geographically distant from the colonial hub in Havana, but pictured as the island’s symbolic core and the source of its material and spiritual riches. For Rodenas, the privileged space of Cubitas and its environs is mapped by lyrical evocations of two distinct tropical ecologies—garden and cave—as well as by a recurrent natural phenomenon—the tempest. The landscape surrounding the Bellavista plantation warns against the impending ravaging of island ecology by “Cuba grande” (Big Cuba), the Cuba of the slave compound and mechanized sugar mills, while, at the same time, mourning for a lost Eden on the verge of disappearance. *Sab*’s lament for insular nature is aligned with a broader yearning for lost landscapes in Caribbean literature, a response to the large-scale deforestation that resulted from the expansion of the sugar industry. For Rodenas, the emphasis on nature, so central to Romanticism, enables Gómez de Avellaneda to elucidate her own sense of dislocation, her ability to move between two worlds, Spain and Cuba. Gómez de Avellaneda’s Romantic ecology contributes to a broader trans-American perspective, as seen in her poem “El viajero americano.”

The final essay of this section, “Nation, Violence, Memory: Disrupting Foundational Readings of *Sab*,” by Jenna Leving Jacobson, focuses on the figure of the indigenous mother, Martina, and her relationship to the foundational violence of Cuban history as evidenced in the system of slavery of the Spanish colony. Storyteller of past violence and of ominous futures, adoptive mother to the slave protagonist, and presumed legatee of Taíno ancestry, Martina is one of the most enigmatic yet least studied characters in Gómez de Avellaneda’s foundational novel *Sab*. At once illegible and revealing, stable and disruptive, she performs the role of the *ab-original* mother, bearer of native roots, oral tradition, and narrative practices. Through a close reading of this marginal character and the Cubitas cave—a space framing an extended characterization of Martina—this essay addresses some of the possible alternative meanings that the figure of the indigenous mother brings to the novel. Along with Martina’s problematic identity, her narrative function is emphasized, specifically as a force of interruption to what has become a dominant

interpretative model applied to the novel, that which, based on the work of Doris Sommer, underscores the primacy of allegory and of the structure of the Romance as principal modes for understanding the national political project that takes shape in *Sab*. But, for Jacobson, such an allegorical reading of proposed cultural reconciliation depends on a forgetting of Cuba's violent origins, on erasing racial dimensions inscribed by colonialism and slavery. Martina, in contrast, remembers (and insists on repetitively narrating) the violence forever inscribed in the subterranean space of the cave. A kind of archival womb of an indigenous past and of colonial violations, the cave symbolizes the reproduction of knowledge and the transmission of a memory that threatens the foundational concept of national consolidation and racial restitution identified by Sommer. Martina's voice interrupts the allegorical dimensions of the text, disrupting the interpretive framework that has a harmonious new proto-nation imagined through the affective ties constructed by the novel. By inscribing memories of past suffering and threats of future violence, the figure of the *madre-indígena* (native-mother) reflects a failed desire for national harmonization and cultural reconciliation inferred by the allegorical structure. She is effectively *other* to the allegory's ecumenical drive, dissonant to that impulse to forget the foundational violence of Cuban history: the conquest and its continued brutality in the system of slavery.

The third section of the volume, "*Guatimozín* and the Rewriting of the Conquest," focuses on the novel *Guatimozín*, and on its creation of a counter-historical narrative of the colonial encounter. In "Rewriting History and Reconciling Cultural Differences in *Guatimozín*," Rogelia Lily Ibarra argues that Gómez de Avellaneda rewrites the history of the Conquest of Mexico in her novel, using the genre of the historical novel to recreate the "account" of the Conquest and to further develop its three epic figures: Cortés, Moctezuma II, and Guatimozín into the main characters. She places these historical figures on the forefront of her fictional plot, which permits the encounter of two discursive modes in the same text: "the narrative mode, intrinsic part of the tale, whose discourse focuses on the act of telling a story; and the scientific mode, centered on the transmission of information and data." Ibarra shows how Gómez de Avellaneda uses the historical narrative of Hernán Cortés and Moctezuma's encounter as a way of re-writing history and broadening the parameters of the traditional role of historian. At the same time, according to Ibarra, Gómez de Avellaneda contests hegemonic discourses of civilization and barbarism and creates a critical subtext on contemporary issues of her time related to gender, race, and colonial relationships of power between Spain and the newly forming Latin American nations. For Ibarra, the use of counter-historical narrative discourses challenges the concept of history as master text and demonstrates the dialogical relationship between "history" and "literature."

The last essay of this section, “Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and her View of the Colonial Past” by Mariselle Meléndez, examines the author’s reconstruction and reinterpretation of the colonial encounter between Europeans and indigenous populations in the following works: *Guatimozín*, a selection of poems included in *Descripción de las grandes fiestas celebradas en Cárdenas con motivo de la inauguración de la estatua de Cristóbal Colón* (1863), and the legends: *El cacique de Turmequé* (1869), and “Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés” (1869). The essay focuses on Gómez de Avellaneda’s critical engagement with four popular figures of the colonial period including the discoverer (Cristóbal Colón), the conquistador (Hernán Cortés), the indigenous emperor (Guatimozín), and the *cacique* (chief) (Turmequé).

In the fourth section of this volume, Catharina Vallejo, in “The ‘Presence’ of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in Three *Tradiciones* from *Mi última excursión por los Pirineos* (1859),” explores Gómez de Avellaneda’s travel narratives and folk tales (*tradiciones*). Between the years 1844 and 1860, Gómez de Avellaneda published twelve *tradiciones*, a genre that placed into writing “historical” narratives originally transmitted orally through local informants and communities. Vallejo studies the three *tradiciones* collected by Gómez de Avellaneda from informants during her travels through the Basque country and the Pyrenees in the years 1857 and 1859, and published in the *Diario de la Marina* of Havana in 1860. Gómez de Avellaneda’s presence in these *tradiciones* is analyzed by referring to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and his ideas of “presence” as a spatial relationship, and its effects as an appeal exclusively to the senses. The notion of “performance” (actions and bodily gestures) proposed by Judith Butler sheds light on how the author/narrator involves herself in the narrative; how this physical and dynamic presence is revealed in the textual space; and how this presence constitutes the material (corporeal) link of the signifying act of the narrative, in which the spatial dimension (presence, being) comes to dominate the temporal one (present-past).

In the last section of this volume, the essays cover drama, poetry and the love letters of Gómez de Avellaneda. In “The Making of *Leoncia*: Romanticism, Tragedy, and Feminism,” Alexander Selimov studies the play *Leoncia* as the drama that marks the beginning of the career of Gómez de Avellaneda as the foremost woman playwright of the nineteenth century. Literary critics have seen two major themes of European Romanticism in this work: love and destiny. However, Selimov argues that the author makes use of romantic rhetoric to address the issue of virtue in order to expose and denounce women’s subordination in society.

In the next essay, “Rebellious Apprentice Devours *Maestros*: Is it Hunger or Vengeance?” Mary Louise Pratt offers an insightful analysis of the author’s poetry that acknowledges her modernity. Gómez de Avellaneda is one of the major innovators in Hispanic poetry. Her original style of poetry influenced

an entire generation of poets, including José Martí and Rubén Darío, among many others. Pratt proposes to read her as a woman poet who was ahead of her time and as more modern than canonical romantics like Heredia, Lamartine, or Espronceda. Although Gómez de Avellaneda was influenced by neoclassicism and the romantic poets of the earlier nineteenth century, Pratt argues that an insubordinate reading (a “per-version”) of her poetry invites a different association, one that looks ahead to the symbolist and decadent poetics that took form in the work of Baudelaire and Verlaine. For Pratt, there exists a reading of Avellaneda’s poetry, in other words, that sees the female poet as more modern than her (male) romantic models and acknowledges her as a pioneer in this regard. In one of her late compositions, a poem written in direct reference to a corresponding poetic text by Heredia, she takes up an aggressively modernizing position in contrast with his romanticism. For Pratt, we are in the presence of a bold creative talent that, in the face of a poetic repertoire that excludes her, appropriates that tradition and uses it to animate an insubordinate artistic practice.

The last essay of the volume, “Tu amante ultrajada no puede ser tu amiga (Your Scorned Lovel Can’t Be Your Friend): Editing Tula’s Love Letters,” by Emil Volek examines in detail the love letters written over more than a decade by Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873) to her lover, Ignacio de Cepeda y Alcalde. These personal and intimate texts intersect in intricate ways narrating an epistolary autobiography, but also a modern novel of formation, a *Bildungsroman*. The correspondence focuses on her transformation into a woman who has gained experience of the world. This *corpus* of letters exhibits the awakening of a modern female consciousness and remains an exquisite expression of human love as one of the greatest universal passions.

Altogether, this interrelated set of essays covers the majority of the literary genres cultivated by Gómez de Avellaneda, including the novel, as well as short prose works like the folk tales, drama, poetry, travel narratives, and letters. By uniting in one volume critical essays that analyze works pertaining to several literary genres, it provides a more complete and thorough picture of the author’s literary output, and helps to correct any partial or incomplete interpretation of her work.

The editors’ objectives with the present collection are to shed light on the innovative and challenging work of Gómez de Avellaneda and also to begin a process of rectifying past and present errors of interpretation. Such acts of misinterpretation and critical blindness are based on superficial approaches to the author’s texts that tend to oversimplify the aesthetic aspects of her works, particularly of her poetry, and trivialize or even totally dismiss the sociopolitical dimension inherent to her writings.

Another goal of this volume is to draw the attention of scholars from other academic disciplines—such as African, Latino, American, Feminist and

Woman Studies, History, and Comparative Literature—to one of Latin America’s major literary figures and the interdisciplinary scope of her writings. We hope to highlight how, in her prose works, Gómez de Avellaneda established a dialogue with several disciplines of knowledge: history, women’s history, political theory, philosophy, theology, and the expanding role of the press.

Notes

1. For a discussion of the major topics see Osterhammel, chapter eight, and chapters twelve to eighteen.
2. Although, the Indianist novel can be traced early to *Netzula* in 1832 by Lafragua (Íñigo Madrigal and Alvar 93). *Guatimozín* (1846) is considered the first indianista novel of importance in Hispanic America. Regarding this matter see Concha Meléndez and Mary Cruz (“Prologue,” *Obra Selecta* XXIII).
3. For an overview of Gómez de Avellaneda’s literary production, see Méndez, *Otra mirada a la Peregrina*; Montero, *La Avellaneda bajo sospecha* and *Estrategia y propuesta de un periodismo marginal*; and Romero, *Lecturas sin fronteras* and *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Obras, ensayos, artículos, crítica literaria e impresiones de viaje*. See also Volek, “Cartas de amor de la Avellaneda” and Williams, *The Life and Dramatic Works of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*.
4. For an analysis, see Albin “*La hija de Cuba* de María Elena Cruz Varela.”
5. The film *Sab*, released in 2004, was directed by Fidel Olivar Bolívar. For an analysis of the opera based on Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel, see Agranoff Ochs, and “Opera Baltasar.” For the novel, see Davies and Servera. For Gómez de Avellaneda’s translations in English and other languages see the sections Foreign Language Translations, English Translations, and English Translations of poems.
6. For a new approach to the Western lyric tradition, see Jonathan Culler’s recent study, *Theory of the Lyric*.
7. For an analysis of the poem, see Albin, “Poesía y Creencia: “La Cruz” de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda”; and Albin, “El cristianismo y la nueva imagen de la mujer.” See also Kelly, “Bibliografía de La Avellaneda”; and Kelly, “Lo que dicen los críticos acerca de la versificación en la poesía lírica de la Avellaneda.”
8. For a study on the rhetoric of Romanticism, see De Man, “The Rhetoric of Blindness,” and *The Rhetorics of Romanticism*. For a study of Romanticism and Gender, see Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism; Romanticism and Gender; and Mothers of the Nation*.
9. See Albin, “Romanticismo y fin de siglo: José Martí, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y José María Heredia”; Albin, “Romanticismo y fin de siglo: Gertrudis Gómez de

- Avellaneda y José Martí”; and Albin, “Ante el Niágara: Heredia, Sagra, Gómez de Avellaneda y el proyecto modernizador.”
10. See Vieira-Branco.
 11. Gómez de Avellaneda left out of her collected works several plays, such as *Egilona* (1845), *Errores del corazón* (1852), *El donativo del diablo* (1852), among others.
 12. The work is considered a biblical play “because its principal incidents and characters are taken from the Bible” (Bransby 15).
 13. “El Liceo . . . quiso también agasajar a la poetisa con una corona de laurel y oro, que ciñó a sus sienes, por ausencia de la Reina, su tío el infante don Francisco de Paula” (Cotarelo y Mori 124) (The Liceo . . . wanted also to regale the poetess with a Crown of carnations and gold, that was placed on her temples, in absence of the Queen, by her uncle the Prince Francisco de Paula).
 14. According to Simón Palmer, this provision bequesting her complete works to the Academy was eliminated from the writer’s testament of 1872 (Simón Palmar 540).
 15. For an analysis of “La dama de gran tono,” see Albin, “El costumbrismo feminista: los ensayos de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda.”
 16. For an analysis of “Capacidad de las mujeres para el gobierno,” see Albin, “Fronteras de género, nación y ciudadanía: *La Ilustración. Album de las Damas* (1845) de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda”; and “Fronteras de género, nación y ciudadanía: *La Ilustración. Album de las Damas* (1845) y *Album cubano de lo bueno y de lo bello* (1860) de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda” in *Género, poesía y esfera pública*. See also Sosa de Quesada, “Album cubano de lo bueno y de lo bello.” For a recent study of *La Ilustración* see Burguera López, “Al Ángel Regio”; and Burguera López, *Las damas del liberalismo respetable*.
 17. For an analysis of “La mujer,” see Albin, “La revista *Album cubano* de Gómez de Avellaneda: La esfera pública y la crítica a la modernidad.”
 18. Francois Poulain de la Barre’s famous pamphlet *De l’égalité des deux sexes (On the Equality of the Two Sexes)* of 1673 was a landmark work in debates on the equality of the sexes.
 19. For a study on African slavery in Spain’s Atlantic empire see Fradera and Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery and Anti-slavery in Spain’s Atlantic Empire*. For an analysis of slavery, law and the press see Alejandro de la Fuente, “Slaves and the Creation of Legal Rights in Cuba. Coartación and Papel”; and Brian Gabriel, *The Press and Slavery in America, 1791–1859*.

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

María C. Albin, Megan Corbin, and Raúl Marrero-Fente

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 *Chozo 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 denunciations 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 Diaz 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 Diaz 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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**Nothing to Hide:
Sab as an Anti-Slavery and Feminist Novel**

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The criticism of slavery in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's first novel, *Sab*, places her at the forefront of the development of anti-slavery literature in the Americas. Gómez de Avellaneda's 1841 novel was published eleven years before the most famous of these works in an international context, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, and was among the earliest of the Cuban anti-slavery novels either to be written or published. Despite her important contribution to abolitionist literature, Gómez de Avellaneda is still not widely known outside of Hispanic studies. Among Cuban anti-slavery writers, the author is the only woman writer of fiction in this area and she is noticeably more direct in her critique of slavery than her male counterparts. Although Gómez de Avellaneda's denunciation of slavery in *Sab* is overt and explicit, critics continue to debate the extent to which the novel in fact presents an anti-slavery argument. While the rights of women are clearly a priority for her, the writer's denunciation of all forms of coercion is driven by a unified Romantic philosophy countering multiple forms of oppression. The goals of this essay are twofold. Firstly, I will contextualize *Sab* within anti-slavery literature of the Americas as well as within the Cuban anti-slavery movement in order to demonstrate the ways in which the author was a pioneer of this branch of protest literature. Secondly, I will show how the critique of all forms of legal oppression permeates Gómez de Avellaneda's text, allowing it to promote multiple, overt denunciations of social injustices.

A search of the most recent publications available via the MLA International Bibliography indicates that critics continue to debate whether or not *Sab* fully promotes an anti-slavery message.¹ Although she was well-known and widely read in her lifetime, Gómez de Avellaneda was, like so many female writers of the nineteenth century, understudied during much of the last

century, until feminist literary critics began a project of recovery and reinvestigation of the works of women writers of previous eras. Additionally, the rise in interest in Afro-Hispanic studies also led to greater investigation of literature representing people of color and, in the context of the nineteenth century, the polemic surrounding the practice of slavery and its representation in works of fiction. As will be further explored below, there has been a tendency among critics to identify a conflict or a tension between the novel's feminist message and its anti-slavery one.

Gómez de Avellaneda has been widely celebrated by feminist critics for reasons that become clear very quickly to those who study her life and works. The author did not conform to the prescribed gender roles of her era in her private life, in her public career as a writer, or in her literary treatment of women. In particular, the novels *Sab* and *Dos mujeres* were so unconventional as to be considered threatening by the Spanish colonial censors in Cuba and were banned from sale there despite having been published and well-received in Spain.² Among the first studies to begin the contemporary reinvestigation into Gómez de Avellaneda's life and literature is Carmen Bravo-Villasante's informative critical biography, *Una vida romántica La Avellaneda*, published in 1967.³ Bravo-Villasante's book was followed later by very influential studies, including the often cited chapters dedicated to *Sab* in Susan Kirkpatrick's *Las Románticas* and in Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions*.⁴ Both of these critics provide valuable insights into the messages of Gómez de Avellaneda's novel and pursue unique critical approaches, yet they are united by their conclusion that the novel privileges feminism over anti-slavery to the extent that the anti-slavery stance is viewed as an additional vehicle for a feminist argument. Sommer, for example, entitles her chapter, "Sab, c'est moi," referencing Flaubert's famous statement of self-identification with his literary creation, suggesting that the author saw only herself seeking freedom in the slave character. Through Sab's transformation into an author, Sommer argues, both Gómez de Avellaneda and her character are able to "vent their passions by writing and [that] their literary slippages destabilize the rhetorical system that constrains them" (115), yet Gómez de Avellaneda stops short of promoting true freedom for Sab (137). In a somewhat similar vein, Kirkpatrick argues that Gómez de Avellaneda subverts the masculinist discourse of Romanticism by creating her own categories of the self and individual expression (23), but agrees with others that, despite the subjectivity she attributes to Sab, his exceptionality prevents the novel from being truly anti-slavery (156). In general, a frequent argument in the criticism of the novel is that Gómez de Avellaneda's overriding concern is for the plight of women rather than for the suffering of slaves. The anti-slavery position of the text is, in this reading, perceived as an allegory or cover for the argument against the oppression of women. This conception of the novel does not allow for the co-existence of two complementary protest messages.

Interestingly, a number of critics who are more interested in the potential anti-slavery and anti-racism messages of the novel arrive at similar conclusions regarding the text's feminist and abolitionist stance, although with some important differences. These critics, too, often determine that *Sab*'s true focus is the oppression of women, although not necessarily on the travails of all women equally. Jerome Branche's "Ennobling Savagery? Sentimentalism and the Subaltern in *Sab*" presents several arguments against the idea that Gómez de Avellaneda's novel is abolitionist or even fully feminist that are representative of the position against reading *Sab* as a truly liberationist work. To begin with, Branche points out the nearly total absence of black female characters in this novel and also the neglect of this topic in many published interpretations (13). For Branche, the failure of the text to represent black women as characters and subjects, "explodes the (uneven) slave-wife analogy" (14) relied upon by many white, female writers who considered themselves anti-slavery advocates and indicates a blindness in Gómez de Avellaneda's text as well as in the criticism of it to the potential for solidarity of women across class and color lines and for the double bind faced by women of color. Moreover, based on Gómez de Avellaneda's curious description of Sab's physical appearance, Branche reads Sab as being "made to pass for White," rather than realize his identity as mulatto or black (15). Not only are Sab's African mother and heritage denied in this way, but Branche considers that more fully black slaves in the novel are characterized as "subhuman and somehow incapable of socio-political consciousness" (17). As Branche and other critics point out, Sab is in fact a member of the de B... family and holds a privileged position of authority as the *mayoral* (overseer) of the Bellavista plantation. For Branche, this exceptionality means that Sab cannot be read as a representative of a larger group of slaves or of people of color (18). Thus, the conclusion drawn from these arguments is that the novel's primary interest is in decrying the oppression of well-to-do white women, like Gómez de Avellaneda herself, and in revisiting earlier versions of the noble or royal slave character as seen in works such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal*.⁵

Branche and other critics of the novel who raise these points indeed mention issues that are central to the consideration of *Sab* or any other novel addressing slavery as an abolitionist and egalitarian text. However, other scholars identify a greater commitment to abolitionism in the novel. Jeremy L. Cass's recent article, "Deciphering Sedition in *Sab*: Avellaneda's Transient Engagement with Abolitionism," reads an abolitionist message in *Sab*, although he does not describe a positioning in the novel that is as radical or as committed as the one described by William Luis, Ivan Schulman, and others. Cass bases his interpretation of the novel on the multiple instances in which Sab alludes to slave uprisings, particularly when he is in the presence of white slave owners (184). Sab's comments are incendiary because they remind his listeners, as

well as his readers, of the first successful slave revolt in the Americas, the revolution in Haiti. Contemporary readers of *Sab* would most likely make this connection themselves, but the narrator steps in to further clarify the reference and strengthen the anti-slavery argument (185). As Cass and others point out, fear of a Haitian-style revolution was endemic to nineteenth-century Cuban planters; references to this slave rebellion in works such as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and others demonstrate that this fear extended to North American slave-owners as well. As Cass argues, these "references highlight a noteworthy engagement with abolitionism. They reveal an undergirding potential for rebellion in even the most compliant of slaves. Even Sab, the slave who rejects his master's repeated offers of freedom so that he may continue to live at Belavista, is capable of considering insurrection" (190). Despite highlighting the novel's invocation of slave uprisings and pointing out that a literary work can have both a feminist and an abolitionist agenda (189), Cass ultimately characterizes *Sab*'s engagement with abolitionism as "transient" (186) and identifies Carlota's coming of age as the true concern of the novel (189).

Nonetheless, other scholars argue that the context in which Gómez de Avellaneda wrote as well as her goals must be taken into consideration in order to fully understand the extent to which the author went against the conventions of her day. This is a key factor in evaluating *Sab* as an anti-slavery novel. Although it is often pointed out, it is important to remember that *Sab* presented a powerful enough argument against both slavery and misogyny that it was banned in colonial Cuba; this fact also illustrates how the work was received in its day. In *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* and "How to Read *Sab*," William Luis presents compelling arguments in favor of considering *Sab* as a committed anti-slavery novel. In "How to Read *Sab*," he offers several major points in favor of considering historical context to the extent possible. He asks, "[S]hould we as critics impose the present on the past; that is, introduce concepts that were not readily available when the works were written?" (175). In order to better contextualize Gómez de Avellaneda's novel, Luis describes the political and literary climates in both Spain and Cuba when *Sab* was composed. He points out that the author was most likely only able to publish her novel in Spain because the liberal Regent María Cristina was in power at the time (178). Further, he argues that Gómez de Avellaneda's text represents the author's own foray into the contemporary slavery debate and she employs the terms of the ruling liberals in her position: "If we consider events unfolding in Spain, Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*, and her treatment of slavery, can be understood as her attempt to participate in the ongoing debate on slavery, supported by constitutionalists in Spain" ("How" 179).

With regard to the argument that Sab is too privileged to be representative of the larger group of slaves, Luis replies that in fact even this characterization of Sab would be problematic for supporters of slavery: "Though a

modern reader may view the protagonists [Sab and Juan Francisco Manzano] as exceptions rather than the rule, in nineteenth-century Cuba, these same figures were objectionable to supporters of slavery, for they undermined the status quo” (182).⁶ Luis reminds us that the presentation of the passive, exceptional slave is a rhetorical device that encourages the white reader—and nineteenth-century readers in Spain and Cuba at the time Gómez de Avellaneda wrote were overwhelmingly white and well-to-do—to identify with the sympathetic slave character (182–183). To portray a violent slave inciting rebellion, Luis proposes, would have been a mistake: “I argue that during this historical period it would have been counterproductive to depict a black who was not a passive slave. Such a description would have reinforced the fears that many had about an impending slave rebellion” (183). Ivan A. Schulman made a similar argument in his 1977 article, “The Portrait of the Slave: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Cuban Anti-slavery Novel”: “Translated into artistic terms, this [fearful] attitude suggested the advisability of encouraging a mild rather than a bold or rebellious anti-slavery narrative, one in which the slave might draw tears from the reader rather than cries of fear or horror” (359). Finally, Luis concludes, among early Cuban anti-slavery works, “*Sab*’s anti-slavery position is the most aggressive” (Luis “How” 183–184). Sab is idealized, but, at the same time, he is endowed with a humanity that society did not generally grant to slaves at the time; Luis states, “During the time of the narration, slaves were treated as animals, considered to be inferior, incapable of reasoning” (182).

Historically speaking, Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel was composed around the same time that Domingo Del Monte had begun his noted *tertulia* and had begun commissioning and collaborating on a number of anti-slavery works. In Schulman’s description of the earliest works of Cuban anti-slavery literature, *Sab* figures third in the chronology, following the 1838 publication of Anselmo Suárez y Romero’s *Francisco* and the 1838 publication of Felix Tanco y Bosmeniel’s *Petrona y Rosalía* (365, Note 3). One must of course also add Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía* in 1835 as an important, early anti-slavery work, although it is not of course a work of fiction. In Luis’s estimation, the majority of novels produced by the Del Monte writers offer only “mild descriptions” of slavery in their critique of the institution (181). Schulman argues that the early Cuban anti-slavery novels, those written prior to 1860, did not promote immediate abolition but “a gradual, forward-looking and humanitarian policy of limiting the growth of slaves through the enforcement of the slave traffic treaties” (359), particularly since the Del Monte writers themselves were dependent upon slave labor for their wealth. The novels were nonetheless perceived at the time as being threatening to the slavery system and therefore to the entire colonial system of administration in the island; as a result, the *tertulia* writers’ works could not be published in Cuba for many

decades (Luis, “How” 181). Nonetheless, as the only female anti-slavery writer of her generation in Cuba, Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel is considered to voice the strongest anti-slavery position articulated at the time.

Despite Luis’s and Schulman’s comparisons between *Sab* and the literary production of the well-known *tertulia*, Nina Scott argues that Gómez de Avellaneda “had no contact with the Del Monte group” (xx). The Del Monte writers began their collaboration in 1834 in sugar-producing Matanzas, not far from Havana (Fisher 323, note 2), while Gómez de Avellaneda was born and raised in Puerto Príncipe, in central Cuba, where the economic focus was on raising cattle rather than sugar (Scott xx). The Del Monte *tertulia* did not move to Havana until 1835, just one year before Gómez de Avellaneda’s exit from the country. Further, Scott suggests that Gómez de Avellaneda most likely would not have been considered a potential candidate for the collective: “Avellaneda was not part of the Del Monte group for a variety of reasons, her youth, [and] her gender” (xx). There do not appear to have been any female participants in Del Monte’s *tertulia*. Further, Scott points out, Gómez de Avellaneda is the sole author of her novel and did not benefit from the comments and input of a collective of peers or of a mentor (xxi). Gómez de Avellaneda may have been a contemporary of the Del Monte writers, but she independently advanced her own, more potent argument against slavery and oppression. As Debra Rosenthal points out, *Sab* is the only black slave in Cuban literature to aspire to love his white mistress (80)⁷; one can add that his love is not entirely unrequited, another feature of the novel that is found in few, if any, other anti-slavery novels. After *Sab*’s death, Carlota is seen visiting his grave every day for three months before she herself vanishes.

Not only was *Sab* among the earliest works of Cuban anti-slavery literature, it was also a forerunner in anti-slavery literature of the Americas in general. In the context of an international readership, the most famous of all anti-slavery novels published in the Americas in the 1800s is, of course, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Published in 1852, Stowe’s novel quickly sold more than a million copies, was translated into a variety of languages, and became a point of reference in protest works denouncing forced labor and slavery by later Latin American writers such as Clorinda Matto de Turner, author of the 1889 novel *Aves sin nido*, and Bernardo Guimarães, author of *A escrava Isaura*, published in 1875. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins calls Stowe’s novel “the most important book of the century” because of the huge impact that it had (124). Stowe’s novel is not without controversy, particularly because of its characterization of Uncle Tom himself, but it did mark an important turning point for public dialogue regarding slavery in the United States. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* exposed the horrors of slavery to readers by paying particular attention to the inhumane practice of breaking apart families and to the terrible cruelty to which slaves were subjected. The narrative voice of the

novel frequently speaks directly to female readers to be moved as wives and mothers to the plight of slave women whose children are stolen from them. The relocation of two of the main characters escaping slavery, George and Eliza Harris, to Liberia is problematic in that it suggests that emancipated slaves could not truly belong in the United States, but the novel does specifically refer to the value of equality espoused in the United States Declaration of Independence and call for an immediate end to slavery. The huge popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* indicates that the reading public was at that time ready to face the issue of slavery in a way that it had not done before.

Stowe is the most widely known of the North American anti-slavery writers, but she was not the first to publish. Lydia Maria Child was the most prominent abolitionist writer prior to Stowe, beginning to publish anti-slavery work in the 1830s. The difficulties she faced in her career because of her radical stance exemplify the polemic surrounding the fight against slavery in the United States.⁸ Child's career as an abolitionist writer began with the publication in 1833 of her nonfiction tract, *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, which was an early attack on the institution of slavery and on the racism that justified it. When writing *An Appeal*, Child did not have a body of U.S. anti-slavery literature to draw upon for inspiration; rather, she was inventing "her own textbook on the subject" (Karcher, *First Woman* 176). In her tome, Child analyzed all aspects of the peculiar institution, from political, legal and economic concerns to moral and ethical ones (*An Appeal* 176). In contrast to Stowe and a number of other North American abolitionists, Child did not believe in "colonization," or the practice of deportation of slaves and former slaves to Africa; rather, she promoted the ideal of full integration of people of color into mainstream society as citizens whose rights are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution (187). The basis for this argument in *An Appeal* is Child's belief in the basic equality of all human beings; she undermines the category of race by instead referring to Americans of color firstly as a class rather than a race and as Americans rather than Africans (183). Finally, her criticism of the northern states' racism and complicity with the practice of slavery seems to have been the bitterest pill for northern readers to swallow (191). Child was very unusual among abolitionists for her integrationist stance and for her presentation of miscegenation as a solution for the racial divisions plaguing the country.⁹ As Robert Fanuzzi describes, miscegenation was an abhorrent concept to many North Americans in the 1830s: even anti-slavery advocates sought to escape the charge of being "amalgamationist": "White abolitionists fled so swiftly from the amalgamation charge that they formally disclaimed the morality of mixed-race unions" (73). Unusual among U.S. anti-slavery writers, Child promoted racial equality, full integration, and interracial romance as solutions to the problems of slavery and of racial prejudice. The anti-slavery and egalitarian stance that she espoused in *An Appeal*

were considered entirely inappropriate for a female writer to address and was so radical that it caused Lydia Maria Child to be shunned both professionally and personally for nearly a decade (Karcher, *First Woman* 191).

It is difficult to know whether or not Gómez de Avellaneda was familiar with Lydia Maria Child's anti-slavery works, but it seems unlikely that she would have known them. Our interest here lies in the comparison with Child and the possibility of locating Gómez de Avellaneda within the larger, inter-American body of anti-slavery literature. By the time Gómez de Avellaneda was writing *Sab*, which, according to Scott, could be as early as 1836, Child had not written any novels related to slavery but had written an early novel, *Hobomok* (published in 1824), which advocated an interracial approach to incorporating Native Americans into U.S. society, *An Appeal*, and a number of short stories that illustrated her beliefs regarding slavery and prejudice.¹⁰ Thematically, there are some interesting points of contact between Child and Gómez de Avellaneda. Like Child's *Hobomok* and *A Romance of the Republic*, Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* explores the possibility for interracial romance and was also considered to have taken on a topic inappropriate for a female writer in addressing the problem of slavery. These similarities are most likely coincidental, but they help demonstrate that Gómez de Avellaneda was at the forefront of literary denunciation of slavery; her opposition to slavery and exploration of the potential for racial mixing place her ideologically closer to the radical Child than to the more cautious Stowe.

Sab is subject to many of the same criticisms aimed at other anti-slavery works. In other words, few, if any, of these works are free from racial prejudice, and they also are likely to reflect class or other biases. In the twentieth century, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the subject of a lot of criticism. James Baldwin took on the racism of Stowe's narrative in "Everybody's Protest Novel," and Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas character in *Native Son* is an inversion of Stowe's passive Uncle Tom character. As with *Sab*, much of the critical interest in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has come from feminist critics who read a potent argument in favor of the rights of women as part of the author's project. Also primarily of interest to feminist scholars, Lydia Maria Child, who appears to have gone farther than Stowe and other U.S. anti-slavery writers in her works to promote racial understanding and integration, is nonetheless the author of "The Quadroons," the first story to introduce the female tragic mulatto character into U.S. literature. Karcher opted not to include this short story in her edition of *A Lydia Maria Child Reader*, and calls it "dangerously flawed" in *The First Woman in the Republic*: "Melodramatic and sentimental, 'The Quadroons' is dangerously flawed from a modern perspective: its heroines' preference for white lovers suggests a repudiation of their African roots, and their clinging dependency and utter lack of inner resources grossly misrepresent slave women" (336).

Of the majority of works comprising Brazilian anti-slavery literature, David Haberly has famously said that the racism revealed in these texts makes them both “anti-slavery” and “anti-slave” (30). In criticism of Cuban anti-slavery literature, the literary patron of the main group of anti-slavery writers, Domingo Del Monte, is frequently described as being of a mind with José Antonio Saco, who promoted the concept of “whitening” in the colony in the nineteenth century. Del Monte himself is often referred to in literary criticism as a “reformer” rather than as an “abolitionist” because of his ownership of slaves and the fact that many of the works he sponsored do not call for the immediate abolition of slavery. Critics are right to point out that anti-slavery literature of the nineteenth century does not meet contemporary standards of tolerance, yet I also agree with Luis that a thorough evaluation of these works requires a full consideration of the context in which they were written. Compared to other nineteenth-century anti-slavery works in general, *Sab* presents a much stronger stance against slavery and at times against racial prejudice, particularly through the potential for romantic relationships between a man of color and two white women and the casting of a slave as a romantic hero.¹¹ Further, while some critics rely on today’s standards to judge the novel’s protest messages, it can also be useful to evaluate racism today by the Romantic ideals presented in the novel. For example, near the conclusion, Sab describes a vision that he has of a utopic age in which worth will be determined by merit and artistic talent rather than by appearances. One may well ask whether such an age has yet been achieved. Markers of inequality, such as average income by gender and race, suggest that it has not. Novels such as *Sab* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are useful in helping us to understand what has and what has not yet been accomplished in the Americas.

To turn now to Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel itself, I would like to examine the critical conclusion that *Sab* is not in fact an anti-slavery novel but a feminist one. I find this argument unconvincing because *Sab* quite explicitly denounces both slavery and the oppression of women. As I have argued elsewhere, *Sab* is in fact a complex novel delivering multiple critiques at once.¹² Scholarly studies often approach *Sab* as an allegory, yet in many cases the term “allegory” or an allegorical means of reading is not sufficiently defined or explored. The simplest meaning of the term is also the most frequently used without delving into the implications. The most basic understanding of allegory is to say that a text says one thing but really means another. Thus, scholars have argued that when Sab or other characters decry slavery in the novel, they are really talking about some other form of oppression. What Sab, Carlota, or the narrator is quite literally saying is discounted for a message perceived to be behind the speaker’s words. However, offering a more fully considered definition,Carolynn Van Dyke proposes that an allegory does not simply say one thing and mean another but rather that it “must say and mean one complex

thing” (42). In this understanding of allegory, *Sab* can communicate several protest messages at once, as did many other anti-slavery works authored by women. The literal meaning of Sab’s words need not be discarded in favor of an abstract, second layer of meaning but rather the two messages combine to make a more complex statement. Further, the messages combined within *Sab* need not be considered somehow mutually exclusive; quite a few anti-slavery texts authored by women in fact combined a call for the abolition of slavery with a denunciation of the treatment of women. Cass makes a similar point when he remarks, “It is important to recognize that one agenda does not necessarily exclude the other; I do not perceive anything that would prevent the two [i.e., feminism and abolitionism] from working in chorus” (189).

Sab is explicit in its denunciation of slavery as an inhumane practice. There are too many instances in the novel to list them all, so I will highlight the most convincing ones here. The title character of the novel is a slave, and slavery is immediately characterized as a barbarity in the first chapter of the novel, when Enrique Otway encounters Sab near the Bellavista plantation. Once his identity is made clear, Sab explains that his mother was sold into slavery by “traficantes de carne humana” (109) (traffickers of human flesh) and that most slaves are treated terribly: Sab remarks, “jamás he sufrido el trato duro que se da generalmente a los negros, ni he sido condenado a largos y fatigosos trabajos” (109) (I have never suffered the harsh treatment that is generally given to blacks, nor have I been condemned to lengthy and wearisome work). The exceptionality of Sab’s status that has been so often commented upon in criticism of the novel, is noticeable right away. At the same time, however, Sab’s reply to Enrique (“jamás he sufrido el trato duro que se da generalmente a los negros”) demonstrates that Sab is fully aware of being one slave among a much larger populace and suggests self-identification as *negro* (black). As an exceptional slave, Sab may be in the best position to affect the nineteenth-century reader through his heroic suffering; he also uses his status to inform both Enrique and the reader of the brutality of slavery.

Criticism of slavery persists throughout the novel. Carlota attempts several times to free Sab and also expresses her horror of the institution. Like a true Romantic, she prefers to free her slaves and live in poverty with her beloved rather than commit the crime of holding slaves. She is particularly upset by the sale of babies away from their mothers: “los ven vender luego como a bestias irracionales . . . ¡A sus hijos, carne y sangre suya! Cuando yo sea la esposa de Enrique [. . .] ningún infeliz respirará a mi lado el aire emponzoñado de la esclavitud” (146) (they see them selling them like irrational beasts . . . Their children, their own flesh and blood! Once I’m Enrique’s wife [. . .] not one unfortunate being by my side will breath the poisonous air of slavery).¹³ As Cass points out, Sab’s references to the slave uprising and eventual revolution in Haiti are perceived as threatening by his interlocutors, the colonial censors,

and Cuban readers. Along with the potential for violent retribution suggested by the references to Haiti, Sab's association with Martina, who claims to be one of the last remaining indigenous persons on the island, implies solidarity between marginalized groups capable of rebelling. As members of Carlota's family travel with Enrique toward the caves at Cubitas, Sab narrates the story of Camagüey and his slaughter by the Spanish during the conquest of the island. Sab startles his white listeners by explaining that Martina proclaims that the violent deaths of the original, indigenous Cubans will be avenged by men of another color: "La tierra que fue regada con sangre una vez lo será aún otra: los descendientes de los opresores serán oprimidos, y los hombres negros serán los terribles vengadores de los hombres cobrizos" (168) (The earth that was once marred with blood will be once again: the descendants of the oppressors will be the oppressed and the black men will be the terrible avengers of the red men). Don Carlos abruptly interrupts Sab at this point, telling him, "Basta, Sab, basta" (168) (That's enough, Sab, enough). Clearly, the notion of such violent revenge and the suggestion of unity among those who have been wronged are unsettling for Sab's listeners.

One of the novel's strongest condemnations of slavery is to be found in the letter that Sab writes to Teresa as he is dying. Proclaiming his individual dignity and capacities, Sab denounces slavery while speaking as a slave and as a man of color. The laws that have enslaved Sab, he explains, are human laws and are in error; God has created all people to be equal: "¿El gran jefe de esta familia habrá establecido diferentes leyes para los que nacen con la tez negra y la tez blanca? ¿No tienen todos las mismas necesidades, las mismas pasiones, los mismos defectos? [. . .] No, los hombres mienten: la virtud no existe en ellos" (265) (Would the great head of this family have established different laws for those that are born with black skin and white skin? Wouldn't they all have the same needs, the same passions, the same defects? [. . .] No, men lie; virtue doesn't exist in them). Later, Sab declares that humans have destroyed the potential that God had granted him: "Pero si no es Dios, Teresa, si son los hombres los que me han formado este destino, si ellos han cortado las alas que Dios concedió a mi alma" (269–270) (But, it's not God, Teresa, it's men that have given me this destiny, it's they who have cut the wings that God gave my soul).

Just as it does with slavery, the novel is overt in its criticism of the mistreatment of women. There is no need to consider the anti-slavery argument as a cover for the feminist one as the latter is expressly part of the content. Again, in his letter to Teresa, Sab demonstrates his awareness of a lack of rights among women: "¡Oh!, ¡las mujeres! ¡pobres y ciegas víctimas! Como los esclavos, ellas arrastran pacientemente su cadena y bajan la cabeza bajo el yugo de las leyes humanas" (270–271) (Oh! Women! Poor, blind victims! Like the slaves, they patiently drag their chains and bow their heads under the yoke of mankind's laws). In a line of thought that has led a number of critics

to propose that the novel is feminist rather than anti-slavery, Sab continues on to say that the lot of women is in fact worse than that of slaves: “El esclavo, al menos, puede cambiar de amo, puede esperar que juntando oro comprará algún día su libertad: pero la mujer, cuando levanta sus manos enflaquecidas y su frente ultrajada, para pedir libertad, oye al monstruo de voz sepulcral que la grita: «en la tumba»” (271) (The slave, at least, can change from one owner to another, can hope that by saving his gold he might one day buy his liberty: but woman, when she raises her weakening arms and her violated forehead to plead for liberty, hears the deadly voice of the monster shout to her “in the grave”). As a Romantic hero dedicated entirely to his mistress, Sab’s remarks can be interpreted as further evidence that he places his concern for Carlota, who is about to marry a man unworthy of her, above himself. It is, or course, unrealistic to think that a slave would choose to stay with his mistress rather than embrace freedom or think that her situation is worse than his, but it is an effective rhetorical strategy for Romantic readers moved by such shows of emotion and radical in its placing of a man of color in the position of the long-suffering Romantic subject (Kirkpatrick 153).

As Elena Grau-Llevería argues for *Dos mujeres*, “al hablar de feminismo en un texto literario (especialmente en un texto del romanticismo hispano escrito en la primera mitad del siglo XIX) es necesario especificar cuáles son los temas esenciales para los feminismos de este periodo” (36) (When speaking of feminism in a literary text (especially Hispanic Romanticism written in the first half of the nineteenth century) it is necessary to specify which are the essential feminist topics of the time period). Additionally, Grau-Llevería asserts that nineteenth-century feminism reflects a new focus on social injustices arising from moral and legal codes that granted women unfair, inferior status: “en el romanticismo el debate se desplaza hacia la injusticia social que representa la desigualdad de las mujeres respecto a los códigos morales y legales de la época” (35) (in Romanticism, the debate revolves around the social injustice of women’s inequality within the moral and legal codes of the time). In the same way that it is necessary to look at how other texts contemporary to the one studied address slavery, it is also essential to understand the central topics of concern to feminists of the time and how they framed their discourse in order to evaluate the feminist content of an earlier work. Sab’s description of women laboring under the yoke of human laws indicates that she espouses the kind of nineteenth-century feminism described by Grau-Llevería. Further, Grau-Llevería’s call to acknowledge the feminisms of the day is useful in understanding why Gómez de Avellaneda would compare the situation of married women to that of slaves. A number of both anti-slavery advocates as well as supporters of women’s rights in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States claimed an analogy between women and slaves; for example, as Branche points out, a very central figure for early feminism, Mary Wollstone-

craft, made the original claim that women's subordination to their husbands was "slavish" (Branche 14). Given that this type of assertion was to become a commonplace in literature considered in its day to be radical, it is interesting to note that the feminist content of Gómez de Avellaneda's work is in this regard on a par with many of her North American and British feminist peers. Further, the vast majority of the known corpus of Cuban and Brazilian anti-slavery literature was written by male authors. These texts do not generally demonstrate a concern for the treatment of women alongside that of slaves. One notes much more anxiety regarding the corruption of society resulting from slavery and darkening demographics than for the destruction of families and denunciation of legalized injustices against women. *Sab* is explicit in decrying both slavery and the oppression of women and therefore quite unusual among Cuban anti-slavery novels.

Further, to look beyond the comments that Sab makes in his letter, the characterization and destinies of the female characters in the novel also provide a potent feminist argument. Carlota at first appears to be an angel of the hearth, but her unhappy marriage to Enrique serves as a condemnation of the institution that becomes a trap for women. Teresa fares slightly better in that she finds peace in the convent, but the author's characterization of the convent as a tomb makes her opinion of the monastic life clear. Branche is correct in pointing out the neglect of women of color in Gómez de Avellaneda's statement about the oppression of women, yet critics appear to agree that the issue of women's rights as she perceived them is a priority for the author. Again, the context in which the author wrote must be considered for a full evaluation of her text. The failure to address issues facing women of color that has plagued much of twentieth-century feminism did not become part of the mainstream critical discussion of Western feminism until the 1980s. In an interesting contrast to her North American, nineteenth-century peers, however, Gómez de Avellaneda's brand of feminism is highly critical of the domestic roles celebrated in a work such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Rather than promote marriage, motherhood, and domesticity as a source of women's influence in society and route to happiness, Gómez de Avellaneda's portrayal of marriage exposes the institution's shortcomings and the materialistic basis for many unions. Branche critiques the novel's failure to promote interracial sisterhood through a celebration of their shared roles as mothers and wives (14). However, unlike novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Sab* subverts domesticity in general, as does the later *Dos mujeres*. Carlota finds solace not in her home or through any children but with her friend, Teresa. There is a brief reference to the sort of early feminist objection to the breakup of families of the type that Branche describes in *Sab*.¹⁴ In general, however, the novel strongly critiques the kinds of traditional female roles embraced in North American anti-slavery writing by female authors.

Rather than portray sisterhood between women of different races and classes, Evelyn Picon Garfield argues that the novel demonstrates interracial solidarity between the alliance of three colonial subalterns: Sab, Teresa, and Carlota (51). Sab is the “other’s other” because he is a person of color and a slave; Carlota and Teresa are subalterns as well given that they are women. They are alike in that each is silenced and disempowered within colonial discourse. Picon Garfield describes the relationships between these characters as expressions of solidarity between marginalized groups (66). Each character comes to recognize their similarity to the others in moments of illumination. Sab and Teresa each identify in the other a person suffering from unrequited love for someone they cannot hope to be paired with in colonial Cuban society. This recognition takes on a metaphoric quality of solidarity between the oppressed, particularly when Teresa, moved by the noble suffering of Sab’s heart, offers to run away with Sab and be his companion in a faraway desert: “[A]mbos somos huérfanos y desgraciados [. . .]. Déjame, pues seguirte a remotos climas, al seno de los desiertos” (220) (We are both disgraced orphans [. . .] Let me follow you to remote climates, to the heart of the deserts). After reading Sab’s letter, Carlota realizes that Sab is really her soulmate and expresses this by visiting his grave on a daily basis. Identifying each as a colonial subaltern is another way to suggest that the anti-slavery and feminist messages complement rather than displace one another; all three characters are victims of the unjust laws of men. Thus, the novel presents radical positions opposing slavery and the treatment of women as two faces of the same coin.

In her study of *Dos mujeres*, Grau-Llevería applies a different term to the development of the type of solidarity among subalterns that Picon Garfield identifies in *Sab*. Grau-Llevería describes the characterizations of Luisa and Catalina as both unusual and unexpected, since neither of the two is revealed to be exactly who their paternalistic society thought that they were (40). Luisa at first appears to be simply the long-suffering wife of the philandering Carlos, and Catalina the typical “other woman.” Yet, most unexpectedly, each woman comes to have sympathy and understanding for the other rather than the venom that one would normally expect to see from stereotypical female characters in such a situation (40). Each ultimately makes the decision to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of the other. Grau-Llevería characterizes this formation of a sense of community among marginalized persons as a key ingredient in Social Romanticism, a branch of Romanticism that concerns itself with the denunciation of society’s ills: “en el romanticismo social se critican los prejuicios, los abusos, los privilegios, las instituciones sociales y se muestra al individuo en lucha contra una sociedad opresiva o mal organizada, pero a diferencia de las otras manifestaciones románticas los protagonistas de la novela social son y se constituyen como parte de un grupo” (34) (In Social Romanticism prejudices, abuses, privileges, and social institutions are

all critiqued and the individual is shown in his/her fight against an oppressive and poorly organized society, but distinct from other Romantic protests, the protagonists of the Social novel are part of a group). Using Grau-Llevería's definition of Social Romanticism, one can describe Sab, Carlota, and Teresa as developing a sense of belonging to a group in which each recognizes the limits that have been placed by society on the others because of its unfair institutions and prescribed roles. The more obvious sense of belonging to the same group would be shared by Carlota and Teresa as women, yet, as Picon Garfield also argues, the error in men's laws that permit a patriarchal, materialist, and slave-holding society have, to borrow Sab's term, cut the wings of all three characters. For his part, Sab not only recognizes the legal oppression of the two women he is close to, but, as we have seen, he also speaks of himself as a slave and as a man of color, indicating his awareness of the suffering of the larger group to which he belongs.

The text's opposition to all forms of oppression equally supports both protest messages and is explicit regarding each one. Some critics have implied that it was somehow safer for the author to oppose slavery than the mistreatment of women, but both positions were risky ones for the author to espouse.¹⁵ The direct discussion of both issues in the text suggests that the anti-slavery argument is not a vehicle for a feminist message but rather that each protest against discrimination strengthens the other and arises from a sense of the many injustices colonial Cuban society supported. Despite what can be characterized as her faults as an anti-slavery writer, Gómez de Avellaneda's promotion of a clear critique of slavery and of a connection between slavery and other forms of oppression, such as colonialism and misogyny, put her at the forefront of protest literature produced in the Spanish language in the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. This essay does not offer an exhaustive review of the scholarly criticism of *Sab*. Rather, I have chosen to focus on a smaller number of articles and book chapters that have been influential in the discussion surrounding *Sab* and that are representative of the general lines of critical arguments formed around the novel. My discussion of anti-slavery literature of the Americas, some of my commentary on *Sab*, and of allegory are based on research completed for my manuscript, "Mixed Messages: Anti-slavery Allegories of the United States and Latin America," which is currently in progress.
2. The censor's denunciation and banning of *Sab* and *Dos mujeres* are often cited, yet

they continue to be important as they permit insight into how Gómez de Avellaneda's works were perceived by her contemporaries and by colonial authorities. Nina Scott translates the censors' decree in the following manner: *Sab* contains "'documents subversive to the system of slavery on this Island and contrary to moral and good habits; and the second [*Dos mugeres*] for being plagued with doctrines prejudicious to Our Holy Religion and attacking therein conjugal Society and canonizing adultery'" (Scott, "Introduction" xv).

3. Emilio Cotarelo y Mori's critical biography of 1930 is also regularly cited in scholarly articles.
4. Please refer to my article, "A New Look at the Strains of Allegory in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*" for a more comprehensive discussion of Kirkpatrick's and Sommer's analyses of *Sab* as well as the complexities of reading the novel as an allegory.
5. Sommer also makes the point that Avellaneda is influenced by Hugo's text but that she opts not to depict a violent slave uprising: "Avellaneda must have felt safer about writing the old works in new combinations so that they would only look incoherent, because the idea of inventing new and revolutionary names evidently seemed more violent than constructive" (137).
6. Juan Francisco Manzano is the author of the only known autobiography written by a slave in nineteenth-century Cuba. He was a celebrated poet and was encouraged by Domingo Del Monte to write his life story, *Autobiografía de un esclavo*.
7. Rosenthal's point is also cited in Cass's article (185).
8. The "Introduction" to Carolyn L. Karcher's *A Lydia Maria Child Reader* offers an excellent overview of the author's life and literary career, as does Karcher's complete study, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*.
9. In two of her novels, Child presents mixed-race unions as a means of resolving national crises much in the way that a number of Latin American national allegories studied by Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions* also suggest. In *Hobomok*, the child of a Pequod Indian and a young English woman is reincorporated into Puritan society along with the young mother. In *Romance of the Republic*, several marriages between prominent young white men and women of color bring the painful era of the Civil War to a happy conclusion.
10. Child was an extremely prolific writer. She published a number of books and stories for children, domestic advice books, and wrote newspaper columns. For a full accounting, please refer to Karcher's *The First Woman in the Republic*.
11. In the letter to Teresa, *Sab* claims equality for all men: "Dios, cuya mano suprema ha repartido sus beneficios con equidad sobre todos los países del globo, que hace salir el sol para toda su gran familia dispersa sobre la tierra, que ha escrito el gran dogma de la igualdad sobre la tumba" (265) (God, whose supreme hand has spread his benefits with equity amongst all the countries of the globe, has made the sun shine for all of his great family spread throughout the earth, has written the great dogma of equality on the grave).

12. Please refer to my article, “A New Look at the Strains of Allegory in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab*.”
13. This is a point of similarity between *Sab* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Stowe frequently appeals directly to her female reader’s sensibility at the horror of children being separated from their mothers and families being broken apart.
14. I have cited this instance above but in an abbreviated way. Here is a slightly longer version of Carlota’s objection to the selling of slave children away from their mothers: “Se juzgan afortunados y son esclavos sus hijos antes de salir del vientre de sus madres, y los ven vender luego como a bestias irracionales . . . ¡A sus hijos, carne y sangre suya!” (146) (“They judge themselves fortunate and yet their children are slaves before they leave their mother’s womb, and they see them sold off after like irrational beasts . . . their children, their own flesh and blood!”)
15. A review of *Sab* written shortly after its publication in Spain declared that Gómez de Avellaneda had taken on a topic inappropriate for a novel and particularly one written by a woman in its denunciation of slavery (Grau-Llevería 31).

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Picturing Cuba: Romantic Ecology in Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841)

Adriana Méndez Rodenas

As the bay of Santiago de Cuba receded from view, a young Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda penned her most famous sonnet, “Al partir,” to commemorate her departure from Cuba on April 9, 1836 (*Antología poética* 29). At the start of a long sea-crossing to Spain, the lyrical subject of “Al partir” voices an emotive farewell echoed among generations of Cubans who live outside the island. In much the same way as her precursor, poet José María Heredia, the first to view his country from afar, Gómez de Avellaneda recalls the sounds and sites of her native island precisely at the point when these beloved places begin to fade from view. Rather than glimpse the palms of her native island amidst the waterfalls, as Heredia had done in the memorable verses of “Oda al Niágara,” Gómez de Avellaneda pictures Cuba as “an edén querido” (29) (an endearing paradise), recreating the essence and ambience of the island in a timeless present. Inscribed on the insular imaginary since Columbus’s *Diary*, this Edenic trope marks the location (or dislocation) of the lyrical subject as she anticipates her distance from the privileged place of origin: “Do quier que el hado en su furor me impele / tu dulce nombre halagará mi oído” (*Antología poética* 29) (no matter where blind fate leads me, your sweet name will always delight my ear). For Severo Sarduy, a contemporary Cuban writer also born in Camagüey, “Al partir” shifts the poem’s register from the visual to the auditive, since the absence from the island is ciphered by the acoustic trace it left behind (20). For Sarduy, the movement from the visual to the auditive marks, in his view, Gómez de Avellaneda’s unique contribution to the discourse of nationhood (20).¹

Gómez de Avellaneda’s coming-of-age in Camagüey, in the interior of the island, and her subsequent literary fame in Seville and Madrid make her both a transnational Cuban writer as well as a model of transatlantic Romanticism.

Perhaps in imitation of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Gómez de Avellaneda dubs herself "la peregrina" (the pilgrim), a self-fashioning surfacing behind the lyrical "I" of "Al partir" caught between two seas in the passage from the Caribbean to the Atlantic.²

Although Gómez de Avellaneda's literary career straddles Cuba and Spain, her first novel is thematically aligned with the anti-slavery novels written by members of the Del Monte circle, a literary salon that gathered in Havana beginning in 1835. It was under Del Monte's leadership and within the chambers of this august *tertulia* (literary salon) that Cuban literature got its start. Works like Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco o las delicias del campo* (1839) and Félix Tanco's "Escenas de la vida privada en la isla de Cuba" (1925) hinge, like *Sab*, on racial desire: vengeful masters who prey on female domestic slaves use their class and racial privilege to force them into submission. In contrast, Gómez de Avellaneda shifts gender and dares to show a slave in love with his white mistress, thrusting the violence of colonialism and slavery onto the shoulders of a long-suffering "noble slave." In picturing a cultured, spiritually evolved, and racially mixed slave, the young expatriate went beyond Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), whose *mulata* protagonist, in love with her white half-brother, becomes the symbol of Cuban nationality. By reverting the prevailing code of anti-slavery narrative, and introducing a miscegenated Sab as an icon of Cuban nationality, Gómez de Avellaneda shows the "desire for the nation" as well as the "desire for racial integration" prevalent in Caribbean literature (Benítez Rojo, "Power/Sugar/Literature" 26–28, 35). Yet Gómez de Avellaneda is often excluded from the anti-slavery tradition for the simple fact that she did not live in Cuba (Luis 4–5); moreover, her use of a Romantic aesthetic rather than the Balzacian high realism promoted by Del Monte is often misunderstood as countering the fledging writers' efforts to denounce slavery under oppressive conditions.³ As the first anti-slavery novel in the Americas, *Sab* is linked to a broader continental network of female-authored abolitionist narrative that fostered a sense of the African's human dignity ([2001] 16–17).

As a transnational Cuban writer, Gómez de Avellaneda is aligned with a pair of foreign artists—the Spaniard Víctor Landaluze and the French Frédéric Miahle—whose colorful sketches of the streets of Havana are filled with plazas, *paseos* (promenades), theaters, market-places, and public spaces where emerging national subjects appear framed within the pictorial conventions of the picturesque. But whereas Landaluze and Miahle provide an urban topography, Gómez de Avellaneda turns her gaze to the interior of Cuba, to the geographic center of the island, where the natural beauty of the land provides an idyllic setting for the emergence of creole (*criollo*) values; as we shall see, the fictional Bellavista plantation is also the perfect setting for a tale of unrequited love.

Sab has appealed to countless generations of readers by its racially tinged

romance. Among its most salient features, critics have noted the novel's "pallimpsest" effect, the way it voices a resistance to slavery while denouncing women's submissive condition under patriarchy.⁴ The novel links women and slaves by their shared, if differently weighed, double condition of bondage, hence articulating the connection between patriarchy and colonialism. Critics have also emphasized the overlapping of two passionate triangles to weave the sentimental plot of the novel (Kirkpatrick 147): Sab and Enrique are rivals for the love of Carlota, and both Carlota and her adopted sister Teresa make the hapless Enrique their one obsessive choice. As the plot unfolds, the male characters contradict readerly expectations regarding gender and race. Enrique Otway, son of a British merchant and a white Anglo-Saxon, is depicted as a "dark" or "inferior" soul, while Sab, who is hinted to be the illegitimate son of Don Luis, his master's brother, is racially black, yet he appears as "elevated" and "noble," the embodiment of a "superior" spirit ([1973] 126, 133).⁵ The two rivals for Carlota's affection are at two extremes not only in terms of race, but, most importantly, in terms of ethical temperament; whereas Enrique is steeped in crass materiality, Sab is capable of altruistic sacrifice for the object of his love. The two female figures are similarly opposed, as Teresa's cold reserve and serious demeanor is countered by Carlota's overly affective temperament, vulnerability, and impetuosity.⁶ Although Sab clearly stands out as Romantic hero, all four main characters participate in Romantic subjectivity to the extent of their involvement in the ethos and pathos of love.

Still eliciting fresh readings after two-hundred years, I want to focus on the role played by tropical nature in the novel, a topic that has gone largely unnoticed.⁷ Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* constructs a "spatial imaginary," a way of picturing Cuba as "edén querido" (beloved Eden), an idyllic trope that depicts the island—and particularly, the interior of the island, its geographic center—as Edenic landscape. In this visual imagination, the region of "Cubitas" functions as metonymy of nation: "little Cuba," a region not yet obliterated by the onslaught of large sugar manufacture that riddled the western provinces—the main sugar-producing regions of Havana and Matanzas. Its pristine landscape signals a warning to the ravaging of island ecology by "Cuba grande" (big Cuba), "the Cuba of the slave compound" and mechanized sugar mills (Benítez Rojo, "Power/Sugar/Literature" 15–16) while, at the same time, mourning for a lost Eden on the verge of disappearance.

I examine the way the novel shapes a "spatial imagination" or an imagination of space that foregrounds "the experience of place" in Caribbean literature (DeLoughrey and Handley 4). Geographically distant from the colonial hub in Havana but pictured as the island's symbolic core, the source of its material and spiritual riches, the privileged space of Cubitas and its environs is mapped in the feminine. Lyrical evocations of two distinct tropical ecologies—garden and cave—and a recurrent natural phenomena, the tropical

tempest—help to produce a distinct sense of place. The accent on nature, so central to Romanticism, enables Gómez de Avellaneda to elucidate her own sense of dislocation, her ability to move between two worlds. Her Romantic ecology figures a detached and an engaged perspective, as if the novel was written with both a *criollo* and a peninsular audience in mind. At the same time, Gómez de Avellaneda's spatial imagination contributes to a broader transamerican sensibility, as seen in her poem "El viajero americano," a coded response to Heredia's "Oda al Niágara."

Picturing Cuba: The Spatial Imagination and the Sugar Plantation

By its focus on the interior of the island and its bucolic descriptions of landscape, *Sab* manifests the "desire for the nation" permeating nineteenth-century Spanish American narrative. In Jorge Isaacs's *María* (1867), set in a similar idyllic landscape, the Valle del Cauca in Colombia, the bountiful scenery of the valley is associated with the dark beauty of its female protagonist, a technique also followed here in the equivalence between Carlota and insular landscape (quoted in Brickhouse 174). By continually voicing a preference for the pastoral, Carlota waxes nostalgia for a pre-conquest mode of life associated with the island's first inhabitants, the *taínos* (203). However, in contrast to Isaacs, Gómez de Avellaneda shifts gender and has Sab, a mulatto slave, appear within the lush landscape surrounding the Bellavista plantation. Although not as heavily accented as in Isaacs, the "feminization of land" becomes a primary trope for the representation of landscape, particularly in later passages, when Sab eulogizes his passion for Carlota in terms of sensing her presence in every element of nature (245). The *excess* of tropical nature conditions and ultimately determines the outcome of romantic passion, while linking in to a broader reflection on nation.

Gómez de Avellaneda articulates a vision of the natural world that is not merely the backdrop where the lovers play out their respective roles, but is rather woven into the texture of the novel as the *raison d'être* of romantic passion. It is the exuberance of their natural surroundings that propels Sab and Carlota's capacity for love, what makes them prototypical Romantic subjects and ultimately determines their tragic end (146). As she would do in her later poem, "El viajero americano," the author dons the mask of a traveler who is about to embark on a journey "por un país pintoresco y magnífico" ([1999] 148) ("a colorful and magnificent country" [*Sab*, Scott 59]) in company of her beloved: "La naturaleza se embellece con la presencia del objeto que se ama y éste se embellece con la naturaleza" (179–180) ("Nature becomes more beautiful in the presence

of the beloved and this person in turn is embellished by nature” [*Sab*, Scott 59]).

Hand-in-hand with an impersonal *viajero* (traveler) who surveys the land for the first time, the reader enters the space surrounding Puerto Príncipe through the lens of a fictional travelogue, stopping “[para] admirar más [. . .] los campos fertilísimos de aquel país privilegiado” (132) (to “admire the fuller savoring of the richly fertile earth of that privileged country” [*Sab*, Scott, 27])). Later identified as Enrique (132), the *viajero*’s interest in the landscape is primarily economic, to foster cultivation of the verdant, “fertile” plains. By emphasizing a newly “discovered” terrain, the narrator’s prospect view re-enacts Columbus’s legacy as well the inquisitive gaze of Enlightenment explorers, who detached themselves from the land in order to conquer it: Columbus, for the Spanish empire; Humboldt and later explorers, for the interests of science.

The spatial imagination traced of the “Cubitas” region falls within the picturesque iconography prevalent in nineteenth-century Spanish American narrative, as in Isaacs’s depiction of the valley of Cauca in *María*. Anticipating Cirilo Villaverde’s description of the Vuelta Abajo coffee plantation in *Cecilia Valdés*, Gómez de Avellaneda displays the Bellavista plantation as object of contemplation and idyllic landscape: “El sol terrible de la zona tórrida se acercaba a su ocaso [. . .] y sus últimos rayos [. . .] vestían de un colorido melancólico los campos vírgenes de aquella hermosa naturaleza [. . .].” (132) (“The brutal sun of the torrid zone was sinking into dusk [. . .] and its last rays [. . .] bathed the virgin fields of that youthful nature in melancholy hues” [Scott, *Sab* 27])). From the start, Gómez de Avellaneda views the tropics as a space tinged with melancholy, a sentiment meant to anticipate the effects of deforestation that were already noticeable in 1838–1840, the period in which the action takes place (editor’s notes, Cruz 321).

Enlightenment explorers had endowed the tropics with a peculiar aura, setting it apart from what they perceived was a “tamed” or domesticated nature in Europe (Stepan 15–17). It was the profusion of plants, the abundance and “hyperfertility” of plant life, and its perpetual verdure, that set the tropics apart as a region distinct from Europe (36). Here the reference to a “vigorosa y lozana vegetación” (Gómez de Avellaneda 132) (“vigorous and luxuriant vegetation” [*Sab*, Scott, 27])) echoes the way Enlightenment explorers perceived the impact of tropical vegetation; the most noticeable example is Humboldt, who, at first glance of the forests near Cumaná, had noted the sublimity associated with the tropical zone. An echo of the way that explorers from La Condamine to Humboldt describe the dense canopy of trees in the Amazon rain forest—a “*forêt vierge*” personified as a feminized though impenetrable space—surfaces subliminally here as “las copas frondosas de los árboles agostados por el calor del día” (132) (“the leafy crowns of the trees, parched by the day’s heat” [*Sab*, Scott, 27])). The accent on vegetation suggests the exoticizing of land from an “outside” or detached perspective, that signals

Gómez de Avellaneda's wish to engage a European reader unfamiliar with New World scenery.

To give us a first glimpse of "Cubitas," Gómez de Avellaneda draws on the archive of scientific travel writing, enumerating the varieties of tropical flora and fauna found in her native region. Birds and flowers are listed in a manner that recalls taxonomic categories used in European travel writing. Yet, true to a Romantic ecology, the author soon turns this detached view into an intimate encounter with nature.⁸ The reader gleans the expatriate writer's desire for *pertenencia* or belonging to an insular community in her subsequent enumeration of birds and trees. She poetically evokes a list of "native" species familiar to a local subject: "El verde papagayo [. . .], el cao de un negro nítido [. . .], el carpintero real [. . .], la alegre guacamaya, el ligero tomeguín [. . .] y otra infinidad de aves indígenas, posaban en las ramas del tamarindo y del mango aromático" (132) ("The green parrot [. . .], the crow, distinctively black and lustrous, the royal woodpecker [. . .], the blithe macaw, the swift *tomeguín* [. . .] and a whole host of native birds alighted in the branches of tamarind and aromatic mango trees" [*Sab*, Scott, 27]). All of these birds are species native to Cuba; moreover, these living species are identified by their local, regional, and even indigenous names, rather than by the Latin [Linnean] nomenclature of European science. Hence the description privileges local knowledge over "universal" categories, emphasizing a deeply rooted sense of place. The use of American toponymy reinforces the narrator's authenticity, while, at the same time, the editorial notes identifying local species nod to a foreign reader who has never set foot on the tropics. For example, Mary Cruz explains that "la tornasolada mariposa" ("the iridescent butterfly" [*Sab*, Scott, 27]) is not a butterfly, as a peninsular reader would expect, but rather "a very small [red and green] bird, common in Cuba" (322).

Since the start of the narrative, the trope of travel unveils the imagination of space, in the sense that both reader and the unsuspecting traveler come to experience insular nature from both near and afar. How to reconcile these two perspectives? On the one hand, the spatial imagination in *Sab* is structured by a similar set of contradictions that build the characters' subjectivity; on the other, picturing insular landscape circumscribes a particular region, affirming regional identity, in contrast to the colonial and commercial center located in Havana.

Soon after the initial framing of landscape, appears Sab, a perfect blend between African and European races—he is, in Gómez de Avellaneda's memorable phrase, "un mulato perfecto" (133) ("a perfect mulatto" [*Sab*, Scott, 28]). In attempting to solve the "enigma" of his name, Mary Cruz conjectures that it refers to a banished tribe in the Congo; indeed, the author may have first heard the name from a Congo mother who used it to refer to her *mulato* offspring, branding, not unfavorably, the child's physique and color (Cruz 64–65). Contrary to critics' perplexity regarding the protagonist's "racial in-

definiteness” (Sommer 118), Sab’s status as miscegenated national subject is meant to illustrate the prototype of an emerging Cuban nationality. This is why Gómez de Avellaneda belabors the description of his physical appearance (exterior) as well as the inner drive that is to characterize his later actions.⁹ Clearly, Sab marks the “desire for racial integration” (Benítez, “Power/Sugar/Literature” 26) evident in Caribbean culture as a theater where indigenous, African, and European races play out their respective roles in a series of continuous migratory flows.

Sab functions as *mayoral* (overseer) in Don Carlos’s plantation, which introduces the economic underside of Romantic ecology: the sugar mill as site of production. In response to the *viajero* recently arrived at the scene, Enrique Otway, his rival for Carlota’s affection, Sab gives crucial facts regarding the size, extent, and purpose of the land: “Tiempo ha habido [. . .] en que este ingenio daba a su dueño doce mil arrobas de azúcar cada año, porque entonces más de cien negros trabajaban en sus cañaverales” (135) (“there has been times [. . .] when this plantation produced for its owner some three hundred thousand pounds of sugar every year, because then over more than a hundred blacks worked in the cane fields” [*Sab*, Scott 29]). A landscape of apparent prosperity soon gives way to imminent decline: “pero los tiempos han variado y el propietario actual de Bellavista no tiene en él sino cincuenta negros, ni excede su zafra de seis mil panes de azúcar” (135) (“But times have changed, and since the present owner of Bellavista has only fifty blacks, his production does not exceed six thousand loaves of sugar” [*Sab*, Scott 29]). From this description, we learn that Don Carlos owns the prototype of *ingenio* common in Cuba between the late eighteenth-century and 1815, a year that marked the rapid turn toward industrialization propelling the unprecedented growth of sugar manufacture at mid-nineteenth-century (Funes Monzote 43–44). Indeed, the Bellavista fits the characteristics of this earlier phase of sugar production almost exactly, given its relatively small size, reduced though enslaved labor force, and average yield of roughly ten thousand *arrobas*.

Sab’s testimony proves, however, that the size of the *ingenio* (sugar factory) does not affect the slaves, who are subject to constant exploitation: “Es una vida terrible a la verdad [. . .]. Bajo este cielo de fuego el esclavo casi desnudo trabaja toda la mañana sin descanso” (135) (“It is truly a terrible life. [. . .] Under this fiery sky the nearly naked slave works all morning without a rest” [Scott, *Sab* 29]), enjoying only a small pause over the noon hour. The three phases of sugar production are synthesized here: the cutting of sugar cane in the fields, the grinding of the stalks in *trapiches* or oxen-powered grinders to extract the juice, then the hot boilers where the *melaza* or fermented cane juice evaporates into crystal. In a few brief lines, Sab conveys not only the intense manual labor required in producing sugar, but also its detrimental effects on the slaves, noting the fact that they were only allowed

two hours of sleep, what necessarily altered the sequence of day and night (135). By means of metaphor—the “fuego del sol” (136) (fiery rays of sun) burning the backs of sugar-cane cutters turns into the “fuego de leña” (136) (“the heat of firewood” [Scott 29]) inside the sugar mill—field and factory are linked in the process of sugar production. We *see* the cauldron that caused the cane-juice to boil, and how the slaves had to patiently toil, stirring the liquid long hours and under exceedingly hot temperatures. Seen in terms of an environmental history of Cuba, this eloquent passage illustrates the reliance on wood as fuel for the sugar industry (Funes Monzote 50, 55). Historian Funes Monzote asserts in *From Rainforest to Cane Field in Cuba* that “wood [was] an important element in building of *ingenios*,” as everything—from buildings to *trapiches*—was made out of wood (49–50).¹⁰

This graphic image of the interior of the sugar mill leads to an abstract statement regarding slave labor: “es un cruel espectáculo la vista de la humanidad degradada, de hombres convertidos en brutos, que llevan en su frente la marca de la esclavitud y en su alma la desesperación del infierno” (136) (“The sight of this degraded humanity, where men become mere brutes, is a cruel spectacle. These are men whose brows are seared with the mark of slavery just as their souls are branded with the desperation of Hell” [*Sab*, Scott, 29–30]). *Sab*’s lament for insular nature is aligned with a broader “yearning for lost landscapes” in Caribbean literature, a response to the large-scale deforestation that resulted from the expansion of the sugar industry, beginning with the “Great Clearing” during the mid-seventeenth century that turned the British and French Caribbean into “sugar islands,” and culminating two centuries later in the technological innovations that depleted wooded areas in the Hispanic Caribbean (Paravisini Gebert 99–116). Although, historically, the landscape surrounding Puerto Príncipe had not yet been totally absorbed by plantation economy (131), Gómez de Avellaneda prefigures its later demise. Central to Gómez de Avellaneda’s Romantic ecology is a striking contrast between the natural world and the social order, what serves as a powerful disclaimer of the institution of slavery and a warning of what is to come.

Bellavista was, then, one of many small sugar mills prevalent in Cuba before the “boom” in the industry which occurred after 1830, a consequence of the 1791 revolution in Haiti and the collapse of the plantation system in the French island (Funes Monzote, *From Rainforest to Canefield* 83; Moreno Friginals 22–23, 27). Led by its intellectual author, Francisco Arango y Parreño, the Havana oligarchy soon “won the backing of colonial authorities,” creating a united front in order “to modernize the colony and develop it economically,” envisioning post-Enlightenment progress and prosperity under the code-name “la felicidad” (Funes Monzote 84) (progress and prosperity). But, “la felicidad” was not shared by all members of the Creole aristocracy. Like many other small landowners, Gómez de Avellaneda’s fictional Don

Carlos had not prospered under the 1830's sugar boom. On the contrary, he had suffered a significant loss of land; a loss due, as Sab hints in his initial exchange with Enrique, due to mounting economic pressures occasioned by the rapid expansion of sugar (136).

Don Carlos's Bellavista plantation is situated in the heart of "Cuba pequeña" (Little Cuba) (Benítez Rojo, "Power/Sugar/Literature" 15), based on small farms, diversified crops, and run by free workers (Funes Monzote 86), an agricultural system more attuned with "nature's economy."¹¹ Sab's ambivalent status as a slave, but one who enjoyed special privilege and protection, is explained, in part, by the fact that Don Carlos's plantation functioned according to an earlier mode of production (159). By the 1830s sugar boom, pasture lands and smaller landholdings were already on the verge of decline, swept away by "Cuba grande" (Big Cuba) based on a single crop and requiring "[large], slaveholding plantations" (Funes Monzote 86). In fact, since the 1830s, the sugar industry was rapidly expanding south, around Matanzas and Trinidad, and invading the "red, fertile soil" of Artemisa Plain, and east to Güines, an area of "'healthy, fertile, and lovely" plains, surrounded by a river and dotted with small farms—the epitome of "Cuba pequeña" (Funes Monzote 84, 87–88; Moreno Friginals 22).

Equidistant from "Cubitas" and the city of Puerto Príncipe (131), and bathed by the waters of the Tíñima, the Bellavista plantation lies next to the fertile "tierras rojas" coveted by the big sugar plantations (131). Bellavista is thus under the threat of "Cuba grande," which required an ever wider extension of land, the clearing away of large tracts of forest for planting sugar cane, and an ever constant supply of slaves. This explains why the landscape is tainted by "melancholy," which colors the *organization* of landscape, its absorption into a social order. By praising the natural beauty of the island in these opening scenes, Gómez de Avellaneda voices the "yearning for lost landscapes" (Paravisini Gebert 99), an aesthetic response to deforestation prevalent in Caribbean fiction.

Enlightenment explorer Alexander von Humboldt had already noted the effect which the European "lust for the land" had in American territories; in Cuba particularly, he had "warned about the lack of subsistence crops that characterized many of the tropical regions owing to 'the imprudent activity of Europeans, which has turned the order of nature on its head'" (qtd. in Funes Monzote 86). Humboldt's prophetic statement explains Gómez de Avellaneda's scathing critique of the British as embodied in the Otways. For it was the British who had first introduced the *máquina de vapor* (steam engine) into the sugar mill, facilitating the transition from "primitive" *ingenios* like the Bellavista, pulled by oxen, to the semi-mechanized sugar mill, run entirely by machines (the steam engine) (Funes Monzote 129; Moreno Friginals 32–33, 102). In an intermediate stage in sugar production, the semi-mechanized sugar

mill would soon turn into the big *factoría*, associated with the rise of “Cuba grande,” a technological shift that prompted the expansion of the industry into the heartland of Cuba, to the east, “the plains of the Central District,” mainly, in Cienfuegos, Santa Clara, and Sancti Spiritus (Funes Monzote 129, 131).¹² Don Carlos’s loss of fortune is, in part, due to this expansion of the big *factoría* in the eastern region, whose ravaging effect on the ecology of the island is denounced in Gómez de Avellaneda’s novel (Benítez Rojo, “Power/Sugar/Literature” 35). Sab comes to embody the values of a traditional creole culture associated with “Little Cuba,” more so than the “soft-hearted,” and somewhat weak, creole land owner, Don Carlos. In her prologue, Gómez de Avellaneda declares that she let the novel sit for over three years (127); assuming, as her biographers do, that she wrote it between 1836 and 1838; that is, in transit between Bordeaux and Seville (Servera 46), the author would have been aware of the impending “savannization” of her native region due to the impact of large-scale sugar manufacture, which would increase over the 1840s and 1860s (Funes Monzote 131; Moreno Friginals 65–70). The novel appeared in Madrid in 1841, as if to alert, if not prevent, the region’s ecological demise.

By the 1860s, when Justo Germán Cantero had published *Los Ingenios de Cuba*, sugar giants had transformed the topography of the island, as towers and smoke stacks loomed over previously wooded territory. Intended as a showcase and aesthetic justification for large-scale sugar production, the beautiful illustrations in Cantero’s series conceal the steam-engine’s negative effect on the ecology (Cantero, “Ingenio la Amistad”). “Steam’s impact on the environment [. . .] was characterized first by an increased need for fuel and later by an expansion of the surface area of the cane fields” (Funes Monzote 129). Near the island’s geographic center, steam-powered *ingenios* (sugar factories) were less common than in the heavily industrialized western region, but the average size of the *ingenios* remained the same.¹³

The apex of sugar production in Cuba came with the introduction of boiler houses or *trenes al vacío* (Jamaican sugar kettle batteries), which ushered the rise of the big *factoría* or “mechanized sugar mill” (Funes Monzote). Of the twenty-five illustrations included in *Los ingenios*, half were mechanized “with an average area of 86 *caballerías*” (Funes Monzote 131), a noticeable difference from both the steam-run plantations and the earlier, Bellavista-type *ingenios* (Cantero, “Interior of Boiler House, Ingenio Santa Susana”). In fact, “this new type of sugar mill reconfigured the technical and spatial organization of the industry compared with its traditional forms during the early nineteenth century” (Funes Monzote 131). Cantero’s illustrations of the sugar-mill, featuring “the three main buildings of the *ingenio*—the *casa de molienda* (pressing house), *casa de calderas* (boiler house), and *casa de purga* (purging house), where the sugar was separated from the molasses”—hide the fact that all “were constructed from lumber” (Funes Monzote 49). The

open fields in seeming harmony with the buildings of the *batey*, along with the church tower, whose bell marked the rhythm of work for the slaves, gloss over the hard truth that “deforestation occurred in every region of the island” (Funes Monzote 131; Cantero, “Ingenio Manaca”).

Alarmed that the same was about to occur in her beloved Puerto Príncipe, Gómez de Avellaneda focuses her resistance to sugar on the Otways, who represent foreigners’ ability to profit from an immensely fertile land, what is facilitated by the locals’ more relaxed attitude to matters of “agriculture, commerce, and industry” (149).¹⁴ Gómez de Avellaneda’s caricature of the eldest Otway may have deeper historical roots: his obscure origins in piracy may allude to British pirate attacks in late seventeenth-century Caribbean; concretely, to Henry Morgan’s raid of Puerto Príncipe in 1668, when he pillaged the villa in return for ransom money (Marrero 137–140).¹⁵ Jorge Otway had succeeded in commerce to such an extent that his dearest ambition was to become, like the most opulent of *criollos* (creoles), a slave owner himself (150). This was tantamount to a foreign “invasion” of the city’s *criollo*-controlled economy; hence, a threat to the city’s Mediterranean traditions and values (Moreno Friginals 69; Levi Marrero 60). To make inroads in a society that would have ordinarily been off limits, the elder Otway plots to have Enrique marry the daughter of the richest creole aristocrat, a hope dashed by Don Carlos’s sudden loss of fortune (153–155).¹⁶ In short, the author’s scathing critique of the Otways is due to their association with foreign interests, the same that fueled the rise of “Cuba grande” (big Cuba), associated with global markets, authoritarian power, and the loss of the island’s lush forests (Benítez Rojo 35; “Power/Sugar/Literature” 15). Read as allegory, Carlota’s doomed marriage to Otway warns against a mercantilist hold on the nation.

The novel stages the contrast between “Little Cuba” and “Big Cuba” in terms of a romantic rivalry between “creole” and foreigner: Enrique Otway and the prototypical Sab. Eager to rush back to Puerto Príncipe to attend to his father’s business, Enrique is not persuaded by the family’s pleas to wait until after an impending storm passes (162). Instructed by Don Carlos to accompany Enrique, Sab wavers whether to let Enrique perish or save his life, as the storm had, predictably, caused Enrique to be thrown off his horse by a thunderbolt (167). In a scene bathed in “pathetic fallacy where nature is subordinated to the [character’s] self” (Bate 77), Sab decides to rescue Enrique, but only because Carlota had entrusted him with his safety (167–169). The tempest stages Gómez de Avellaneda’s romantic ecology, pitting two opposing attitudes toward the natural world as an effective strategy for characterization: the younger Otway is depicted as an “inferior” soul given his reckless behavior, disregard for local knowledge, and crass material values; in contrast, Sab and Carlota, respectively, are each endowed with “superior” sensibilities (164; 168); despite the abyss of race, they are “loftier souls [. . .]

rich in sentiment" (*Sab*, Scott, 48). Romantic ecology here underscores anti-slavery sentiment, for, once the men arrive back at the plantation, Carlota grants Sab his freedom (171).

Sab's Garden and the Tropes of Romantic Ecology

Soon after the tempest scene, and reassured that her beloved is safe, Carlota finds refuge in the garden (173). The garden trope recurs in European Romanticism to signify the harmony between the natural and social worlds, a domesticated nature that has been carefully tended to bring out salient features of the landscape, "beautifying" it as a visually pleasing, and sensually delightful, site. Gómez de Avellaneda pictures the garden within a larger frame: "todo el país [era] un vasto y magnífico vergel" (174) ("the entire country was a vast and magnificent garden" [*Sab*, Scott, 56])—what not only reinforces the Edenic trope configuring the tropics, but turns the garden into a metonymy of nation. Moreover, the narrator stresses the difference between the tropical garden and the continental tradition, for Sab's garden, grown out of sentiment, does not conform to French or English styles of "enclosed" or artificially landscaped gardens (174). While acknowledging the patterns of taste and sensibility which led to the rise of the institution of gardening in Europe—particularly in the two countries associated with the Romantic movement, England and France—Gómez de Avellaneda nods, once again, to a European public, who had to be accommodated (acclimatized) to the virtues of Sab's secluded spot in the tropics. Like the garden in which Efraín and María exchange amorous looks in Isaacs's *María* (Operé 169), the garden Sab has carefully tended for his beloved is a bucolic space set apart from the plantation's sphere of influence. Framed by "triples hileras de altas cañas" (174) ("a triple row of tall reeds" [*Sab*, Scott, 56])—a "wilder" yet related species of cane to the one used in cultivation¹⁷—the sugar plantation looms sufficiently near so to disrupt the idyll contained within its borders.

Sab's garden displays a dazzling array of tropical flowers. Much like Silvestre de Balboa's epic poem *Espejo de paciencia* (1604), famous for its lyrical cornucopia of flowers and fruits, the flowers blooming in Sab's garden reveal "the desire for insular nature" that anticipates the "desire for the nation" in nineteenth-century Latin America (Benítez Rojo, "Power/Sugar/Literature" 26–27).¹⁸ Paralleling the opening scene describing the Bellavista plantation, the garden's flora and fauna abound with native species: the emerald *colibrí*, the "clavellina," "malva rosa," and *pasionaria* flowers are identified in the author's notes (175), following her earlier tactic of privileging local knowledge over Linnean taxonomy. Sab's garden, and the broader metonymy of

nation implied in “un vasto y magnífico vergel” (174) (a vast and magnificent garden), figures “Cuba pequeña” (little Cuba), located in the interior of the island, dotted by small sugar plantations such as Don Carlos’s Bellavista.

The Caves or an Archeology of Space

Gómez de Avellaneda’s Romantic ecology shapes an imagination of space according to specific topographic features and natural phenomena. The last in the series is the family’s trip to “Cubitas,” a zone known for its spectacular cave formations. En route to “Cubitas,” the landscape shifts from the evergreen foliage that endows the tropics’ paradisiacal aura, to a more “somber” hue. The underside of a Caribbean “spatial imaginary,” the caves uncover layers of buried history, from pictographs drawn by unknown *taíno* hands, to a hidden chamber that provided refuge to runaway slaves (207–209). As they approach the caves, the group is greeted by a light that intermittently shines across their path (199), suggesting a region immune to the expansion of sugar. Martina, an indigenous wise-woman who lives alone in the midst of this “wilderness,” and who is allegedly the last descendant of the *cacique* Camagüey, greets the group and entertains them with her story-telling. As if to counter the erasure of indigenous peoples from the map of the nation, Gómez de Avellaneda voices through Martina a corrective view of Cuba’s colonial history. Substituting oral memory for written record, Sab retells the legend that Martina had often transmitted to him. At the first colonial encounter, Camagüey had greeted the foreign invaders with gestures of good will; his kindness cruelly repaid when the Spaniards exacted the ultimate vengeance by throwing Camagüey over a cliff; the soil still reddened by his blood and sacrifice. The light that mysteriously appears across the night sky is the *cacique*’s tormented soul who comes to haunt his oppressors as a last act of defiance. Sab ends his soliloquy with a prophetic vision in which the blacks promise to carry out the vengeance exacted by their indigenous forebears (202).¹⁹ One of the few instances in which Sab hints at open rebellion, this passage effectively links the disappearance of Cuba’s indigenous population with the ecological devastation brought by a plantation economy. That explains why Don Carlos’s party does not dare step into the eleventh and deepest chamber of the cave—a refuge for runaway slaves, the rock was also steeped in blood (208–09).

At the conclusion of the “Cubitas” scene, the family sits down to a banquet where master and slave, man and woman, white and black, English and creole, enjoy a communal feast in celebration of *convivencia* or mutually shared bonds of sociability. For a brief epiphany, racial tensions are suspended (219), upholding a “utopian project of co-existence to compensate for a frag-

mented, unstable, and conflictive Antillean identity” (Benítez Rojo, *La isla que se repite* 28). As we have seen, the bucolic landscape of “Cubitas”—“Cuba pequeña” (little Cuba)—is the depository of autochthonous values; the site of an authentic creole culture peopled by descendants of the original *tainos* (Martina), Spanish immigrants, and Africans, a pastoral site where these diverse communities evolve with a strong sense of *pertenencia* or rootedness in place (Benítez Rojo, “Power/Sugar/Literature” 15). The banquet scene anticipates the transition to a broader sense of *civitas* or a communal way of life, an echo of Silvestre de Balboa’s exultation of Bayamo in *Espejo de paciencia*.

The same utopian impulse surfaces toward the end of the novel, when a broken-hearted Sab returns to Martina, on the eve of Carlota and Otway’s marriage and before his own imminent end (281–286). In parallel fashion, Carlota returns to Bellavista after her marriage, for nature offers her respite and consolation from the disillusionment of finding herself tied to a man who is ruled only by material values (302–304). In a poignant last scene, Carlota mourns for Sab after Teresa reveals to her the contents of his letter, what prompts her to return to the cherished landscape of “Cubitas” (306–307, 318). Whereas before the mysterious light appearing in this region had been associated with the *cacique* ancestor, now, local superstition attributes it to Martina’s ghost; however, the shadowy figure is soon identified as Carlota, who has come to pay homage to Sab in his final resting place. The Gothic atmosphere suggests that, although their union was impossible given existing class and racial barriers, the lovers are united in the mythical time/space of a (future) imagined nation: “¿Habrà podido olvidar la hija de los trópicos, al esclavo que descansa en una humilde sepultura bajo aquel hermoso cielo?” (320) (“will the daughter of the tropics have been able to forget the slave who rests in a simple grave under that magnificent sky?” [*Sab*, Scott, 147]).

Sab’s farewell letter brings together all the elements of Gómez de Avellaneda’s Romantic ecology to provide an edifying, albeit contradictory, “moral of landscape” (Bate 62). Sab seeks in nature—the azure sky of the tropics, the night sky, the blustering winds of the hurricane—an answer to his question regarding the basic inequity of his condition. While nature guarantees the equality among all humans, it is social injustice that condemns the slave to an abject state, hence upsetting the inherent harmony of nature. Without a place in the social order, the slave is condemned to *pariah* status, denied a claim to citizenship or land (309–311). Sab’s rhetoric denounces the fundamental cause of the slavery system: a radical split between nature and culture, a severing of the bonds between the natural and social worlds. Only a pervasive belief in the unity of nature can save him, for that is what had fanned his all-consuming passion (312–313).

Picturing Cuba in a Trans-American Frame

Striking her own note as a transnational writer, Gómez de Avellaneda's picturing Cuba as a natural space is both a pastoral hymn to her island from her vantage point in the peninsula (nostalgia) as well as a dirge before the failure of modernity to sustain a viable project of nation-building. By her poetic rendition of garden, field, and cave, Gómez de Avellaneda affirms "Cuba pequeña" (little Cuba), articulating her own discourse of resistance to sugar, one aligned with the Del Monte circle's program of reform but countering their allegiance with British abolitionists (Luis 1–4; Benítez Rojo "Power/Sugar/Literature" 26–28, 35).

In many ways, Gómez de Avellaneda's treatment of nature echoes José María Heredia's "Himno del desterrado," which depicts Cuba as a binary between paradise and hell:

¡Dulce Cuba! En tu seno se miran
 En su grado más alto y profundo
 La bellezas del físico mundo,
 Los horrores del mundo moral. (Heredia 75)

(Cuba! In thy bosom are coupled
 of the physical world, its beauty
 of the moral world
 its horror.)

At a later stage in her life, returning to Spain via New York, Gómez de Avellaneda's "A vista del Niágara" (*Antología poética* 234–239) responds to one of Heredia's most famous poems, "Oda al Niágara," a celebration of the American sublime (Heredia 221–229). In contrast to Heredia, her poetic voice falls silent before the imposing waterfalls, since both her widowed state and her precursor's verses have muted what would otherwise have been a song of admiration and praise (*Antología poética* 235). Unlike Heredia, whose ode ends on a Romantic longing for love, Gómez de Avellaneda turns her gaze, not to sentiment, but to an object fashioned by human industry: the bridge uniting two sides of the same continent (*Antología poética* 238), thus affirming a hemispheric view of the Americas.²⁰ A similar transamerican perspective surfaces in "El viajero americano" (The American Traveler), a poem where a traveler views from above the high *sierras* surrounding the valley of Mexico and its imposing landscape of snow-capped volcanoes.²¹ The prospect view soon gives way to a vision of "un nuevo paraíso" (a new paradise) composed of gardens, forests, waterfalls, and caverns, a composite image of American

landscapes which ends abruptly when the traveler arrives at the desert. There the vision turns into a mirage, for the traveler has now reached an inward vision—an inscape—of the diverse ecologies conjoined in the Americas (*Antología poética* 157–158). As “viajera solitaria” (a solitary traveler), *la peregrina* bridging two worlds, Spain and Cuba, Europe and the New World, Gómez de Avellaneda shares her own inner vision so that we, too, can reimagine our own space and place.

Notes

1. Albin also quotes Sarduy in her reading of “Al partir.” The predominance of sound leads her to assess the poem’s lyrical “I” as nomadic subject (111–112).
2. Carlos Raggi affirms that “Al partir” shows Byron’s influence, as the Cuban author’s *Memorias*, recalls Byron’s “The Corsair,” which accents the allure of sea voyage and the freedom of maritime travel (38–39).
3. Luis privileges the writers associated with the Del Monte circle who resided in Cuba as the originators of “early anti-slavery works” (4–5).
4. See Picón Garfield, Araújo (1997), and Guerra’s lucid readings.
5. All references to *Sab*, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1973 edition by Mary Cruz.
6. A contrast established in chapter 2 ([1973] 144–145).
7. In her edition, Mary Cruz notes: “Escenario romántico, la naturaleza cubana, despojada de su realidad por la fantasía de la autora, que le confiere otra realidad poetizada, puebla el mundo novelesco de *Sab* de elementos nunca vistos en la literatura de ficción” ([1973] 91). (A romantic setting, the Cuban environment, stripped of its reality by the author’s fantasy, who projects onto it another, poeticized reality, dominates the novelistic world of *Sab*, composed of elements never before seen in literary fiction).
8. I agree with Bate’s reappraisal of Wordsworth as a “Poet of Nature,” and his assessment of Romanticism as a movement prefiguring contemporary concerns about nature and the environment (9). Both science and art, the term “ecology” was coined in 1866 by German zoologist Ernst Haeckel “who defined it as ‘the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature’ [. . .] the relationship between living beings and their environment” (Bate 36). It is in that sense that I read Gómez de Avellaneda’s fiction and poetry.
9. Mary Cruz also notes that the term “labriego” to describe Sab is not usual in Cuba (323), another sign of the author’s acknowledgement of a peninsular reader.
10. He continues: “It was more ‘economical’ to clear forests and put cane fields in their place, using the wood to rebuild the mill quickly. Finally, there was the imperious

need to keep a reserve of woodland to feed the fires under the boilers during the harvest” (49–50).

11. “Although *ingenios* existed in other areas, their smaller numbers and less powerful technologies made their impact on the environment relatively less” (Funes Monzote 129).
12. “The center of slave plantation system moved from the Havana area to east, occupying natural regions in the cane had not yet been grown” (Funes Monzote 129).
13. Although the figures are a bit contradictory, Funes Monzote indicates 44.6 *caballerías* en Puerto Príncipe, Nuevitas, and Oriente, compared to 43.3 in Havana-Matanzas (129–130).
14. “Sabido es que las riquezas de Cuba atraen en todo tiempo innumerables extranjeros, que con mediana industria y actividad no tardan en enriquecerse de una manera asombrosa para los indolentes isleños que [. . .] se adormecen, [. . .] y abandonan a la codicia y actividad de los europeos todos los ramos de la agricultura comercio, e industria” ([1973] 149) (“It is well known that Cuba’s riches continually attract innumerable foreigners who, with middling effort and activity, soon become prosperous, in a way that astonishes the indolent islanders; these [. . .] become somnolescent [. . .] surrendering their agriculture, commerce, and industry to the greed and enterprise of the Europeans” [*Sab*, Scott, 38]).
15. The eldest Otway is described as a “buhonero,” associated with piracy or contraband trade; he is not, strictly speaking a “peddler in the United States,” as rendered in Nina M. Scott’s translation (38); on this hinges Brickhouse’s reading of the novel, which has Enrique “born in all likelihood in the United States” given “his father’s former peddling years” (174). However, the eldest Otway is associated, not with North America, but with two Catalan merchants with whom he set up shop. That confirms the Otways’ British lineage, bolstered by the fact that Enrique is sent to London to study, much like Isaacs’s Efraín (149–150). The link between peninsular and British mercantile interests could not be more clear.
16. Don Carlos’s family objected to the match due to Jorge Otway’s suspicious origins and *nouveau riche* status; when, at Carlota’s insistence, he agreed to have her marry Enrique, the family dispossessed him. To add to his misfortune, a legal suit had also deprived him of his late wife’s inheritance. Likewise, the elder Otway saw the marriage as a way to recuperate from financial set-back (1973] 153–155).
17. The garden is not merely “an ideal space for intimacy and daydreaming,” as Sommer claims, concluding, somewhat hastily, that “he, [. . .] as much as Carlota, needed a spot for recreation” (119–120). It is both Sab’s gift to his beloved and a sign of his love, as well as a metonymy of nation, as I argue here. Cruz explains that the type of cane alluded to here is the “caña brava” or “caña bambú” (328); the cane used in sugar manufacture was the *Otahiti* strain.
18. Silvestre de Balboa was a poet from the Canary Islands who served as “escribano” in the zone of Puerto Príncipe; *Espejo de paciencia* registers the degree of integration and prosperity achieved by an emerging *criollo* society in Bayamo (Benítez Rojo, *La isla que se repite* 25–26). The poem was discovered by José Antonio Echeverría, one

of the members of the Del Monte circle, who turned it into the cornerstone of Cuban literature (González Echevarría 105–109). For a new reading of *Espejo de paciencia*, see Marrero-Fente *Epic, Empire and Community in the Atlantic World: Silvestre de Balboa's Espejo de paciencia*.

19. “La tierra que fue regada con la sangre una vez lo será aún otra: los descendientes de los opresores serán oprimidos, y los hombres negros serán los terribles vengadores de los hombres cobrizos” (168) (“The earth which was once drenched in blood will be so again: the descendants of the oppressors will be themselves oppressed, and the black men will be the terrible avengers of those of copper color” [*Sab*, Scott, 73]).
20. For further discussion of the connections between Heredia and Gómez de Avellaneda's Niágara poems, see Albin (134–142, 146–161).
21. For further discussion of “El viajero americano,” see Albin (242–258).

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**Nation, Violence, Memory:
Interrupting the Foundational Discourse in *Sab***

Jenna Leving Jacobson

A Martina es a quien he oído, repetidas veces, referir misteriosamente e interrumpiéndose por momentos con exclamación de dolor y pronósticos siniestros de venganza divina la muerte horrible y bárbara que, según ella, dieron los españoles al cacique Camagüey, señor de esta provincia; y del cual pretende descender nuestra pobre Martina. . . .

En sus momentos de exaltación, señor, he oído gritar a la vieja india. La tierra que fue regada con sangre una vez lo será aún otra: los descendientes de los opresores serán oprimidos, y los hombres negros serán los terribles vengadores de los hombres cobrizos. (Gómez de Avellaneda 167–168)¹

(It is Martina who I have heard, many times, mysteriously recount and interrupting herself by moments of painful exclamation and sinister predictions of divine vengeance the horrible and savage death that, according to her, the Spanish gave to chief Camagüey, ruler of this province; and from whom our poor Martina claims to descend. . . .

In her moments of exaltation, Sir, I have heard the old Indian woman cry out. The earth that was once washed over with blood will shall once again be so: the descendants of the oppressors shall be oppressed, and the black man shall be the dreaded avenger of the red man.)

A storyteller of past violence and predictor of ominous futures, presumed legatee of Taíno ancestry, and adoptive mother to the narrative's slave protagonist, Martina is one of the most enigmatic yet least studied characters in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's foundational novel, *Sab*. This essay aims to propose possible alternative meanings of the novel through a close reading of the figure of the indigenous mother, a marginal figure who has remained relatively silenced in existing scholarship. In particular, I will highlight Martina's narrative function, not so much as a kind of alter ego to the authorial subject, but more precisely as a force of interruption ("interrumpiéndose por momentos con exclamación de dolor y pronósticos siniestros de venganza divina" (167) [interrupting herself by moments of painful exclamation and sinister predictions of divine vengeance]), a voice dissonant to what has become a dominant hermeneutic model applied to the novel. That model, based on the very important work of Doris Sommer, highlights the primacy of the allegory and of the Romance structure as principal modes for interpreting the national political project imagined in *Sab*.² Without denying the validity of these readings, I wish to underscore how Martina's character reveals the failure of the desire for national harmonization, a desire couched in the allegorical structure of the Romance. Martina makes this failed desire explicit in the narrative by inscribing, rather loudly (to the point of querulous, even agonizing repetition), the violence rooted in the nation's very founding. Martina's voice, figuratively speaking, is *other* to the allegory's ecumenical drive,³ a voice of dissent before the appeal to forget the foundational violence of Cuban history: the violence of the Conquest and the continuity of its brutality under the system of slavery. It is Martina who tells that hi/story.

Echoing Sommer, Kelly Comfort analyzes the protagonist Sab as a multiracial symbol of this idealized, national consolidation, but recognizes the symbolic role of the indigenous mother in the construction of a future Cuban nation insufficiently projected by the novel. Such an imagined future is engendered in the moment when Martina symbolically adopts Sab as her son, substituting his absent African mother "with the vestiges of an original, pre-colonial Cuban mother. When Martina . . . adopt[s] Sab as her son, Gómez de Avellaneda continues her sketch of an independent and protonational Cuba" (182). Giving credence to what Martina says about herself (i.e. that she is indeed of indigenous descent, an identity over which the novel casts substantial doubt), Comfort interprets her character as an allegorically stabilizing force in that she completes the Indian, Spanish, African trilogy in Sab's genealogy. For Comfort, the novel's uniting of Sab and Martina symbolizes a more perfect and harmonious national unity: "this merger of the 'native' mother with the hybrid son introduces the possibility for a new Cuban protonational subject" (182). The novel's political project, according to Comfort, is one that promotes this "protonationalism."

Although the mulatto slave's desire for the Creole woman can indeed allegorize a certain notion of national solidarity—and while Martina's performed adoption of Sab can be read as a complex image of racially harmonious, historic synthesis—these readings ignore other important dimensions of her character: namely that Martina's voice forcefully interrupts the allegorical fantasies that, according to Sommer and Comfort, are posed by the novel. Martina destabilizes the novelized foundations of the future nation by *not* forgetting the violence committed in the process of Cuba's national formation. In contrast, she remembers these violent origins by assuming them as elements constitutive to her character. Rather than forming part of a protonational reconciliation and consolidation, Martina's role is one that disrupts the stability of the notion of "independence and nationhood" highlighted by Comfort (180) and the "oportunidad para la consolidación [nacional]" ("C'est Moi" 36) (opportunity for [national] consolidation) identified by Sommer. This is not to suggest that reading *Sab* as a national allegory is an untenable approach, but rather that the novel allows for other, less idyllic, interpretive modes. The allegorical framework in *Sab* is undermined by a reluctance to forget; colonial violence is neither forgotten nor are the scars engraved by its painful history ever fully erased. Martina, amplified in the voices of the other characters, exposes these scars and, as we shall see, thereby serves to echo the system of slavery constructed in the novel.

Who is Martina, and what is her function in the novel? Above all she is a racially illegible figure, characterized as much by her claimed indigenous ancestry as she is by the uncertainty surrounding that ancestry. When presenting her to the Creole family of the female protagonist Carlota, Sab confirms that the locals (the *Cubiteros*) do not doubt that she truly is *indígena* (indigenous) because of "su grande experiencia, sus conocimientos en medicina de los que sacan tanta utilidad, y el placer que gozan oyéndola referir sus sempiternos cuentos de vampiros y aparecidos" (167) (her great experience, her knowledge of the medicine of which they get so much use, and the pleasure that they enjoy hearing her tell her never-ending stories of vampires and ghosts). Martina is identified over and over again as "la vieja india" (168, 176, 184, 274) (the old indian woman) and yet the novel questions whether "realmente [era] descendiente de aquella raza desventurada, casi extinguida en esta Isla" (167) (she really [was] a descendent of that unfortunate race, nearly extinguished on this Island) as the ranchers of Cubitas conjecture. But in her preserving these narratives she assumes the role of proprietor for the indigenous community's heritage. Martina performs the part of the *ab-original* mother, holder of native roots as well as both indigenous oral traditions and narrative practices.

The narrative voice in the novel tends to only half-accept Martina's indigenous "lineage," transmitting certain distrust to the reader: "este color [de su rostro], empero, era todo lo que podía alegar a favor de sus pretensiones

de india, pues ninguno de los rasgos de su fisonomía parecía corresponder a su pretendido origen” (176) (this color [of her face], nevertheless, was all that they could allege in favor of her indigenous pretensions, since none of the facial features of her physiognomy seemed to correspond to her claimed origin). The doubts generated by this question of her racial identity confirm Martina’s otherness (she claims to be what her own body, according to the narrative voice, does not substantiate) as well as an otherness within the world of the novel. Because of the opacity of her identity, she remains outside the networks of racial sociability established by the main plotline: the commercial and love triangles between the mulatto slave, the white Creoles and the European foreigner. An outsider to the dominant social circuits, Martina is further distinguished not only for “sus puntos de loca” (167) (her crazy points), but also for being racially illegible, for being neither white nor black, nor mixed like Sab. In nineteenth-century Cuba, as noted by historian Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, colonial power was maintained by the racial opposition between black slave and his white master: “the division between white and nonwhite was . . . jealously guarded by the colonial state and the white elite” (8). The fact that Martina neither fits within this racial binary, nor within its permutations, underscores the displaced quality of her racial identity. And yet her character is configured as wholly representative of an indigeneity that is also not entirely legible. Her claim to these supposed native roots, however, is undeniably troubling.

We meet Martina halfway through the novel through a digressive pause in the primary narrative when the protagonists (the Creole family and English visitors) travel to Cubitas, a small town in the Camagüey region of the island known for its “famosas cuevas . . . obra admirable de la naturaleza, y dignas de ser visitadas” (128) (famous caves . . . an admirable work of nature, worth of being visited). The scene at the Cubitas cave is framed by an extended introduction of Martina who is portrayed as inhabiting its subterranean space. This episode is crucial to understanding the figure of Martina, the *madre-india* (Indian-mother), as interruptive of the allegorical dimensions of the text. I will thus focus here on a detailed discussion of this passage, noting the peculiarities of its aesthetic composition, with the aim of highlighting the ways in which the novel employs the cave to symbolize the persistence of a discordant memory, a memory of the violent past that the allegorical model wishes to forget.

Early in the episode we are told that “[la india] vive en una pequeña choza, cerca de las cuevas” (170) ([the indian woman] lives in a small hut, near the caves), along the path from the caves, “los viajeros [la] vieron en el umbral de su humilde morada” (176) (the travelers saw [her] in the threshold of her humble abode). Not long after, the caves are characterized as her “asilo” (182) (refuge), making it a space essentially identified with Martina. The caves also provide the setting for the novel’s subplot, the trip to Cubitas from Carlota’s

family's property, the Bellavista plantation. This space is crucial to our reading as it is within the caves where the text unites all of the main characters and, consequently, a unification of all of the allegorized components necessary for the founding of an idealized nation: the Creole landowner and his daughters (the presumed future mothers of the nation—including Carlota in her personification of the nation's lineage of western cultural tradition), the foreign merchant, the mulatto slave (who personifies the African narrative and cultural tradition of Cuba's history), and the native (grand)mother, who bears and transmits aboriginal stories (and History—*Historia e historias*). Cubitas, the little Cuba, is a microcosm of the nation Avellaneda presents and its symbolic value is emphasized in being the country's most interior space. The cave appears as a space simultaneously embedded (subterraneously) in the center of Cuban earth and interpolated in the center of the novel's primary narrative. It is the place where the country's native roots are planted, a symbol of the nation's womb. And although the caves are in the margins of plantation society, they nevertheless occupy a multiple centrality: central geographically in the interior of the island, geologically in the interior of the land, and textually in the center of the book.

Upon entering into the physical space of the caves, an immediate relationship is established between its interior space and an indigenous ancestry. Following the description of the passageways and enclosures of the three main caves through which the characters navigate, the narrator pauses to detail the images drawn on the walls of the cave named María Teresa. There we encounter: “pinturas bizarras designadas en las paredes con tintas de vivísimos e imborrables colores, que aseguran ser obra de los indios, y mil tradiciones maravillosas prestan cierto encanto a aquellos subterráneos desconocidos” (174) (bizarre paintings marked on the walls with inks of vivid and indelible colors, that are certain to be the work of indians, and thousands of marvelous traditions lending a certain charm to those strange underground spaces). The introduction of the hieroglyphs as an indigenous repertoire constructs this cave in such a way as to appear as a space unequivocally belonging to the aboriginal tradition. That tradition is the habitat of Martina, the storytelling mother. Furthermore, the region in which these caves are located is known as Camagüey, the very name of the famous Taíno *cacique* whom Martina claims to be her ancestor. Therein emerges a single chain of signifiers connecting Camagüey/petroglyphs and the cave/Martina/indigenous history.

As they approach the caves, Sab reminds Carlota's father, Don Carlos, that Martina is “madre de uno de sus mayores de Cubitas” (167) (the mother of one of the overseers from Cubitas), and that she cares for all of the ranchers with maternal affection by delighting them with her stories and with “sus conocimientos en medicina de los que sacan tanta utilidad” (167) (her knowledge of medicine of which she makes such good use). The association

formed between Martina and a uterine characterization of the cave itself further elaborates her own motherhood. The narrative voice illustrates the depth of the cave explored by the protagonists in a manner evocative of the female sex: “nadie ha osado todavía penetrar más allá de la undécima sala. Se dice, empero, vulgarmente que un río de sangre demarca su término visible, y que los abismos que le siguen son las enormes bocas del infierno” (174) (no one has yet dared to penetrate beyond the eleventh room. It is commonly said, however vulgarly, that a river of blood marks its visible limit, and that the abyss that follows it is the enormous mouths of Hell). The cave is a space inscribed with the violence of a “río de sangre” (174) (river of blood); it is a “reducido y tenebroso recinto” (174) (small and gloomy enclosure) marked by a fear of ending up suffocated “por el calor excesivo que hay en ella” (174) (by the excessive heat within it). The image of menstrual blood signaling the act of deep penetration emphasizes the cave’s maternity and fertility. The cave, moreover, dazzles the traveler that “ve brillar sobre su cabeza un rico dosel de plata sembrado de zafiros y brillantes, que tal parece en la oscuridad de la gruta el techo singular que la cubre” (174) (sees shining above his head a rich silver canopy sown with sapphires and diamonds, such that appears in the darkness of the cave the special ceiling that covers it). Upon penetration, the cave gives light and life (*da luz, y da a luz*). In this regard, the maternal cave refigures the original colonial violation of the Conquest and its violent penetration in search of precious metals, and consequently, restages the birth of a new historical period founded in the destruction of indigenous culture (with its “mil tradiciones maravillosas”).

In penetrating the Cuban earth, the foreigner Enrique and the Creole family are rewarded by “el placer de admirar las bellezas que contiene” (174) (the pleasure of admiring the beauty contained within) in seeing that shining, “rico dosel de plata sembrado de zafiros” (174) (rich silver canopy sown with sapphires). This description of the exploration of the cave by white subjects invokes the exploitative violation of the colonial project. By recalling its colonial past (the “penetration” by the *conquistadores*), the characterization of the cave suggests it as both a violent and sexualized female space that in turn records the historical violence of the island: the cracks, the “imborrables [dibujos] de los indios” (174–175) (indelible [drawings] of the indians) inscribed in the walls of the cave, document traces of a petrified memory of oppression. In the Cubitas cave episode, the encounter with such memories of native origins (the indigenous peoples’ history, the Conquest) is presented as a violent and infernal journey through a subterranean space, through a metaphorical womb of Mother Earth (or the *motherland*), and symbolizes the archive of ancestral history and memory—all of which are images deeply associated with Martina.

It will be worthwhile to underline here the irreducible connection between the functions of femininity and maternity and of the reproduction of

knowledge and transmission of memory, a connection reaffirmed by the vast literary tradition that has associated the metaphorical field of the cave with the mother's uterus. Florence M. Weinberg, for example, explains that the cave has been seen "primarily as nature's sheltering womb" (3). In reading the Cubitas caves as a womb-shelter, Martina's motherhood is visually manifested as a receptacle concurrently for the forgetting and memorializing of Cuba's foundational violence. The cave's archival and fertile functions elicit the theoretical notion of *chora* (or *khora*); the paradoxes of *chora* echo the paradoxes of Martina's character. Introduced by Plato's *Timaeus* as a kind of receptacle to be written upon, *chora* has since been recognized for its/her reproductive quality. Elizabeth Grosz and Julia Kristeva have theoretically synthesized the equivalence between the feminine-maternal symbolization and the transmission of knowledge in the concept of *chora*. While not a concrete place, *chora* evokes notions of space—region, country, setting—and of femininity by being associated with sexually codified terms. Grosz explains that *chora*, "follows a long line of deconstructively privileged terms . . . 'writing,' 'trace,' 'pharmakon,' 'dissemination,' 'supplement,' 'parergon' . . . , 'ghost,' 'remainder,' 'residue'" linking the semiotics of motherhood to the reproduction of knowledge and memory, and to the recuperation and dissemination of history (112). Grosz likewise affirms that words like "'mother,' 'nurse,' 'receptacle,' and 'imprint-bearer'" are associated with *chora*. These terms resonate with the space of the Cubitas caves in the context of *Sab*. The concept of *chora* also serves us in theorizing the important symbolism of the maternal cave that is inscribed with traces of the original indigenous peoples and allows for a rethinking of the figure of Martina as a spectral, maternal narrator.

The reformulation of maternity through the historicized space of the cave is generated in a way quite closely to how Julia Kristeva theorizes the *chora* concept: "nourishing and maternal . . . the mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*" (36–37). The mediation and abjection of the maternal body, this dichotomy of a uterus constructed as much as a victim of an intrusive penetration as a source of life is, for Kristeva, the dichotomous state characterizing the semiotic *chora*. While Derrida pushed back on the networks of metaphorical interpretations of *chora* as "'mother,'" "nurse," "receptacle," "imprint-bearer" for being anachronistic in its reliance on translation, his essay on the concept provides a way to think about the cave to connect such interpretations of space as maternal and generative of history as well as negating that history with the violence that is inscribed upon it. For Derrida, *chora* is "the sum or the process of what has just been inscribed 'on' her" (99). Like a womb that nurtures and produces, like the cave that remembers and transmits stories, Derrida entertains *chora* as a receptacle "if it/she gives place to all the stories, ontologic or mythic, that can be recounted on the

subject of what she receives and even of what she resembles but which in fact takes place in her” (117). His reflection on the problematic oral tradition in *Timaeus* is of interest as “it will not make us forget (since it is written!) that all this is written in that place which *receives* everything” (115). He describes this passage as a “tale about the possibility of the tale, a proposition about origin, memory, and writing” (115).

Within this vision, the notion of the cave is complicated as the mother occupies the place of otherness in the process of signification: “[de]pendence on the mother is severed, and transformed into a symbolic relation to an other In this way, the signifier/signified break is synonymous with social sanction: ‘the first social censorship’” (Kristeva 43).⁵ Despite being a nourishing and maternal womb, *chora*, the cavernous state represented by Martina reproduces the semiotic problematic of an alterity, a social censorship comparable to that of the slave and of the native in nineteenth-century Cuba as represented in *Sab*: “The semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated” (Kristeva 37). This is essentially what happens with Martina in Cubitas, the little Cuba—feminine diminutive and symbolic microcosm—where we encounter native roots of the country’s past. The cave, geological it may be, is Cuba’s metaphorical womb. And there the uterine cave is simultaneously generating and negating the nation’s indigeneity, and the reproduction of its most painful memories.

The episode in the Cubitas caves presents the subterranean space as a kind of archival womb of the indigenous past. The hieroglyphics on the cave walls capture the visitors’ attention: “una larga hilera de columnas parecen decorar el peristilo de algún palacio subterráneo; allá una hermosa cabeza atrae y fija las miradas: en otra parte se ven infinitas petrificaciones sin formas determinadas, que presentan masas de deslumbrante blancura y figuras raras y caprichosas” (174) (a long row of columns appear to decorate the peristyle of a subterranean palace; there a beautiful head draws in and fixes the gaze: in another part one sees infinite petrifications without specific form, that present masses of dazzling white and strange, capricious figures). These images are symbols *other* to the travelers’ comprehension, however, difficult to interpret as codes belonging to a cultural tradition already half-erased and forgotten. But the cave preserves an indigenous history, as discussed above, with those “pinturas bizarras designadas en las paredes con tintas de vivísimos e imborrables colores, que aseguran ser obra de los indios, y mil tradiciones maravillosas prestan cierto encanto a aquellos subterráneos desconocidos” (174) (bizarre paintings marked on the walls with inks of vivid and indelible colors, that are certain to be the work of indians, and thousands of marvelous traditions lending a certain charm to those strange underground spaces). Exhibited on those interior walls is a work admired by “muchos viajeros [que] han visitado con curiosidad e interés” (173) (many travelers [that] have visited with

curiosity and interest) that makes the space as much an archive of the indigenous people as a catalogue of its past admirers: “las paredes estaban llenas con los nombres de los visitantes de las grutas” (175) (the walls were filled with the names of visitors to the caves). The hieroglyphics introduce the characters to a kind of archeological museum. Visible on the walls is a written archive of the nation’s past, turning the cave into a space that symbolically recounts the history of the origins of the Cuban nation and its peoples. The walls of the cave therein serve as a system of writing, transmitting the knowledge of that past.

Given the relationship established in the novel between Martina and the cave, the illustration of the cave as an archive indicates that the Indian woman’s body itself also incorporates an archival dimension. The novel makes this explicit in the physical description of her character. In Martina’s face, we are told that “las arrugas . . . surcaban en todas direcciones” (176) (the wrinkles . . . plowed through in all directions) similarly to how the water filtered into the cave “por innumerables e imperceptibles grietas, [y que] ha formado bellísimas figuras al petrificarse” (174) (through innumerable and imperceptible cracks, [and that] had formed beautiful figures upon petrification). The mirrored relationship drawn between Martina’s face and the walls of the Cubitas cave suggests that the indigenous woman embodies the physical space whose walls exhibit the “obra de los indios” (174) (work of the indians). The parallelism between her body and the cave is made even more striking given the “blancura y belleza” (174) (whiteness and beauty) of “las piedras admirables de que aquellas grutas [que] se hallan entapizadas” (174) (the remarkable rocks of those caves [that] cover the walls) that echo the “lustre y blancura” (176) (luster and whiteness) of the bald part of Martina’s head, as well as the “blanco vidriado” (176) (glazed white) of her eyes. The characterizations of these structures—of the cave and of Martina—are marked by the striking glow and strange attraction of the figures inscribed in their surfaces in having survived the fossilization of time. Martina forms part of this written (and drawn) tradition, and her body itself becomes the scriptural vehicle for the transmission of indigenous Cuban culture.

The memory of violence committed against the Taíno people, sparked by the cave hieroglyphs, is narrated orally primarily by Martina in the legend of the *cacique* tortured and murdered by Spaniards, who is then said to appear recurrently in the form of the curious light in Cubitas’s night sky. The oral quality of her character expresses what the silent hieroglyphs can only trace. The legends orally transmitted by Martina move parallel to the drawings inscribed in the cave walls, those that, by the metaphorical mirroring described above, are also associated with the wrinkles of her own face, the grooves in her body. Martina’s voice-body archive serves the conservation of native origins of both oral and written traditions. However, as the transmitting mother, Martina does not allow an allegorical restitution of the nation; the memory that she invokes

is a memory disabling the allegory's ecumenical fictions.

Such disabling caused by the transmission of legends originated by Martina (legends unassociated with an idyllic, inclusive memory) is evidenced in the passage in which Sab, on the way to the Cubitas cave, retells a story that he has repeatedly heard from the old *india*: the legend of the death of the *cacique* Camagüey. Martina is absent at the moment when Sab narrates the legend, a story that has become inscribed now legendarily in the celestial phenomenon “[a]rrebatada . . . por este furor de venganza, delira[ndo] de un modo espantoso y osa[ando] pronunciar terribles vaticinios” (168) (enraptured . . . by this furor of vengeance, rave[ing] in a frightening way and dare[ing] to pronounce dreadful prophecies). By way of Sab, however, Martina appears as the source of the oral transmission of that terrifying past and of the ominous predictions that accompany that legend.

It is following a question posed by Carlota's father that Sab begins retelling this legend. Approaching Cubitas, Don Carlos marvels at the “luz vacilante y pálida que oscilaba a lo lejos” (106) (pale and flickering light that oscillated in the distance) and becomes interested to learn about the local conjectures related to the phenomenon. Don Carlos asks Sab if he had heard any explanations with respect to this light.⁶ Don Carlos's curiosity prompts his slave to share the legend repeatedly told to him by Martina, whom the town believes to be a descendant of Camagüey, the *cacique* that, as we are told, was “tratado indignamente por los advenedizos [españoles], a quienes acogiera con generosa y franca hospitalidad, [y que fuera] arrojado de la cumbre de esa gran loma y su cuerpo despedazado [quedara] insepulto sobre la tierra regada con su sangre” (168) (treated contemptibly by the foreigners [Spaniards], who were welcomed with generous and honest hospitality, [and that was] thrown from the peak of that big hill and his dismembered body [would remain] unburied upon the earth that was bathed in his blood). Sab explains that, according to Martina's account, the nocturnal apparition of the light is actually the “alma del desventurado cacique [que] viene todas la noches a la loma fatal, en forma de luz, a anunciar a los descendientes de sus bárbaros asesinos la venganza del cielo que tarde o temprano caerá sobre ellos” (168) (soul of the unfortunate chief [that] comes every night to that fatal hill, in the form of the light, to announce to the descendants of his barbaric murders the vengeance of the heavens that sooner or later will fall upon them). But the story does not end there. Immediately thereafter, Sab adds that, as narrated by Martina, “los hombres negros serán los terribles vengadores de los hombres cobrizos” (168) (the black man shall be the dreadful avenger of the redman), reminding his master of the violence that occurred on their “isla vecina” (168) (neighboring island) of Haiti. In the middle of Sab's recounting, Don Carlos, “con cierto disgusto” (with certain disgust), interrupts his slave by silencing him: “Basta, Sab, Basta” (168) (Enough, Sab, enough), horrified to hear of the

ever-possible uprising “en la boca de un hombre del desgraciado color” (168) (from the mouth of a man of disgraced color).

The counterpart of Don Carlos’s alarmed reaction to Sab’s tale is the insensitive reaction of his daughter, Carlota. After hearing the legend, Carlota begins to cry and laments the tragic fate of the island’s indigenous people, “al recordar una raza desventurada que habitó la tierra que habitamos, que vio por primera vez el mismo sol que alumbró nuestra cuna, y que ha desaparecido de esta tierra de la que fue pacífica poseedora. Aquí vivían felices e inocentes aquellos hijos de la naturaleza” (169) (upon remembering an ill-fated race that inhabited the land that we now inhabit, that saw for the first time the same sun that illuminated our cradle, and that has disappeared from this land of which it was a most peaceful possessor. Here they lived happy and innocent those children of nature). Meditating over the “escondidos tesoros” (169) (hidden treasures) of the “suelo virgen” (169) (virgin soil) enjoyed by Indians, Carlota exclaims: “¡Oh, Enrique! Lloro no haber nacido entonces y que tú, indio como yo, me hicieras una cabaña de palmas en donde gozásemos una vida de amor, de inocencia y de libertad” (169) (Oh, Enrique! I weep for not having been born back then and that you, indian like me, would have made me a hut of palms in which we would have enjoyed a life of love, innocence and freedom).⁷ This melodramatic lament not only solidifies Carlota’s romantic insensibility, but also signals a common forgetting among the island’s new inhabitants, the white Creoles, and their blindness to the violence toward, and suffering of, the present slave populations. Carlota demonstrates such blindness in the face of potential future violence expressed in Martina’s warnings retold by her adopted mulatto son; she remains oblivious to the slaves’ capability to disable Cuba’s Creole future.⁸ By virtue of the oral tradition, the transmission of the legend of Camagüey—together with the prediction of a vengeful violence—dramatizes the impossibility of forgetting the nation’s brutal origins and potentialities that the text insistently associates with its contemporary conditions of slavery. As the native narrator, Martina displays the persistence of Cuba’s violent past, its continuity in orally transmitted memories, and the threatening shadow it hangs over the nation’s future.⁹

Related to the oral tradition, we also find a semi-oneiric discourse surrounding the figure of Martina. Characteristic of the romantic aesthetic, this discourse is important in the construction of her character as interruptive of the ecumenical allegory and its kinship structures. Analogous to the legends that she recounts about Camagüey, toward the end of the novel after Sab and Martina have both died, rumors in Cubitas circulate about strange nocturnal happenings: it is said that after her death, the old woman returned to visit the grave of her adopted son. According to “los observadores de la visitadora nocturna” (274) (the observers of the nocturnal visitor) it was the spirit of the departed old woman; the text does not make it entirely clear if this “visión

misteriosa” (274) (mysterious vision) is a product of a collective delusion or a fact of reality. The novel suggests, however, that the figure was neither old nor indian-looking, but rather a “joven, blanca y hermosa cuanto podía conjeturarse, pues siempre tenía cubierto el rostro con una gasa” (274) (young, white, and beautiful woman, inasmuch as one could surmise, since she always had her face covered with a face covering), resembling Carlota more than Martina, giving the impression that in the end, both characters (Sab’s beloved as well as his *madre india*) have been cast into the same spectral figure, there facing the slave’s tomb.

This spectral dimension intensifies the uncertainty that characterizes the figure of Martina. Made “ghost-like,” she seems to occupy a place outside of her own body, echoing those stories she tells about “vampiros y aparecidos” (167) (vampires and ghosts). The description of her physical condition is noteworthy for the townspeople could see Martina, even after her death, kneeling in front of Sab’s grave at the same time she would pay her respects while she was still alive (Sab died before she did): “Este rumor encontró fácil acceso, pues siempre se había creído en Cubitas que Martina no era una criatura como las demás” (274) (This rumor found easy acceptance, since it had always been believed in Cubitas that Martina was a creature unlike any other). The spectral image of Martina reminds us of that famous light she describes in one of her legends as the supposed indication of the “alma del desventurado cacique [que] viene todas las noches a la loma fatal, en forma de luz” (168) (soul of the unfortunate chief [that] comes every night to that fatal hill, in the form of the light). Through such associations and confusion caused by this enigmatic figure, a double parallel is suggested in this passage: the substitution of Martina for Carlota (or their merging into a single figure) runs parallel to the identity of the supposed *india* (indian) with the equally spectral figure of Camagüey. The chain of signifiers that emerge from this parallelism establishes the following peculiar relationships: Martina/Carlota, Martina/Camagüey, Carlota/Camagüey.

This double phantasmagorical image—the interchangeability between Martina and Carlota, split threefold by Camagüey—is even more disturbing when considering the questions of kinship, and the transmission of memories, that she disrupts. In representing a symbolic identification between Martina and Carlota, the mirroring between the *criolla* and the *india*, disturbs the mother-son relationship that occurred between Martina and Sab, superimposing the figure of unrequited love encoded on Carlota onto the figure of the indigenous mother. This transfiguration of the adoptive mother into the object of desire for the slave marks another form of spectral and highly perverse familial union, symbolically haunted by the shadow of incest.¹⁰

As already mentioned, the novel effectively asserts a filial relationship between Sab and Martina. Albeit by the book’s end, Carlota comes to refor-

mulate this family nucleus in her convergence with Martina during the latter's profession of mourning (once she is already dead) and as such, solidifying a spiritual union with her. But this is not just a sentimental attachment. As Evelyn Picon Garfield has observed, Carlota symbolically becomes a "receptáculo" of culture and of tradition through an identitary association with Martina's ghost in front of Sab's grave:

sombra indígena, escritura mulata, y por fin, peregrina blanca, receptáculo vivo de la realidad cubana. Al tejer los hilos periféricos del subalterno colonial, Gómez de Avellaneda sella un pacto entre los seres invisibles de la sociedad de la Isla quienes cumplen la función de rescatar de la cultura cubana la esencia de su faz sincrética y heterogénea, ignorada por la metrópoli. (79–80)

(indigenous shadow, mulatto writing, and finally, white pilgrim, living receptacle of Cuban reality. By weaving together the marginal strands of the colonial subaltern, Gómez de Avellaneda seals a pact between the invisible beings of the Island society that fulfill the role of rescuing from Cuban culture the essence of its syncretic and heterogeneous face, ignored by the metropolis.)

Picon Garfield sustains that Carlota has internalized Martina's sacrifice and "de ese modo Carlota llega a ser el receptáculo destinado a recordar la experiencia subalterna colonial frente al materialismo y mercantilismo de la creciente crisis del siglo de la modernidad" (81) (in this way Carlota becomes the receptacle destined to remember the subaltern colonial experience in the face of the materialism and mercantilism of the growing crisis of the modern century).¹¹ Thus the transmission of indigenous culture is seen in a physical and spiritual rebirth, together with the narrative transmission of the already mentioned legend of Camagüey. Important to the interpretation of the indigenous figure as one that is metaphorically stabilizing is what Picon Garfield poses as that "pacto entre los seres invisibles de la sociedad de la Isla" (80) (pact between the invisible beings of the Island society). The national family unit is not one that is united materially but rather in spirit, and therein opens up the possibility for symbolic-transcultural resolution. What Picon Garfield does not say, however, is that the memory transmitted and assumed by Carlota is none other than that of disgrace and intercultural discord, the now spectral disabling of an ecumenical narrative for the future nation.

Martina is the only maternal figure in a novel full of motherless orphans. Kelly Comfort has suggested that she functions symbolically as the future mother of the nation. But contrary to this thesis, I contend that Martina complicates the discourse on historical roots in the formation of the nation sym-

bolized as such, as well as the kinship discourse that accompanies it. Indeed, in the novel *Martina* and Sab repeatedly affirm the mother-son relationship that they themselves have freely chosen (a non-biological filiation). Martina identifies Sab as her “único hijo” (244) (only child) and again announces this affective bond by wallowing in grief during the last moments of Sab’s life: “hijo mío . . . ven, hijo mío, que yo te oiga, que oiga tu voz, que vea tus facciones, que sienta latir tu corazón junto al mío. ¡Oh, Sab!, piensa que ya nada me queda en el mundo sino tú . . . que eres mi único hijo, el único apoyo de esta larga y destrozada existencia” (243–244) (my son . . . come, my son, let me hear you, let me hear your voice, see your features, feel your heartbeat next to mine. Oh, Sab! To think that nothing is left for me in this world without you . . . that you are my only child, my only support in this long and devastated existence). This adoptive, non-genealogical relationship produces an indigenous maternity that is only made possible outside of traditional family networks, not within a multicultural, heteronormative-protonational family. The familial bond formed between Sab and Martina produces ties that the heterosexual romantic unions, so dear to the allegorical discourse of the nation, fail to establish. The Sab-Martina nucleus, perverse and semi-incestuous for the eventual fusion of Martina and Carlota, remains free of biologisms.

This affective filial dimension is structured in the novel by an equally powerful narrative dimension. Sab is the son that gives continuity to the old Indian woman’s stories, repeating the ominous legend of Camagüey. Picon Garfield has asserted that this relay of voices signals the unification of races represented by Sab and Martina:

como testigo-relator, Sab se distancia de su enunciado subversivo, y para mayor seguridad, lo encuadra dentro del marco del relator originario, la arrebatada, y delirante vieja Martina. No obstante, las palabras violentas de la india en boca del mulato patentizan la solidaridad entre las razas de color, una solidaridad inexistente en otras novelas cubanas. (63–64)¹²

(as witness-storyteller, Sab distances himself from his declared subversion, and, for greater security, he frames it within the mark of the original storyteller, the aggressive and outrageous old woman, Martina. Nevertheless, the violent words of the indian woman in the mouth of the mulatto make evident the solidarity between the races, a solidarity that is non-existent in other Cuban novels.)

For Picon Garfield, the fusion of voices, or ventriloquism on the part of the Indian mother, establishes a solidarity between the native and the slave. The fear provoked by Martina’s predictions (and then repeated by her “son”), however, cannot but disturb the harmony imagined in the allegorical models

studied by Sommer and Comfort. This is a moment of contact that reveals much more than a relationship of solidarity or familial affiliation between the mulatto slave and an old indigenous woman. That *Sab* is a vehicle to retransmit the story of Camagüey narrated by Martina complicates the novel's only maternal relationship as well as the ecumenical and protonational allegory suggested by critics. To some extent, this transmission dismisses Martina from her function as symbolic mother of a future nation—free of conflicts, fissures or cracks—by virtue of the bonds of love, turning her into the maternal voice of an atrocious and discordant memory, in the relay of the enslaved son's voice, a foreshadower prefiguring a future threat of violence.

Indigenous figure, storyteller of past violence and future threats, mother to the new Cuban nation, as restorative as she is disturbing: Martina is at once both illegible and revealing. In order for the novel to unequivocally propose a political-literary project of cultural restitution and reconciliation, it would need to forget the violence central to the nation's origins, a violence inscribed in Martina's body-archive. Reading the Cubitas cave, a space belonging to Martina as well as a generator of particularly meaningful symbolism, as an archive of the violence suffered by slaves and indigenous people, is to recognize a geological-geographic space memorializing that violence forever inscribed in the earth-body of the Cuban nation, in the body of the indigenous mother, and in the pages of the novel. It is an indelible and threatening memory, destabilizing to the national allegory and to its community desires: a memory of the foundational violence of the Cuban nation.

Notes

1. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*. Cátedra, 1997. Citations hereafter will refer to pages from this edition.
2. I am referring to the chapter "Sab C'est Moi," from the book *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, and to the article of the same title published in *Hispanamérica*.
3. "Ecumenical" here and throughout is used in the etymological sense of the word. The concept of ecumenism, a term derived from the Greek word for house or household (*oikos*), etymologically makes specific reference to a longing for universal unity.
4. Evelyn Picon Garfield similarly posits this question of the racially idealized proto-nation, imagined in *Sab* as the "utópico e igualitario" (utopic and egalitarian) subtext of the novel. Picon Garfield observes that through the relationship between the mulatto slave and the white woman, Avellaneda recognizes "la miscegenación en la Isla" (the

miscegenation of the Island), and thereby asserts “la solidaridad entre los oprimidos” (66) (solidarity among the oppressed). Picon Garfield likewise reads a unifying vision in the novel’s harmonious union of races.

5. Derrida insists upon *chora*’s unintelligibility and remarks on her/its otherness or ‘apartness’: “*Khora* marks a place apart . . . this strange mother who gives place without engendering can no longer be considered as an origin” (124). The “strange mother” that “engenders nothing” and possesses nothing, not even children (105) reminds us of Martina’s adoption of Sab. Her otherness, her position apart from the racial binaries, love triangles, economic exchanges, and family units, is constitutive to her character and to the reading proposed in this essay. *Chora* presents a framework to think about the figures of both the cave and Martina symbolically as generative receptacles of oral and imprinted history, as well as their positions as “outsiders” beyond the family and racial paradigms structuring the allegorical interpretation of the novel. And with regard to this claim that *chora* is not an origin but rather a pre-origin requiring a “threatened, bastard, hybrid” discourse is remarkably similar to the discourse presented in the Cubitas cave. Interpretive clarity, for Derrida, comes by “going back behind and below the origin, or also the birth” (125). Such a regression curiously reflects the narrative and historical movement “back behind and below” into Martina and her caves.
6. Avellaneda elaborates on the cultural and narrative significance of the phenomenon of this light in a footnote with supplemental information relevant for reference here: “Los cubiteros han forjado en otros tiempos extraños cuentos relativos a una luz que decían aparecer todas las noches en aquel paraje, y que era visible para todos los que transitaban por el camino de la ciudad de Puerto Príncipe y Cubitas . . . cuyas causas jamás han sido satisfactoriamente explicadas. Un sujeto . . . dice que eran fuegos fatuos, que la ignorancia calificó de aparición sobrenatural . . . que las quemazones que se hacen todos los años en los campos pueden haber consumido las materias que producían el fenómeno. Sin paramos a examinar si es o no fundada esta conjetura, y dejando a nuestros lectores la libertad de formar juicios más exactos, adoptamos por ahora la opinión de los cubiteros, y explicaremos el fenómeno, en la continuación de la historia, tal cual nos ha sido referido y explicado” (166–167) (The people of Cubitas have concocted strange tales concerning a light that they said appeared every night in that spot, and that it was visible for all that travelled by way of the city of Puerto Príncipe to Cubitas . . . whose causes have never been satisfactorily explained. One individual . . . says that they were fleeting spook lights, that ignorance called it a supernatural apparition . . . that the bonfires that are made every year in the fields may have consumed the substances that produced the phenomenon. Without stopping to examine if this conjecture is or is not well founded, and allowing our readers the freedom to form more exact judgments, we will adopt for the time being the *Cubiteros*’s opinion, and we shall explain the phenomenon, in the continuation of the story, just as it has been recounted and explained to us.) The transmission of folklore is highlighted even more with this intervention in the oral tradition by the author herself. Avellaneda privileges

local beliefs, despite raising doubt in the minds of readers by referring to their “libertad de formar juicios más exactos” (freedom to form more exact judgments). In this way Martina participates in the formation and continuation of the myth of the Cubitas light, in the construction and preservation of the legendary archive of Cuban oral history.

7. Carlota’s imagined idyllic pre-Columbian past calls to mind important critical interpretations of *Sab*’s nationalistic discourse beyond that with which this essay is occupied, namely scholarship placing the novel within the intellectual tradition of Cuban creole reformism and the aesthetic movement of *siboneyismo*. José Gomariz has suggested reading Carlota’s romanticized exaltation of the “hombre natural” (native man) and “la memoria cultural indígena” (indigenous cultural memory) present in the novel as comparable to José Fornaris, a founder of the *siboneyista* movement, and his *Cantos del Siboney*. Characterized by Cintio Vitier as “la falsedad romántica importada” (imported romantic falsehood) leading to “una especie de auto-exotismo imperdonable; de la otra, la naturaleza híbrida de una visión que quería ser a la vez poética y política” (a kind of inexcusable auto-exotism; of the other, the hybrid nature of a vision that wanted to be at once poetic and political), the effort to paint the “antigua bucólica” (bucolic old-fashioned) of the “antiguos habitantes de Cuba” (former inhabitants of Cuba) was a way to express patriotism using the native as a symbol for other oppressed Cubans (158–159). And referring to what Moreno Friginals defined as “una especie de indigenismo sin indígenas, expresando una nostalgia romántica por una imaginaria Arcadia india destruida por los conquistadores españoles” (192) (a form of Indigenism without indigenous peoples, expressing a romantic nostalgia for an imaginary indigenous Arcadia destroyed by the Spanish conquistadors), Gomariz’s argument further illuminates the symbolic weight placed on the figure of Martina. And while the *siboneyista* discourse is not the primary question interrogated here, the *india*’s (indian’s) pretensions of her indigenous heritage both insists upon remembering the violent destruction of her ancestors as well as suggests a resistance to the kind of racial homogenization (or whitening) driving Creole reformers like Domingo del Monte.
8. Unlike other Latin American historical narratives, in *Sab* the Spanish conquistador’s offence against the native peoples is not projected onto the white Creole colonial political situation, but onto the socioeconomic exploitation of their slaves. In the novel, slaves are to Creoles what indigenous peoples were to Spaniards.
9. The memory of this violence produces a kind of dissonance reminiscent of that which was asserted by Ernst Renan in his now classic essay “What is a Nation?” regarding the origin of modern political formation requiring the forging of a common memory that suppresses “the deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations,” while “unity is always effected by means of brutality” (11). In *Sab*, it is Martina who highlights such initial suffering that Renan considers dangerous to the forging of a common national memory founded on other more ecumenical sacrifices linked to the worship of ancestors.
10. Although the novel insinuates that Sab and Carlota are cousins, their relationship would not be, according to Sommer “the unproductive dead-end of love.” Rather, the

potential cousins' intimacy "might have provided an ideal family consolidation in the nation building project" (*Fictions* 135). The fact that Carlota never ends up having any children voids that potential consolidation, as she was to symbolize the national mother within the interpretive framework of the allegory. The barren white woman's symbolic convergence with the indigenous mother is consistent with the notion of interruptions in the national Creole discourse pursued in this essay. The incest suggested in the mother-Martina's substitution by the object-of-desire-Carlota cancels any sort of reproduction that could be desirable from such union.

11. Also reading in an ecumenical-allegorical register, Steven Skattebo has interpreted these final scenes in the novel as a spiritual union between characters that can represent racial *mestizaje* in Cuba.
12. The expression of this "profética visión de la historia de Cuba" (prophetic vision of Cuban history), according to Adriana Méndez Rodenas, marks a continuity between Cuba's indigenous peoples and slaves. The fact that it is Sab who articulates this vision echoes Avellaneda's vision of the "rescate de la presencia indígena, sistemáticamente anulada por la conquista. El sustrato indígena se verifica en *Sab* a través de la anciana Martina, madre emblemática y cobriza" (22–23) (recovery of the indigenous presence, systematically destroyed by the Conquest. The indigenous substrata is validated in *Sab* through the elderly Martina, the emblematic and copper-colored mother). Sab and Martina are not united simply by a family bond, but also by their shared hi/stories (and origins) of violent erasures.

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Rewriting History and Reconciling Cultural Differences in *Guatimozín*

Rogelia Lily Ibarra

First published in serial form in *El Heraldo* of Madrid in 1846, *Guatimozín. Último Emperador de México*, retells the story of the Conquest of Mexico by Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortés, and his fleet. Avellaneda uses the genre of the historical novel to recreate the “account” of the Conquest and to develop its three epic figures: Cortés, Moctezuma II, and Guatimozín,¹ into the main characters. She places these historical figures on the forefront of her fictional plot, which permits, as Francisco Solares-Larrave has shown in other historical novels, the encounter of two discursive modes in the same text: “the narrative mode, intrinsic part of the tale, whose discourse focuses on the act of telling a story; and the scientific mode, centered on the transmission of information and data” (59). Solares-Larrave notes that this combination of discursive forms further allows for the creation of a counterhistorical narrative discourse that re-writes history from within, thus proposing variants or amending historical facts in and throughout the story. He also adds that this new discourse identifies the empty spaces in history and fills them in with narrative or ideological contents that follow a cultural agenda, that is, “because its authors view history as a text, susceptible to changes and editions” (59).

The “truthfulness” or authenticity of history versus the fictional invention of the traditional novel was a prevalent debate in nineteenth-century Europe, which informed the rise of the historical novel and one that is already inherent to the genre itself (White 6). The discussion over the possible harmonizing of the “opposite” principles of history and fiction in the new genre were well present in nineteenth-century Latin America and fervently discussed among intellectuals and writers such as Domingo del Monte and José María Heredia, both from Cuba. The former sympathized with the historical novel, yet emphasized the complexity of its composition and recommended that the writer of

this form be at once a poet, philosopher, and antique dealer (*anticuario*), that is, a metaphorical investigator of objects of the past that would provide information on the time period represented (Anderson Imbert 7). In his *Ensayo sobre la novela*, Heredia rejected this type of novel because he saw history and fiction as irreconcilable and considered it: “Género malo en si mismo, género eminentemente falso, al que toda la flexibilidad del talento más variado sólo presta un atractivo frívolo, y del que no tardará en fastidiarse la moda, que hoy lo adopta y favorece” (Anderson Imbert 8) (A poor genre in and of itself, an eminently false genre, to which all the flexibility of even the most varied talent only lends itself to an attractive frivolity, and which won’t delay in going out of style, while today it’s used and favored). The Argentine writer Vicente Fidel López, who also wrote a historical novel (*La novia del hereje*, 1854), favored a history that knew how to combine documentation with imagination. For him, the historian should be faithful to the facts, but should also know how to represent dramatic situations with art and style (Anderson Imbert 10). The famed Venezuelan Andrés Bello suggested in his essay, “Autonomía cultural de América” (1848), that the necessary connection between fiction and history and put forward the idea that the narrative supplement itself could be history’s “truest” form; narrative’s freer hand, writing from personal worries and including fabulous legends, seemed to deliver for him a more accurate picture than the one presented by a still unformed “science” of history in Latin America. Additionally, Bello saw fiction as a vehicle for independent and local expression (Sommer, “Not Just” 49–50). Another notable propagandist of this genre was José Martí, who praised Manuel de Jesús Galván’s *Enriquillo* (1882) and saw it as an example of the edifying and practical literature that America needed to distinguish itself from Europe. Martí’s admiration and purpose for *Enriquillo* is an example of how the historical novel was linked to a clearer nation-building project in nineteenth-century Latin America (Sommer, “Not Just” 50–51).

The influence of Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels in Spain in the 1820s and 1830s also incited the appearance of many early imitations (i.e. Larra, Espronceda). The Spanish historical novel initially took refuge in medieval settings and in dualistic plots of romance, yet it was not completely escapist as it frequently encoded a series of contemporary concerns that allowed it to be read as an allegory of the agitating present in which it developed (Iarocci 383). There were some novels that treated topics related to the Americas. Hernán Cortés was transformed into a paradigmatic literary/historical figure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and became the center of a polemic in the latter century between the defenders and detractors of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas. Historian, Salvador Bernabéu Albert has pointed to seven nineteenth-century novels whose focus are Cortés or the Conquest of Mexico, among these are: Salvador García Baamonde’s *Xiconténcal, príncipe*

americano (1831), Patricio de la Escosura's *La conjuración de Méjico o los hijos de Hernán Cortés* (1850), and Rafael del Castillo's *Hernán Cortés y Marina* (1898) (9–10). The historical novel's embrace of Spanish and some Latin American history, its reliance on archival research, and its highly detailed natural description paved the foundation of realist mimesis that would later inform the representation of a more recent past and of contemporary society in the novels of the Restoration authors, such as Galdós, Alas, or Pardo Bazán. As late as the end of the nineteenth century, the "Generation of 1898" continued to engage Romantic historicism's quest for the imagined origins of the nation, particularly Unamuno, Baroja, and Valle-Inclán (Ribbans 114–119).

Amidst this background, this study will show how Avellaneda uses the historical narrative of Hernán Cortés and Moctezuma's encounter as a way of re-writing history and broadening the parameters of the traditional role of historian. At the same time, she also contests hegemonic discourses of civilization and barbarism and creates a critical subtext on contemporary issues of her time related to gender, race, and colonial relationships of power between Spain and the newly forming Latin American nations. The use of counterhistorical narrative discourses challenges the concept of history as master text and implies the dialogical relationship between "history" and "literature." This hybrid narrative space, thus, demonstrates the interplay between "facts" and "fiction," which further allows the complementing, correcting or even subverting of preceding historiographical texts (Solares-Larrave 60). Accordingly, in her novel *Guatimozín*, Avellaneda creates counterhistorical narrative discourses primarily by dialoguing with major chronicalists and historians of the Conquest of Mexico.² Through this dialogue, Avellaneda uses the former historical texts both to legitimize her knowledge of the Aztec-Spanish encounter and to revise the historical narratives.

Avellaneda establishes a figurative dialogue with the past historical texts on the narrative plane itself but also on the margins, by adding footnotes that allow her to make reference to these and correct or modify them, which I will discuss in more detail in another section of this study. On the narrative level, she begins with a break from the panegyric tradition carried out through many Conquest chronicles and demystifies the epic elevation of Cortés. She narrates the encounter of the two leaders, Cortés and Moctezuma, and delineates their complex and contradictory behaviors in the face of victory and conquest. Building on the historical knowledge of these two figures, Avellaneda further complicates the depiction of the characters by neither fully praising nor fully critiquing one over the other.

Avellaneda places the two leaders of opposing forces on par and depicts characterizations that equally demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of both. The narrative first describes Cortés as "previsor y político como atrevido y perseverante" (15) (foresighted and political as well as daring and perseverant).

His ambition and talent for persuasion make him an agreeable figure that easily wins over the alliance of Moctezuma's Tlascalan subjects. Although Cortés is feared for the supposed god-like qualities attributed to him by the Tlascalans, his personal traits are attractive to them as well, as the narrator explains:

La dignidad de sus modales, su admirable destreza en los ejercicios militares y un don particular de persuasión con que la naturaleza le había dotado, cautivaban los corazones de aquellos fieros republicanos . . . y que se sorprendían de encontrar el más amable de los huéspedes en aquel mismo a quien habían temido como el más maléfico de los dioses. (14)

(The dignity of his manners, his admirable abilities in military exercises and a particular talent for persuasion that nature had given him, captivated the hearts of those fierce republicans . . . and they would be surprised to find the most friendly of guests in he himself who they had feared as the most maleficient of the gods.)

Although the narrative implies that Cortés takes full advantage of the indigenous prophecy of Quetzalcoal³ and the rift between the Tlascalans and Aztecs, they nevertheless identify him with virtues worthy of trust and admiration. Similarly, Moctezuma is depicted with paradoxical qualities: “Era liberal, magnífico, justiciero; sus parciales le atribuían una sabiduría sobrehumana y virtudes sublimes; sus enemigos le temían porque conocían su rigor y la violencia de sus resentimiento” (16) (He was tolerant, magnificent, stern; his followers attributed a superhuman wiseness and sublime virtues to him; his enemies feared him because they were familiar with his rigor and the violence of his resentment). Like Cortés, he is both feared and admired and, while being an almost endearing leader, he is also a dictatorial emperor that “El pueblo, aunque no menos esclavo en su reinado que en el de sus predecesores, aplaudía sus actos arbitrarios contra la nobleza y amaba en el gran tirano el azote de los tiranos pequeños” (16) (The people, although no less enslaved under his reign than that of his predecessors, applauded his arbitrary acts against the nobility and loved in the great tyrant the scourge of the smaller tyrants). Both Moctezuma and Cortés are shown in the novel to gain command through fear and esteem from their subjects.

The tragic irony of Moctezuma's downfall is that while he was an unvanquished military hero and firm ruler, his superstition and belief in his doomed fate made him vulnerable to Cortés's skilled manipulation. Moctezuma typifies the nineteenth-century romantic subject throughout this novel by revealing a kind of *mal du siècle*.⁴ However, his disillusionment is not an overt response to an ideological change in society, as is traditionally associated with the romantic hero, but rather a detachment brought on by excessive self-con-

sciousness and the acceptance of an inevitable destiny. The emperor emotionally retreats into an almost catatonic state because he believes the gods have turned their backs on him and that he could no longer change the course of his doomed fate. For example, in a scene where he confides to Guatimozín his deep melancholy with the arrival of the Spaniards, he responds to the latter's interrogatives about the cause of his sadness as follows: "Allá están, joven presuntuoso; ve pues a pedir cuenta de mi flaqueza a los grandes espíritus que dirigen la suerte de los reyes" (39) (Over there they are, presumptuous youth; go then to ask the great spirits who command the luck of the kings for an account of my weakness). Moctezuma's depressed state, generated by his superstition, allows for the author to simultaneously highlight his fanaticism and Cortes's opportunistic behavior.

Moctezuma's belief in the legend of Quetzalcoatl and the displeasure of the gods is an element that the narrative voice places into question. After Moctezuma shares his doubts with his most trusted royal court members, the narrative includes a suggestive interpolated commentary:

Nos aprovecharemos de él para manifestar al lector el origen que suponemos a todas aquellas notables profecías, de las que se muestran maravillados los historiadores españoles, exagerándolas y desfigurándolas a su placer. Parécenos indudable que todas ellas no eran otra cosa que ingeniosas astucias sacerdotales para imponer terror a los príncipes y sujetarlos, por decirlo así, a los altares. (23)

(We will take advantage of him in order to show the reader the origin that we suppose of all of those notable prophecies, of those that the Spanish historians marvellously tell, exaggerating them and disfiguring them at their will. It appears to us to be undeniable that they be anything but astute and ingenious priests to be imposing such terror on the princes and, to put it one way, holding them over their altars.)

Although a subtle criticism of Moctezuma's credulity, the narrative voice underscores the construction of Aztec beliefs and how the Quetzalcoatl legend may have been used as a method to instill religious fear in the Aztec people.

Cortés too takes advantage of the emperor's superstition and vulnerable state and uses his power of persuasion over him. Using this veiled method, Cortés convinces the emperor to take him prisoner and the latter acquiesces. The narrative emphasizes Cortés's shrewdness through descriptors, such as "el astuto caudillo" (the astute dictator) to imply the almost hypnotic power that he has over the Aztec leader. The power of language is another of his talents, as he convinces Moctezuma that his imprisonment was more of a voluntary effort on his part: "Que permita vuestra majestad a mis oficiales entren

a ofrecerle sus respetos y a tributarle gracias por el honor que nos dispensa viniendo a habitar entre nosotros” (76) (That your holiness might permit my officials to enter and offer their respects and tributes in gratitude for the honor you have given us by coming to live among us). In such way, Cortés is able to persuade Moctezuma to command unimaginable orders against his own court, so that his very subjects perceive him as under the spellbinding power of the Spanish leader. One of Moctezuma’s princes, Cacumatzín, who is held captive on his commands, retorts the following invective to Cortés: “¡Aléjate hipócrita! -exclamó- y ve a engañar con tus palabras embusteras al monarca infeliz a quien has entontecido con tus hechicerías” (98) (“Get out, hypocrite!” he exclaimed, “and go fool with your deceitful words the unhappy monarch whom you have dumbfounded with your sorcery.”)

Not only does the narrative point to a superstitious vulnerability in Moctezuma, but also underlines a similar religious fanaticism in Cortés, which permeates his concept of justice and allows him to justify the wrongs he commits against the Aztecs. Avellaneda appears to go against the grand narrative of Cortés’s divine mission in the Conquest of Mexico by stating:

Participaba también de aquella feroz superstición de su época, en que un celo religioso mal entendido hacia que no se considerasen como hombres a los que no profesaban, las mismas creencias. Venía de una tierra poblada de hogueras inquisitoriales, donde casi era un rito religioso o un artículo de dogma el aborrecimiento a los infieles y herejes. (83)

(He participated as well in that furious superstition of his time, that a misunderstood religious zeal would make it so that those that professed the same beliefs would not be considered men. They came from a land populated by the fires of the Inquisition, where the abhorrence of non-believers and heretics was almost a religious rite or a dogmatic command.)

Here the narrative begins to unveil the radical religious ideology that informs Cortés’s inferior treatment of the Aztecs, with a certain distance that does not weigh heavily with criticism but leaves the moral judgment to the readers.

By juxtaposing the characters of Cortés and Moctezuma and exposing similar characteristics in both, the author also places them on a more human level and reveals the admirable and weak elements of their persons without placing one on a higher level than the other. In this way, Avellaneda begins to implicitly redefine the “divine” purpose of Cortés and the Spanish fleet’s voyage to the Americas and the result of the encounter between these two civilizations.

Another way in which Avellaneda responds to colonial historians is by legitimizing the Aztec people and highlighting its sophisticated culture, and

in so doing, she further contests a colonial narrative of civilization and barbarism.⁵ She begins to do so by using the conquest plot as a new way of disseminating cultural knowledge about Mexico and its indigenous groups. Early in their arrival, Cortés and his men are given a tour of the city by the princes of Tenochtitlan. There they witness the complex and rich structure of an Aztec market, the grand architectural design of their temples, and a zoo of diverse animals. Later, the Spanish soldiers are free to explore the city and the narrator mentions how the more astute ones found recreation by visiting the public schools, orators, and famous poets of the region. Interestingly, through the Spaniards' travel practices throughout the city, the narrator is able to underscore their demystification of the Aztec people as a barbaric race. At the same time, Avellaneda debunks her European audience's preconception of the "Other" and in so doing the author makes space for its legitimization.

Avellaneda articulates the sophisticated structure of the Aztec government not only as a way of validating the Aztecs, but also as a way of revealing the shortcomings of her own society in the present time. In Chapter Six of the first part, Cortés has a conversation with one of the elder ministers of the Aztec government, in which he is open to asking questions about the way it functions. One of the first questions he asks is how their laws are kept and circulated. In contrast to the European written law, the elder describes an oral tradition of passing laws down through generations. This system allows for the redefinition of laws and goes against the concept of absolutes. Although she does not give evidence in her footnotes of a historical basis for this legal system, Avellaneda is able to use it as an example to indirectly critique her current society's strict social laws that relegate groups to certain institutions.⁶

Another element made salient in Cortés's conversation with the elder is the Aztec's educational system. He describes a more democratic public system of education. Although somewhat segregated between the various class sections, the masses still have access to a free form of education, which includes that of girls and women. The author's inclusion of this can be read as a subtle criticism of the limited educational options for women in nineteenth-century Spain and Latin America, as we see questioned more overtly in Avellaneda's novel *Dos mujeres*, where middle class women's educational opportunities are limited to a domestic realm and their learning is highly censored.

The third major point discussed in this conversation is the question of slavery. The elder explains that the slaves of Aztec society are prisoners who are kept alive and not sacrificed, like other captives of war. Nevertheless, the elder elaborates that a slave is not born into slavery, therefore it is not considered hereditary. Again this example of Aztec tradition is not referenced to a Spanish chronicle or validated by some other historical source, yet, the author uses this detail, even if perhaps fictionalized, both to sanction the Aztec government and simultaneously oppose her current society's laws regarding

slavery.⁷ Ironically, Avellaneda uses the conversation between the elder and Cortés in order to highlight the latter's true motives in making Moctezuma his subject later on and his attempt to take over the Aztec Empire. That is, he is gaining as much information about the Aztec governmental structure and culture to later use in his manipulation of the emperor.

Avellaneda's most sobering contestation of colonial narratives of civilization and barbarism is exemplified in her explanation of the Aztec sacrificial tradition, which had long been perceived as savage. Upon the election of Guatimozín as the successor to Moctezuma, a series of sacrifices are made in honor of his initiation. Maintaining an objective and almost dignifying tone, Avellaneda describes the sacrificial ritual at a respectful and non-judgmental distance. She then reiterates her legitimization of Aztec practices by making the following explicit comparison:

¿Buscaremos rasgos de una civilización más adelantada que la que se lee en la sangrienta piedra de los teocalis mexicanos, en las hogueras de la inquisición, a cuya fatídica luz celebraba España el acrecentamiento de su poder y los nuevos de su gloria? (239)

(Will we look for characteristics of a civilization more advanced than that which one reads on the bloody rock of the Mexican Teocalis, in the fire of the Inquisition, whose fateful lights Spain celebrated the growth of its power and the newness of its glory?)

Avellaneda inverts the civilization and barbarism binary here by implying Spain's hypocritical diagnosis of the savagery of the indigenous "Other," since it is not free of practices that can be deemed guilty of the same barbarism it condemns.

Another manner in which Avellaneda responds to her historical predecessors, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is by filling in the gaps of colonial history through the use of fiction in her novel. She creates allegorical couples to redefine the meaning of the conquest/rape trope often associated with this cultural encounter. In her comprehensive text, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba provides several examples of how colonial antagonisms have been coded with sexual and racial languages. Some of the most repeated with regard to gender are the use of the female body to symbolize the conquered land and the rape of this body as a metaphor of the conquest by the male conqueror (129). The reciprocated romance exemplified in the novel by two secondary characters, the indigenous princess Tecuixpa and the Spanish soldier Velázquez de León, provides an alternative model to that of the sexually "aggressive" taking of the colonized land by the colonizer.

The two characters are not "authentically" represented, but are fiction-

ally modified and linked to the main historical figures in the novel.⁸ Here, Tecuixpa is Moctezuma's daughter and Velázquez de León is one of Cortés's captains. The young lovers represent a pure and impartial love in the face of conflict, as Tecuixpa is already betrothed to another prince of Tenochtitlán and advisor to Moctezuma, Cacumatizín, who will go to great lengths to protect his future bride. Tecuixpa and Velázquez's love crosses racial and religious barriers as they make strong commitments to one another. While the lovers are constantly torn between their nations (Tenochtitlán and Spain), their patriotism, and their love for one another, they put their love first.

Doris Sommer has studied the element of romance in some nineteenth-century historical novels in her well-known work, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. She maintains that the central romances between lovers in novels such as *Martín Rivas* and *María*, served as allegories for the desire of a national consolidation, which Latin American governments institutionalized for their nation-building projects. The romantic plot worked to obtain an erotic interest from readers in the couple's romance, which also provoked in them a patriotic desire for a unified nation that would allow the coming together of such a couple. Sommer studies Avellaneda's earlier novel, *Sab*, even though it is published outside of Cuba, as a potential foundational fiction by suggesting that the protagonist's love for Carlota, "is also a desire for greater national solidarity" (135) that would strengthen Cuba against Spanish Imperialism. The slavocracy that produces the racially amalgamated protagonist, Sab, is the same institution that prohibits him from marrying his master's daughter, Carlota, and figuratively limits racial and political unity in nineteenth-century Cuba. Even as Avellaneda's historical novel, *Guatimozín*, shows the characteristics of romance that allegorically express a desire for the consolidation of racial and political differences, it was also not written in Cuba nor was it published near its independence in order to appropriately fit the national model that Sommer proposes. Avellaneda writes and publishes the novel in Spain while her native country, Cuba, remains in colonial status.⁹ However, perhaps the voluntary and more successful union of Tecuixpa and Velázquez represents for Avellaneda a peaceful consolidation of the racial and religious differences that would constitute the *mestizo* future of Mexico. It appears that she travels back to the time of the inception of the Conquest, anticipating the hierarchical institution of slavery in Latin America, to suggest the inevitable outcome the Spanish Conquest would bring. In so doing, the writer underscores the heterogeneous reality of the newly forming nation states of Latin America and the need to dissolve divisive power relations brought forth by colonialism.¹⁰ With this message Avellaneda counters the actions of nineteenth-century Latin American liberal patriots, who while trying to forge national communities from colonial societies marked by sharp social divisions, tended to associate the traits of the "proper" citizen—literacy, property ownership, and individual

autonomy—with whiteness and masculinity. Thus, those who did not conform to citizen norms—slaves, Indians, and those without property (that often included women)—were generally deemed to be dependent and excluded from full citizenship (Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Roseblatt 5).

The idyllic representation of the two lovers, Tecuixpa and Velázquez, also functions in the novel to contrast the religious intolerance and aggressive violence of war that surrounds them and defines much of the Conquest. Critics of Avellaneda have signaled a lack of attention to the brutal side of the African slavocracy in Cuba, which serves as a historical backdrop in her novel *Sab*.¹¹ The narrative implies that Sab is the fruit of an interracial affair between his mother and her owner, Don Carlos's brother. However, there is no attempt to suggest that Sab's mother was raped by her owner, which was the reality of African female slaves. The topic of rape may not be explicit in *Sab*, published five years prior to *Guatimozín*, but more strongly suggested in the second book. In a graphic scene in this novel, Avellaneda describes what appears to be a slave market in Tezcuco, made up of indigenous slaves captured by Cortés and his Mexican allies. Here, the author shows the more gruesome side of the Conquest as young indigenous women are openly bought and sold:

Allí en aquellas plazas convertidas en inmundos bazares, regateaban el precio de las hermosas vírgenes americanas los soldados españoles, y acudían a insultar a los prisioneros sus feroces enemigos tlaxcaltecas. Allí, en medio de aquellos denuetos y de las obscenas chanzas de los compradores, exhalaban estériles amenazas los esposos, los padres, los amantes, que veían rasgar los velos sus mujeres, de sus hijas, de sus amadas, para exponerlas desnudas al examen de los mercaderes, que palpaban sus carnes para conocer su mayor o menor morbidez, su frescura más o menos intacta. (296)

(There in those plazas converted into filthy bazaars, the Spanish soldiers negotiated the prices of beautiful American virgins, and their fierce Tlaxcalteca enemies resorted to insulting the prisoners. There, in the middle of the buyers' insults and obscene jokes, the husbands, fathers, and lovers exhaled sterile threats as they saw their wives, daughters and lovers' veils ripped off while they were subjected, naked, to examinations by the merchants, who touched their flesh with greater or lesser morbidity in order to know that their freshness was more or less intact.)

Avellaneda compensates for her silence over the cruel reality of slavery in *Sab* in this novel by not holding back and demonstrating the multilayered denigration of indigenous women during the Conquest of Mexico. This scene generally shows that the indigenous woman was not only a more vulnerable victim

then her male counterpart, but that she was taken to literally and allegorically express the exploitation of the new-found territory, by being captured, measured, sampled, bought, and sexually violated by the Spanish soldiers.

Avellaneda does not leave her readers with a binary representation of the indigenous woman by depicting a romantic view of Tecuizpa on the one hand and the violated women of the slave market on the other, but suggestively complicates this representation by allowing a space for female resistance.¹² In the scene previously described, the author focuses on a particular female captive that is especially young and fertile and ready to be bought by one of Cortes's head captains, Alvarado. Once she is bought, she subtly convinces the captain to buy another male slave whom she claims is her father. They embrace passionately after the exchange is made, and in the act, her father strangles her amidst his loving grasp and "liberates" his daughter of her bleak future, as Avellaneda suggests (297). Although this scene may be read as a father defending his patriarchal honor and thus, affirming male-defined roles, the young captive on the other hand, is very much an agent in maintaining her "honor" intact. By juxtaposing other examples of male indigenous captives who resist being enslaved through suicide (one man swallows his tongue) with the female prisoner, the author goes beyond providing some of her female characters agency and puts them on par with the oppressed indigenous men who in the same way defend their right to freedom in a time of conquest.

Avellaneda includes an array of female characters in her historical novel to diversify the perspective of gender, but she also, as Evelyn Picon Garfield has stated, "recrea la historia humana, escondida y perdida, en episodios urdidos por su imaginación y convicciones sociales. Con ellos realiza la contracara de la crónica varonil" ("Conciencia" 45) (recreates human history, hidden and lost, in episodes beseeched by her imagination and social convictions. With them she creates the counterpart to the male Chronicle). She adds as part of the forgotten human history a more complex representation of indigenous women and gives them a voice. Although Tecuixpa and her sister Gualcazinla fit the traditional bourgeois female roles of faithful girlfriend and mother-wife respectively, they both also express moments of valor in the novel and are highly regarded by the male Aztec leaders in their counsel during war. As Cortés begins his return to Tenochtitlán and the Aztec prepare for war against him, the empress Miazochil and an assembly of Aztec female princesses from the Anahuac area confine themselves within the *teocali* (temple) of Huitzilopochtli. Here, they comfort each other and speculate of the possible outcome, although remaining hopeful for the Aztecs' victory.

The author creates a female-centered space in the temple and does so, suggestively, in a place that was already consecrated to the male war-god, Huitzilopochtli and used to sacrifice prisoners of war (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). At the foot of this temple was the large stone disk of Coyolxuahqui, the

war-god's sister, who was slain by him in order to prevent her from killing him and his mother. Coyolxuahqui was immortalized in a stone disk of her nude and dismembered body and placed at the base of the temple to convey the humiliation of a captive destined to sacrifice. Of further interest, on the disk is an allusion to male clothing. According to Emily Umberger in her article, "Art and Imperial Strategy in Tenochtitlán," a standard Aztec insult for a warrior was to call him a woman, and the taunting of warriors by men dressed as women is well documented (95). Thus, Umberger poses that the loincloth on the disk may figuratively refer to the original male identity of the conquered enemy, transformed into a woman by defeat (95). Avellaneda, thus, uses the temple of Huizilopochtli as a textual palimpsest of meaning and redefines the gender-coded language of male dominance and female defeat by feminizing this space and making it a safe haven for indigenous women and their coming together.

Among this group of indigenous women, Avellaneda continues to present an intricate perspective of female roles. As they wait for their warrior husbands and sons' return from war, one woman, the matron of Tlacopán expresses her anger for the Spaniards in the following way: "el corazón me dice que antes que vuelva Meztli a asomar en el cielo su pálido semblante, harán visto mis ojos humear la sangre del último de ellos en la piedra de los sacrificios y conocerán mis dientes el sabor de su carne" (325) (My heart tells me that before Meztli returns to appear in the heavens with his pale countenance, they will have seen my eyes smolder with the blood of the last of them from the sacrificial rock and my teeth will know the taste of their flesh). At this point, the princess of Tlacopán assumes a fierce and masculine position by placing herself in the role of the cannibalistic warrior. The narrative does not negatively judge the princess's bold attitude and openness to cannibalism, but at the same time, the mention of it confirms the hegemonic discourse of barbarism that defines the Aztec natives historically. Additionally, Tecuixpa, the young Aztec princess that represents the bridge between the two cultures, reprimands the elder Quilena for her "unfeminine" ways: "pero me parece que no está bien en una mujer cuyo seno ha sido fecundado, esa hambre de carne humana. Tus hijos se llenarán de Gloria presentando corazones enemigos en el altar de Huizilopochtli; pero besarán con horror tu mano, si cuando la tiendas para bendecirlos, los salpicas con sangre" (325) (but it appears to me that this hunger for human flesh is not good in a woman whose breast has been fertilized. Your children will be filled with glory presenting enemy hearts to the altar of Huizilopochtli; but they will kiss with horror your hand if, when you incline it to bless them, you splash them with blood). Avellaneda presents to her audience a generational range of indigenous women; the senior Quilena embraces the intense and masculine bravery of traditional Aztec beliefs, while the younger Tecuixpa conforms to more conventional and "refined" roles for women.

The young princess's words do not stop the angry Quilena, as she decides to join the warrior men in combat along with her two male sons: "ha cubierto con la coraza de soldado su fecundo seno, ha oprimido su espalda con el pesado carcax, y empuñando la lanza y embrazando el escudo" (329) (has covered with the soldier's breastplate her fertile breast, has oppressed her back with the heavy quiver, and, seizing the lance and emblazoning herself with the coat of arms). After bravely taking part in battle, Quilena is seen cutting the throats of two Spanish soldiers, drinking their blood insatiably, and leaping into a lake with the bodies of her two dead sons. Avellaneda invents this Amazonian-like character to represent a radical expression of resistance, since this princess would rather kill herself than relinquish to Spanish dominion.

The association made between Quilena and the mythical Amazon warrior women suggests the idea of a female subject that appropriates a masculine role in order to obtain power. This topic is close to Avellaneda's personal experience as a women writer in the nineteenth century, who stretched the boundaries of expected gender roles for women. It is well known that Avellaneda was criticized for her "manly" intellectual ambitions by her male contemporaries and often referred to as being "too much of man" for a woman, which constituted an anomaly. A writer and contemporary of Avellaneda's, Carolina Coronado, came to her defense by appropriating this masculine detraction and transforming it into an epithet of empowerment as she wrote: "Es, en efecto, la amazona de nuestro Parnaso, y mejor era que la hubiesen dado desde luego esta calificación los doctos varones que se empeñaban en que varón había de ser, porque es más fuerte que nosotras. Es más fuerte, no porque es hombre-poeta, sino porque es poetisa-amazona" (see Picon Garfield, "Periodical Literature") (She is, in effect, the amazonian of our Parnaso, and, even better that she had been given from that point on this description that the male erudites who had insisted to themselves that she must have been male, because she is stronger than us [women]. She is stronger, not because she is a male-poet, but because she is an Amazon-poet). Similarly, Avellaneda takes the ambiguous sign of the Amazon woman, through the character of Quilena, who also becomes a palimpsest of contradictory meaning throughout colonial history, and transforms the Amazon woman into a symbol of female agency.¹³

Avellaneda continues filling the empty spaces of history not only by creating allegorical couples and complex female characters in her novel, but also through her use of footnotes. The author implements this "encyclopedic" form to record, translate, and explain similar elements to those she includes in her novel *Sab*, such as the flora and fauna of Mexico, endemic animal species, and local legends or myths. She also presents, translates, and describes these "native" types primarily for a foreign European audience. The length and contextual complexity of *Guatimozín*'s plot allows her to utilize the footnotes in a more extensive and distinct manner. Additionally, Avellaneda uses this form

to give historical credibility to her “narrative” and to create, as introduced at the beginning, counterhistorical narrative discourses.

In relation to historical accreditation, Avellaneda utilizes her footnotes to dialogue with an array of historians of colonial history, ranging in perspective and cultural background. She cites first-person accounts of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, such as Cortés’s letters to Charles V and Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera*, among other respected historians, such as the *criollo* Jesuit priest, Javier Clavijero, and William Robertson from Scotland. Other than using these historians as sources to bolster her narrative, she takes the liberty of supplementing and correcting these references. For example, Avellaneda fills a particular historical lacuna, as she does at the plot level, by tracing Guatimozín’s genealogy. She expresses a great surprise in finding that none of the European historians who have documented the Conquest have been incited to research the origin and reason for such a young man’s rise to power: “un personaje que tanto figura después en la historia de la conquista, y que es indudable debió figurar antes, puesto que tan alto aprecio se granjeó entre sus compatriotas, que le elevaron al solio a pesar de sus pocos años y en circunstancias tan críticas” (387) (a character who becomes so important in the history of the Conquest, and that undoubtedly must figure in the history before it as well, since he gained such a high level of appreciation amongst his countrymen that they elevated him to the throne despite his youthful inexperience and under such critical circumstances). This observation allows for her not only to investigate this absence but to highlight her meticulous and exhaustive study of “cuantos libros se han publicado sobre México, así en Europa como en América” (387) (how many books they have published about Mexico, both in Europe and in America). In other footnotes she corrects erroneous translations made by other historians from *nahuatl* or points to discrepancies in historical dates.

Avellaneda already suggests history is a text that could be revised by embracing the genre of the historical novel; moreover, with the use of her footnotes, she explicitly shows the need to expand the perimeters of historical discourse. By supplementing and correcting she establishes her authority amongst her historical predecessors. While in *Sab* she raises the figure of Martina as a figurative model of an alternative female historian by conserving the oral history of Cubitas, with *Guatimozín*, Avellaneda boldly legitimizes her role as a historian in a line of male historians. She takes the place of the “Other” through her delivery of Cuban history in *Sab*, and thus brings to the later novel the same complex positionality and tells the story of the Conquest from a doubly marginalized perspective, as a woman and colonial subject, yet writing from a place of power, the metropolis of Spain.

Just as Avellaneda legitimizes a non-written form of history in *Sab* through the oral traditions practiced by Martina, she also validates indigenous culture and traditions via her footnotes in her second novel. Continuing to

blur the civilization and barbarism dichotomy, this time on the margins of her text, Avellaneda highlights particular institutions and practices that can be considered signs of “high” civilization in Mexico. Not only does she praise the Aztecs for their eloquent oratory tradition, as she does in the main text, but also discusses systems they have to which Europe could not compare. For example, the author praises the Aztec empire’s communication structure (mail system) for its extension and efficiency, with which she says Europe had nothing comparable during the same time period. She also admires the republic-like government of Tlaxcala, an independent nation in Mexico during Pre-Colombian times, for being ahead of the British and French governments:

¡Cosa singular! Las secciones inglesas y las Assises francesas, cuya creación se atribuye con orgullo la Gran Bretaña, eran conocidas y practicadas por pueblos a quienes llamamos bárbaros cuando aquellas grandes naciones europeas gemían bajo el yugo vergonzoso de aquella tiranía que más tarde hicieron pesar sobre los pueblos americanos. (391)

(A unique thing! The English sections and the French Assises, whose creation is attributed with pride to Great Britain, were known and practiced by peoples whom they called barbarous when those great European nations groaned under the shameful yoke of that tyranny whose weight they later brought down upon the American peoples.)

The writer, thus, points to the contradictory stereotypes of indigenous populations as barbaric by underscoring their governmental sophistication.

Avellaneda is not the first to recognize the cultivated characteristics of the Aztec and other indigenous groups of Mexico; Cortés himself identified the superior level of commerce and way of life of the Aztec empire in his letters to Charles V (Merrim 73). However, the Aztec’s paganism still made it a barbaric people and to Cortés’s judgment: “cut off from the knowledge of God and from other peoples of reason” (Merrim 74). Avellaneda stands apart from this line of thinking by beginning to draw parallels between Aztec religion and other world religious views. In another of her footnotes, she compares the linguistic similarities between the *nahuatl* term “Teotl,” which means “great spirit,” to the Greek term “Theos” and suggests that the former god, although part of a polytheistic religion, assumes a central role in Aztec religion. Here again, Avellaneda asks her European readers to return to the colonial discourse of civilization and barbarism and reconsider the hegemonic definitions cast upon indigenous cultures.

Avellaneda places herself in a line of colonial historians and amends their historical discourses in order to negotiate the cultural differences that result from the Spanish Conquest. Her efforts bring to mind *mestizo* chroniclers of

the early modern period who were undergoing similar projects, such as El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Through his heritage, both Incan and Spanish, Garcilaso was discredited in the eyes of some as an historian capable of telling the truth regarding his mother's people, thus, he negotiated this dilemma by employing the historiographical tools of European rhetoric. His constant desire was to show the rational, monotheistic, just, and civilized nature of his maternal forebears (Ross 137–138). Although not *mestiza*, but a *criolla*, Avellaneda must also negotiate her sense of displacement in the space of the metropolis, which gives her a complex perspective and the ability to relate to the indigenous "Other." Raúl Ianes has argued in his article, "El viaje por el texto: *Guatimozín* y las aventuras de la épica romántica," that Avellaneda reminded her European audience of her remote and marginal origin by taking the literary epithet, "La Peregrina" in her early poems. Building on Ianes's thoughts, I would add that Avellaneda, like Garcilaso, writes from the interstices as a Cuban immigrant in Spain and desires a reconciliation between the colonizers and colonized and a need to legitimize the indigenous "Other."

Notes

1. Moctezuma II, also spelled Montezuma, was the ninth Aztec emperor of Mexico, having succeeded his uncle Ahuitzotl in 1502 and reigned until his death in 1520. Guatimozín, also spelled Cuautémoc, became the eleventh and last Aztec emperor of Mexico in 1520 after the death of Moctezuma's successor, Cuitláhuac. Guatimozín was the nephew and son-in-law of Moctezuma II (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).
2. The most recognized chronicles and historical documents which Avellaneda makes reference to in her footnotes are: *Cartas de relación de la conquista de Méjico* by Hernán Cortés, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Antigua de Méjico* by Francisco Javier Clavijero, *Historia de la conquista de Méjico* by Antonio de Solís, and *The History of America* by William Robertson.
3. According to Avellaneda's explanation, Quetzalcoal was an ancestor of the Aztecs who traveled in search of another relative who had left for distant lands so that his descendants would learn of better laws and unknown sciences. The prophecy included the return of Quetzalcoal's descendants, who it was believed would come back to Mexico to punish tyrannical and impious leaders (22–23).
4. I am referring here to the progressive alienation expressed in Romantic literature by its writers, such as experienced by Mariano José de Larra in Spain, from present realities of liberalism and radical doubt about the future. For Larra, immersed in a

historical circumstance that failed to correspond to liberal hopes and intentions, Romantic introspection revealed the truth of subjectivity to be the agonized combination of desire with impotence (Kirkpatrick 107).

5. The civilization and barbarism dichotomy in Avellaneda's novel is responding to multiple contextual references. Considering the date of the novel's publication and its proximity to Sarmiento's monumental work *Civilización y barbarie: vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* in 1845, we can estimate that her representation of this binary is dialoguing with Sarmiento's text, as I conjecture in another study (see Ibarra). For Sarmiento, the dynamics of history were seen as a conflict between native (American) barbarism and cosmopolitan (European) civilization. Yet, Sarmiento's discourse was not a new one, but one that he highlighted and adapted from a trope which had prevailed in connection with America from the time of the conquests, and even before, when the constricted imagination of medieval Europe had felt the need for an idealized Other against which to measure itself (Fisburn 204). Avellaneda also responds then, to the varying discourses of civilization and barbarism in the historical texts she uses as her direct references, the colonial historians of the Conquest of Mexico. Particularly of interest in this essay and to Avellaneda's legitimization of the Other is these historians' representation of the indigenous in their documents and chronicles. It must be noted that although the indigenous were generally viewed as barbaric amongst these writers, their descriptions show many nuances with every different document and its purpose, be it for legal or autobiographical purposes. In Columbus's *Diario de a bordo*, he homogenizes the indigenous groups and consistently characterizes them as innocent, childlike and peaceful, having no religious "sects" nor developed culture, they were a *tabula rasa* upon which Spanish culture could easily be inscribed (Merrim 63). In his *Cartas de relación*, Cortés describes the Aztec Indians as a "barbarous" civilization and is overcome with awe as he marvels at the unnatural conjunction of barbarism and civilization in Moctezuma's court. Barbarism, in sixteenth-century Castilian, at once meant foreign, savage, and pagan. Clearly for Cortés paganism did not impede the creation of a civilization, of "harmony and order" or of magnificent artifacts of gold (Merrim 74).
6. For example, in her novel *Dos mujeres*, written in 1843, Avellaneda objects to the strict laws against divorce and adultery that are applied to men and women unequally.
7. Sab's letter, written at the end of the eponymous novel, recalls a discussion on laws of nature versus social laws that reflects Avellaneda's objection to a Cuban slavocratic society. We must note that although Independence from Spain and Portugal heralded the abolition of slavery, achieved in most countries by 1854, it continued in Cuba until 1886. Slave imports from Africa persisted into the 1860s in Cuba and Brazil.
8. The character of Tecuixpa is a fictional modification of the historical Tecuichpo, who was the youngest daughter of Moctezuma II. She was betrothed to Cuauhtémoc (or Guatimozín) and upon his death was raped by Cortés and then married off to another Spanish soldier and baptized Isabel Moctezuma (Prologue, Cruz 24). Interestingly, Avellaneda makes no mention of this rape in the novel and instead makes her character part of a romantic interracial relationship.

9. In 1847, the Chilean press, *Imprenta del Mercurio*, prints the first American edition of *Guatimozín* in Valparaíso. In 1853, another edition is published in Mexico (Ianes 39). In 1898, it is published in English, as *Cuautemoc, The Last Aztec Emperor*, in Mexico City by Helen Edith Blake. In her preface, Blake mentions a neglect of this novel in Mexico and its being completely out of print, she says: “. . . I know of but two copies of ‘Cuauhtemoc’ in the city of Mexico, and from one of them this translation is made” (2). Blake also notes that the book was, however, well-known and respected among “literary Spanish-Americans” (2).
10. The other couple present in the novel that crosses racial and religious barriers is Hernán Cortés and Malintzin, or Marina as she is called here. Marina is represented as a liaison and translator for Cortés and his men. Avellaneda subtly implies Marina and Cortés’s affair in the two appearances the indigenous character makes throughout the novel. She is also represented as having voluntarily accepted the Catholic religion as her own and attempts to convert others. A comparative study of these two couples could be an interesting project, but one that time and space will not allow here. Like Tecuixpa and Velázquez, Marina, and Cortés symbolize, although more controversially, the inevitable outcome of their cultural encounter. Marina, or “la Malinche,” has permeated the national imaginary of Mexico as the original mother of *mestizaje* and has become paradigmatic throughout the nation’s historical evolution (see Octavio Paz).
11. See Branche and Read.
12. All of Avellaneda’s female characters in the novel *Guatimozín* are indigenous women of Mexico. There is only one European female character, Cortés’s wife, who makes an appearance in the epilogue and is depicted as Andalusian with “bright Arabic eyes” (371). Avellaneda does not represent any romances between indigenous men and Spanish women, which may be, as Loomba suggests, less sustainable for a “white” woman to mix with a black or indigenous man (134). Yet, we must not forget Avellaneda’s attempt at coupling her mulatto protagonist, Sab, with his owner’s *criolla* (or “white”) daughter, Carlota, even if an unreciprocated romance.
13. Astrid Steverlynck has argued that European tradition brought different (and conflicting) views of Amazon women, ranging from warlike and hostile, cruel, and anthropophagous savages; to models of courtliness and chivalry, beautiful and feminine (690). He also states that these ambiguous images gave the Amazons an important role in the exploration of America and made them useful representations in the discourse of conquest.

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Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and her View of the Colonial Past

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Nineteenth-century female writers played an important role in the cultural and political debates regarding the construction of the nation and their concerns with issues of education, female sexuality, and the future and progress of their homelands. But one topic that gained great attention from writers such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Clorinda Matto de Turner, Juana Manuela Gorriti, and Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, to name a few, was the reconstruction and interpretation of the colonial past. For some of them, the views of their societies were filtered through their recollection of important figures and events. According to Fernando Unzueta, in the nineteenth century, “La historia es el tema predominante en los relatos de ficción de la época” (History is the predominant theme in fictional works of the time) and “esta tendencia expresa, además de una aguda conciencia histórica, el deseo de insertar las comunidades imaginadas nacionales en un proyecto histórico específico” (223) (this tendency expresses, beyond a sharp historical consciousness, the desire to insert a specific national project into the imagined national communities).¹ However, some of these narratives cannot be limited to an interpretation of the desire to find a construction of an imagined community. They should also be considered for their critical and many times ambivalent engagement with certain figures and events of the colonial past. This essay examines Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s reading of the colonial past through historical figures such as Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, Guatimozín, and of prototypical characters such as the Spanish *visitador* (visitor) and the female black slave. I analyze the intertextual nature that characterizes her personal readings and the reasons behind her desire to reappraise historical moments such as the so-called discovery of America, the conquest of Mexico, and the colonization of New Granada. I would like to focus on her role as female *cronista* (chronicler)

and her use of female characters to present her view of the colonial past. The following works will constitute the focus of discussion: a poem included in *Descripción de las grandes fiestas celebradas en Cárdenas con motivo de la inauguración de la estatua de Cristóbal Colón* (1863), edited by D. R. Zambrana, and the legends “Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés” (1869) and “El cacique de Turmequé” (1869).²

The Colonial Past and Nineteenth-Century Spanish American Writers

The reappraisal of the colonial past by Latin American female writers in the nineteenth century is still an area of inquiry seldom discussed by critics. The role that prominent intellectual women played in the cultural and political debates regarding the construction of the nation and their concerns with issues of education, female sexuality, and the future and progress of their homelands have gained more scholarly attention. The manner in which female intellectuals reconstructed and interpreted the colonial past deserves serious consideration as it serves as a way to understand their social concerns of their own present as female citizens and authors writing and publishing in a male dominated world. Writers such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba), Clorinda Matto de Turner (Peru), Juana Manuela Gorriti (Argentina), Soledad Acosta de Samper (Colombia), Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera (Peru), and Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo (Puerto Rico), among others, actively contributed to debates about the condition of women in their emergent nations. Many of them devoted essays, poems, novels, and legends to the reconstruction of particular moments or historical figures of the colonial past. For example, Christopher Columbus, Bartolomé de las Casas, Hernán Cortés, and mythical indigenous figures seem to emerge as characters that allow these writers to reappraise part of history from their respective female discursive positions.

In the case of Avellaneda, most critical studies on her historical writings center on her reconstruction of historical figures such as Cortés, Malinche, and Cuauhtémoc in her novel *Guatimozín, último emperador de México* (1846).³ However, I believe it is important to discuss Avellaneda’s lesser-studied works to emphasize her overall project of revisiting historical figures such as Christopher Columbus and Diego de Torre, cacique de Turmequé. What exactly is Avellaneda’s purpose in assuming the mask of a chronicler in order to talk about the past? What role do secondary prototypical characters play in her reappraisal of the colonial past? And finally, what type of reconstruction does she engage in and why? These all constitute some of the questions to be addressed in this essay.

Mary Cruz argues that Avellaneda's work can be considered "un todo coherente, enlazado como por un entretejido de vasos comunicantes que alimentan y retroalimentan cada una de sus obras" (xix) (a coherent whole, connected as if woven together with communicating veins that nourish and learn from each one of her works). For Cruz, Cuba as a *patria* is one of the themes that connects Avellaneda's works and life. Since leaving for Spain in 1836, Cuba becomes a vivid memory that permeates some of her most intimate poems, such as "Al partir." Other themes that are indelible in her work are women's education, love, friendship, women's moral and intellectual nature, marriage as an institution, and the social condition of the oppressed, including black slaves and indigenous people.

A constant trait of Avellaneda's literary undertaking is to center her works on historical contexts away from her present *loci* of enunciation by situating her stories in past centuries; ranging from the sixth century a.n.e. (*Baltasar*), to the twelfth century in *Munio Alfonso*, and to the sixteenth century in *Guatimozín*. To situate some of her works in the time of the discovery and conquest of the so-called "New World" was not that strange at the time. Many famous nineteenth century authors, such as Andrés Bello, José Victorino Lastarria, José Martí, Simón Bolívar, José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, Eugenio María de Hostos, among others, engaged in political discussions about the colonial past and Spain's legacy in Spanish America. One of the most famous debates on this topic occurred between Bello and Lastarria in 1844 in which both authors discussed the need to reconsider the colonial past in order to understand the present.⁴ For Lastarria, knowing the past was equivalent to knowing the soul of the nation. However, for Bello, the soul and future of the nation lay in understanding the present. What becomes apparent in this debate is that the past can never be erased, and is ubiquitous in the rethinking of that present, especially when articulating what constitutes the nation. As Ernest Renan argued, one of the pervasive elements in any discussion about the condition of a nation is "the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets" (19). In the case of nineteenth-century Spanish America, the attitudes toward the colonial past range from total negation, reconciliation, nostalgic restitution, to admiration. The case of Avellaneda is quite fascinating because she does not approach the colonial past as a whole, but rather chooses to center on specific historical figures that she turns into characters. But is it possible to read the past through a particular historical figure? What is the reason behind choosing particular figures and ignoring others? How are these characters transformed to suit the author's personal political views?

For Avellaneda, historical figures come to represent aspects of the colonial past that need to be either retained or erased. Critics such as Mary Cruz tend to see Avellaneda's historical works such as her novel *Guatimozín* and the *tradición* "El cacique de Turmequé" as examples of Avellaneda's Hispano

American soul: “Y siendo *cubana*, tenía que ser *hispanoamericana*” (xix) (And, being Cuban, she had to be Hispanic American). However, I would like to propose a different reading of Avellaneda by emphasizing her European soul when revisiting a remote colonial past.

Avellaneda as a Chronicler: Remembering Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés

In 1862, the town of Cárdenas announced the celebration of the arrival of a statue in honor of Christopher Columbus to be placed in the Plaza de Recreo of the city. As part of the celebration that took place on December 26 in honor of the first statue of Columbus to be erected on Spanish American soil, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was invited to contribute a poem that was to be sung in the festivities. Her poem was subsequently published in 1863 by Ramón Zambrana as part of the volume entitled, *Descripción de las grandes fiestas celebradas en Cárdenas con motivo de la inauguración de la estatua de Cristóbal Colón*. This hymn praises Columbus as an ingenious man that opened the sea to another world: “Si en el vasto hemisferio arrancado / por tu genio al secreto del mar / Tu alto nombre no está vinculado/ cual la Gloria la supo grabar” (Zambrana 14) (If in the vast, uprooted hemisphere / through your genius of the secrets of the sea / Your highest name is not bound / which Glory knew to engrave). Columbus is a hero in need of recognition and only Cuba, or La Española as Gertrudis calls it, is capable of establishing justice to his deeds: “Hoy por fin de justicia la aurora / Ya en su cielo comienza a lucir” (Zambrana 15) (Finally, today, as justice the daybreak / In the sky begins to shine). Cuba, personified as a female tropical queen, is only capable of understanding Columbus’s contribution and relevance: “Que hoy la reina del trópico lava/ Por tu genio al secreto del mar” (Zambrana 15) (That today the kingdom of the tropics washes / Through your genius the secret of the seas). A telluric sense of maternal love toward Christopher Columbus emanates from this female figure: “Se alza digna la Antigua Española/ Que la sombra maternal abjuró” (Zambrana 15) (The Old Spanish Woman rises dignified / that which the maternal shadow retracted).

This geography of love turns into national love when Gertrudis proclaims that “Nuestro amor te lo brinda ferviente / Lo saluda el pendón nacional” (Zambrana 15) (Our love fervently toasts you / The national banner greets it).⁵ Cuba’s collective love shows in the statue erected in the plaza as a sign of recognition of Christopher Columbus. But what is Columbus’s major contribution that makes him worthy of such a tribute? According to the author, what makes Columbus a great man (“grande hombre”) is his influential role

in unifying two worlds: “Y dos mundos que llena tu nombre / Y te deben su próspera unión” (Zambrana 15) (and two worlds that fill your name / and owe you their prosperous union). Columbus is responsible for the union and exchange of two worlds that now are connected forever. Through the figure of Columbus, Avellaneda emphasizes the unequivocal tie that connects Cuba to Europe. The town of Cárdenas serves as a space and place in which such contribution is recognized in the form of a statue. The statue in this sense becomes an insignia, representing an abstract idea of Columbus as envisioned by Avellaneda and the town of Cárdenas. If sculptures are symbolic representations of people’s beliefs, for Avellaneda the effigy of Christopher Columbus epitomizes the recognition that she and other Cubans feel for the Almirante: “Que ya la efigie / del Almirante / pisó triunfante / su pedestal” (Zambrana 15) (Already the effigy / of the Admiral / triumphantly tread upon / its pedestal).

The invitation to compose a poem in honor of Christopher Columbus offers Avellaneda the opportunity to praise a historical figure that she sees as a facilitator of two worlds. His deeds contributed to the connection between the “old” and the “new” worlds, bringing culture and civilization to the Americas. For Avellaneda, Columbus represents Europe, and Europe equals civilization. The Admiral facilitated what Avellaneda considers to be a “colossal enterprise.” In a section of her literary journal *Album cubano de lo bello y lo bueno* (1860),⁶ devoted to “Galería de mujeres célebres,”⁷ Avellaneda discusses Columbus’s colossal enterprise:

Sí Colón desechado por todos los reyes, objeto de burla para todos los sabios, encuentra en Isabel la única inteligencia que le comprende y el único poder que le ampara. La reina ofrece sus joyas, si es menester, para los gastos de la expedición; parten las naves, surcan el océano encargadas de esperanza, descubren la América, y viene á rendir á los pies de una mujer la gloria de aquella empresa colosal, que produce una revolución sin ejemplo en el sistema de las potencias de Europa. (“Galería” 268)

(Yes, Columbus rejected by all the kings, and object of ridicule for all his knowledge, finds in Isabel the only intelligent being that understands him and sees in her the only power that protects him. The Queen offers her jewels, if necessary, for the expenses of the expedition; the boats depart, plough through the ocean filled with hope, discover America, and come to yield at the feet of a woman the glory of that colossal Enterprise, which came to produce an unparalleled revolution in the system of powers in Europe.)

It seems that Columbus’s magnificent enterprise can only be understood through the common sense and intelligence of a woman (“encuentra en Isabel la única inteligencia que le comprende y el único poder que le ampara”

[finds in Isabel the only intelligent being that understands him and sees in her the only power that protects him]). For Avellaneda, Columbus changed and revolutionized the world and Europe would not be Europe if it were not for him. It is in this sense that the town of Cárdenas and its citizens offer their utmost respect to a historical figure whom has been largely forgotten by Europeans and seldom recognized for his transformation of the world. Elise Bartosik-Velez, in her fascinating book *The Legacy of Christopher Columbus in the Americas*, explains that intellectuals such as Francisco de Miranda, Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, and Simón Bolívar praised Columbus for the great efforts and risks he took in discovering the so-called “new world,” and in the case of Bolívar, is perceived as “the creator of our hemisphere” (113, 129). According to Bartosik-Vélez, the figure of Columbus was instrumental “in the Creole narrative justifying independence” (Bartosik-Vélez 127).⁸ Although Avellaneda concurs with the aforementioned writers in granting Columbus his place in history, her reading is distinct, as there is no call for political action. The Admiral symbolizes a father figure who gave physical existence to the Americas as well as Europe.⁹

This emphasis on endowing historical significance through the eyes of a woman is also evidenced in her tale “Una anécdota de la vida de Cortés” published in 1869.¹⁰ Avellaneda, in her role as a chronicler, highlights the heroic figure of Hernán Cortés stating that he is “una de las mayores figuras que puede presentar la historia; Hernán Cortés, que quizás no ha sido colocado a su natural altura ni aun por desacertados encomiadores, que han alterado la verdadera fisonomía del hombre queriendo deificarlo; Hernán Cortés, tipo de su nación, en aquel tiempo en que era grande, heroica, fanática y fiera” (“Una anécdota” 161) (one of the greatest figures that History can present; Hernán Cortés, who perhaps has perhaps not yet been placed at his natural height due to mistaken worshippers that have altered the true physiognomy of the man while wanting to deify him; Hernán Cortés, a representative of his nation, in that time was great, heroic, enthusiastic, and ferocious). For Avellaneda, Cortés symbolizes the great Spanish nation and is a figure that lacks the recognition that he deserves. As one of the “genios superiores” (superior geniuses), she later adds, Cortés was a victim of traitors and enemies who fought hard to discredit him. She mentions some captains such as Villafañá and Olid who, in the last stages of the conquest of Mexico, betrayed Cortés for their own personal greed. It is this historical point in time in which Avellaneda situates her story about Cortés.

Avellaneda depicts the ability of Cortés in overcoming the indigenous conspiracy that he confronted before finally conquering Mexico. The scene she recreates is the punishment that Cortés decides to impose upon the indigenous leader of the insurrection, Guatimozín, and his cousin Netzalc, in the center of town. Members of the population hurry to the plaza to witness the spectacle of

punishment to be imposed by the Spaniards. Two witnesses in particular call our attention: a Spanish woman named Guiomar from Andalucía and doña Marina, better known as La Malinche. These two characters became micro chroniclers who shared their respective views about the event to take place. Avellaneda's voice splits into the voice of two female characters that function as *cronistas* (chroniclers). The Spanish woman angrily comments about "la perversidad de estos indios" (the depravity of these Indians), justifying the punishment. Although acknowledging that the indigenous leader responsible for the insurrection deserves to die, Malinche instead questions the fact that a conspiracy indeed took place and that Guatimozín indeed was in charge.

Marina's view seems to coincide with the version given by Bernal Díaz in his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, when he states that Guatimozín denied the charges. Avellaneda quotes a passage from Díaz del Castillo that shows evidence of this fact. The passage reads, "E fue la muerte que les dieron muy injustamente dada, y pareció mal á muchos de los que aquella jornada hacíamos" ("Una anécdota" 165) (It was a death that was given most unjustly, and it seemed wrong to many of them who had made that trip).¹¹ But why choose Guatimozín to be the protagonist of what might be considered Cortés's injustice? It is interesting that physically, the indigenous leader is described as almost as white as the Spaniards. Guiomar comments "distinguiéndose entre todos los naturales hasta por su color, tan blanco que lo hace parecer europeo" ("Una anécdota" 166) (differentiating himself amongst all of the natives even in his color, so white that it made him appear almost European). Although Bernal Díaz, in his *Historia verdadera*, does not exactly mention that the *cacique* looked almost European, it is relevant that Avellaneda as a chronicler adds this information. For example, Bernal Díaz does mention that, "era de edad de veinte y un años, y la color tiraba su matiz algo más blanco que a la color de indios morenos" (388) (he was of the age of twenty-one, and he was a shade whiter than the color of the bronzed Indians).¹² For Avellaneda, Guatimozín is not an ordinary Mexica Indian; he is a native who more closely resembles the Spaniards.

There is a double sorrow expressed by both women in the event of the execution. For Guiomar, it is sad that an Indian so different from his own people (Aztecs) and so close to her own people (Spaniards) is about to be executed. For Marina, it is tragic that his execution will represent the end of the Aztec empire, "que no puedo menos de trastornarme al considerar que va a perecer en ignominioso patíbulo el ilustre descendiente de los héroes de Atzacapuzalco" ("Una anécdota" 166) (I can't help but get upset thinking about how the illustrious descendent of the heroes of Atzacapuzalco is going to appear in the insulting gallows).¹³ What both women seem to agree upon is the fact that Cortés had no choice but to conquer the Aztecs so that Spanish power and civilization could be instituted. Marina even acknowledges, "Hay

necesidades que hacen inevitable crueles sacrificios” (“Una anécdota” 165) (There are necessities that make cruel sacrifices inevitable). What seems to cause sorrow for the death of the indigenous leader is his closeness to the Spaniards, at least in appearance and in character. Guatimozín reiterates his innocence to the very last moment, consequently accepting his death in order to save the rest of his people from violence and starvation. However, it is the presence of another woman who represents a distinct point of view about Cortés; Guatimozín’s wife. It is ironic that this woman, named Cualcazintla is introduced as “la loca triste” (the sad, crazy woman). Cualcazintla is devastated by the imprisonment and suffering of her husband. Avellaneda introduces a third female voice to complete her portrait of Cortés.

Doña Marina consoled Cualcazintla after having witnessed the death of her husband. Feeling sorry for the widow, Marina invites her to come and live with her under the protection of Cortés: “¿Quieres vivir conmigo, bajo la protección del grande y victorioso general don Hernando Cortés?” (“Una anécdota” 168) (Do you want to live with me under the protection of the great and victorious general Sir Hernando Cortés?). Ironically, it was Cortés who ordered the death of Guatimozín, her husband. Cualcazintla refuses Marina’s offer and calls her a “slave” of the man who condemned their own race, “¡Y tú, su esclava, su manceba!” (“Una anécdota” 168) (And you! His slave! His concubine!). Marina responds angrily and calls Cualcazintla a crazy woman who needs to come to her senses and forget about the irreversible past “Es menester resignarte con las disposiciones del cielo y olvidar para siempre lo pasado” (“Una anécdota” 168–169) (It’s necessary to resign oneself to the wills of the heavens and forget once and for all the past). Surprisingly, Cualcazintla accepts Marina’s invitation and decides to live under Cortés’ protection. When the widow arrives at the house, Cortés feels sorrow and guilt for what he did to her family to the extent that Marina feels jealous of the attention given to Cualcazintla.

The tale ends when Cortés, unable to fall asleep, walks out of his room to find himself attacked by what he refers to as a black ghost. He realizes that the attacker is Cualcazintla who tells him that she has come to take revenge. She managed to hurt him but he is able to take the weapon away from her. After being succumbed by Cortés, Cualcazintla loses consciousness and is taken by Cortés to Marina’s room. After witnessing the lovely manner in which Cortés carries Cualcazintla and places her on bed, Marina reacts with the utmost anger and jealousy. Cortés insults her and tells her that she is “la verdadera loca, ¡incurable celosa!” (“Una anécdota” 173) (the truly crazy one, incurably jealous!). To Cortés’s dismay, Marina confessed to him that she has drowned Cualcazintla to death so her soul can be reunited with her beloved Guatimozín. Cortés reacts with horror and anger pushing Malinche to the ground but drastically changes his tone and acknowledges that thanks to Marina, the woman

who attempted to take his life, Cualcazintla, is dead. Marina to a certain extent has saved his life. Acknowledging his faults in his decision to execute Guatimozín, Cortés does reiterate that his actions against the indigenous leader aimed to bring religious civilization to this part of the world: “como me cuesta la Gloria de plantar la cruz del Gólgota en el suelo de estas vastas regiones, abiertas de hoy más a la civilización Cristiana” (“Una anécdota” 174) (how much the Glory of planting the cross of Gólgota on the grounds of these vast regions, today so much more open to the Christian civilization, has cost me).

Avellaneda portrays Cortés as a hero whose mistakes can be forgiven because he brought Christianity and civilization to Mexico. The author uses the voices of three different women (Guiomar, Marina, and Cualcazintla) to construct an image of the conquistador as someone who sacrificed his reputation in order to defend Christianity. The only character who had attempted to question Cortés’s actions ended up dead in the hands of another indigenous woman. Avellaneda reiterates that those who question Cortés’s actions would be forever silenced. Violence is justified if it entails the spread of Christianity and civilization to a barbaric world. Cortés, as is the case of Christopher Columbus, is praised by Avellaneda because of his role in transferring European ideals to the so-called “New World.” The tale (“anécdota”) of a quotidian moment in Cortés’ life serves as an opportunity to recognize his contribution. To this extent the voices of the marginalized indigenous women are silenced and eradicated. Both women are considered by Cortés as irrationals or “locas” (crazy) and only the European man is able to make sense of this new historic era.¹⁴

Avellaneda transforms Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s opinion about what was bothering Cortés after Guatimozín’s death and turns the story into a romantic view of the Spanish conqueror. For Bernal, Cortés was worried about all the vicissitudes he had gone through to subdue the Aztecs as well as his decision to order the execution of Guatimozín. Avellaneda concludes her tale by citing directly from Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera* again; a quote that serves as the reason for the creation of the tale. She quotes:

Andaba Cortés, mal dispuesto y pensativo después de haber ahorcado a Guatemuz y a su deudo el señor de Tacuba, sin tener justicia para ello, y de noche no reposaba; e pareció ser que saliéndose de la cámara donde dormía, a pasear por una sala donde había ídolos, descuidóse y cayó, descalabrándose la cabeza; no dijo cosa buena ni mala sobre ello, salvo curarse la descalabradura, e todo se lo sufrió callando. (“Una anécdota” 174)

(Cortés kept on going, in a bad mood and pensive after having hanged Guatemuz and his relative, the gentleman from Tacuba, without putting them on trial, and at night he didn’t rest; and it seemed to be that he was taking leave of the room in which he slept, to meander through a room

where there had been statues of idols, and, not paying attention, he fell, injuring his head; he didn't say a good or bad thing about it, save for tending to his wound, but suffered through the whole thing in silence.)¹⁵

The uncertainty of what caused Cortés's injury ("pareció ser" [it seemed to be]) is what prompted Avellaneda to write her tale.¹⁶ Consequently, her tale offered the author the opportunity to praise, to recognize, and to defend the figure of Cortés as a kind and unselfish man. Both Columbus and Cortés represent the best of the old world. The death of Guatimozín is used as an opportunity to defend Cortés against accusations that he betrayed Guatimozín and that what he did against the indigenous leader was unjustified. In Avellaneda's work the erasure of the indigenous power rectifies the good character of Cortés. However, what happens when Avellaneda revises historical characters that are lesser known? What is her agenda when recapturing an anecdote from a chronicle almost unknown at her time such as *El carnero*? What does she want the reader to remember about that particular colonial past? The legend, included in her last volume of complete works, "El cacique de Turmequé," offers us some answers.

The Unknown Heroes of the Kingdom of New Granada

"El cacique de Turmequé" is based on *El carnero*'s account of a 1582 episode that occurred in the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada that involved Don Diego de Torre, known as the cacique de Turmequé.¹⁷ In the real historical event, Don Diego de Torre along with Don Alonso de Silva, Cacique of Tibasosa, were involved in a judicial process against Spanish authorities that resulted in removal of Diego de Torre's *cacicazgo* (chiefdom) and sending him to exile in Spain. Diego de Torre was indeed a mestizo son of a Spanish conqueror and *encomendero* (encomienda holders) and an indigenous woman whose brother was governing Turmequé.¹⁸ Diego de Torre inherited the *cacicazgo* in 1551 after the death of his uncle. After becoming cacique of Turmequé he denounced the colonial authorities for the imposition of *tributos* (taxes) and the abuse committed against the Indians in the *encomiendas*. Alonso de Silva, cacique of Tibasosa, accompanied Torre in his demands to the Spanish authorities. Both were incarcerated and destituted of their *cacicazgos* on the basis that they were both *mestizos* (mixed race). However, Don Diego de Torre managed to travel to Spain to present an official complaint to the King. As a result, the Crown decided to send Juan Bautista de Monzón as a *visitador* (visitor) to resolve the alleged abuses committed against the cacique and the indigenous people. Don Diego de Torre returned to Nueva

Granada with Monzón and they became great friends. Monzón engaged in a campaign to punish those members of the Royal Court (Real Audiencia) who committed all the abuses. The friendship between Diego de Torre and Monzón caused great animosity between the members of the Royal Court to the point of accusing Torre and Monzón of planning an insurrection against the Spanish government. They managed to imprison Monzón, but Diego de Torre was able to escape. The Spanish crown found out about the situation and sent another *visitador* (visitor) to resolve the problem. As a result, Monzón was liberated and Diego de Torre turned himself into the Spanish authorities who sent him to Spain where he continued to defend his innocence and his right to the *cacicazgo*. He died in Spain in 1590.¹⁹

Although the history and symbolic importance of Diego de Torre has been widely discussed in the last decade by critics and scholars, such as Luis Fernando Restrepo, Joanne Rappaport and Santiago Villa Chiape, to name a few; it is important to keep in mind that this was not the case in the nineteenth century.²⁰ The only reappraisal of the figure of the cacique of Tumerqué was the one included in the recently published nineteenth-century first edition of *El carnero* in 1859. Avellaneda's reading of Diego de Torre is obviously influenced by her reading of Freyle's comments about the cacique in chapters thirteen and fourteen of his book. As Luis Fernando Restrepo states with regard to Freyle: "En esta crónica, don Diego es una figura marginal en una historia de adulterios y corrupción" ("El Cacique" 26) (In this chronicle, Sir Diego is a marginal figure in a history of adultery and corruption). Restrepo adds that Don Diego appears totally different in the legal petitions placed by Diego himself to the Spanish crown especially in the *Memorial* of 1584. However, it is on Freyle's version that Avellaneda bases her reappraisal of the *mestizo* and what at the time was not a well-known book. For some critics like Restrepo, Avellaneda's legend can be understood as a national romance in which the Cuban author "offers a positive yet idealized view of don Diego and of *mestizaje*" ("Don Diego" 105). For Carolina Alzate who mistakenly refers to the legend as a novel, Avellaneda questions Freyle's misogynistic view of women to propose "una perspectiva esencialmente feminista" (207) (an essentially feminist perspective) of the female character Estrella, portraying her as a victim of her lover's corruption and not as an instigator and passionate woman who engaged in an illicit relationship despite being married.²¹ However, I would like to propose a different reading of Avellaneda's reconstruction of this episode of the colonial past. My discussion does not center on Estrella as the primary character that Avellaneda is trying to defend through her questioning of the role of woman in colonial society. Instead, I choose to underline the roles that primary and secondary characters play in Avellaneda's view of the circumstances surrounding Diego de Torre.²² These characters are emblematic of key figures of the colonial past.

As Restrepo observes, in the original work of *El carnero*, Diego de Torre was a marginal character (“El Cacique” 26). The story has to do mainly with a description of Alonso Orozco, a married man and a corrupt colonial administrator, and his affair with a married young lady. The illicit relationship, according to Freyle, contributes to the animosity that Orozco developed against the Spanish judge Juan Bautista Monzón who came to Santa Fe to impose law and order in a city where the Royal Court (*Audiencia*) was dominated by Orozco and his corrupt friends. Freyle mentioned that Orozco was responsible for the rumor that spread that Diego de Torre was organizing an insurrection with the help of “indios caribes de los llanos, mulatos, mestizos y negros” (205) (Caribbean Plains Indians, Mulattos, Mixed Breeds, and Blacks). The rumors continued when a letter written by Diego de Torre, and addressed to Monzón, is intercepted causing Monzón’s arrest. The cacique is eventually arrested and sentenced to death. Freyle’s story is one of good versus evil in which, according to the author, “los buenos bien conocían el engaño y la falsedad; los malos, que era el mayor bando, gustaban del bullicio y alzabanlo de punto” (206) (the good men were well aware of trickery and falsehoods; the bad men, which was the larger side, enjoyed the racket and built it up). At the end, Freyle denounces that the reason for all the corruption and false rumors against Monzón was due to the illicit relationship between Orozco and his lover: “mucho ciega una pasión amorosa” (218) (much blinded by an amorous passion). Of course, for Freyle, the female lover is the major instigator of Orozco’s corrupted actions and the real cause of the social disorder that erupted in the capital city.²³

There is no doubt that the historical figure of Diego de Torre serves Avellaneda as an excuse to read the colonial past including its prototypical characters. I am referring to the figures of the Spanish judge Juan Bautista Monzón, Alonso Orozco a member of the *Audiencia*, and the female character of *la negra* (black servant). All of them serve to praise the character of the Spanish crown or *madre patria* (motherland) as Avellaneda refers to it in the introduction of the legend. From Spain, order and control will emanate. She mentions that Felipe II will send to Nueva Granada a judge “cuya honradez, integridad y energía pudiera detener los progresos de aquel mal, que amenazaba hacer para siempre odiosa la administración de la madre patria en sus ricos dominios del vasto continente americano” (“El cacique” 229) (whose honor, integrity and energy could detain the progression of that evil which threatened to make the motherland’s administration a hate-filled presence once and for all in its rich possessions on the vast American continent). Spain is introduced as a mother who aims to guide and protect her children (“ricos dominios” [rich possessions]) from chaos and disorder. The *madre patria* is also in charge of cleaning her territories of “bastardas pasiones” (“El cacique” 230) (illegitimate passions) that have emerged in the urban centers of the colonies. The

judge to whom she is referring is Juan Bautista Monzón. I would argue that this legend is as much about the Spanish judge as about the *cacique* Diego de Torre. The administrators controlling the Royal Court (Real Audiencia), such as Orozco and his friends, are the ones responsible for the different social disorders taking place in Santa Fe de Bogotá along with his lover Estrella. They represent those evil forces that the wise and honest Monzón has to fight against in order to restore social and moral order.

The character that will connect the lives of Monzón, Orozco, and the *cacique* Diego de Torre is Estrella. Estrella is an accessory to demonstrate the moral weaknesses of the local prosecutor (Orozco) and of Diego de Torre. Both men fell for her love despite knowing that she was a married woman. It is worth noting that her husband is also a Spanish man who is depicted as a noble gentleman. However, if Orozco is depicted by Avellaneda as a corrupt and evil man; the *cacique* (leader) is portrayed as an honest and innocent *indiano* (indian) who succumbed to passion. If the illicit relationship between Orozco and Estrella is summarized as “vulgar crimen de adulterio” (“El cacique” 234) (the vulgar crime of adultery); the relationship between Estrella and Diego de Torre is conceived as unavoidable due to the attractiveness of the *cacique*. He is described as, “príncipe indiano [. . .] elegante talle, de negros y fulgurantes ojos, de tez ligeramente bronceada—pero admirable por su juvenil tersura—y de profusa cabellera rizada [. . .] prestándole cierta gravedad melancólica—una frente altiva y espaciosa, hecha al parecer expresamente para ostentar una corona” (“El cacique” 234–235) (an indian prince [. . .] of elegant waist, of black and shining eyes, of lightly-bronzed skin—but admirable for his youthful smoothness—and of profuse curly hair [. . .] which lent him a certain melancholy seriousness—a raised and spacious forehead, made to appear so in order to better carry a crown). The exotic representation of the *cacique* endows him with a sense of otherness that is perceived attractive. Diego de Torre represents a colonial past that, although alluring, should be preserved as a distant memory. Estrella and the *cacique*’s relationship has no future as it is illustrated at the end of the story when Estrella dies and Diego escapes to Spain; another sign of what Unzueta refers to as tragic romance (195).²⁴

The characterization of the corrupt Orozco versus the idealized Diego de Torre serves to underline the respected character of Estrella’s husband to whom Avellaneda refers as a Spanish captain. His reputation as a distinguished citizen is intact and Avellaneda refers to him as a victim and an example of the “fatal tendencia de todos los maridos condenados por la suerte a ser víctimas de una desgracia que tarda o nunca conocen” (“El cacique” 238–239) (fatal tendency of all the husbands condemned by luck to be victims of a disgrace that they come to realize late, or perhaps never). The love triangle between Alonso de Orozco, Estrella, and Diego de Torre serves to highlight the integrity of the betrayed Spanish husband. The fates that Orozco and Diego de Torre

suffered in Spain, where punishment and forgiveness are imposed, underline the notion that only in Spain order can be restored. Estrella's husband at the end also left for Spain to take revenge against the two men that contributed to the damage of his reputation ("limpiar su honra" [to clean his honor]). This further emphasizes that resolution can only emanate from the *madre patria* or can be found there. It is also important to remember that it is the King who sends new Spanish administrators to the capital of Nueva Granada to restore social order and justice. It is the arrival of a new *visitador* to Santa Fe that makes possible the release of the Spanish judge Juan Bautista Monzón. The dementia that Orozco suffers once he is imprisoned in Spain and the fact that Diego de Torre was reduced from being a *cacique* to work in the royal stables point out that no future was awaiting them (280). They have both been symbolically punished by the loss of his mental faculties in the case of Orozco, and by the loss of social status in the case of Diego de Torre. Both punishments are exemplified at the end of the story when Estrella's husband realizes that in the case of Orozco "no le toca al hombre tomar venganza del hombre: hay invisible mano justiciera, que ningún delito deja impune jamás" ("El cacique" 281) (it's not the man's job to take his revenge upon his fellow man: there is the invisible hand of justice, which doesn't let any crime go unpunished). In the case of Diego de Torre, it is Avellaneda herself who acknowledges the punishment when she says, "¿Qué pena podría imponérsele, mayor de la que sufre, al joven príncipe indiano, reducido á adiestrar los caballos del rey por el salario de una peseta al día?" ("El cacique" 281) (What greater punishment could impose itself than that which the young Indian prince already suffers by being reduced to training the King's horses for a salary of one *peseta* a day?). A providentialist view of justice helps Avellaneda to portray a colonial past in which Spain is synonymous with order and justice.

"El cacique de Turmequé" does not necessarily see in the character of Diego de Torre a solution to the future. Although the King forgives him, his *cacicazgo* is never restored. His social situation worsens as he ends up working for the King in his royal stables. The *cacique* is remunerated as a master of horses but not the master of his own people. His "sangre regia americana" ("El cacique" 235) (royal American blood) does not endow him with better social recognition or status. He is idealized as "la singular belleza producida por el cruzamiento de razas" (235) (the most singular beauty produced by the crossing of the races), but not seen as the key to the future (235). His social prestige diminishes at the end of the story, while the character of Juan Bautista Monzón is remunerated and restored by naming him to the position of *visitador* in Lima. Monzón is perceived as a symbol of the colonial administration's political and social order.

When it comes to social order there is another character that allows us to discuss how other non-Spanish sectors of the population are perceived by Avel-

laneda. The prototypical figure of the black female slave and servant remains intact in the story. Estrella's slave is portrayed as a facilitator of the illegal relationships of her owner. The *negra* facilitates the encounter between Estrella and Diego de Torre. But if Estrella is perceived by the author as a victim of the patriarchal system (228), the black female slave is portrayed as a contributor to moral disorder. In this sense Avellaneda does not seem to question Freyle's portrayal of sectors of the population of African descent. At least in this story, the black servant has no redeeming qualities. When Estrella's husband realizes that the *negra* knows everything about his wife's illicit relationships, he forces her to confess through the use of force. Avellaneda, the chronicler, comments, "El deber que nos hemos impuesto, sin embargo de no alterar la exactitud de los hechos, nos obligue a confesar que no tuvo la esclava negra el heroico sufrimiento que ostentó Roldán en la tortura, pues declaró plenamente, bajo los golpes del látigo, cuantos secretos le eran conocidos por la confianza que en ella tenía la imprevisora capitana" ("El cacique" 275–276) (The obligation that we have imposed upon ourselves, nevertheless does not alter the truth of the matter, it obliges us to confess that the black slave-woman didn't possess the heroic suffering that Roldán displayed in torture, but declared frankly, under the blows of the whip, how many secrets were made known to her through the confidences she had with the improvident female captain). Avellaneda confesses that the black woman was unable to endure the pain that Juan Roldán suffered in the hands of Orozco and his allies for defending and allying himself with Monzón and Diego de Torre. This *negra* was not willing to sacrifice her life to defend Estrella. Instead, she just confessed everything so she could save her own life. For Avellaneda, heroism cannot be found in the female persona of the black slave as she betrays the lady who invested so much confidence in her. In the reconstruction of this story of the colonial past, the black female slave connotes mistrust. For her and the *cacique*, there is no freedom but only social stagnation. It is the Spaniard, and subsequent *visitador* of Lima, Juan Bautista Monzón, who is able to enjoy better social status as a result of his laudable actions. He is the facilitator of social order in the so-called "New World." In sum, in "El cacique de Turmequé," the colonial past as it is lived in the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada is viewed as a time of chaos and social order that was only able to be restored by the presence of Spanish representatives of the *madre patria* who were recognized for their honesty, high moral standards, and a rigorous sense of the law.

Final Remarks: Colonizing the Past

There is no doubt that Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is known by critics for her criticism of social prejudices and injustices as portrayed, for example, in

her famous novel *Sab* or in her work *Dos mujeres*, among others. However, it is evident that when it comes to reappraise a distant colonial past, her position is more ambivalent. Spanish figures such as Columbus, Cortés, and Monzón are praised for their contribution to the Americas in bringing visibility and order to colonial society.²⁵ They also contribute with wisdom and justice to the new continent. Female characters are used to make this message clear as is the case of Isabel la Católica, Malinche, Estrella, and the black female slave. Such is the case for the indigenous character Diego de Torre, cacique of Turmequé. Either through words (Isabel la Católica and Malinche) or through punishments (Guatimozín, the black servant, and Diego de Torre) they all function in Avellaneda's revision of the distant past as characters who reiterate Avellaneda's point of view in which Europe is privileged. But we might ask ourselves: why look at a distant colonial past in colonial regions away from Cuba?

It is important to understand that at the time that Avellaneda wrote her poem in honor of Christopher Columbus and her works "El cacique de Turmequé" and "Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés," Cuba was still under Spanish control. It is also important to note that between 1820 and 1860 Cuba enjoyed more economic progress than any other Latin American country (Bushnell and Macaulay 293), but that soon after political tensions between Cuban *criollos* in charge of coffee and tobacco production and the Spanish administration erupted in the political unrest of the Ten Year's War. The turbulent rebellion known as *Conspiración de la Escalera* (1843–1844) was still fresh in Cuban society.²⁶ Also, as Luis E. Aguilar explains, by the 1860s "opposition to Spain had not only increased, but had spread to all sectors of the population [. . .] The island was becoming divided into two hostile camps: Cubans versus Spaniards" (22). There is no doubt that Cuba's current political situation was present in Avellaneda's mind when she wrote and published these particular works. Looking at the distant past functioned as a way to symbolically prevent an uncertain future.

Avellaneda loved her country, Cuba, but she viewed herself as part of her *madre patria*. Her view of the distant colonial past pertaining to other regions of Spanish America (Mexico and Nueva Granada) served as a way to reflect and let Cubans know about Spain's contribution to their existence and sense of identity. The fact that the aforementioned works emphasized a glorious past and the sense of order and justice, underlines what Avellaneda conceives as important with regard to the future of her own island. Cuba should be cautious of not succumbing to political unrest and disorder and should view her motherland as a sign of stability and order. People must remember that what happened to Guatimozín, to Diego de Torre, *cacique* of Turmequé, and to the female black slave can happen to those who do not cooperate or are perceived as not cooperating with the colonial system. If Cuba is the source of inspiration for many of Avellaneda's work, Spain as the *madre patria* is the source of

constancy, dependability, and pride.

Alvaro Félix Bolaños and Gustavo Verdesio argue that another type of colonialism that emerged in Latin America consisted in “the uses of indigenous pasts in order to create discourses of Latin American identity” in which the Amerindian images are “appropriated in order to differentiate between a national or supranational (that is, regional) identity and an external hegemonic power” (12).²⁷ This type of colonialism is very applicable to the case of the Cuban writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. For Avellaneda, the indigenous past, as read through the figures of Guatimozín and Diego de Torre, and through heroic figures such as Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés, serves to underline that Cuban identity lies in the heart of Europe, that is, Spain. Ties with the motherland will never be broken as long as Cubans are reminded that the *madre patria* brought civilization, order, and symbolic recognition to the Americas. As she reminds us in her hymn to Christopher Columbus, “Y dos mundos que llena tu nombre / Y te deben su próspera unión, / Ecos mil volverán, ¡grande hombre! / De esta villa á la fausta ovación” (15) (And two worlds unite your name / and owe you their prosperous union, / Thousands of echoes will return, great man! / From this villa to the fortunate ovation).

Notes

1. Unzueta refers to the notion of “imagined community” developed by Benedict Anderson for whom the nation is “imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (16).
2. “El cacique de Turmequé” and “Una anécdota en la vida de Cortés” were published for the first time in 1869 as part of Avellaneda’s *Obras completas*. Both writings are considered part of the genre of *tradiciones* which is usually described as short stories composed of historical facts and fiction with the goal to educate and entertain the reader. For Aníbal González, orality seems to be an important component of the *tradiciones* as well as the author’s attempt to function as a “supreme dictator or guide” to join the diverse elements of the text as harmonious (65). Perhaps the most known author of this type of genre is Peruvian Ricardo Palma, author of *Tradiciones peruanas* (1872–1910) who according to González, also aimed to criticize and deconstruct “the genealogical framework that underlines nineteenth-century historicism” (63).
3. Guatimozín was another name for Cuauhtémoc who is also known as Cuauhtemotzin, the last Aztec emperor. For in-depth studies on Avellaneda’s novel *Guatimozín*, see the works listed in the bibliography of Evelyn Picon Garfield (“Conciencia”), Michèle

- Guicharnaud-Tollis, Raúl Ianes (1997), and María Teresa González de Garay.
4. The essay that originated the debate was Lastarria's, "Investigaciones sobre la influencia de la Conquista y el sistema colonial de los españoles en Chile." The same year in the newspaper *El Araucano* Bello responds to Lastarria's arguments in an essay with the same title. For an in-depth discussion of this debate, see Meléndez.
 5. For an analysis of the Columbus voyage in Avellaneda's poetry, see María C. Albin ("Género").
 6. For a study of *Album cubano* see María C. Albin ("La revista").
 7. The section "Galería de mujeres célebres" appeared for the first time in the journal directed by Avellaneda "*La Ilustración: Album de las damas*," see María C. Albin ("Fronteras").
 8. Bartosik-Vélez does not study any female writers in her chapter devoted to the case of Spanish America. For a further discussion on the legacy of Columbus in Spanish America, see chapter four, "Colombia: Discourses of Empire in Spanish America."
 9. One must remember that Cuba at the time (1862) was still considered a colony of Spain along with Puerto Rico and the Philippines. However, the political environment was tense and conflicts between Cuban creoles and peninsulars increased due to their different stances with regard to the slave trade and the sugar and tobacco industries. As Tulio Halperín Donghi reminds us, shortly after that in 1868 "a ten-year for independence" is launched resulting in Spain granting Cuba political autonomy in 1875 (156).
 10. This anecdote derives from the epilogue of her novel *Guatimozín*. Avellaneda did not include her novel *Guatimozín* in her *Obras literarias de la Señora Doña Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Novelas y leyendas* as she had not had a chance to revise it. Instead, she decided to include this anecdote in the last volume of her works.
 11. Bernal's original passage is quite similar. He mentions, "and so it appeared to all us, among who there was but one opinion upon the subject; that it was a most unjust and cruel sentence" (284). Bernal recalls Guatemuz's confession in which the *cacique* tells Cortés that he never planned a rebellion against him. In the recreation of the episode Bernal quotes the indigenous leader himself telling Cortés, "Malintzin! Now I find in what your false words and promises have ended-in my death. Better that I have fallen by my own hands than trust myself in your power in my city of Mexico." (283) Bernal shows his compassion toward the *cacique* and through Guatemuz's own words judges Cortés for his actions.
 12. The rest of the description states, "Guatemuz era de muy gentil disposición, así de cuerpo como de faiciones, y la cara algo larga y alegre, y los ojos mas parecían que cuando miraba que era con gravedad que halagueños y no había falta en ellos" (388) (Guatemuz was of very gentle disposition, as much of body as of countenance, a face that was long and happy, and his eyes shown even more when he looked with gravity upon the favored ones and saw no fault in them).
 13. Avellaneda adds the following note, "El último emperador de Méjico juntaba en sus venas la sangre de los Aztecas con la de sus antiguos enemigos los valientes fundadores del reino de Atzcapuzalco, que fué durante mucho tiempo el más poderoso e

- ilustre de todos los del Anahuac” (“Una anécdota” 165) (The last emperor of Mexico brought together in his veins the blood of the Aztecs with that of their old enemies, the valient founders of the kingdom of Atzacapuzalco, that was for a long time the most powerful and illustrious of all of the Anahuac).
14. For Fernando Unzueta, Avellaneda’s version of Guatimozín’s story (especially in her novel) is one of a tragic national romance. For Unzueta, Guatimozín’s death and the death of his wife reinforce Avellaneda’s criticism of the violence of conquest, while the love relationship between Cortés and Malinche underlines the possibility of the conquest as an illegitimate foundational act (213).
 15. Although Avellaneda seems to suggest that Cortés’s unrest was due to the guilt he felt toward his decision to order the execution of Guatemuz and his cousin, Bernal Díaz states that Cortés was also unhappy about all the vicissitudes they had suffered and the uncertainty waiting ahead. Bernal recounts, “bien quiero decir que como Cortés andaba mal dispuesto y aun muy pensativo e descontento del trabajoso camino que llevábamos, e como había mandado a ahorcar a Guatemuz e a su primo el señor de Tacuba” (491) (well I want to say that since Cortés was in a bad mood and very pensive and discontent over the difficult path we were taking, and how he had ordered the hanging of Guatemuz and his cousin the man from Tacuba).
 16. For Bernal, the reason for the accident had more to do with Cortés’s inattentiveness when he did not pay close attention to the idol figures that surrounded the room in the indigenous palace where he was staying.
 17. The story was narrated in chapters thirteen and fourteen of *El carnero*.
 18. The biographical information comes from Ulises Rojas, *El cacique de Turmequé y su época* and Luis Fernando Restrepo, “El Cacique de Turmequé o los agravios de la memoria.” See also Gamboa.
 19. According to Luis Fernando Restrepo, “En 1584 presentó a Felipe II el muy conocido “Memorial de agravios,” en el que documenta los múltiples abusos que sufrían los indígenas de parte de los encomenderos y las autoridades coloniales neogranadinas” (“El Cacique” 17) (In 1584, he presented to Felipe II the well-known “Memorial de agravios,” in which he documents the multiple abuses the indians suffered by the hands of the encomienda holders and Neo-Granadian colonial authorities). Restrepo adds that in this “Memorial,” Torres presented himself to the Spanish authorities as a “cacique Cristiano” (Christian indigenous leader) who “buscaba legitimar su dominio tanto por la tradición muisca como por la tradición jurídica hispánica” (“El Cacique” 18) (hoped to legitimize his dominion as much through the Muisca tradition as through the Hispanic juridic tradition).
 20. These studies have centered on documents found in the Archivo General de Indias and Archivo General de la Nación in Bogotá.
 21. Restrepo following Carolina Alzate refers to Avellaneda’s “El cacique de Turmequé” as a novel but it must be clarified that Avellaneda never refers to this story as a novel but instead calls it in her *Obras Completas* a “leyenda americana” (American legend). Critics such as Mary Cruz consider it a type of “tradición” (tradition).

22. Evelyn Picon Garfield and Carolina Alzate are among the most important critics who privilege this feminist approach when studying “El cacique de Turmequé.” See Picon Garfield (“Sexo/texto”) and Alzate.
23. For an in-depth study of Freyle’s misogynist view of colonial society see, Ivette Hernández Torres.
24. It is important to note that Unzueta is not discussing “El cacique de Turmequé.” He is referring instead to Avellaneda’s novel, *Guatimozín*.
25. For Avellaneda, Christopher Columbus belongs to Spain as Queen Isabel la Católica was the only one to recognize his plan to discover and conquer new lands.
26. For a discussion of the years which preceded and followed the insurrection, see Hugh Thomas.
27. For a discussion of other types of colonialism in Latin America, see Alvaro Félix Bolaños and Gustavo Verdesio.

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**The “Presence” of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in
the Three *Tradiciones* from *Mi última excursión por
los Pirineos* (1859)**

Catharina Vallejo

The twelve *tradiciones* (traditions) that Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda published between 1844 and 1860 share a complex cluster of circumstances, which include the interplay between the particularities of the genre itself—a way to conceive, recuperate, and safeguard history as orally transmitted by the local community (see Ezama Gil 337)—and her own historical position as a woman writer from the colonies writing and publishing in Spain during the Romantic era, an exceedingly complex environment in itself. The first story published by Gómez de Avellaneda, a fairly lengthy text titled “La baronesa de Joux,” was published in the newspaper *El Globo* in Madrid in 1844 (Cruz 20), quite an early moment in the history of women’s writing in Spain, as Susan Kirkpatrick mentions that 1841 was the start of a “publication explosion” by women in Spain, though mostly of poetry (1, 63). This text was followed by the other eleven until 1860 and, in fact, Gómez de Avellaneda republished a number of them in those years, both in Spain and in Cuba. These stories have very different sources (friends, tourist guides, books, her brother) and chronological and geographical locations (a traditional legend from France and one from Cuba, medieval Spain, the conquest of Mexico and colonial Peru, two stories about Switzerland), including five that take place in different eras in the Basque region and the Pyrenees.

I have chosen three of these latter stories, which, in addition to being from the same region, also have other common characteristics: they were all collected—told to Gómez de Avellaneda by informants—during her travels through the Basque countryside and the Pyrenees in 1857 and 1859 and, the issue that fascinates me, she participates as a speaking (seeing, standing, sitting) subject in the re-telling of the stories. I wish to explore this ‘being there’

of Avellaneda in the two narrative instances (as narratee to the informant and author of the *tradición* text) as per Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s view of ‘presence’ as being a “spatial relationship to the world and its objects. Something that is ‘present’ is supposed to be tangible . . . [and] can have an immediate impact on human bodies” (xiii).

The major demonstration of the ‘presence’ of Avellaneda the narrator-writer in these narratives is the oral expression of her relation with the informants. Indeed, much as Ricardo Palma’s *tradiciones* will have, Gómez de Avellaneda’s also present two narrative voices, that of the informant who tells the story and that of the ‘I’ or declared narrator of the text, that is, Gómez de Avellaneda herself, alternating—both ‘present’—between her own memory of the story-telling and the story itself (her text). Through the conversations with the informant, the text-narrator reveals her presence and thus, instead of disappearing from the narrative (as Ricardo Palma generally does), makes her more ‘present’ as a material (physical, corporal) component of the narratives, and a presence that is remarkable for her time and circumstances. In addition, there are significant differences in this ‘presence’ as relating to the travel accounts that gave rise to the stories and as relating to the *tradiciones*.

My interest in this subtle ‘presence’ of the author-narrator in these three narratives and their context thus bears on how she gets involved, and how her presence—physical and dynamic—in the *tradiciones* themselves is revealed in the space of the text; how this ‘presence’ constitutes the material (physical, corporal) link of the signifying effect of the *tradición*, in which the spatial dimension (involving perspective, a horizon of limits, and the substance that space occupies) comes to dominate the temporal line (from the past of the *tradición* to the present of Gómez de Avellaneda’s own time and circumstances).

The first issue, how Avellaneda—traveler, writer—gets involved in the stories she presents is of interest in itself, as it refers to her obtaining the information during her travels and her relation to the informants and the sites where the *tradiciones* originated, as published in the accounts of her travels. The bibliography on women’s travels and travel writing is now quite vast, even in these early years (see, for example, Albin, Grivel, Hahner, Méndez-Rodenas, Pratt, Schmidt, Vallejo); suffice it to say that mid-nineteenth-century travel by women was still quite rare, and more so the publication of their accounts. What is relevant to the current issue is how the author (woman-traveler-writer Avellaneda) signifies in this travel writing. As Noel Valis states, the act of writing is an act of self-affirmation (31), and in travel writing by women, in particular, specifies Aileen Schmidt, “the validation of the feminine subject is [its] fundamental sign” (221). This was, of course, a phenomenon that went counter to the social and sexual roles that patriarchal convention had established for women in Spain. In fact, the position of the woman writer in Spain during Romanticism was a marginal and complex one. Among others, Kirk-

patrick has detailed how, though individual subjectivity constituted a central reality during those times, the paradigms of selfhood were always male (47, 23), and thus “the woman writer who situated herself in any way within Romantic discourse as a writing subject confronted and challenged a basic premise of that discourse, a premise that located women outside subjectivity and the production of meaning” (25).

It is of some interest to note that Avellaneda (and some other women writers) were aware of this challenge. A brief article that appeared in the Madrid newspaper *La Iberia* (subtitled *Diario Liberal*) in August 1857—as part of a debate that took place during the years of Avellaneda’s travel-writing, on whether Avellaneda (and by extension, any woman writer), “¿Es poeta o poetisa?” (see de la Rosa)—includes an excerpt from an article by Avellaneda that contains a response to the well-known writer Carolina Coronado, who had apparently stated that Avellaneda should be called a ‘poeta.’ In her article, which was a report on a folkloric celebration, Avellaneda stated that she could not write too much about its energetic, tumultuous music, as already

algunas estrofas un poco rudas han bastado para que se me quiera incluir, como ella [Coronado] dice, entre los poetas barbudos, ¿qué no dirían si descubriese aquí imprudentemente mis arranques belicosos? Esperaré a que la ilustre extremeña pruebe [. . .] que no le plugo a Dios crear *almas varones* y *almas hembras*, para poder entonces manifestar sin peligro los impulsos que, irresistibles y exabruptos, se suelen levantar en mi mente. Me limitaré, por tanto, a decir a V. *femenilmente* . . . (3)

(just a few crude stanzas have been sufficient for them to want to include me, as she [Coronado] says, amongst the bearded poets. What would they say if they were to imprudently discover here my belligerent outbursts? I will wait for the illustrious Extremaduran woman to prove [. . .] that it didn’t please God to create *male souls* and *female souls*, and to then just manifest without risk the impulses that, irresistible and abrupt, tend to spring up in my mind. I will limit myself, therefore, to speaking to you *femininely* . . .)

The writing subject as a ‘gendered’ quality is made very clear here.

In addition, it should also be emphasized that from its origins in Germany, the culture of Romanticism defined the self as ‘mind’ (Henderson 8), and thus during the nineteenth century, including in Spain, spiritual or intellectual ‘meaning’ came to dominate. In this philosophical perspective, whatever is tangible, whatever belongs to the materiality of the signifier, becomes secondary; the interpretation of the world around the human beings was seen as extracting inherent meanings from the objects in the world (Gumbrecht 30, 26)

—and the world itself, its being-there, lost its value as meaning. Indeed, as Gumbrecht reminds us (25), the dichotomy between ‘spiritual’ and ‘material’ is the basis of an epistemological structure on which Western philosophy would rely after the Renaissance and early modernity, as ‘subject’ (always seen as male) versus ‘object’ paradigm.

The Romanticism that came about in Spain accepted these basic original concepts of the movement as it was growing in other European countries, but within a “protean” (Silver 13) atmosphere that, on the one hand, made it (diluted it) into a general cultural ambience and, on the other, emphasized several of its particular characteristics—to some extent to the exclusion of others. Spain was marginalized in Europe, geographically (by the Pyrenees—a limit broached by Avellaneda in her travels), historically (by its conquest, colonization and loss of America—Avellaneda’s origins), and culturally (by its ties to the Orient and its denial of this loss). Michael Iarocci expresses the “symbolic amputation of Spain from ‘modernity,’ ‘Europe’ and the ‘West’” as being among the most profound historical determinants in defining modern Spanish culture (8), which nineteenth-century Spanish Romanticism began to express. Philip Silver defines its main characteristic as being a “backward-looking historical romanticism, resurrecting a supposedly admirable Medieval way of life” (10) in a strategy of legitimation of a grandiose history—in which Avellaneda’s *tradiciones* set in the Pyrenees can be seen as participating. This first “variegated” Romanticism, becoming more and more politicized (Silver 70), lasted until the mid-1840s and the continuing civil and military disorders after the first Carlist war (which of course centred on the Basques and their political concepts) had ended in 1839, transforming into an “attenuated” romanticism, which Silver terms to have a more “Biedermeierish” quality (23)—non-political, conventional bourgeois, interested in small-town and country life, without losing its historicism—until the revolution of 1868.

It is clear that these characteristics of Romanticism, and these time-periods, are exceedingly pertinent to Gómez de Avellaneda’s travel writing and the three *tradiciones* with which I am dealing. As travel writer, Avellaneda is very manifestly ‘present’ in her texts, both as a member of the husband-and-wife pair that traveled together (a ‘nosotros’), and as the singular ‘subject’ that sought out and told the stories. Her accounts abound in the vocabulary (generally of admiration) and verbs that are standard in travel writing: “nos transportaron, pudimos visitar, vimos, asistimos” (VI, 7-9) ([they] transported us, we were able to visit, we saw, we attended),¹ but when, in the same first travel account—which gives rise to the *tradiciones* “La bella Toda” and “Avendaño y Elvira” or “Los doce jabalíes”—“la imaginación” (imagination) comes into play, Avellaneda is evidently alone, the cicerone addressing her in the singular, and she expressing herself as “yo” (I): “me detuve, seguí” (9, 10) (I stopped, I followed).²

As a genre, the *tradiciones* relate to oral customs (communicated through a “present” human voice), local history (Basque, in this case), love (tragic), and violence. The texts being examined were collected in the mid-1800s in Spain by Avellaneda, a woman born in Cuba (the only major colony left of the empire) during travels in the region with her husband, in a time when women did not usually travel, nor had communication with men (as she did with one of her informants), and published in Madrid (which still considered itself the empire’s metropolis) as a mixed genre: travelogue, letter to the editor and *tradición*. This publication in different ‘media’ has its effect. The three texts are “La bella Toda,” “Los doce jabalíes,” and “La ondina del lago azul”; a brief summary is in order.

“La bella Toda” takes place during the reign of Queen Isabel la Católica, whose husband Fernando de Aragón had seduced a young lady (Toda de Larrea), who was sent by the Queen to a convent with her child, where she stayed until her death. “Los doce jabalíes” also deals with a love-story, between Elvira and Avendaño (the names serving as the title with which the *tradición* was published in the *Diario de la Marina* of Havana). The story narrates the intrigues instigated by a man named Lazama in order to conquer the happily married Elvira. Avendaño is shown as very able in many of the typical activities of young men of his class, and awakens the envy of the Prince of Vizcaya—a rivalry promoted by Lazama. When the prince decides to celebrate a circus in the Plaza Mayor, with twelve “fat swine” that he proposes to spear mounted on a brave steed (“brioso corcel”), the steed throws the prince off his saddle and Avendaño, running his lance through several of the swine, saves the prince, thus further stoking the latter’s envy. That night, three masked men arrive at the house of the young couple, take Avendaño and, killing him with a dagger, open the balcony doors and throw his “still-warm body” to the swine in the Plaza. By the next morning, only a few clean bones remain scattered over the street (“sólo quedaron morondos y esparcidos huesos” [V, 629]).³

The last *tradición* deals with the obsession by a young man from the Pyrenees region for a woman that appears to him in a lake. He plays his flute for her and she floats on the lake in a small boat accompanied by other young women, all of whom the young man sees as being *ondinas*, that is, water nymphs. The woman refuses to approach him, and one day the young man disappears mysteriously, according to the informant Lorenzo, who participated in the efforts to ‘cure’ the young man from his obsession and who searched for him after his disappearance.

The first two *tradiciones* examined here, “La bella Toda” and “Los doce jabalíes” (published in Vol. V of the 1914 edition under the double title as one text), are told to Gómez de Avellaneda by the same *amiga* (friend), also called *cicerone* (V, 619) (tour guide) and, according to the research carried out by Rocío Charques Gámez (70), were published together in her series of articles

in Havana’s *Diario de la Marina* titled “Recuerdos de mi última excursión por los Pirineos” in 1860. They are explicitly linked both in the travel account (where “La bella Toda” only appears mentioned in a very brief paragraph) and in the texts of the two *tradiciones*. In the travel account Avellaneda’s informant is her “amable e inteligente cicerone . . . una distinguida señorita” (VI, 9) (kind and intelligent travel guide . . . a distinguished young lady), who ‘sees’ that Avellaneda refuses to abandon the center of the Plaza, “como si la fijase en él un encanto secreto” (VI, 10) (as if a secret spell had transfixed her upon it). Near the end of the travel account, the *cicerone* takes Avellaneda to the house where Avendaño and Elvira lived, so that the old lady grocer who lives there now—a descendant of the couple—can recount their story, which Avellaneda “aunque en distinto estilo” (VI, 10) (although in a different style), has, in turn, just related in her text. In the text of the *tradiciones*, however, at the end of the first, very brief “La bella Toda,” the young friend *cicerone* (and not the old lady in the house) also tells the story of “Los doce jabalíes,” saying to Avellaneda the narrator: “sentémonos, . . . y prepare su cartera de viaje para tomar notas del trágico suceso que tuvo lugar en este mismo paraje . . . [y que] no ha sido [borrado] de la memoria de los bilbaínos, quienes conservan con fidelidad la terrífica tradición siguiente” (V, 621) (Let’s sit down . . . and prepare your travel portfolio to take notes of the tragic events that occurred in this very place . . . [and that] have not been [erased] from the memory of the people of Bilbao, who faithfully conserve the following terrifying *tradición*). This comment is made because the friend has ‘observed’ that Avellaneda has stopped in the Plaza, “como si fijase sus plantas una atracción misteriosa” (V, 620) (as if her feet had been transfixed by a mysterious attraction)—in other words, physically “grounded” to the environment of the story that she has just heard. Avellaneda answers that she seems to feel that it is not only the tears of “la bella Toda” that have given this old Plaza the inexplicable power that is disturbing her imagination (“el inexplicable poder con que agita mi fantasía,” [V, 620]). The ‘presence’ of Avellaneda the narrator here, therefore, is in this case stronger in the text of the *tradición*, and it is through her voice, in conversation, as well as her feelings, which she had already expressed at the beginning of “La bella Toda”: without knowing the cause, she felt suddenly possessed by a certain vague feeling of melancholy (“sin saber la causa, me sentí súbitamente poseída de cierto sentimiento de vaga melancolía” [V, 619]).

It is worth noting that the verbs and tenses emphasize the desire, the appearance, and feelings: “como si fijase sus plantas” (as if her feet had been transfixed), “parece presentir” (seems to feel)—all indirect expressions of the bodily status, or of physical actions. Indeed, it is notable that the ‘presence’ of Avellaneda as narrator consists mainly of verbal expressions (her words in conversation) of her emotions, fantasies, and dreams, even sometimes expressed through silence: the absence of voice and actions. Feelings were of

great importance to Avellaneda, as evident in her entertaining (and significant) texts published as “La mujer” in her magazine, *Album cubano de lo bueno y lo bello*, in 1860, that is, a very short time after the travels that gave rise to these three *tradiciones*. In the *Album* texts she underscores the fact that ‘feeling’ is the base for “los más gloriosos hechos, [ya que éstos] han sido siempre obra del sentimiento . . . fuente y motora de otras [cualidades]” (293) (the most glorious events, [since these] have always been the work of the emotions . . . source and instigator of other [qualities])⁴—insinuating, of course, that the glorious feats have been accomplished by men, and that ‘feeling’ is not exclusive to women.⁵ There is, however, a “supremacía” (286) (supremacy) of the affective quality in women—present in them more than in men—and therefore Woman has an astonishing force whose sphere of action cannot easily be determined (“una fuerza asombrosa, cuya esfera de acción sería bien difícil determinar” [294]), clearly defying the *barbudo* (bearded) perspective on women writers that she had outlined in her newspaper article on folkloric music. This whole section of her *Album* article is uncannily close to Gumbrecht’s take on the development of modernity in his *The Production of Presence*, which values the dominance of intelligence over matter which, in turn, according to contemporary feminism, is *a/the* phallogocentric perspective that has prevailed in the West. As is evident, in her newspaper or referential texts, Avellaneda already combats this view, and in her travel accounts and *tradiciones* this aspect of the female personality (the importance of feelings) also comes to the fore as one of the main elements of the ‘presence’ of the writer herself in the *tradiciones*, through her verbal expression of these feelings in the texts. At the end of “Los doce jabalíes,” Avellaneda the narrator refers to the shadows of the night giving her “ojos de mi mente” (mind’s eye) a certain undefinable poetry during “un prolongado silencio” (a prolonged silence) between herself and her friend-informant (V, 630). This silence and mental activity is followed during the night by “un insomnio agitado” (an agitated wakefulness) in which she ‘sees’ the tears of “la bella Toda” (all of these are details omitted from the travel account), wrenched from her palace, and the blood of Avendaño running beneath the feet of the raging swine (“las lágrimas de la bella Toda, arrancada de su palacio . . . y la sangre de Avendaño corriendo bajo los pies de los furiosos jabalíes” [V, 630])—again linking the two stories and making herself ‘present,’ even through her mind’s eye and the thoughts forced upon her through insomnia.

As mentioned, for Gumbrecht ‘presence’ refers to a spatial relation between the person and his/her world and its objects (xiii, 17), and its effects relate exclusively to the bodily senses, as “an integral part of any world-observation” (xv, 39). The main ‘sense’ that signals ‘presence’ in these texts by Avellaneda is vision: the *cicerone* ‘sees’ things in Avellaneda’s behaviour; Avellaneda ‘sees’ with her ‘mind’s eye’—in her poetry and dreams—and the

couple went to ‘see’ the lake. The metaphorical relation between physical seeing and ‘understanding’ or ‘interpreting’ is very strong—again as developed during the progression of modernity (see Gumbrecht)—and thus Avellaneda makes the relation between matter and mind transparent in these texts.

So far we are aware mostly of the apparent absence of other manifestations of the body, but this is an absence marked by explicit silences—which, alternating with the voice and the thoughts that express ideas and desires, in effect underscores the ‘presence’ of the body, and this especially through vision. There cannot be thought (or looks) without there being a brain (or eyes), a physical body of a person or the “materialities” required for communication to take place, creating what Gumbrecht calls the “interface of meaning and materiality” (11, 12), in which meaning is abstract, conceptual, historically grounded, and materiality is substance, being, space—a connection (‘interface’), which, because it is subtle, makes it more ‘meaningful’ and interesting. This phenomenon is even more ‘present’ in the *tradición* called “La ondina del lago azul,” the longest of the three texts examined. “La bella Toda” runs barely three pages; “Los doce jabalies,” eleven—both “tradiciones vascas” (Basque traditions), but “La ondina . . .” is thirty, and is a “tradición pirenaica” (a Pyrenean tradition). In this text there is no direct interplay between the travel account (which does not even mention any legend or story related to the lake, this just being one of two “hermosos lagos” [VI, 42] [beautiful lakes], and is offered exclusively in the plural narrative voice ‘nosotros’ [we])⁶ and the *tradición*, which does begin by referring directly to the life and voyages of Avellaneda and her husband: “Era el año de 1859, y tocaba a su término la temporada veraniega que habíamos pasado en los Pirineos franceses” (V, 665) (It was the year 1859, and the summery season that we had experienced in the French Pyrenees was coming to an end). It then follows with a summary of the tours the couple has made through the region, naming the sites visited (as related in the relevant installment of the travel account of her “Última excursión”), still expressed in the first person plural, as per the travel account (VI, 37–43), which is here incorporated into the text of the *tradición*. This narrative continues, saying that: “Aun no habíamos visto el lago azul, resolvimos aquella excursión postrera en compañía de algunos otros bañistas, que nos presentaron por cicerone al inteligente Lorenzo, a quien soy deudora de la extraña historia que voy a referir a los benévolos lectores de estas desaliñadas páginas” (V, 666) (We had not yet seen the blue lake, [so] we concluded that final excursion in the company of other bathers, who proposed as our travel guide the intelligent Lorenzo, to whom I am indebted for this strange story that I’m going to relate to the benevolent readers of these untidy pages). The switch from traveler-companion and its ‘nosotros’ (we) to ‘yo-escritora’ (I-writer) is very manifest in the change from the plural to a singular first person subject. In this *tradición*, Avellaneda is also fully present through her

vocal expressions in conversation with Lorenzo, as well as through her comments that reflect her experience of walking with Lorenzo, and that mark the “frame” of the *tradición* that is the narrative. Lorenzo invites her to sit at the shore of the lake and listen to him. “Hice lo que me pedía” (V, 667) (I did what he asked of me) she writes, and, by sitting (as in “La bella Toda,” by standing), thus marking, “grounding” her material presence.

As is the case with the other two *tradiciones*, the ‘historical base’ of this last text is the coincidence of the author finding herself—being present (“fijadas sus plantas” [her feet transfixed])—in the place in which certain events occurred, which motivates their re-telling. And in the pages that follow, Lorenzo—the informant and second narrator who addresses the narratee that is the other ‘I’-narrator—tells the story of “La ondina del lago azul,” but with multiple commentaries addressed to the “señora” (lady) who accompanies him, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Here there is a clear example of the Ricardo Palma model of the *tradición*, a narrative with a frame, the latter being the secondary anecdote of how Gómez de Avellaneda came to know the legend of the water nymph, but a frame and a story that end up interrelated when Lorenzo in his narration frequently addresses the primary narrator, making references to her being and state of mind: “vos, señora, que me parecéis afecta a todo lo maravilloso” (V, 666) (you, my lady, who seem to be attracted to all things marvelous), “¡Oh, señora!, no penséis que exagero” (V, 668) (Oh, my lady! Don’t think that I’m exaggerating), “reíd, si queréis, señora” (V, 675) (laugh, if you want, my lady), etc. Here, then, the (actual) reader of the text perceives the ‘presence’ of the author-narrator mainly in her role of narratee—in effect, the reverse of narrator.

Again, the contact between Lorenzo and the author-narrator is revealed at the register of the voice. At various points Lorenzo interrupts his narrative to attend to some of the other tourists that form part of his group; the commentary by the primary narrator (the author of the *tradición*) on how well Lorenzo manages this maneuver assigns him the status of a skillful writer:

Se alejó Lorenzo para hacer notar a los compañeros, que me precedían, las bellezas de la zafírea [sic] llanura que estaban contemplando... Tan hábil retirada en el instante mismo en que acababa de excitar hasta lo sumo mi impaciente curiosidad, era un rasgo digno de Dumas o de Soulié... y concedí a mi hombre el placer de fastidiarme un rato en ansiosa expectativa, pero al cabo logré posesionarme de él. (666–667)

(Lorenzo distanced himself to signal to the companions who preceded me, the beauties of the sapphire plains that they were looking at . . . Such a timely retreat at the same instant that my impatient curiosity had just piqued, was a move deserving of Dumas or Soulié . . . and I ceded to my

man the pleasure of annoying me for a bit longer in anxious expectation, but in the end I succeeded in taking him into my possession.)

What is of course most interesting about this comment is the reference to “mi hombre” (my man) and her power to “posesionarme de él”—a clear empowerment of the female ‘I’ who is the narrator over her informant, at a very personal level, which situates Lorenzo not just as informant but as an object possessed by her, as if he were a book, for example.

When it is decided to stop the walk for that day—and therefore the rest of the story Lorenzo is telling her—the narrator expresses her “no poco” displeasure, having to abandon that place and suspend her “female and poetic curiosity” that had been so strongly animated by the story that she had been listening to about people whose ‘echoes’ still seemed to her to be wandering around (“abandonar aquel sitio llevando en suspenso mi curiosidad de mujer y de poeta, vivamente excitada por lo que acababa de oír de la historia . . . del joven y desconocido artista . . . de cuya flauta . . . aún me parecía que vagaban errantes . . . ecos perdidos de místicos amores” [V, 673] [abandoning that place carrying in suspense my curiosity as a woman and a poet, intensely excited by the story I had just heard . . . of the young and unknown artist . . . of whose flute . . . lost echoes of mystical passions . . . still seemed to me to be errantly wandering]). In the text of this *tradición*, therefore, we again find the author emphasizing her profession as writer but also with a comment on what in her times was seen as a ‘natural’ characteristic in women, being ‘possessed’ by curiosity. Thus, the next day, the narrator attempts and obtains “otro tête-à-tête con el Dumas campesino” (another tête-à-tête with the peasant Dumas) in order to continue the storytelling by Lorenzo (V, 674). Here again is a literary reference related to her informant, but accompanied by a reference to the body, and concretely the part that needs to be possessed: the head.

Toward the end of this *tradición* there is again a reference to the literary quality of Lorenzo’s story, as well as an explicit reference to silence, caused by how the story affects the primary narrator (author): “Largo rato guardamos silencio el cicerone y yo después que él hubo terminado la novelesca historia, cuyo trágico desenlace me había afectado mucho” (V, 688) (For a long while the travel guide and I maintained our silence after he had finished that novelistic story, whose tragic ending had much affected me)—that is, how the story silenced her voice, the most evident trace of her physical presence in the narratives. Indeed, silence plays an interesting role in all three *tradiciones*, to the extent that it becomes a signifying ‘presence.’ In “La bella Toda” the *cicerone* speaks to the narrator of the text, thus explicitly interrupting the silence that they had both maintained for a few minutes (“—interrumpiendo el silencio que guardábamos ambas hacía algunos minutos—” [V, 619]), the text states in parenthesis, a textual sign of interruption. And in “Los doce jabalíes” there

is no intervention whatsoever on the part of the primary narrator for the first five pages of the narrative by the informant, nor yet even dialogue on the part of the characters in the story; the only voice that is ‘heard’ is that of the informant-friend who tells what at the end of “La bella Toda” she had announced would be a “terrificada tradición” (V, 621) (terrifying tradition).

The end of “La ondina del lago azul” is interesting because it takes place in the present time of the two narrators, again mixing the narrative ‘frame’ into the story told, and requiring a comment from the narratee-Avellaneda present at the telling. Lorenzo relates how he was able to travel through Europe for some time, and how in France he met a lady that he thought he recognized as being the water-nymph of the tale he had told Avellaneda. He proposes the following to his narratee: “¿No pensáis, como yo, señora, que mejor fuera conservar intacta mi sencilla creencia en la pérfida ondina del lago azul, que no concebir la desconsoladora sospecha de que pueda abrigarse en el pecho de una mujer la crueldad más implacable?” (V, 690) (Don’t you think, as I do, my lady, that it would be better to keep my simple belief in the deceitful water nymph of the blue lake intact, and not imagine the distressing suspicion that a woman’s breast can hold such implacable cruelty?)—and she responds “vivamente” (in a lively manner) with a comment that, in this case,

La extraña historia que me habéis referido, despojada de todo lo que tiene de maravilloso y bello, vendría a ser solamente una indigna comedia de la coquetería y del capricho, representada (a guisa de pasatiempo) por una gran señora del mundo positivo . . . y la trágica escena con que la terminó . . . podría considerarse horrible efecto de la burla lanzada por la prosaica realidad sobre la poética aspiración. (V, 690)

(The strange story you’ve told me, stripped of all its wonders and beauty, would just end up being an unworthy comedy of flirting and whim, represented (in the guise of a hobby) by a great lady of the positive world . . . and the tragic scene with which it ended . . . could be considered a horrible consequence of the mockery hurled by common reality against poetic aspiration.)

And to explore this comment, in conclusion here I would like to introduce the concept of performativity of gender, proposed by Judith Butler as “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (xv). In the texts examined, the author’s ‘presence’ is revealed especially through her voice—and its absence. In the last paragraphs of “La ondina” there is still a voice, responding “vivamente”—a sign of conscience, life and thought on the part of the narrator “present” in the scene she narrates. The

narrator defines herself as a woman and as a poet—the origin of the voice that narrates. The informants converse with that voice, they address this “señora” through a near-ritual cadence, and at times it is explicitly silenced. This is the voice that makes the primary narrator “present,” that in effect permits the reader to know the mental activities of the one being who has the triple role of person-narrator-character. Because we must also remember, as Judith Butler indicates, that the external world in great measure determines the activities of that internal self, that the psyche works to internalize the external world, transforming it (xvi). In this way a game is established, a game of appearances, contradictions, a dance of masks (Butler 63)—a view perhaps proper to the *tradicción* too—a genre in which the narrator can be ‘present,’ through her senses, her voice, in different dimensions of her vision, and through her explicit silences—as is the case of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *tradiciones* from *Mi última excursión por los Pirineos*.

Notes

1. I will quote from the 1914 edition of Avellaneda’s *Obras*, where the *tradiciones* appear in Vol. V (*Novelas y leyendas*), and the travel accounts in Vol. VI (*Miscelánea*).
2. A brief comment is in order here regarding the similarities between Avellaneda’s travel account and that of Soledad Acosta de Samper, the Colombian writer who traveled through Europe during the late 1850s. Acosta de Samper in particular published her travels through Switzerland, which she undertook with her husband in 1859 (the same year as Avellaneda’s in the Pyrenees!), and sent to the newspaper *El Mosaico* in Bogotá, and in 1879–1880, reprinted it in serialization in her own magazine *La Mujer* (see Vallejo, “La perspectiva femenina”). Perhaps, although the travel sites were fairly distant from each other, since the terrain, era, and circumstances were similar, the two travelogues have many things (experiences, subject expressions, vocabulary) in common. A thorough comparison of these texts would make an interesting study.
3. A brief aside is of interest, as it relates the story even to our own present. In November of 2013, a notice from Italy was posted in the news that a *mafioso* boss had been thrown alive into a pigsty by his rivals, where he was killed, also leaving, according to the newspaper report, the equivalent of “morondos y esparcidos huesos” (bare and scattered bones). See “Mafia Boss Eaten By Pigs.”
4. The quotations from the *Album* are taken from the 1871 version of the *Obras literarias*, Vol. 5b, as available on-line in <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com>
5. In fact, she criticizes the exclusive use of ‘great intelligence’ without feeling: “la vasta inteligencia asociada a mezquino poder afectivo es [. . .] una monstruosidad”

(293) (vast intelligence associated with paltry affective power is [. . .] a monstrosity). These quotes are from the section titled “La mujer considerada respecto a las grandes cualidades de carácter, de que se derivan el valor y el patriotismo.”

6. Memorable in this text are the remarks Avellaneda makes about “los ingleses” that travel with her group, and how similar these comments are to the ones contained in Acosta de Samper’s accounts of her travels through Switzerland and the English travelers she encounters there.

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**The Making of *Leoncia*:
Romanticism, Tragedy, and Feminism¹**

Alexander Selimov

Leoncia, a long-forgotten play by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873), staged in 1840, but never published, appeared in print for the first time in 1917, thanks to the efforts of a prominent Spanish literary historian, Emilio Cotarelo y Mori. This very first piece of theater that Gómez de Avellaneda authored collected dust for three quarters of a century, and would have continued to do so if not for the sudden resurgence of interest in the Cuban-born Spanish dramatist, owed to an unauthorized publication of her private love letters. It is not totally clear why Gómez de Avellaneda decided against publishing her first play, which had a very successful premiere in Seville and enjoyed a warm reception by Spanish theater critics. The encouragement the author received from her first reviewers stimulated her to continue on a road leading to national recognition and international literary fame as a dramatist.

Between 1840 and 1844, Gómez de Avellaneda published a volume of poems, several novels, and theater pieces. Although some have argued that *La Peregrina*'s² legacy is indebted mostly to her poetry (Bleiberg, Ihrle and Pérez 741), the contribution she made to Spanish theater is equally significant (Piñeyro 152; Smith 236). By 1859, she had produced a total of seventeen plays, including five original tragedies: *Alfonso Munio* (1844), *El Príncipe de Viana* (1844), *Egilona* (1845), *Saúl* (1849) and *Baltazar* (1859), “matching in productivity and creativity many of her male counterparts, and frequently surpassing them in popular reception” (Gies 193). The first and the last of these tragedies were applauded as masterpieces; *Alfonso Munio* earned the author immediate recognition in literary circles of the capital, while *Baltazar* was announced as one of the top plays in nineteenth-century Spain.

The first reviewers of *Leoncia* were positively impressed by the play, describing the premiere as a total success:

Un drama, primera composición de una joven española [. . .] debía excitar y excitó vivamente nuestra curiosidad. Es tan raro el número de producciones originales que se representan en el teatro [. . .] *La Peregrina* ha triunfado en la empresa que se propuso [. . .] Hemos visto a un público, bien difícil de contentar por cierto, escuchar con una atención sostenida los últimos actos del drama, y hemos sorprendido el llanto en los ojos de personas. (Cotarelo y Mori 426)

(A play, the first composition by a young Spaniard [. . .] was bound to excite our curiosity and so it did. It is so rare to see original productions in our theaters [. . .]. *La Peregrina* triumphed in the enterprise she proposed to herself [. . .] We saw our hard-to-please public pay great attention to the last acts of the drama, and even shed tears. [translation mine])

Other reviews, referred to by Emilio Cotarelo in his comprehensive book *La Avellaneda y sus obras*, attest to the fact that, in the eyes of her contemporaries, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda positioned herself as an innovative and talented dramatist from the very beginning of her career. Her plays catered to the contemporary audience's heightened interest in national theater. Avellaneda produced highly original work for the Spanish stage, which at the time was still heavily populated by foreign productions and Golden Age Comedia *refundiciones* (recasts) in spite of the successful competition coming from Duque.

Leoncia presents a tragedy of a noble soul who struggles for acceptance amidst a web of social prejudice, while simultaneously working to maintain her dignity. The structure and enactment of the plot conform to the aesthetic criteria of the romantic literary model. Gómez de Avellaneda depicts a love triangle consisting of three characters: Carlos Maldonado, a young aristocrat, his fiancée Elena de Castro, a young maiden of noble lineage, and Leoncia, a mysterious mature woman, for whom Carlos feels a fatal attraction. The situation becomes exacerbated by rumors of an alleged affair between Leoncia and her friend, an elderly man by the name of Count Peñafiel. The love theme serves to set the stage for a conflict modeled on the ethics and aesthetics of romanticism, between a virtuous but disgraced individual and a cruel, corrupt society.

Gómez de Avellaneda appropriates the strategies of the male-generated and male-centered romantic discourse to construct her female protagonist. Leoncia is not a typical idealized female character objectified by male desire, but a full-fledged romantic hero(ine), who exercises agency in her confrontation with a hostile environment. A noble heart and a virtuous soul, she has experienced many dark moments in her life. Seduced in her youth by an immoral libertine, she gave birth to a beautiful daughter, only to lose her in a shipwreck soon after. Leoncia's mother perished in the same disaster, while her father died of grief and shame some time later. Devastated by all this loss, Leoncia

has been blaming herself ever since for “murdering” her own family (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 71). As the plot progresses, the author emphasizes more fully the archetypal nature of the romantic heroine’s experience. Leoncia suffers unjust persecution and debasement by Madrid’s society, and in a moment of extreme anguish, cries out, “No tengo padre, ni madre [. . .] Soy sola en el desierto del mundo” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 67) (I do not have a father or mother [. . .] I am all alone in the desert of the world; [translation mine]). Like many other romantic protagonists, Leoncia experiences *Welschmerz*, although she does seem to find some comfort in the presence of her only friend, Count Peñafiel. This goes along the lines of an early Romantic paradigm, according to which an anguished individual can find temporary solace in a virtuous friend (Sebold 32–33). One of the first examples of this paradigm appears in 1777 in *Oda XXI, A la mañana en mi desampara y organdad* por Juan Meléndez Valdés (1754–1817). The poet reveals his mental torment caused by the experience of living in a “corrupt world” and describes himself as “Huérfano, joven, solo y desvalido” (189) (Orphaned, young, lonely, and powerless; translation mine). Yet, in spite of his feelings of grave distress, abandonment, and even suicidal thoughts, he has a friend whom he addresses in his *Elegy II, A Jovino: el melancólico*, complaining about his painful solitude, confessing that his heart longs for virtue, “su corazón por la virtud suspira,” and imploring him to come to his rescue (Meléndez Valdés 202).

Avellaneda’s Leoncia also has the privilege of having a friend who is able to offer her a helping hand in a moment when she is “young,” “alone,” and “without shelter”: “sola, joven y sin amparo” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 67). Avellaneda goes to great lengths to convince the readers / spectators of the non-sexual nature of the relationship between her female protagonist and the Count. Peñafiel treats Leoncia as his daughter, and when she confesses feeling alone and abandoned he reminds her of his support and his “paternal affection” for her (67). In response, Leoncia accepts that the count is indeed a father figure in her life (73).

The Romantic hero is a rebel who defies “the moral and social conventions of his time” (Bevan 40), and longs to recover his faith in the meaning of life through his search for the absolute ideal. It would seem at first that Leoncia feels a passionate, all-encompassing love for Carlos, but just like male heroes in Romantic drama, she is infatuated with the idea of love, and her feelings are highly egocentric. Leoncia wants Carlos’s love and esteem as an antidote against slanderous rumors of an affair with the Count. She feels devastated, violated, and trampled by her past, and at the same time humiliated by society (Cotarelo y Mori 426). In scene seven of the first act, when Carlos asks Leoncia to trust him, she refuses to disclose anything that in her mind could diminish his respect for her. Unlike her young suitor, Leoncia has a clear understanding of the many obstacles that stand in their way, and

when Carlos offers her a Rousseauian escape from the corrupt society, she knows that she can't accept it. At that point, the discourse of the play moves from a depiction of a typical romantic conflict with social norms, to a feminist questioning of the patriarchal order. Leoncia does not believe Carlos will be able to overcome the patriarchal infatuation with feminine purity, and knows that he may reject her once he has a more intimate knowledge of her life. Yet she is not willing to let go of him completely, because she needs to hold on to this idealized love, which is a source of vital energy for her, as of course should be the case for a true Romantic hero. Their conversation in scene eight is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of the count Peñafiel. Carlos, inflamed by jealousy, storms out of the house. He now believes the rumors of her alleged indiscretions and frivolous behavior, and out of spite, frustration, and disappointment, decides to go ahead with his previous plans to marry Elena. The culmination of the conflict takes place when Leoncia receives the notice of the impending wedding, and in a moment of emotional distress, takes off for the young bride's house, disguised as a dressmaker and armed with a dagger. Once inside the house, Leoncia hears Elena sing the favorite song of her mother and suddenly realizes that the maiden is her long lost daughter. Moments later, Carlos's father, Don Fernando, walks in, and Leoncia recognizes in him the man who seduced her and ruined her life. Furious, Leoncia attacks Don Fernando with the dagger, but as Elena interferes in between them, she turns the dagger against herself and commits suicide. The tragedy concludes with the realization that Carlos and Elena are brother and sister.

The representation of the theme of love in this play has an undisputable romantic identity, as it connects the primary source of love with the process of neoplastic ideation within a context of imagined reality. That is, it shows the thought process of fashioning an ideal passion based on desires and illusions. José de Espronceda wrote in his canonical poem *El diablo mundo* "es el amor que al mismo amor adora / el que creó las sílfides y ondinas, / la sacra ninfa que bordando mora / debajo de las aguas cristalinas" (228) (it is love that adores love itself / that which created sylphs and water nymphs / the sacred nymph that embroiders and lives in pure waters [translation mine]). In her first play, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda writes that "La actividad naciente del corazón, que busca un objeto en quien complacerse; la necesidad de amar . . . ¡éste es el origen del primer amor!" (*Leoncia* 12) (the nascent activity of a heart searching for an object of passion; the need to love . . . That is the origin of the first love! [translation mine]). In her last novel, *El artista barquero*, Avellaneda conceptualizes the egocentric nature of romantic passion, stating that "se ama el amor y no al amante . . . Se ama la propia facultad de amar que comenzamos sentir en nosotros" (*Obra selecta* 162) (we love the love itself and not the lover . . . we love the very ability to love, when we start experiencing that feeling [translation mine]). According to this view, love is linked to

the empirical experience, associated with a natural need of a human being to exteriorize a sensible subjectivity. Love does not emerge as a result of a spell or some sort of contagion from outside; it is always a materialization of the sentimental longing of the protagonists. On the other hand, for the authors of Romanticism, love is essentially tragic, as it bears the hallmark of death or disillusionment. It is an ideal embellished by the fantasies of young minds, yet very much disconnected from reality, and therefore destined for failure, as Espronceda has demonstrated so masterfully in his *Canto a Teresa* (228).

Maria Prado stated that unfulfilled tragic passion is the main theme of *Leoncia* (159). Indeed, the reader can clearly identify the theme of love as the literary device central to the development of the plot. It makes the emotions run high and powers the conflict. The female protagonist does not conceive her life without love. In scene seven of the first act, she reprimands her young suitor for being late because she feels alive only next to him, “Sólo existo cuando estoy junto a ti, y desde ayer, no te veo” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 13) (I only exist when I am next to you, and I have not seen you since yesterday [translation mine]). Carlos responds with his own set of complaints, but in the end accepts that they can’t live one without the other (13). While making her argument, Maria Prado opposes Emilio Cotarelo’s view of inexorable and fatal destiny as the main theme in *Leoncia* (65). In ancient Greek theater, the force of destiny is an important theme and, “its tragic effect is said to lie in the contrast between the supreme will of the gods and the vain attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them” (Bloom 72). In Spanish Romantic theater the representative play which develops this theme is *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1935) by Angel Saavedra Duque de Rivas (1791–1865). In *Leoncia*, indeed, it can be argued that the heroine struggles against and is overpowered by her fate. The power of destiny becomes particularly evident in the final scene of the third act, which seals Leoncia’s defeat, as she realizes the fruitlessness of her efforts just like many classical heroes before her. The heroine goes through stages of hope, anguish, jealousy, and desperation. It appears that Leoncia’s unfulfilled love, or better said, her betrayed passion, exacerbates her emotional distress and pushes her to the fateful encounter with her offender in the final scene. Yet, we can’t help but wonder why she refuses Carlos’s proposal to run away? Had she attempted to escape the corrupt society in order to fulfill her love, and had she encountered Elena and Don Fernando under more forceful circumstances, the primary status of the fate theme would have a stronger case. Leoncia acts in the way she does mainly because she does not believe in the existence of an idyllic land where she can hide from society. She is pursuing a cause, which differs from the typical romantic idealistic search for an eternal love. Deep inside, Carlos’s mind is contaminated by the patriarchal idea of feminine purity, and therefore he will never be able to offer Leoncia what she really wants: a moral redemp-

tion on the basis of the purity of her virtuous soul. That is why she does not accept his proposal to escape from society, and that is why she rejects what she considers a degraded version of love, since it requires a conscientious transgression of moral rules. The criticism of the play focuses on one main problem: a society that does not attribute value to clean consciences and pure hearts. For an individual to be considered virtuous, it is necessary to follow a strict set of arbitrary social rules. Carlos bitterly complains about that, “desgraciados aquellos que, apoyados en la rectitud de su corazón y en la pureza de su conciencia se atreven a infringir la más ligera de sus leyes!” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 7) (poor are those who guided by the righteousness of their hearts and pure consciences dare to violate the lightest of the laws [of the society] [my translation]).

In a broad sense, it appears that the conflict conforms to the typical Romantic model, where the tragic outcome emerges from the clash between an idealistic individual and a corrupt society. The society is positioned to win because it has a total control over the moral framework, which gives it power over all of its members, but especially over those who desire to be recognized as virtuous. The ability to manipulate the concept of virtue, particularly as it applies to women, is what enables the society to include or exclude individuals at will, and that power is what enables the patriarchal order to exercise dominance. On the other hand, if we take a close look at the causes of social marginalization of Leoncia, it becomes evident that she is denied the possibility of happiness, not because of her social class, status, race or religion (which happens quite frequently in romantic literature), but because she does not conform to the social standard of a virtuous woman in mid-nineteenth century Madrid. Basically, we are in the presence of a conflict between the ideal or absolute virtue, based on “a knowledge of the true good,” and a virtue based on opinion, which Plato considers a “shadow of virtue” (Janet 406). This conflict is truly the central theme of the play, while the themes of love and fate are secondary and have more of a supporting role in the structure of the play.

Gómez de Avellaneda was deeply concerned with the success the patriarchal order achieved in manipulating the concept of virtue with the purpose of controlling the individual conduct of women (Selimov 216). Her first novel *Sab* (1841), written approximately during the same time as *Leoncia*, presents similar concerns, although it challenges the relativist approach to moral values and principals in a much more direct fashion than the play:

Virtue! But what is virtue? Of what does it consist? I have wanted to understand it, but in vain have I asked men for the truth. I remember that when my master sent me to confess my sins at the feet of a priest, I asked God’s minister what I should do in order to attain virtue. The virtue of the slave, he replied, is to obey and be silent, serve his lawful masters with humility and

resignation, and never to judge them. This explanation did not satisfy me. Well then, I thought, can virtue be relative? Is virtue not one and the same for all men? (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab and Autobiography* 140)

The character writing these words is an Afro-Cuban slave, and thus his questioning of societal moral relativism has been traditionally interpreted within the context of anti-slavery discourse. At the same time, the references to social injustice articulated by the slave also have been considered as an early example of feminist criticism directed at the patriarchal social order in Cuba and Spain alike (Kirkpatrick 156). Sab, who is the hero of the novel, questions the limitations of the position he occupies in the social hierarchy, and suggests a parallel between his social status and the role assigned to women in the patriarchal society. It is plausible to suggest that Avellaneda uses the black protagonist as a metaphor of a subaltern condition, and as Nina Scott has pointed out, “critics have rightly noted that in *Sab* her feminism consistently overshadows her denunciation of slavery” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab and Autobiography* xxiv). The novel clearly identifies women as subalterns and universalizes their social inequality through the discourse of the Afro-Cuban protagonist (Guerra 709). Sab’s anguished cries, caused by the lack of ability to realize himself as an individual and contribute to society in proportion to his own talents, represent the voice of all marginalized groups, who find themselves in a subordinate or subaltern position:

But it is not God, Teresa, it is men who have shaped my destiny [. . .] Who have said: [. . .] Do you feel the noble ambition of wanting to be useful to your fellow man, and to employ for the general good and for its delight the abilities which weigh heavily upon you? Well, bow down under their weight and ignore them, and resign yourself to living in a useless and despised way, like the barren plant or the filthy animal. . . . It is men who have imposed this dreadful fate upon me. (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab and Autobiography* 144)

Doris Sommer has rightfully noted that the author expresses her own existential anxiety in the novel as she identifies herself with the slave, not only in relation to her subordinate status in the patriarchal hierarchy, but also as someone who produces subversive epistolary discourse (25). Most importantly in the context of this essay, Avellaneda demonstrates, both in her private writings and in the novel, through Sab, the technology of domination, which is based on the manipulation of the norms of public and private conduct and their passive acceptance by the subaltern group: “Oh, women! Poor, blind victims! Like slaves, they patiently drag their chain and bow their heads under the yoke of human laws” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab and Autobiography* 144). As Ger-

da Lerner has suggested, “the domestic subordination of women provided the model out of which slavery developed as a social institution” (99).

What is particularly relevant to our discussion is that the role of women is similar to that of slaves in having been forced to accept a relativist idea of virtue based on “obedience, humility,” and “resignation” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab and Autobiography* 146). The parallel between the two subaltern groups, women and slaves, runs deeper if we consider it in the context of the domination of their bodies. The power of a slave-holding society is directly connected to its ability to own and control the lives and the bodies of other human beings, violently forced into a subaltern position. In case of “free” women, control is exercised indirectly, by regulating their behavior, which is exactly what Avellaneda criticizes in *Leoncia*. The control over the female body has been, and continues to be, the fundamental obsession of the patriarchal society, which uses it to uphold its own dominance (Palencia Villa 41). The patriarchy dominates women by forcing them to adjust their behavior according to a set of established values, with one of the more important components being the association between feminine virtue and virginity.

In the religious context it has been a given that a female must be a virgin in order to serve God, while a male must only maintain abstinence in the sacred times (Martínez Díez 126). In the context of the institution of marriage, the traditional prerequisite for women is to be a virgin in spirit and body (Martínez Díez 126). That differs significantly from a “masculine position, in which a virtuous or virginal life would disqualify masculinity” (Glocer Florini 62). In addition to its role in the ethical dimension, feminine virtue has a monetary value in the social economy of the patriarchy. The price that is paid for an individual in a slave-holding society is equivalent to the traditional transaction that is required for a marriage to take place, such as dowry the groom receives from the bride’s family in some cultures, or the compensation he is obligated to pay to the bride’s family in others. What is especially significant in both cases is that the amount of dowry or compensation can be negotiated in proportion to the age, beauty, and bodily integrity of the bride. In a patriarchal society, sexual integrity is the norm, according to Freud, and “implies a virtuous condition which defines a woman as ‘normal’ and worthy of being loved” (Glocer Florini 66).

Gómez de Avellaneda arrives in Sevilla with emotional baggage, which she acquired as a result of a negative social experience in Cuba and Galicia. Her first conflict with the male dominated cultural hegemony took place when her family tried to arrange a marriage of convenience against her will. Upon arrival to La Coruña, the eighteen-year-old writer has to endure the consequences of her Galician step-father’s greed, being unable to recover her share of inheritance and dowry, which her biological father left her. She did not find much support from her brother or her paternal uncle, both of whom attempted to use her as commodity and give her away in arranged marriages for personal

benefit. Gomez de Avellaneda resisted in both cases, and that resistance reaffirmed her independent conscience and her belief in her own self-worth. This personal experience undoubtedly influenced the configuration of the protagonists in the novels and plays she later published.

Chronologically, the premiere of the tragic drama *Leoncia* coincides with the intensification of public scrutiny of the feminine image. The intensification occurs as a consequence of anxiety, which the patriarchal order felt in light of the increase in participation of women in the process of cultural production. The advances of the Enlightenment in the area of recognition of personal merit, and the focus on individual emotions in Romanticism empowered women to make a public use of reason and express emotions through literary devices. The transformation of European society in the eighteenth century “brought with it a shift in definitions of gender difference and a new way of representing and experiencing subjectivity that opened a channel through which women could assert themselves as producers of print culture” (Kirkpatrick 2). These changes threatened to destabilize the hegemony of patriarchal power, based traditionally on a strict hierarchical differentiation of traits, which determine gender roles and define masculinity and femininity. The eighteenth-century moral discourse on love prepared the foundation for a much more optimistic view on passions and their role in the human society (Bolufer Peruga 12). A positive valuation of moderate affections began competing with the traditional negative view of passions developed in the moral and religious literature of the Old Regime. Prior to the Enlightenment, love has been frequently depicted in terms comparable to sickness (Boase 1) and madness (Singer 62). The new eighteenth century moral discourse leaves the door open for the possibility of reconciliation between love, the natural inclinations of individuals and social usefulness, all within a context of the new sensibility acceptable for women as well as for men,

se aspira a que mujeres y hombres se empapen, a través de un proceso de ósmosis, de los sentimientos y virtudes de los personajes, que sufran con sus penas y se complazcan con su felicidad, modelando a imagen y semejanza de los héroes y heroínas de la literatura sus propios deseos y aspiraciones amorosas. (Bolufer Peruga 13)

(It is hoped that women and men will blend and absorb through osmosis, the feelings and virtues of the characters, and that they will suffer their punishment and will be pleased with their happiness, accepting literary heroes and heroines as models for their own desires and aspirations of love. [translation mine])

In the eighteenth century, the growing concern of the patriarchal society with the modified social role of women translated into an increase in public

criticism of such traits as “martial nature,” “nerve,” “disembarrassment,” and “licentious behavior” attributed to women (Jago, “La misión de la mujer” 23). In the nineteenth century, however, the triumph of the ethical and aesthetic values of Romanticism forced the establishment to change tactics, by shifting from direct recriminations in the press to promotion of the ideal of feminine domesticity “advertised as the essence of natural womanhood,” an essence which would later be captured by the term “angel del hogar” (Jago, *Ambiguous Angels: Gender in the Novels of Galdós* 14) (angel in the house). Hence, there is a substantial increase in the number of publications, by male and female authors, focused on forcing the hegemonic gender models on the awakening female consciousness. A large number of articles, monographs, anthologies, and speeches appear in print after 1840 describing the nature of women and prescribing their role in society (Jago, “La Misión De La Mujer” 23). That is exactly when Avellaneda publishes her *Leoncia*, soon followed by two novels *Sab* and *Dos mujeres* (1842), which present a similar questioning of the dominating ideology.

The cultural hegemony of the patriarchal narrative influences and splits the emerging female voices. On the one hand, the newly acquired access to the production of print culture opens the door for feminist discourse, and empowers women to engage in challenging the hierarchy of power in society. At the same time, a number of them join the ranks of apologists of the patriarchal dominance. They write mostly for periodicals and journals, addressing traditional women, focusing on the importance of their status as wives and mothers, and promoting such traits as tenderness, modesty, humility, and submissiveness (Cantizano Márquez 285).

In the foreword to *Leoncia*, Emilio Cotarelo suggests the possibility of the subject of drama being connected to a stormy love affair between the author and a certain student of law in Seville by the name Ignacio Cepeda (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* xi). The relationship stayed out of the public scrutiny until it was revealed in the 1914 unauthorized publication of Avellaneda’s private letters by Lorenzo Cruz de Fuentes.

Avellaneda’s personal letters reveal her strong feelings toward the addressee, and show that she suffered greatly from the fact that they were not reciprocated (Kirkpatrick 145). From the very first epistle, the emotional motivation of the author becomes evident, as she engages in what “is essentially an act of seduction: the writer attempts to produce an image of herself that will please and capture his desire” (136). Significantly, in some of her first letters, Avellaneda writes to her lover about her work on *Leoncia*, shares her frustration with rehearsals and the actors, and finally pleads with him to attend the premiere. It appears the affair was not going well, which made Emilio Cotarelo suggest that the plea could mean that the writer “had some vague hopes to attract him back to the fold of her unfulfilled love” (Gómez de Avellaneda,

Leoncia 122). According to the critic, by requesting the addressee's presence at the drama function, Avellaneda intended to sensitize him with the pathetic picture of the sufferings of her heroine. Romantic authors believed in the transformative power of their discourse, and considered the task of sensitizing their readers and spectators as their public mission. Some, such as the Colombian novelist Jorge Issacs, included references to that mission in the body of their literary production (7).

The love letters reveal Avellaneda's main dilemma: Cepeda refused to formalize their relationship, mostly due to the social prejudice against independent women. Women writers, in particular, were disregarded as marriage material in the traditional patriarchal society, as noted by Nicasio Gallego in his prologue to Avellaneda's volume of poetry (x). Judging from Avellaneda's letters, the public image of the young playwright and her independent lifestyle did not conform to the model of a virtuous woman for Cepeda, and he became openly uncomfortable with Avellaneda's passionate expression of her feelings toward him (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Autobiografía y epistolarios de amor* 31). Avellaneda confronted Cepeda's apprehensions caused by the negative social perception of female sexual agency, but in the end, in spite of all her efforts, she failed to transcend the role of a secret lover (161).

In *Leoncia*, the contrast between the negative social opinion, based on rumors and gossip, and the true inner virtue of a noble human heart, emerging from the individual behavior and moral qualities of the heroine, is the building block of Avellaneda's argument. The importance of the subject of virtue is revealed from the first scene, which presents a counterpoint between the two characterizations of the protagonist. Carlos speaks highly of Leoncia, sharing his admiration for her spiritual qualities in his conversation with his friend Gaspar, who for his part, makes damaging remarks about the lady. The latter brings up the alleged affair with Count Peñafiel, suggesting that it was based on economic interests and saying that "el Conde es anciano, pero es rico" (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 4) (the Count is old, but he is rich [translation mine]). Gaspar is not impressed with Carlos's emotional outburst about Leoncia's spiritual superiority and the purity of her heart, as he assumes that Carlos is sexually motivated. Hence Gaspar's practical advice to Carlos: he should enjoy his freedom and passion, and only start thinking about marrying Elena after he fully satisfies his desire for Leoncia (5).

This dialogue exposes the power of the collective public opinion and its damaging effects on the reputation of individual members of society. Gaspar does not even try to support his allegations about Leoncia's supposed frivolity with proof. For him it is sufficient that "the whole of Madrid knows" about her alleged affair with the Count (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Leoncia* 5). The ability to control public opinion and the perception of the concept of virtue is instrumental to the dominance of the patriarchal order. The manipulation of social

norms was a means to exercise power, administer discipline and punish. Gaspar underlines the relativist position of the society toward the virtue, the lack of which is tolerated if appearances are kept (7). Of course, Carlos is outraged in the face of slanderous allegations against Leoncia. He recognizes that he lives in a hypocritical society, but at the same time he is incapable of thinking outside of the patriarchal box, and demonstrates that his expectations fall well within the framework of the hegemonic ideal of female purity. His acceptance of Leoncia is contingent upon the confirmation of her female purity. Early in the play, Carlos reveals that he hopes to discover that she is “tan noble y pura como mi corazón la desea” (11) (as noble and pure as my heart desires her [translation mine]). This statement serves to justify Leoncia’s mistrust of Carlos, and supports her decision not to run away with him. Espronceda’s “Canto a Teresa” is a clear example of what happens after the first illusions dissipate: the very same Romantic hero who anxiously seeks to join his idealized object of love, perceiving her as a beautiful “butterfly” and “crystal pure water spring,” is the one who will later reject her as a “fallen angel” and “filthy mud” (Espronceda 231), seeing in her an “emblem of a vitiated object world” (Kirkpatrick 129).

It is legitimate to assume that Avellaneda aspired to convey the encoded message to Cepeda, and to make him see the Romantic perspective on the intrinsic virtue of individuals. Entrenched in his traditionalist views, he proved not to be very receptive to the romantic idea of virtue and the possibility of female sexual agency. However, this was not a personal failure on the part of the playwright, but it had to do with a larger issue in European societies:

the position of the female subject in relation to the Romantic elaboration of a language of subjectivity was contradictory: on the one hand, the new aesthetic movement seemed to encourage women’s participation by valorizing feeling and individuality, but on the other hand, women found it difficult to assume the many attributes of Romantic selfhood that conflicted with the norm tying feminine identity to lack of desire. (Kirkpatrick 10)

The increased access to the production of literary culture in post Enlightenment Spain allowed women writers to participate in the liberalization of Spanish society. Gómez de Avellaneda felt empowered enough to question the ethical and aesthetic values of patriarchy from a position that appeared to be protected by the Romantic ideology. However, by appropriating Romantic paradigms in her private and public discourses, Gómez de Avellaneda unwittingly excluded herself from the group of women considered virtuous according to the patriarchal norm. As Susan Kirkpatrick noted, citing Cora Kaplan, “the appearance of any sexualized sensibility was the mark of a degraded and vitiated subjectivity” (10). In *Leoncia*, Avellaneda depicts a heroine as

a subject and agent of action. She criticizes the role attributed to women as objects of male consumption, described in the mid eighteenth century by Jean J. Rousseau in his apologia for inequality in male and female education entitled *Emile, or on Education*: “woman is specially made for man’s delight” (336). Leoncia defies this model by exercising agency in her search for the romantic ideal of love. Her failure to achieve it and her suicide are intended to influence her audience in favor of a much more liberalized model of female subjectivity. In her first play Avellaneda rejects moral relativism and defends the concept of virtue from a position based on the consideration of the intrinsic qualities of the individual, rather than on the role that has been imposed on her/him by the social hegemonic order. Joan Torres-Pou notes that in this process of appropriation of the language of power, Avellaneda’s narrative and epistolary discourse become inevitably contaminated by the rhetoric of the same patriarchal tradition against which she raises her voice (58). However, such “contamination” actually enables the playwright to establish a channel of communication with the public, which was by large complacent with the dominant patriarchal ideology. Avellaneda’s first play presents an argument that conflicts with the hegemonic ideology on many levels. And in particular it demonstrates a profound lack of conformity by the writer with the techniques of manipulation of the concept of virtue and her determination to reconfigure the prevailing hierarchical cultural paradigm in the Spanish society of her time. If we consider the fact that “women were in general excluded from the theater, except as actresses,” Gómez de Avellaneda’s public display of talent and her ability as a woman writer to persevere within a literary field dominated by men, becomes an inspirational model for many other female dramatists who “from mid-century on” followed her example (Gies 191). *Leoncia*, Avellaneda’s first theatrical piece, is emblematic in the sense of being the stepping-stone for this collective endeavor.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article, entitled “El amor, el destino y la virtud: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y su primer drama *Leoncia*,” appeared in *Arbor*, the journal of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
2. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s pen name.

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**Rebellious Apprentice Devours *Maestros*:
Is it Hunger or Vengeance?**

Mary Louise Pratt

Born in 1814, daughter of a Spanish father and a creole mother, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda grew up in comfort and privilege in Camaguey, Cuba, educated by private tutors. In 1836, at the age of twenty-two, she emigrated with her mother and brother to Spain¹ where, over the next two decades, she produced most of her extraordinary *obra*. By the early 1840s, nicknamed “La Peregrina” (pilgrim or wanderer), she was already established as one of Spain’s most celebrated literary figures, famed as a playwright, novelist, poet, autobiographer, essayist, and journalist. Her patrons included eminences of the Spanish literary scene, above all José Zorrilla, who introduced her into Madrid’s literary circles and nominated her to the Spanish Royal Academy in 1853. In 1859, Gómez de Avellaneda’s trajectory took her back to Cuba on assignment with her husband, royal envoy Domingo Verdugo y Massieu. Contrary to appearances, the reason for this move was not a bureaucratic assignment, but threatening responses to one of Avellaneda’s plays.

As Carolina Alzate has shown, the circumstances of Avellaneda’s return to Cuba guaranteed her the hostility and rejection of the younger generation of *independentistas*, and shaped the Cuban reception of her work for more than a century. Her career and her marriage identified her with the Spanish Crown, and colonial authorities in Cuba saw fit to organize a grand, triumphal welcome in her honor. Alzate cites a satirical sonnet that circulated on the island on the occasion of this celebration. The final tercet puns on her husband’s surname:

Hoy vuelve a Cuba, pero a Dios le plugo
que la ingrata torcaz camagueyana
Tornara esclava, en brazos de un verdugo. (Alzate 7)

(Today she returns to Cuba, but God saw fit
 To turn the ungrateful dove from Camaguey
 Into a slave in the arms of an executione.)

From the moment she set foot on the island in 1859, Avellaneda assumed the role of a (proto)national Cuban literary figure. She wrote intensely Cuban civic poetry, founded a magazine (the *Album Cubano de lo Bueno y lo Bello*), and spoke as a mouthpiece for her homeland. Yet she was never accepted there by the literary community.² Undoubtedly the main reason was her failure to take a stand on the question of independence. She appeared to experience no conflict between her *Cubanidad* and her loyalty to Spain. Being a famous Spanish writer posed no threat to the deeply Cuban identity that permeated her writings; she found no contradiction between her ties to the Spanish court (the king and queen patronized her wedding) and her commitment to the future of Cuba. These heterogeneous ties apparently did not trouble her, and for that very reason, she troubled the *independentistas* for whom love of Cuba meant aspiring to independence. Following her husband's death in 1864, she returned to Spain, where she died in 1873 at the age of fifty-nine.

For the Cuban nationalist literati, Gómez de Avellaneda became a constitutive other of their decolonizing project, an other against which they defined and perceived themselves. As Alzate so brilliantly documents, from the Del Monte circle in the 1830s to Martí in the 1870s to Cintio Vitier in the 1950s, their condemnation dominated the reception of her work. She was never given an entry permit into Cuba's national lettered city. Avellaneda's otherness in relation to Cuban letters was double-edged: on one side, her lack of radicalism on the question of independence, and on the other, her excessive radicalism on the question of gender. The two are, of course, related. Gender inequality unquestionably stands as one of liberalism's most significant foundational failings, in Europe and the Americas. Gómez de Avellaneda struggled with and against it all her life. That struggle drives the literary drama that is the subject of this essay: the contestatory relationship Avellaneda sustained throughout her career with the writings of the canonical romantic poets, and in particular, her fellow Cuban and poetic mentor, José María Heredia. Eleven years her senior, Heredia also left Cuba in his early twenties, exiled in 1823 for anti-Spanish subversion. During some fifteen years in Mexico, he did not thrive. After a brief return to Cuba, Heredia died in broken health in 1839, at the age of only thirty-six. Avellaneda wrote a gorgeous elegy in his honor, "A la muerte de Don José María de Heredia."³ In the years that followed, as I hope to demonstrate here, she used his work as raw material for a bold exploration of the gendered dimensions of romantic subjectivity, and the predicament of the freedom-seeking woman in the nineteenth century.

Social Contract and Sexual Contract

Like other women of her generation—one thinks of Flora Tristán, Juana Manuela Gorriti, Eduarda Mansilla, Juana Manso—Gómez de Avellaneda experienced the breakthroughs in women's emancipation that took place in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. While still living in Cuba as a young woman, she read the early feminists Mary Wollstonecraft, George Sand, and Madame de Stael. Ironically, as Kirkpatrick notes, it was her colonial location that gave Avellaneda access to these readings and many others. In Spain, a young woman's chances of contact with early feminist texts were virtually nil. We do not know whether her readings of early feminists influenced her decision at an early age to refuse a lucrative marriage her family proposed, but she did do so, at a cost of financial security for herself and her family. It would not be the only time she took such a decision.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as Landes shows, the political winds shifted. Calls for women's emancipation began to give way to new prescriptions of domesticity and social hygiene. As Landes puts it, a sociopolitical pact evolved in Europe and the Americas that produced a democratization of politics whose condition of possibility was an intensified subordination of women. For men to be more free, women must be more contained. As the century unfolded, gender equality lost ground.⁴ In Latin America, for example, Garrels finds, Aimé Martin's tract *De l'éducation des meres de famille ou de la civilisation du genre humain par les femmes* (1834, translated in Chile in 1840) marked a new stage in female subordination.

The shift marked Avellaneda's literary career. In the 1840s, she integrated herself into Spanish literary circles with great success. Her well-known amorous exploits did not hinder her fame as a dramatist, novelist, and poet. The poet Zorrilla promoted her and nominated her to the Royal Spanish Academy in 1853.⁵ Twenty years later, by contrast, José Martí condemned her in openly misogynist terms: "There is an arrogant, sometimes ferocious, man in Avellaneda's poetry," (Martí 311) he said, meaning no compliment. Avellaneda was not the only target of Martí's misogyny and androcentrism, attitudes not separate from his republican politics. Such gendered rejections reflect the narrowing down of public space for women in the second half of the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic. They reflect as well the sexual panic so brilliantly explored in Martí and other end-of-century Latin American intellectuals by Molloy ("His America," "The Politics"), Ramos, Cruz-Malavé, Ledesma, Lugo-Ortiz, and others.

In her groundbreaking 1987 study, *The Sexual Contract*, political theorist Carol Pateman theorized the relation within liberalism between the emancipation of men and the subordination of women. According to Pateman, what standard political theory calls the social contract exists only by virtue of a second

contract with respect to which political theorists willfully blind themselves. She calls it the sexual contract. The social contract, as postulated by Rousseau and his followers, defines relations of fraternal citizenship among men (that is, among male bodies). The sexual contract, argues Pateman, defines relations between men and women (that is, between male and female bodies), subordinating the latter to the former. The most obvious form of the sexual contract, Pateman observes, is marriage (prostitution is another). Marriage is a contract, Pateman argues, because however unequal the relations between the parties, it requires public acts of consent from both, and imposes obligations and responsibilities on both. Entering into the sexual contract, the female authorizes the male to make use of her sexual, reproductive and productive capacities in exchange for material subsistence and security. The two contracts, sexual and social, cannot be understood apart from each other, Pateman argues. The sexual contract is the instrument that excludes female bodies from the social contract; the social contract between men consists, among other things, of shared sex rights over female bodies. This does not mean women are excluded from the civic order: marriage is a civil contractual form. Pateman calls it a form of civil subordination. As such it was adamantly resisted by radicals from Wollstonecraft to Mills, and problematized by writers from Austen to Woolf. The difficulty of establishing and legitimating this civil subordination is, one can argue, a central preoccupation of the nineteenth century novel. In the Americas, the canonical foundational fictions of the nineteenth century (Sommer) hinge on the sexual contract as both allegorical figure and social engine of the post and neo-colonial nation. The partial, limited character of America's decolonization translated into racialized loves and impossible marriages, as in Avellaneda's own contribution to the genre, her novel *Sab*.

In standard political theory, the social contract is seen as supplanting vertical patriarchal state authority with horizontal, consensual, fraternal relations. This revolution did not, however, eliminate patriarchal power. Rather it produced a new mutation of it, one Pateman calls fraternal patriarchy, in which the subordination of women to men remains a constitutive (not tangential) element of democratic order. This fact remains either silenced, placed out of view in the domain of the private, or legitimated by consigning women to the order of Nature and declaring them unsuited for citizenship. With women excluded, the fraternal order can define and envision itself as autonomous and self-sustaining.

Pateman's theory has required elaboration on two fronts. First, not all women enter into the sexual contract. What spaces do women negotiate and occupy outside that contractual order? Obviously such spaces existed and exist, sometimes institutionalized, sometimes improvised. (Convents, to give one example, served unmarried women as a place to bear illegitimate children.) Second, Pateman does not elaborate on the non-contractual aspects of citizenship, aspects often referred to by the term cultural citizenship (Rosaldo).

Forms and practices of social belonging exist even in the absence of contractual rights, forming what Rosaldo has called cultural citizenship. These forms and practices shape how social subordination is actually lived. Gómez de Avellaneda achieved high public esteem for her writings, despite being excluded from formal citizenship (and the Royal Academy). These dimensions of belonging did not concern Pateman, whose goal was exposing the limits of contract theory as used in political science. They become relevant, however, as soon as we ask what possibilities nineteenth century women had for giving meaning to their lives and connecting to society as a whole.

Gender and Romanticism

Much has been learned in the last fifty years about the cultural dimensions of domesticity in the nineteenth century. Domesticity marked what Pateman called a state of civil subordination. At the same time, cultivation of the domestic realm generated subjective and symbolic maps that granted women a certain kind of authority based on a supposed superiority in what Avellaneda called “*el imperio de los sentimientos*” (the realm of feelings). According to the formula, women hold power inside the family house, where they hold power over reproductive and educational activities. They produce citizens without being citizens themselves. In an innovative study of Spanish women romantics, Susan Kirkpatrick argues that it is a mistake to discount the empowering possibilities of domesticity, limited though they might be. Dominion over the “realm of feeling” offered women an opening to inner life; an expanding press organized around consumption and domesticity offered them a plethora of reading material, and an invitation to write; their educative role called for literacy and access to books. Romanticism opened literary spaces to women, elaborating an esthetic that not only admitted passion and emotivity, but saw them, rather than erudition, as paths to universal truth. In a series of powerful essays on woman written after her return to Cuba, Gómez de Avellaneda argued that far from disabling women for public authority, their expertise in the “realm of feeling,” along with their physical prowess as shown in childbirth, made them superior to men in the civic realm (Pratt, “Las mujeres”).⁶

It would be erroneous, however, to suggest that the new domesticity truly encouraged women’s literary creativity. On the contrary, domesticity and the sexual contract, as lived experiences, were on the whole at odds with literary creativity, and with life as a writer. Avellaneda was one of the great many nineteenth century women on both sides of the Atlantic who rejected marriage in order to pursue literary careers. All her life, surrounded by suitors and lovers, she vehemently rejected the conjugal state: “Mi horror al matrimonio era ex-

tremado” (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Autobiografía* 69) (My horror of marriage was extreme), she said in her autobiography, narrating a painful decision to break an engagement that would have required her to give up her literary career. When late in life she did marry, during a period of physical, existential and financial vulnerability, she referred to it as “un mal necesario” (a necessary evil). For Avellaneda, marriage was the opposite of freedom, an attitude shared by many women writers before and since, from Sor Juana to Gorriti and Matto de Turner, Ocampo, Storni, Mistral, de la Parra, Castellanos, Garro, and so many more. While marriage might be incompatible with a literary life, however, sex (and therefore maternity) were not. Many of the figures just mentioned, including Avellaneda herself, loved freely and bore children out of wedlock.⁷

Why this incompatibility between marriage and literary creativity? A materialist analysis might point to the subordination of women’s labor in the sexual contract. Equally important, however, is the kind of power conceded to women in the domestic sphere. Domesticity gave women power and responsibility to oversee the desires and sentiments of everyone in the home, in the name of domestic harmony. This called for the voluntary repression of their own desires, especially erotic and sexual ones. Their conjugal duties included policing their own sexual pleasure and desire. Sentimentality and tenderness were valued, but passion was dangerous. Martí affirmed the paradigm in his heated critique of Avellaneda, where he called for a women’s poetry written exclusively from this repressed domestic sphere. In a revealing text cited by Carolina Alzate, Martí contrasts Gómez de Avellaneda with another Cuban poet, Luisa Perez de Zambrana, “a pure creature sensitive to any suffering and accustomed to delicacy, generosity, perpetual chastity—and also, the wife of a distinguished man” (8). His recipe is ideologically coherent, but esthetically indefensible. As recent rereadings of Martí have made clear (Molloy, Ramos, Cruz-Malavé), his democratic radicalism did not extend to the gender order. On the contrary, Martí exemplifies the interdependency Pateman signals between democratic ideology, homosociality, misogyny, and patriarchal hierarchy. Molloy (“Dos lecturas”) has made a similar observation about Rubén Darío who, in correspondence with the Uruguayan poet Delmira Agustini, infantilizes her in a fashion completely incompatible with the boldness and force of her writing.

This configuration of the domestic-conjugal sphere as a space of repression had consequences for artists of both sexes. Artistically, it nourished no one. It rarely appears as a topos in the writing of either sex, and even more rarely as an emancipatory one. Domesticity is incompatible with the mobilization of subjectivity and desire that drive romanticism. The romantic subject constitutes itself through the performance of subjectivity and desire; the domestic-conjugal space was an impossible arena for such performance. Its esthetic inviability has consequences for both men and women writers, but not the same consequences, for men had access to the fraternal-civic order.

This order interpellates men both as fraternal subjects and as self-sufficient, autonomous entities, offering them alternative spaces for constructing a poetic subjectivity. Male poets could write from the monosexual subjective space of citizenship and personhood, and they did. But lettered women? From what alternative spaces could they write? Outside the social contract (for they are not citizens) and outside the sexual contract (for they avoided marriage), women seem to write from an undefined space, a foothold on the margins of the lettered city, a space that still has no name. Gómez de Avellaneda called it freedom, but perhaps we might also speak of a space of insubordination, and unsubordinated desire.

The Parallel Corpus

Gomez de Avellaneda explored this gendered predicament in her poetry, developing a poetics of insubordination and unsubordinated desire. One of the main modalities this exploration took was a continuous and purposeful appropriation of the writings of mainstream romantic poets including the canonical French poet Alphonse de Lamartine, the Spaniard José de Espronceda, and her Cuban compatriot José María Heredia. Gómez de Avellaneda developed her own poetic project and poetic subjectivity in part by appropriating and radically reworking the writings of these canonical figures (Pratt, “Las mujeres”; Albin, “Ante el Niágara”). She produces what I am calling per-versions of some of their key texts. This term attempts to capture the fact that even as she wrote drew on their poems, her creative intent was not in the least mimetic. Far from imitating her masters, she transforms their themes, titles, imagery, lexicon, even whole lines into a contrasting performance of her own subjectivity.

I propose here to examine her interaction specifically with the work of her compatriot Heredia, probably Latin America’s best-known exemplar of romantic poetics. Their chronologies (Heredia was born in 1803 and Avellaneda in 1814) led some scholars to imagine Heredia among the sequence of private tutors that passed through Gómez de Avellaneda’s childhood, a hypothesis now discarded. But in another way, Avellaneda does treat Heredia as a tutor, for in her poetry she develops a reactive and contestatory relation with his work. Her poetry includes a set of parallel texts in which, like a rebellious apprentice, Avellaneda challenges and rewrites specific poems by Heredia, creating what I have called per-versions of his texts. These compositions specifically seek to capture profoundly gendered aspects of romantic esthetics.

The most explicit case is well-known: Heredia’s poem “La inconstancia” (Inconstancy), triggered Gómez de Avellaneda’s sardonic reply, “El por qué de la inconstancia” (The Source of Inconstancy). Since these texts are so well

known, I will not quote them at length here. Heredia's poem, dedicated to his friend (and fellow citizen) Domingo del Monte, finds the poet in a pastoral retreat recovering from the pain of a recent female betrayal. Woman's inconstancy is offset by fraternal friendship on the one hand, and nature's patriarchal order on the other ("El almo sol en el sereno cielo . . . Salud, ¡oh, padre!") [Heredia 14] [the sacred sun in the serene heavens . . . Greetings, oh father]). The universe is bisected by gender, opposing faithful male to unfaithful female: "El alma que fina te adoró, falsa te adora!" (Heredia 15) (My soul that adored you refined, adores you fallen). The woman in question, of course, has no voice, desire, life, or even real existence in the poem. Heredia's final lines invoke, to use Pateman's terms, an imaginary, idealized version of the sexual contract:

¡Ah, cruel! No te maldigo,
Y mi mayor anhelo
Es elevarte con mi canto al cielo,
Y un eterno laurel partir contigo (15)

(O cruel one! I curse you not,
And my greatest desire
Is to raise you skyward with my song
And share with you an everlasting laurel)

Avellaneda's famous countertext specifically rejects the male-female polarization and the identification of woman with fickleness. Her poem insists on a relation of *equivalence* and *reciprocity* between the genders. When it comes to inconstancy, she claims, "Que son las hijas de Eva/Como los hijos de Adan" (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 151) (the daughters of Eve/ are just like the sons of Adam).⁸ For both sexes, she argues, inconstancy is a sign not of weakness ("flaqueza"), but of higher callings ("altos destinos"). Her poem ends insisting on a human condition common to both sexes, and ruled by desire:

Y aquí—do todo nos habla
De pequeñez y mudanza—
Sólo es grande la esperanza
Y perenne el desear. (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 153)

(And here—where everything speaks
Of pettiness and mutability
Only hope is great
Only desire endures.)

Avellaneda repeats this gesture often. Heredia's poetry revolves around a po-

etics of plenitude and transcendence, for which Avellaneda substitutes a poetics of lack and longing. This is not, in my view, a protest on Avellaneda's part, but rather an investigation whose point of departure is the work of her predecessors and poetic models. The place of woman in Heredia's poetic universe—the imagined virtual companion—is uninhabitable. The woman poet cannot speak from there. What can she do?

Let us turn to another pair of parallel poems, both songs to the sun: Heredia's "Himno al sol, escrito en el océano" ("Ode to the Sun, Written at Sea"), and Avellaneda's "Al sol, en un día de diciembre" (To the Sun, on a December Day). Following romantic convention, Heredia's text sets off from a narrative moment, an experience of sunrise at sea ("Las estrellas en torno se apagan / Se colora de rosa el oriente. . ." (Heredia 144) [the stars fade one by one/ the east turns pink]). Once again, nature, the symbolic order, is patriarchal: "¡Salve, padre de luz y de vida . . . De la vida eres padre: tu fuego / Poderoso renueva este mundo" (Heredia 144) (Hail, father of light and life . . . father of life: your fire / with its power renews the world). Following romantic formula, the performance of subjectivity culminates at the end in a moment of transcendent affirmation and adoration:

A su inmensa grandeza me humillo
Sé que vive, que reina y me ama,
Y que su aliento divino me inflama
De justicia y virtud en amor. (Heredia 145)

(I bow before his immense grandeur
I know he lives, reigns, and loves me
And his holy breath inflames me
With justice and virtue in love.)

Gomez de Avellaneda picks up the precise diction from this stanza in the opening lines of her poem, "Al sol, en un día de diciembre":

Reina en el cielo, ¡Sol!, reina, e inflama
Con tu almo fuego mi cansado pecho:
Sin luz, sin brío, comprimido, estrecho,
Un rayo anhela de tu ardiente llama.
(Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 64)

(Reign in the sky, oh Sun, reign and inflame
With your sacred fire my weary breast:
Lightless, joyless, compressed, constrained,
It yearns for a bolt of your burning flame.)

Here the sun retains its monarchic character, though at first glance the line seems to make it a queen—any reader will initially read *reina* as the noun ‘queen,’ rather than as the verb ‘it reigns,’ and Avellaneda certainly intended this. But far from celebrating the sun reigning in her presence, Avellaneda’s poem invokes a sun that is not there. It is winter. What is performed is unsatisfied longing. Here is the rest of this anguished sonnet:

A tu influjo feliz brote la grama;
 El hielo caiga a tu fulgor deshecho:
 ¡Sal, del invierno rígido a despecho,
 Rey de la esfera, sal; mi voz te llama!

De los dichosos campos do mi cuna
 Recibió de tus rayos el tesoro,
 Me aleja para siempre la fortuna:

Bajo otro cielo, en otra tierra lloro,
 Donde la niebla abrumame importuna...
 ¡Sal rompiéndola, Sol; que yo te imploro!
 (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 64)

(Let the grass sprout ‘neath your welcome touch
 Let ice fall shattered by your brilliance,
 Come out! despite this rigid winter,
 King of the sphere, come out; my voice hails you!

From the happy lands where my cradle
 Received your rays’ richness,
 Fortune has forever expelled me:

Under other skies, in another land I weep,
 Where wretched fog besets me...
 Come out, break through, oh Sun: I beseech you!)

In contrast with the declarative verbs in Heredia’s text, we find subjunctives and imperatives, that is, verbal structures that evoke not presence and plentitude but absent possibilities. For anyone who has experienced a Madrid winter, a purely climatological reading of the poem might seem more than sufficient. But the fact that the poem references Heredia’s text and the romantic sun topos, calls for a literary reading as well. Avellaneda reorganizes and resemantizes the heredian symbolic order while retaining its thematics, certain images and lexical items. Heredia’s passion for presence, transcendence, absorption

in the infinite is replaced in Avellaneda's poem by a poetics of absence, a performance of desire for an absent wholeness, healing, and belonging.⁹

My intention is not to revindicate Avellaneda against Heredia (though I would certainly revindicate her against Martí). Rather I aim to note the artfulness of these processes of resemanticization, or per-version, of heredian materials in a performance of subjectivity and desire that *necessarily* contradicts masculinist romantic orthodoxy. In other words, we are in the presence of a bold creative talent that, in the face of poetic repertoire that excludes her, appropriates that repertoire and uses it to animate an insubordinate artistic practice.

This process of resemanticization takes place in another series of parallel poems on the canonical Caribbean theme of the hurricane. In his famous ode "En una tempestad" (In a tempest) Heredia again pushes off from an experiential moment triggered by nature: "Huracán, huracán, venir te siento" (Heredia 134) (Hurricane, hurricane, I feel you approach). The poem unfolds in narrative mode, relating the darkening sky, the arrival of lightning, thunder, and finally rain. Again a poetics of presence and evocation culminates in a moment of vertical transcendence, adoration, and plenitude: "Yo en tí me elevo / Al trono del Señor: oigo en las nubes / El eco de su voz" (Heredia 135) (In you I rise / To the throne of the Lord: in the clouds I hear / the echo of his voice).

The corresponding poem by Avellaneda is again a sonnet, a radically different poetic form from romanticism's preferred form of the ode. Again a series of lexical and semantic correspondences suggest a direct, intentional reprise of Heredia's text. Just as in "Al sol en un día de diciembre" there was no sun but a desire for sun, so in this poem there is no hurricane, but a desire for a hurricane. I quote the poem in full:

¡Del huracán espíritu potente,
Rudo como la pena que me agita!
¡Ven, con el tuyo mi furor excita!
¡Ven, con tu aliento a enardecer mi mente!
¡Que zumba el rayo y con fragor reviente,
Mientras – cual hoja seca o flor marchita—
Tu fuerte soplo al roble precipita
Roto y deshecho al bramador torrente!
Del alma que te invoca y acompaña
Envidiando tu fuerza destructora,
Lanza a la par la confusión extraña.
¡Ven..., al dolor que insano la devora
Haz suceder tu poderosa saña,
Y el llanto seca que cobarde llora!
(Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 101)

(Mighty spirit of the hurricane
 Harsh like the pain that stirs me!
 Come! Arouse my rage with yours!
 Come! In flame my mind with your breath!
 Let lightning buzz, crash, and burst
 While—like a dry leaf or a faded flower—
 The oak falls to the force of your breath,
 Snapped and broken by the howling torrent!
 From this soul that calls and accompanies you,
 And envies your destructive force,
 Expel likewise this alien confusion
 Come!...replace its devouring pain,
 With the force of your rage,
 Replace these dry tears it so cowardly weeps.)

In contrast with Heredia, we find here not a poetic I desiring to be absorbed into the hurricane, but a poetic I that desires to absorb the hurricane into itself. Again we note the subjunctive mode, the imperative call, the esthetics of lack. Avellaneda is not witnessing an actual tempest, she is calling forth one that is lacking. Again what is desired is not transcendence, nor faith, but something like healing and wholeness.

Avellaneda underscores the contrast with Heredia explicitly in the last lines, where she resemanticizes the image of weeping. Heredia's "In a tempest" famously ends with a transcendent weeping, the poet's tears falling in harmony with the storm, mixing with the rain: "Ferviente lloro / Desciende por mis pálidas mejillas / Y su alta majestad trémulo adoro" (Heredia 135) (Fervent tears / descend my pallid cheeks / and his loftly majesty, tremulous, I adore). In a pronounced and, I would argue, intentional contrast, Avellaneda calls upon the hurricane to supplant her tears which, far from sublime, are abject and cowardly. As in the previous instances, desire here is horizontal, in contrast with the verticality that structures Heredia's poetic universe. While his poetic subject "rises" toward the ineffable in the final lines, hers calls for a *serial* process of replacing one thing (tears) with another (rage). Instead of transcendence, the desire is for one emotive state to follow on another. The vivid image of the fallen oak in Avellaneda's poem seems to recode Heredia's image of the bull that presages the storm. Heredia's lines are:

¿Al toro no miráis? El suelo escarban,
 De insoportable ardor sus pies heridos:
 La frente poderosa levantando,
 Y en la hinchada nariz fuego aspirando,
 Llama la tempestad con sus bramidos

(Do you not see the bull? His wounded feet
 scrape the ground with unbearable ardor
 His powerful brow raised
 The flared nostrils breathing fire
 He calls forth the tempest with his roar)

The verb *bramar* (to roar) ties this image of masculine potency to the oak in Avellaneda's poem, which, however, is broken by the storm and thrown into the "bramador torrente" (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 101) (roaring torrent), imaging a collapse of phallic power. That image obliges me now to mention the title of Avellaneda's hurricane poem. In the 1841 edition of her poems, this text is titled "En una tarde tempestuosa: Soneto" (On a stormy afternoon: Sonnet), but in the better known edition of 1850, it appears under an entirely different title: "Deseo de venganza" (Desire for Vengeance). Again the theme is unsatisfied desire, and perhaps more important here, an emotion—vengefulness—that is alien to the romantic repertoire, absent in Heredia, a form of impotence marked by gender.¹⁰

Students of Latin American romantic poetry have long commented on its geographical and territorial thematics. In the Americas, the performance of romantic subjectivity is often anchored in geography—in Heredia's case, for instance, the Teocalli de Cholula, the Caribbean sea, the pastoral retreat. Except for her poems about Cuba, such geographical placement is not a common feature of Avellaneda's poetry. Her poetic voice speaks from unnamed places, from non-places, from spaces that have no name on social or geographical maps. Romantic poetry dramatizes a kind of geographic mobility that enables the poet to situate himself in places where nature and divine forces can act upon him. Solitude is an essential element. This convention presupposes forms of agency tied to class and gender privilege. The same scenario, the solitary poet outdoors in a space far from society turns out to be genuinely implausible for a female poetic subject, in the same way that social norms placed the combination of geographic mobility and solitude off limits for women.

Avellaneda and the Modern

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was one of the great virtuosos of Spanish verse (see, for example, Lazo). Her formalism and her preference for the sonnet has sometimes led critics to associate her with neoclassicism rather than romanticism, to read her as out of step with her times and as more conservative than canonical romantics like Heredia, Lamartine, or Espronceda. But an insubordinate reading of her work invites a different association, that looks ahead to the sym-

bolist and decadent poetics that took form in the work of Baudelaire (*Les Fleurs du mal* appears in 1867) and Verlaine (*Poemes saturniens* appeared in 1866.) There is a reading of Avellaneda, in other words, that sees her as more rather than less modern than her romantic models.¹¹ In one of her late compositions, a poem written in direct reference to a corresponding poem by Heredia, she takes up an aggressively modernizing position in contrast with his romanticism. I end this essay with a reflection on Avellaneda's infrequently read and even less frequently appreciated 1864 ode "A vista de Niágara."

Except for the elegy she wrote on his death, I believe "A vista de Niágara" is the only composition in which Avellaneda refers specifically to Heredia. As if to avoid any doubts about the parallel with Heredia's "Niagara" (1825), Avellaneda writes a poem with exactly the same number of lines (140 in both poems), and even quotes two lines from Heredia. Again, hers is a tortured, anguished text. Avellaneda planned to visit Niágara in the company of her husband, Domingo Verdugo, but the latter's unexpected death obliged her to make the trip without him, accompanied by her brother. Her collected letters, published in 1907, recount her visit to Niágara as "the woman in black." In her poem, she speaks in the voice of the woman in mourning: "Y tú, ¡sublime Niágara!, perdona / si con un himno triunfal no te saluda/mi tosca lira" (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 371) (And you, sublime Niágara! Forgive me / if with triumphal song my hoarse lyre fails to greet you.) If she were emotionally capable of hearing the voice of Niágara, she says, she would rival the "the great poet of Cuba," (that is, Heredia): "¡Cómo también mi poderoso canto / —Rival del suyo—ufana elevaría" (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 373) (My powerful song as well / would proudly rise and rival his). But she writes from grief and loss, even (again) abjection.

This long text culminates with a dramatic rupture. Heredia's "Niagara" ends with a somewhat gratuitous final twist in which he evokes a hypothetical lover (again the idealized sexual contract) who might accompany him and intensify his emotional experience: "Cómo gozara / viéndola cubrirse de leve palidez y ser más bella en su dulce terror" (Heredia 143) (How I would thrill / to see her turn pale and more beautiful in her sweet terror). At precisely the same point in her text (line 115), Avellaneda introduces a twist of her own. Leaving the cataracts to "the Cuban troubadour," she turns her glance away ("al apartar la vista de tu hermosura" [Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 374] [turning my gaze from your beauty]) and is captivated by "another portent of human power"—and here there appears one of the strangest endecasylable lines in the history of Spanish verse:

¡Salve o aereo, indescribible puente
Obra del hombre, que emular procuras
La obra de Dios, junto a la cual 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...
 (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 374)

(Hail! O airborne, indescribable bridge,
 Work of man, aimed to imitate
 The work of God beside which you flaunt yourself!
 Hail, bold signal
 Of industrial progress, whose heights
 —which slow-footed nations scale—
 Are ruled like a king by a young people
 That only yesterday in its robust arms, rising,
 Seized its liberty.)

The poem ends praising the United States.¹² In her composition, Avellaneda replaces the romantic fetish of the mighty cataracts, with the man-made, horizontal industrial construction of the bridge, a work of transportation rather than transcendence, a mediating device aimed at overcoming the cataracts, not surrendering to them. The bridge inaugurates a symbolic order entirely distinct from that of the romantics, a terrestrial, modern, secular, industrial order. In Avellaneda's poetic *obra* I believe this moment of presence and plenitude at Niágara is unique. Ironically or tragically, these lines that open toward a new poetics of the modern are the last lines of one of Avellaneda's last compositions. From Niágara, she returned to Spain, where she died in 1873 at the age of fifty-nine, after editing her complete works (1869), dedicated to Cuba.

Notes

1. Shortly after being widowed, Gómez de Avellaneda's mother remarried against her family's wishes. This rupture occasioned her departure to Spain with her children, where she sought the protection of her new husband's family.
2. For a study of *Album cubano* see María C. Albin "La revista *Album cubano* de Gómez de Avellaneda: La esfera pública y la crítica a la modernidad." See also Albin, "Fronteras de género, nación y ciudadanía: *La Ilustración. Album de las Damas* (1845) y *Album cubano de lo bueno y de lo bello* (1860) de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda," in *Género*,

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3. For an analysis of this poem see María C. Albin, "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y José María Heredia: El yo lírico y la invención de un mito insular," in *Género, poesía y esfera pública: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la tradición romántica*.
4. Kirkpatrick notes, for example, that in this period French and Spanish women first began using their husband's surnames, preceded by the preposition "de" (Kirkpatrick).
5. She was refused admission on the grounds of her gender.
6. For an extended analysis of these essays, see Pratt "Las mujeres." It is noteworthy in these essays, as was common among nineteenth century women essayists, that the models for female leadership are monarchic. This discourse often irritated republicans, but it is not paradoxical that the monarchic order appeared to offer women more access to power than the liberal-democratic order. It was much easier for a woman to become a queen than a president.
7. Gómez de Avellaneda's daughter was born in a convent in 1845 and died after a few months. Shortly after, Avellaneda was married for the first time, to Pedro Sabater, a prominent figure in Madrid society and politics (and not the father of her child). Already ill from cancer, he left her a widow three months later. On maternity, see her poems "To a young mother" and "To a sleeping child," where Avellaneda vehemently rejects not motherhood, but the cult of motherhood and the idealization of childhood.
8. Gender equivalence was a point of dogma for Avellaneda. From her personal diary addressed to her lover Ignacio de Cepeda: "I am free as are you; we should both be free always, and the man who gains the right to humiliate a woman, the man who abuses his power, wrests this precious freedom from that woman; for she who recognizes a master is not free" (79).
9. My readings of Avellaneda's poetry differ from those Susan Kirkpatrick offers in her brilliant study of Spanish women romantics. Kirkpatrick reads from an expressive and autobiographical perspective, while I work from the perspective of performance and intertextuality. Kirkpatrick finds that in Avellaneda's poetry desire itself is dangerous and threatening, in contrast with masculine poets. Our readings differ sharply on this point. On the other hand, her observation that female romantics display "different and more extreme forms of alienation than male poets" (202) is certainly compatible with the reading of Avellaneda proposed here.
10. Space does not permit discussion of the entire corpus of parallel poems, which in addition to the texts discussed here includes the following pairs (citing first Heredia's text, followed by Avellaneda's): "En el Teocalli de Cholula" and "El viajero americano"; "La partida" and "Al partir"; "Los placeres de la melancolía" and "Genio e la melancolía"; "Himno del peregrino" and "A Él." Both also wrote poems titled "Contemplación" and elegies to George Washington.
11. Consider for instance, such antiromantic lines as these from "La venganza" (Vengeance):
 ¡Dadle a mis labios, que se agitan ávidos,
 Sangre humeante sin cesar, corred!

¡Trague, devore sus raudales rápidos,
Jamás saciada, mi ferviente sed!
Hagan mis dientes con cruidos ásperos
Pedazos mil su corazón infiel
Y dormiré, cual en suntuoso tálamo
En su caliente, ¡ensangrentada piel! (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 136)

(Give my lips, avidly trembling,
Smoking blood without end, flow!
Let me gulp, devour its torrential streams
Never sated, my burning thirst!
Let my teeth grind to bits
The thousand pieces of his faithless heart
And I will sleep, as in a lavish marriage bed
In his warm and bloody carcass!)

Do lines like these hark back to Echeverría's *La cautiva*, or do they reach ahead to Baudelaire's decadent "La Charogne"? Critics have speculated about a fin de siècle terror among male writers in the face of female agency. Perhaps Martí and others were right to be alarmed.

12. National pride obliges me to note that neither poet acknowledges their location on the border with Canada—the unnamed frontier spanned by the indescribable bridge. For an extensive corpus of poetry on Niagara, see The Niagara Falls Poetry Project, www.niagarapoetry.ca.

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**Tu amante ultrajada no puede ser tu amiga
(Your Scorned Lover Can't Be Your Friend):
Editing Tula's Love Letters**

Emil Volek

Translated by Katie A. Brown

In memory of Nara Araújo

¿dónde ecsiste el hombre que pueda llenar
los votos de esta sensibilidad tan fogosa
como delicada? ¡En vano lo he buscado
nueve años!; ¡en vano! He encontrado
hombres!, hombres, todos parecidos
entre sí: ninguno ante el cual pudiera
yo postrarme con respeto y decirle con
entusiasmo: Tú serás mi Dios sobre la
tierra, tú el dueño absoluto de esta alma
apasionada.

El cuadernillo de la autobiografía, 68

(where is the man who can fulfill the vows
of this feeling as ardent as it is delicate?
In vain, I've searched for him for nine
years! In vain! I've found men! Men, all of
them the same: none before whom I could
prostrate myself with respect and cry with
enthusiasm: You will be my earthly god,
you, the absolute master of this passionate
soul.)

The Autobiography Booklet

When one considers the literary legacy of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873), her love letters (as well as those letters of just friendship) stand out among the totality of her works. Although they may not be primarily “literary,” for many readers, they could even overshadow a large part of her work, so famous in her time and spread across various genres (poetry, novel, short story, and drama). While her literary pieces and even plays, minus a few exceptions, hibernate on the dusty shelves of nineteenth-century art museums, occasionally shaken up by every possible motive minus the genuinely literary ones, her letters—flirty, passionate, direct, ironic, or tormented in tone—maintain the force of their immediateness and continue speaking to us of the complexities of intimate life, about the labors of the heart. They fill us with sadness and admiration. In them, one of the fundamental conflicts experienced by any human being searching for happiness is staged: between the high expectations one has for their own life (who hasn’t dreamed?), and the real circumstances that usually hinder, if not completely frustrate, those flights of fancy. The mythical Icarus fails due to the earthly wax holding his wings together, melted by the Sun. The Argentine writer headed toward blindness lets his inspired “yo” (self) fall into the dearth of a “Borges” fabricated by a “terna de profesores” (panel of professors) looking for “tenure.” Plotting out Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is our task at hand.

In the case of Tula, as she was called by friends, we have before us a conflict between Romantic codes and their foreseeable setback by the surrounding realities of the society in which she lives. That conflict is heightened in her because her work, for its feminist and anti-slavery postures, is better situated within “revolutionary” Romanticism as opposed to “conservative” Romanticism (using the categorization proposed *illo tempore* by Georg Brandes). Upon contact, the masculine “idols” sought out and desired, melt into “men” that no longer deserve love, but whom she will continue viewing and treating with the intimate complicity of a friend. Where she makes no mistake is in the fascination with her literary heroines: Madame de Staël’s Corinne, the focus of lettered men’s courtship, and the libertine and provocative figure of George Sand, who exercise over her the unsettling attraction of far-off myths, imitated selectively. Unlike the ingenious literary game of Borges, actually purloined from Rimbaud, Tula’s letters vigorously reclaim her “self”; this doesn’t dissolve into the literature, and the letters aren’t easily reduced to one literary theme. Although her literature is her life, her life is not all literature. The letters capture and expose this painful struggle.

In a brilliant essay “What Is Poetry?” (from 1933), Roman Jakobson ponders the tensions between life and literature in the example of the young Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha. He wrote a beautiful poem, in 1836, about frustrated springtime love, “Máj” (May), where the lover’s obsessive jealousy provokes a tragic outcome. He also left us a diary, partially

written in code, where he noted his corporeal functions with an accountant's precision, along with describing the fleeting, vulgar and multiple amorous encounters with his girlfriend, mocking the vigilance of her parents. Sometimes literature and reality overlap even in the diary, when in the very act of lovemaking he obligates his girlfriend to swear that she wasn't unfaithful to him. Jakobson provocatively suggests that the poet's diary would be more appreciated as literature in the twentieth century.

The critic's boutade also reveals a more serious aspect to the provocation: the attitude of "revealing," initiated by Freudism and radicalized during the Twentieth century, leads us toward a more and more sexual (re)reading of everything. However, in criticism as well as in a simple reading, forgetting the nuances, the fine points, the contradictions, and reducing it all to a common denominator, whether it be sexual, ideological, or political, dulls the text. The monothematic mutilates it. Luckily, in these postmodern times, we don't have to return to the exquisite turn-of-the-century aestheticism, nor embrace the purist "esthetics of negativity" (Theodor Adorno's term), as has been the tendency of the post-Kantian modern aesthetic, which began to purge art of all its apparent "extra-aesthetic" values, until ending with almost nothing (Roland Barthes meditates on this sad result in his *Le Plaisir du texte*, from 1971). That's how the onion is peeled back in search of its "essence." We can now be more indulgent, if only we forget all the big and petty agendas that are pressing their message upon us, and allow Tula's letters to create their own aesthetic, assembled upon the interstices between literature and reality, and share the continuous vicissitudes and displacements of the borders between them.

Now, if we contemplate the picture offered to us from the perspective of contemporary Western culture (the deterioration of certain cultures and even of cultural thought itself today is frightening), the social scene revealed through those letters is quite different from our own: we are certainly a little more "modern" (or that's what we believe); but the aforementioned complexities haven't left our lives, not with the new, ultra-modern gadgets that fill our world and our time, nor with the diverse revolutions that have left holes in the walls of traditional morality. However, the very *mode of communication* of those handwritten missives (on occasion, sealed with an opportune tear, little drawing, or blot) has almost completely disappeared from our world, being substituted by "sexting" and by hieroglyphic abbreviations of forever shorter messages, but instantly exchanged between multitudes.

In comparison with the photos that we take and share on cell phones, these letters *cum* verbal photographs come to us irremediably outfitted in their historic patina, as antique photographs flaunt their half-blurry sepia coloring; but, despite other clothing, different poses and jargon, in them we see *ourselves*. This historic patina ends up *literaturizing* to a certain extent the documents from other epochs and bestows new touches to the initial "literary"

values disseminated in them. Considering it from the author's side, it is an unintentional *literaturization*; but it is converted into reality under the intentional, hermeneutic gaze of the reader.

For Jan Mukařovský, in his *avant la lettre* "deconstructive" moment, revealed to him in 1943, to the extent that the text cedes to the readers' interpretive impulse, their intentionality creates a signic message; as soon as it resists, it becomes a thing, and, if it signifies something, it is the cessation of signification. A black hole appears in the discursive universe, oriented to attract attention precisely to the enigma of its non-signification. Unfortunately, the fact that in many cases such a hole emerges not because of the text's resistance, but due to readers' ignorance, escapes Mukařovský. Whatever the case may be, the zeal for the totalization of meaning, the mantra of "scientific" structuralism, reaches a limit that is always unpredictable. In Mukařovský's vision, sign and "thing" would enter into a secular dance: the border between them would unceasingly shift, according to the gaze, the context, the intentionality of the recuperation of meaning.

From this point of view we get the following alternative: in one extreme, the letters are "things," are detailed autobiographical documents; treating them as otherwise would be inappropriately manipulating them (here we could place the focus of Ezama Gil); at the other extreme, they would be the "new" literature, validated by the twentieth century (Jakobson's position). However, *tertium datur*: there is still an intermediate option because, as I see it, the letters draw and blur potential constellations of forms and values, and the readers can try to rescue them from their latent condition and put them in view for the general public. We are going to explore this third route and its limits.

Among the cycles of love letters written by Tula, the long episode of her relationship with an Andalusian, Ignacio de Cepeda y Alcalde (1816–1906), stands out. The young Cuban woman and the then law student meet in the autumn of 1838, and in July of the following year, their amorous entanglement begins. It will change in tone (vacillating between love and friendship), in scene (from Seville it moves to Madrid), and altogether will be prolonged for some fifteen years, until the amicable, definitive separation in 1854, when Cepeda marries another woman and Tula enters, with all pomp and circumstance, into her second nuptials in April of 1855, with Coronel Domingo Verdugo.

Between Saturday, July 13, and Thursday, August 1, when she writes the second letter (Cruz de Fuentes, *Autobiografía y cartas* 265), Tula dedicates almost an entire week to composing, in a little notebook, an autobiography destined to present her in a better light in the inquisitive eyes of Cepeda, intrigued by her attractive personality, but also somewhat worried by the public life of the young writer, with the fame for affairs that surrounds her. Tula not only recounts with frankness her history, her mistakes, and the reasoning that then led her to make good decisions, but also comments daily on what hap-

pens and doesn't happen between them.

The booklet is then an integral part of the budding relationship with Cepeda; it is part of the initial flow of the letters, and it is surprising that the editors persist in publishing it separately, under the imposed title of "Autobiography." Its absence creates a hole in the epistolary communication. If this correspondence interests us only as a collection of various letters, the difference of "genre" announced in the apocryphal title of the booklet justifies the separation. However, if we are interested in how these materials mark the development of the relationship and its ups and downs, the booklet will be another material within the correspondence. Something similar happens with the order of the letters: in the first case, it doesn't matter; in the second, it is of utmost importance. Thus, we can see until what point the type of reading that we consciously or unconsciously adopt casts its shadow over the meaning of the epistolary materials.

When we approach the group of letters addressed to Cepeda with an interest in the history of the relationship, it is surprising the extent to which these heterogeneous epistolary materials—written in various registers (more "literary" letters alternate with exchanges with more practical ends) and with diverse rhythms in distinct times (the accumulation of the letters reflects the intensity of the relationship in the autumn of 1839 and, again, in the autumn of 1847)—create a whole that is quite closed and balanced. The "literary" aperture of the first letter-poem, written in "una hora de desvelo y melancolía" (57) (an hour of insomnia and melancholy), will have a gentle ending in the last letter, in 1854. Between the two "ends" are two explosive centers of the relationship, in 1839 and 1847, symmetric and inverse (in the first, Tula reaches out to Cepeda; in the second, Cepeda will call on Tula). The two encounters, in Seville and Madrid, end in intimate "disencounters"; numerous romantic leitmotifs are woven through the letters from beginning to end. However, in the second encounter, eight years later, the Romantic chronotope, in principle atemporal (defended by Tula), stumbles upon the reality of what happened in Madrid a few years before with another Andalusian, the poet Gabriel García Tassara; and this conflict presents a dilemma that ends up being irresolvable for Cepeda.

These collected letters have been very successful and the number of reprints that Ezama Gil registers up through the last decade is impressive. One could conjecture that it is precisely because the whole has an impact for qualities that go beyond just a few "cartas sueltas" (loose letters), although anthologies have also been published. Carmen Bravo-Villasante, following the same path as other readers, saw in the letters "toda una novela epistolar a la manera de *Nouvelle Héloïse*" (75) (an epistolary novel in the style of *Nouvelle Héloïse*). And, really, it's not an absurd impression, provided that we understand that it is a metaphorical baptism, and that it is about similarity,

an approximation. Just as the painting by René Magritte, commented on by Foucault, simultaneously presents and negates the reality of a pipe, we need to have present that “this ‘novel’ is not a novel,” and that this collection is not “literature”; but also that the border between what is and isn’t one or the other is displaced and will continue being displaced throughout time and from one reader to another (for more on aesthetic reading see Volek “Cartas de amor”).

To a great degree, the letters are, at least partly, “literary.” Many of them are long and utilize the “lenguaje de la imaginación” (language of the imagination) of which Cepeda complains; they constantly mention the poetry and literature of the epoch, quote poems or fragments of them, and include clippings of poems published by Tula in print. Her invitations to read certain romantic works together are clearly a manipulation of the reticent lover. We need to understand also that the word “amante” (lover), had a semantic charge somewhat different than its current one until later in the nineteenth century: in social use it referred to a person that courted another (“Amante,” defined in *Diccionario de autoridades*: “El que ama y quiere bien, y tiene afecto a otro” [Lover, one who properly loves and likes, and has affection toward another]). When Cepeda prohibits the mention of the word “amor” (love) so as not to disturb the tranquility of his studies, Tula will make an incursion in the art of “cartas no de amor” (non-love letters), in which the word “love” is avoided but shows through in all touched upon topics. This art will be perfected by Viktor Shklovsky in the 1920s in his correspondence with Elsa Triolet, collected in *Zoo, or Letters Not About Love*. The result of the taboo is the even sharper perception of that which is forbidden.

The fact that the letters are written by Tula and the voice of Cepeda is only heard indirectly and in fragments, in polemic passages, reinforces the leading role that she plays in the relationship. She seems to dedicate her maneuvers to seduction, advancing and retreating, according to circumstances. In one moment, she plays a surprising and “rare” role in the relationship, that of tranquilizing the man of his own fear of loving her (letter VIII in Volek *Tu amante ultrajada*). That she is the focus of discursive—and apparently also real—activity bestows on her not only a certain feminist touch, but also influences how the image of the protagonists emerges from the epistolary materials in the imagination of readers.

The figure of Tula acquires complex and well-defined psychological contours. We know her “from within,” through the emotions that she expresses and for the reason she displays with her addressee, behind whom we, the intrusive readers, are placed. Much less can we see her yet “from without.” This case is only given fleetingly when she debates with some perception of her expressed by Cepeda. He is more ghost-like. We know him only “from without,” and as Tula “sees” him in her letters. These aren’t even the direct register of what really happened between them, but instead are some elaborations that

elucidate, make sense of, or change the meaning of what happened or what is wished would have happened. And, as we know, “what really happened” is not always that clear: so many times “the same” means something totally different for the people involved.

When we realize that Tula is aware that she writes “literary” letters and that she plays a romantic role with Cepeda, we become alert to her “narrative voice.” We have said that we slowly get to know her “from within”; but this does not mean that her voice is always reliable. We sense that, sometimes, it is out of step with “what really happened,” which we have to conjecture from the distinct pieces of information offered, or that we glean from reading between the lines. Unless we are naïve readers, and it seems that many are, the work imposed upon us recalls the arduous struggle that we have with certain modern texts that play with the reliability of the narrative voice. Only, in this case, there is no “author” behind the “narrator,” only a potential *self* behind the scribe Tula in every moment.

That said, to what point are these “literary” letters autobiographical? Are they perhaps more autobiographical than her novels? Maybe, to a certain degree, but not absolutely. Remember that the letters and novels overlap (this is visible in the case of *Sab*, written between 1838 and 1840). To think that the Tula of the letters is the very same Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in person would be to not recognize these differences. This is even more valid for Cepeda, *literaturized* by Tula and punished by the readers that adopt her point of view (see the introduction to my edition). Yet *both* are written creations. Following Otakar Zich’s phenomenological analysis of the “theatrical illusion,” we would say that the illusion of reality that the letters offer us is not reality nor unreality (then, neither fiction, “lies,” “pseudo-reality,” or “quasi-reality”), but is *another* reality. Aside from the “literary worlds” referred to or created by the writer, the correspondence between Tula and Cepeda—like any other correspondence—opens yet another “possible world” opposing the “real” life of the author, which is, however, now and ever, the most conjectural of all.

In a novel Tula would be a round character, that is, relatively complex and changing over time. The correspondence takes us down the turbulent path of the protagonist’s maturation process. Her “educación sentimental” (sentimental education) takes us from her emotional awakening under the imprint of Romanticism, through the struggle for the love of a man that she feels could understand her, toward being a full-fledged “woman of the world,” who maintains a nobility of soul and her composure among disillusion and disagreements.

Another aspect that is not often mentioned as “literary” is the group of letters written and exchanged in the two periods of intense personal contact in the autumns of 1839 and 1847. Remember that even in those occasions the “lovers” saw each other during social functions or courtesy visits, always under the watch of a relative and with the participation of other people that came

and went, and sometimes, *didn't leave* . . . The messages had to be secretly exchanged, maybe in a book, carried by servants or confidants, and many of them don't have dates or anything that helps us easily put them in order. In turn, the letters sent by mail, although easier for us, could have created difficulties for the recipient, which is basically what happens for Tula in the first moment that she had to keep up appearances as a "decent young lady": she had to invent fictional names and make arrangements to secretly receive them; but all this conspiratorial romance was also part of the game.

The autobiographical perspective, related to the realist novel in critical tradition, sees in the undated letters more of an obstacle than a possible achievement. Trying to order the letters according to their internal connections—in the end they are a "barometer" of the relationship—is an exercise in clock making. I wrote about this in more detail in "Cartas de amor de la Avellaneda" (Avellaneda's Love Letters). Placing certain letters according to their sense is easy. The history is known in broad strokes and repeats itself on two occasions: the sympathy (so as not to say "love at first sight") provokes some growing hopes (more in Tula than in Cepeda, always cautious), but a few setbacks (different on the two occasions) intervene, which in the end frustrate the relationship, and the "lovers" distance themselves more or less peaceably as "friends." One can see that this history follows the structure of the Aristotelian *mythos*—of the story—; it is not said in vain that life is a *subliterature*, a blot that would have to be relived cleanly if we had the opportunity. Only, the blot of epistolary novel that occupies us here is quite accomplished and rather than take away or rewrite certain alluded to voids, it asks us to fill them.

Some letters, however, resist the precise chronological ordering and acquire the value of a "wild card" that could be put in distinct possible places along the chain. The ideal solution would be to publish the correspondence in loose sheets and then each reader could order them according to their own criteria. This reading emphasizes the open structure at the very heart of the collection (in the sense of Umberto Eco), latent in the correspondence with Cepeda as it has been conserved. The fate of the writing, its circumstance and preservation, has created a semblance of experimenting with the construction of the work that has characterized post-modern art. In reality, it is this level of experimental art which makes possible, retroactively, this new perspective. We can conclude, with surprise, that while Romantic literature becomes a document of the epoch, in Avellaneda's love letters, aesthetic values of modern and postmodern art surface.

That said, Cepeda, who zealously guarded Tula's letters during his long life, turned them over before dying in 1906 to his friend Lorenzo Cruz de Fuentes, a professor of the Instituto (high school), and entrusted his widow to finance the edition. Cruz made a non commercial first edition in 1907, a sampling that consists of forty letters and the "autobiographical" booklet. In some

of them he omitted “offensive passages,” supposedly exaggerations of Tula’s jealousy (probably toward Cepeda’s future wife). The success of the publication and centenary of Avellaneda in 1914 fostered a second edition, “corrected and expanded,” which holds fifty-three letters and a short facsimile. The difference between these editions goes beyond the newly included texts: in the second, the editor “corrects” the author’s idiosyncratic orthography and punctuation, sometimes with little sense for accuracy; and also changes the order of the letters, with the same result (which his readers didn’t stop criticizing; see Cotarelo Mori).

The new transcription, correction or typographic composition produces numerous textual errors of detail. For example, we read in the “Autobiography” booklet: “¡Cuántas veces lloré en secreto lágrimas de hiel, y pedí a Dios me quitase la existencia!” (Cruz de Fuentes, *Autobiografía y cartas* 61) (How many times have I secretly shed icy tears, and asked God to take me out of existence!), while the complete phrase is: “ecsistencia, que no le había pedido, ni podía agradecerle!” (*La Avellaneda. Autobiografía* 28) (existence, which I hadn’t asked for, nor could I be grateful for it). Later, already from a distance of friendship, Tula writes: “Vale más no tocar nuevamente un asunto que hemos hablado ya” (*Autobiografía y cartas* 156) (Better not to touch on a matter that we have already discussed), while in the first edition we read: “Vale más no tocar nuevamente un asunto espinoso y del cual harto hemos hablado ya” (*La Avellaneda. Autobiografía* 82) (Better not to discuss a thorny topic that we have already talked to death). Further on, Tula excuses herself for utilizing ugly paper because she is “demudada” (*Autobiografía y cartas* 172) (upset); but the context and the first edition indicate that “está de mudada” (*La Avellaneda. Autobiografía* 93) (in the middle of a move), that she has changed homes and can’t find better paper. Examples of a lesser weight could be multiplied. However, the second edition does correct some typographic errors from the first one.

These two editions have been reproduced under original descriptive titles or under some new and interchangeable ones (see the complete list in Ezama Gil). The “Diario de amor” (Love Diary) stands out among the new titles. This takes us to a sham perpetrated by Alberto Ghirardo, who, in 1928, publishes under that title as “unpublished works” a brief selection of the letters, trimmed and organized in bizarre chapters. This book has also been reproduced and considered by some unquestioning critics as an authentic work by the Cuban writer. The edition was indeed “unpublished,” but the mutilated letters were not.

Tula’s letter included in the anthology of Hispanic American Literature by Anderson Imbert and Florit intrigued me; I found the 1914 edition in our library and began to study the case around the mid-1980s. That edition seemed antiquated and I especially questioned the order of the letters in the two intense personal encounters of the protagonists (I expressed my qualms

in “*Cartas de amor*”). I was intrigued by the explosive letters to Tassara (from 1844 and 1845; they are cited in his biography by Méndez Bejarano in the chapter “*Tassara erótico*” [Erotic Tassara]); maybe because they are few, they had never been published in a volume of or about Avellaneda, and it seemed to me that they would have been a good counterpoint to those addressed to Cepeda, especially because the episode is mentioned in their correspondence and played an important role in their fallout in 1847. The intent to publish the project in that phase did not prosper, and I set it aside. Later, Selimov released an edition following that of 1914 and my indication of the letters’ order in my “*Cartas de amor*,” which was a relief for me because I saw that my original project, including Tassara letters, would yet not be it.

Long reflection, a new century and a new love made me return to the project with more energy and ideas. It became clear to me that, because of the re-editions of the same letters, criticism suffered from “Cepeda-centrism,” orienting the reading, the interpretation of her life, and even the work of Tula around the Andalusian. It also became clear that there was more; that, aside from those addressed to Tassara, other letters of love/friendship from the period 1839–1854 provided new facets to the image of Avellaneda. For example, those addressed to Francisco Navarro Villoslada, in which she shows her disdain for an immature lover too presumptuous of his conquest. Or the letter that she writes to Juan Valera about her qualms with marriage weeks or maybe even days before marrying Pedro Sabater. All of these letters alternate like a counterpoint to the missives to Cepeda, and in some Tula even mentions indirectly her faux pas with Tassara.

The letters addressed to Antonio Romero Ortiz, written between the spring of 1853 and the beginning of 1854, and later in friendship, intermittently until 1871 (discovered by Priego Fernández del Campo and edited in 1975), represent an independent cycle. But in these Tula also reflects upon her past loves and in this way the thematic horizon from 1839–1854 is completed. The new project came to life and filled the voids left by the correspondence with Cepeda. Finally, as she herself included poetic texts or fragments, the idea arose to also add the poetic epistles addressed to Sabater and some reflexive poems about the steps (or missteps) taken by the poet. And if a letter mentioned that it carried a clipping of a certain published poem, why not include that text, taken from the closest edition? And if we know that she sometimes substantially rewrote her poems, then, why not, as a final touch, insert the version of “*A él*” from the 1869 edition, the Dumasian “thirty years later?”

That way, on the one hand, readers would have the letters and poems in their hands just as Cepeda had read them; on the other hand, the other included materials would serve as a complement and a counterpoint. Romanticism would alternate with realism, the sublime with the banal, the *Nouvelle Héloïse* by Rousseau with the *Les Liaisons dangereuses* of Laclos. This new context

sheds a new light on several things. For example, the well known poem “A . . .,” which is usually related to the sentimental breakup with Cepeda in 1847 and the edition of *Poesía* from 1850, is situated in November of 1845 (234), and therefore in relation to the end of the episode with Tassara when their daughter Brenhilde dies.

And there is more; in a letter to Antonio Romero Ortiz, when certain trust had been established after discovering the person behind the pseudonym “Armand Carrel” under which he had directed the first missives to her (Letter 11 in Priego; LXXII in my edition), a long letter of reflection on her loves, Tula writes:

Por mi parte solo te diré que una sola vez he creído amar. El amor, tal como yo lo concibo y lo he menester, no he hallado quien me lo inspire, ni quien lo sienta por mí. Pero abrigué largo tiempo un sentimiento enérgico, único de su especie que he sentido. No fui víctima de un abandono vulgar: mi desgracia consistió en que me dejé subyugar por las cualidades de la inteligencia sin cuidarme de las del corazón. No concebía entonces que pudiese un hombre comprenderlo todo y no sentir nada. . . . Cuando lo conocí mi orgullo me empeñó en un imposible: quise asimilar lo que era heterogéneo. La lucha comenzó; fue larga; fue terrible; y acabó por cansar a la parte más débil, que no era yo. No cesó *él* de amarme; fue que comencé yo a comprender que no podía haberme amado nunca. (Volek 263)

(For my part, I will say that only once have I believed myself to be in love. Love, as I conceive it and hold it to be necessary, I haven't found inspired in me by anyone, nor found one who feels it toward me. But, for a long time I cherished an energetic sentiment that I felt, unique to your species. I was not the victim of vulgar abandonment; my misfortune lied in the fact that I let myself be captivated by qualities of intelligence without looking after those of the heart. At that time I couldn't conceive that a man could understand everything and feel nothing. . . . When I met him my pride incited me toward the impossible: I wanted to assimilate that which was heterogeneous. The struggle began; it was long; it was terrible; and ended up hurting the weakest part, which wasn't me. *He* did not stop loving me; it was that I began to understand that he never really could have loved me.)

Up to this point, what Tula says corresponds perfectly to the image that the history with Cepeda has imprinted upon the readers. But she adds in the next paragraph of the letter: “Tres meses después me casé. Esto esplica el porqué no me inspiró amor mi marido. Hallaba en él todo lo que había buscado en el otro, pero había perdido la fe” (264) (Three months later I got married. This explains

why my husband did not inspire love in me. I found in him everything I had looked for in the other, but I had lost faith). And she continues reflecting on if she “debe amar todavía” (264) (should still love), if she “merece ser amada” (264) (deserves to be loved), and if she can believe in the hope that this new lover offers her. The mention of her husband obviously refers to Pedro Sabater, whom she married on May 10, 1846. The feint of the one great love, then, cannot be Cepeda but Tassara, from whom she will have finally separated after the death of their daughter. But the quote offers, in addition, yet another light on the separation than what the heart-rending letters to the male poet would suggest. The “three months” will be a symbolic figure, impactful, that doesn't necessarily correspond to the real amount of time that had passed.

But, let's not prematurely celebrate the break with “Cepeda-centrism.” Rather, it seems that the high Romantic ideal that Tula glimpses while still on the Island, and assumes in her search for love, constitutes a species of “wild-card idol” that is imperceptibly displaced from one Andalusian to another, and even beyond those two, as is demonstrated by the letters to Antonio Romero Ortiz. But the same Romantic model that is accommodated with surprising ease to a series of candidates, is mounted in such a way that it carries within it seeds of failure: the search for the ideal is and always will be at odds with reality. The idol's fall from divine grace upon revealing that they are “only men,” mere mortals; but they are redeemed by the grace of the poet as “friends.”

Now if we think about the famous poem “A él” (To Him), substantially rewritten in 1869, to whom does it refer? To Cepeda, as indicated in its first versions? The edition of *Poesías* from 1841 only puts the year “1840” at the end of the poem (54); the one from 1850 gives a more precise indication of “November of 1840” (81). But in 1869, does not the image of the ideal recipient also get seeped in Tassara, and Sabater, and Romero Ortiz, and—why not—Verdugo, if we leave out the bit players of fleeting importance? The mentioned silent competition with George Sand has produced a balance that is not completely insignificant. The autobiography of the poet herself offers us then more complex answers than the simple “autobiographical” identification, rooted in traditional criticism. Now, if we reread the versions of the poem from this ultimate revelation, we note that in all of them, from the first, the real addressee is precisely the sublime Romantic version of himself and in all of them failure is anticipated.

My edition, *Tu amante ultrajada no puede ser tu amiga, cartas de amor/novela epistolar (Your Scorned Lover Can't Be Your Friend: Love Letters/Epistolary Novel)*, published by Fundamentos in 2004, gathers together all kinds of materials around the correspondence with Cepeda that complement and to a certain degree complete the latent form outlined by these letters. For some readers, they will be superfluous, and for valid reasons. For others, they will offer the pleasure of discovering new, more complex facets, of the

“sentimental education” of the great Cuban and Spanish poet. The almost detective-like work of combing the archives has brought out of oblivion some unknown or little known actors, and has assigned some roles in a different way than in the traditional casting. Have we gotten closer to the literature or more to the life? It would seem to me that sometimes the opposites follow a parallel path.

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◆ Afterword

Of the Margins and the Center: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda

Lesley Wylie

Gertrudis Gómez Avellaneda's most famous literary work, *Sab*, opens with a line from the popular Spanish dramatist of the eighteenth century, José de Cañizares: "¿Quién eres? ¿Cuál es tu patria?" (38) ("Who are you? What is your homeland" [*Sab*, Scott, 27]). This is a question that might very well be posed of Gómez de Avellaneda's own life and work and which surfaces throughout this valuable collection of essays. Gómez de Avellaneda was born in Cuba in 1814 to a Spanish naval officer and Cuban mother and lived on the island until moving to Spain in 1836, where she spent most of her adult life, and wrote and published the vast majority of her work. Whilst Gómez de Avellaneda's life straddled two continents, her literary output is profoundly oriented toward Latin America. As this collection stresses, she published not only the first abolitionist novel of the Americas—her great anti-slavery work, *Sab*, which is set in a lushly tropical Cuba—but across much of her writing was fascinated with Latin America, particularly that moment of first encounter between the Old and New Worlds, especially in *Guatimozín. Último Emperador de México*, which relates the story of the Conquest of Mexico.

As the lines from Cañizares above suggest, national identity is one of the persistent concerns of *Sab*, a novel in which few if any characters can claim native roots: the eponymous slave is partly of African heritage, Enrique Otway, the handsome lover of the heroine, is of English ancestry, and Carlota herself is *criolla*. The single figure of putative Amerindian descent is Martina, whose only proof of this genealogy is her color, "pues ninguno de los rasgos de su fisonomía parecía corresponder a su pretendido origen" (108) ("for none of her facial features appeared to match her alleged origin" [*Sab*, Scott 78]). Like the garden planted by Sab at the Bellavista plantation in honor of his beloved Carlota, the design of which follows neither a nativist stance nor

English nor French fashion, but rather contains plants of all origins, from temperate favorites like the rose to the archetypally tropical banana tree, this is a book in which national belonging is profoundly complex.

The narrative form of the novel itself shares this sense of dislocation: of being neither Spanish nor fully Cuban. “Although written in Madrid, *Sab* is a Cuban novel,” Catherine Davies asserts (2). Yet whilst the novel was conceived of and indeed started in Cuba before Gómez de Avellaneda set off for Spain, the narrative voice vacillates between the perspective of an insider and an outsider: as Adriana Méndez Rodenas stresses in this collection, the narrator displays a “detached and an engaged perspective, as if the novel was written with both a *criollo* and a peninsular audience in mind” (156). Accounts of the tropical landscape display both an intimate knowledge of nature, a lived experience of a place seen close up over many years, whilst also often imagining it from the point of view of the traveler, as when, for instance, the narrator describes in Part I, chapter XI how “El viajero, que transita por dicho camino [Paso de los Paredones (Davies 120, note 92)], no puede levantar la vista hacia la altura sin grandes moles” (120) (“The traveler who journeyed by this path could not lift his eyes on high without feeling vertigo” [*Sab*, Scott 87]). At other times the topographical descriptions are modulated by Romantic appeals to the sublime or the picturesque. According to Beatriz Rivera-Barnes, living in Spain the author “began to [. . .] construct the Cuban environment just as a Spaniard would” (70), with awed reverence for an exotic, tropical world. Both Rivera-Barnes (68) and Thomas Ward (99) compare the tendency of the novel’s narrator to enumerate natural features to colonial tracts like Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* (1535). In the opening chapter of the novel, the narrator presents a superabundant nature, redolent of the colonial *relato* and infused with the discourse of the ‘marvellous’—a concept which permeated all areas of writing on the New World and, as Stephen Greenblatt has argued, denoted “the presence [. . .] of a world of objects that exceed[ed] [the] understanding of the probable and the familiar” (75). In the tradition of colonial travel writing the narrator of *Sab* evokes how:

Bandadas de golondrinas se cruzaban en todas direcciones buscando su albergue nocturno, y el verde papagayo con sus franjas de oro y de grana, el cao de un negro nítido y brillante, el carpintero real de férrea lengua y matizado plumaje, la alegre guacamaya, el ligero tomeguín, la tornasolada mariposa y otra infinidad de aves indígenas, posaban en las ramas del tamarindo y del mango aromatic. (39)

(Flocks of swallows crossed and recrossed in all directions in search of their night’s refuge; the green parrot, banded with gold and scarlet, the

crow, distinctly black and lustrous, the royal woodpecker, of iron tongue and muted plumage, the blithe macaw, the swift *tomeguín*, the iridescent butterfly, and a whole host of native birds alighted in the branches of the tamarind and aromatic mango trees. [*Sab*, Scott 27])

Here we have clear echoes of Columbus's first enraptured accounts of the New World in his "Diario del primer viaje" (1492), of the "aves y pajaritos de tantas maneras y tan diversas de las nuestras que es maravilla" (110) (birds so various and different from our birds that it is a marvel [my translation]). The account of avian life also anticipates the tendency to catalogue nature, a feature of the Plinian tradition of colonial chroniclers like Oviedo through to the Latin American *novela de la tierra* in the hands of Rómulo Gallegos and José Eustasio Rivera, among others. The narrator presents Cuba's birds to a reader from beyond the island's shores, evoking their abundance and ebullience, just as elsewhere the landscape is depicted in terms which are archetypally Romantic.

Much of this collection highlights the Romantic qualities of *Sab* and of Avellaneda's work in general—qualities which seem to be in line with what Méndez calls her 'detached' perspective on the New World. The "Introduction" stresses the central position of the author in Hispanic Romanticism, both as a playwright, poet, and novelist. Her work is replete with Romantic heroes and heroines, from Moctezuma or Cortés in *Guatimozín* to Leoncia in the play of the same name, discussed by Alexander Selimov in this volume. Selimov shows how Avellaneda appeals to Romantic discourse in *Leoncia*—a discourse usually dominated by male characters and writers in the nineteenth century—to forge the eponymous female protagonist. In her relationship with a young man called Carlos, Leoncia is shown, like many Romantic heroes (in the words of Lilian R. Furst) to "welcome even exceptional sorrow or dramatic misfortune" (103). The tragic outcome of the play—which ends in suicide and desperation—fits with the Romantic hero's predisposition to be controlled by fate and inclined to tragedy.

The Romanticism of *Sab* is manifold. The essay by Julia C. Paulk draws on Elena Grau-Llevería's definition of Social Romanticism (where an individual is seen to struggle against the abuses and privileges of society) to show how the protagonists of *Sab* identify themselves with a group which is in some sense limited by social institutions and mores. Martina's laments on behalf of the vanquished former inhabitants of Cuba or Sab's railing against slavery are examples of this. And as a number of critics have pointed out, Sab himself fits into the pattern of the black hero of Romantic texts such as Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal* (1826). But more than any other aspect of *Sab*, it is the descriptions of the natural environment which typify the author's relationship to European Romanticism. Chapter V, which takes its epigraph from the José María Heredia's poem "En una tempestad," draws on one of the set pieces of

nineteenth-century Romantic writing on the tropics: the storm. Alexander von Humboldt, whose travels in South America are credited by Mary Louise Pratt with the “reinvention” of America (111–143), holds up a night spent out in the open during a “fearful thunderstorm” in *Views of Nature: The Sublime Phenomena of Creation* as a crystallization of the sublime. In Avellaneda’s novel, the inclusion of a tropical storm not only has important consequences for the plot (Carlota’s lover Enrique narrowly escapes death when his horse takes fright and knocks him off his saddle) but seems to position the novel within a European tradition of tropical nature writing:

La tempestad estalla por fin súbitamente. Al soplo impetuoso de los vientos desencadenados el polvo de los campos se levanta en sofocantes torbellinos: el cielo se abre vomitando fuego por innumerables bocas: el relámpago describe mil ángulos encendidos: el rayo troncha los más corpulentos árboles y la atmósfera encendida semeja una vasta hoguera. (70)

(At last the storm broke. Suddenly, at the impetuous gust of the unleashed winds, the dust of the fields rose in suffocating spirals. The heavens opened, spewing fire through innumerable openings. Lightning described a thousand fiery angles, its bolts shattering the thickest trees, and the burning atmosphere was like a huge conflagration. [*Sab*, Scott 50])

Here tropical nature is powerful and sinister, personified as a fire-breathing beast. A number of critics have pointed out the proximity of *Sab* to classics of European Romanticism by, for example, Chateaubriand (Schlau 498) and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (Servera 55). Carlota’s fantasy about living in a simple hut with her lover enjoying “una vida de amor, de inocencia y de libertad” (102) (“a life of love, innocence, and freedom” [*Sab*, Scott 74]) reminds one of Chactas’s plea to the heroine of *Atala* that they “build a hut . . . and hide . . . away forever” (Chateaubriand 46) and, as Jenna Leving Jacobson points out in this volume, shares some of the characteristics of what Cintio Vitier has called “la falsedad romántica importada” (imported romantic falsehood) leading to “una especie de auto-exotismo imperdonable” (191) (a kind of inexcusable auto-exoticism).

Despite its proximity to Romantic texts from a European tradition, however, the novel remains palpably Latin American. Pratt’s essay in this volume shows that Avellaneda maintained a critical distance from Romanticism throughout her oeuvre, creating what Pratt calls “per-versions” (270) of canonical Romantic works, including poems by Heredia. Méndez’s essay in this volume shows how many of the natural descriptions in *Sab* are not merely concerned with parroting European classics, but work to preserve the still largely untouched rural interior of Cuba and denounce the destruction of other areas

of the island by the sugar industry. The essay shows the concern of the author with the widespread destruction of Cuba's landscapes, especially forests, and situates the melancholic evocation of the plantation Bellavista, threatened by the imperatives of sugar production, as part of a broader "yearning for lost landscapes" (Paravisini-Gebert) in Caribbean fiction. The novel is certainly filled with wistful references to the "prodigiosa fertilidad" (97) ("prodigious fertility" [*Sab*, Scott 71]) of the landscape, corresponding to a long-held idealization of the New World as a paradise where there is no necessity for work, expressed most concretely by Carlota as she mourns the passing of the island's original inhabitants: "Aquí vivían felices e inocentes aquellos hijos de la naturaleza: este suelo virgen no necesitaba ser regado con el sudor de los esclavos para producirles: ofreciales por todas partes sombras y frutos, aguas y flores" (102) ("Here those children of nature lived in happiness and innocence: this virgin soil did not need to be watered with the sweat of slaves to be productive; everywhere it gave shade and fruit, water and flowers" [*Sab*, Scott 73]).

This is reminiscent of Andrés Bello's 1826 "Silva a la agricultura en la zona tórrida," in which the classical motif of the Golden Age is invoked in the poem's opening to convey the generosity of a tropical nature which does not require human toil: "el banano, primero / de cuantas concedió bellos presents / Providencia a las gentes / de Ecuador feliz con mano larga. / No ya de humanas artes obligado el premio rinde opimo" (Bello 48) ("Banana, first / of all the plants that Providence has offered / to happy tropic's folk with generous hand; it asks no human arts, but freely yields / its fruit" [Bello, Jaksić 30]). Yet in Bello's poem as in Carlota's impassioned lament, there is a suppression of the reality of slavery—"escasa industria bástale, cual puede / hurtar a sus fatigas mano esclava" (Bello 48) ("No care does it require, only such heed / as a slave's hand can steal from daily toil" [Bello, Jaksić 30])—a reality made explicit from the start of *Sab* when the protagonist points out that even when "la naturaleza descansa" (42) ("nature rests" [*Sab*, Scott 29]), "el esclavo va a regar con su sudor y con sus lágrimas al recinto donde la noche no tiene sombras, ni la brisa frescura" (42) ("the slave with his sweat and tears waters the place where neither the night has shadows nor the breeze freshness" [*Sab*, Scott 29]). Just as we are not allowed to forget the brutal reality of slavery in the novel, we are also disbarred from engaging too readily with Romantic descriptions of Cuban scenery. This is a landscape on the verge of change—the shift toward what Benítez Rojo calls "Cuba grande" (15–16), and the decimation of all those trees, majestic *ceibas* and palms—referenced in the novel's pages.

Sab is not the only of Avellaneda's works concerned with topography. Catharina Vallejo in this volume has explored Avellaneda's other travel writing, in particular three *tradiciones* which the author gathered during trips to the Basque land and Pyrenees in the late 1850s. Vallejo situates Avellaneda as a woman and a Romantic subject, both of which define her as marginal

(Spanish Romanticism, she explains, was a result of the country's marginalization—geographically in Europe, as well as historically and culturally). The persona of the female traveller is an important strand of Vallejo's exposition: the essay is concerned with the 'presence' of Avellaneda in her travel writing—the dual role she plays as both the recipient of the story (several she gleaned from tour guides) and as the author of the present text. This, it is shown, is related closely to Avellaneda's self-positioning as a woman. Within the stories, the expression of feelings—one of the hallmarks of femininity—is a central part of the author's presence. On the other hand, the stories are silent about the more material manifestations of presence—eyes, which give rise to vision, or the brain, responsible for feelings, prioritizing the immaterial, the spiritual over material substance, in line with Western philosophical thinking from Romanticism on.

The presence of Avellaneda in her writing is, of course, a subject that has attracted a good deal of critical attention. Doris Sommer's chapter on *Sab* in her groundbreaking *Foundational Fictions* is entitled "Sab C'est Moi" and argues that through her mulatto protagonist Avellaneda was able to "construct a paradoxical, interstitial, and ultimately new or American persona [. . .]. Neither Old World nor New World, neither a woman's writer nor a man's, Gertrudis was both, or something different; she was Sab" (114).¹ Part of this identification, Sommer argues, rests on Sab's and Avellaneda's shared endeavor at authorship and their struggle to overturn the social order—whether that relating to master-slave or male-female relations. In his examination of quite a different genre—Avellaneda's letters to her lover, the Andalusian law student Ignacio de Cepeda y Alcalde whom she met in 1838—Emil Volek in this volume also considers the presence of the author in her writing. Much of the essay considers the ways in which life and literature collide and considers the 'paratexts' of the Cuban's amorous epistles—the extracts of poems, for instance, not included in anthologies of the letters but which provide a valuable insight into the author's processes of composition and 'narrative voice.' The letters, like much twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, pose questions about narrative reliability and the divide between autobiographical and non-autobiographical works. Volek reminds us that the worlds of letters and novels overlap: "both are written creations" (289) and that *Sab* is a novel in which fact as well as fiction obtains.

Avellaneda's presence in *Sab* is at times explicit, as when she directly addresses the reader in the opening "Dos palabras al lector" ("A Word to the Reader" [*Sab*, Scott 26]), a prologue which underplays the significance of her work as a "novelita" (36) ("little novel" [*Sab*, Scott 26]). Yet it is not only history which has judged *Sab* to be, as claimed in the introduction to this volume, a "pioneer anti-slavery novel" (5): *Sab* was notably banned in Cuba when it was first published for its controversial portrayal of slavery. A number of

critics have discussed the narrative voice in the novel, identified by Davies as that of a woman given her views on marriage and male-female relations (27). Although some criticism has tended to view the novel as *either* abolitionist *or* feminist, as Julia C. Paulk's essay in this volume stresses, these two positions, far from being incompatible, are mutually reinforcing: "each protest against discrimination strengthens the other and arises from a sense of the many injustices colonial Cuban society supported" (148). Both Sab and Carlota, in their different ways, suffer the yoke of slavery and a lack of freewill. Indeed, as Sab famously declares in his letter to Teresa, women might even be regarded as less fortunate than slaves since "El esclavo al menos puede cambiar de amo, puede esperar que juntando oro comprará algún día su libertad; pero la mujer, cuando levanta sus manos enflaquecidas y su frente ultrajada, para pedir libertad, oye al monstruo de voz sepulchral que le grita: 'En la tumba'" (194) ("The slave can at least change masters, can even hope to buy his freedom some day if he can save enough money, but a woman, when she lifts her careworn hands and mistreated brow to beg for release, hears the monstrous, deathly voice which cries out to her: 'In the grave'" [*Sab*, Scott 145]). This is a view, as Pratt's essay confirms, which was shared by the author who admitted in her *Autobiografía* that her "horror al matrimonio era extremado" (268) (horror of marriage was extreme). Although she did marry, this perspective, Pratt argues, places her in a long tradition of female writers, from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to Rosario Castellanos, who regarded marriage as a restriction on their personal freedom.

Although Avellaneda was, as the "Introduction" reminds us, credited with having a "male genius" (10) and through her writing was able to overcome some of the restrictions placed on women in the nineteenth century, the plight of her sex in a patriarchal society was an abiding concern for Avellaneda. Selimov's essay, for instance, shows that the play *Leoncia* is primarily concerned with female virtue or the perceived lack thereof. Because of the protagonist's past (she was seduced as a young woman and bore a child), Leoncia cannot be considered virtuous—a discrepancy for which Avellaneda blames patriarchal society. Through reference to *Sab*, the essay shows that the role of women under patriarchy is parallel to that of a slave in a plantation culture where a monetary value is placed on the body (in *Leoncia*, on female virginity). This concern is shown to rhyme with a general awakening in other mid-nineteenth-century writing, by both men and women, to the plight of women and in particular with Avellaneda's own personal experience, her love affair with Cepeda, which ended in heartbreak. Pratt's essay also draws out Avellaneda's feminist credentials and the presence of this in her writing in which she developed a "poetics of insubordination and unsubordinated desire," (270) which questioned gender relations and the restrictions imposed on her as a woman.

This "insubordination" can also be traced in a number of Avellaneda's

indigenous American characters. Jacobson's essay in this volume resists readings of *Sab* as a national romance by suggesting that the indigenous woman, Martina, far from assisting in a process of national reconciliation and racial integration, reminds the reader of the violence of the Conquest and that underpinning present-day slavery in Cuba. Sab and Martina's non-biological mother/son relationship disrupts the romantic, productive ties fitting of the nineteenth-century romance and Martina's vision of the vengeance of her alleged forebear, the *cacique* Camagüey, foretells not of a future of national reconciliation but one of violence and retribution. As Rogelia Lily Ibarra shows in her essay, in *Guatimozín*, Avellaneda also employs an Aztec woman to overturn gender stereotypes of female inferiority and submission, when Quilena goes into battle against the Spaniards, and is shown beheading her enemies and drinking their blood. Ibarra maintains that one of the primary concerns of Avellaneda is to contest the Sarmientan trope of civilization and barbarism, applied by Europeans in the Americas from the time of the Conquest. Through a rewriting, or better reemphasis, on the key colonial accounts of the Conquest of Mexico, indigenous culture is presented as in many cases more civilized than that of their European observers.

Nevertheless, the image of the female cannibal warrior might also be seen to appeal to entrenched images of the Amerindian as a savage cannibal. Peter Hulme has argued that "Human beings who eat other human beings have always been placed on the very borders of humanity" (14): the Aztec warrior may prove that she is the equal of any man but falls short of being human. Whilst many of the essays in this collection present the radicalism of Avellaneda's works—whether it is *Guatimozín*, *Sab*, or, as delineated in Pratt's essay, subversive rewritings of Heredia—at times we glimpse another side of the author. Mariselle Meléndez's essay, which examines Avellaneda's view of the colonial past through the portrayal of historical characters such as Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés, as well as stock figures like the Spanish *visitador* and female black slave, shows how the author sometimes sympathized with and even lauded Spanish colonial figures. An examination of her 1862 hymn to celebrate the erection of a statue of Columbus in the Cuban town of Cárdenas, for example, surprisingly reveals the writer's view of him as, in the words of Meléndez, a "great man" (216), responsible for uniting Europe and the Americas. The essay also explores how in the 1869 tale "Una anécdota de la vida de Cortés," the conquistador is held up as a hero who brought civilization and Christianity to Mexico. And despite the position of *Sab* as an anti-slavery novel, in the legend "El cacique de Turmequé" (1869) the black slave is shown to be deeply untrustworthy and a facilitator of her mistress's dishonor.

Whilst, as Meléndez outlines, such works can be contextualized by Avellaneda's concern with the souring and potential severing of Cuba's relationship with Spain in the mid-nineteenth century, this essay offers an import-

ant reminder of the complexities of identity and national belonging evinced throughout Gómez de Avellaneda's works. Whilst identifying herself strongly with Cuba and Latin America, Gómez de Avellaneda was also capable of deep loyalty toward Spain and of using her writing as a tool for acknowledging and preserving the country's relationship with its colonial outposts. Nevertheless, as this important volume shows, Gómez de Avellaneda was by instinct a radical, provocative writer, especially on questions of race and gender. The "Introduction" by Albin, Corbin, and Marrero-Fente suitably casts the Cuban as trail-blazer, before her time in so many of her views. And her writing style was also radical, as Pratt and Volek (both in this volume), among others, have shown, displaying literary tendencies which can be seen as more modern than Romantic, anticipating *modernismo* in Hispanic America. In this, as in so many other aspects of her life and work, Avellaneda resists binary definitions: she was a figure of the margins and of the center: a Romantic with modern propensities, a Cuban in Spain, and a woman in a man's world.

Notes

1. Williams, however, argues that "Avellaneda can be identified neither consistently nor exclusively with her protagonist; his voice is not always hers. On the contrary, there are moments when the novelist seems to deliberately distance herself from him by allowing other characters to critique his postures and to point the way to 'right' thinking and action" (163).

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