

◆ 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, *Guatimotzín* 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 re-writes 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 *Chozza 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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