

## ◆ 9

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

*Mary Louise Pratt*

Born in 1814, daughter of a Spanish father and a creole mother, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda grew up in comfort and privilege in Camaguey, Cuba, educated by private tutors. In 1836, at the age of twenty-two, she emigrated with her mother and brother to Spain<sup>1</sup> where, over the next two decades, she produced most of her extraordinary *obra*. By the early 1840s, nicknamed “La Peregrina” (pilgrim or wanderer), she was already established as one of Spain’s most celebrated literary figures, famed as a playwright, novelist, poet, autobiographer, essayist, and journalist. Her patrons included eminences of the Spanish literary scene, above all José Zorrilla, who introduced her into Madrid’s literary circles and nominated her to the Spanish Royal Academy in 1853. In 1859, Gómez de Avellaneda’s trajectory took her back to Cuba on assignment with her husband, royal envoy Domingo Verdugo y Massieu. Contrary to appearances, the reason for this move was not a bureaucratic assignment, but threatening responses to one of Avellaneda’s plays.

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

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

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

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

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

## Social Contract and Sexual Contract

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

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

The shift marked Avellaneda's literary career. In the 1840s, she integrated herself into Spanish literary circles with great success. Her well-known amorous exploits did not hinder her fame as a dramatist, novelist, and poet. The poet Zorrilla promoted her and nominated her to the Royal Spanish Academy in 1853.<sup>5</sup> Twenty years later, by contrast, José Martí condemned her in openly misogynist terms: "There is an arrogant, sometimes ferocious, man in Avellaneda's poetry," (Martí 311) he said, meaning no compliment. Avellaneda was not the only target of Martí's misogyny and androcentrism, attitudes not separate from his republican politics. Such gendered rejections reflect the narrowing down of public space for women in the second half of the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic. They reflect as well the sexual panic so brilliantly explored in Martí and other end-of-century Latin American intellectuals by Molloy ("His America," "The Politics"), Ramos, Cruz-Malavé, Ledesma, Lugo-Ortiz, and others.

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

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

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

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

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

### Gender and Romanticism

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

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

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

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

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



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

### The Parallel Corpus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Avellaneda and the Modern**

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

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

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

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

¡Salve o aereo, indescrrible puente  
Obra del hombre, que emular procuras  
La obra de Dios, junto a la cual te ostentas!

¡Salve, signo valiente  
 Del progreso industrial, cuyas alturas  
 —a las que suben las naciones lentas—  
 Domina como rey el joven pueblo  
 Que ayer naciente en sus robustos brazos  
 Tomó la libertad...  
 (Gómez de Avellaneda, *Obras literarias* 374)

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

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

## Notes

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



*poesía y esfera pública: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la tradición romántica.*

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

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

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

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

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

## Works Cited

- Albin, María C. *Género, poesía y esfera pública: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la tradición romántica*. Madrid: Trotta, 2002. Print.
- Albin, María C. "Género, imperio y colonia en la poesía de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda." *Romance Languages Annual* 10.2 (1999): 419–25. Print.
- Albin, María C. "Ante el Niágara: Heredia, Sagra, Gómez de Avellaneda y el proyecto modernizador" *Tradición y actualidad de la literatura iberoamericana*. Ed. Pamela Bacarisse. Vol.1. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995. 2 vols. 69–78. Print.
- Albin, María C. "La revista *Album cubano* de Gómez de Avellaneda: La esfera pública y la crítica a la modernidad." *Cincinnati Romance Review*. 14 (1995): 73–79. Print.
- Alzate, Carolina. *Desviación y verdad: la re-escritura en Arenas y la Avellaneda*. Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1999. Print.
- Cruz, Mary. "Los versos de la Avellaneda." *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: Antología*

- poética*. Ed. Mary Cruz. La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1963. 5–28. Print.
- Cruz-Malavé, Arnaldo. “Lecciones de cubanidad: Identidad nacional y errancia sexual en Senel Paz, Martí y Lezama Lima.” *Cuban Studies* 29 (1998): 129–54. Print.
- Garrels, Elizabeth. “La Nueva Heloisa en América o el ideal de la mujer de la generación de 1837.” *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 2.4 (1989): 27–38. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Sarmiento and the Woman Question: From 1839 to the *Facundo*.” *Sarmiento: Author of a Nation*. Eds. Tulio Halperín Donghi et al, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 272–293. Print.
- Gómez de Avellaneda, Gertrudis. *Obras literarias de la señora doña Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda: Coleccion completa*. Madrid: Imprenta y esteriotipia de M. Rivadeneyra, 1869. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Autobiografía y cartas de la ilustre poetisa Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*. Prolog. D. Lorenzo Cruz de Fuentes. *Obras de la Avellaneda, VI*. Havana: Impr. de A. Miranda, 1914. 103–281.
- Heredia, José María. *Niágara y otros textos* (Poesía y prosa selectas). Ed. Ángel Augier. Caracas: Ayacucho, 1990. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Obra poética*. La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1993. Print.
- Kirkpatrick, Susan. *Las románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain, 1835–1850*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Print.
- Landes, Joan. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. Print.
- Lazo, Raimundo. *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, la mujer y la poetisa lírica*. México: Porrúa, 1972. Print.
- Ledesma, Silvia Casillas. “Los hombres en la vida de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda.” *Géneros Universidad de Colima, Centro Universitario de Estudios de Género*. 5:15 (1998): 49–53. Print.
- Lugo-Ortiz, Agnes. “Notas en torno a Plácido: Guerras genealógicas y los intersticios de la identidad en Cuba ante el noventa y ocho.” *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana* 10 (1998): 133–46. Print.
- Martí, José. “Tres libros. Poetisas americanas.” *Obras Completas* La Habana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 1975, VIII. 310-311. Print.
- Molloy, Sylvia. “His America, our America: José Martí reads Whitman.” *Modern Language Quarterly* 57:2 (1996): 369–79. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Politics of Posing.” *Hispanisms and Homosexualities*. Eds. S. Molloy et. al. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. 141–60. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Dos lecturas del cisne: Rubén Darío y Delmira Agustini.” *La sartén por el mango*. Ed. Patricia Elena González. Rio Piedras: Ed. Huracán, 1984. 57–69. Print.
- Pateman, Carol. *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987. Print.
- Pratt, Mary Louise (1993): “Las mujeres y el imaginario nacional en el siglo XIX.” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 38 (1993): 51–62. Print.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Género y ciudadanía: las mujeres en diálogo con la nación." *Literatura y cultura latinoamericana del siglo XIX*. Ed. Beatriz González Stephan. Caracas: Montealban, 1996. Print.
- Ramos, Julio. "The Repose of Heroes." *The Places of History*. Ed. Doris Sommer. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.
- Rosaldo, Renato. "Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism." *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*. Eds. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor. Boston: Beacon, 1998. 27–38
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Print.

---

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Rebellious Apprentice Devours *Maestros*: Is it Hunger or Vengeance?" *Gender and the Politics of Literature: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*. Ed. María C. Albin, Megan Corbin, and Raúl Marrero-Fente. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 18 (2017): 264–282. Web.

---