

## Gertrudis de Avellaneda

(1814–1873)

One of Cuba's most distinguished and successful writers, living, as she did, between Cuba and Spain while Cuba was still a colony of the Spanish empire. As a prose writer, autobiographer, novelist, literary critic, playwright, and poet, she wrote under the pseudonym of La Peregrina (the wanderer or pilgrim). Her entire career was during the period of Romanticism. She married twice and had a partner at the end of her life. Her most famous novel, *Sab* (1841), ostensibly an anti-slavery work, was published first in Spain and then again in Cuba. Her vast published writings made her one of the first professional women writers to live by their publications.



FIRST PERIOD: 1814–1836

1814

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Arteaga was born in Santa María del Puerto Príncipe (now Camagüey) Cuba, into a slave-owning family. Her father, Manuel Gómez de Avellaneda, was a Spanish royal naval officer, who had arrived in Cuba in 1809. Her mother, Francisca de Arteaga y Betancourt, was the daughter of a rich upper class family of long standing in Puerto Príncipe. She had no formal education, but rather was an

- autodidact her devoured the books in her home and her grandfather's home. One of her tutors, briefly, was the great Romantic Cuban poet José María Heredia.
- 1823 Gertrudis' father died. Her mother remarried a Spanish army officer, whom Gómez de Avellaneda disliked intensely. Hence, she had 2 half-siblings from her father's first marriage, one full brother, and 2 other half-siblings from her mother's second marriage.
- 1827 Her grandfather arranged for her marriage to a wealthy distant relative, but she broke the engagement in 1829. (The rest of her life she wrote strong works opposing patriarchy.)

## SECOND PERIOD: 1836–1856

- 1836 Fearing a slave rebellion in Cuba, Gómez de Avellaneda's family sold their property and moved to Spain, first in Galicia, where she was engaged but refused to marry. Her stepfather then refused to give her a dowry, and she became determined to support herself.
- 1838 She wrote her first autobiography.
- 1839 She moved to Sevilla, where she fell in love with and had a torrid affair with a wealthy aristocrat, Ignacio de Cepeda. She wrote her second, and fairly unreliable, autobiography. Throughout her life she had many lovers. Cepeda's wife later published the love letters Gómez de Avellaneda sent to Cepeda.
- 1841 She moved to Cádiz when her affair with Cepeda ended, where she had an affair with Gabriel Tassara, a poet from Sevilla. In 1844, a 3-month-old out-of-wedlock daughter died.
- Her quasi anti-slavery and anti-patriarchy novel, *Sab*, was published in Madrid (Imprenta Calle del Barco, #26). Cuban exiles in New York republished *Sab* during the Ten Years War using the novel as anti-Spanish abolitionist propaganda. The novel's narrative voice protests the subjugation of women by men. In 1845 the copies of the novel were sent to Cuba, but it was banned on the Island by Colonial authorities and sent back to Spain. The novel is Romantic because it foregrounds idealized love as the principal redemptive force on earth but demonstrates the perverse human (i.e., phallogentric) order makes ideal (heterosexual, but, in this novel, interracial) love impossible. This novel also demonstrates traits of Siboneyism (i.e., indigenous literature without native characters or people).
- 1842–1845 Gómez de Avellaneda's novel *Dos mujeres* (Two Women) was published first as a *novela por entregas* (serialized fiction). This is a melodramatic work centering on a classic love triangle and a negative view of marriage. According to Susan Kirkpatrick, "the author creates the first fully developed feminine figure of the Romantic ego in Spain" (1991).

- 1846 She married Pedro Sabater, but he died, probably from cancer, shortly after they were married. She immediately entered a convent and wrote an undistinguished play, *Egilona*.  
She wrote her third autobiography.
- 1850 She wrote her fourth and final autobiography.
- 1855 She married a Spanish colonel, who was a native of Cuba, Domingo Verdugo y Massieu

### THIRD PERIOD: 1756–1863

- 1856 She and her husband moved back to Cuba. In Cuba she was treated as a literary and social celebrity, and she worked hard to help women be successful as writers and artists.
- 1860 She founds *Álbum cubano de lo bueno y lo bello* [Cuban Album of the Good and Beautiful], the first cultural magazine founded and run by a woman in Cuba.
- 1861 Gómez de Avellaneda's last novel is published in Havana: *El artista barquero o los cuatro cinco de junio* [The Boatman Artist or the Four June Fifths]. This work is generally classified as a *Künstlerroman* (i.e., a novel centered on the theme of the (Romantic) artist).
- 1863 She was rejected for membership in the Spanish Royal Academy due to the fact that she was a woman.

### FINAL PERIOD: 1863–1873

- 1863 She moved back to Spain.
- 1873 She died in Madrid due to diabetes.

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