

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

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In memory of Nara Araújo

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

El cuadernillo de la autobiografía, 68

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

The Autobiography Booklet

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pens and doesn't happen between them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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