

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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

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

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

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