

Rewriting History and Reconciling Cultural Differences in *Guatimozín*

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First published in serial form in *El Heraldo* of Madrid in 1846, *Guatimozín. Último Emperador de México*, retells the story of the Conquest of Mexico by Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortés, and his fleet. Avellaneda uses the genre of the historical novel to recreate the “account” of the Conquest and to develop its three epic figures: Cortés, Moctezuma II, and Guatimozín,¹ into the main characters. She places these historical figures on the forefront of her fictional plot, which permits, as Francisco Solares-Larrave has shown in other historical novels, the encounter of two discursive modes in the same text: “the narrative mode, intrinsic part of the tale, whose discourse focuses on the act of telling a story; and the scientific mode, centered on the transmission of information and data” (59). Solares-Larrave notes that this combination of discursive forms further allows for the creation of a counterhistorical narrative discourse that re-writes history from within, thus proposing variants or amending historical facts in and throughout the story. He also adds that this new discourse identifies the empty spaces in history and fills them in with narrative or ideological contents that follow a cultural agenda, that is, “because its authors view history as a text, susceptible to changes and editions” (59).

The “truthfulness” or authenticity of history versus the fictional invention of the traditional novel was a prevalent debate in nineteenth-century Europe, which informed the rise of the historical novel and one that is already inherent to the genre itself (White 6). The discussion over the possible harmonizing of the “opposite” principles of history and fiction in the new genre were well present in nineteenth-century Latin America and fervently discussed among intellectuals and writers such as Domingo del Monte and José María Heredia, both from Cuba. The former sympathized with the historical novel, yet emphasized the complexity of its composition and recommended that the writer of

this form be at once a poet, philosopher, and antique dealer (*anticuario*), that is, a metaphorical investigator of objects of the past that would provide information on the time period represented (Anderson Imbert 7). In his *Ensayo sobre la novela*, Heredia rejected this type of novel because he saw history and fiction as irreconcilable and considered it: “Género malo en si mismo, género eminentemente falso, al que toda la flexibilidad del talento más variado sólo presta un atractivo frívolo, y del que no tardará en fastidiarse la moda, que hoy lo adopta y favorece” (Anderson Imbert 8) (A poor genre in and of itself, an eminently false genre, to which all the flexibility of even the most varied talent only lends itself to an attractive frivolity, and which won’t delay in going out of style, while today it’s used and favored). The Argentine writer Vicente Fidel López, who also wrote a historical novel (*La novia del hereje*, 1854), favored a history that knew how to combine documentation with imagination. For him, the historian should be faithful to the facts, but should also know how to represent dramatic situations with art and style (Anderson Imbert 10). The famed Venezuelan Andrés Bello suggested in his essay, “Autonomía cultural de América” (1848), that the necessary connection between fiction and history and put forward the idea that the narrative supplement itself could be history’s “truest” form; narrative’s freer hand, writing from personal worries and including fabulous legends, seemed to deliver for him a more accurate picture than the one presented by a still unformed “science” of history in Latin America. Additionally, Bello saw fiction as a vehicle for independent and local expression (Sommer, “Not Just” 49–50). Another notable propagandist of this genre was José Martí, who praised Manuel de Jesús Galván’s *Enriquillo* (1882) and saw it as an example of the edifying and practical literature that America needed to distinguish itself from Europe. Martí’s admiration and purpose for *Enriquillo* is an example of how the historical novel was linked to a clearer nation-building project in nineteenth-century Latin America (Sommer, “Not Just” 50–51).

The influence of Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels in Spain in the 1820s and 1830s also incited the appearance of many early imitations (i.e. Larra, Espronceda). The Spanish historical novel initially took refuge in medieval settings and in dualistic plots of romance, yet it was not completely escapist as it frequently encoded a series of contemporary concerns that allowed it to be read as an allegory of the agitating present in which it developed (Iarocci 383). There were some novels that treated topics related to the Americas. Hernán Cortés was transformed into a paradigmatic literary/historical figure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and became the center of a polemic in the latter century between the defenders and detractors of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas. Historian, Salvador Bernabéu Albert has pointed to seven nineteenth-century novels whose focus are Cortés or the Conquest of Mexico, among these are: Salvador García Baamonde’s *Xiconténcal, príncipe*

americano (1831), Patricio de la Escosura's *La conjuración de Méjico o los hijos de Hernán Cortés* (1850), and Rafael del Castillo's *Hernán Cortés y Marina* (1898) (9–10). The historical novel's embrace of Spanish and some Latin American history, its reliance on archival research, and its highly detailed natural description paved the foundation of realist mimesis that would later inform the representation of a more recent past and of contemporary society in the novels of the Restoration authors, such as Galdós, Alas, or Pardo Bazán. As late as the end of the nineteenth century, the "Generation of 1898" continued to engage Romantic historicism's quest for the imagined origins of the nation, particularly Unamuno, Baroja, and Valle-Inclán (Ribbans 114–119).

Amidst this background, this study will show how Avellaneda uses the historical narrative of Hernán Cortés and Moctezuma's encounter as a way of re-writing history and broadening the parameters of the traditional role of historian. At the same time, she also contests hegemonic discourses of civilization and barbarism and creates a critical subtext on contemporary issues of her time related to gender, race, and colonial relationships of power between Spain and the newly forming Latin American nations. The use of counterhistorical narrative discourses challenges the concept of history as master text and implies the dialogical relationship between "history" and "literature." This hybrid narrative space, thus, demonstrates the interplay between "facts" and "fiction," which further allows the complementing, correcting or even subverting of preceding historiographical texts (Solares-Larrave 60). Accordingly, in her novel *Guatimozín*, Avellaneda creates counterhistorical narrative discourses primarily by dialoguing with major chronicalists and historians of the Conquest of Mexico.² Through this dialogue, Avellaneda uses the former historical texts both to legitimize her knowledge of the Aztec-Spanish encounter and to revise the historical narratives.

Avellaneda establishes a figurative dialogue with the past historical texts on the narrative plane itself but also on the margins, by adding footnotes that allow her to make reference to these and correct or modify them, which I will discuss in more detail in another section of this study. On the narrative level, she begins with a break from the panegyric tradition carried out through many Conquest chronicles and demystifies the epic elevation of Cortés. She narrates the encounter of the two leaders, Cortés and Moctezuma, and delineates their complex and contradictory behaviors in the face of victory and conquest. Building on the historical knowledge of these two figures, Avellaneda further complicates the depiction of the characters by neither fully praising nor fully critiquing one over the other.

Avellaneda places the two leaders of opposing forces on par and depicts characterizations that equally demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of both. The narrative first describes Cortés as "previsor y político como atrevido y perseverante" (15) (foresighted and political as well as daring and perseverant).

His ambition and talent for persuasion make him an agreeable figure that easily wins over the alliance of Moctezuma's Tlascalan subjects. Although Cortés is feared for the supposed god-like qualities attributed to him by the Tlascalans, his personal traits are attractive to them as well, as the narrator explains:

La dignidad de sus modales, su admirable destreza en los ejercicios militares y un don particular de persuasión con que la naturaleza le había dotado, cautivaban los corazones de aquellos fieros republicanos . . . y que se sorprendían de encontrar el más amable de los huéspedes en aquel mismo a quien habían temido como el más maléfico de los dioses. (14)

(The dignity of his manners, his admirable abilities in military exercises and a particular talent for persuasion that nature had given him, captivated the hearts of those fierce republicans . . . and they would be surprised to find the most friendly of guests in he himself who they had feared as the most maleficient of the gods.)

Although the narrative implies that Cortés takes full advantage of the indigenous prophecy of Quetzalcoal³ and the rift between the Tlascalans and Aztecs, they nevertheless identify him with virtues worthy of trust and admiration. Similarly, Moctezuma is depicted with paradoxical qualities: “Era liberal, magnífico, justiciero; sus parciales le atribuían una sabiduría sobrehumana y virtudes sublimes; sus enemigos le temían porque conocían su rigor y la violencia de sus resentimiento” (16) (He was tolerant, magnificent, stern; his followers attributed a superhuman wiseness and sublime virtues to him; his enemies feared him because they were familiar with his rigor and the violence of his resentment). Like Cortés, he is both feared and admired and, while being an almost endearing leader, he is also a dictatorial emperor that “El pueblo, aunque no menos esclavo en su reinado que en el de sus predecesores, aplaudía sus actos arbitrarios contra la nobleza y amaba en el gran tirano el azote de los tiranos pequeños” (16) (The people, although no less enslaved under his reign than that of his predecessors, applauded his arbitrary acts against the nobility and loved in the great tyrant the scourge of the smaller tyrants). Both Moctezuma and Cortés are shown in the novel to gain command through fear and esteem from their subjects.

The tragic irony of Moctezuma's downfall is that while he was an unvanquished military hero and firm ruler, his superstition and belief in his doomed fate made him vulnerable to Cortés's skilled manipulation. Moctezuma typifies the nineteenth-century romantic subject throughout this novel by revealing a kind of *mal du siècle*.⁴ However, his disillusionment is not an overt response to an ideological change in society, as is traditionally associated with the romantic hero, but rather a detachment brought on by excessive self-con-

sciousness and the acceptance of an inevitable destiny. The emperor emotionally retreats into an almost catatonic state because he believes the gods have turned their backs on him and that he could no longer change the course of his doomed fate. For example, in a scene where he confides to Guatimozín his deep melancholy with the arrival of the Spaniards, he responds to the latter's interrogatives about the cause of his sadness as follows: "Allá están, joven presuntuoso; ve pues a pedir cuenta de mi flaqueza a los grandes espíritus que dirigen la suerte de los reyes" (39) (Over there they are, presumptuous youth; go then to ask the great spirits who command the luck of the kings for an account of my weakness). Moctezuma's depressed state, generated by his superstition, allows for the author to simultaneously highlight his fanaticism and Cortes's opportunistic behavior.

Moctezuma's belief in the legend of Quetzalcoatl and the displeasure of the gods is an element that the narrative voice places into question. After Moctezuma shares his doubts with his most trusted royal court members, the narrative includes a suggestive interpolated commentary:

Nos aprovecharemos de él para manifestar al lector el origen que suponemos a todas aquellas notables profecías, de las que se muestran maravillados los historiadores españoles, exagerándolas y desfigurándolas a su placer. Parécenos indudable que todas ellas no eran otra cosa que ingeniosas astucias sacerdotales para imponer terror a los príncipes y sujetarlos, por decirlo así, a los altares. (23)

(We will take advantage of him in order to show the reader the origin that we suppose of all of those notable prophecies, of those that the Spanish historians marvellously tell, exaggerating them and disfiguring them at their will. It appears to us to be undeniable that they be anything but astute and ingenious priests to be imposing such terror on the princes and, to put it one way, holding them over their altars.)

Although a subtle criticism of Moctezuma's credulity, the narrative voice underscores the construction of Aztec beliefs and how the Quetzalcoatl legend may have been used as a method to instill religious fear in the Aztec people.

Cortés too takes advantage of the emperor's superstition and vulnerable state and uses his power of persuasion over him. Using this veiled method, Cortés convinces the emperor to take him prisoner and the latter acquiesces. The narrative emphasizes Cortés's shrewdness through descriptors, such as "el astuto caudillo" (the astute dictator) to imply the almost hypnotic power that he has over the Aztec leader. The power of language is another of his talents, as he convinces Moctezuma that his imprisonment was more of a voluntary effort on his part: "Que permita vuestra majestad a mis oficiales entren

a ofrecerle sus respetos y a tributarle gracias por el honor que nos dispensa viniendo a habitar entre nosotros” (76) (That your holiness might permit my officials to enter and offer their respects and tributes in gratitude for the honor you have given us by coming to live among us). In such way, Cortés is able to persuade Moctezuma to command unimaginable orders against his own court, so that his very subjects perceive him as under the spellbinding power of the Spanish leader. One of Moctezuma’s princes, Cacumatzín, who is held captive on his commands, retorts the following invective to Cortés: “¡Aléjate hipócrita! -exclamó- y ve a engañar con tus palabras embusteras al monarca infeliz a quien has entontecido con tus hechicerías” (98) (“Get out, hypocrite!” he exclaimed, “and go fool with your deceitful words the unhappy monarch whom you have dumbfounded with your sorcery.”)

Not only does the narrative point to a superstitious vulnerability in Moctezuma, but also underlines a similar religious fanaticism in Cortés, which permeates his concept of justice and allows him to justify the wrongs he commits against the Aztecs. Avellaneda appears to go against the grand narrative of Cortés’s divine mission in the Conquest of Mexico by stating:

Participaba también de aquella feroz superstición de su época, en que un celo religioso mal entendido hacia que no se considerasen como hombres a los que no profesaban, las mismas creencias. Venía de una tierra poblada de hogueras inquisitoriales, donde casi era un rito religioso o un artículo de dogma el aborrecimiento a los infieles y herejes. (83)

(He participated as well in that furious superstition of his time, that a misunderstood religious zeal would make it so that those that professed the same beliefs would not be considered men. They came from a land populated by the fires of the Inquisition, where the abhorrence of non-believers and heretics was almost a religious rite or a dogmatic command.)

Here the narrative begins to unveil the radical religious ideology that informs Cortés’s inferior treatment of the Aztecs, with a certain distance that does not weigh heavily with criticism but leaves the moral judgment to the readers.

By juxtaposing the characters of Cortés and Moctezuma and exposing similar characteristics in both, the author also places them on a more human level and reveals the admirable and weak elements of their persons without placing one on a higher level than the other. In this way, Avellaneda begins to implicitly redefine the “divine” purpose of Cortés and the Spanish fleet’s voyage to the Americas and the result of the encounter between these two civilizations.

Another way in which Avellaneda responds to colonial historians is by legitimizing the Aztec people and highlighting its sophisticated culture, and

in so doing, she further contests a colonial narrative of civilization and barbarism.⁵ She begins to do so by using the conquest plot as a new way of disseminating cultural knowledge about Mexico and its indigenous groups. Early in their arrival, Cortés and his men are given a tour of the city by the princes of Tenochtitlan. There they witness the complex and rich structure of an Aztec market, the grand architectural design of their temples, and a zoo of diverse animals. Later, the Spanish soldiers are free to explore the city and the narrator mentions how the more astute ones found recreation by visiting the public schools, orators, and famous poets of the region. Interestingly, through the Spaniards' travel practices throughout the city, the narrator is able to underscore their demystification of the Aztec people as a barbaric race. At the same time, Avellaneda debunks her European audience's preconception of the "Other" and in so doing the author makes space for its legitimization.

Avellaneda articulates the sophisticated structure of the Aztec government not only as a way of validating the Aztecs, but also as a way of revealing the shortcomings of her own society in the present time. In Chapter Six of the first part, Cortés has a conversation with one of the elder ministers of the Aztec government, in which he is open to asking questions about the way it functions. One of the first questions he asks is how their laws are kept and circulated. In contrast to the European written law, the elder describes an oral tradition of passing laws down through generations. This system allows for the redefinition of laws and goes against the concept of absolutes. Although she does not give evidence in her footnotes of a historical basis for this legal system, Avellaneda is able to use it as an example to indirectly critique her current society's strict social laws that relegate groups to certain institutions.⁶

Another element made salient in Cortés's conversation with the elder is the Aztec's educational system. He describes a more democratic public system of education. Although somewhat segregated between the various class sections, the masses still have access to a free form of education, which includes that of girls and women. The author's inclusion of this can be read as a subtle criticism of the limited educational options for women in nineteenth-century Spain and Latin America, as we see questioned more overtly in Avellaneda's novel *Dos mujeres*, where middle class women's educational opportunities are limited to a domestic realm and their learning is highly censored.

The third major point discussed in this conversation is the question of slavery. The elder explains that the slaves of Aztec society are prisoners who are kept alive and not sacrificed, like other captives of war. Nevertheless, the elder elaborates that a slave is not born into slavery, therefore it is not considered hereditary. Again this example of Aztec tradition is not referenced to a Spanish chronicle or validated by some other historical source, yet, the author uses this detail, even if perhaps fictionalized, both to sanction the Aztec government and simultaneously oppose her current society's laws regarding

slavery.⁷ Ironically, Avellaneda uses the conversation between the elder and Cortés in order to highlight the latter's true motives in making Moctezuma his subject later on and his attempt to take over the Aztec Empire. That is, he is gaining as much information about the Aztec governmental structure and culture to later use in his manipulation of the emperor.

Avellaneda's most sobering contestation of colonial narratives of civilization and barbarism is exemplified in her explanation of the Aztec sacrificial tradition, which had long been perceived as savage. Upon the election of Guatimozín as the successor to Moctezuma, a series of sacrifices are made in honor of his initiation. Maintaining an objective and almost dignifying tone, Avellaneda describes the sacrificial ritual at a respectful and non-judgmental distance. She then reiterates her legitimization of Aztec practices by making the following explicit comparison:

¿Buscaremos rasgos de una civilización más adelantada que la que se lee en la sangrienta piedra de los teocalis mexicanos, en las hogueras de la inquisición, a cuya fatídica luz celebraba España el acrecentamiento de su poder y los nuevos de su gloria? (239)

(Will we look for characteristics of a civilization more advanced than that which one reads on the bloody rock of the Mexican Teocalis, in the fire of the Inquisition, whose fateful lights Spain celebrated the growth of its power and the newness of its glory?)

Avellaneda inverts the civilization and barbarism binary here by implying Spain's hypocritical diagnosis of the savagery of the indigenous "Other," since it is not free of practices that can be deemed guilty of the same barbarism it condemns.

Another manner in which Avellaneda responds to her historical predecessors, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is by filling in the gaps of colonial history through the use of fiction in her novel. She creates allegorical couples to redefine the meaning of the conquest/rape trope often associated with this cultural encounter. In her comprehensive text, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba provides several examples of how colonial antagonisms have been coded with sexual and racial languages. Some of the most repeated with regard to gender are the use of the female body to symbolize the conquered land and the rape of this body as a metaphor of the conquest by the male conqueror (129). The reciprocated romance exemplified in the novel by two secondary characters, the indigenous princess Tecuixpa and the Spanish soldier Velázquez de León, provides an alternative model to that of the sexually "aggressive" taking of the colonized land by the colonizer.

The two characters are not "authentically" represented, but are fiction-

ally modified and linked to the main historical figures in the novel.⁸ Here, Tecuixpa is Moctezuma's daughter and Velázquez de León is one of Cortés's captains. The young lovers represent a pure and impartial love in the face of conflict, as Tecuixpa is already betrothed to another prince of Tenochtitlán and advisor to Moctezuma, Cacumatizín, who will go to great lengths to protect his future bride. Tecuixpa and Velázquez's love crosses racial and religious barriers as they make strong commitments to one another. While the lovers are constantly torn between their nations (Tenochtitlán and Spain), their patriotism, and their love for one another, they put their love first.

Doris Sommer has studied the element of romance in some nineteenth-century historical novels in her well-known work, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. She maintains that the central romances between lovers in novels such as *Martín Rivas* and *María*, served as allegories for the desire of a national consolidation, which Latin American governments institutionalized for their nation-building projects. The romantic plot worked to obtain an erotic interest from readers in the couple's romance, which also provoked in them a patriotic desire for a unified nation that would allow the coming together of such a couple. Sommer studies Avellaneda's earlier novel, *Sab*, even though it is published outside of Cuba, as a potential foundational fiction by suggesting that the protagonist's love for Carlota, "is also a desire for greater national solidarity" (135) that would strengthen Cuba against Spanish Imperialism. The slavocracy that produces the racially amalgamated protagonist, Sab, is the same institution that prohibits him from marrying his master's daughter, Carlota, and figuratively limits racial and political unity in nineteenth-century Cuba. Even as Avellaneda's historical novel, *Guatimozín*, shows the characteristics of romance that allegorically express a desire for the consolidation of racial and political differences, it was also not written in Cuba nor was it published near its independence in order to appropriately fit the national model that Sommer proposes. Avellaneda writes and publishes the novel in Spain while her native country, Cuba, remains in colonial status.⁹ However, perhaps the voluntary and more successful union of Tecuixpa and Velázquez represents for Avellaneda a peaceful consolidation of the racial and religious differences that would constitute the *mestizo* future of Mexico. It appears that she travels back to the time of the inception of the Conquest, anticipating the hierarchical institution of slavery in Latin America, to suggest the inevitable outcome the Spanish Conquest would bring. In so doing, the writer underscores the heterogeneous reality of the newly forming nation states of Latin America and the need to dissolve divisive power relations brought forth by colonialism.¹⁰ With this message Avellaneda counters the actions of nineteenth-century Latin American liberal patriots, who while trying to forge national communities from colonial societies marked by sharp social divisions, tended to associate the traits of the "proper" citizen—literacy, property ownership, and individual

autonomy—with whiteness and masculinity. Thus, those who did not conform to citizen norms—slaves, Indians, and those without property (that often included women)—were generally deemed to be dependent and excluded from full citizenship (Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Roseblatt 5).

The idyllic representation of the two lovers, Tecuixpa and Velázquez, also functions in the novel to contrast the religious intolerance and aggressive violence of war that surrounds them and defines much of the Conquest. Critics of Avellaneda have signaled a lack of attention to the brutal side of the African slavocracy in Cuba, which serves as a historical backdrop in her novel *Sab*.¹¹ The narrative implies that Sab is the fruit of an interracial affair between his mother and her owner, Don Carlos's brother. However, there is no attempt to suggest that Sab's mother was raped by her owner, which was the reality of African female slaves. The topic of rape may not be explicit in *Sab*, published five years prior to *Guatimozín*, but more strongly suggested in the second book. In a graphic scene in this novel, Avellaneda describes what appears to be a slave market in Tezcuco, made up of indigenous slaves captured by Cortés and his Mexican allies. Here, the author shows the more gruesome side of the Conquest as young indigenous women are openly bought and sold:

Allí en aquellas plazas convertidas en inmundos bazares, regateaban el precio de las hermosas vírgenes americanas los soldados españoles, y acudían a insultar a los prisioneros sus feroces enemigos tlaxcaltecas. Allí, en medio de aquellos denuetos y de las obscenas chanzas de los compradores, exhalaban estériles amenazas los esposos, los padres, los amantes, que veían rasgar los velos sus mujeres, de sus hijas, de sus amadas, para exponerlas desnudas al examen de los mercaderes, que palpaban sus carnes para conocer su mayor o menor morbidez, su frescura más o menos intacta. (296)

(There in those plazas converted into filthy bazaars, the Spanish soldiers negotiated the prices of beautiful American virgins, and their fierce Tlaxcalteca enemies resorted to insulting the prisoners. There, in the middle of the buyers' insults and obscene jokes, the husbands, fathers, and lovers exhaled sterile threats as they saw their wives, daughters and lovers' veils ripped off while they were subjected, naked, to examinations by the merchants, who touched their flesh with greater or lesser morbidity in order to know that their freshness was more or less intact.)

Avellaneda compensates for her silence over the cruel reality of slavery in *Sab* in this novel by not holding back and demonstrating the multilayered denigration of indigenous women during the Conquest of Mexico. This scene generally shows that the indigenous woman was not only a more vulnerable victim

then her male counterpart, but that she was taken to literally and allegorically express the exploitation of the new-found territory, by being captured, measured, sampled, bought, and sexually violated by the Spanish soldiers.

Avellaneda does not leave her readers with a binary representation of the indigenous woman by depicting a romantic view of Tecuizpa on the one hand and the violated women of the slave market on the other, but suggestively complicates this representation by allowing a space for female resistance.¹² In the scene previously described, the author focuses on a particular female captive that is especially young and fertile and ready to be bought by one of Cortes's head captains, Alvarado. Once she is bought, she subtly convinces the captain to buy another male slave whom she claims is her father. They embrace passionately after the exchange is made, and in the act, her father strangles her amidst his loving grasp and "liberates" his daughter of her bleak future, as Avellaneda suggests (297). Although this scene may be read as a father defending his patriarchal honor and thus, affirming male-defined roles, the young captive on the other hand, is very much an agent in maintaining her "honor" intact. By juxtaposing other examples of male indigenous captives who resist being enslaved through suicide (one man swallows his tongue) with the female prisoner, the author goes beyond providing some of her female characters agency and puts them on par with the oppressed indigenous men who in the same way defend their right to freedom in a time of conquest.

Avellaneda includes an array of female characters in her historical novel to diversify the perspective of gender, but she also, as Evelyn Picon Garfield has stated, "recrea la historia humana, escondida y perdida, en episodios urdidos por su imaginación y convicciones sociales. Con ellos realiza la contracara de la crónica varonil" ("Conciencia" 45) (recreates human history, hidden and lost, in episodes beseeched by her imagination and social convictions. With them she creates the counterpart to the male Chronicle). She adds as part of the forgotten human history a more complex representation of indigenous women and gives them a voice. Although Tecuixpa and her sister Gualcazinla fit the traditional bourgeois female roles of faithful girlfriend and mother-wife respectively, they both also express moments of valor in the novel and are highly regarded by the male Aztec leaders in their counsel during war. As Cortés begins his return to Tenochtitlán and the Aztec prepare for war against him, the empress Miazochil and an assembly of Aztec female princesses from the Anahuac area confine themselves within the *teocali* (temple) of Huitzilopochtli. Here, they comfort each other and speculate of the possible outcome, although remaining hopeful for the Aztecs' victory.

The author creates a female-centered space in the temple and does so, suggestively, in a place that was already consecrated to the male war-god, Huitzilopochtli and used to sacrifice prisoners of war (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). At the foot of this temple was the large stone disk of Coyolxuahqui, the

war-god's sister, who was slain by him in order to prevent her from killing him and his mother. Coyolxuahqui was immortalized in a stone disk of her nude and dismembered body and placed at the base of the temple to convey the humiliation of a captive destined to sacrifice. Of further interest, on the disk is an allusion to male clothing. According to Emily Umberger in her article, "Art and Imperial Strategy in Tenochtitlán," a standard Aztec insult for a warrior was to call him a woman, and the taunting of warriors by men dressed as women is well documented (95). Thus, Umberger poses that the loincloth on the disk may figuratively refer to the original male identity of the conquered enemy, transformed into a woman by defeat (95). Avellaneda, thus, uses the temple of Huizilopochtli as a textual palimpsest of meaning and redefines the gender-coded language of male dominance and female defeat by feminizing this space and making it a safe haven for indigenous women and their coming together.

Among this group of indigenous women, Avellaneda continues to present an intricate perspective of female roles. As they wait for their warrior husbands and sons' return from war, one woman, the matron of Tlacopán expresses her anger for the Spaniards in the following way: "el corazón me dice que antes que vuelva Meztli a asomar en el cielo su pálido semblante, harán visto mis ojos humear la sangre del último de ellos en la piedra de los sacrificios y conocerán mis dientes el sabor de su carne" (325) (My heart tells me that before Meztli returns to appear in the heavens with his pale countenance, they will have seen my eyes smolder with the blood of the last of them from the sacrificial rock and my teeth will know the taste of their flesh). At this point, the princess of Tlacopán assumes a fierce and masculine position by placing herself in the role of the cannibalistic warrior. The narrative does not negatively judge the princess's bold attitude and openness to cannibalism, but at the same time, the mention of it confirms the hegemonic discourse of barbarism that defines the Aztec natives historically. Additionally, Tecuixpa, the young Aztec princess that represents the bridge between the two cultures, reprimands the elder Quilena for her "unfeminine" ways: "pero me parece que no está bien en una mujer cuyo seno ha sido fecundado, esa hambre de carne humana. Tus hijos se llenarán de Gloria presentando corazones enemigos en el altar de Huizilopochtli; pero besarán con horror tu mano, si cuando la tiendas para bendecirlos, los salpicas con sangre" (325) (but it appears to me that this hunger for human flesh is not good in a woman whose breast has been fertilized. Your children will be filled with glory presenting enemy hearts to the altar of Huizilopochtli; but they will kiss with horror your hand if, when you incline it to bless them, you splash them with blood). Avellaneda presents to her audience a generational range of indigenous women; the senior Quilena embraces the intense and masculine bravery of traditional Aztec beliefs, while the younger Tecuixpa conforms to more conventional and "refined" roles for women.

The young princess's words do not stop the angry Quilena, as she decides to join the warrior men in combat along with her two male sons: "ha cubierto con la coraza de soldado su fecundo seno, ha oprimido su espalda con el pesado carcax, y empuñando la lanza y embrazando el escudo" (329) (has covered with the soldier's breastplate her fertile breast, has oppressed her back with the heavy quiver, and, seizing the lance and emblazoning herself with the coat of arms). After bravely taking part in battle, Quilena is seen cutting the throats of two Spanish soldiers, drinking their blood insatiably, and leaping into a lake with the bodies of her two dead sons. Avellaneda invents this Amazonian-like character to represent a radical expression of resistance, since this princess would rather kill herself than relinquish to Spanish dominion.

The association made between Quilena and the mythical Amazon warrior women suggests the idea of a female subject that appropriates a masculine role in order to obtain power. This topic is close to Avellaneda's personal experience as a women writer in the nineteenth century, who stretched the boundaries of expected gender roles for women. It is well known that Avellaneda was criticized for her "manly" intellectual ambitions by her male contemporaries and often referred to as being "too much of man" for a woman, which constituted an anomaly. A writer and contemporary of Avellaneda's, Carolina Coronado, came to her defense by appropriating this masculine detraction and transforming it into an epithet of empowerment as she wrote: "Es, en efecto, la amazona de nuestro Parnaso, y mejor era que la hubiesen dado desde luego esta calificación los doctos varones que se empeñaban en que varón había de ser, porque es más fuerte que nosotras. Es más fuerte, no porque es hombre-poeta, sino porque es poetisa-amazona" (see Picon Garfield, "Periodical Literature") (She is, in effect, the amazonian of our Parnaso, and, even better that she had been given from that point on this description that the male erudites who had insisted to themselves that she must have been male, because she is stronger than us [women]. She is stronger, not because she is a male-poet, but because she is an Amazon-poet). Similarly, Avellaneda takes the ambiguous sign of the Amazon woman, through the character of Quilena, who also becomes a palimpsest of contradictory meaning throughout colonial history, and transforms the Amazon woman into a symbol of female agency.¹³

Avellaneda continues filling the empty spaces of history not only by creating allegorical couples and complex female characters in her novel, but also through her use of footnotes. The author implements this "encyclopedic" form to record, translate, and explain similar elements to those she includes in her novel *Sab*, such as the flora and fauna of Mexico, endemic animal species, and local legends or myths. She also presents, translates, and describes these "native" types primarily for a foreign European audience. The length and contextual complexity of *Guatimozín*'s plot allows her to utilize the footnotes in a more extensive and distinct manner. Additionally, Avellaneda uses this form

to give historical credibility to her “narrative” and to create, as introduced at the beginning, counterhistorical narrative discourses.

In relation to historical accreditation, Avellaneda utilizes her footnotes to dialogue with an array of historians of colonial history, ranging in perspective and cultural background. She cites first-person accounts of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, such as Cortés’s letters to Charles V and Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera*, among other respected historians, such as the *criollo* Jesuit priest, Javier Clavijero, and William Robertson from Scotland. Other than using these historians as sources to bolster her narrative, she takes the liberty of supplementing and correcting these references. For example, Avellaneda fills a particular historical lacuna, as she does at the plot level, by tracing Guatimozín’s genealogy. She expresses a great surprise in finding that none of the European historians who have documented the Conquest have been incited to research the origin and reason for such a young man’s rise to power: “un personaje que tanto figura después en la historia de la conquista, y que es indudable debió figurar antes, puesto que tan alto aprecio se granjeó entre sus compatriotas, que le elevaron al solio a pesar de sus pocos años y en circunstancias tan críticas” (387) (a character who becomes so important in the history of the Conquest, and that undoubtedly must figure in the history before it as well, since he gained such a high level of appreciation amongst his countrymen that they elevated him to the throne despite his youthful inexperience and under such critical circumstances). This observation allows for her not only to investigate this absence but to highlight her meticulous and exhaustive study of “cuantos libros se han publicado sobre México, así en Europa como en América” (387) (how many books they have published about Mexico, both in Europe and in America). In other footnotes she corrects erroneous translations made by other historians from *nahuatl* or points to discrepancies in historical dates.

Avellaneda already suggests history is a text that could be revised by embracing the genre of the historical novel; moreover, with the use of her footnotes, she explicitly shows the need to expand the perimeters of historical discourse. By supplementing and correcting she establishes her authority amongst her historical predecessors. While in *Sab* she raises the figure of Martina as a figurative model of an alternative female historian by conserving the oral history of Cubitas, with *Guatimozín*, Avellaneda boldly legitimizes her role as a historian in a line of male historians. She takes the place of the “Other” through her delivery of Cuban history in *Sab*, and thus brings to the later novel the same complex positionality and tells the story of the Conquest from a doubly marginalized perspective, as a woman and colonial subject, yet writing from a place of power, the metropolis of Spain.

Just as Avellaneda legitimizes a non-written form of history in *Sab* through the oral traditions practiced by Martina, she also validates indigenous culture and traditions via her footnotes in her second novel. Continuing to

blur the civilization and barbarism dichotomy, this time on the margins of her text, Avellaneda highlights particular institutions and practices that can be considered signs of “high” civilization in Mexico. Not only does she praise the Aztecs for their eloquent oratory tradition, as she does in the main text, but also discusses systems they have to which Europe could not compare. For example, the author praises the Aztec empire’s communication structure (mail system) for its extension and efficiency, with which she says Europe had nothing comparable during the same time period. She also admires the republic-like government of Tlaxcala, an independent nation in Mexico during Pre-Colombian times, for being ahead of the British and French governments:

¡Cosa singular! Las secciones inglesas y las Assises francesas, cuya creación se atribuye con orgullo la Gran Bretaña, eran conocidas y practicadas por pueblos a quienes llamamos bárbaros cuando aquellas grandes naciones europeas gemían bajo el yugo vergonzoso de aquella tiranía que más tarde hicieron pesar sobre los pueblos americanos. (391)

(A unique thing! The English sections and the French Assises, whose creation is attributed with pride to Great Britain, were known and practiced by peoples whom they called barbarous when those great European nations groaned under the shameful yoke of that tyranny whose weight they later brought down upon the American peoples.)

The writer, thus, points to the contradictory stereotypes of indigenous populations as barbaric by underscoring their governmental sophistication.

Avellaneda is not the first to recognize the cultivated characteristics of the Aztec and other indigenous groups of Mexico; Cortés himself identified the superior level of commerce and way of life of the Aztec empire in his letters to Charles V (Merrim 73). However, the Aztec’s paganism still made it a barbaric people and to Cortés’s judgment: “cut off from the knowledge of God and from other peoples of reason” (Merrim 74). Avellaneda stands apart from this line of thinking by beginning to draw parallels between Aztec religion and other world religious views. In another of her footnotes, she compares the linguistic similarities between the *nahuatl* term “Teotl,” which means “great spirit,” to the Greek term “Theos” and suggests that the former god, although part of a polytheistic religion, assumes a central role in Aztec religion. Here again, Avellaneda asks her European readers to return to the colonial discourse of civilization and barbarism and reconsider the hegemonic definitions cast upon indigenous cultures.

Avellaneda places herself in a line of colonial historians and amends their historical discourses in order to negotiate the cultural differences that result from the Spanish Conquest. Her efforts bring to mind *mestizo* chroniclers of

the early modern period who were undergoing similar projects, such as El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Through his heritage, both Incan and Spanish, Garcilaso was discredited in the eyes of some as an historian capable of telling the truth regarding his mother's people, thus, he negotiated this dilemma by employing the historiographical tools of European rhetoric. His constant desire was to show the rational, monotheistic, just, and civilized nature of his maternal forebears (Ross 137–138). Although not *mestiza*, but a *criolla*, Avellaneda must also negotiate her sense of displacement in the space of the metropolis, which gives her a complex perspective and the ability to relate to the indigenous "Other." Raúl Ianes has argued in his article, "El viaje por el texto: *Guatimozín* y las aventuras de la épica romántica," that Avellaneda reminded her European audience of her remote and marginal origin by taking the literary epithet, "La Peregrina" in her early poems. Building on Ianes's thoughts, I would add that Avellaneda, like Garcilaso, writes from the interstices as a Cuban immigrant in Spain and desires a reconciliation between the colonizers and colonized and a need to legitimize the indigenous "Other."

Notes

1. Moctezuma II, also spelled Montezuma, was the ninth Aztec emperor of Mexico, having succeeded his uncle Ahuitzotl in 1502 and reigned until his death in 1520. Guatimozín, also spelled Cuautémoc, became the eleventh and last Aztec emperor of Mexico in 1520 after the death of Moctezuma's successor, Cuitláhuac. Guatimozín was the nephew and son-in-law of Moctezuma II (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).
2. The most recognized chronicles and historical documents which Avellaneda makes reference to in her footnotes are: *Cartas de relación de la conquista de Méjico* by Hernán Cortés, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Antigua de Méjico* by Francisco Javier Clavijero, *Historia de la conquista de Méjico* by Antonio de Solís, and *The History of America* by William Robertson.
3. According to Avellaneda's explanation, Quetzalcoal was an ancestor of the Aztecs who traveled in search of another relative who had left for distant lands so that his descendants would learn of better laws and unknown sciences. The prophecy included the return of Quetzalcoal's descendants, who it was believed would come back to Mexico to punish tyrannical and impious leaders (22–23).
4. I am referring here to the progressive alienation expressed in Romantic literature by its writers, such as experienced by Mariano José de Larra in Spain, from present realities of liberalism and radical doubt about the future. For Larra, immersed in a

historical circumstance that failed to correspond to liberal hopes and intentions, Romantic introspection revealed the truth of subjectivity to be the agonized combination of desire with impotence (Kirkpatrick 107).

5. The civilization and barbarism dichotomy in Avellaneda's novel is responding to multiple contextual references. Considering the date of the novel's publication and its proximity to Sarmiento's monumental work *Civilización y barbarie: vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* in 1845, we can estimate that her representation of this binary is dialoguing with Sarmiento's text, as I conjecture in another study (see Ibarra). For Sarmiento, the dynamics of history were seen as a conflict between native (American) barbarism and cosmopolitan (European) civilization. Yet, Sarmiento's discourse was not a new one, but one that he highlighted and adapted from a trope which had prevailed in connection with America from the time of the conquests, and even before, when the constricted imagination of medieval Europe had felt the need for an idealized Other against which to measure itself (Fisburn 204). Avellaneda also responds then, to the varying discourses of civilization and barbarism in the historical texts she uses as her direct references, the colonial historians of the Conquest of Mexico. Particularly of interest in this essay and to Avellaneda's legitimization of the Other is these historians' representation of the indigenous in their documents and chronicles. It must be noted that although the indigenous were generally viewed as barbaric amongst these writers, their descriptions show many nuances with every different document and its purpose, be it for legal or autobiographical purposes. In Columbus's *Diario de a bordo*, he homogenizes the indigenous groups and consistently characterizes them as innocent, childlike and peaceful, having no religious "sects" nor developed culture, they were a *tabula rasa* upon which Spanish culture could easily be inscribed (Merrim 63). In his *Cartas de relación*, Cortés describes the Aztec Indians as a "barbarous" civilization and is overcome with awe as he marvels at the unnatural conjunction of barbarism and civilization in Moctezuma's court. Barbarism, in sixteenth-century Castilian, at once meant foreign, savage, and pagan. Clearly for Cortés paganism did not impede the creation of a civilization, of "harmony and order" or of magnificent artifacts of gold (Merrim 74).
6. For example, in her novel *Dos mujeres*, written in 1843, Avellaneda objects to the strict laws against divorce and adultery that are applied to men and women unequally.
7. Sab's letter, written at the end of the eponymous novel, recalls a discussion on laws of nature versus social laws that reflects Avellaneda's objection to a Cuban slavocratic society. We must note that although Independence from Spain and Portugal heralded the abolition of slavery, achieved in most countries by 1854, it continued in Cuba until 1886. Slave imports from Africa persisted into the 1860s in Cuba and Brazil.
8. The character of Tecuixpa is a fictional modification of the historical Tecuichpo, who was the youngest daughter of Moctezuma II. She was betrothed to Cuauhtémoc (or Guatimozín) and upon his death was raped by Cortés and then married off to another Spanish soldier and baptized Isabel Moctezuma (Prologue, Cruz 24). Interestingly, Avellaneda makes no mention of this rape in the novel and instead makes her character part of a romantic interracial relationship.

9. In 1847, the Chilean press, *Imprenta del Mercurio*, prints the first American edition of *Guatimozín* in Valparaíso. In 1853, another edition is published in Mexico (Ianes 39). In 1898, it is published in English, as *Cuautemoc, The Last Aztec Emperor*, in Mexico City by Helen Edith Blake. In her preface, Blake mentions a neglect of this novel in Mexico and its being completely out of print, she says: “. . . I know of but two copies of ‘Cuauhtemoc’ in the city of Mexico, and from one of them this translation is made” (2). Blake also notes that the book was, however, well-known and respected among “literary Spanish-Americans” (2).
10. The other couple present in the novel that crosses racial and religious barriers is Hernán Cortés and Malintzin, or Marina as she is called here. Marina is represented as a liaison and translator for Cortés and his men. Avellaneda subtly implies Marina and Cortés’s affair in the two appearances the indigenous character makes throughout the novel. She is also represented as having voluntarily accepted the Catholic religion as her own and attempts to convert others. A comparative study of these two couples could be an interesting project, but one that time and space will not allow here. Like Tecuixpa and Velázquez, Marina, and Cortés symbolize, although more controversially, the inevitable outcome of their cultural encounter. Marina, or “la Malinche,” has permeated the national imaginary of Mexico as the original mother of *mestizaje* and has become paradigmatic throughout the nation’s historical evolution (see Octavio Paz).
11. See Branche and Read.
12. All of Avellaneda’s female characters in the novel *Guatimozín* are indigenous women of Mexico. There is only one European female character, Cortés’s wife, who makes an appearance in the epilogue and is depicted as Andalusian with “bright Arabic eyes” (371). Avellaneda does not represent any romances between indigenous men and Spanish women, which may be, as Loomba suggests, less sustainable for a “white” woman to mix with a black or indigenous man (134). Yet, we must not forget Avellaneda’s attempt at coupling her mulatto protagonist, Sab, with his owner’s *criolla* (or “white”) daughter, Carlota, even if an unreciprocated romance.
13. Astrid Steverlynck has argued that European tradition brought different (and conflicting) views of Amazon women, ranging from warlike and hostile, cruel, and anthropophagous savages; to models of courtliness and chivalry, beautiful and feminine (690). He also states that these ambiguous images gave the Amazons an important role in the exploration of America and made them useful representations in the discourse of conquest.

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