◆ 2

Nothing to Hide: *Sab* as an Anti-Slavery and Feminist Novel

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The criticism of slavery in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's first novel, *Sab*, places her at the forefront of the development of anti-slavery literature in the Americas. Gómez de Avellaneda's 1841 novel was published eleven years before the most famous of these works in an international context, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, and was among the earliest of the Cuban anti-slavery novels either to be written or published. Despite her important contribution to abolitionist literature, Gómez de Avellaneda is still not widely known outside of Hispanic studies. Among Cuban anti-slavery writers, the author is the only woman writer of fiction in this area and she is noticeably more direct in her critique of slavery than her male counterparts. Although Gómez de Avellaneda's denunciation of slavery in *Sab* is overt and explicit, critics continue to debate the extent to which the novel in fact presents an anti-slavery argument. While the rights of women are clearly a priority for her, the writer's denunciation of all forms of coercion is driven by a unified Romantic philosophy countering multiple forms of oppression. The goals of this essay are twofold. Firstly, I will contextualize *Sab* within anti-slavery literature of the Americas as well as within the Cuban anti-slavery movement in order to demonstrate the ways in which the author was a pioneer of this branch of protest literature. Secondly, I will show how the critique of all forms of legal oppression permeates Gómez de Avellaneda's text, allowing it to promote multiple, overt denunciations of social injustices.

A search of the most recent publications available via the MLA International Bibliography indicates that critics continue to debate whether or not *Sab* fully promotes an anti-slavery message.[1] Although she was well-known and widely read in her lifetime, Gómez de Avellaneda was, like so many female writers of the nineteenth century, understudied during much of the last

century, until feminist literary critics began a project of recovery and reinvestigation of the works of women writers of previous eras. Additionally, the rise in interest in Afro-Hispanic studies also led to greater investigation of literature representing people of color and, in the context of the nineteenth century, the polemic surrounding the practice of slavery and its representation in works of fiction. As will be further explored below, there has been a tendency among critics to identify a conflict or a tension between the novel's feminist message and its anti-slavery one.

Gómez de Avellaneda has been widely celebrated by feminist critics for reasons that become clear very quickly to those who study her life and works. The author did not conform to the prescribed gender roles of her era in her private life, in her public career as a writer, or in her literary treatment of women. In particular, the novels *Sab* and *Dos mujeres* were so unconventional as to be considered threatening by the Spanish colonial censors in Cuba and were banned from sale there despite having been published and well-received in Spain.[2] Among the first studies to begin the contemporary reinvestigation into Gómez de Avellaneda's life and literature is Carmen Bravo-Villasante's informative critical biography, *Una vida romántica La Avellaneda*, published in 1967.[3] Bravo-Villasante's book was followed later by very influential studies, including the often cited chapters dedicated to *Sab* in Susan Kirkpatrick's *Las Románticas* and in Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions*.[4] Both of these critics provide valuable insights into the messages of Gómez de Avellaneda's novel and pursue unique critical approaches, yet they are united by their conclusion that the novel privileges feminism over anti-slavery to the extent that the anti-slavery stance is viewed as an additional vehicle for a feminist argument. Sommer, for example, entitles her chapter, "Sab, c'est moi," referencing Flaubert's famous statement of self-identification with his literary creation, suggesting that the author saw only herself seeking freedom in the slave character. Through Sab's transformation into an author, Sommer argues, both Gómez de Avellaneda and her character are able to "vent their passions by writing and [that] their literary slippages destabilize the rhetorical system that constrains them" (115), yet Gómez de Avellaneda stops short of promoting true freedom for Sab (137). In a somewhat similar vein, Kirkpatrick argues that Gómez de Avellaneda subverts the masculinist discourse of Romanticism by creating her own categories of the self and individual expression (23), but agrees with others that, despite the subjectivity she attributes to Sab, his exceptionality prevents the novel from being truly anti-slavery (156). In general, a frequent argument in the criticism of the novel is that Gómez de Avellaneda's overriding concern is for the plight of women rather than for the suffering of slaves. The anti-slavery position of the text is, in this reading, perceived as an allegory or cover for the argument against the oppression of women. This conception of the novel does not allow for the co-existence of two complementary protest messages.

Interestingly, a number of critics who are more interested in the potential anti-slavery and anti-racism messages of the novel arrive at similar conclusions regarding the text's feminist and abolitionist stance, although with some important differences. These critics, too, often determine that *Sab*'s true focus is the oppression of women, although not necessarily on the travails of all women equally. Jerome Branche's "Ennobling Savagery? Sentimentalism and the Subaltern in *Sab*" presents several arguments against the idea that Gómez de Avellaneda's novel is abolitionist or even fully feminist that are representative of the position against reading *Sab* as a truly liberationist work. To begin with, Branche points out the nearly total absence of black female characters in this novel and also the neglect of this topic in many published interpretations (13). For Branche, the failure of the text to represent black women as characters and subjects, "explodes the (uneven) slave-wife analogy" (14) relied upon by many white, female writers who considered themselves anti-slavery advocates and indicates a blindness in Gómez de Avellaneda's text as well as in the criticism of it to the potential for solidarity of women across class and color lines and for the double bind faced by women of color. Moreover, based on Gómez de Avellaneda's curious description of Sab's physical appearance, Branche reads Sab as being "made to pass for White," rather than realize his identity as mulatto or black (15). Not only are Sab's African mother and heritage denied in this way, but Branche considers that more fully black slaves in the novel are characterized as "subhuman and somehow incapable of socio-political consciousness" (17). As Branche and other critics point out, Sab is in fact a member of the de B… family and holds a privileged position of authority as the *mayoral* (overseer) of the Bellavista plantation. For Branche, this exceptionality means that Sab cannot be read as a representative of a larger group of slaves or of people of color (18). Thus, the conclusion drawn from these arguments is that the novel's primary interest is in decrying the oppression of well-to-do white women, like Gómez de Avellaneda herself, and in revisiting earlier versions of the noble or royal slave character as seen in works such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal*.[5]

Branche and other critics of the novel who raise these points indeed mention issues that are central to the consideration of *Sab* or any other novel addressing slavery as an abolitionist and egalitarian text. However, other scholars identify a greater commitment to abolitionism in the novel. Jeremy L. Cass's recent article, "Deciphering Sedition in *Sab*: Avellaneda's Transient Engagement with Abolitionism," reads an abolitionist message in *Sab*, although he does not describe a positioning in the novel that is as radical or as committed as the one described by William Luis, Ivan Schulman, and others. Cass bases his interpretation of the novel on the multiple instances in which Sab alludes to slave uprisings, particularly when he is in the presence of white slave owners (184). Sab's comments are incendiary because they remind his listeners, as

well as his readers, of the first successful slave revolt in the Americas, the revolution in Haiti. Contemporary readers of *Sab* would most likely make this connection themselves, but the narrator steps in to further clarify the reference and strengthen the anti-slavery argument (185). As Cass and others point out, fear of a Haitian-style revolution was endemic to nineteenth-century Cuban planters; references to this slave rebellion in works such as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and others demonstrate that this fear extended to North American slave-owners as well. As Cass argues, these "references highlight a noteworthy engagement with abolitionism. They reveal an undergirding potential for rebellion in even the most compliant of slaves. Even Sab, the slave who rejects his master's repeated offers of freedom so that he may continue to live at Bellavista, is capable of considering insurrection" (190). Despite highlighting the novel's invocation of slave uprisings and pointing out that a literary work can have both a feminist and an abolitionist agenda (189), Cass ultimately characterizes *Sab*'s engagement with abolitionism as "transient" (186) and identifies Carlota's coming of age as the true concern of the novel (189).

Nonetheless, other scholars argue that the context in which Gómez de Avellaneda wrote as well as her goals must be taken into consideration in order to fully understand the extent to which the author went against the conventions of her day. This is a key factor in evaluating *Sab* as an anti-slavery novel. Although it is often pointed out, it is important to remember that *Sab* presented a powerful enough argument against both slavery and misogyny that it was banned in colonial Cuba; this fact also illustrates how the work was received in its day. In *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* and "How to Read *Sab*," William Luis presents compelling arguments in favor of considering *Sab* as a committed anti-slavery novel. In "How to Read *Sab*," he offers several major points in favor of considering historical context to the extent possible. He asks, "[S]hould we as critics impose the present on the past; that is, introduce concepts that were not readily available when the works were written?" (175). In order to better contextualize Gómez de Avellaneda's novel, Luis describes the political and literary climates in both Spain and Cuba when *Sab* was composed. He points out that the author was most likely only able to publish her novel in Spain because the liberal Regent María Cristina was in power at the time (178). Further, he argues that Gómez de Avellaneda's text represents the author's own foray into the contemporary slavery debate and she employs the terms of the ruling liberals in her position: "If we consider events unfolding in Spain, Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*, and her treatment of slavery, can be understood as her attempt to participate in the ongoing debate on slavery, supported by constitutionalists in Spain" ("How" 179).

With regard to the argument that Sab is too privileged to be representative of the larger group of slaves, Luis replies that in fact even this characterization of Sab would be problematic for supporters of slavery: "Though a

modern reader may view the protagonists [Sab and Juan Francisco Manzano] as exceptions rather than the rule, in nineteenth-century Cuba, these same figures were objectionable to supporters of slavery, for they undermined the status quo" (182).[6] Luis reminds us that the presentation of the passive, exceptional slave is a rhetorical device that encourages the white reader—and nineteenth-century readers in Spain and Cuba at the time Gómez de Avellaneda wrote were overwhelmingly white and well-to-do—to identify with the sympathetic slave character (182–183). To portray a violent slave inciting rebellion, Luis proposes, would have been a mistake: "I argue that during this historical period it would have been counterproductive to depict a black who was not a passive slave. Such a description would have reinforced the fears that many had about an impending slave rebellion" (183). Ivan A. Schulman made a similar argument in his 1977 article, "The Portrait of the Slave: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Cuban Anti-slavery Novel": "Translated into artistic terms, this [fearful] attitude suggested the advisability of encouraging a mild rather than a bold or rebellious anti-slavery narrative, one in which the slave might draw tears from the reader rather than cries of fear or horror" (359). Finally, Luis concludes, among early Cuban anti-slavery works, "*Sab*'s anti-slavery position is the most aggressive" (Luis "How" 183–184). Sab is idealized, but, at the same time, he is endowed with a humanity that society did not generally grant to slaves at the time; Luis states, "During the time of the narration, slaves were treated as animals, considered to be inferior, incapable of reasoning" (182).

Historically speaking, Gómez de Avellaneda's novel was composed around the same time that Domingo Del Monte had begun his noted *tertulia* and had begun commissioning and collaborating on a number of anti-slavery works. In Schulman's description of the earliest works of Cuban anti-slavery literature, *Sab* figures third in the chronology, following the 1838 publication of Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* and the 1838 publication of Felix Tanco y Bosmeniel's *Petrona y Rosalía* (365, Note 3). One must of course also add Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía* in 1835 as an important, early anti-slavery work, although it is not of course a work of fiction. In Luis's estimation, the majority of novels produced by the Del Monte writers offer only "mild descriptions" of slavery in their critique of the institution (181). Schulman argues that the early Cuban anti-slavery novels, those written prior to 1860, did not promote immediate abolition but "a gradual, forward-looking and humanitarian policy of limiting the growth of slaves through the enforcement of the slave traffic treaties" (359), particularly since the Del Monte writers themselves were dependent upon slave labor for their wealth. The novels were nonetheless perceived at the time as being threatening to the slavery system and therefore to the entire colonial system of administration in the island; as a result, the *tertulia* writers' works could not be published in Cuba for many

decades (Luis, "How" 181). Nonetheless, as the only female anti-slavery writer of her generation in Cuba, Gómez de Avellaneda's novel is considered to voice the strongest anti-slavery position articulated at the time.

Despite Luis's and Schulman's comparisons between *Sab* and the literary production of the well-known *tertulia*, Nina Scott argues that Gómez de Avellaneda "had no contact with the Del Monte group" (xx). The Del Monte writers began their collaboration in 1834 in sugar-producing Matanzas, not far from Havana (Fisher 323, note 2), while Gómez de Avellaneda was born and raised in Puerto Príncipe, in central Cuba, where the economic focus was on raising cattle rather than sugar (Scott xx). The Del Monte *tertulia* did not move to Havana until 1835, just one year before Gómez de Avellaneda's exit from the country. Further, Scott suggests that Gómez de Avellaneda most likely would not have been considered a potential candidate for the collective: "Avellaneda was not part of the Del Monte group for a variety of reasons, her youth, [and] her gender" (xx). There do not appear to have been any female participants in Del Monte's *tertulia*. Further, Scott points out, Gómez de Avellaneda is the sole author of her novel and did not benefit from the comments and input of a collective of peers or of a mentor (xxi). Gómez de Avellaneda may have been a contemporary of the Del Monte writers, but she independently advanced her own, more potent argument against slavery and oppression. As Debra Rosenthal points out, Sab is the only black slave in Cuban literature to aspire to love his white mistress (80)[7]; one can add that his love is not entirely unrequited, another feature of the novel that is found in few, if any, other anti-slavery novels. After Sab's death, Carlota is seen visiting his grave every day for three months before she herself vanishes.

Not only was *Sab* among the earliest works of Cuban anti-slavery literature, it was also a forerunner in anti-slavery literature of the Americas in general. In the context of an international readership, the most famous of all anti-slavery novels published in the Americas in the 1800s is, of course, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Published in 1852, Stowe's novel quickly sold more than a million copies, was translated into a variety of languages, and became a point of reference in protest works denouncing forced labor and slavery by later Latin American writers such as Clorinda Matto de Turner, author of the 1889 novel *Aves sin nido*, and Bernardo Guimarães, author of *A escrava Isaura*, published in 1875. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins calls Stowe's novel "the most important book of the century" because of the huge impact that it had (124). Stowe's novel is not without controversy, particularly because of its characterization of Uncle Tom himself, but it did mark an important turning point for public dialogue regarding slavery in the United States. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exposed the horrors of slavery to readers by paying particular attention to the inhumane practice of breaking apart families and to the terrible cruelty to which slaves were subjected. The narrative voice of the

novel frequently speaks directly to female readers to be moved as wives and mothers to the plight of slave women whose children are stolen from them. The relocation of two of the main characters escaping slavery, George and Eliza Harris, to Liberia is problematic in that it suggests that emancipated slaves could not truly belong in the United States, but the novel does specifically refer to the value of equality espoused in the United States Declaration of Independence and call for an immediate end to slavery. The huge popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* indicates that the reading public was at that time ready to face the issue of slavery in a way that it had not done before.

Stowe is the most widely known of the North American anti-slavery writers, but she was not the first to publish. Lydia Maria Child was the most prominent abolitionist writer prior to Stowe, beginning to publish anti-slavery work in the 1830s. The difficulties she faced in her career because of her radical stance exemplify the polemic surrounding the fight against slavery in the United States.[8] Child's career as an abolitionist writer began with the publication in 1833 of her nonfiction tract, *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, which was an early attack on the institution of slavery and on the racism that justified it. When writing *An Appeal*, Child did not have a body of U.S. anti-slavery literature to draw upon for inspiration; rather, she was inventing "her own textbook on the subject" (Karcher, *First Woman* 176). In her tome, Child analyzed all aspects of the peculiar institution, from political, legal and economic concerns to moral and ethical ones (*An Appeal* 176). In contrast to Stowe and a number of other North American abolitionists, Child did not believe in "colonization," or the practice of deportation of slaves and former slaves to Africa; rather, she promoted the ideal of full integration of people of color into mainstream society as citizens whose rights are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution (187). The basis for this argument in *An Appeal* is Child's belief in the basic equality of all human beings; she undermines the category of race by instead referring to Americans of color firstly as a class rather than a race and as Americans rather than Africans (183). Finally, her criticism of the northern states' racism and complicity with the practice of slavery seems to have been the bitterest pill for northern readers to swallow (191). Child was very unusual among abolitionists for her integrationist stance and for her presentation of miscegenation as a solution for the racial divisions plaguing the country.[9] As Robert Fanuzzi describes, miscegenation was an abhorrent concept to many North Americans in the 1830s: even anti-slavery advocates sought to escape the charge of being "amalgamationist": "White abolitionists fled so swiftly from the amalgamation charge that they formally disclaimed the morality of mixed-race unions" (73). Unusual among U.S. anti-slavery writers, Child promoted racial equality, full integration, and interracial romance as solutions to the problems of slavery and of racial prejudice. The anti-slavery and egalitarian stance that she espoused in *An Appeal*

were considered entirely inappropriate for a female writer to address and was so radical that it caused Lydia Maria Child to be shunned both professionally and personally for nearly a decade (Karcher, *First Woman* 191).

It is difficult to know whether or not Gómez de Avellaneda was familiar with Lydia Maria Child's anti-slavery works, but it seems unlikely that she would have known them. Our interest here lies in the comparison with Child and the possibility of locating Gómez de Avellaneda within the larger, inter-American body of anti-slavery literature. By the time Gómez de Avellaneda was writing *Sab*, which, according to Scott, could be as early as 1836, Child had not written any novels related to slavery but had written an early novel, *Hobomok* (published in 1824), which advocated an interracial approach to incorporating Native Americans into U.S. society, *An Appeal*, and a number of short stories that illustrated her beliefs regarding slavery and prejudice.[10] Thematically, there are some interesting points of contact between Child and Gómez de Avellaneda. Like Child's *Hobomok* and *A Romance of the Republic*, Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* explores the possibility for interracial romance and was also considered to have taken on a topic inappropriate for a female writer in addressing the problem of slavery. These similarities are most likely coincidental, but they help demonstrate that Gómez de Avellaneda was at the forefront of literary denunciation of slavery; her opposition to slavery and exploration of the potential for racial mixing place her ideologically closer to the radical Child than to the more cautious Stowe.

Sab is subject to many of the same criticisms aimed at other anti-slavery works. In other words, few, if any, of these works are free from racial prejudice, and they also are likely to reflect class or other biases. In the twentieth century, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the subject of a lot of criticism. James Baldwin took on the racism of Stowe's narrative in "Everybody's Protest Novel," and Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas character in *Native Son* is an inversion of Stowe's passive Uncle Tom character. As with *Sab*, much of the critical interest in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has come from feminist critics who read a potent argument in favor of the rights of women as part of the author's project. Also primarily of interest to feminist scholars, Lydia Maria Child, who appears to have gone farther than Stowe and other U.S. anti-slavery writers in her works to promote racial understanding and integration, is nonetheless the author of "The Quadroons," the first story to introduce the female tragic mulatto character into U.S. literature. Karcher opted not to include this short story in her edition of *A Lydia Maria Child Reader*, and calls it "dangerously flawed" in *The First Woman in the Republic*: "Melodramatic and sentimental, 'The Quadroons' is dangerously flawed from a modern perspective: its heroines' preference for white lovers suggests a repudiation of their African roots, and their clinging dependency and utter lack of inner resources grossly misrepresent slave women" (336).

Of the majority of works comprising Brazilian anti-slavery literature, David Haberly has famously said that the racism revealed in these texts makes them both "anti-slavery" and "anti-slave" (30). In criticism of Cuban anti-slavery literature, the literary patron of the main group of anti-slavery writers, Domingo Del Monte, is frequently described as being of a mind with José Antonio Saco, who promoted the concept of "whitening" in the colony in the nineteenth century. Del Monte himself is often referred to in literary criticism as a "reformer" rather than as an "abolitionist" because of his ownership of slaves and the fact that many of the works he sponsored do not call for the immediate abolition of slavery. Critics are right to point out that anti-slavery literature of the nineteenth century does not meet contemporary standards of tolerance, yet I also agree with Luis that a thorough evaluation of these works requires a full consideration of the context in which they were written. Compared to other nineteenth-century anti-slavery works in general, *Sab* presents a much stronger stance against slavery and at times against racial prejudice, particularly through the potential for romantic relationships between a man of color and two white women and the casting of a slave as a romantic hero.[11] Further, while some critics rely on today's standards to judge the novel's protest messages, it can also be useful to evaluate racism today by the Romantic ideals presented in the novel. For example, near the conclusion, Sab describes a vision that he has of a utopic age in which worth will be determined by merit and artistic talent rather than by appearances. One may well ask whether such an age has yet been achieved. Markers of inequality, such as average income by gender and race, suggest that it has not. Novels such as *Sab* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are useful in helping us to understand what has and what has not yet been accomplished in the Americas.

To turn now to Gómez de Avellaneda's novel itself, I would like to examine the critical conclusion that *Sab* is not in fact an anti-slavery novel but a feminist one. I find this argument unconvincing because *Sab* quite explicitly denounces both slavery and the oppression of women. As I have argued elsewhere, *Sab* is in fact a complex novel delivering multiple critiques at once.[12] Scholarly studies often approach *Sab* as an allegory, yet in many cases the term "allegory" or an allegorical means of reading is not sufficiently defined or explored. The simplest meaning of the term is also the most frequently used without delving into the implications. The most basic understanding of allegory is to say that a text says one thing but really means another. Thus, scholars have argued that when Sab or other characters decry slavery in the novel, they are really talking about some other form of oppression. What Sab, Carlota, or the narrator is quite literally saying is discounted for a message perceived to be behind the speaker's words. However, offering a more fully considered definition, Carolynn Van Dyke proposes that an allegory does not simply say one thing and mean another but rather that it "must say and mean one complex

thing" (42). In this understanding of allegory, *Sab* can communicate several protest messages at once, as did many other anti-slavery works authored by women. The literal meaning of Sab's words need not be discarded in favor of an abstract, second layer of meaning but rather the two messages combine to make a more complex statement. Further, the messages combined within *Sab* need not be considered somehow mutually exclusive; quite a few anti-slavery texts authored by women in fact combined a call for the abolition of slavery with a denunciation of the treatment of women. Cass makes a similar point when he remarks, "It is important to recognize that one agenda does not necessarily exclude the other; I do not perceive anything that would prevent the two [i.e., feminism and abolitionism] from working in chorus" (189).

Sab is explicit in its denunciation of slavery as an inhumane practice. There are too many instances in the novel to list them all, so I will highlight the most convincing ones here. The title character of the novel is a slave, and slavery is immediately characterized as a barbarity in the first chapter of the novel, when Enrique Otway encounters Sab near the Bellavista plantation. Once his identity is made clear, Sab explains that his mother was sold into slavery by "traficantes de carne humana" (109) (traffickers of human flesh) and that most slaves are treated terribly: Sab remarks, "jamás he sufrido el trato duro que se da generalmente a los negros, ni he sido condenado a largos y fatigosos trabajos" (109) (I have never suffered the harsh treatment that is generally given to blacks, nor have I been condemned to lengthy and wearisome work). The exceptionality of Sab's status that has been so often commented upon in criticism of the novel, is noticeable right away. At the same time, however, Sab's reply to Enrique ("jamás he sufrido el trato duro que se da generalmente a los negros") demonstrates that Sab is fully aware of being one slave among a much larger populace and suggests self-identification as *negro* (black). As an exceptional slave, Sab may be in the best position to affect the nineteenth-century reader through his heroic suffering; he also uses his status to inform both Enrique and the reader of the brutality of slavery.

Criticism of slavery persists throughout the novel. Carlota attempts several times to free Sab and also expresses her horror of the institution. Like a true Romantic, she prefers to free her slaves and live in poverty with her beloved rather than commit the crime of holding slaves. She is particularly upset by the sale of babies away from their mothers: "los ven vender luego como a bestias irracionales . . . ¡A sus hijos, carne y sangre suya! Cuando yo sea la esposa de Enrique [. . .] ningún infeliz respirará a mi lado el aire emponzoñado de la esclavitud" (146) (they see them selling them like irrational beasts . . . Their children, their own flesh and blood! Once I'm Enrique's wife [. . .] not one unfortunate being by my side will breath the poisonous air of slavery).[13] As Cass points out, Sab's references to the slave uprising and eventual revolution in Haiti are perceived as threatening by his interlocutors, the colonial censors,

and Cuban readers. Along with the potential for violent retribution suggested by the references to Haiti, Sab's association with Martina, who claims to be one of the last remaining indigenous persons on the island, implies solidarity between marginalized groups capable of rebelling. As members of Carlota's family travel with Enrique toward the caves at Cubitas, Sab narrates the story of Camagüey and his slaughter by the Spanish during the conquest of the island. Sab startles his white listeners by explaining that Martina proclaims that the violent deaths of the original, indigenous Cubans will be avenged by men of another color: "La tierra que fue regada con sangre una vez lo será aún otra: los descendientes de los opresores serán oprimidos, y los hombres negros serán los terribles vengadores de los hombres cobrizos" (168) (The earth that was once marred with blood will be once again: the descendants of the oppressors will be the oppressed and the black men will be the terrible avengers of the red men). Don Carlos abruptly interrupts Sab at this point, telling him, "Basta, Sab, basta" (168) (That's enough, Sab, enough). Clearly, the notion of such violent revenge and the suggestion of unity among those who have been wronged are unsettling for Sab's listeners.

One of the novel's strongest condemnations of slavery is to be found in the letter that Sab writes to Teresa as he is dying. Proclaiming his individual dignity and capacities, Sab denounces slavery while speaking as a slave and as a man of color. The laws that have enslaved Sab, he explains, are human laws and are in error; God has created all people to be equal: "¿El gran jefe de esta familia habrá establecido diferentes leyes para los que nacen con la tez negra y la tez blanca? ¿No tienen todos las mismas necesidades, las mismas pasiones, los mismos defectos? [. . .] No, los hombres mienten: la virtud no existe en ellos" (265) (Would the great head of this family have established different laws for those that are born with black skin and white skin? Wouldn't they all have the same needs, the same passions, the same defects? [. . .] No, men lie; virtue doesn't exist in them). Later, Sab declares that humans have destroyed the potential that God had granted him: "Pero si no es Dios, Teresa, si son los hombres los que me han formado este destino, si ellos han cortado las alas que Dios concedió a mi alma" (269–270) (But, it's not God, Teresa, it's men that have given me this destiny, it's they who have cut the wings that God gave my soul).

Just as it does with slavery, the novel is overt in its criticism of the mistreatment of women. There is no need to consider the anti-slavery argument as a cover for the feminist one as the latter is expressly part of the content. Again, in his letter to Teresa, Sab demonstrates his awareness of a lack of rights among women: "¡Oh!, ¡las mujeres! ¡pobres y ciegas víctimas! Como los esclavos, ellas arrastran pacientemente su cadena y bajan la cabeza bajo el yugo de las leyes humanas" (270–271) (Oh! Women! Poor, blind victims! Like the slaves, they patiently drag their chains and bow their heads under the yoke of mankind's laws). In a line of thought that has led a number of critics

to propose that the novel is feminist rather than anti-slavery, Sab continues on to say that the lot of women is in fact worse than that of slaves: "El esclavo, al menos, puede cambiar de amo, puede esperar que juntando oro comprará algún día su libertad: pero la mujer, cuando levanta sus manos enflaquecidas y su frente ultrajada, para pedir libertad, oye al monstruo de voz sepulcral que la grita: «en la tumba»" (271) (The slave, at least, can change from one owner to another, can hope that by saving his gold he might one day buy his liberty: but woman, when she raises her weakening arms and her violated forehead to plead for liberty, hears the deadly voice of the monster shout to her "in the grave"). As a Romantic hero dedicated entirely to his mistress, Sab's remarks can be interpreted as further evidence that he places his concern for Carlota, who is about to marry a man unworthy of her, above himself. It is, or course, unrealistic to think that a slave would choose to stay with his mistress rather than embrace freedom or think that her situation is worse than his, but it is an effective rhetorical strategy for Romantic readers moved by such shows of emotion and radical in its placing of a man of color in the position of the long-suffering Romantic subject (Kirkpatrick 153).

As Elena Grau-Llevería argues for *Dos mujeres*, "al hablar de feminismo en un texto literario (especialmente en un texto del romanticismo hispano escrito en la primera mitad del siglo XIX) es necesario especificar cuáles son los temas esenciales para los feminismos de este periodo" (36) (When speaking of feminism in a literary text (especially Hispanic Romanticism written in the first half of the nineteenth century) it is necessary to specify which are the essential feminist topics of the time period). Additionally, Grau-Llevería asserts that nineteenth-century feminism reflects a new focus on social injustices arising from moral and legal codes that granted women unfair, inferior status: "en el romanticismo el debate se desplaza hacia la injusticia social que representa la desigualdad de las mujeres respecto a los códigos morales y legales de la época" (35) (in Romanticism, the debate revolves around the social injustice of women's inequality within the moral and legal codes of the time). In the same way that it is necessary to look at how other texts contemporary to the one studied address slavery, it is also essential to understand the central topics of concern to feminists of the time and how they framed their discourse in order to evaluate the feminist content of an earlier work. Sab's description of women laboring under the yoke of human laws indicates that she espouses the kind of nineteenth-century feminism described by Grau-Llevería. Further, Grau-Llevería's call to acknowledge the feminisms of the day is useful in understanding why Gómez de Avellaneda would compare the situation of married women to that of slaves. A number of both anti-slavery advocates as well as supporters of women's rights in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States claimed an analogy between women and slaves; for example, as Branche points out, a very central figure for early feminism, Mary Wollstone-

craft, made the original claim that women's subordination to their husbands was "slavish" (Branche 14). Given that this type of assertion was to become a commonplace in literature considered in its day to be radical, it is interesting to note that the feminist content of Gómez de Avellaneda's work is in this regard on a par with many of her North American and British feminist peers. Further, the vast majority of the known corpus of Cuban and Brazilian anti-slavery literature was written by male authors. These texts do not generally demonstrate a concern for the treatment of women alongside that of slaves. One notes much more anxiety regarding the corruption of society resulting from slavery and darkening demographics than for the destruction of families and denunciation of legalized injustices against women. *Sab* is explicit in decrying both slavery and the oppression of women and therefore quite unusual among Cuban anti-slavery novels.

Further, to look beyond the comments that Sab makes in his letter, the characterization and destinies of the female characters in the novel also provide a potent feminist argument. Carlota at first appears to be an angel of the hearth, but her unhappy marriage to Enrique serves as a condemnation of the institution that becomes a trap for women. Teresa fares slightly better in that she finds peace in the convent, but the author's characterization of the convent as a tomb makes her opinion of the monastic life clear. Branche is correct in pointing out the neglect of women of color in Gómez de Avellaneda's statement about the oppression of women, yet critics appear to agree that the issue of women's rights as she perceived them is a priority for the author. Again, the context in which the author wrote must be considered for a full evaluation of her text. The failure to address issues facing women of color that has plagued much of twentieth-century feminism did not become part of the mainstream critical discussion of Western feminism until the 1980s. In an interesting contrast to her North American, nineteenth-century peers, however, Gómez de Avellaneda's brand of feminism is highly critical of the domestic roles celebrated in a work such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Rather than promote marriage, motherhood, and domesticity as a source of women's influence in society and route to happiness, Gómez de Avellaneda's portrayal of marriage exposes the institution's shortcomings and the materialistic basis for many unions. Branche critiques the novel's failure to promote interracial sisterhood through a celebration of their shared roles as mothers and wives (14). However, unlike novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Sab* subverts domesticity in general, as does the later *Dos mujeres*. Carlota finds solace not in her home or through any children but with her friend, Teresa. There is a brief reference to the sort of early feminist objection to the breakup of families of the type that Branche describes in *Sab*.[14] In general, however, the novel strongly critiques the kinds of traditional female roles embraced in North American anti-slavery writing by female authors.

Rather than portray sisterhood between women of different races and classes, Evelyn Picon Garfield argues that the novel demonstrates interracial solidarity between the alliance of three colonial subalterns: Sab, Teresa, and Carlota (51). Sab is the "other's other" because he is a person of color and a slave; Carlota and Teresa are subalterns as well given that they are women. They are alike in that each is silenced and disempowered within colonial discourse. Picon Garfield describes the relationships between these characters as expressions of solidarity between marginalized groups (66). Each character comes to recognize their similarity to the others in moments of illumination. Sab and Teresa each identify in the other a person suffering from unrequited love for someone they cannot hope to be paired with in colonial Cuban society. This recognition takes on a metaphoric quality of solidarity between the oppressed, particularly when Teresa, moved by the noble suffering of Sab's heart, offers to run away with Sab and be his companion in a faraway desert: "[A]mbos somos huérfanos y desgraciados [. . .]. Déjame, pues seguirte a remotos climas, al seno de los desiertos" (220) (We are both disgraced orphans [. . .] Let me follow you to remote climates, to the heart of the deserts). After reading Sab's letter, Carlota realizes that Sab is really her soulmate and expresses this by visiting his grave on a daily basis. Identifying each as a colonial subaltern is another way to suggest that the anti-slavery and feminist messages complement rather than displace one another; all three characters are victims of the unjust laws of men. Thus, the novel presents radical positions opposing slavery and the treatment of women as two faces of the same coin.

In her study of *Dos mujeres*, Grau-Llevería applies a different term to the development of the type of solidarity among subalterns that Picon Garfield identifies in *Sab*. Grau-Llevería describes the characterizations of Luisa and Catalina as both unusual and unexpected, since neither of the two is revealed to be exactly who their paternalistic society thought that they were (40). Luisa at first appears to be simply the long-suffering wife of the philandering Carlos, and Catalina the typical "other woman." Yet, most unexpectedly, each woman comes to have sympathy and understanding for the other rather than the venom that one would normally expect to see from stereotypical female characters in such a situation (40). Each ultimately makes the decision to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of the other. Grau-Llevería characterizes this formation of a sense of community among marginalized persons as a key ingredient in Social Romanticism, a branch of Romanticism that concerns itself with the denunciation of society's ills: "en el romanticismo social se critican los prejuicios, los abusos, los privilegios, las instituciones sociales y se muestra al individuo en lucha contra una sociedad opresiva o mal organizada, pero a diferencia de las otras manifestaciones románticas los protagonistas de la novela social son y se constituyen como parte de un grupo" (34) (In Social Romanticism prejudices, abuses, privileges, and social institutions are

all critiqued and the individual is shown in his/her fight against an oppressive and poorly organized society, but distinct from other Romantic protests, the protagonists of the Social novel are part of a group). Using Grau-Llevería's definition of Social Romanticism, one can describe Sab, Carlota, and Teresa as developing a sense of belonging to a group in which each recognizes the limits that have been placed by society on the others because of its unfair institutions and prescribed roles. The more obvious sense of belonging to the same group would be shared by Carlota and Teresa as women, yet, as Picon Garfield also argues, the error in men's laws that permit a patriarchal, materialist, and slave-holding society have, to borrow Sab's term, cut the wings of all three characters. For his part, Sab not only recognizes the legal oppression of the two women he is close to, but, as we have seen, he also speaks of himself as a slave and as a man of color, indicating his awareness of the suffering of the larger group to which he belongs.

The text's opposition to all forms of oppression equally supports both protest messages and is explicit regarding each one. Some critics have implied that it was somehow safer for the author to oppose slavery than the mistreatment of women, but both positions were risky ones for the author to espouse.[15] The direct discussion of both issues in the text suggests that the anti-slavery argument is not a vehicle for a feminist message but rather that each protest against discrimination strengthens the other and arises from a sense of the many injustices colonial Cuban society supported. Despite what can be characterized as her faults as an anti-slavery writer, Gómez de Avellaneda's promotion of a clear critique of slavery and of a connection between slavery and other forms of oppression, such as colonialism and misogyny, put her at the forefront of protest literature produced in the Spanish language in the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. This essay does not offer an exhaustive review of the scholarly criticism of *Sab*. Rather, I have chosen to focus on a smaller number of articles and book chapters that have been influential in the discussion surrounding *Sab* and that are representative of the general lines of critical arguments formed around the novel. My discussion of anti-slavery literature of the Americas, some of my commentary on *Sab*, and of allegory are based on research completed for my manuscript, "Mixed Messages: Anti-slavery Allegories of the United States and Latin America," which is currently in progress.
2. The censor's denunciation and banning of *Sab* and *Dos mujeres* are often cited, yet

they continue to be important as they permit insight into how Gómez de Avellaneda's works were perceived by her contemporaries and by colonial authorities. Nina Scott translates the censors' decree in the following manner: *Sab* contains "'documents subversive to the system of slavery on this Island and contrary to moral and good habits; and the second [*Dos mugeres*] for being plagued with doctrines prejudicious to Our Holy Religion and attacking therein conjugal Society and canonizing adultery'" (Scott, "Introduction" xv).

3. Emilio Cotarelo y Mori's critical biography of 1930 is also regularly cited in scholarly articles.
4. Please refer to my article, "A New Look at the Strains of Allegory in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*" for a more comprehensive discussion of Kirkpatrick's and Sommer's analyses of *Sab* as well as the complexities of reading the novel as an allegory.
5. Sommer also makes the point that Avellaneda is influenced by Hugo's text but that she opts not to depict a violent slave uprising: "Avellaneda must have felt safer about writing the old works in new combinations so that they would only look incoherent, because the idea of inventing new and revolutionary names evidently seemed more violent than constructive" (137).
6. Juan Francisco Manzano is the author of the only known autobiography written by a slave in nineteenth-century Cuba. He was a celebrated poet and was encouraged by Domingo Del Monte to write his life story, *Autobiografía de un esclavo*.
7. Rosenthal's point is also cited in Cass's article (185).
8. The "Introduction" to Carolyn L. Karcher's *A Lydia Maria Child Reader* offers an excellent overview of the author's life and literary career, as does Karcher's complete study, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*.
9. In two of her novels, Child presents mixed-race unions as a means of resolving national crises much in the way that a number of Latin American national allegories studied by Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions* also suggest. In *Hobomok*, the child of a Pequod Indian and a young English woman is reincorporated into Puritan society along with the young mother. In *Romance of the Republic*, several marriages between prominent young white men and women of color bring the painful era of the Civil War to a happy conclusion.
10. Child was an extremely prolific writer. She published a number of books and stories for children, domestic advice books, and wrote newspaper columns. For a full accounting, please refer to Karcher's *The First Woman in the Republic*.
11. In the letter to Teresa, Sab claims equality for all men: "Dios, cuya mano suprema ha repartido sus beneficios con equidad sobre todos los países del globo, que hace salir el sol para toda su gran familia dispersa sobre la tierra, que ha escrito el gran dogma de la igualdad sobre la tumba" (265) (God, whose supreme hand has spread his benefits with equity amongst all the countries of the globe, has made the sun shine for all of his great family spread throughout the earth, has written the great dogma of equality on the grave).

12. Please refer to my article, "A New Look at the Strains of Allegory in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab.*"
13. This is a point of similarity between *Sab* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe frequently appeals directly to her female reader's sensibility at the horror of children being separated from their mothers and families being broken apart.
14. I have cited this instance above but in an abbreviated way. Here is a slightly longer version of Carlota's objection to the selling of slave children away from their mothers: "'Se juzgan afortunados y son esclavos sus hijos antes de salir del vientre de sus madres, y los ven vender luego como a bestias irracionales … ¡A sus hijos, carne y sangre suya!'" (146) ("They judge themselves fortunate and yet their children are slaves before they leave their mother's womb, and they see them sold off after like irrational beasts . . . their children, their own flesh and blood!")
15. A review of *Sab* written shortly after its publication in Spain declared that Gómez de Avellaneda had taken on a topic inappropriate for a novel and particularly one written by a woman in its denunciation of slavery (Grau-Llevería 31).

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