

## ROMANTIC DISCOURSE AND FEMININE SUBJECTIVITY IN GERTRUDIS GÓMEZ DE AVELLANEDA'S "LA DAMA DE AMBOTO" (THE DAME OF MT. AMBOTO)

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### ABSTRACT

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's short story, "La dama de Amboto" (The Dame of Mt. Amboto), is classified under the genre of Romantic legends. The authoress develops a fictive narrative in which the theme, characters and motives inscribe themselves perfectly in the discourse of canonical Romanticism. However, the reading of this text in the light of the theories of feminist criticism exposes to us a discourse in which develop and take shape a whole network of subject matter and narrative strategies that subvert the norms of Romantic canon and center the text on the subjectivity of the woman writer. The aim of this essay is to analyze these strategies and demonstrate that Avellaneda plays a main role in the formation and diffusion, into the Hispanic countries, of the feminine tradition that began to speak, in a decisive way, in 19th Century.

### ÖZET

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda'nın "La dama de Amboto" (Amboto Dağının Kadını) başlıklı kısa öyküsü Romantik efsane türüne girer. Yazarın konu, karakter, ve kişilerin davranış nedenleri yönünden Romantik yazın geleneği söylemine tümüyle uyan bir anlatı kurgusu geliştirdiği görülür. Ancak, öyküyü feminist eleştiri kuramları ışığında okuduğumuzda, içinde Romantizm geleneği normlarına aykırı düşen bir içerik ve anlatı yöntemleri örgüsünün biçimlenip geliştiği, ve metni kadın yazarın öznelliğine odaklayan bir söylem saptarız. Bu makalenin amacı sözü edilen yöntemlerin incelenmesi ve 19.yy'da kararlı bir biçimde sesini yükseltmiş olan kadın yazını geleneğinin oluşumunda ve özellikle Hispanik ülkelerdeki yayılış sürecinde Avellaneda'nın ne denli önemli bir rolü bulunduğunu göstermektir.

As we explore nineteenth-century literature, we will find that this madwoman emerges over and over again from the mirrors women writers hold up both to their own natures and to their own visions of nature.

— Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 77.

### Introduction

Romanticism, which constitutes a complex and contradictory movement, is a period that has had great impact on and consequences in the literature of the past. "From the crisis of Romanticism have surged all the attitudes, procedures, manners, styles, theories regarding the literary (text), concepts of the relation between the author and the public, etc., which have marked out the course of literature from the late 18th century to our times" (Llovet, 2005: 131).<sup>1</sup>

Traditional historiography has extensively studied authors, themes, motives and works pertaining to this period. However, it has been in the recent decades that new perspectives of analysis have provided us with a more comprehensive and complex vision of the period of cultural history that the Romantic Movement comprises. In particular, the surging of a criticism that aims to study the significance of the sex genre in the literary production and history of Romanticism has opened up new areas of study which have radically altered the related concepts provided by traditional criticism and classical historiography.

Anglo-American feminist criticism has been greatly helpful and enriching in the study and analysis of texts written by women – especially works like Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) in which she sets up her theory of gynocriticism, or *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in which they analyze how the Anglo-Saxon women writers of Romantic novels express their creative subjectivity subverting the patriarchal discourse.

Traditionally, Romanticism has been regarded primarily as a period in which the subjective "I" has been formulated. This is a concept of the "I" (self)

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations except the two books (*The Madwoman in the Attic* by Gilbert and Gubar's and *Theory of Literature* by Selden et al.) among those cited are translated from their original in Spanish into English by the authoress herself.

elaborated by the philosophy of German Idealism predominant in all instances of European Romanticism. This new subject "constitutes the primordial and absolute reality in the same way as consciousness by itself represents the absolute principle of all knowledge" (Aguar e Silva, 1972-2005: 356). This subject had been studied until recent times through the discourse of the hegemonic masculine. However, Lacan's contributions to psychoanalytic theory have provided Criticism with a new theory about the "subject" which claims that the subject is a non-unitary entity, since there are varieties of "subject positions" accessible to each social class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity in the discursive formation of the constitution of history. Starting with the premise that "poetic language shows how dominant social discourses can be undermined by the creation of new subject positions" (Selden & Widdowson, 1993: 137), we can say that Romanticism's historical construct needs to be scrutinized in the context of its proper poetic language, especially in view of the fact that it is in the Romantic movement when women writers will noticeably begin to occupy "subject positions" in literary discourse.

The analysis of the role of women writers of the Romantic Movement is essential, not only to achieve a full cultural panorama, but also to question the principles on which our conception of Romanticism is based. In order to achieve this reconstruction, or "deconstruction," it is necessary in the first place to realize the recovery and critical analysis of the entire production of women writers which has been marginalized to date before the redefinition of the concepts of history and culture, and subsequently to evaluate in what manner Romantic subjectivity has come to be conditioned by gender difference (Monleón & Zavala, 1994: 23).

### Women's Romantic Writing in Spain

In the Spanish context attempts of the recovery and study of women's romantic writing is relatively recent,<sup>2</sup> and as J. B. Monleón and I. M. Zavala indicate, this effort has brought into the light some important particulars. In the first place, we note the presence of an abundant production of texts by romantic women writers, who comprise, moreover, the most outstanding figures of their times, confirming them to be by no means cases of exception. Secondly,

<sup>2</sup> In this context a work that stands out is the book by Carmen Simón Palmer, entitled *Escritoras españolas del siglo XIX: Manual bio-bibliográfico*, (XIX<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographic Manual) Castalia, Madrid, 1991.

although the greatest contribution has been in the genre of poetry (owing to the facility of publication in periodicals), women writers have also engaged the genres like the novel, drama, and collections of poetry. Thirdly, the production of women writers boosts up from the decade of the 1840s, in other words, in Spain women's romantic writing shows a belated yet phenomenal rise, while the masculine wing of the movement suffers a decline with respect to the rest of Europe (Monleón & Zavala, 1994: 35-36).

In general, in the Hispanic world – peninsular Spain as well as the lands possessed in the American continent – the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century was to witness a significant proliferation of women writers producing work mainly but not exclusively directed to a feminine audience. These writers began to publish their work in women's and literary journals, those being the most impressive channels of expression of the epoch.<sup>3</sup> These women wrote among others on themes related to the marginalization of women. Owing to the scarcity of women writers in the past centuries, the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century woman had to face various barriers when she tried to enter the literary world under absolute male dominion. To overcome these barriers women had to work collectively<sup>4</sup>, in what was a slow and gradual process. But many of these women had to adapt themselves to the accepted social and cultural tenets, and express their ideas without openly challenging the social conventions of patriarchy (Pastor, 2002: 28).

Another barrier that the women writers of Romanticism faced in the Hispanic cultural world in their pursuit of a writerly career was the obligation of living in societies under tight control of religion. "The Catholic Church, with its enormous influence in matters economic, political and social, was a determining factor in the belated birth of Hispanic feminism. In this way the Catholic Church impeded woman from transcending the limits set for her in matters of political and social thought" (Pastor, 2002: 22).

<sup>3</sup> During her long stay in Cuba, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda herself founded and edited in 1860 the journal entitled *Album Cubano de lo Bello y lo Bueno* (a fortnightly publication on morals, literature, fine arts, and fashion). She was the first woman to establish a publication addressing a feminine audience in Cuba (Pastor, 1999: 328).

<sup>4</sup> In Spain, the women poets of the 1840s adopt, unlike their male counterparts, a policy of solidarity rather than rivalry with other women writers. The constant support and patronage which they maintained among themselves, as well as the direct dialogue they held regularly via their poetry gave rise to a trend called "lyric sisterhood" (Monleón & Zavala, 1994: 35).

The works of Hispanic women writers of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century – apart from rare exceptions – do not feature among the canonical texts deemed worthy of the study of History of Literature, although they represent “the first steps of a fecund tradition, steps at times leisurely and hesitant but with the animating sense of accomplishment under crucial historical circumstances, with scarcely any past models to emulate, and under highly unfavorable circumstances, even openly hostile to women writers” (Mataix, 2003: 7). Besides, when they were ever studied they were tethered to a certain history of the nationalist or regionalist bent as rare specimens thereof, yet detached from one another, and from those traditions far beyond their set borders, or even more frequently, as simplistic and bizarre reflections of male writing.

However, we should not forget that the majority of Hispanic women writers of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century belonged to the bourgeoisie class and were educated women of culture, who mastered at least one foreign language. Above all, they were readers, who were familiar with each other's work and read and often translated – texts written by women of other countries and cultures – a fact that stands proven in the letters and autobiographies which they have left behind. By way of these readings there developed a discourse, a feminine tradition that crosses linguistic borders. If Gilbert and Gubar have shown us in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that common to the work of Anglo-Saxon women writers of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century there is a series of strategies for subverting the patriarchal discourse, we shall try to demonstrate in this essay that the range of this tradition is much wider and that its reach extends far beyond the Hispanic world. As we shall see in the analysis of “The Dame of Mt. Amboto,” the story presents us a history and characters that give voice to the same feminine subjectivity, to that “madwoman” whom we find, as Gilbert and Gubar say, in women's literature all along the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century.

Among the Hispanic women writers of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century stands out the figure of the Cuban-Spanish Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Born in Cuba in 1814 and settled in a countryside residence in Spain from 1836 until her death in 1873, she enjoyed in her time the recognition of critics – both in Spain and Cuba – belonging with that small group of women writers who feature in the textbooks of History of Literature. Her work, which encompasses a surprising range, treats practically all the literary genres: journalistic articles, poetry, drama, the essay, the short story and the novel. Her first novel *Sab*, published in Madrid in 1841, and considered as the first abolitionist novel in the literature of

Hispanoamerica<sup>5</sup>, is also an example of the early feminist novel written in Spanish, since it denounces on the one hand the oppression of slaves in Colonial Cuba, and on the other the subjection of women in a patriarchal society (Martínez Andrade, 2001: 163).

La Avellaneda has also left us authentic material in her autobiography and letters, which provide us ample information about her personal life, a life quite uncommon for a woman of her epoch, and one that has served her to develop the image of a romantic persona. Born to a family of Cuban high bourgeoisie, she received a thorough education and had access to the literature of contemporary Europe. A traveler, a polyglot and a woman of independent personality given to contradictions, she had an illegitimate daughter, was married and widowed twice and enjoyed in her lifetime a brilliant literary career. In her texts she “assumed what we now call a liberal feminism, and in her work we see interwoven the subversion of dominant aesthetic and social systems beside her reverence of the Romantic canon” (Araujo, 2002: 11).

#### “La dama de Amboto”: Romantic Discourse and Feminine Subjectivity

Between 1844 and 1869 La Avellaneda published nine stories; two of these have an American setting and constitute homage to the native land of the authoress. The remaining seven stories are generally classified as legends in which the writer recovers popular traditions and themes of Spanish, French and Swiss folklore.

“La dama de Amboto,” which bears the subtitle “Tradición vasca” (Basque Tradition), was first published in 1858 in the *Álbum Cubano*, a journal founded and edited by La Avellaneda herself in Cuba<sup>6</sup>. The narrative is based

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<sup>5</sup> Another Cuban author, Anselmo Suárez y Romero, had completed in manuscript his similarly abolitionist novel *Francisco, El Ingenio o las delicias del campo* toward 1939. In the same year Avellaneda had finished the manuscript of *Sab*. However, Suárez's novel was not published until 1880, while, as indicated above, *Sab* appeared in Spain in 1841 (Morillas Ventura, Enriqueta, 1990: 64).

<sup>6</sup> This journal was short-lived – only 12 issues appeared in a period of six months. La Avellaneda collaborated in the journal with a series of articles on feminine figures standing out in the course of history. There are four other articles entitled “Woman” in defense of the talent and superiority of woman, three legends, eight poems, and various other articles (Pastor, 1999: 329).

on a legend of Basque folklore in oral tradition<sup>7</sup> and in it the authoress draws upon one of the various extant traditions about the most important mountains of Basque geography, Mount Amboto.<sup>8</sup>

In the narrative "The Dame of Mt. Amboto" the events take place in the Medieval Era. The protagonist María is the only daughter and inheritress of an eminent family of Basque nobility. To the father's second marriage is born a male child when María is ten years old, and in accordance with the existing rules of succession he is to come into the whole property, thus despoiling the protagonist of the inheritance.

Later, upon the death of his parents, Don Pedro becomes, at the age of seventeen the sole head of the family. María inwardly rebels against this situation, and during a hunting party commits fratricide, pushing her brother down a precipice in the mountain. María thus becomes the sole inheritress, but she is not happy. Gradually she begins to lose her mind until finally she commits suicide jumping off the same cliff where she had caused the death of her brother. The inhabitants of the village rise up demanding that María not be buried in her brother's tomb. Since then her spirit roams about in the entrails of the mountain, occasionally rising from her grave/cave to presage mishaps.

The version of the legend that Avellaneda presents us is adjusted to the parameters adopted by this genre during the period of Romanticism. In other words, this is a fictive narrative about an event, a character (persona), a historical place or monument, which almost always contains a core supposedly based on History, embellished with imaginative and marvelous elements. But it

<sup>7</sup> There are several oral versions of this legend along the entire mountainous region of the Basque Country. Probably it is a legend that appears in different versions in other European regions. We know from her biography that Avellaneda visited those parts and possibly got hold of one version of the legend during her journey. She herself confirms in some of these narrations that they reached her in the oral form, as in the case of the legend entitled *La ondina azul* (*The Blue Water-sprout*), which she says she heard from the guide.

<sup>8</sup> This mountain is one of the most emblematic entities within the culture, geography and traditions of the Basque Country. According to Basque mythology this mountain, and in particular the cave located near the summit, called "the Cave of Mari," is the principal abode of the goddess Mari, one of the pagan representations of Mother Earth. Along the mountainous zone of the Basque Country several legends exist on this subject affirming that the region's mountains and caves are associated with stories in which the protagonist is a woman representing the Earth Goddess, as well as women with magical powers. Other legends set in the medieval times relate these mountains to the origins of prominent Basque dynasties.

is not only the genre of this story that is adjusted to romantic norms. When we apply to the text a critical analysis taken from any of those textbooks of Theory of Literature<sup>9</sup> which analyze the discourse of canonical Romanticism, we can see that the majority of the elements that constitute the story of this legend inscribe themselves exclusively with the themes and motives proper to that artistic movement. When we look at the temporal setting of "La dama de Amboto" we see that it is the Medieval Age, an era which "appealed to the Romantic imagination and sensibility with its picturesque practices and customs, with the mystery of its legends and traditions, with the nostalgic beauty of its castles..." (Aguiar e Silva, 1972-2005: 363). As regards the spatial setting of the story, it is located in the mountain ranges of the Basque Country, a region of rich folklore in Spain, a country that, together with Italy, affords abundant material of romantic exoticism within the European context (*op cit.* 363).

Analyzed from a traditional perspective, the protagonist of the narrative, María, represents the feminine version of the Romantic hero prototype:

The Romantic character configures as a rebel who stands up, proud and disdainful, against the rules and set limits that oppress him, challenging society and even God Himself (...). His destiny is drawn with misery, solitude and rebellion, but he triumphs over his fate, rebelling and changing into victory even death itself... (*op cit.*: 359).

In brief, María is a rare heroine who, disdaining the rules of society, personifies rebellion, like Satan, one of the characters converted into a grand symbol by the Romantics. In the similarity of their deeds even greater is her likeness to Cain, another of those Biblical characters who, as Aguiar e Silva points,

is also interpreted by the Romantics as a sublime rebel, tortured by his own misery and by the pain of human destiny, avid for eternity and infinity, he refuses to obey God submissively, inviting the rest of humanity to a heroic rebellion, preferring death to a brief life of servitude... (*op cit.* .360)

As we see, La Avellaneda respects the romantic canon, and in her discourse we find many of the elements that characterize the movement, which

<sup>9</sup> In this section of the study we shall follow the Chapter X dedicated to Pre-romanticism and Romanticism in the textbook entitled *Teoría de la literatura* (Theory of Literature) of Aguiar e Silva (see Bibliography), considered as a canonical text in the parameters of Hispanic Literature.

she uses with skill and mastery. Precisely for this reason she has been considered as one of the distinguished writers of her epoch, greatly appreciated by traditional criticism.

On the other hand, the reading of the same text in the light of the theories of feminist criticism exposes to us a discourse in which we find various elements, some of these being contradictory to and rarely appearing in the canonical patriarchal discourse of Romanticism. This reading rather makes us follow a parallel discourse, a discourse, as it were, at the other side of the mirror in which occur almost the same things that take place on the front side, yet now viewed from the reverse side, and by another sensibility. This is what Elaine Showalter has defined as the "double voice": the one of the canonical discourse, and the other of feminine subjectivity. Interlacing the two voices in "La dama de Amboto" La Avellaneda subverts the canon and introduces contents that relate this text with texts of other romantic women writers of Europe, yet differentiating it from those others of its genre written by men.

"La dama de Amboto" focuses on the female character María. Around this character La Avellaneda constructs a text in which, by way of the romantic discourse, the protagonist's feminine subjectivity is distributed into two levels or planes. The first of these presents us in evident manner the authoress' resistance against the social rules imposed upon women by patriarchy. In the second one, through contents much more symbolic, she reveals to us the anguish, the fury of the woman writer in a society which would accept her likes with difficulty.

In the first plane in which the authoress' feminist bent is displayed the protagonist of the story, María, is a character constructed upon La Avellaneda's own personal experiences. Throughout the narrative we note a manifest presence of autobiographical elements, a quality quite common in feminist writing (Ciplijauskaitė, 2004: 127), which turn the protagonist into a projection of the authoress. María, just like La Avellaneda<sup>10</sup> herself, suffers from injustices of patriarchal society, and only for being a woman is dispossessed of her father's inheritance. The authoress makes use of this occasion to censure her society standing up in defense of women and her protagonist:

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<sup>10</sup> This episode of inheritance is similar to what Gertrudis herself actually experienced at sixteen, when her grandfather disinherited her for refusing a matrimonial compromise arranged by her family.

Such was the spirit of the age of which we are speaking: the weaker sex was disinherited without compunction and condemned to a perpetual confinement in a monastery, so that the male representative of the house would not have to worry about providing her with a suitable abode or even a modest allowance. (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1871: 149)

Although the story passes in Medieval Times, we understand that the condition of woman and her rights of inheritance on the family patrimony were not much different in the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century. For a woman deprived of inheritance the only way of securing for herself a respectable position was the convent or marriage. Not only in real life, but also in literature, the aspiration and objective of all women was supposed to be the wedding, and therefore this was what was expected from María:

But [María] had reached the age of twenty-eight, without a sign of her preferment for any of her suitors, perhaps because there were none among them who could gratify her ambitions and aspire to higher levels, or because of her inordinate pride nothing would please her without her independence and the ownership of the seignior, which she believed to be her birthright (...) It seemed evident that María de Urraca inwardly rebelled against the injustice of the privileges conceded to the male sex, and to depend on a younger brother, or on a vulgar husband, were for her – ordained by the heavens to be always free and powerful – equally difficult and humiliating. (*op cit.* 150)

María embodies resistance to marriage and desire for independence and liberty. Marriage – the institution that sands as the mirror image of the oppression of patriarchal society – is not a solution to decide for a woman of strong and independent temperament her lifecourse and position.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In La Avellaneda's fictional works as well as her *Autobiography* and *Letters* we find an unremitting criticism of marriage. The consistency between her literary discourse and personal convictions stand manifested in her personal life. In one of her letters we find the following assertions: "I have not married and will not ever marry, but this is not because of my extreme dedication to liberty as some suppose. I believe I wouldn't mind being tied up for a lifetime if I could find a man capable of winning my esteem, who could guarantee long duration to my affection. Yet I have the conviction that there is no happiness in what is transitory, and I say, like Chateaubriand, that if I were foolish enough to believe in felicity I would seek it in social customs. Marriage is a necessary evil from which many advantages may be obtained. I would only consider it in my own way and in my own manner embrace it. I would embrace it with the blessing of the priest or without it, it wouldn't matter much! For me a marriage guaranteed by men, or one guaranteed by the reciprocal faith of the contractors are not much different, except that one is more public and the other more solemn: one can be useful against the impunity of abuses, while the other makes their practice somewhat more difficult: one is more social, the other more individual. For me all bonds are sacred contracted under reciprocal confidence and good faith. I only see dishonor where there are mendacity

Gómez de Avellaneda creates a character which embodies an implicit rejection of the model of virtuous woman that has found unanimous acceptance in society. María does not possess the qualities of abnegation, humility and modesty that characterize the ideal woman of patriarchal discourse. An inordinate pride, egoism and rebelliousness are the qualities of the woman who presents a new way of understanding and inscribing feminine subjectivity.

Following the episodes that serve as a presentation for her protagonist, La Avellaneda goes on to construct the character of María in whom stand inverted the conventional paradigms regarding feminine conduct. María, besides her rejection of marriage and her passion for independence and power, raises herself to the level of male characters of Romanticism who stand as figures of rebellion against an unjust society. At the same time the authoress dons her protagonist with the same physical and sentimental capacities regarded by patriarchy as proper to the male sex. The hunting episode – which comprises the breaking point of the tragedy – is fundamental in the configuration of the protagonist: María, the only woman that takes part in the hunting party, is also the only person among numerous men, who succeeds in wounding the wild boar. A woman possessing the power and valor attributed to men, but still relegated by society to second place.

La Avellaneda respects the romantic canon, but at the same time she subverts it and rejects the ruling models that represent woman. She manipulates the narrative strategies of the Romantic discourse, and with the feminine character she constructs, proposes an alternative that calls up resistance to the extant discourse, and a new option in representing and defining woman within a society that denies her autonomy and personal identity.

María, in her search of personal identity, struggling to achieve and maintain the state of independence, confronts the rules of her society, kills her brother and thus places herself at the margins of that society. Hence she converts herself into the stereotype of the “monster” woman in contrast to the “angel” woman, the other feminine stereotype installed by patriarchal discourse. Her rebellion will call for punishment. First her madness, and subsequently her

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and greed. I do not have nor will suffer any personal bonds, because in fact I have a high respect for them, because the man with whom I would join in marriage should be to me not only amiable, but also worthy of respect; because I have never met nor will ever find a heart big enough to receive mine without oppressing it, or a character noble enough to consider things and men as I consider them” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1914, Letter 32).

suicide would be the only solution to the inner conflict between María’s instinctive will to survive and realize her desires, and her vision of herself as sinner, as monster. But besides her death, which should ultimately resolve her conflicts, the patriarchal community will impose on her an even heavier punishment, the eternal condemnation of her soul.

In the first level of the narration, it is clearly seen that La Avellaneda takes up the defense of women’s rights. Her feminism is openly demonstrated although the protagonist is punished by the same society that she herself actually confronts. But María also represents, as the double of the authoress, La Avellaneda’s own subjectivity as woman writer. In a discourse of symbolic contents we find a second level of reading in which emerges her predicament of being a woman and a writer within a patriarchal society.<sup>12</sup>

The similarities between the characters of María and Gertrudis come out in abundance from the first paragraphs of the story. Both women identify themselves not only in their eagerness for independence or their rejection of marriage. Over and above that, the authoress’ use of some terms employed to define her protagonist seem to be almost taken up from her own life-story. María is described as a proud woman, for whom it is humiliating to depend on a younger brother or vulgar husband, because she is predestined, *ordained by the Heavens to be always free and powerful*. La Avellaneda, who achieved her liberty and independence by means of her professional career and with her temperament, was also destined to be strong, and one of the most admired women writers of her time in the Hispanic world.

It was already indicated that the hunting episode was fundamental in the configuration of the female character. In this part of the narrative emerge in implicit form not only assertions about gender, but also the underlying subjectivity of the woman writer. María occupies in this episode the place that would correspond to a man. She not only joins the hunting party but, placing herself in a position of superiority over the masculine sex, is the only person

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<sup>12</sup> Although La Avellaneda enjoyed fame and public favor, she nevertheless suffered, occasionally, marginalization at the hands of hegemonic male institutions. In 1853 La Avellaneda applied for full membership in the Spanish Royal Academy, but the majority of the Academy’s members, despite admitting her merits to be superior to many of their male colleagues, voted against her, contending that “women could not enter the Academy” (Pastor, 2002: 36). The event greatly disturbed the authoress, and she gives vent to her chagrin in her letters. The story taken up for analysis in this study is posterior to this event.

who manages to wound the wild boar. Regarded from the perspective of symbolic reading, Gómez de Avellaneda seems to have situated herself in a similar plane: she has done the same in the world of letters, occupying a place reserved to male hegemony, and achieving a success that seemed to be meant for men only. From this point onwards the tragedy mounts and María turns into a murderer, a monstrous woman. Evidently the authoress identifies herself with the character she created, and consequently carries out another prerequisite that Gilbert and Gubar ascribe to the feminine tradition:

(...) by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them. What this means, however, is that the madwoman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979: 78)

(...) For it is, after all, through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained (*op cit.* 85).

María's madness, her suicide and her condemnation by the society are only symbols of punishment that patriarchal societies impose on those women who reject established models and try to come out as autonomous beings with their proper identities. María will be punished, as Gertrudis herself was, by those institutions that did not recognize her as a writer (see above Note 12). Nevertheless, this punishment that condemns them to death will not be able to condemn them to silence.

After her death María turns into "*a spirit that roams about the depths of the abyss, coming up only to presage mishaps*". María's voice remains inscribed in the legend, like an imperishable presence, in some manner immortal, both in history and popular culture. Her abode will be a cave in a mountainside, a place with high mythic potentials "a female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred. To this shrine the initiate comes to hear the voices of darkness, the wisdom of inwardness" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979: 93).

In spite of the fact that the spirit of the protagonist remains imprisoned in that legendary abode, La Avellanda achieves to reconcile the negative mythic potential of closure and confinement with affirmative mythic possibilities (*op. cit.*: 94). With the term "presage," a verb referring to explication, a verb that bears the meanings of *telling* and *narrating*, the authoress refers to her own activity as a writer, a woman who tells stories, and who, in some manner, presages through her female characters, a new way of being for woman. As it was with María, the voice of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda will not be silenced, because it will perdure in her texts.

As we have seen, the story "The Dame of Mt. Amboto" is a text in which develop and take shape a whole network of subject matter and narrative strategies centering on the subjectivity of the woman writer. The journal in which the story was published *El Album Cubano* (The Cuban Album) was a publication addressing a female audience and in this capacity did prove an expedient means for the formation, diffusion and continuity of the feminist tradition which it championed. It was not only Cuban woman readers that had access to this short story. Between 1870 and 1871 La Avellaneda published in Madrid several volumes of her complete works, and although she would leave out some of her more blatantly committed texts, "La dama de Amboto" always had a place in these publications. If we also take into account the fact that La Avellaneda had first hand acquaintance with the work of leading European women writers, the role she played as a link of the chain connecting them is indisputable. This authoress of Hispano-Cuban origin constitutes a part of the feminine tradition that has survived at the margins of the patriarchal discourse for centuries, and the significance of her work is of the first order in the formation of this Hispanic feminine tradition.

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