

Biographical information on Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Arteaga

◦March 1814: Avellaneda y Arteaga was born in Puerto Príncipe (Camagüey) Cuba, to a wealth Creole mother and an aristocratic Spanish father.

◦Education: She received an unusual education for her day, especially for a woman, studying with a number of private tutors, including Cuban patriot and Romantic poet José María Heredia (who was later exiled for conspiring against the Spaniards and died at the age of 36).

◦1823: her father died. Soon after, her mother remarried (to a man who, like her first husband, was an officer in the Spanish navy).

◦1836: Avellaneda y Arteaga's stepfather, afraid of possibility of slave uprisings, sold off his wife's land and slaves and moved the family to Spain.

◦A Literary Life in Spain: Once in Spain, Avellaneda y Arteaga settled with her brother in Seville, where she wrote letters, plays, poetry and novels; her home became a gathering place for the local literati and, in the words of translator Nina Scott:

"She soon learned to parlay her physical attractiveness, her exotic background and an undeniable literary talent into useful connections with men of influence in the world of letters." (xiii)

She eventually moved to Madrid, gained entrance into the highest literary circles of the day and, very unusual for a woman of her day, earned a living through her writings. She became one of the most famous Spanish-language authors of the 19th century.

◦Personal Life: Her personal life was, not surprisingly, unconventional; she had numerous lovers, an illegitimate child who died before reaching her first birthday, and two short-lived marriages (both husbands died of serious illnesses).

◦1859-64: Avellaneda y Arteaga returned to Cuba, where she was celebrated as a great Cuban writer.

◦1864: She returned to Spain via the United States, and wrote very little new material, dedicating herself instead to preparing her previous writings for publication in five volumes of her collected works, which were published between 1869 and 1871. She did not include her first novel, *Sab*, or her second novel, *Two Women*, in these volumes because both had been banned in Cuba (the former for its antislavery message, the second for glorifying adultery).

◦1873: She died of diabetes in Madrid at the age of 59.

◦In Foundational Fictions: the National Romances of Latin America, Doris Sommer describes the political allegory in *Sab*, in the broadest of terms, in the following manner:

"Failure to bring the racial (love) affair to a happy ending accounts for the tragedy of *Sab* in which the racially amalgamated hero (also Cuba) is desperate for the love (and legitimacy) his creole mistress could give him. *Sab*'s hopes are obscured by the dazzle of a blond English rival who marries the mistress and proves how indifferent foreigners are to both women and slaves." (21)