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BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
Shiffman 109, MS 024
Waltham, MA 02453
Email: lalr.editors@gmail.com
Website: www.lalrp.net

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TRANSLATION

The "Primitive" *Cecilia Valdés*. A short story by Cirilio Villaverde A translation and introduction by Thomas Genova

Thomas Genova
University of Minnesota Morris
tgenova@morris.umn.edu
ORCID: 0000-0002-9444-8679

ABSTRACT: The text is the first English translation of Cirilo Villaverde's 1839 "primitive" *Cecilia Valdés*, a short story that the author penned decades before publishing his canonical novel by the same name. The 1882 novel narrates the unwittingly incestuous relationship between the novel's eponymous *mulata* heroine and her creole half-brother Leonardo Gamboa. Though the work enjoys high-canonical status, its textual history, tightly entangled with nineteenth-century Cuba's racially fraught struggle for independence, is largely unknown to non-specialists. The translation is preceded by an introduction that discusses the short story's relationship to the novel and the racial and political ideas present in the earlier text, as well as the translator's efforts to render these paradigms legible to an English-language readership.

KEYWORDS: Cirilio Villaverde, Cecilia Valdés, Cuba 19th century, Afrolatinidades, Latin American literature in translation, literary translation

Introduction

Cirilo Villaverde's 1882 *Cecilia Valdés* narrates the unwittingly incestuous relationship between the novel's eponymous *mulata* heroine and her creole half-brother Leonardo Gamboa. Though the work enjoys high-canonical status, its textual history, tightly entangled with nineteenth-century Cuba's racially fraught struggle for independence, is largely unknown to non-specialists. As a young man, the author formed part of Domingo del Monte's literary *tertulia*, a group of creole intellectuals who espoused antislavery sentiments in an effort to reduce Cuban dependence on Madrid and pave the way for greater autonomy for the island in the wake of revolutions on the Spanish Main and in Haiti.[1] Asked by a friend for a description of Fiesta de San Rafael in El Ángel, Havana (Croguennec-Massol 1), in 1839, Villaverde penned the short story translated below for the literary magazine *La siempreviva*. Later the same year, he expanded the story into a novella entitled *Cecilia Valdés, o, la Loma del Ángel. Tomo I*, published by the Editorial Cuba Intelectual.[2] The same press republished the original short story as "La primitiva Cecilia Valdés" in 1910.[3]

Villaverde then turned his attention to politics, participating in the Venezuelan Narciso López's filibustering expeditions to Cuba, which sought to annex the island to the United States (Luis 106-7). Arrested for these activities, Villaverde escaped from a Havana jail and went into exile in the eastern United States, eventually settling in New York, where he worked in education and Spanish-language journalism. Though he translated Confederate propaganda into Spanish, he eventually was converted to the causes of abolition and full independence for Cuba by his wife, the radical exile Emilia Casanova.[4] Two years after Cuba's 1880 defeat in the independence war known as La Guerra Chiquita, Villaverde published the definitive version of *Cecilia Valdés, o, la Loma del Ángel* in New York. He would die twelve years later, still in exile, without seeing his dreams of an independent Cuba realized.[5]

Cecilia Valdés has been translated into English at least twice; as *The Quadroon: or, Cecilia Valdés, A Romance of Old Havana* by the Spanish-born Argentine American Mariano J. Lorente in 1935 and as *Cecilia Valdés, or, El Angel Hill: A Novel of Nineteenth-Century Cuba* by the American Helen Lane in 2005.[6] The latter was published on the Oxford University Press Library of Latin America series, a testament to the novel's importance in the emerging field of Inter-American literature, as evidenced by its inclusions in studies by Earl Fitz, Efraín Kristal, Anna Brickhouse, Monika Kaup and Deborah Rosenthal, and Rodrigo Lazo, among others. Yet, despite *Cecilia Valdés*'s salience in the study of North-South literary relations in the Americas, to date, only the canonical 1882 text has appeared in English. Thus, despite the importance of "La primitiva," "la semilla de una obra [que,] enriquecida y modificada con el paso del tiempo, marca el inicio y la cima de un género," to Cuban cultural history, many hemispheric scholars have, until now, been unable to trace the evolution of Villaverde's racial and political thinking through the different versions of his magnum opus (Romero LXXI). In the rest of

this introductory essay, I will note some of the ways in which these views manifest themselves in the 1839 story and explain how I have attempted to render them legible to an English-language audience.

The first 1839 text corresponds to Chapters II and III of the 1882 work, but with significant changes. Some of these are due to the shift in genre between the two versions, as the short story bears witness to its origins in a serial publication, with the last paragraph of the first section teasing what will come in the next issue and the first paragraph of the second section reminding readers of where the story left off. By the same token, conceived as an independent text and not an excerpt of a longer novel, the "primitive" work is obliged to offer a self-contained narrative arch, concluding with Cecilia's disappearance, whereas Chapter III of the definitive version ends simply with Cecilia disregarding her grandmother's advice. The short story's generic emphasis on concision similarly compels Villaverde to introduce the narration of Cecilia's sexual "downfall" earlier than in the 1882 novel (1975: 188).

Other changes, however, cannot be explained by reasons of reduced length. The 1882 text, for example, does not include the paragraph that speculates on Cecilia's origins (1975: 185), perhaps reflecting Villaverde's ultimate opting for the novel's well-known incest plot. Even more significantly, Cecilia's grandmother's famous speech encouraging the young woman to aspire to a white husband (1992: 86) is absent from the short story, possibly due to the protagonists' young age. The racial dimensions of the relationship between Cecilia and Leonardo surface, however, in the latter's name in the 1839 text: Leocadio, which is derived from the Greek word for "white."[7] This etymological encoding of color hierarchy demonstrates that the racial theme was central to Villaverde's Cecilia-complex from its earliest drafts.[8]

As a scholar, I am particularly struck by the 1882 novel's omission of the short story's opening pages, which situates the text within Spanish-language letters:

> Hemos oído hablar tanto y tanto contra la sociedad a los escritores franceses señaladamente y a algunos otros de otras naciones imitadores de su literatura, que se nos antoja ver en ella un endriago, una esfinge, un monstruo descomunal que se devora a sí mismo, como la tortuga fuera de su elemento. (Villaverde 1975: 182)

Here, "endriago" represents a reference to the hydra-dragon hybrid featured in Garci de Montalvo's 1508 chivalric romance *Amadís de Gaula*. This early intertext primes the reader to spot other references to the Hispanic canon in the story, such as the comment about when, as a young girl, Cecilia "enredaba el perro del ciego en el cañón de la esquina, o [l]e encaminaba a San Juan de Dios si iba a Santa Teresa" ["she got some blindman's dog tangled up in a corner tree, or sent him off to San Juan de Dios when he asked for directions to Santa Teresa"] (1975: 186) –an allusion to the picaresque hero of the anonymous *Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), who famously (mis)guides a blind man in Imperial Spain.[9] The arch-canonical work of Miguel de Cervantes, too, appears in Villaverde's "primitive" text, which critic Roberto González Echeverría has claimed was influenced by the Spaniard's 1613 "La gitanilla" (271). Importantly, the 1839 version locates the Gamboa's house on "cierta calle de cuyo nombre no nos acordamos" ["a certain street, the name of which we do not remember"] (188) –a clear echo of the memorable opening words of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (pt. 1 1605; pt. 2 1615): "en un lugar de La Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme" ["someplace in La Mancha, whose name I do not wish to remember"] (Cervantes 30). Like the "endriago" of the short story's first paragraph, this obvious Cervantine reference falls out of the 1882 text, which places the house more ambiguously on "cierta calle de que no hay para qué mencionar ahora el nombre" ["a certain street whose name need not be mentioned now"] (79). These changes may represent shifts in Villaverde's political views; gradually turning his back on a desire for greater autonomy for Cuba within the Spanish Empire and coming to embrace full-fledged independence, the author ceased to view Cuban literature as an overseas province of the Peninsular tradition and tempered his intertextual efforts to locate it there.

It is unrealistic to expect twenty-first century English-language readers to have the same familiarity with the Hispanic canon as nineteenth-century Cuban intellectuals. How then is a translator to alert Anglophone audiences to the presence of these allusions in Villaverde's text and to imitate the impact they would have had on the author's compatriots and contemporaries?

As the theorist Lawrence Venuti reminds us, while it is ethically imperative for translators to show target-language readers the differences between their world and that of the source text, translation entails reinscribing foreign discourse "in *domestic* terms, in domestic dialects, registers, discourses, and styles." This means that "the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text can only be signaled indirectly, by their displacement in the translation, through a domestic difference introduced into values and institutions at home" (483. Emphasis in the original.). As a result, a translation includes "textual effects that signify only in the history of the receiving language and culture. The translator may produce these effects to communicate the foreign text, trying to invent domestic analogues for foreign forms and themes. But the result will always go beyond any communication to release target-oriented possibilities of meaning" (485). Venuti's words have empowered me to retain many of Villaverde's allusions despite their probable incomprehensibility to Anglophone readers while also embedding my own literary references in the translation. I have attempted to signify Villaverde's dialogue with the Hispanic canon by adding nods to Shakespeare and Milton, whom I deploy as synecdoches for the English literary tradition. My assumption is that these ironically domestic defamiliarizing strategies will force English-language readers to recognize the presence of elements in the source text that lie beyond their cultural comprehension. Paradoxically, then, the

familiarity of Shakespeare and Milton to English-language readers serves as a signifier of Villaverde's difference from the translation's Anglophone audience.

To indicate the political valences of allusions to Spanish literature in a Cuban nationalist text, I have seized on Villaverde's reference to the "Campeche chair" in Cecilia's house. Named after a city in Mexico, the chair only seems out of place in colonial Havana if one does not realize that Cuba was administratively subordinate to Mexico City until the island elected not to join continental New Spain in the latter's War for Independence (1810-1821). Following the spirit of Villaverde's text if not the letter, I have built an allusion to those events into the narrative as an aid to English-language readers unfamiliar with Latin American history.

Venuti's dictates on the displacement of foreign content through domestic form also inspired me to reorganize Villaverde's syntax –influenced by the Baroque authors to whom he frequently alludes– and the order of a few details in his descriptions that otherwise would not make sense in English, a route that many a translator has taken through the labyrinth of nineteenth-century Spanish sentence structure (Brown 86-7). Curiously, after its "de-Baroquing," the story began to remind me of the work of British writer Samuel Richardson, whose Enlightenment-era morality tales were known to have circulated among the del Monte group.[10] At the same time, I realize that Richardson is about a century too early for the bourgeois sentimentality that often exudes when the narrator of "La primitiva" addresses readers directly; for this, I have looked to Victorian prose for inspiration (not coincidentally, Villaverde translated Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* into Spanish in 1857; Fernández de Cano n. pag.). I suspect that Villaverde also recognized himself in Anglophone literature; the Cuban initially supported annexation to the US because he "admired the democratic life of the northern states" (Luis 106), which he viewed as "offering a place of liberty as opposed to Cuba and its system of colonial surveillance" (Lazo 172). "Anglo-Saxon" liberalism, then, was intimately tied to Villaverde's political and literary projects; his Independence activities were financed with money obtained from the reinvestment of his in-laws' holdings in Cuban plantations and enslaved bodies in Pennsylvania mines (Hernández González) and publicity for his definitive 1882 novel appeared alongside ads for US industrial products in the press of the time (Lazo 169). In short, Villaverde's words lend themselves to reworking within the language of the Anglo-American canon because they reflect ideas that are already infused with the values of Anglo-American bourgeois modernity.

Less legible to English-language readers, however, are Villaverde's racialized sexual politics. Though clearly not alien to the contemporary Anglosphere, these ideas take different expression in the nineteenth-century Cuban cultural realm. For example, the house of Cecilia and her grandmother Chepa is described as an "albergue" (193). Literally a "hostel," the term has its origins in El Camino de Santiago [the Way of St. James], the path that takes pilgrims to the Galician shrine of St. James, who legendarily fought the Moors in Spain during the Middle Ages. Importantly, as historian Jack D. Forbes has shown, the categories of "Arab" and "black" overlapped in the Spanish colonial imaginary, meaning that Villaverde's choice of words also alludes to the African ancestry of the *albergue*'s inhabitants (131-90). In my translation, I have invoked nineteenth-century racializing Orientalist discourses in order to register these associations in English.

As a white-passing Afrodescendant, Cecilia's racial adscription is difficult to read from within US racial binaries based in the logic of hypodescent. To Villaverde's 1839 Cuban readers, however, the story would have appeared replete with oblique references to her mixed-race background. For example, the early text includes a conversation in which the Gamboa sisters discuss using Cecilia's hair for a wig (190-1). This emphasis on Cecilia's hair interpellates the Hispanophone Caribbean discourse of "pelo bueno/malo" ("good," or Euronormative, versus "bad" hair), subtly positioning Cecilia as almost –but not wholly– white. Similarly, Cecilia is described as a "paloma" at the end of the text. Meaning both "dove" and "pigeon," the ambiguous word suggests that the character may be read as either white or grey, a mixture of black and white.

Aware that Villaverde's subtle racial discourse will elude most Anglophone readers, I have displaced discussion of the protagonist's racial background to another passage of the story. In his description of Cecilia, Villaverde writes that she was "más bien delgadita que encarnada" (1975: 184), misusing "encarnada" (derived from the word for "meat") to mean "plump" when the term is more conventionally glossed as "scarlet."[11] Understanding Villaverde's apparent mistake to be an offer of creative license, I have translated the passage as "We can only describe her as more skinny than robust or meaty." Availing myself of the etymological relationship between "robust" and the Latin word for "red" (i.e., "scarlet"), I have taken inspiration in James Fenimore Cooper's description of the mixed-race Jamaican Cora Munro –one of the most famous white-passing Afrodescended women in English-language literature–, whose "complexion was not brown, but appeared charged with the colour of the rich blood, that seemed ready to burst its bounds" (11). Not coincidentally, Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* was published in 1826, the same year in which "La primitiva" begins. The translational decision thus conserves references to Hispano-Caribbean racial paradigms while reminding English-language readers of canonical representations of mixed-race women in Anglo-American literature and alluding to a shared hemispheric culture of racial coloniality.

Yet, while Cooper's Cora refuses to "pollute" the national bloodline and virtuously dies a virgin, scholars of Cuban literature long have maintained that Cecilia's hypersexual depiction reflects common cultural beliefs concerning mixed-race women (Kutzinski; Fraunhar). "At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the myth of the 'tragic mulata' as a 'fallen woman' began to proliferate in colonial circuits, inundating literary and cultural representations of mixed-race Black women in the colonial Hispanic Caribbean." The sexualized discourse of the *mulata* is central to readings of the 1882

novel as a "foundational romance," as, "symbolic of exoticized, feminized Caribbean blackness, the mulata became a transnational symbol of Cubanía in the nineteenth century. [...] Through her, the violence of colonization was symbolically displaced by the notions of unity and belonging" (García Peña 159).[12] It is important to note, then, that, though less obvious, these racial-erotic tropes also are present in the 1839 short story, where Cecilia is first introduced to readers on the street, a place considered unsuitable for putatively chaste white women. "In the traditional Hispanic distinction between *la calle* and *la casa*, or public and private spaces, the street, for anyone aspiring to respectability, is a space of potential danger. Thus, according to these social codes, a woman's honor is imperiled by time spent *en la calle*" (Civantos 4). In my translation, I have attempted to render this cultural discourse visible to Anglophone readers by playing up the idiomatic relationship between "walking the street" and sex work in English.

In "The Task of the Translator," theorist Walter Benjamin identifies translation not an action performed by the translator, but as an intrinsic property of a literary work, claiming that some texts possess "a specific significance inherent in the original [that] manifests itself in its translatability" (254). I do not pretend to have revealed the "true" meaning of the "primitive" *Cecilia Valdés* or Villaverde's *Cecilia* complex in translating the story that appears below, but I do know that I have learned a good deal about how they dialogue with broader cultural traditions and social systems in the Spanish- and English-speaking worlds –and how those systems dialogue with one another– in the process. I hope you will now, too.

Cecilia Valdés

Sola soy, sola nací.
Sola me parió mi madre.
Sola me tengo que andar
Como la pluma en el aire.
Cantorcillo popular

A lonely lass am I.
Alone my mother bore me.
Alone will I wander
Like a feather fluttering in the wind.
An old ditty

I

We've heard writers talk and talk against society (especially French ones, and some from other nations who imitate their literature). So much so, that we are inclined to see society as a fire-breathing hybrid, a sphynx, a cannibal devouring itself like a turtle out of its element.

But the funny thing is that, though they represent the most noble and sublime part of society, these writers are also the very first to attack it. They corrupt society with their writings, and then they drag that Gorgon through the mud by its knotty hair. In general, society –taken in the abstract sense of the term, in the real meaning of the word—is almost never unjust in its verdicts; a portion of its individual members may be, but (as daily events show), not its entirety.

I ask, is slinging insults and imprecations at society by any chance the way to lead public opinion down the right path? We believe that –seeing as how each nation has its own peculiar tendencies, its own distinctive habits and customs–, if a people lose their way, it is the fault of those who have overseen the advance of their gradual and steady march; of those who, possessing the knowledge and the power to do so, did not grasp what the people needed and failed to lead them from corruption to a laudable and humane end. But the fault is never with society, which, like a sheep, often allows itself to be led to the pen –and, not infrequently, into the wolf's clutches.

The guilty say that society is demanding; she punishes harshly, despotically. Apologies and examples of prior virtue are offered in vain. You will be surprised when she gives you a paddling and sends you out to the gallows. Covered in a rich mantle of charity and humanity, society will burn grimily judgmental glances onto those who have strayed without a thought as to the circumstances. At least, this is our understanding of the workings of a well-bred, Christian, and cultured society. It metes out punishment –and rightly so. There is no saving grace for a society that places a veil over the grievous faults of those whom it should excommunicate. We wonder: why is it only then, and not before, that a man remembers (or realizes) that society is following him and counting the beats of his unmeasured heart? Because it is only then and not before that he contracts a sacred debt to her.

To limit ourselves to the subject at hand, about whom should the poor orphan who never knew his parents complain? Whom should he blame? From whence the wanton tears that he sheds over his dark existence? From his parents? From his grandparents? From the society that has cared for him since childhood, that offered him its breast when he cried and clothed his flesh against the harsh clime? Those who gave him life drank from the bitter cup of an ill deed and bequeathed him the dregs. But the depths of blame are not entirely theirs. Men have turned public charity into a cloak for evil; the unfeeling mother abandons her child on the church steps sure that he will not perish and that his cries will not disturb her slumber or ring in her ears as she walks down the street.

These reflections come to mind as we recall how, back in 1826 or 27, when we were studying philosophy, almost every day we

would happen upon a girl who must have been a little over ten at the time on our walks through Santa Catalina Plaza. There are certain physiognomies (especially female ones), that become so fixed in the imagination of the interested observer that the passage of time does not suffice to erase them. And if she has that silhouette, those smooth curves, that finish that distinguishes Greek statues (which, to our misfortune, is prevalent in Southern countries), one's mind shall forever compare all others to her. Dwelling in one's soul, she grows in one's fantasy.

And this singular girl's face really was a polished model of beauty. With somewhat flat temples, her head seemed to have been painted by the skilled brush of Rafael. Unfurling in dark curls, her hair was thick and shiny like the wings of the Cuban blackbird known as the *totí*. Her brow was wide and smooth. Her arched eyebrows formed an angle with the ebony eyes she flashed from behind long lashes, lending her a lavishness and a spirited liveliness that are difficult to depict. Oh, her gaze was quick, penetrating, perhaps even harsh! But that fine mouth of hers, that upper lip ever poised in a provocative grin, subtly revealing her small, straight, white teeth –that was the ruin of everything. Not because it detracted from the gift of glory that was her smile. No! What I mean to say is, who could fear disdain, or bitter repulsion from a girl whose lips appeared ready to forgive any excess committed in the name of their perfections?

We can only describe her as more skinny than robust or meaty. For her age, she was rather more short than tall. When seen from behind, her neck was thin on top and wide towards the shoulders, harmonizing with her narrow and flexible waist like the base of a wineglass. Her bewitching liveliness, joy, and joviality were proverbial among the girlfriends who joined her in her games and excursions (and she had many, of all shapes and sizes).

Few moments had seen her sad, few had seen her ill-humored, and she had never been seen to quarrel with anyone. Yet no one could say where she lived nor what she lived on. Did she subsist on air, like a chameleon? Her companions would inform us that the free sweets and pastries that she received from shopkeepers suggest otherwise. What was such a pretty girl doing all alone every day and night on the city streets? Wasn't there a school where she learned to sew, to read, and to write a little? Didn't she have a grandmother, some charitable female relation to care for her virtuous upbringing? Or at least keep her from perpetually walking the streets like some stray, hungry dog?

People used to tell a thousand wild, impertinent stories about her life. Someone who claimed to have seen her born with those eyes that were destined to eat the world swore that her mother was a lady of rank who committed who knows what indiscretion with some petty officer, either from the navy or the army, we aren't sure. (This sort of frailty is forgivable for a woman of her position.) They say that, to preserve her honor, she had to abandon the girl on the steps of Santo Ángel Church on the morning of Saint Raphael's Day, and that the mother commended her daughter to the saint with all her heart. Other people had better information, straight from the midwife's loose mouth. That half-witch, half-human mulata specialized in this sort of desperate cover-up. She swore by all the saints that the little girl's mother was a pretty little mulatica whom some fine caballero had wronged. Because of that, the creature was half-noble and half-plebian, a thing that is and is not, something that seems to be both but is really neither. The inevitable consequence was that, while, on her father's side, the girl deserved every consideration, she instead was forced to eat the rotten fruit of the woman's first disobedience.

Meanwhile, Cecilia Valdés (for that was her name), blossomed and bloomed. The perky, fine-looking girl paid no attention to the whispers and speculations about her. Nor did she realize that her wandering ways inspired suspicion and fear –if not pity—in the old women who saw her on the street. Or that her growing charm and the carelessness and freedom with which she lived fed the hopes and illicit desires of young rakes every time they spied her crossing the square at Cristo Plaza. Other hearts were set a-beating when they spotted the sly vixen running to steal a roll or pork rind from the black negras who fried them; or when she stuck her little hand in the raisin bin at some store; or when she lifted a plantain, or a mamey, or a guava off some fruit seller's table; or when, as a picaresque prank, she got some blindman's dog tangled up in a corner tree, or sent him off to San Juan de Dios when he asked for directions to Santa Teresa. She didn't know that all these charms were worthy of celebration in a girl with black hair, wheat-colored skin, and a carnation mouth.

She normally wore a white linen dress, or a flouncy striped skirt with no kerchief. Her only shoes were a pair of sandals that rang out on the stone sidewalks and announced her arrival long before she appeared. Her hair was loose and naturally curly, no need for curling papers or anything of the sort. At least that was the case as long as her childhood lasted, which (and it's not just me), they say is not long enough in these tropical climes, and that education and habits have nothing to do with it. Adorning her neck there was an old gold rosary with little coral beads and a curious, filigreed little cross that hung down at the end –the only souvenir she retained of her unhappy mother.

The fair Cecilia was so pure, so delicate, so playful that she seemed the work of a child's imagination, the ideal creation of a poet in love. She was a candid creature of virginal innocence and loose hair who had walked unselfconsciously through the door of Life (a seemingly golden door). Like we said before, the city streets, the plazas, the shops, the cheap sidewalk stands, and the clothing stores were her school. And, needless to say, in those places, her tender heart, which had been made to hold all the virtues that lend beauty to the life of a good woman, received the most wicked lessons and fed on the wanton extremes of lust and immodesty that are the daily bread of a base and demoralized people.

How to rid a young and ardent mind of that influence? How to keep those spirited eyes from seeing? How to keep those ever-

attentive ears from hearing? Or that soul, overflowing with life and love, from straining to survey the darkness around it? How to preserve the innocent slumber of those eyes and ears? Dear Lord, it was early indeed when that legion of passions that lay waste to the heart and bow the proudest of heads came knocking at her door.

As her body grew physically, gaining each day in grace and supple attraction, her willfulness grew fiercely. It would number among the bitter pills she would swallow, adding to the unspeakable trials and troubles that she suffered...But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Raised so leniently, abandoned to her freewill, without a care for the present or a worry for the future, it is easy to imagine how fantastically her typically feminine imagination roamed. Entering the vast and beautiful fields of life, her spirit found no obstacles to its seemingly trifling desires. On the contrary, she always felt as though her feet had wings, with shiny dreams in her head and joy and hope in her heart.

Yet, what were these hopes, these pleasures that she savored before they even came to fruition? Where could she see the smiling fate of her fortunes? That we can say in two words. Without working for it, without anguish, without shameful begging from door to door, she and her grandmother (for she had one) had lived well and easy –not in luxury and abundance, but at least without poverty and want–, as if by magical arts or Divine Providence, as the old woman tried to impress upon her. It was therefore easy for Cecilia's childish soul to dream –to believe, even—that they would live the rest of their lives that way. God forsakes no one.

Although she gladly received the compliments paid by all who saw her, as a young girl, she learned to conceal her pleasure with artful modesty. From the time she came out of her little white eggshell (like the common folk say), she found a mask, and always reached for it when presenting herself on the public stage. We're talking about those compliments that one showers on a woman with no greater object than gaining her favor, if not a kind, sincere love (for Cecilia was discerning enough to tell the two apart). She heard them all with an interest that she expressed willingly and agreeably with her angelic smile. She took full advantage of them, as though they were prudent advice, whenever she could.

The facts demonstrate as much. At the age of eleven, the poor girl had already abandoned her little coral rosary for a pair of earrings. She wore silk slippers and a tight dress. She put her hair up and wore a mantel over her head whenever she went out on the street, moved more by her own fancy than by any real obligation. Her grandmother didn't want her to dirty her clothes. It was a frivolous excuse and came too late –a fact that never escaped the girl's penetrating understanding, which is why she insisted on disobeying.

All this screaming praise (that's the only way to say it) gradually would fade away. That's why no one noticed as Cecilia grew vapid and vain. Without letting on or appearing coquettish, she never forsook the pleasure of drawing everyone's attention and would employ all means at her disposal to do so. That's why we find her so spruced up at eleven, why the babe was so proud when she was practically still a suckling.

It's from that age, truth be told, that she first noticed a pair of eyes following her wherever she went –-and not entirely to her chagrin. Woe is she! Those eyes (we have it on good authority) had been following her ever since she first began to walk the streets... Let's back up a little here and tell the story in its correct order. Let's see the girl speak and act in accordance with that character of hers that we loudmouths have tried in vain to make out. Maybe, in one or two lines, she can explain things more clearly than we can. Let's listen to the little girl tell what she thinks and how she thinks it in her own words.

On one of many fine afternoons, Cecilia was walking with her usual speed down a certain street, the name of which we do not remember. (It's on the map, but we don't have it on hand right now.) Cecilia was fast, like we said, but some girls in a house with a trap parked in the zaguán spotted her going by, the same way they saw everyone coming and going (which is what women do in the summer) and they could not help but call her over and entreat her to come in. She did what she was asked with no hesitation or discomfort, with her head held high and a determined expression on her face. She asked the two young ladies who went out to greet her (who were very pretty and very elegant, by the way) what they wanted. It was just to have a look and fawn on her, one of them answered, for she was so dreadfully lovely.

"Why don't you give me a medio to buy some sweets with? Chew that over!" she said disdainfully, as though this weren't the moment for such flattery.

The girls laughed at the idea and, each taking Cecilia by an arm, they carried her to a woman who appeared to be their mother. The somewhat heavy lady sat dressed with great care and refinement in a soft armchair, her feet reposing aristocratically on a stool in front of her.

"What a cute little monkey!" the señora exclaimed when she saw Cecilia up close. She sat up a bit in her chair to pet her. "What is your name?" she asked by the by.

"Cecilia Valdés," the girl answered promptly.

"What of your mother?"

"I don't have a mother."

"Poor dear! And your father? Do you have him?"

"I don't have a father."

"Papá! Papá!" the youngest of the ladies shouted, turning towards a gentleman of slightly more than thirty-six years in shirtsleeves. He had just lain down on a black sofa by the hearth at the front of the sitting room. It seemed the caballero was distracted, or half asleep, or hadn't heard his daughters and his wife (we are at liberty to assure our readers that that's who they were) talking.

"Come see this delightful little girl, sir," the young ladies repeated.

"Yeah, yeah, I saw her. Now leave me alone," the father said without turning his head. He raised his hand to his brow to suggest

that he might be concentrating on some matter more serious than what was occupying the others at the moment and did not wish to be distracted. But no sooner had the words escaped his lips than Cecilia, who seemed to remember hearing that imperious voice in some closer context, turned to break free of the girls' too-friendly grasp and said, "Hey, I know that señor lying over there!"

The gentleman did not even move his lips, he just cast her an ill-humored basilisk stare, his eyes bursting with displeasure, from under the hands he was using to prop up his head on the sofa's arm. Then he turned over on his side and pretended to be asleep. How odd that he should be the only one to dislike the pretty little foundling!

"So, you don't have a father or a mother?" the good señora asked, barely betraying any worry regarding the scene she had just witnessed. "How do you live, then? Whom do you live with? Are you a child of the earth? Or maybe the air?"

"¡Ave María purísima!" the girl exclaimed, turning her head over her right shoulder and looking the three women up and down rather.... We were going to say "shamelessly," but that seems a harsh turn of phrase... "¡Jesús! These people ask so many questions! I live with my grandmother. She's a kind little old lady, and she loves me a lot, and she lets me do whatever I want. My mother died far away, and so did my father. (Here the gentleman shifted on the sofa, hiding his face in his hands as much as he could.) I don't know anything else, so don't ask."

"Come, don't get cross," said the one who looked to be the elder of the two girls as she stroked Cecilia's head, combing the wavy dark hair with her snow-white fingers. "Don't get cross. When Mamá asks you things, she's only after your welfare. She's taken a liking to you, as you can see by the interest she's showing in your lot."

"Don't you want people to fawn on you and ask you questions? You're so lovely, and you have such good, pretty hair! It would make a beautiful cachucha,[13] don't you think, Mamá?" the younger one added, joining her sister in weaving her silky fingers through the girl's black corkscrew spirals.

"Well, it won't be looking back at you in the mirror any time soon," the girl answered, shaking herself as though she could already feel the scissors.

"I didn't mean it that way, Cecilia. But, if they paid you for it, would you let someone cut your hair?"

"Not even for an ounce of gold."

"And if they gave you more than an onza?" the elder one continued.

"Not even for fifty pesos."

"What about four onzas?" the señora put in with a smile.

Cecilia shook her head and blew a raspberry (like the common folk say). Struggling to get away, she practically shouted that she wouldn't let them cut her hair even if they killed her, even if they gave her all the treasures in the world, because her grandmother had promised it as an offering to the Virgin.

(At this point the caballero got up from the sofa and, ordering his daughters to leave him in peace, departed for the house's interior rooms.)

But the young ladies wouldn't let her go until they gave her some sweets and a swath of satinet to make herself shoes with. Cecilia refused as much as she could, but finally gave in so that they would let her leave. Meanwhile, in the zaguán, a young man in a house suit was heading down the servants' stairs that led to the dining room. He must have been about eighteen, because the peach fuzz was beginning to show over his upper lip. Compared to others of his gender, he was more than a bit handsome of face and body. Recognizing Cecilia as soon as he saw her, he sucked the air into his chest and shouted, "Cecilia! ¡Virgencita! Cecilia, come here! Where you going? Listen up, you roguish little imp!"

Without turning away from him, she continued quickly to the door, crying out "Cop! Cop!!"

She stuck her right thumb between her pursed lips and quickly moved the other fingers from side to side to mock him, the way children often do, as though saying "Fooled ya! See how I got away, dummy?"

Cecilia hightailed it down the road as the family heatedly debated her peregrine little features and uninhibited charm. One of them chalked it up to shamelessness and even vulgar chicanery, another interpreted everything as coquetry and calculation, and still another took it all to be innocence and natural naiveté. Such varying opinions made some laugh, while others offered praise and still others grew depressed. Yet another listened on, which was no small task. But, suddenly, right then and there, one of the girls thought to ask who Cecilia looked like. Here's what happened:

"Why, she's as similar to you as one egg is to another."

"No, she looks like you."

"Me?! No, like Leocadio.

"Why should she look like me any more than some random person on the street?"

"No, not you. Like Papá."

"She looks the least like Papá. Papá has green eyes and hers are black. Papá has blond hair and hers is jet."

"Good Heavens, muchacha! Looks like your father! What foolishness!" (We understand that she was swallowing her tears.) "Wherever did you...?"

And so it went, much as it has always gone and always will go in the polemics of our newspapermen, in which each believes that he has adduced sufficient evidence to silence a less stubborn opponent, without anyone becoming convinced of anything, nor understanding anything, nor remembering anything about it later. The two girls headed off to the window to greet some acquaintances who were passing by, lounging in a luxurious trap. The other woman stayed on her soft armchair, cooling herself with a peacock-feather fan as she secretly swallowed a bitter pill that she would much rather spit out into the open. And the young fellow in the lounge jacket, who was a student named Leocadio (as has been document-

ed), grabbed a candle and went back upstairs, we think to study the other day's lesson.

Meanwhile, the girl headed up the street and out onto little Santa Catalina Square, where she climbed up on the embankment that doubtlessly exists to protect the convent from the obstreperous squeaking of wheels. (Although, we're of the persuasion that coaches were not yet in use when said convent was built.) A good many steps and minutes later, she entered one of the many hovels to be found along the way. The door was barely a vara and a half wide with no paint. The windows, too–like in a jail, but with fewer bars and not as secure. There were just two wooden balusters that, if they resembled anything, resembled an old man's mouth, with just two rotten teeth.

As far as the interior goes, it was not better outfitted than the exterior, consisting of a parlor divided by a partition to make the bedroom. The door was right on the street. On the left, about a vara and a half up the wall, there was a niche, at the back of which one could see a full-length Mater Dolorosa, her chest pierced by a burning sword. It was painted on wood by Juan del Río in the 1700s, facts to which the *fecit* on the bottom bore witness.

The Lady of Sorrows was illuminated day and night by two "mariposas," that is, a butterfly-like pair of burners with their corresponding wicks, placed in two cups filled with three parts water and one oil. This queerly peregrine painting was adorned with a garland of flowers, all of which were artificial, crinkled like garlic, discolored, and chewed by cockroaches. Around it, on the walls, were an endless number of holy cards, collected at church festivals and as alms. Some were stuck on with large breadcrumbs, some with wafers, and the rest with starch, an incentive for any critters on the hunt for old papers.

The little house was scantly furnished. The first and most notable piece was a Campeche chair, so named for the town in Mexico (recently New Spain). Dwarfish, wobbly, and swollen, with rickety sides like an ass's ears, it was older than the palm forest at Anaphe, or at least a contemporary of the siege of that city. There were three or four vaqueta stools made out of calfskin. These stood strong, even though their figures testified that they were at least as old as the Campeche chair (with all due respect to the old carpenters now lying in the dusty earth from which they were made). There was a stand with shelves in the corner, made of mahogany like the stools, its legs in the shape of satyrs, or dogs, with Arabesque inlays and carvings of leaves and wine glasses. All about the room were cooing doves, hens, and ducks. They lived peacefully and harmoniously in that meager menagerie with the humble abode's sole proprietresses, the placid people on Noah's Ark.

A long and wide leather bed sprawled like a Persian carpet across the tiny little bedroom. The feather mattress was soft, if filled with telltale holes, and the quilt was a promiscuous assembly of one thousand and one bits and pieces. By the head, on the partition, and all around, there were holy cards, hanging relics, images of Saint Blaise, paperboard crosses, cheap crystals, mirror shards, palm fronds from Palm Sundays long past, etc. Behind the doors, in place of almanacs, on paper yellowed by time, were signs in crableg handwriting saying "¡Ave María Purísima!", "May the grace of God be in this house," "Viva Jesús, Viva María, long live grace and death to sin." There were many other verses of a similar tenor, but we wouldn't wish to annoy the unbelieving reader with a detailed account.

We've lingered so long on the meticulous description of this hovel with the intention of allowing the gentle reader's imagination to repair upon the contrast that the scene offered Cecilia when, so full of life and fresh youth, she entered. It was as though Heaven had placed the pretty girl in those shabby circumstances so as to whisper over and over in her ear, "Look at what you are, my daughter, and don't do anything crazy, hija." But we're sure that that was the least of her concerns, especially at this point, when something more important consumed her thoughts: that she should not be heard by a certain person, who, facing the niche in her Campeche chair, seemed to be praying or sleeping (the elderly often mistake one activity for the other).

Yet, even though Cecilia tried to tread as carefully as a blindman with her little feet, our roguish heroine couldn't step softly enough to prevent the old woman, who had scrawny ears like a catechist, from hearing the little imp as clearly and distinctly as if she had burst a blister or cracked her knuckles (same difference). She was neither praying nor sleeping, but sat flipping through a tattered little old book sprinkled with scarlet, blue, and black letters –prayers, no doubt.

"Hello," she said, looking at Cecilia sideways over the perfectly rounded glasses that sat a bit too snuggly on the end of her snub nose, like a boy on a horse's rump. "Hello, young lady. Fancy seeing you here, señorita! Isn't that nice? Is this any time to come asking for your grandmother's blessing? (The girl was walking over with her arms folded.) Where have you been all this time? (The prayer bells had rung a while ago.) You're looking mighty fine to be hanging around church!

She suddenly laid a hand on her, dropping the book and startling the doves, and exclaimed: "Come here! Come here, you slinky sprite! You tropical butterfly without wings, you lost sheep without a flock, you madwoman in the stocks! There's no king or country that can rule you! No pope that can excommunicate you! Don't you have anything in your life besides running around the streets?"

Instead of becoming frightened, instead of running away, Cecilia laughingly threw herself into her grandmother's arms. Kissing the leathery flesh of her knobby chest, she handed the sour old woman all that the girls in the house where she had been had given her, as though to cover her grumpy and growling mouth before it unleashed... But first we ought to say who this old woman was, what her life was like and what her aspect was, and all that, and something more that maybe we can't say. It all figures for a better knowledge of the story we are retelling.

II

In case the reader has forgotten, we left off with Cecilia throwing herself into the scolding old woman's arms and warmly and effusively giving her a hug and a kiss. This appeased her grandmother's anger, for that poor woman had been so unhappy, had such a good heart, and felt such a keen desire to be loved that the attentions of a dog would have made her eyes water. Of course she closed her lips and could do no more than contemplate her smarmy granddaughter, just as moments before she had contemplated the peaceful face of the Virgin in fervent prayer. Still, Ceclia held señora Chepa by the waist with her shapely arms and laid her beautiful head on the old woman's bony chest, looking like a flower that springs from a dry trunk and, with its green leaves and fragrance, betokens life besides death itself.

'Ña Chepa's singular physiognomy requires observations that a faithful historian should not omit here. Lacking molars, her sunken cheeks rolled out or in like bellows when she talked and, whether because she was in the habit of wearing her hair pulled back or because nature had made it that way, I cannot say, her bare and bulging brow gave the appearance of a skull. Covering her pointy chin, mouth, and the sunken eyes between which her snub nose peeked was a layer of toasted parchment, naturally copper in color. But, between her age and her wrinkles (that crepuscular tarnish that creeps across even the world's greatest portraits!) her skin had grown tan, a Chinafied "achinado" (which is the term we use here to refer to the child of a mulato and a negra, or vice-verse).

Her eyes, popping and dusky, were so big and lively that we can affirm without exaggeration that the rest of 'ña Chepa's body was dead and her soul, tightly squeezed into its bony jail, looked for an exit, any crack through which to escape. As the hour had not yet arrived, it had no recourse or relief but to peak through the glass bars, with all the anxiety that is to be expected. This came to light when she laughed or cried, when she was happy or cross, as neither her lips, nor her forehead, nor her eyebrows, nor her nose –those parts of the human form in which passions show themselves and take shape—would undergo even the slightest immutation. Poor woman! She lost her expressiveness when she lost her felicities and forever forsook the compassion of man. Those who saw her calm and serene thought her blessed and joyful, believing the bonfire that still burned beneath that covered mouth to be extinguished.

And Cecilia, who heard her sighs, who saw her penitence, who was the only one in a position to offer her some comfort, was in no state to understand her. So it was that all that sustained 'ña Chepa on this earth was a Christian resignation worthy of Job and a faith and hope in God that nourished her spirit in the late hours that she devoted to prayer and meditation. Beyond that, she knew all too well what her fortune was and what she could ask for and hope from her granddaughter, that beautiful flower cast into the middle the plaza for the first passerby to trample.

Finding herself now in the last third of her life and filled with guilt about the past, rather than swelling with rage, she thought it her duty to seek moments of calm and repose while awaiting the stroke of her Last Hour. Her naturally irascible spirit imposed upon her to somehow placate the Lord's wrath and find forgiveness for her infractions. It is thus easy to believe that –though justifiably angry with Cecilia because she had returned late and for other, prior peccadilloes, she was more prepared to pardon than to find fault. So, when Cecilia came sweet-talking her way over, instead of pushing the girl's fussing body away, the old woman found a pretext. Suddenly changing her tone, she contented herself with asking for the second time where she had been so late.

"Me?" the girl answered, resting her elbows on the old woman's knees as she played with the scapularies that hung from her neck. "Me? In the house of some girls who saw me going by and called me. There was a fat lady sitting in her armchair and she asked me what my name was, and what my father's name was, and what my mother's name was... everything. ¡Ay! They were such busybodies! And can you believe one of the girls wanted to cut my hair to make a cachucha? Yes siree, but I got away. But if it wasn't for the man lying on the sofa who scolded the girls... He told them to let me go and then he went off to his room in a huff.... Guess who it was! I've seen him talking to you a couple of times, on Paula Promenade when we go to Mass... Whenever he finds me in the street, he tells me that I'm a lost wench, a stray... all kinds of things! And that he'll have the soldiers take me and lock me up! Oh! I'm afraid of that man."

"¡Niña!" her grandmother exclaimed deafly, pushing her slightly from her breast and nailing her eyes ferociously on the girl. It was as though a grave thought, a painful memory crossed her conscious and she dared not admonish the child, nor counsel her, so as not to shed light on something that the babe should never behold in all her life. Yet, little by little, the turbulent sea grew calm and the clouds crowding the dark horizon grew faint. Once again holding the little angel in her scrawny arms, she added with all the maternal sweetness and serenity with which she could coat her naturally gruff voice:

"Cecilia, hija mía, don't go back to that house."

"Why, Abuelita?" her granddaughter asked.

"Because... those people... Don't you know?... They're very bad."

"Bad? But they petted me and gave me sweets and satin for shoes!"

"But still, don't believe it. You're very trusting... a little girl, after all. Look, they're just doing it to draw you in and seduce you. Then, one day, when you least expect it, when you're being less careful, ¡tris! They'll knock your hair off. And you have such beautiful hair! It would be a shame!" She combed the girl's curls with her fingers as she said this.

"Yeah, like I'm such a bozo I'd let them trick me like that."

"Still, Cecilia, the best thing you can do with dice is not to roll

them. Even if they go hoarse calling you, pay them no mind. Then there's that man... you say that, wherever you go, that man is looking at you the wrong way... God knows who he could be, hija mía! We shouldn't think ill of anyone... but, if he can be a saint, he can be a de... May the Lord bless and keep us all (and she blessed herself). Then, Cecilia, you're so innocent, so dazed and flighty, and in that house... Why, don't you know? There's a witch who eats pretty young girls alive. It's a miracle of His Divine Majesty that you escaped! You were there in the evening, weren't you?

"Late in the afternoon. They hadn't lit the streetlamps yet."

"Poor you if you go in at night. Don't ever go back to that house in your life, you hear? Don't even go down that block."

"Oh! And there's a boy who lives there, too... I mean a guy that I always run into hanging around Cristo Church with a book tucked under his arm. And every time he sees me, he pounces and comes after me. He knows my name and everything."

"That's probably some student. He must be twisted like the rest of them. But you're not listening to what I'm saying. Your head is as hard as a stone. I can tire myself out giving you advice and I don't get anywhere. Whoever saw a girl as pretty as you hitting the streets and dragging her sandals around with her hair let down until eight or nine at night?"

"What about Nemecia, 'ña Pimienta's daughter? How come she's in the street until ten? Just last night I bumped into her in Cristo Plaza playing *la lunita* with a bunch of boys."

"You want to compare yourself to 'ña Pimienta's daughter, to that raggedy, nasty little mulata? The day you least expect it they're going to bring her home with a broken head... Why, if you knew what happened to a little girl about your age because she wouldn't listen to the advice of a grandmother of hers who told her that, if she carried on walking the streets at night, she was going to get herself into trouble."

"Tell me, tell me, Chepilla! I want to know," Cecilia said, and she clung to her grandmother's neck.

"Well, sir... one very dark night, when a harsh wind was blowing... It was St. Bartholomew's Eve, when, like I've told you before, the Devil runs lose after three o'clock. Narcisa, for that was the little girl's name, sat singing on a stone bench in front of the door to her house while her grandmother prayed in the corner behind the window. I remember it like it was happening this minute. Well, sir, the clock at Espíritu Santo had just struck nine and, since the wind had blown out what few streetlamps there were, the streets were dark and empty. So, like I said, the little girl was singing and the grandmother was praying. Just then, she heard a violin playing just over El Ángel Hill. What did Narcisa think? That it was some kind of dance and, without asking her grandmother for permission, she slowly crept away and... then she set out running and didn't stop till she got to the hill. When the old woman finished praying, she thought her granddaughter was in her cot and, naturally, she locked the door."

"And she left the poor girl in the street?" Cecilia interrupted with a sad and anxious tone.

"Now you'll see what happened. Before she went to bed (for she was very tired), the old woman grabbed a candle and went to her granddaughter's cot to see if she was sleeping. You just imagine how she felt, loving her so much, when she found it empty! She ran to the front door, opened it, and hollered for her granddaughter. 'Narcisa! Narcisa!' But Narcisa didn't answer. Of course not! How could the poor girl answer when the devil had carried her away!"

"And how did that happen?" Cecilia asked, that mouth of hers open wide and her eyes burning.

"I'll tell you," 'ña Chepa continued, seeing that her saga of sagas produced the desired effect. Well, sir, when Narcisa got to the five corners at the top of El Ángel Hill, a handsome young man suddenly appeared to her and asked her where she was going at that time of night. She answered that she was going to see a dance. "I'll lead you," the young man replied and, grabbing her by the hand, he took her to the city wall. Narcisa noticed that, as they were walking, the young man started turning black –very black, like char; that the hairs on his head were standing erect like wires; that, when he laughed, cruel his eye, his enormous teeth stuck out like a wild boar; that two horns were sprouting from his brow; that, as he walked, he pounded the ground with his turgid, hairy tail and that he spewed fire out his mouth like a bread oven. Then Narcisa gave a cry. The black figure nailed its claws into her neck so that she wouldn't scream and, picking her up, scaled the tower of El Ángel Church (which, as you must have noticed, doesn't have a cross). From there he cast her into a deep, deep well that, opening and closing again, swallowed her that very instant. And that's what happens to little girls who don't listen to the advice of their elders."

Here ended 'ña Chepa's story and here began Cecilia's awe (better said, her fear, her fright). She began to tremble as though she had mercury poisoning. (Although she soon wiped the tale from her imagination by going to sleep in her bed, which, truth be told, is what the astute old woman was aiming for.)

Chepa would tell other, similar stories to the wandering lass. Yet, we are of the persuasion that their only fruit was to fill her head with superstition and affrighten her flighty spirit. For, still, she would continue to do what she willed and as she pleased, sometimes escaping out the window, sometimes taking advantage of an errand to the tavern to walk from street to street and plaza to plaza all God's blessed day; when she went after the inciting music of a dance –something to which she had had an affection ever since she was a little girl (and this hardly belied her race)–, when she followed a funeral procession, when she threw herself into the frenzy of a party, or even when she snatched the christening coin at somebody's baptism.

The fair Cecilia was in the custom of going to bed late and falling still as a stone as soon as she closed her eyes. Her grandmother, who, as the reader already knows, spent long nights in prayer and never (or rarely) convinced Cecilia to join her, would look in on the girl with a light in one hand and a rosary in the other before retiring to her own poor bed. After covering her tightly with the sheet

(because, even in her sleep, she was restless), she would swat at the mosquitos that dared to jab at Cecilia's charming face and next arrange her untidy hair. Then she would run her hand over the girl's forehead and pulse, as though taking the temperature of her febrile blood. This touch, soft as it may have been, would sometimes make the girl stir violently; other times, she would mutter in her sleep, uttering incoherencies, chewed up words (to use a turn of phrase); or, parting her small lips, she would smile as though playing at one of her street scenes. 'Ña Chepa then would kneel beside the bed and, fervently, almost with tears in her eyes, offer Cecilia to the Virgin and ask her Guardian Angel never to forsake the girl when she herself was gone. There was such blessed devotion, such piety, such love in her supplications, that we can conceive of no greater maternal tenderness towards a child. Nor can another heart understand or know how to express that language, that affection that asks for no reward, but contents itself with a smile, with anything.

Unfortunately, all these cares are insufficient when it comes to securing a happy fortune. One needs to pass on a particular genus of teaching; one needs to sow virtue in children's hearts if those special virtues that alone can bring fortune and felicity are to be reaped –and 'ña Chepa, a sad woman from the masses, lacking these things for herself, could not humanly furnish them for another.

The grandmother loved Cecilia as a daughter and raised her as such. Though the father was alive, he never showed his face, nor did he attempt to fulfill the other –and hardly less urgent—duties that his role demanded, for he was beholden to the sacred duties of society. Rather, he entrusted time (and, perhaps, luck) with the girl's education –or, better said, he never thought about it at all. He couldn't think about it, as he had his own lessons to learn. Instead, he dragged the unfortunate Cecilia, the product of his crime, to sin down the same road down which he had dragged her mother's star. We frequently see such bonds bequeathed from parents to children onto the fifth generation.

Of naturally good and pacific tendencies, the girl, from constantly seeing what happened in the streets, from giving free reign to her passions, completely altered her character. Her wish was her whim. Her love, like her hatred, was total. Such was the strength of these two contradictory emotions, so thoroughly and completely did each possess her, that today she would cast away and spit on a doll over which yesterday she had spilled tears and tomorrow (no surprise) she would seek desperately to return to her power.

As befitted her age and her passions, luxury came to flatter Cecilia's vanity and ego. And what tears she shed when she couldn't attend a dance to which he had been invited by childhood friends –luckier than she, more favored by the graces of fortune than she– who could appear dressed in satin and crowned with flowers! And how she sighed and suffered on account of her grandmother's darkly dubious status (which she wound up denying)! If her heavenly countenance allowed her to pass through the doors of society, a malignant suspicion cast by many of the women who were jealous of her triumphs (and some presumptuous men, discontented by certain opinions found among hack writers and modern moralists) slammed them in her face!

What was more, raised to be proud, once she brushed up against people of another rank, Cecilia heard it said that the scorching blood running through her veins was stained. Yet, her ardent and impassioned heart never ceased to repeat that first love was earthly delight, and that these delights flowed only from the feeling hearts of the enlightened race. And so, when her passion carried her to a certain point, the specter of stained blood disdainfully pushed her away if a young man did not realize his aim (which was to abase her). Hence the battles she waged over her short and hazardous life.

Who was there to tell Cecilia that the same charms on which she based entirely her pride, and that made so many ask Heaven to be the object of her love, would prove the engine of her disgrace, would serve as an obstacle to her happiness? As can be seen, the circumstances of her life never put her in a position to imagine it, nor was there anyone to bring the matter to light. On the contrary, she was always encountering people (we do not think them ill-intentioned) who gave her to understand that, with that pretty face of hers and those graces, she had what it took to have a grand time in this world.

She should not have been born so beautiful; pride should not have carried her so high; nor should she have offered herself so many times to the libidinous eyes of the magnate to be dazzled and seduced. She should have had someone set her head on straight, and she should have found within herself floodgates to stem the violent torrents of her heart. Had she witnessed more morality tales and fewer popular scenes, more constraint and less indulgence, she would not have seen such an early awakening of her turbulent passions.

By the time Cecilia reached the age of fourteen around February of 1830, she was so charming that her admirers distinguished her as the *la Virgencita de Bronce*. Her shapeliness, her glow, the spring in her polished features, along with her coppery countenance had earned the Little Bronze Virgin this saintly sobriquet.

It was in this period that she began to blush, embarrassed… afraid to go out alone. For that reason, she started to go around with a childhood friend, a little mulatica who was no less enamored of wantonly wandering the streets than was Cecilia. Yet, the light-skinned mulata's origins shielded her from the scarlet slings and arrows of malice, which one needn't point at a woman of such limited prospects.

When there was an affair where many people were expected to gather, out of respect for wagging tongues, Cecilia turned to an elderly parent of her friend as to a duenna, that she might serve as their chaperone. Protected by that horrible scarecrow, there was no black *cuna* ball, no dance at a fair, no rollicking *jaranita* with flutes and guitars, no baptism or other amusement (for we are the sort of people who are ever amusing ourselves) that she did not attend. If, at ten, she was a spectator, today, at fourteen, she was an actress playing the lead. Sometimes she would dance and sometimes not. One cannot always, nor should one always.

In time she learned to pluck a harp from Catalino Mendoza, who was a skilled musician on that instrument. She executed this charming accomplishment with such grace and dexterity that some judged her more a seraph than a *bronze virgin*. There was a particular occasion, one night around October of that same 1830, right before the Santo Ángel fairs (which are at the end of that month), in one of the homes of the ragtag and bobtail where she had been invited to bring life to the party, where she enraptured all with her sweet, harmonious voice and the sacred instrument's melancholic notes.

Among the many young men who burst into applause over the beautiful songstress was one whom the reader already knows, though he may not be thinking of him at the moment. The youth supposedly had organized that jamboree just to see how Cecilia did with a new bolero that was very much in vogue just then and how her fingers stroked the harp cords. Innocent intentions, which we would be willing to forgive if that's all there were to it.

But soon he had the same whim had by all passionate men of tempestuous tendencies in matters of love and women. His thirst quenched, it soon gave way to dearer desires formerly veiled to his eyes. After that night, it was no longer merely a question of seeing and hearing Cecilia. He now wished to possess, if possible, the silky hand that skillfully strummed the harp's cords, the voice that erupted in torrents of harmony from that titillating neck, and the soft heart that moved the hand and voice to such ecstatically ravishing depths, like a siren in the seas, like a sylph in skies. And did he acquire that which he coveted? Oh, the man was capable of that and more.

The descendent of a rich (if not exactly noble) family, young Leocadio Gamboa was destined from early childhood for the tribunal, one of the only three professions to which he could dedicate himself (if it were necessary for someone who was born rich and with pretenses of nobility to dedicate himself to anything). Perhaps the problem was that he lacked inclination toward the study of jurisprudence; perhaps it was that he did not believe himself possessing of the necessary talents to make a name for himself in that field; or because, after listening to his parents babble "lawyer," "lawyer" over and over again, he just got sick of it; or because (and this is what we maintain), from a young age, he liked the leisurely life more than he liked burning his eyelashes on the books. Anyway, the true fact of the matter is that, even if they made him go to Latin, philosophy, and law classes and, even if he finally got a degree in that subject, that didn't make him a lettered man. As they say of certain boys, he made it to school, but he didn't make it in school.

He was, however, the finest fop in Havana on account of his erudition and loquaciousness (he had to get something out of all those classes). His new trap was the flashiest and the fastest. His horse was the sturdiest. His mulato coachman had the best posture and the slimmest legs of anyone who ever dressed in livery, or wore military-style boots, or jingled when his silver spurs touched the ground.

At the horse races; or in carriages between the picturesque, green boundary strips of the coffee plantations at Artemisa, Alquízar, San Antonio, and Quivicán; where the *season* was; where there were cockfights, games, women, fairs, etc. –that's where you'd find him. That's where he'd make up for the palm-switch penance that his teachers and professors were always inflicting on him. He was the best thing since milk punch at the baths at Guanabacoa, Mariano, and San Juan; the jim-dandy of the fairs at Regla, Carraguao, las Mercedes, Jesús María, or El Ángel... wherever someone strummed a cord.

One saw him as often at the philharmonic, or in the theater, at the side of a young lady from among the finest families as at a dance at a fair, where all classes of society shuffle and mix, laughing and chatting with a girl of humble status; as at the *cuna* rubbing up against the lowly masses; as at a carnival booth betting a dozen onzas on the spin of a wheel; as before the gambling table following a horse that threatened to go off course. One just as soon saw him get down from his trap, his head held high and smelling of cologne, to step on stairs of marble, as stooping down to squeeze into a wretched hovel in the city's most far-flung slums.

What a popular and democratic young man, anyone would say! He represents civilization in his country! What a frank physiognomy, what nobility, what ease, what gentlemanliness! With what nonchalance does he look upon the vain concerns of a heterogeneous society! But whoever thought that had another think coming! Beneath his silk vest, it's true, there beat a heart of the tropics, but inside that perfumed head of his there stirred (if, indeed, it stirred at all) a vulgar soul, unworthy of such a beautiful figure, incapable of virtue, nor of noble and elevated thought.

When he appeared to condescend to the level of the common man, it was only to abase him if he did not satisfy the bastard desire that brought him there: to sate himself with vengeance for the petty slights that he had received among his own class those times when a vain view of his own worth impelled him to reach above his station.

He never got down from his trap to offer succor, nor to wipe a tear from a beggar's leathery cheek, nor to carry a candle in a religious procession. The best one could say of him was that, when he placed himself physically at the same level as other men, it was with the depraved intention of introducing desolation and infamy into the bosom of his victims.

Then he would get back in his coach, where the sound of the wheels on the stone streets, the crack of the driver's whip on the generous brute's haunches, the resonant beating of the silver spurs and buckles of the trappings would put him to sweet sleep, so that he did not hear the inopportune screaming of his conscience.

This man is what Cecilia found upon stepping through the golden gates of the world!

Woe unto her! Like the grey dove, she leaves the nest to see the light and the flowers, the rivers and the hills and try her weak wings beneath the blue and cochineal firmament of her native land in pursuit of air. And she is surprised by the black, round eyes of the

predatory Cuban kite, swooping fearfully down to devour her in his claws.

If the young don Leocadio was captivated by Cecilia's charms (after all, he chose her as one of his victims), she was no less dazzled by the graceful splendor and pomp that don Leocadio affected. A few words from him were enough to produce a vague disquiet in her heart –and to leave the little bird with notions of men and love, of a world of satins and bowers of flowers, and with such sayings and visions in her head that she could not sleep the first night (though the same thoughts brought her strange dreams on subsequent evenings).

Again she would play the harp and sing, and again, and again –until her songs and the melancholic sounds of her instrument lost themselves, confused and silenced, in the whirlwind of her passion; until they burst from all the pores of her body and drove her mad, carrying her off like a meek lamb to the feet of one who would slaughter it. And the sacrificer, proud of his triumph, dressing her in silks (which were her vanity) and putting her to sleep with music (which was her delight), and dazzling her senses with offers of gifts and the glitter of gold, painted magical castles in the sky. And then he hurriedly marched her down the road to perdition... God knows if she has awoken from her stupor! God knows if, at her last hour, she has recognized her fault and if she repentantly and tearfully begs forgiveness!

As for us, after that, we lost sight of her. We are, nonetheless, making the necessary inquiries to discover her whereabouts. If we succeed, and she is in a mood to relate her story, our readers may count on us to narrate it if it proves interesting (and it will), provided that the pen does not fall from our hands with the scarlet shame of offended decorum. In the meantime, we ask that you pray for the soul of the unhappy Chepa, who flew off to heaven some days later, weighed down by grief at the disappearance of Cecilia, who asked her leave to go to a dance and never again returned.

NOTES

[1] For a canonical study of the del Monte group, see Luis. On the Cuban independence movement, see Foner, Pérez, and Ferrer.

[2] Despite the title, there is no second volume.

[3] On "La primitiva," see Harney and Genova, "Foundational" 68-69. On Villaverde's early work, see Sosa Cabanas. For a textual history of Villaverde's canonical novel and its earlier iterations, see Romero.

[4] On Casanova, see Villaverde, *Apuntes*; Horrego Estuch; Cairo; Hernández González; and Genova, *Imperial* 138-140 and 147-150.

[5] On Villaverde's life and transnational peregrinations, see Lazo.

[6] For a brief biographical sketch of Lorente, see "Mariano Joaquin Lorente." On Lane, see Saxon.

[7] The 1882 version displaces this racial reference onto Leonardo's father don Cándido—unnamed in the 1839 story—, whose name comes from the Latin for "white."

[8] For a comparison of the short story and the opening chapters of the definitive novel, see Luis 105-6.

[9] As a testament to the novel's cultural influence, the common noun *lazarillo* means "guide dog" in contemporary Spanish. All translations from Spanish appearing in this introduction are my own.

[10] As Cuban critic Cira Romero notes, the short story "tiene un tono y un contenido inicial que se corresponden mucho más con un artículo de crítica social y literaria que con una novela" (Romero LXXIII). On "La primitiva" as an Enlightenment didactic text, see Harney.

[11] The 1882 text rectifies this linguistic error and describes the character as "más bien delgada que gruesa" (73).

[12] On the foundational romance genre in Latin American literature, see Sommer.

[13] A headpiece very much in vogue at the time (Villaverde's note).

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