



TEXT: *Cecilia Valdés o La Loma del Ángel* (1882)

AUTHOR: Cirilo Villaverde

CRITICAL EDITION: Ana María Hernández (LaGuardia College, CUNY)

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on the Critical Introduction by Prof. Hernández)

1. THE CUBAN "UNCLE TOM'S CABIN":

- **A Panorama of Slavery:** Often compared to Harriet Beecher Stowe's work, *Cecilia Valdés* is the pinnacle of the 19th-century anti-slavery novel in Latin America. It paints a broad canvas of life in a slave colony: from the sugar plantations to the urban stratification of Havana.
- **From Annexation to Independence:** Villaverde wrote the final version during his long exile in New York (1849-1894). His ideological shift from supporting annexation to the U.S. to advocating for total Cuban independence permeates the text, especially in its critique of the colonial elite.

2. THE ARCHETYPE OF THE "MULATA":

- **Ochún and Yemayá:** Prof. Hernández proposes a fascinating reading based on Afro-Cuban mythology.
 - **Cecilia** represents **Ochún**: the goddess of sensual love, beauty, and vanity. She is the "Mulata de Rumbo," the tragic seductress who seeks to ascend socially through her beauty but is ultimately destroyed by the rigid racial caste system.
 - **María de Regla** (the wet nurse) represents **Yemayá**: the maternal, protective, and nurturing figure.
- **The Tragic Hybrid:** Cecilia is the embodiment of *mestizaje*. Like Carmen or Don Juan, she has become a universal archetype, inspiring operas (Gonzalo Roig), films, and ballets.

3. HAVANA AS PROTAGONIST:

- **Urban Mapping:** The novel is not just a romance; it is a meticulous map of 19th-century Havana. The narrator guides the reader through plazas, markets, and streets, reflecting the city's transformation and its strict social stratification. Cecilia is Havana: beautiful, mixed, and volatile.

4. MUSIC AND IDENTITY:

- **The Soundtrack of a Nation:** The novel documents the birth of Cuban national identity through music. The *contradanza*, *habanera*, and *danza* appear as spaces where African rhythms (like the *cinquillo*) infiltrate European forms, mirroring the racial mixing that defines Cuban culture.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- **Incest as Metaphor:** Discuss the incestuous relationship between Cecilia and Leonardo. How does it serve as a metaphor for the colonial society, where the white elite and the mulatto population are inextricably (and often secretly) related?
- **Race and Class:** Analyze the "Limpieza de Sangre" (purity of blood). How does Cecilia try to "pass" for white? Why is her tragedy inevitable in a slave-holding society?
- **The Male Characters:** Contrast Leonardo Gamboa (the frivolous, spoiled white heir) with José Dolores Pimienta (the skilled, resentful mulatto tailor). How does the ending—Pimienta killing Leonardo—subvert the traditional power dynamics of the anti-slavery novel?
- **Historical Accuracy vs. Fiction:** Villaverde claims to write a realistic chronicle. Discuss how the detailed descriptions of sugar mills (*ingenios*) and urban life function as a historical document.

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Villaverde, Cirilo.** *Cecilia Valdés o La Loma del Ángel*. Edición Crítica de Ana María Hernández. Stockcero, 2013.
- **Benítez Rojo, Antonio.** *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna*. Hanover: Ediciones del Norte, 1989.
- **Luis, William.** *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- **Williams, Lorna V.** *The Representation of Slavery in Cuban Fiction*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994.



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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. Cecilia Valdés is often compared to which goddess in Afro-Cuban mythology?

A) Yemayá (Motherhood) B) Ochún (Sensual love) C) Changó (War) D) Babalú Ayé (Healing) **Correct Answer: B**

2. What is the hidden relationship between Cecilia and Leonardo Gamboa? A)

They are cousins B) They are half-brother and sister C) They are unrelated D) Leonardo is her uncle **Correct Answer: B**

3. What does Cecilia aspire to achieve through her relationship with Leonardo? A)

To become an opera singer B) To buy her freedom C) To "whiten" her social status (ascend socially) D) To move to Spain **Correct Answer: C**

4. Who kills Leonardo Gamboa at the end of the novel? A) Cecilia Valdés B) Don

Cándido Gamboa C) José Dolores Pimienta D) The Spanish authorities **Correct**

Answer: C

5. Besides being a romance, the novel is considered a detailed document of: A)

The War of 1898 B) 19th Century Havana society and the slave trade C) The Cuban Revolution of 1959 D) The life of Jose Martí **Correct Answer: B**

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