



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (121)

TEXT: *Sab* (1841)

AUTHOR: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda

EDITOR: Ivan A. Schulman

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on the Introduction by Ivan A. Schulman and historical context of Cuban slavery)

1. A REVOLUTIONARY PRECURSOR:

The First Antislavery Novel?

Published in 1841 (predating *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), *Sab* is arguably the first novel to address African slavery in Cuba. Unlike later works born from the reformist Del Monte circle, *Sab* was conceived independently in Europe, allowing for a more radical, albeit ambiguous, critique.

Humanizing the Enslaved:

Avellaneda breaks with the objectification of slaves common in her era. *Sab* is not a "sack of coal" but a complex human being with a "noble soul," challenging the racist ideologies that underpinned the colonial economy.

2. THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND GENDER:

Double Subalternity:

The novel draws a powerful parallel between the condition of the slave and the condition of women in 19th-century patriarchal society. Both *Sab* (the mulatto slave) and *Carlota* (the white woman) are victims of a system that treats them as property or tools for economic gain.

Transgressive Love:

The romantic tension between *Sab* and *Carlota*—and the shocking intimacy of the scene between *Sab* and *Teresa*—transgresses the strict racial and social boundaries of colonial Cuba, proposing a humanity that transcends caste and color.

3. IDEOLOGICAL AMBIGUITIES AND "BLANQUEAMIENTO":

The "Amphibological" Discourse:

The narrative voice reflects a tension between metropolitan (Spanish) values and a burgeoning Cuban identity. Avellaneda condemns slavery's immorality but, through *Sab*'s own voice, expresses fear of violent rebellion (like the Haitian Revolution).

Racial Ambiguity:

Sab is depicted as a mulatto of light skin and "noble" bearing, and his adoptive mother is Indigenous. This choice reflects contemporary debates on "blanqueamiento" (whitening) the population, perhaps to make the abolitionist message more palatable to white readers or to align with specific socio-political theories of the time.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Slavery and Abolitionism:

To what extent can *Sab* be considered an abolitionist novel? Discuss the contradictions in Sab's own speeches regarding freedom and rebellion.

Race and Gender Parallels:

Analyze how Avellaneda links the oppression of slaves with the oppression of women. How does the marriage market in the novel mirror the slave market?

The "Tragic Mulatto" Trope:

Discuss the characterization of Sab. Does his depiction as a "noble soul" in a "slave's body" reinforce or challenge racial stereotypes? Why might Avellaneda have chosen a mixed-race protagonist?

Romanticism vs. Realism:

Sab is often classified as a Romantic novel. Identify Romantic elements (nature, passion, tragedy) and discuss how they serve the novel's social critique.

The Colonial Context:

How does the novel depict the economic shifts in Cuba (e.g., the rise of the sugar industry, foreign investment via the Otway family)? How do these shifts impact the characters?

Indigenous Presence:

Discuss the role of the Indigenous legend of Camagüey and the character of Martina. What function do they serve in a novel primarily about African slavery?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gómez de Avellaneda, Gertrudis. *Sab*. Stockcero.

Barreda, Pedro. *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1979.

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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. Who is the author of *Sab*?

- A) Cirilo Villaverde
- B) Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda
- C) Domingo del Monte
- D) Harriet Beecher Stowe

Correct Answer: B

2. Where does the novel *Sab* take place?

- A) Madrid, Spain
- B) Lima, Peru
- C) Camagüey, Cuba
- D) Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Correct Answer: C

3. What is the primary social institution critiqued in the novel?

- A) The Catholic Church
- B) The Monarchy
- C) African Slavery
- D) The Educational System

Correct Answer: C

4. The novel draws a strong parallel between the oppression of slaves and the oppression of:

- A) Indigenous people
- B) Factory workers
- C) Women
- D) Immigrants

Correct Answer: C

5. Why was *Sab* banned in Cuba upon its publication?

- A) It was considered too sexually explicit.
- B) It contained doctrines subversive to the system of slavery.
- C) It insulted the Spanish Crown.
- D) It was written by a woman.

Correct Answer: B

Explore the “Afro-Hispanic & Caribbean Literature” Collection: This book is part of our comprehensive collection on the rich heritage of the African diaspora in the Hispanic world: *Sab* (Gómez de Avellaneda); *Autonosuya* (Fontanilles); *Aponte* (Calcagno); *Cosas Añejas* (Penson); and *Montalván, la negra* (Cáceres).

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