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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Black Atlantic Abolitionist Agency in Latin American and British Literary Legacies: A Comparative Study of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda' *Sab* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*

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Abstract

Abolitionism emerged during the Enlightenment as a powerful movement aimed at ending slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It sought to expose the moral and economic contradictions of these practices through activism, literature, and social reform. This study analyzes two abolitionist texts engaging Afro-Atlantic agency—Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*—to explore how they articulate intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and colonialism. Utilizing Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory, which views the Atlantic as a space of cultural exchange and political solidarity shaped by shared histories of diaspora, this research employs thematic analysis to investigate key motifs such as resistance and empowerment, intellectual and political leadership, transatlantic connections, intersectionality, revolution and emancipation, as well as narrative voice and representation. Both texts emphasize the agency and inner lives of enslaved individuals while differing in their narrative forms and political expressions. *Sab*, a romantic novel, focuses on moral introspection and feminist abolitionism within the context of Cuban colonial society. In contrast, Browning's Victorian dramatic monologue embodies a spirit of defiance and direct political protest against American slavery. Despite their differences, both works offer a profound critique of racial and gender oppression while affirming a commitment to human dignity and transatlantic solidarity. Nonetheless, their genres, tones, and strategies diverge: Avellaneda's introspective and philosophical resistance contrasts with Browning's radical call for collective action. Additionally, *Sab* features a contemplative male narrator, while Browning presents a visceral female voice. Together, these texts illuminate the dynamic nature of Afro-Atlantic abolitionist literature as a project that envisions freedom, justice, and collective emancipation across temporal and geographic boundaries.

Keywords: Abolitionism, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sab*, *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, Black Atlantic Theory.

I. Introduction

Abolitionism is a social and political movement dedicated to ending slavery and the slave trade. It arose during the Enlightenment and gained momentum in the 18th and 19th centuries as activists highlighted the moral injustices and economic consequences of enslaving human beings. The movement drew upon ideals of liberty, equality, and human rights, opposing slavery on ethical, religious, and humanitarian grounds. Abolitionism used various means, including literature, political activism, legal challenges, and organized protests, to pressure governments to outlaw slavery and emancipate enslaved populations globally (Portner, 1937). In Latin America, abolitionism developed within the complex context of colonialism, independence struggles, and racial hierarchies. While indigenous peoples experienced forms of forced labor akin to slavery, African slavery was a significant economic institution, especially in Cuba. As many Latin American countries gained independence from Spain and Portugal in the early 19th century, abolitionist ideas were often linked to broader movements for freedom and nationhood. Enslaved people and free people of African descent played crucial roles, both through resistance and participation in revolutionary armies. Legal abolition occurred gradually, with Brazil abolishing slavery last in 1888 (Sobrevilla Perea, 2022; Needell, 2010). Throughout the region, abolitionism was shaped by local customs, colonial laws, and the efforts of activists, including literary figures like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, who used their work to critique slavery and advocate for emancipation.

In Britain, abolitionism emerged as a powerful moral and political force in the late 18th century, fueled by economic changes, evangelical religious movements, and growing humanitarian sentiment. British abolitionists, such as William Wilberforce and groups like the Anti-Slavery Society, campaigned vigorously against the transatlantic slave trade, culminating in its legal abolition in 1807. This was followed by the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833, which ended slavery in most of the British Empire (Williams, 1944; Brown, 2006). British abolitionist literature and art, including the works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, played a significant role in shaping public opinion by exposing the brutal realities of slavery. The British abolitionist movement combined moral persuasion, grassroots activism, and political lobbying to achieve its goals and influenced abolition movements worldwide.

Accordingly, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873), a Cuban-born writer who divided her life between Cuba and Spain, stands as a pivotal figure in Latin American and Cuban literature. Within the rich tradition of Cuban abolitionist works—such as Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (c. 1839) and Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1839)—her pioneering feminist-abolitionist novel *Sab* (1841), published in Madrid, holds unique distinction as the only such text by a woman in 19th-century Spain or its slaveholding colonies. This early anti-slavery narrative in the Americas, predating Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by over a decade, intertwines critiques of racial injustice and gender oppression in colonial Cuban society. *Sab* centers on the tragic, unrequited love of its titular protagonist, a

mulatto¹ slave, for Carlota, the white daughter of his master, exposing the intersections of race, class, and patriarchy amid Cuba's sugar plantation economy (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841). Banned in Cuba for its subversive content, *Sab* nonetheless stands out for its blend of feminist and abolitionist discourse, making it a pioneering literary critique of slavery in the Latin American context.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) made significant contributions to the vibrant tradition of 19th-century British abolitionist literature—featuring poets like William Cowper, Hannah More, and Robert Southey alongside Victorian voices galvanizing post-1833 emancipation efforts—most notably through her poem *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, published in 1847, which stands out for its unprecedented dramatic monologue from an enslaved Black woman's perspective, vividly exposing American racial hypocrisy at Plymouth Rock. This dramatic poem delivers a poignant protest against American slavery, narrating the story of a Black woman who escapes slavery but kills her child to save him from a life of bondage (Browning, 1847). Browning's poem was a bold and influential statement within British abolitionist circles, exposing the brutal inhumanity of slavery and critiquing the hypocrisy of the United States' claims to freedom. As part of Victorian abolitionist literature, it helped galvanize public opinion against slavery, blending powerful emotional appeal with moral urgency. Browning's abolitionist works, including this poem, hold a notable place in British literature's engagement with social justice causes of the era.

Both *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* articulate the Afro-Atlantic struggle against slavery through literary expression during roughly the same historical period, making them valuable texts for comparative analysis in abolitionist literature. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, writing from Latin America, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, from Britain, employ distinct narrative and poetic forms to expose the moral and social evils of slavery while giving voice to enslaved or formerly enslaved individuals marginalized by their societies. Their works engage deeply with intersecting themes of race, gender, and human rights, serving as complementary lenses through which to examine abolitionist agency across different Atlantic contexts. This comparative approach is essential because it reveals how abolitionist ideas and literary strategies traveled and transformed across cultural and geopolitical boundaries, adapting to local histories and social realities while participating in a shared transatlantic dialogue. By exploring the similarities and differences between *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, this study highlights the transnational dimensions of abolitionism and the critical role literature played in shaping abolitionist discourse within diverse social and political frameworks. It argues that, despite differences in genre and style, both texts collectively illuminate the Afro-Atlantic fight against slavery by amplifying marginalized voices and

¹ Mulatto is a term historically used to describe a person of mixed Black and white ancestry. It originated during colonial times and has social and historical significance linked to race and slavery. However, today it is considered outdated and offensive in many contexts.

exposing systemic injustices. Drawing on Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic Theory and employing thematic analysis, the research focuses on key themes such as resistance and empowerment, intellectual and political leadership, transatlantic connections, intersectionality, revolution and emancipation, and narrative voice and representation.

II. Literature Review

Most research on abolitionist literature approaches Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, along with their works, within distinct cultural and national frameworks, often isolating their contributions to their respective literary traditions. Consequently, comparative studies examining their abolitionist perspectives in dialogue remain limited, resulting in a gap in transnational analysis of 19th-century anti-slavery literature.

Among the significant scholarly contributions on Avellaneda is *Gender and the Politics of Literature: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, edited by María C. Albin, Megan Corbin, and Raúl Marrero-Fente. This comprehensive scholarly collection explores Avellaneda's multifaceted legacy as a pioneering feminist and abolitionist figure in Hispanic literature. The essays examine how her literary production—spanning poetry, fiction, and journalism—intersects with early feminist thought, political activism, and social justice debates. The editors emphasize her role in shaping feminist discourse not only in Cuba and Spain but across the Americas, highlighting how her writings challenged entrenched social and racial hierarchies through implicit and explicit critiques. The volume situates Avellaneda as both a literary innovator and a transatlantic intellectual whose work engaged with contemporary abolitionist and feminist movements (Albin et al., 2017). Within this collection, Julia C. Paulk's article, *Nothing to Hide: Sab as an Anti-Slavery and Feminist Novel*, offers an incisive analysis of *Sab* as a groundbreaking abolitionist text. Paulk situates Avellaneda firmly within 19th-century transnational abolitionist networks, demonstrating how *Sab* integrates anti-slavery arguments with feminist critiques of patriarchal and colonial power structures. She highlights *Sab* as one of the earliest Cuban novels to denounce slavery explicitly, emphasizing the novel's intersectional critique that links racial oppression with gender and colonial exploitation. Paulk's work foregrounds Avellaneda as a bold literary agent whose denunciation of slavery was unusual for her time, especially among female writers in Latin America and beyond (Paulk, 2017).

Further scholarship expands on *Sab*'s literary and cultural significance within Cuban and Latin American abolitionist discourse, often emphasizing the novel's complex portrayal of marginalized identities. For instance, Ismael López Martín's *La construcción literaria de las minorías en Sab, de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda [The literary construction of minorities in Sab, by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda]* argues that Avellaneda is a central figure in the canon of New World Romantic literature, whose nuanced treatment of enslaved people and women challenges prevailing stereotypes and social norms. López Martín contends that her literary strategies shed light on the ideological underpinnings of slavery and minority marginalization,

underscoring her importance not only as a canonical author but as a catalyst for social consciousness in 19th-century Hispanic America. His analysis emphasizes how *Sab* critiques ideological constructs that sustain slavery and exclusion, contributing to Avellaneda's legacy as a progressive thinker in both racial and gendered terms (López Martín, 2023).

Additionally, Adriana Méndez Rodenas' chapter, *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda as Literary Precursor and Transatlantic Intellectual*, in *The Cambridge History of Cuban Literature* (2024), articulates Avellaneda's extensive transatlantic influence. Rodenas examines Avellaneda's evolving feminist consciousness and her innovative engagement with themes of race, gender, and colonial critique, highlighting how *Sab* and other works extend beyond local contexts to engage with global abolitionist and feminist debates (Méndez Rodenas, 2024). Together, these works reveal a rich scholarly conversation that establishes *Sab* as a foundational text linking race, gender, and colonial critique within the broader Latin American abolitionist tradition. This growing body of research provides valuable insight into Avellaneda's complex contributions to 19th-century literature and politics, inspiring further comparative studies with contemporaneous abolitionist writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Significant scholarship also exists on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*. Sarah Brophy's *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" and the Politics of Interpretation* analyzes how the poem presents the fugitive slave woman's experience through a complex interplay of spiritual, racial, and political dimensions. Brophy argues that the poem situates the Runaway Slave between freedom and bondage by aligning her symbolically with the Pilgrim Fathers, who represent liberty, while exposing the persistent barriers that slavery imposes on her emancipation. The poem critiques slaveholders' moral failings through the slave's relationship with God, advocating an inclusive spirituality that transcends racial divisions. Brophy's interpretation reveals how Browning combines conservative religious imagery with a progressive abolitionist message, using narrative voice and symbolism to assert the slave's humanity and equality under divine authority, thus engaging deeply with abolitionist discourse through moral and literary means (Brophy, 1998).

In *Loci of Limitation and Liberation: Spatial Subjectivity in "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"*, Marilyn Walker explores the poem's use of geography and spatial relationships to express the fugitive slave's constrained subjectivity. Walker shows that neither the American South nor the North—symbolized by Pilgrim's Point—offers true freedom: the South enforces legal slavery, while the North leaves the fugitive vulnerable and marginalized. The poem's narrative repeatedly interrupts the slave woman's romantic, spiritual, and social ties, underscoring how no geographic space in antebellum America provides genuine liberation. Walker highlights spatial symbolism as a critical tool for understanding the enslaved woman's limited agency and the contradictions at the heart of freedom and bondage during the period (Walker, 2007).

Moreover, Yana Rowland's 2024 article, *Infanticide as Self-defacement: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point'*, examines the disturbing theme of infanticide in the poem. Rowland interprets the mother's act of killing her child as a tragic response to the brutal realities of slavery, where maternal sorrow is compounded by racial violence and systemic oppression. The essay explores the conflicted emotions experienced by the enslaved mother—her love for the child intertwined with horror at its destined life in bondage. Rowland argues that this act serves both as a profound resistance against white supremacist control and a form of self-defacement, revealing the severe limits placed on the slave woman's agency and humanity. The infanticide symbolizes the devastating impact of slavery on family, identity, and survival (Rowland, 2024). Overall, the poem's intricate use of historical allusion, imagery, and emotional appeal continue to attract scholarly attention, reinforcing Browning's legacy as a key figure in Victorian abolitionist literature who merges artistic expression with social activism.

Despite extensive individual scholarship on Avellaneda and Browning, there remains a notable absence of comprehensive comparative studies focused on these authors' abolitionist writings. This gap underscores the originality and importance of the present research, which proposes a novel transatlantic comparative approach bridging Latin American and British abolitionist literature. By examining *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* together, the study uncovers shared struggles and diverse experiences across the Afro-Atlantic world related to slavery and emancipation. This comparative analysis enriches understanding of abolitionism as a global, interconnected movement and a literary phenomenon, advancing scholarship in hemispheric and world literature studies.

III. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*: Feminism and Abolitionism in Nineteenth-Century Latin American Literature

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814–1873) was a Cuban-born Spanish writer and a major figure of 19th-century Romantic literature. Born in Puerto Príncipe (now Camagüey), Cuba, she relocated to Spain in 1836, spending most of her life there except for a return to Cuba between 1859 and 1863. Avellaneda achieved renown as a poet, playwright, and novelist, producing a prolific body of work that combined classical influences with a deeply personal Romantic vision. She was celebrated for her lyrical poetry, historically and biblically inspired dramas, and pointed social critiques. Often regarded as a precursor to modern feminism, her writings challenged prevailing patriarchal and racial norms of her era (Albin, 2002).

Her novel *Sab* (1841) stands as her most significant contribution to abolitionist and Latin American literature. Set in Cuba, the novel centers on Sab, a mulatto slave secretly in love with his white mistress, Carlota. The novel critiques the inhumanity of slavery and the social hierarchies perpetuating racial and gender inequality. First published in Madrid, *Sab* was controversial and banned in Cuba for unveiling the brutal realities of colonial slave society. It integrates abolitionist and feminist themes by challenging the institution of slavery and

critiquing the complicity of colonial and patriarchal power structures (Pastor, 2003; Miller, 1983). While overshadowed today by her poetry, *Sab* remains foundational within Latin American abolitionist discourse.

Moreover, Avellaneda holds a pivotal place among 19th-century abolitionist writers for producing *Sab*, recognized as the first abolitionist novel in the Americas—published a decade before Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)—and the only feminist-abolitionist novel by a woman in Spain or its slaveholding colonies. Unlike contemporaneous works by male authors like Anselmo Suárez y Romero (*Francisco*, c. 1839) or Cirilo Villaverde (*Cecilia Valdés*, 1839), which focused primarily on racial injustice, *Sab* innovatively parallels the enslavement of Black bodies with women's subjugation under patriarchy, creating a dual critique that elevated abolitionism beyond racial confines to encompass gender oppression (Pastor, 2006). This intersectional approach, combined with its Romantic emphasis on the enslaved protagonist's moral superiority and humanity, positioned Avellaneda as a trailblazer whose work anticipated later transnational feminist and anti-slavery discourses, influencing Cuba's independence and abolition movements leading to the Ten Years' War (1868–1878).

In the historical context of the novel, Cuba's sugar economy in the 1830s–1840s relied heavily on slavery, with approximately 370,000–400,000 enslaved Africans fueling plantation wealth amid Spain's gradual abolition elsewhere (Britain emancipated in 1833; full Spanish abolition came in 1886) (Knight, 1977). Intellectual ferment brewed through secret societies like the Aponte conspiracy (1812), alongside liberal creole discontent with colonial rule. Influenced by Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) echoes and European Romanticism, early abolitionist literature emerged, but *Sab*'s publication coincided with rising censorship as Spanish authorities suppressed antislavery sentiment to protect economic interests. Avellaneda's Madrid-based critique thus operated within a transatlantic tension between metropolitan liberalism and colonial repression, making her intervention both daring and immediately banned in Cuba.

Nevertheless, *Sab* elicited sharp contemporary backlash in Cuba for its “subversive” interracial romance and slave-sympathizing narrative, banned upon publication and sparking accusations of moral corruption from colonial authorities and plantocracy figures who viewed it as inciting unrest ((Barreto, 2006). Critics like Domingo del Monte praised its artistry privately but distanced publicly, while later Spanish conservatives decried its Romantic excesses as unladylike for a woman author (Paulk, 2017). Modern postcolonial scholars debate its racial politics—some faulting *Sab*'s tragic passivity as reinforcing noble savage stereotypes—yet feminist readings celebrate its proto-intersectionality (Williams, 2008; Schlau, 986; Paulk, 2017). Nationalist interpreters occasionally critique Avellaneda's Spanish residency as diluting Cuban authenticity, underscoring ongoing tensions in her transnational legacy.

Thus, *Sab* exemplifies Avellaneda's dedication to social justice through literature, employing the voice of an enslaved man to interrogate love, loyalty, and human rights, while

dramatizing the injustices of slavery and emphasizing the protagonist's humanity and moral integrity. Its depiction of interracial love, social exclusion, and resistance to oppression characterizes it as both a Romantic and an early abolitionist work in Latin American literary tradition. Avellaneda's nuanced critique extends beyond abolitionism, addressing broader social and gender inequalities by intertwining the experiences of racialized and gendered subjects within the colonial framework (Barreto, 2006).

Throughout her life, Avellaneda faced personal and social contradictions. Born into a wealthy family with slave-owning ties, she nonetheless condemned slavery in her writings. She endured significant personal hardship and societal censure, including ending an arranged marriage and losing a child born out of wedlock, experiences that informed her feminist perspective. Throughout her career, she navigated the literary and social contexts of both Cuba and Spain, earning respect and awards but facing obstacles such as being denied admission to the Royal Spanish Academy due to her gender (Miller, 1983). Her work connected her with prominent literary and political figures, and she used her stature to advocate for women's literary expression. As scholar Catherine Davies observes, *Sab* "is the only feminist-abolitionist novel published by a woman in nineteenth-century Spain or its slaveholding colony Cuba" (Davies, 2001, p. 1).

In sum, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's literary legacy, especially as epitomized in *Sab*, stands as significant cultural artifact illuminating Afro-Atlantic abolitionist history and the feminist Romantic tradition. Her writing bridges Latin American and European cultures, offering incisive critique on slavery, colonialism, and patriarchy in the nineteenth century. By foregrounding marginalized voices and themes, Avellaneda contributed to shaping abolitionist thought and continues to be a key figure in the history of feminist and anti-slavery literature.

IV. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*: Race, Resistance, and Abolitionism in Victorian Poetry

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) was a seminal English poet renowned for her passionate engagement with critical social issues, notably the abolition of slavery. As a prominent figure in the Victorian literary landscape, Browning harnessed her poetry as a powerful instrument to confront injustice, oppression, and affirm human dignity. Her body of work combines emotional depth with intellectual rigor, situating her among the foremost poets of the 19th century. Beyond her literary influence, Browning maintained correspondence with political activists and actively championed progressive causes including abolitionism and women's rights, embodying these ideals throughout her public and literary life (Wynter, 2018).

Her poem *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* (1847) is a compelling dramatic monologue voiced by a Black enslaved woman who has escaped bondage in North America and arrived at the historic shores where the Pilgrim Fathers first landed. The poem confronts the deep-seated hypocrisy embedded within American ideological foundations by juxtaposing the mythic narrative of liberty with the brutal reality of racial slavery. Browning's vivid imagery and

poignant voice articulate the suffering, resilience, and resistance of enslaved individuals—especially women—while exploring themes of spiritual anguish, racial identity, and systemic injustice. This poem holds a distinguished position within British abolitionist literature for illuminating the racial violence inherent in slavery and offering a trenchant critique of colonial legacies through the amplified voice of a marginalized subject (Battles, 1991; Keirstead, 2022).

Browning's significance among abolitionist literature of her time stems from her innovative use of the dramatic monologue form to grant an authentic voice to the enslaved, distinguishing her work from male-authored prose narratives like those of Harriet Martineau or Thomas Clarkson. Published just before the 1848 European revolutions and amid Britain's post-emancipation moral reckoning, *The Runaway Slave* elevated poetry as a transatlantic abolitionist weapon, bridging British guilt over colonial slavery with American hypocrisy (Brophy, 1998; Byrd, 2016). Unlike contemporaries focusing on economic arguments, Browning foregrounded the enslaved woman's subjective trauma and maternal anguish, pioneering intersectional feminist abolitionism that influenced later activists like Julia Ward Howe and resonated across the Atlantic in works like Frederick Douglass's narratives.

In the historical context of Britain, the late 1840s marked peak abolitionist fervor following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, yet public attention shifted to “free labor” critiques of American slavery amid the 1846 Corn Laws repeal and Irish Famine. Evangelical societies like the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society mobilized transatlantic networks, with women's petitions flooding Parliament while fugitive slave narratives fueled moral outrage (Sinha, 2016). Browning's poem, commissioned for the 1848 Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar, tapped this zeitgeist by weaponizing Pilgrim mythology against U.S. exceptionalism, aligning with liberal reformers like Lord Brougham who condemned the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) as barbaric. Her intervention thus crystallized Britain's post-imperial abolitionist identity during a decade of revolutionary upheaval.

Nevertheless, *The Runaway Slave* faced criticism from contemporaries wary of its graphic violence and infanticide motif, with some reviewers like the *Athenaeum* decrying its “hysterical” tone as unbecoming a lady poet, while American pro-slavery apologists dismissed it as foreign meddling (Hupf, 1995; Miller, 2014). Later Victorian formalists faulted its political didacticism over aesthetic purity, and 20th-century New Critics marginalized it amid her “Sonnet 43” fame. Postcolonial scholars critique its white-authored ventriloquism of Black subjectivity as appropriative, echoing Edward Said's Orientalism concerns, though recent feminist readings by Tricia Lootens rehabilitate it as proto-trauma testimony (Lootens, 1996). These debates underscore the poem's enduring provocation within abolitionist canons.

However, *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* intricately explores the intersectionality of race and gender, portraying the protagonist's multifaceted emotional landscape—marked by love, loss, and defiance in the face of brutal oppression. Browning's evocative imagery, including the metaphor of “prison bars” of blackness and the haunting silence of God amid relentless suffering, powerfully conveys the psychological and physical traumas inflicted by

slavery. Through metaphorical and literal violence borne by the Runaway Slave, the narrative exposes the oppressive social order sustained by white supremacy. The narrative's emotional depth and symbolic complexity invite readers to engage empathetically with the enslaved woman's perspective, establishing the work as a pioneering anti-slavery text that foregrounds human dignity and the unwavering quest for freedom (Daley, 2021).

Furthermore, Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* offers a robust critique of colonial foundations and religious hypocrisy by ironically addressing the settlers who professed to champion liberty while perpetuating slavery. The poem starkly contrasts the Puritan settlers' fervent prayers for freedom with the blunt unfreedom endured by enslaved peoples, revealing profound contradictions and moral failures within American society. Browning's work represents a radical reexamination of historical narratives, reclaiming the voice of the oppressed to challenge prevailing myths and illuminate entrenched systemic injustice. The poem culminates with the protagonist's tragic yet resolute defiance, symbolizing resistance amid profound suffering and condemning a society complicit in cruelty and silence (Walker, 2007).

Overall, Browning's abolitionist poem endures as a significant literary achievement within the 19th-century British literary canon and the broader global abolitionist discourse. It melds artistic excellence with fervent advocacy against slavery, giving voice to the silenced and marginalized. Through *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, Browning encourages readers to critically reflect on race, power, and human rights, advancing abolitionist ideals by transforming poetry into an instrument of social justice. Her work continues to be studied for its emotional intensity, historical significance, and its enduring contribution to literary activism.

V. Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic Theory: Hybridity, Diaspora, and Abolitionist Discourse

The Black Atlantic approach, first articulated by Paul Gilroy, reframes the transatlantic historical and cultural exchanges involving African-descended peoples as a dynamic, interconnected space of resistance, creativity, and identity formation. It emphasizes the agency and mobility of Black individuals within the Atlantic world, rejecting narratives that cast them solely as victims of slavery and colonialism. By focusing on the circulation of ideas, people, and cultural forms between Africa, the Americas, and Europe, this approach reveals how African diasporic communities forged shared identities and political solidarities that nurtured abolitionist and anti-colonial movements (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 4-5).

Paul Gilroy's foundational work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* offers a transformative framework for understanding African diasporic identities and cultures as intrinsically transnational and intercultural. Gilroy critiques the reduction of Blackness to fixed national or ethnic identities, arguing instead for the concept of a Black Atlantic culture that transcends geographical and political boundaries. He writes,

“cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis... to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 15).

Central to this conception is the shared history of slavery and displacement, which serves as the basis for collective experiences and cultural production across the Atlantic world. So, the Black Atlantic framework is based on the recognition of hybridity and cross-cultural dialogue that shaped the experiences and expressions of enslaved and free Black people. It highlights how these groups navigated complex realities marked by displacement, oppression, and survival (Tunç, 2009; Mambrol, 2017). Abolitionist literature from across the Atlantic—whether originating in Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States, or Europe—reflects this hybridity and interconnectedness. These works often articulate common themes of freedom and bondage, racial and gendered violence, and the struggle for human dignity, illustrating interconnected political and cultural movements against slavery.

The framework also focuses on the active roles Black people played in shaping abolitionist discourse, challenging reductive portrayals of passivity. Through narratives, poetry, songs, and other cultural expressions, African-descended peoples asserted their humanity and resistance, both preserving cultural traditions and innovating new forms that spoke to their transatlantic realities (Lebron, 2017). The Black Atlantic perspective underscores that abolitionist literature is as much about cultural survival and identity formation as it is about political emancipation, providing a holistic understanding of how these texts functioned within broader networks of struggle and expression.

Although Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* are authored by non-Black writers, these texts engage Black Atlantic discourses by representing diasporic agency within Gilroy's mapped hybridity, extending analysis to non-Black voices in abolitionist networks. Applying Gilroy's framework not only amplifies the hybrid discourses he maps but also reveals the depth of transatlantic cultural and political dialogue in anti-slavery writings. Both texts articulate intertwined experiences of race, gender, and colonial violence that reflect the hybridity central to Black Atlantic identities. Through *Sab*, Avellaneda expresses Cuban and wider Latin American abolitionist concerns about racial injustice and social hierarchies, while Browning's poem gives voice to the anguish and resistance of enslaved women within the United States. Seen through Gilroy's lens, these works participate in the broader narrative of Black Atlantic culture by negotiating the tension between roots—ancestral and local histories—and routes—the shared diasporic trajectories shaped by slavery and emancipation. Their literary engagement with abolitionism thus illustrates how diverse voices challenged national and racial boundaries, reflecting common struggles against slavery and oppression.

VI. Thematic Analysis Methodology: Uncovering Afro-Atlantic Agency

Application of Gilroy's Black Atlantic Theory to the texts of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* requires a rigorous methodology to uncover the similarities and differences in Afro-Atlantic agency across different regions. In this respect, thematic analysis is an appropriate and effective qualitative

research method. It systematically identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes within textual data, allowing for an organized interpretation of complex qualitative information (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis proceeds through several stages: becoming thoroughly familiar with the texts (familiarization), generating initial codes (coding), searching for themes among those codes (theme development), grouping codes into coherent themes reflecting patterns in the data (reviewing and refining the themes), articulating what each theme means and how it relates to the theoretical framework (defining and naming the finalized themes), and ultimately producing a detailed analytical report (reporting) (Ibid.). Its primary strength lies in its flexibility to synthesize diverse data into coherent thematic patterns, revealing both explicit and implicit meanings. Furthermore, it enables the researcher to actively construct nuanced interpretations grounded in the data while maintaining openness to theoretical insights, such as those provided by Gilroy's Black Atlantic framework, without being constrained by a rigid methodological blueprint.

Thematic analysis guided by Gilroy's Black Atlantic Theory begins with careful coding through close and repeated readings of abolitionist texts to identify concepts that represent Black Atlantic agency. These include codes such as "racial self-assertion," "embodied revolt," "diasporic solidarity," and "activist discourse," which capture the political, intellectual, and cultural dimensions of agency across diasporic communities. These initial codes reflect Gilroy's focus on cultural hybridity and transnational connectivity, emphasizing the fluid interplay of identities and histories beyond national and ethnic borders. Subsequently, the codes are inductively grouped into broader thematic patterns through rigorous reflexivity, detailed journaling, and intercoder reliability checks. This systematic reflexivity ensures that themes such as resistance, empowerment, transatlantic connections, intersectionality, and narrative voice are not abstract concepts but are deeply informed by Gilroy's framing of the Black Atlantic as a hybrid, transnational space of cultural exchange and transformative political engagement. This process not only situates the thematic analysis within Gilroy's dialectic of roots and routes, cultural memory, and ongoing struggles for freedom, but also offers a refined framework for producing detailed analytical reports from abolitionist literary texts as they relate to the broader transatlantic diasporic experience.

Accordingly, thematic analysis, informed by Black Atlantic Theory, categorizes critical patterns in abolitionist literature into the following key themes: 1) Resistance and Empowerment—the ways in which enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals assert agency in the face of oppression; 2) Intellectual and Political Leadership—the role of African-descended figures as thinkers, writers, and activists shaping abolitionist movements; 3) Transatlantic Connections—the exchange and interplay of abolitionist ideas and movements across Africa, the Americas, and Europe; 4) Intersectionality—the interconnected impact of race, gender, and class on experiences of enslavement and emancipation; 5) Revolution and Emancipation—representations of collective rebellions, such as the Haitian Revolution, as

expressions of Black sovereignty and freedom; and 6) Narrative Voice and Representation—how literature articulates and amplifies marginalized Afro-Atlantic perspectives. These themes provide a structured and nuanced lens through which to analyze abolitionist literature, enabling a deep exploration of the complex dynamics of freedom struggles and cultural production across the Atlantic world.

VII. Thematic Exploration of Abolitionism in Avellaneda's *Sab* and Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*

Avellaneda's *Sab* and Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* stand as pioneering abolitionist and feminist literary works in nineteenth-century literature, addressing the interconnected oppressions of slavery, colonialism, feminism and patriarchy. Both Avellaneda and Browning, one in prose and another in poem, employ narrative form to illuminate the Afro-Atlantic struggle against dehumanizing oppression, giving voice to marginalized protagonists silenced within their societies. Using Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory as a critical framework, the following analysis delves into *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* to explore key themes including resistance and empowerment, intellectual and political leadership, transatlantic connections, intersectionality of race and gender, revolution and emancipation, and the role of narrative voice and representation.

VII. I. Resistance and Empowerment

Resistance in both Avellaneda's *Sab* and Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* originates from the protagonists' recognition of their social condition as enslaved subjects and gradually transforms into a moral awakening that fosters empowerment. Through this process of awareness, both Sab and the Runaway Slave confront the violence and dehumanization imposed by the slaveholding order, moving from endurance to active resistance.

In *Sab*, the protagonist's internal struggle reflects a profound consciousness of social injustice. In his conversation with Enrique Otway, Sab reveals his resigned yet reflective understanding of his birth into bondage:

“¡Mi libertad!... sin duda es cosa muy dulce la libertad... pero yo nací esclavo: era esclavo desde el vientre de mi madre, y ya... [My freedom!... freedom is undoubtedly a very sweet thing... but I was born a slave: I was a slave from my mother's womb, and already...]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. I, p. 23)

This self-awareness deepens into a moral revolt when Sab recognizes the broader inequities of colonial society:

“¡Entonces recordé también que era vástago de una raza envilecida!... Entonces mi corazón, abrasado de amor y de celos, palpité por primera vez de indignación... Imbécil sociedad, que nos ha reducido a la necesidad de aborrecerla, y fundar nuestra dicha en su total ruina! [Then I also remembered that I was offspring of a degraded race!... Then my heart, burning with love and jealousy, palpitated for the first time with indignation... Foolish society, which has reduced

us to the necessity of hating it, and to founding our happiness in its total ruin!]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, pp. 11-12)

Here, Sab's indignation transforms his suffering into insight and criticism of a hypocritical society that denies natural equality. His discourse moves beyond personal anguish to articulate a universal call for justice and freedom, aligning moral resistance with emotional truth.

Similarly, Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* presents resistance as a form of spiritual defiance shaped by recognition of racial oppression. The enslaved woman's declaration captures the despair and rebellion of those condemned by racial hierarchy:

"We were black, we were black! / We had no claim to love and bliss: / What marvel, if each turned to lack?" (Browning, 1847, XIV. Lines 1-3)

Her repeated acknowledgment of "blackness" underscores the imposed identity that confines her existence within "prison bars," yet it also becomes a space of assertion and survival:

"But we who are dark, we are dark! / Ah, God, we have no stars! / About our souls in care and cark / Our blackness shuts like prison bars..." (Browning, 1847, VI. Lines 1-4)

Despite her suffering, she reclaims her humanity by bearing witness to her pain. Her voice transforms from lamentation into resistance, challenging divine and human silence alike.

Empowerment in both works arises from this synthesis of suffering and defiance. In *Sab*, the enslaved protagonist attains moral transcendence through love and sacrifice, viewing his emotional purity as a redemptive force:

"El amor es la más bella y pura de las pasiones del hombre... En esta hora suprema, en que víctima suya me inmolo en el altar del dolor, paréceme que mi destino no ha sido innoble ni vulgar... El amor y el dolor elevan el alma, y Dios se revela a los mártires de todo culto puro y noble. [Love is the most beautiful and pure passion of man... In this supreme hour, in which I sacrifice myself as its victim on the altar of pain, it seems to me that my destiny has not been ignoble or vulgar... Love and pain elevate the soul, and God reveals himself to the martyrs of every pure and noble cult.]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 139)

Here, Sab becomes a "mártir de amor [martyr of love]," transforming subjugation into spiritual nobility. His sorrow becomes an instrument of empowerment, granting moral superiority over his oppressors.

In Browning's poem, empowerment culminates in the profoundly tragic act of infanticide—a gesture that resists the systemic perpetuation of slavery. The speaker's deliberate refusal to let her child live under bondage becomes a radical assertion of agency:

"My own, own child! I could not bear / To look in his face, it was so white... / And he moaned and struggled, as well might be, / For the white child wanted his liberty—Ha, ha! he wanted his master right." (Browning, 1847, XVIII.)

Her laughter, both sarcastic and defiant, exposes the grotesque irony of a society that sanctifies white liberty while denying freedom to the enslaved. Through this ultimate act of resistance, she seizes a moral and symbolic power denied to her by the world, overturning the master-slave relationship by reclaiming control over life and death.

While both protagonists achieve an awakening through resistance, their paths toward empowerment reveal striking differences shaped by genre, gender, and authorial context. Sab's empowerment is expressed through introspection and moral martyrdom rooted in Romantic idealism. His resistance unfolds within a reflective interior space, where emotional and ethical reasoning elevate his humanity above his oppressors. His suffering becomes a purifying force that ennoble him, aligning with Avellaneda's humanistic and spiritual vision of redemption through love and morality. By contrast, Browning's heroine achieves empowerment through physical rebellion and an act of existential rupture. Her resistance is not contemplative but embodied; it manifests through violent refusal—a protest against both the racial order and the maternal norms that enslaved women were forced to embody.

Furthermore, gender inflects each narrative's conception of power. Avellaneda's male protagonist resists oppression through moral virtue and intellectual depth, reflecting a Romantic ideal of suffering that purifies the soul. Browning's female speaker, however, channels her empowerment through transgression and corporeal defiance. Her rebellion disrupts the patriarchal symbolism of motherhood itself, turning her act of infanticide into both a personal and political gesture of emancipation. This fundamental divergence underscores the hemispheric and gendered dimensions of abolitionist resistance: Avellaneda envisions liberation as spiritual elevation within colonial hierarchy, while Browning transforms resistance into radical revolt against systemic and theological injustice.

In both *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, resistance and empowerment emerge not only as oppositional acts but as moral, emotional, and spiritual affirmations of dignity. Sab and Browning's unnamed heroine transcend their imposed limitations, converting pain into consciousness and suffering into defiant strength—embodying the Black Atlantic ideal of self-realization through struggle and agency.

VII. II. Intellectual and Political Leadership

Intellectual and political leadership in *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* is manifested through the protagonists' capacity to articulate critical perspectives on slavery and society, rather than conventional political mobilization or direct leadership of abolitionist movements. Both Sab and Browning's unnamed heroine serve as spokespersons for the moral consciousness of their communities, challenging the values and prejudices that sustain their oppression.

Avellaneda's *Sab*, while rejecting active participation in organized rebellion, displays profound intellectual leadership through self-aware critique and ethical discourse. When Teresa suspects Sab of instigating slave conspiracies, he responds, “los esclavos arrastran pacientemente su cadena; acaso sólo necesitan para romperla oír una voz que les grite: ¡Sois hombres! pero esa voz no será la mía, podéis crearlo. [The slaves patiently drag their chains; perhaps they only need to hear a voice that shouts to them: ‘You are men!’ in order to break it, but that voice will not be mine, you may believe.]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, pp.

12-13) Through such confessions, Sab demarcates his leadership as internal and philosophical, characterized by introspective struggle rather than public activism. Instead of leading an army or inciting revolt, Sab's intellect becomes a site of resistance: "Me atreví a formar absurdas suposiciones!... la había también instruido de que se encerraba en el cuerpo de un sér degradado, proscrito por la sociedad, envilecido por los hombres... [I dared to form absurd suppositions!... I had also taught her that it was enclosed in the body of a degraded being, outlawed by society, degraded by men...]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 21) By transcending the limitations imposed upon him and imagining a world of radical equality and justice—"gran nombre: ¡la virtud!... ¿la virtud puede ser relativa?... ¿No tienen todos las mismas necesidades, las mismas pasiones, los mismos defectos? [Great name: Virtue! ... Can virtue be relative? ... Do not all have the same needs, the same passions, the same defects?]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 131)—Sab enacts an abolitionist consciousness at the heart of Avellaneda's novel, rendering enslaved subjectivity into a political force capable of contesting colonial codes and asserting universal humanity.

At multiple points in his narrative, Sab's reflections extend beyond personal anguish to interrogate the very foundations of moral law and religious authority, highlighting the deficiency of "virtue" prescribed to slaves by their oppressors. His meditation—"Es que en mí hay una facultad inmensa de amar; es que vos tenéis el valor de la resistencia y yo la energía de la actividad; es que a vos os sostiene la razón y a mí me devora el sentimiento [It is that in me there is an immense capacity to love; it is that you have the courage of resistance and I the energy of activity; it is that reason supports you and feeling devours me.]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 134)—maps out the potential for intellectual and emotional solidarity among the oppressed. Avellaneda's broader abolitionist and feminist activism is evident in her published essays and participation in transnational intellectual networks, providing discursive spaces for social justice and women's emancipation. Within the text, Sab's interior life functions as a vehicle for collective critique, making the novel itself a pioneering act of political intervention in nineteenth-century Cuban society.

In *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, intellectual and political leadership takes shape through the poem's dramatization of individual testimony and communal address. Browning's heroine commands agency not as an organizer but as a voice of conscience: "I am black, I am black; / And yet God made me, they say. / But if He did so, smiling back / He must have cast His work away..." (Browning, 1847, IV. Lines 1-4) The speaker's invocation of spiritual and natural imagery ("little dark bird sits and sings... the sweetest stars are made to pass / O'er the face of the darkest night" (Browning, 1847, V.)) affirms the dignity of the marginalized, contesting religious and social exclusion with poetic argument and emotional force.

As the poem unfolds, her rhetoric transitions from personal suffering to a call for solidarity and action ("Up to the mountains, lift your hands, / O slaves, and end what I begun!" (Browning, 1847, XXXIII. Lines 6-7) articulating abolitionist leadership through resistance, suffering, and critique. Browning's subject narrates the journey toward self-recognition: "And from that hour

our spirits grew / As free as if unsold, unbought... / strong enough, since we were two / To conquer the world, we thought!" (Browning, 1847, X. Lines 1-4) Love and unity become bases for reclaiming worth, while the speaker's address to "pilgrim-souls" exposes the disparity between American ideals and lived realities, demanding moral accountability and political change.

Both texts locate abolitionist leadership not in formal organization but in the intellectual and affective capacity to expose, imagine, and demand justice. Avellaneda's Sab, through inwardness and philosophical debate, and Browning's slave-woman, through testimonial lyric and collective address, perform crucial roles as thinkers and cultural activists within transatlantic abolitionist discourse. Their literary voices serve as powerful vehicles for social critique, reshaping public understanding and helping to establish the foundational narratives of both feminism and abolitionism.

While both works showcase protagonists as intellectual and moral leaders, their paths are shaped by distinct strategies and cultural contexts. Sab's leadership is articulated through reflective dialogue and ethical questioning, distancing himself from overt political mobilization—he repeatedly declines to incite large-scale revolt, preferring to critique the system's morality through introspection and private conversations. Embedded in Cuban and Spanish colonial context, Sab embodies the Romantic ideal of the "thinking slave," whose wisdom challenges the justice of colonial codes but channels action into provoking societal reflection rather than direct collective uprising.

In contrast, Browning's poem utilizes the power of public address and testimonial lyric to foreground a more confrontational intellectual and political stance. The slave-woman's voice is directed outward—to "pilgrim-souls," slaveholders, and the broader community—asserting her authority as a spokesperson for the oppressed. Her leadership arises from direct engagement with forces of oppression: "Up to the mountains, lift your hands, O slaves, and end what I begun!" (Browning, 1847, XXXIII. Lines 6-7) The narrative structure enables her to move from victimization to activism, repurposing suffering into a call for collective action and moral reckoning. Browning, writing for the Victorian English public, shapes a character whose leadership emerges through indictment, protest, and radical empathy—making the enslaved woman's voice central in the abolitionist struggle. Where Sab invites reflection and spiritual transcendence, Browning's heroine insists on concrete action and transformation, pushing abolitionism beyond interior conviction to external change.

VII. III. Transatlantic Connections

Transatlantic connections in *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* are foregrounded through both texts' engagement with the historical realities and consequences of colonization and slavery, as experienced on both sides of the Atlantic. Avellaneda's *Sab* draws explicit lines between Africa and the Americas, centering its narrative on the trauma and transformation wrought by the forced mobility and commodification of African lives. Sab reveals, "Mi madre

vino al mundo en un país donde su color no era un signo de esclavitud: ...nació libre y princesa...fue vendida en éste como esclava, [My mother came into the world in a country where her color was not a sign of slavery: ...she was born free and a princess...she was sold in this one as a slave,]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. I, p. 20) underscoring the abrupt shift from freedom on the “costas del Congo [coasts of Congo]” to bondage in Cuba. This narrative highlights not just individual suffering, but the ongoing effects of the transatlantic slave trade—depopulation, exploitation, and cultural erasure.

Throughout the novel, Sab denounces the brutal conditions of plantation life: “bajo este cielo de fuego el esclavo casi desnudo trabaja toda la mañana sin descanso...alimentado por una escasa ración, [Under this fiery sky, the almost naked slave works all morning without rest...fed only by a meager ration,]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. I, p. 15) situating these hardships as symptomatic of larger colonial economies rooted in transatlantic exploitation. Carlota’s lament for indigenous and African peoples—“jamás he podido...leer tranquilamente la historia sangrienta de la conquista de América [I have never been able...to calmly read the bloody history of the conquest of America]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. I, p. 136)—reflects a Romantic nostalgia for precolonial innocence and critiques the violence of European arrival. Avellaneda’s narrative style, interwoven with liberal and Romantic ideals, places Cuban abolitionism in dialogue with European Enlightenment values, responding to Rousseau and other transatlantic thinkers in its advocacy for justice and equality. Her critical approach situates *Sab* firmly within an Atlantic discourse on freedom, social progress, and cultural exchange.

Likewise, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point* situates American slavery within the wider history of transatlantic colonialism. The setting at Plymouth Rock—the symbolic arrival point of the Pilgrim Fathers—serves as a backdrop for reflecting on liberty’s betrayal: “I STAND on the mark beside the shore / Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee...God was thanked for liberty.” (Browning, 1847, I. Lines 1-4) Browning’s speaker invokes the ghosts of the pilgrims and confronts their descendants’ perpetuation of systemic racial violence: “O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!...ye are born of the Washington-race: / And this land is the free America.” (Browning, 1847, II. Line 1; Browning, 1847, XXXII. Lines 4-5) The poem’s narrative links foundational European-American ideals with the legacy of slavery, exposing transatlantic continuities in oppression and moral contradiction.

As the poem progresses, Browning intertwines British abolitionist critique with American realities: “Up to the mountains, lift your hands, / O slaves, and end what I begun!” (Browning, 1847, XXXIII. Lines 6-7)—her protagonist’s call for collective emancipation resonates with abolitionist movements on both sides of the Atlantic, suggesting the poem’s activist intent within an international context. The vivid references to whippings, forced labor, and forced family separations situate the slave’s suffering within broader patterns of Atlantic exploitation and challenge the mythologies of national innocence and exceptionalism.

Despite these shared transatlantic frameworks, *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point* differ significantly in how they conceptualize and represent cross-Atlantic relationships

and legacies. Avellaneda's *Sab* engages the Atlantic largely from the perspective of Cuba's colonial morality and socio-economic realities, connecting African origins, Caribbean suffering, and European intellectual traditions in a tapestry that critiques diverse forms of oppression, including race, gender, and class. The narrative's focus on personal experience, blended with historical meditation, favors nuanced solidarity between marginalized groups—slaves and women—while embracing both local and imported traditions for constructing resistance.

By contrast, Browning's approach in *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* uses the direct confrontation with white colonial inheritance—embodied in the “pilgrim-souls”—to dramatize transatlantic hypocrisy and rupture. Her protagonist operates less within a framework of local or communal solidarity, and more through overt public protest, indicting America's founding ideals and starkly exposing the “adverse rows” between “two kinds of men” created by colonial policy. Browning's poem leverages British abolitionist discourse to interrogate American identity, casting the Atlantic crossing as a site of broken promises and challenging readers across national boundaries to reckon with shared responsibility for slavery's legacy.

Further, while Avellaneda's abolitionism is marked by the integration of European philosophical ideals and sentimental Romanticism into Cuban literature, Browning's poem is more explicitly activist and polemical, shaped by the print culture and mass political movements of Victorian England. These divergent strategies reflect each author's distinct positionality within the Atlantic world, demonstrating how comparative abolitionist literature not only bridges hemispheric divides, but also reveals tensions and differences in literary form, agency, and vision.

VII. IV. Intersectionality

Intersectionality in *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* is central to the Black Atlantic approach, which views the Atlantic as a complex, unitary space of transnational oppression and resistance, shaped by the interlocking forces of race, gender, and class. Both works illustrate how lived experiences of subjugation are constructed at the crossroads of multiple social hierarchies, prompting nuanced critiques of domination and creating foundations for solidarity among the oppressed.

Avellaneda's *Sab* intricately explores the interplay of race, gender, and class by presenting characters who transgress typical boundaries: Sab (racially mixed and enslaved), Carlota (white and privileged), and Teresa (a woman whose social position is limited by gender). Through Sab's hopeless love and his conversations with Teresa—“no, señora, no hay tampoco amor ni esposa para mí... Ninguna mujer puede amarme, ninguna querrá unir su suerte a la del pobre mulato [No, madam, there is neither love nor wife for me... No woman can love me, no one will want to unite her fate with that of the poor mulatto]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 41)—the novel foregrounds the multi-layered inferiority that a mulatto slave suffers, not only as a man in a patriarchal and classist society, but also in relation to white and Criolla women.

Sab's reflections on women's condition—"las mujeres... arrastran pacientemente su cadena... El esclavo al menos puede cambiar de amo... pero la mujer... oye al monstruo... que le grita: En la tumba [Women... patiently drag their chains... The slave at least can change masters... but the woman... hears the monster... who shouts to her: In the grave]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 143)—expose the parallelism between slavery and the "chains" of gendered oppression. The text repeatedly sympathizes with women's plight, critiquing legal and social norms that subjugate both slaves and women, and calls for spiritual equality—"Dios es el Dios de los débiles como de los fuertes [God is the God of the weak as well as the strong]" (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 144)—while challenging man-made codes of virtue and obedience.

The novel challenges traditional binaries and reflects the "mutual complementarity" of race and gender dynamics, suggesting that abolition and feminism are interconnected struggles against oppression. The alliance between Sab, Carlota, and Teresa exemplifies a "solidarity between marginalized groups": each character is silenced and disempowered within colonial discourse, and their moments of recognition and alliance reflect a metaphoric kinship among the colonially oppressed. Critics debate the limits of this approach, noting that while Avellaneda advocates explicit denunciation of all forms of coercion, her text still sometimes falls short of imagining full intersectional sisterhood across lines of color and class. Nonetheless, *Sab* stands as an early, ground-breaking protest novel combining abolitionist argument and protofeminist critique, linking the double binds faced by women and people of color in colonial Latin America.

In *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, Browning sharpens the focus on the compounded oppressions of race and gender through her enslaved woman protagonist. The poem repeatedly emphasizes the vulnerability produced by blackness and womanhood: "We were black, we were black! / We had no claim to love and bliss... They wrung my cold hands out of his... They dragged him..." (Browning, 1847, XIV. Lines 1-5) Here, sexual violence and forced motherhood ("I wore a child upon my breast... an amulet that hung too slack" (Browning, 1847, XVI. Lines 2-3)) emerge as poignant manifestations of intersectional injustice. The speaker endures forced separation from her lover, rape, and the agony of enslaved motherhood, denied even the solace of mourning: "They would not leave me for my dull / Wet eyes!... it was too merciful / To let me weep pure tears and die." (Browning, 1847, XV. Lines 5-7)) Browning's narrative foregrounds how race and gender intersect to shape suffering and resistive agency, revealing the deep entanglement of racial, sexual, and bodily violence at the heart of slavery.

The speaker's recollection of being whipped ("ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place" (Browning, 1847, XXXII. Line 7)) and her lament for "our wounds... different" (Browning, 1847, XXXV. Line 1) deepens this critique, dramatizing how legal punishments, sexual exploitation, and familial rupture all converge in her experience as a black woman under slavery. Browning's poetic voice thus advances an abolitionist agenda inseparable from

profeminism, drawing attention to the interconnected nature of racial and gender injustice within American and transatlantic slavery.

Despite these intersections, *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* reveal important differences in their negotiation of race, gender, and class. Avellaneda approaches intersectionality through metaphor, alliance, and comparative suffering, constructing solidarity among subalterns (Sab, Carlota, Teresa) yet sometimes privileging class and whiteness, with the narrative centering most often on the anguish of elite white Creole women and a male mulatto who holds a special social position. As critics have noted, Sab's exceptional status as a favored slave and his sentimental bonds with privileged women may limit the novel's ability to represent more marginalized voices, and its narrative sometimes risks passing over black women's double bind.

Browning, however, refuses the sentimental detachment of her British and American contemporaries, centering the black female body and its violations. The enslaved woman's agency is expressed through indignation and bodily resistance, and the poem's refusal to console or sentimentalize her pain marks a radical intervention in abolitionist literature. Browning's voice is uncompromising, focused on embodiment, pain, and survival, with intersectionality emerging viscerally—through images of sexual violence, childbirth, and endurance—rather than alliances or dialogue across gender and class. Her critique is more direct, politically challenging, and grounded in the bodily realities of slavery, making clear that intersectional suffering demands intersectional resistance.

VII. V. Revolution and Emancipation

Revolution and emancipation in Avellaneda's *Sab* manifest primarily as internal, spiritual struggles rather than depictions of collective uprisings or immediate liberation. Sab laments his isolation as a mulatto slave:

“¡Cuán buena sois, pero ¿quién soy yo para que os intereséis por mi vida?... No tengo padre ni madre... Soy solo en la patria... Los deberes del esclavo son los deberes de la bestia de carga... El esclavo envilecido legará por herencia a sus hijos... esclavitud y envilecimiento... [How good you are, but who am I that you should care about my life?... I have no father or mother... I am alone in the homeland... The duties of the slave are the duties of the beast of burden... The degraded slave will leave slavery and degradation as inheritance to his children...]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, pp. 39-40)

This soliloquy evokes profound alienation, powerlessness, and social exclusion rooted in race and class. Yet it reveals a revolutionary consciousness coupled with a yearning for emancipation, propelled by “una convicción que les grite: levantaos y marchad. [A conviction that cries out to them: rise up and march.]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 40) Sab's death epitomizes revolution as martyrdom and emancipation as transcendence, with his final words affirming love as a cosmic force of justice and a herald of hope:

“¡adiós!... yo he amado, yo he vivido... ya no vivo... pero aun amo. [Farewell!... I have loved, I have lived... I no longer live... but I still love.]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, p. 146)

“¡Oh, qué suplicio!... No es la muerte... sino el presentimiento del destino... El día de la verdad amanecerá claro y brillante... [Oh, what torment!... It is not death... but the foreboding of fate... The day of truth will dawn clear and bright...]” (Gómez de Avellaneda, 1841, vol. II, pp. 144-145)

Though the novel refrains from depicting active rebellion, its horizon is shaped by revolutionary abolitionist movements such as the Haitian Revolution, invoking hope for liberation and the collapse of oppressive “viejos ídolos [old idols]” and societies.

In Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point*, revolution and emancipation are dramatized through the protagonist’s radical defiance against slavery, culminating in the tragic act of infanticide. Faced with the “look” of her master in her white child’s face (“I saw a look that made me mad! The master’s look... on my soul like his lash... or worse!” (Browning, 1847, XXI. Lines 3-5)) she kills her child to prevent perpetuating oppression:

“I twisted it round in my shawl... ha, ha!—I laugh to think on ’t at this hour! Your fine white angels... plucked my fruit to make them wine, / And sucked the soul of that child of mine...” (Browning, 1847, XXI. Line 7; Browning, 1847, XXIII. Lines 1-6)

She consoles herself with the belief that her child is “More, then, alive, than now he does” (Browning, 1847, XX. Line 3) in the afterlife, finding spiritual solace and hope beyond mortal suffering. This act marks a violent rupture with slavery’s continuity and refusal to accept her child’s future as master or oppressor. Her subsequent lines affirm reconciliation through shared darkness:

“All, changed to black earth,—nothing white,—A dark child in the dark...And thus we two were reconciled, / The white child and black mother, thus.” (Browning, 1847, XXVII. Lines 3-4; Browning, 1847, XXVIII. Lines 1-2)

This metaphorical union symbolizes rejection of racial hierarchy and invokes a spiritual emancipation beyond death. The poem culminates in a call for collective uprising (“From these sands / Up to the mountains, lift your hands, / O slaves, and end what I begun!” (Browning, 1847, XXXIII. Lines 5-7)) and denunciation of systemic injustice:

“Whips, curses; these must answer those! For in this Union / You have set / Two kinds of men in adverse rows, / Each loathing each...” (Browning, 1847, XXXIV. Lines 1-4)

Here, revolution is an active political struggle demanding recognition and the overthrow of slavery, while emancipation includes physical liberation and spiritual transcendence beyond mortal constraints.

Sab frames revolution and emancipation as internal, tragic struggles marked by isolation, resigned martyrdom, and spiritual hope. Avellaneda’s character embodies social and literary constraints, with revolution unfulfilled in life and actualized only in death and promise of future justice. The novel’s restrained depiction suggests ambivalence toward direct social disruption

and immediate emancipation, reflecting nineteenth-century Cuban colonial society and Romantic literary forms.

Conversely, Browning's poem embodies stark, embodied revolution and emancipation, articulated as defiance and transformation through physical rebellion and collective mobilization. The enslaved woman's act of infanticide is a radical rupture with slavery's structures, and her call for uprising invites solidarity and action. This directness contrasts with *Sab*'s contemplative tone, resonating with Victorian abolitionism's activist spirit and demands immediate social and political upheaval. Browning centers the enslaved woman's corporeal experience as the profound site of revolution and emancipation.

VII. VI. Narrative Voice and Representation

The theme of narrative voice and representation is central to both *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, as these texts amplify marginalized Afro-Atlantic perspectives by centering the lived experiences, emotions, and subjectivities of enslaved individuals. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* uses prose narration centered on an enslaved mulatto man, offering intimate access to his inner life through monologues and epistolary forms. This narrative strategy challenges dominant white colonial narratives by portraying Sab's profound feelings, resistance, and humanity, effectively making visible the interiority of a subaltern subject. Sab's presence as a "female speaking subject," poetically rendered despite being male, reflects Avellaneda's revolutionary effort to articulate the enslaved's subjectivity and dissent, thus broadening literary representation to include historically silenced voices.

In contrast, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* innovatively employs poetic form—specifically, the dramatic monologue—to give voice to a marginalized enslaved woman. The poem grants intimate access to her psychological and emotional landscape, capturing pain, defiance, and resilience. This direct, personal address confronts silencing and invisibility by granting articulate speech and profound subjectivity to a figure often excluded from historical and literary narratives. By humanizing the enslaved woman through voice and perspective, Browning's poem critiques dominant racial ideologies and amplifies Afro-Atlantic abolitionist agency within a transnational literary context.

Both texts share key representational commitments: they depict African-descended individuals, whether male or female, across the Atlantic world as divine creatures endowed with equal humanity, united in their struggle for emancipation from oppression. This theological and humanistic identification strengthens abolitionist arguments through deep empathy and spiritual resonance. Furthermore, each work foregrounds the marginality imposed by race and gender, engaging with intersectional oppressions that shape the characters' social realities and narrative voices.

However, notable differences mark the respective works. *Sab*'s prose narration by an enslaved man emphasizes interiority and emotional depth within a Romantic novel tradition. Avellaneda's narrative, shaped by both Cuban colonial realities and European literary forms,

provides a complex social tableau where multiple marginalized figures—Sab, Carlota, Teresa—are woven into a shared narrative of oppression and affective connection. The narrative voice is contemplative, with Sab's intimate reflections inviting readers into the psychological terrain of enslaved subjectivity, while also reflecting Avellaneda's own positionality as a colonial woman writer confronting patriarchal and racial norms.

By contrast, Browning's poetic monologue is explicitly female-voiced, centering on an enslaved woman's bodily and emotional experience. The poem's lyrical, evocative form creates immediacy and urgency, breaking through historical silencing by directly addressing oppressors and audiences. This confrontational voice enacts resistance by embodying the trauma and defiance of black womanhood under slavery, raising themes of sexual violence, motherhood, and spiritual struggle. Browning's representation is therefore notably visceral and embodied, deploying poetic form to elevate marginalized female experience within British abolitionist discourse.

In summary, while both texts reclaim the narrative voice of the marginalized and challenge dominant ideologies through the literary subjectivity of Afro-Atlantic characters, *Sab* offers a more reflective, prose-centered male narrative functionally intertwined with feminist concerns, whereas *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* delivers a direct, emotive, and poetic female testimony that foregrounds bodily suffering and revolutionary voice. Together, they contribute rich, complementary perspectives to the literature of abolition, feminism, and Afro-Atlantic identity.

Concluding Remarks

This investigation has provided a comparative analysis of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*, two seminal abolitionist texts engaging Afro-Atlantic agency. Utilizing Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory and thematic analysis, it explored key themes such as resistance and empowerment, intellectual and political leadership, transatlantic connections, intersectionality, revolution and emancipation, and narrative voice and representation to reveal the rich complexity of these works within nineteenth-century abolitionist discourse.

Both *Sab* and Browning's poem articulate profound critiques of slavery and colonial oppression from marginalized Afro-Atlantic perspectives, centering the lived experiences and voices of enslaved individuals historically silenced. Each text underscores the intersection of race, gender, and class, illuminating the interconnected oppressions that shape Afro-Atlantic subjectivities. Both protagonists achieve moral and political awareness, serving as spokespersons for their communities' consciousness through literary expression—whether philosophical introspection or emotive poetic testimony. Furthermore, both texts situate their narratives within transatlantic abolitionist traditions, responding to broader political, social, and intellectual currents in Europe and the Americas, and establishing solidarity in the fight against slavery's dehumanization. Additionally, both works employ a strong spiritual and humanistic

sensibility, portraying their protagonists as figures of dignity and moral worth, challenging prevailing racist and patriarchal ideologies and elevating abolitionist causes through appeals to shared humanity and divine justice.

Despite these shared commitments, *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* diverge markedly in form, tone, and cultural context. Avellaneda's *Sab* is a Romantic prose novel focusing on a mulatto male protagonist who embodies internal, spiritual resistance and moral martyrdom within a colonial Cuban setting. The narrative is contemplative, nuanced, and infused with European philosophical ideals, emphasizing introspection, ethical debate, and the tragic limits imposed by society and literary conventions. Its rich psychological portraiture and epistolary sections invite a reflective engagement with the emotional and moral turbulence of enslavement. In contrast, Browning's poem is a Victorian dramatic monologue passionately voiced by an enslaved woman who enacts overt, embodied defiance—most notably through the radical act of infanticide—demanding immediate political change. Browning's work is confrontational, emotive, and directly critiques colonial foundations and religious hypocrisy, reflecting the activist ethos of British abolitionist movements. The poem's lyrical intensity and public address style make it a distinctly performative call to action, implicating readers in the moral urgency of abolitionism.

Avellaneda's abolitionism is nuanced by its integration of feminist and abolitionist discourses, suggesting alliances between marginalized groups within the colonial hierarchy, while maintaining certain narrative constraints reflective of her context and period sensibilities. Browning's intersectional feminism centers the corporeal trauma of black womanhood, refusing sentimental consolation in favor of potent political protest. Similarly, leadership in *Sab* is internal and philosophical, expressed through personal struggle and moral questioning, whereas Browning's heroine commands public, activist leadership through direct denunciation and encouragement of collective revolt.

In sum, this investigation underscores how *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* offer rich complementary yet contrasting Afro-Atlantic perspectives on abolition, resistance, identity, and representation. The texts collectively broaden the conceptual terrain of abolitionist literature by revealing multiple forms of resistance—from *Sab*'s spiritual martyrdom and moral introspection to Browning's embodied defiance and call to revolutionary action. These works highlight how abolitionism was engaged not only politically but as a profound cultural and intellectual project that crosses geographical, racial, and gender boundaries.

This comparative study also illustrates how literary form and genre shape the articulation of abolitionist agency—the reflective novelistic prose providing psychological depth and ambiguity, and the dense poetic monologue delivering urgency and public confrontation. Their differences reflect broader hemispheric and historical contexts: Caribbean colonial complexity and Romantic sensitivities versus Victorian political activism and British literary traditions. However, both insist on the humanity and dignity of the enslaved, modeling new modalities of political and personal agency that resist hegemonic narratives.

Moreover, the investigation reveals important limitations and challenges within each text regarding representation and feminist solidarity, inviting ongoing scholarly engagement with their intersectional politics. *Sab*'s blending of abolitionist and feminist concerns foreshadows later debates about class and racial privilege, while Browning's uncompromising portrayal of black womanhood demands sustained attention to gendered experiences of slavery.

Ultimately, by situating *Sab* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* within Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic framework, this research affirms the transnational and intercultural dimensions of 19th-century abolitionist literature. It enriches current understandings of how literature functions as a dynamic site of resistance, cultural survival, and identity formation within Afro-Atlantic histories and legacies. These texts remain vital not only as historical documents but as living interventions inspiring contemporary reflections on race, gender, and justice worldwide.

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