THE SILENT MOTHER
A Literary and Biographical Analysis of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano

La madre silenciosa. Un análisis literario y biográfico de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y María Zambrano

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In this literary paper on the traumas of unwed motherhood and the silence surrounding it, I compare the experiences of two mother-poets: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano. Although these women writers are from two separate centuries and countries, the motherly pains they experience and the scholarly silence surrounding their motherhoods closely mirror one another's. Through their *cartas* (letters) and poems, the silence surrounding their losses as unwed mothers with deceased young children is shattered, seeing as their traumas are forever recorded within their written words. Utilizing *biografías* (biographies), *las cartas,* Susan Stanford Friedman's birth theory, and poetic analysis, I make the argument that both Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano encapture their motherly pains in their poetry unlike that of any of the scholarly work written about either of them.

Keywords
Biografía (biography), birth, *carta* (letter), death, motherhood, poetry, unwed mother

En este trabajo literario sobre los traumas de la maternidad soltera y el silencio que la rodea, comparo las experiencias de dos madres-poetas: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y María Zambrano. Aunque estas escritoras pertenecen a dos siglos y países distintos, los dolores maternos que experimentan y el silencio literario que rodea sus maternidades son un reflejo los unos de los otros. A través de sus cartas y poemas, se rompe el silencio que rodea sus pérdidas como madres solteras con hijos pequeños fallecidos, ya que sus traumas quedan registrados para siempre en sus palabras escritas. Utilizando las biografías, las cartas, la teoría de la metáfora de la creación de Susan Stanford Friedman y el análisis poético, sostengo que tanto Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda como María Zambrano plasman sus dolores maternales en su escritura creativa, aunque esto no se haya recogido en estudios académicos sobre ellas.

Palabras clave
Biografía, carta, madre soltera, maternidad, muerte, nacimiento, poesía

How do the traumas of female authors, specifically *las revolucionarias* Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano, seep into their literary work? Can we see the pain of these mother poets within their writing when their existence and social conditioning called for silence? What can readers understand from these silences? Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda[1] and María Zambrano[2] were both infamous for their poetry, activism, and being severed from their *Patrias* or "homelands". However, what is not mentioned in most *biografías* about these two authors is their experiences with single (unwed) motherhood and the traumas that surfaced due to the loss of their infants. As a mother-scholar who has personally wrote poetry about the traumas accompanying my own experiences with single motherhood, I will utilize my own perspective as well as the evidence presented within *las cartas* of Avellaneda and Zambrano in locating their pain within specific pieces of poetry by them. Specifically, I will analyze two pieces by Avellaneda: "A él" ("To Him"), "A una mariposa" ("To a Butterfly"), and one piece by Zambrano: "The Chalice" ("El cáliz"). I will quote both in Spanish and in English. Through the analysis of these poems, readers will be able to shatter the silence around these authors' sufferings as mothers with dead children.

In Beatriz Caballero Rodríguez's book *María Zambrano: A Life of Poetic Reason and Political Commitment,* Rodríguez notes the influence of Zambrano's traumas as an *exiliada* upon her philosophical writings, stating that Zambrano's "traumatic memories of war as well as her personal experience as a woman in exile had a decisive impact on shaping the direction, content and style of her thought" (Rodríguez, 2017, p. 64). Scholars try to define Zambrano by these terms but forget who she was before writing; they discard her brief motherhood and her immense suffering thereafter.[3] As for Avellaneda, there is little to any scholarly work written about her being an unwed mother and losing her child. If there is so much silence surrounding these women's unconventional and tragic motherhoods, how can one be sure that they were ever mothers to begin with? Here, readers find themselves reliant on the information relayed to us through *las cartas*. Both Avellaneda and Zambrano recorded their losses of their children through the letters they personally wrote to their lovers.

[1] Born in Santa María de Puerto Príncipe, Cuba in 1814; died in Madrid, Spain in 1873.

[2] Born in Vélez-Málaga, Spain in 1904; died in Madrid, Spain in 1991.

[3] Until Avellaneda and Gabriel García Tassara's letters were published biographers did not know about this matter, but even after they were published there does not seem to be a serious discussion on how to incorporate the matter.

Relying on *las biografías* of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano

From the various online *biografías* about Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, we can gather the following: (1) she was a poet during the Spanish Romanticism era, (2) there has been heavy debate as to whether or not she was a Spanish writer or a Cuban writer given her exile and familial roots in both countries, (3) she wrote all sorts of literary work –poems, autobiographies, novels, plays–, and (4) her literary work was as feminist as it was abolitionist and anti-slavery –in fact, she often compared the black condition to that of the married female condition. Readers can also conclude that she engaged in a multitude of romances and brief marriages, despite her being anti-marriage and anti-patriarchal.[4] However, what is not thoroughly discussed is her brief time as a single mother and the immense grief the loss of her child caused her. In 1844, Avellaneda gave birth to a daughter outside of marriage[5] –with further research, readers can locate the girl's name: María or "Brenhilde".[6] The father of her daughter was the poet Gabriel García Tassara (1817-1875). Despite the open mentioning of Avellaneda's dead daughter, most *biografías* neglect to discuss the immense pain and suffering this must have caused Avellaneda –and, arguably, how it influenced her writing. This is the trouble with relying on *las biografías*. However, in Emil Volek's "Tu amante ultrajada no puede ser tu amiga" (Your Scorned Lover Can't Be Your Friend): Editing Tula's Love Letters, Volek addresses Avellaneda's letters with all of her lovers, including that of Gabriel García Tassara –the father of her late daughter. Volek writes: "I was intrigued by the explosive letters to Tassara … they had never been published in a volume of or about Avellaneda" (Volek, 2017, p. 292). Volek continues his analysis of *las cartas* de Avellaneda, linking one of her poems to the death of her daughter: "A él" (To Him). Volek argues that the poem "is situated in November of 1845 … and therefore in relation to the end of the episode with Tassara when their daughter Brenhilde dies" (Volek, 2017, p. 293). Utilizing Volek's connection between *las cartas* and the poetry of Avellaneda to that of her traumatic motherhood, I would like to expand his connection to that of a more comparative lens between multiple mother writers, including María Zambrano's experiences –which mirror that of Avellaneda's.

In comparison, *las biografías* of María Zambrano do not address her brief encounter with young

[4] (Gómez, 2020a).

[5] (Gómez, 2020a, par. 13).

[6] (Contreras, 2018b).

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single motherhood whatsoever. There is ample online public information on her being a Spanish writer and poet, being associated with the Generation '36 Movement, being anti-fascist and arguably feminist. Scholars tend to focus on her occupation as a writer of philosophy and the amount of influence her experience with exile has had on her (i. e. Beatriz Caballero Rodríguez's book mentioned earlier). Yet, there is no public or scholarly indication as to the dates in which she became pregnant, birthed her son, and lost him.[7] The only *biografía* I could locate that so much as mentioned the name of her lover who impregnated her and their brief, disastrous love affair was that of Margarita Contreras' online article, "Biografía de María Zambrano escritora española". In her piece, Contreras writes: "Tras un primer momento de desolación, María vivió una nueva experiencia amorosa con Gregorio del Campo. En el intercambio de cartas entre ambos, dan detalles de esta aventura juvenil" (Contreras, 2018a, par. 13-14). [Translation: "After a first moment of desolation, María had a new love experience with Gregorio del Campo. In the exchange of letters between the two, they give details of this youth adventure"]. Now here within Contreras' commentary on the relationship between Zambrano and Gregorio del Campo does she hint to the existence of their son, who was born out-of-wedlock and died fairly young like Avellaneda's daughter. For Zambrano readers, we must rely on the authority of *las cartas* of Zambrano (or of Gregorio del Campo) and her writing to break the silence surrounding this trauma.

The Power of *la carta* in Relation to Literary Theory

A strong parallel between Avellaneda and Zambrano's lives is the presence of *las cartas*. Both women recorded the loss of their children within their letters sent to the absent biological fathers of their children. The grief and loss these mother-writers endured is captured within these *cartas,* linking their brief motherhoods to that of their written words forever. Seeing as Avellaneda's daughter is given two names –Brenhilde being the apparent favorite of Avellaneda from the looks of her letters– and Zambrano's son is given no name, I will refer to Avellaneda's daughter only as Brenhilde –not her legal name María– and Zambrano's son through the terms of endearment she refers to him as (i. e. *nene, hijito,* etc.).

In Florinda Alzaga's text *La Avellaneda: intensidad y vanguardia*, Alzaga addresses the link between Avellaneda's poem "A él" and the letters Avellaneda sent to Tassara. She quotes one letter in particular that was sent before Brenhilde's death, in which Avellaneda called for Tassara to come see their daughter before it was too late. Avellaneda began her letter with: "Tassara, aún vuelvo a escribir a usted y, lo que es más, estoy resuelta, si usted desatiende mi carta, a buscarle por todas partes, y a decir a gritos, donde quiera que lo encuentre, lo que voy a manifestarle por escrito" (Alzaga, 1997, p. 32). [Translation: "Tassara, I am still writing to you and, what is more, I am determined, if you neglect my letter, to look for you everywhere, and to shout, wherever I find you, what I am going to express to you in writing"]. Immediately, readers note the threatening tone within Avellaneda's words as an attempt to persuade Tassara to acknowledge her letter. From this tone, we can infer that Tassara has not been responsive to Avellaneda's previous attempts at communication and that she feels her only strategy left is that of persuasive threats. As the letter continues, Avellaneda addresses the ailments[8] of her small daughter and how they impact her, stating that: "Se muere mi hija y yo con ella" (Alzaga, 1997, p. 32). [Translation: "My daughter dies and I withher"]. As Avellaneda writeson, she expresses her determination to have Tassara present for his daughter's death, exclaiming: "Venga usted, Tassara, de rodillas se lo pediré … para mí no hay nada fuera de mi niña, ni temo desprecios ni evito humillaciones: me arrojaré a los pies de usted para suplicarle dé una primera y última mirada a su pobre hija. Ella no es culpable de mis delitos, si usted me cree cargada de ellos" (Alzaga, 1997, p. 32). [Translation: "Come on, Tassara, on my knees I will ask you … for me there is nothing outside of my child, nor do I fear contempt or avoid humiliation: I will throw myself at your feet to beg you to take a first and last look at your poor daughter. She is not guilty of my crimes, if you believe me charged with them"]. Here, Avellaneda is referring to the "crimes" of having been a sexually free woman, linked to no

[7] With the exception of Gregorio del Campo's compilation of letters, of course.

[8] Brenhilde is described to have suffered "de los nervios y de una tos convulsiva que algunas veces le produce alferecía, esta malísima ahora, complicándose sus antiguos males con la dentición … [y] con una terrible fiebre y gran inflamación de estómago" (Alzaga, 1997, p. 32). [Translation: "from nerves and a convulsive cough that sometimes causes her to be ill, [that] is now very bad, complicating her old ills with teething … [and] with a terrible fever and a great inflammation of the stomach"].

single man. She begs Tassara not to take his anger with her out on their dying child, seeing as any sexual act on Avellaneda's part is not Brenhilde's doing or responsibility. Throughout the remainder of her letter, Avellaneda continues to threaten the tarnishing of Tassara's reputation by revealing to the public that he is indeed Brenhilde's father and what a poor father he has been by abandoning his child during the hours of her death if he does not comply and visit Brenhilde before she dies. Avellaneda continues, questioning Tassara for his in her it absence, exclaiming:

> ¿Y es tanto lo que pido? Una caricia de piedad para una pobre inocente ¿es sacrificio tan grande para usted que no puede concederlo? ¿Qué es lo que usted teme? ¿Quiere usted que no piense nadie que es padre de mi hija? (Alzaga, 1997, p. 33).
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> [Translation: "And is it so much I ask? Is a caress of mercy for a poor innocent [child] so great a sacrifice for you that you cannot grant it? What is it that you fear? Do you want no one to think that you are the father of my daughter?"].

Here, readers see the sheer frustration and helplessness Avellaneda feels regarding Tassara's silence and absence. Unlike the contents of *una biografía,* Avellaneda's *carta* provides us with the raw and unedited emotion of a mother losing her child as she fights for her daughter's inevitable death to be conducted with respect. Clearly, Avellaneda is past any feelings of shame or guilt she might have possessed towards her unwed motherhood. At this point in time, all she wants is for her daughter's father to be there for her dying child; she does not have the patience nor energy for whatever shame Tassara might selfishly fear upon his attendance.

With the knowledge that Tassara most likely did not attend Brenhilde's death and the fact that both Avellaneda and Tassara lived on beyond this point of time as writers, the only survivors of their tragic relationship, it leaves readers to soak in the silence surrounding Brenhilde's death –seeing as the child's death was not a public matter nor a concern of most scholars discussing Avellaneda. We can only try to fill in the gaps within our own minds as to what exactly Avellaneda suffered as a mother made childless.

In María Zambrano's text *Cartas inéditas (a Gregorio del Campo),* Zambrano's letters to her lover Gregorio are recorded for the public eye, decades after her being deceased. Within letters XVI, XVII, and XVIII, Zambrano's journey with out-of-wedlock motherhood and the death of her young son are captured, revealing the pain that arguably influenced Zambrano's writing long after, utilizing literature as a means of rebirth.

The dates these specific *cartas* are not explicitly stated, forcing readers to speculate when exactly these events of birth and death occurred in Zambrano's life. Given that she was born in 1904 and that her romance with Gregorio occurred prior to her success as a writer, the birth and death of Zambrano's unnamed son most likely occurred somewhere in her early twenties, making her a young single mother. Unlike Avellaneda, Zambrano had her child prior to her being established as a known writer, making her status as a single mother more detrimental to her survival than it may have been for Avellaneda, who was considered a grown woman at the point of Brenhilde's conception.

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In *la carta* XVI, readers witness the existence of Zambrano's child being openly acknowledged. Unlike that of Avellaneda's painful letter to Tassara, Zambrano's tone is playful and cheery with her lover. She refers to Gregorio as "maridico" –which comes from the word "marid" or husband, but in this case refers to an unmarried male partner– and to herself as "tu chonflica" (a term of endearment similar to "your girl"). She addresses their son only as "su nene" (her son) several pages into the letter, stating: "Si recibes con menos frecuencia cartas mías, piensa que tu chonflica está recogidica en espera de días mejores en que te pueda abrazar a ti y a su nene, que está lejos de ella: que su alma está sequita esperando a su maridico que venga a infundirle nueva vida" (Zambrano, 2012, p. 102). [Translation: "If you receive letters from me less often, think that your girl is collected, waiting for better days when she can hug you and her baby, who is far from her: that her soul is dry waiting for her 'husband' to come to infuse her with new life"].

Zambrano ends her letter with the hopes of she and her little family being reunited again for the holidays, exclaiming:

> Que Dios te bendiga a ti y proteja el sueño de nuestro nene, hasta que otra nochebuena más dulce nos junte a los tres. ¿Recuerdas el año pasado? ¡Quién nos diría que tan pronto íbamos a tener un nene! Adiós, perdona esta carta tan tonta. Te quiere y te abraza tu chonflica. (Zambrano, 2012, pp. 102-103).

> [Translation: "May God bless you and protect our baby's sleep, until another sweeter Christmas Eve brings the three of us together. Do you remember last year? Who would tell us how likely we were to have a baby! Goodbye, forgive this silly letter. Your chonflica loves you and hugs you"].

Within this *carta,* a multitude of factors revolving around Gregorio and Zambrano's relationship. Firstly, they have been together during occasions like holidays, like that of a traditional family. Secondly, the couple and their child otherwise live apart, which brings readers to question where Zambrano's baby is living and who is caring for him? For what reasons do they all live apart, especially if they all love one another as Zambrano claims? While the circumstances of this mother, father, and baby living apart are not made explicit, readers can gather from Zambrano's words that she is happy to be a mother –despite being young, unmarried, and separated from her baby and partner– and thinks of her lover as a husband figure already. In her mind, the three of them will be reunited shortly and all will be jolly. She reflects on how surprising and yet joyful the existence of their baby boy is for her, perhaps hinting to the unplanned manner of his conception. There is no negativity detected in Zambrano's voice towards her motherhood, only love and happiness is directed towards Gregorio and their son.

In *carta* XVII, however, the tone and mood of Zambrano shifts dramatically. Given that the letter is undated, we are unsure as to how much time has passed since Zambrano's happy letter to Gregorio. She addresses the letter to her *nene,* presumably after he has died. She writes: "Nene, ¿por qué te has ido sin despedirte de tu madre, por qué te has ido sin que tu padre te dé un beso? Hijito, ¿por qué te has ido donde tu madre no te puede ver, donde vas a estar solo?" (Zambrano, 2012, p. 104). [Translation: "Baby, why have you left without saying goodbye to your mother, why have you left without your father giving you a kiss? Little son, why have you gone where your mother can't see you, where are you going to be alone?"]. While it is obvious that Zambrano is exercising her grief as a childless mother through this *carta,* what is not made obvious is the circumstances of her son's death (i. e. where did he die, what caused his death, etc.). From the sound of this letter, it seems that neither Zambrano nor Gregorio were present at the time of the baby's death, indicating that it was unexpected –unlike that of Brenhilde's inevitable passing. Further into *la carta,* Zambrano acknowledges who was caring for her baby in her and Gregorio's absence, exclaiming: "¿Me traerá mi madre un pelito tuyo, ese pelo tan negro que tenías, como el de tu padre?" (Zambrano, 2012, p. 104). [Translation: "Will my mother bring me a little hair of yours, that black hair that you had, like your father's?"]. With the knowledge that Zambrano's mother has been caring for the baby and was there at the time of his death, readers can imagine the doubling of trauma Zambrano is experiencing here. Having been displaced from her child, only to learn that he has died in her absence, Zambrano is stripped of her motherhood, relying on the mere hope that her mother will save a piece of her child's hair to remember him by. This stripping of motherhood is only amplified by her body, seeing as she experiences a leaking of breast milk while writing to her dead son: "¡Qué pena, si me aprieto los pechos aún sale leche, la leche que era para ti, nene, y que no llegaste a tomar!" (Zambrano, 2012, p. 104). [Translation: "What a shame, if I squeeze my breasts, milk still comes out, the milk that was for you, baby, and that you didn't drink!"]. Her body's continuance of expelling milk despite her child's absence adds another layer of loss for Zambrano, reminding her of the baby that has hardly been there by her side throughout his brief life. It is a wonder if, seeing as Zambrano was not granted the ability to care for and feed her child while he was still alive, she ever got the chance to name him at all. Was this aspect of motherhood stripped from Zambrano, too? Did the child have a name, other than merely *nene?* Zambrano ends her painful letter to her dead *nene* on a somber note, crying out:

Within this *carta*, a multitude of factors revolving around Gregorio and Zambrano's relationship

> Nene, hijito mío, nene pequeñito, dónde estás, por qué te has ido, di, por qué te has ido si eras muy guapo y tenías unos ojicos negros muy grandes llenos de inteligencia, todavía los tendrás, nene, ya cerradicos; tu carita tan mona parecerá de cera, tu manitas chiquininas que sostenían tu cabecita cuando tenías un día, aquellos ojos que iban a la luz, nene pobrecito nene, ya no verás más la luz, la tierra caerá sobre ellos y una eterna oscuridad. (Zambrano, 2012, p. 104).
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> [Translation: "Baby, my little boy, little baby, where are you why have you gone, say, why have you gone if you were very handsome and had very big black eyes full of intelligence, you will still have them, baby, already closed: your little face is so [white] will look like wax, your little hands that held your little head when you had a day, those eyes that went to the light, baby, poor baby, you will no longer see the light, the earth will fall on them and an eternal darkness"].

She simply declares that she understands why and calls him out for being happy despite the death of their son and the immense grief Zambrano is going through alone

This last line from Zambrano's second *carta* is almost like that of her poems: written in a stream of consciousness. Without any filter or concern for structure, we witness Zambrano pouring out her heart into this letter to her dead *hijito*. The imagery she describes here leaves the reader with a haunting image of her dead baby, once beautiful with black hair and dark eyes, now forever frozen in a pale wax-like state. Given that Zambrano is not present for her son's death, she is left with little to any devices but that of imagery to process her son's death, thus depicting her creative abilities as a writer to be her sole means of surviving this traumatic loss.

In *la carta* XVII, Zambrano addresses another letter to Gregorio, although this time her tone is not that of an infatuated lover but rather that of a scorned childless single mother. She openly questions Gregorio's newfound silence towards her. Bitterly, she writes:

> Tú eres feliz, y bien comprendo por qué no quieres escribir a tu chonflica, que así sola se muere de pena … ¿qué te importa a ti de las chonflicas que han perdido a su hijito y se mueren de pena? ¿a qué molestarse en escribirle una palabrica de consuelo? que se mueran ellas y así acabamos de una vez. (Zambrano, 2012, p. 106).
>
> [Translation: "You are happy, and, well, I understand why you do not want to write to your girl, who just dies of grief like that … What do you care about the girls who have lost their little boy and are dying of grief? Why bother writing her a word of comfort? let them die and that's how we're done at once"].

Here, readers witness Zambrano's epiphany that her lover Gregorio does not wish to concern himself with grieving girls like herself. She does not bother questioning his silence like Avellaneda questioned Tassara's or try to persuade him to respond. She simply declares that she understands why and calls him out for being happy despite the death of their son and the immense grief Zambrano is going through alone. Oddly enough, her *carta* does not end here. A page or so later, Zambrano completely changes the subject and begins discussing literature, initiating the silence that surrounded her brief motherhood for the rest of her career. Through this silence, Zambrano begins her rebirthing process, turning away from her grief and establishing a reliance on writing to continue forward.

Utilizing *las cartas* to fill in the gaps *biografías* neglect to address, readers are better able to visualize and feel the grief of these mother-writers, thus establishing a better understanding of who these women truly were and where their literary work stemmed from. Having endured their motherly traumas, Avellaneda and Zambrano resort to their writing as a source of healing and rebirth after having spiritually died alongside their dead babies.

The Theory of Birth through Poetry

In Susan Stanford Friedman's article "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse", Friedman discusses the unique nature of the childbirth metaphor within female poet's written works. Friedman argues that: "The female childbirth metaphor challenges this covert concept of creativity by proposing a genuine bond between creation and procreation and by suggesting a subversive community of artists who can literally and literally procreate" (Friedman, 1987, pp. 75-76). Friedman continues building her theory on the power of the feminine birth metaphor, stating that: "Emerging like women themselves from the confinement of patriarchal literary tradition, birth metaphors have celebrated women's birthright to creativity. Women's oppression begins with the control of the body, the fruits of labor. Consequently, many women writers have gone directly to the source of powerlessness to reclaim that control through the labor of the mind pregnant with the word" (Friedman, 1987, p. 76).

In her theory, Friedman cites the literature of authors like Mary Shelley, Sylvia Plath, and Erica Jong in relation to their usage of the birth metaphor. Unlike the blunt nature in which these white-Eurocentric artists depict pregnancy and birth through their works, Avellaneda and Zambrano's works require a bit more insight into the authors' personal lives given the silent nature of their motherhoods. However, birth theory is still useful in building an understanding of how a mother poet's creativity stems from and connects to her experiences with motherly traumas, thus building a more theory-based understanding of Avellaneda's and Zambrano's poetry.

Seeing Motherly Trauma: An Analysis of Poetic Works by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano

Within the poetic works of Avellaneda and Zambrano, the traumas of their identical brief single mother-

I would like to argue that her poem "A una mariposa" may demonstrate direct references to her daughter, Brenhilde

hoods seep through. For example, readers can see these motherly traumas within Avellaneda's "A él" and "A una mariposa" as well as that of Zambrano's "The Chalice".

Although "A él" is a very structured poem, given its consistent structure of four lines per each stanza and its "ABAB" rhyme scheme, it does not fall into any particular genre of poetry. It has twenty-eight lines like that of a French ballad but only has seven stanzas, each with an equal amount of lines. Readers can note Avellaneda's calculated nature in writing this debatably free-verse poem, making for an unbridled and yet also impactful message to her intended audience.

Going off of Volek's argument that this poem was written with the intention of addressing Avellaneda's scorned ex-lovers –specifically Tassara in the re-publishing of 1845–, there are a few stanzas in particular that may stand out to readers, the first being the initial stanza to "A él". Itreads as follows (lines 1-4):

> No existe lazo ya: todo está roto:
> plúgole al cielo así: ¡bendito sea!
> Amargo cáliz con placer agoto:
> mi alma reposa al fin: nada desea.

In English, the first stanza translates to:

> There are no ties to bind us now; all ties are broken:
> I asked that Heaven make it so; thanks be to God!
> A bitter cup once filled with pleasure, is now empty;
> My soul, at last, can find repose; it desires nothing.

Within these first few lines, Avellaneda directly addresses the loss of relations to Tassara. Given that Brenhilde died in 1845 and Tassara had made it clear that he wanted to distance himself from Avellaneda and Brenhilde prior to their daughter's death, we can see here the doubled loss of their romantic and biological connections. In the second line, readers might detect a bitterness from Avellaneda, seeing as she claims to have prayed for her ties to Tassara to be cut. While it is doubtful that Avellaneda is exclaiming that she wanted all ties –including that of the life of their child, Brenhilde– to be cut, readers can note the defensive nature of this line and how it demonstrates Avellaneda's emotional turmoil. In line three, we watch that turmoil spiral as she recalls the "emptiness" of her current "cup" or rather position as her lover has abandoned her, leaving her only with the initially fond memories of him. In the fourth line, readers witness this turmoil turn into somewhat acceptance as Avellaneda claims that her soul can now be at rest given that this tumultuous relationship is over. However, by reading this process of grief through the lens of traumatic motherhood, the meanings behind these lines become doubled in their meanings, carrying a heavier message of loss and heartbreak than that of a mere loss of romantic partnership can ever amount to.

In the sixth stanza, the two closing lines of this passage can be further linked to the isolation Avellaneda experienced through her doubling of loss as a mother and as a romantic partner. She writes (lines 23-24):

> Hice un mundo de ti, que hoy se anonada
> y en honda y vasta soledad me miro.

Which translates to:

> I made a world of you; that world is gone;
> In vast and profound loneliness, I dwell.

El mundo ("the world") Avellaneda notes having made for Tassara here may refer not only to the efforts she put into their relationship but also the creation of life she engaged in from her relationship with Tassara –i. e. the conception and birth of Brenhilde. With the death of both her daughter and her relationship to Tassara, Avellaneda is left "en honda y vasta soledad", making reference to the amount of solitude that is present in her doubled loss.

While readers can see the connection between Avellaneda's poem "A él" to the loss of her daughter and the end of her relationship with Tassara, I would like to argue that her poem "A una mariposa" may demonstrate direct references to her daughter, Brenhilde. Unlike that of "A él", "A una mariposa" follows the unyielding structure of an unconventional fourteen lined poem. Although its end rhymes are calculated –being "ADBC" in the first two stanzas and "AC" in the following two stanzas– and a pattern is established in its formation of stanzas –the first two being four lines, whereas the third and fourth are three lines each–, the poem does not follow the typical conventions of other fourteen lined poems (i. e. the English sonnet and the Petrarchan sonnet). Similar to "A él", this makes for another free verse poem by Avellaneda with a calculated message.

In "A una mariposa", the two stanzas that arguably make reference to Avellaneda's daughter, Brenhilde, are that of stanza one and stanza four. Stanza one reads (lines 1-4):

> Hija del aire, nívea mariposa,
> que de luz y perfume te embriagas
> y del jardín al amaranto vagas,
> como del lirio a la encendida rosa;

This first stanza translates to:

> Daughter to the wind, snow-white butterfly,
> Inebriate with perfume and sunlight,
> Wandering from garden to amaranth,
> And from iris to fiery rose alighting.

In the first line, Avellaneda addresses her subject as *hija* or "daughter" *del aire* or "of the wind". Given the unexpected nature of Brenhilde's death and the quick loss of Avellaneda's daughter, one could argue that she is comparing her late daughter to that of a butterfly flying away. In the second line, Avellaneda describes her subject as a creature of sweet smells and warmth, much like that of a newborn baby's imagery to a new mother. In the third line, Avellaneda describes her subject as *vagas* ("roaming" or "wandering"). She continues with this imagery of her subject descending or flying, given her word choice in line four translating to "alighting". Much like the quick movement of a butterfly jumping from flower to flower, garden to garden, Brenhilde is quick to jump out of Avellaneda's life, having existed in the world for such a brief time. This word choice could also be referring to the "brightness" Brenhilde's presence brought to Avellaneda's life as a mother.

In the last stanza of "A una mariposa", Avellaneda concludes her poem with advice for her *mariposa*/daughter. She writes (lines 12-14):

> Fijar tu giro vagaroso evita,
> que la más bella flor que adorna el suelo
> brilla un momento y dóblase marchita.

Which, in turn, translates to:

> Avoid a fixed course; wander, wander at will
> For the most beautiful flower adorning earth
> Shines for a moment, withers, bends and dies.

Given that the stanza prior makes a reference to *el cielo* or "Heaven"[9] and that this final stanza concludes with the death of a flower, readers can see Avellaneda directly addressing her dead daughter here. In line 12, Avellaneda encourages *la mariposa* to continue her wandering and to stop for no one but herself, for even "la más bella flor que adorna el suelo" (like Brenhilde) dies. The last line encaptures the brief life of Brenhilde as she was only able to "brilla un momento" before passing. Within these last lines of "A una mariposa", readers are given a glimpse at how much love and tenderness Avellaneda had for her *hija,* her little *mariposa*.

Given the acknowledgement of scholarly and biographical silence established in this paper regarding Zambrano's motherhood, it is not surprising that her written work does not outright address motherhood either. However, the loss of purity and innocence she felt from having sex out-of-wedlock is arguably encaptured in her piece "The Chalice",[10] thus tying this piece to her traumas as an unwed mother with a dead child.

Similar to Avellaneda's two poems, Zambrano's piece does not follow any particular structure or genre of poetry, making it free-verse as well. Unlike Avellaneda' pieces, "The Chalice" does not have stanzas or separations between its lines: the poem itself is a large block of dialogue between two unnamed speakers equivalent to that of a page. Zambrano's style of free-verse mimics that of stream of consciousness, creating an intermixed message of personal confession and revelation. Her piece starts (lines 1-3):

> "What are you doing there, daughter? No, I don't mean that, you're not my daughter". "I know". "Girl". "No, not anymore". "Woman, whatever you are, what are you doing there?".
>
> [Traducción: "Pero ¿qué haces ahí, hija? Digo, no: hija no eres mía". "Ya lo sé". "Muchacha". "No, ya no". "Mujer, bueno, lo que seas, ¿qué haces ahí?"].

Within these first three lines, readers can witness the first unnamed speaker struggling to properly label the second speaker with her correct female identity. The closeness of "daughter" is initially ruled out, followed by the innocence and naivety of "girl", leaving us only to speculate that this second speaker is indeed female enough to be "woman". Considering Zambrano's *cartas* and the conditions of her motherhood, it is plausible that this loss of identity for the second speaker aligns with that of Zambrano's loss of girlhood and purity.

Further into the poem, the speakers debate the passing of the second speaker's "chalice". The first speaker starts, arguing that (lines 9-11):

> "It's nothing, go ahead, you can do it; it's easy, you just pass it on". "That means it passes –to whom? Maybe someone I love". "And what do you care? The important thing is it passes".

[9] The third stanza reads (lines 9-11): "Sigue, sigue feliz tu raudo vuelo. / Placer fugaz, no eterno solicita / que la dicha sin fin solo es el cielo", which translates to: "Continue happily on your swift rounds, / Fleeting, not eternal pleasure seeking, / For endless joy is only in Heaven's gift".

[10] Unlike my quotations of Avellaneda's poetry, I will primarily rely on the English translation of Zambrano's poem "The Chalice" and provide the original Spanish poem's ("El cáliz") lines as the *traducción*. My reasoning behind this is because I worked with the English translation prior to quoting from the Spanish original piece. With that in mind, readers should consider that the English translation may not repeat the original poem "El cáliz" word-for-word given the translator's preferences.

> [Traducción: "Nada, hazlo, puedes, es fácil, se traspasa. ¿Y eso te importa? El caso es que pase. ¿Estás tú segura de que no te lo han pasado a ti y de que te estás bebiendo el tuyo? ¡Tonta! ¿Y si fuera el de otro que te lo hubiese pasado a ti, traspasado por otro que sabe? Si a lo menos estuvieses cierta de que es el tuyo, el intransferible que podría transferirse también…"].

The "passing" of the second speaker's "chalice" or virginity being the subject of open conversation between these two speakers demonstrates the lack of autonomy the second speaker possesses due to her femininity. While the second speaker tries to navigate the direction of her being "passed" to only that of someone she loves, the first speaker continues their mission to persuade the second speaker to just pass her chalice on already, deeming the destination as unimportant, much like that of which the second speaker's feelings and personhood are perceived, too.

Towards the end of the poem, the theme of shame is introduced and linked to the second speaker's feelings of undesirability. Within this portion of dialogue, the first and second speakers become intermixed in their dialogue, almost mirroring that of the same individual arguing with herself. She exclaims (lines 16-24):

> "Does it make you feel ashamed? So many have done it, so many people you know, everyone knows". "But what am I supposed to do? Go from door to door saying 'Sir or brother, would you like my cup?'. What if no one wants it? Can a person just leave it, alone, forsaken?". "But what if that's not what happened and what happens is it's not forsaken, and it gets spilled, and it spills all over everything? Nobody wants to drink from it, and then it spills, and confusion ensues: I don't know if it's mine; mine, my cup. But do I even have a cup, one that is mine, mine alone? What if there is just one cup, one for all of us with one lone drop that falls to me, just one drop that cannot be passed on, one drop of eternity?".
>
> [Traducción: "¿Te da vergüenza? Lo han hecho tantos, tantos que tú conoces y de todos conocidos". "Pero ¿qué voy hacer, ir de puerta en puerta diciendo: 'Señor o hermano, ¿quiere usted mi cáliz?'. ¿Y si nadie lo quiere? ¿Es que se puede dejar solo, abandonado?". "Pero ¿acaso no ha sucedido y sucede así? ¿No está así abandonado y se vierte, se vierte sobre todo? Nadie lo quiere beber y entonces se derrama y viene la confusión. No sé si es el mío; el mío, mi cáliz. Pero ¿tengo yo algún cáliz, mío para mí, de mí? ¿No será uno, uno para todos, del que me cae una gota, una gota solo que no pasa, una gota de eternidad?"].

The metaphor of "passing a chalice" to that of losing one's virginity extends here, capturing the "spilling" or "ruining" of a young female's sense of purity/self during and after the sexual act. With this "spilling", the speakers note the confusion that comes from having lost their virginity, such as to whom does this "spilt" or "ruined" body now belong to? Does she belong to the man who ruined her, or does she still belong to herself? This leads the speakers to ask even more complex questions, such as whether their chalice/virginity ever belonged to them or if it even existed in the first place. The last question the speakers end with expands this notion of doubt and questioning everything in a last effort to recapture their lost sense of self, of purity and virginity, arguing that perhaps their chalice and the contents of it only belonged to themselves forever, incapable of being "passed" onto someone else. The psychological warfare encaptured within "The Chalice" must mirror the terrifying questions of morality and self-autonomy Zambrano faced after losing her younger self to the out-of-wedlock conception, birth, and quick death of her unnamed son.

In her analysis of poetry by María Zambrano including "The Chalice" ("El cáliz"), Roberta Johnson argues that: "The message of 'El cáliz' is … that the individual is always a social, communal entity" (Johnson, 1997, p. 191). Tying the role of Zambrano's girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood to Johnson's concept of community, readers can visualize how "The Chalice" tackles the morality behind the feminine shame Zambrano –and girls or women like Zambrano– endured. In her poem, Zambrano addresses the larger issue at hand: how society manipulates females like herself due to the double-standards of heterosexuality within her community and how the consequential shame leaves females feeling displaced within their own communities.

Although Friedman's poetic birth theory enables readers to link motherhood to the creation of the written word, these three poems by Avellaneda and Zambrano do not necessarily create life but rather capture the death of that created life. For instance, in "A él", Avellaneda records the doubling death of her relationship to Tassara and to that of her daughter's actual death. She speaks of the isolation she faces, how *el mundo* she built around these figures in her life ceased to exist, leaving her only with memories. In "A una mariposa", Avellaneda records the brief life and quick death of her Brenhilde, her *mariposa*. She captures the beauty and light her *hija* once held, suggesting that she never stops flying, for even "la más bella flor que adorna el suelo / brilla un momento y dóblase marchita" (lines 13-14). In "The Chalice", rather than visualizing the death of a relationship or one's child, we witness the death of the second speaker's sense of self. The second speaker confesses the loss of her purity, of her girlhood/virginity or "chalice". She indicates that she no longer knows what exactly she is or has become, marking herself

and her chalice undesirable by men. Although Zambrano does not directly address the loss of her son or her lover, she does capture the loss or rather death of her younger self within this piece. So, where does this leave our traumatized speakers? Perhaps, through these deaths –romantic, real, and within oneself– these authors are in a sense reborn; their lives start over as they continue to write and live on.

Unanswered Questions

Despite the combined application of *biografías, las cartas,* birth theory, and poetry analyzed within this framework, readers are still left with unanswerable questions surrounding the deaths of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and María Zambrano's children and the impact of these losses upon these writers as mothers. However, through the assessment of these mother-poets' written works, we are able to shatter the silence previously surrounding their unconventional motherhoods and consequential traumas as childless mothers. By allowing their written words to break this deafening silence, their experiences of resistance against agents of oppression (i. e. patriarchy) of these women are able to live on. By linking their motherhoods to their words, Avellaneda's and Zambrano's love for their lost *niños* becomes the fire for that resistance, never ceasing to exist.

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