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Translating Spain to the United States during the Cuban War of Independence: Mary J. Serrano and the Associated Spanish and Cuban Press



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Abstract: This article examines the life and work of Mary J. Serrano (1840–1923), a successful translator and popularizer of Spanish literature in late nineteenth-century United States. It provides a short biography of Serrano and focuses on her work for the Spanish Legation in Washington DC during the Cuban War of Independence (1895–98), a period of increasing anti-Spanish sentiment in the country. The article seeks to recover the figure of this important, yet largely unknown translator. Her biography also illuminates a number of trends that helped define this moment in history: the burgeoning role of women as translators and authors, but also cultural mediators and engaged citizens; the diffusion and popularization of the emerging field of Hispanism in the United States; and the complex web of interactions and ethnic identities that shaped the immigrant experience in urban America.

Keywords: Associated Spanish and Cuban Press, Cuban War of Independence/guerra de la independencia cubana, María Juana Christie de Serrano, Mary J. Serrano, translation/traducción

Translation played a critical role in the interactions among the three main players in the Spanish-Cuban-American War. The letter that eventually forced the resignation of the Spanish Minister in Washington, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, is perhaps the most memorable example of the importance of (mis)translation in the lead-up to the War of 1898.¹ Cubans and Spaniards understood that the conflict was also a battle over control of the historical narrative and the ability to present it to the American public. The Cuban diaspora in the United States, forged through decades of struggle against Spain, relied on the leadership of the Cuban Junta and the support of American politicians and the yellow press to advance its program. A number of prominent Cuban exiles in the United States were fluent in English and some earned their living as translators or as teachers of Spanish. That was the case with José Martí, the leader of the Cuban revolution of 1895, and his successor, Tomás Estrada Palma, who managed a bilingual school in Central Valley, New York. The work of these men and the émigré communities that supported the revolution for Cuba's independence has been studied by a number of scholars (e.g., Lazo, Pérez, and Poyo). This article will focus instead on how the Spanish Legation in Washington sought to counter the Cuban narrative.

During his three years as Spanish Minister in Washington, one of Dupuy de Lôme's main undertakings was to combat the sensational accounts of the situation in Cuba in the yellow press.² To this end he established the Associated Spanish and Cuban Press (ASCP), a news agency funded by the Spanish Legation and headquartered in New York. It was managed by two brothers, Arturo and Antonio Cuyás, born in Spain but long-time residents of the United States, and Luis V. de Abad, a Cuban-born supporter of colonial reform.³ Besides loyal *peninsulares* and Cubans, the agency employed a number of Americans, among them Mary J. Serrano, who worked as translator. During the Cuban War of Independence (1895–98) Serrano deployed her linguistic skills and her personal connections with New York society and the New York press to help the

Legation and the ASCP present the Spanish perspective to the American public. Beyond her work for the Spanish Legation, Serrano's life illustrates broader trends that defined this period: the increasing participation of women in the public sphere, the transnational networks that shaped diasporic communities in the Americas, and the development of the emerging field of Hispanism in the United States.

Mary J. Serrano: A Biographical Sketch

Despite her relative prominence in literary circles in gilded age New York, little is known about Mary J. Serrano. The few sources available do provide an insight into a life marked by migration and mobility that forged her relationship to the Anglo-American and Hispanic worlds.⁴ Serrano was born in Ireland as Mary Jane Christie in 1840. When she was a child, her family joined the Irish exodus to the United States that followed the potato famine and settled in New York City, where she grew up (Connolly 767). In her early twenties Mary Jane moved to Costa Rica. In San José, on July 30, 1862, she married Juan Emigdio Serrano, a dentist, and the scion of a prominent Colombian family (Láchner 219).⁵ During the early years of their marriage the couple and their growing family moved several times between Costa Rica and the United States—two of their four children were born in San José and two in New York City.⁶

By the 1870s, Mary J. Serrano had settled in New York. The city's cosmopolitanism allowed her to cultivate her connections to both the Hispanic and Irish communities. Juan E. Serrano advertised his professional services as “Dentista Hispanoamericano” to his “compatriotas” in New York's Spanish newspaper *La Crónica*.⁷ The Serranos' home was also open to friends from Latin America. In 1870, for example, the census recorded the presence there of Mercedes Ramírez de Hine, a young widow, and her seven children.⁸ A native of Costa Rica, and godmother to Serrano's eldest daughter, Mercedes had lost her husband, Marquis Lafayette Hine, in 1867. Hine, a New Yorker, had worked as a physician in Costa Rica and served as American Consul in San José for several years.⁹ Rafael Pombo, the Colombian poet, diplomat, and translator, also lived with the Serranos in New York for several years (Orjuela 104). Like Juan E. Serrano, Pombo belonged to a notable family from the Cauca region. He served as Secretary of the Colombian Legation in New York in the 1850s (Orjuela 59–108; Quintero 1360).¹⁰ Mary J. Serrano also maintained close ties with Irish leaders, in particular Irish patriot John Mitchel and his wife, Jane Verner Mitchel (Orjuela 104; “Serrano”).

These transnational connections help explain the inclusion of Serrano's early literary work in two anthologies—Irish and Colombian—in 1887. Julio Añez's *Parnaso Colombiano* included three poems by María Juana Christie de Serrano, as she was known in the Spanish-speaking world. Rafael Pombo translated this selection from Serrano's first book, *Destiny and Other Poems*, published in 1883. Pombo declared that the volume “respira la viril y generosa preocupación del espíritu de su autora con la triste condición de su país natal” (Añez 378). The same year that her poems were published in Colombia, a selection appeared in New York, in Daniel Connolly's *The Household Library of Ireland's Poets*.

It is not clear where Mary J. Serrano received her education, but a biographical note in *Parnaso Colombiano* states that “aprendió por sí sola las lenguas clásicas y el francés, el alemán, el italiano y el español, que posee admirablemente” (378). Like many women writers of her generation, Serrano's linguistic abilities opened the door to employment as translator. Other scholars (Dow 2007) have written about the challenges faced by female writers and translators, whose work was often dismissed as derivative and amateurish. Although this article does not focus on the quality of Serrano's literary translations, it is worth noting that they enjoyed remarkable success with both authors and readers.

When Añez published Serrano's work in Colombia, she was already known for her translation to English of Juan Valera's *Pepita Jiménez* and several poems of Gaspar Núñez de Arce (Añez 378).¹¹ Valera had met Serrano while serving as Spanish Minister in Washington (1884–86). The

Spanish author received a copy of *Parnaso Colombiano* from José Rivas Groot, who had written the book's introduction. Responding to Rivas in his *Cartas Americanas*, Valera dedicated several pages to Serrano (175–79). He praised her work as a poet and translated to Spanish one of her compositions. He also highlighted her skill as translator and acknowledged his indebtedness to her for making his work accessible to American readers: “Núñez de Arce y yo [le] debemos estar y estaremos muy agradecidos” (Valera 175). Indeed, Valera was so pleased with Serrano's translation of *Pepita Jiménez* that he recommended her as a translator for his other novels, and he suggested her name to other Spanish authors seeking to see their work in English translation (Moreno 120–21).

In one of her syndicated articles for the American Press Association in 1898, Lida Rose McCabe wrote about women translators, remarking on the rising popular demand for translations. Serrano was one of a growing number of female translators ready to meet that demand. During the 1880s and 1890s, she translated several important works, including Eça de Queiros' *O Primo Basílio*, Camille Flammarion's *Uranie*, Jules Breton's *La vie d'un artiste*, Alphonse Daudet's *Rose et Ninette*, and Marie Bashkirtseff's *Mon Journal*. Serrano's translation of the journal of the Russian artist in 1889, five years after her death in Paris at the age of 23, was enormously popular, elevating her into a select club of financially successful women translators. According to McCabe: “Mrs. Serrano's royalties netted some \$3,000 and resulted in her signing a three years' contract with the publisher [Cassell and Company].” “During that period,” McCabe reported, Serrano “translated one book per month, a herculean task.”

Even though McCabe's article featured two translators who had enjoyed relative success—Katherine P. Wormley and Mary J. Serrano—both women discouraged others from following their path, in part because of the low pay. “As a rule,” McCabe wrote, “publishers pay a stipulated sum for a translation and the translator has no further claim on [it]. The sum rarely exceeds \$100 a volume.” In fact, by late 1898, when McCabe's article was published, Serrano declared herself to be “employed largely by the Spanish Legation.” She admitted that she found “the translation of state documents more remunerative than the Englishing of books.” But Serrano did more than just translate books and documents. She participated in the cultural moment that saw the emergence of Hispanism in the United States. In her role as a translator and cultural mediator, she encouraged communication and understanding between two worlds she knew well, using the literary and professional resources, and the social and political networks at her disposal to do so.

Serrano's translations of Juan Valera, Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, Benito Pérez Galdós, and Emilia Pardo Bazán, among others, contributed to the development of what Miguel Romera-Navarro dubbed “hispanismo literario” (1) and to the popularization of Spanish language and literature in the United States, studied in 2007 by Mercedes Caballer Donarza. Her work was also noted and appreciated by members of the small Spanish immigrant community in New York. In 1888, for example, the publication of a letter by Spanish writer and politician Emilio Castelar in the *Home Journal*, translated by Serrano, led the editor of *Las Novedades*, New York's Spanish newspaper, to declare: “Esta señora, dando a conocer al público norteamericano selectas muestras de nuestra literatura, traducidas con verdadero *amore* y con mano maestra, ha contribuido en gran manera a fomentar el alto concepto y la popularidad creciente de nuestros literatos entre los lectores yankees” (“Castelar”).

The commemoration of the Fourth Centennial of the “Discovery” of America in 1892 and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 heightened popular interest in Spanish history and culture in the United States. The celebrations energized the Spanish immigrant community, whose members promoted a Spanish-American ethnic identity built around the figures of Miguel de Cervantes and Christopher Columbus (Varela-Lago 22–27). The Columbian festivities also allowed Serrano to reconnect with Enrique Dupuy de Lôme. He had been the secretary of the Spanish Legation when Valera served as Spanish Minister in Washington in the mid-1880s. In 1892, Dupuy de Lôme was named Spanish Minister, but a change in government in Madrid cut short his tenure. The new government appointed him instead Special Representative to the

World's Fair in Chicago (García 42). In that capacity, he nominated Serrano to the Spanish jury that awarded prizes for exhibits in the Liberal Arts (Vilardell).

In the summer of 1894, Serrano, recently widowed, traveled to Europe with her eldest daughter and spent several weeks in Spain.¹² The purpose of the trip, according to the New York correspondent for the Madrid daily *La Epoca*, was to gather material for a series of twenty-five lectures on Spain and Spanish literature that she would deliver in New York that fall (Vilardell). Serrano's weekly lectures on Spain started on November 14, 1894 at the residence of Mrs. George E. Lockwood in New York, which also housed the Lockwood School for Girls ("Notes"). In January 1896, she concluded a ten-week lecture series on the same topic at the Normal College in New York ("Lectures"). Two months later, she spoke on "Spain, the country and the people" at a women's Catholic club ("In the Women's Clubs"). Serrano's knowledge of the language and culture of Spain, her ability to convey that knowledge to an American audience, and her extensive social and professional network would become a valuable asset to the Spanish Legation following the outbreak of the war in Cuba in 1895. In the ensuing years, she would be a trusted collaborator in the Legation's attempts to combat the anti-Spanish narrative promoted by Cuban supporters of independence and their American sympathizers, including the sensationalist press that flourished at the time.

Mary J. Serrano, the Spanish Legation, and the Associated Spanish and Cuban Press

Enrique Dupuy de Lôme arrived in Washington as Spanish Minister in April 1895, just two months after the Cuban insurrection began. That same month, General Arsenio Martínez Campos took over as Governor General of the island. In 1878, the Spanish general and Cuban insurgents had signed the Treaty of Zanjón, ending the Ten Years' War. The Spanish government hoped that he could again bring peace to the island. To promote these efforts, Dupuy de Lôme prepared to launch a Spanish news agency in New York. The records of the Spanish Legation indicate that Mary J. Serrano was employed there in the fall of 1895. Once the Associated Spanish and Cuban Press was established, in December 1895, Serrano worked closely with its president, Arturo Cuyás.

In his first letter to Dupuy de Lôme regarding the creation of the press agency, Arturo Cuyás wrote of organizing "un plan de campaña en la prensa," something he considered "tan necesario como el de Martínez Campos en Cuba" to quell the rebellion (AGA 22 Sep. 1895). Both men understood that the war would have to be fought as much in the field of American public opinion as on Cuba's battlefields. The "press" became a category in the accounting records of the Spanish Legation, funded out of the intelligence budget ("gastos de vigilancia"). These included, among other things, the payment of spies that reported on activities of Cuban supporters, particularly the organization of filibustering expeditions to the island.

One of the main tasks of the Spanish news agency in New York was to produce, translate, and distribute booklets that presented the Spanish view of events in Cuba and countered the narrative promoted by Cuban insurgents and their American supporters. The first such pamphlet, *The Cuban Question in Its True Light*, addressed the very topic of the coverage of the news on Cuba in the American press. It denounced "the unreliability of Cuban news" ("An American" 3) and declared in its subheading that it offered "a dispassionate and truthful review of the situation in the island of Cuba, and the position of the United States toward the insurrection." Other publications focused on the history of Spanish rule in Cuba presenting it in a positive light. The Spanish Legation, through the ASCP, printed thousands of copies of these booklets for members of Congress and shapers of public opinion (newspaper editors, college professors, librarians). Even when Cuyás, an accomplished linguist and the author of a well-regarded bilingual dictionary, did the bulk of the translations, Serrano was often called upon to review galley proofs to ensure their accuracy, a key quality control element.

Judging by some editors' responses, the strategy of the ASCP was not very successful. In Rochester, for example, the editor of the *Democrat and Chronicle* dismissed *The Cuban Question* as an "anonymous, sneaking publication [that] will not accomplish the least change in public opinion" ("Mud Slinging"). The *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Montana Standard* responded by publishing a rebuttal by Gonzalo de Quesada, Secretary of the Cuban Junta ("Defends," "Spanish Lies"). Two years later, another booklet, *New Constitutional Laws for the Island of Cuba*, received similarly scathing responses. The editor of the *Buffalo Enquirer* stated, "The laws read well enough, it is true. But of what good is a law that is not obeyed?" Declaring his mistrust of the new liberal legislation on Cuban autonomy, the editor proclaimed, "The Americans who know the Spanish best trust them least. The Cubans, who know them even better, trust them not at all" ("Not to Be Trusted").

Serrano's job at the Spanish Legation was not limited to translating texts. She also directly addressed the anti-Spanish bias prevalent in the American press. Her success as a translator of Spanish literature to English readers, Lida Rose McCabe had stated, was built not only on her linguistic skill, but on "her knowledge of Spanish temperament" and her "sympathetic and intelligent touch with their much-misunderstood character." Most of Serrano's work at the ASCP involved interpreting Spain to the United States in order to facilitate Americans' understanding of the Spanish position regarding Cuba and, by extension, of Spain's history as an imperial power in the Americas. Serrano approached this task of interpretation not just through her knowledge of the Spanish-speaking world, but also by deploying her personal experience as an Irish immigrant.

Serrano's contribution to the production of *New Constitutional Laws for the Island of Cuba* illustrates her intersecting roles as translator and activist, Hispanic and Irish. The booklet, co-authored by the three members of the agency (the Cuyás brothers and Abad de las Casas), combined a comparative history of Spanish colonization in the Americas and an analysis of more recent legislative reforms on the island. After months in the making, it was ready to go to press in April 1897 when Cuyás wrote to Dupuy de Lôme: "me propongo que la señora Serrano le de una ojeada y corrija las faltas de estilo que pueda haber cometido" (AGA 14 Apr. 1897). The booklet's introduction prominently featured the work of American hispanophile Charles Lummis, a precursor of Borderland Studies, whose *Spanish Pioneers* had been published in Chicago in 1893 during the Columbian celebrations.¹³ But a study of the footnotes also reveals an intriguing reference to Ireland. In a section on "Methods of Early Spanish Colonization," critical of the anti-Spanish bias of English historians, the text includes the following quotation from an author identified only as "a contributor to the *Irish World*":

John Mitchell (sic) has said, in the preface to one of his historical works, that the greatest conquest England ever made was to gain the ear of the world. And so true is this that even we, Irish and Irish-Americans, knowing as we do her falseness and her craft, accept as gospel truth the calumnies handed down from one generation to another of English historians, and repeated by Anglo-American historians, of England's hereditary enemy—Spain. (12)

The reference to England's control and misrepresentation of the narrative on Ireland, and the allusion to John Mitchel, the Irish patriot and a friend of Serrano's, suggest that the "M. S." credited in the footnote was very likely Mary Serrano.

Serrano's defense of Spain as a victim of the anti-Spanish propaganda that Julian Juderías would later dub the *leyenda negra*, is also present in her response to an article published in the *New York Herald* titled "The Territorial Decay of Spain in the Present Century Comparatively Shown." The piece identified two causes for this decline. First, Spain's "greed," since "her colonial policy from the beginning was grasping oppression." Second, "the nature of her people—love of luxury, personal laziness, cruelty, ignorance, and unprogressive inertia." In her letter to the editor, Serrano refuted those claims, extensively citing Lummis's book, where Spaniards were described as "the first civiliziers." Like Lummis, Serrano decried the United States' "traditional hostility" towards Spain, rooted "in race prejudice, religious bigotry and national rivalry." As

to the treatment of Native Americans, she quoted Lummis's description of Spanish legislation as "incomparably more extensive, more comprehensive, more systematic and more humane than that of Great Britain, the Colonies and the present United States all combined." Serrano compared Spanish rule in Cuba favorably to English rule in India and South Africa. She also pointed to the situation in her native Ireland: "The periodical famines and the perpetual stream of emigration . . . speak more eloquently than could any words." In her view, Spain was a dynamic modern liberal nation; the typical Spaniard was "courteous, high-minded, just in his dealings, modest in his estimation of himself and willing to accord all they claim for themselves to others" (AGA 1897).

Serrano's frustration with the American press's control of the narrative of developments in Cuba is also evident in another exchange with the newspaper. When the Marqués de Rabell [Prudencio Salvador Rabell y Pubill], a prominent peninsular and the leader of the Reformist Party in Cuba, visited New York in May 1897, Serrano requested that the *Herald* send a reporter to interview him. The paper dispatched a Cuban reporter, and the Marqués asked as a condition of the interview that Serrano would be allowed to review the English copy before publication. Cuyás reported to Dupuy de Lôme that this was done "para evitar malas interpretaciones y subsiguientes rectificaciones." This turned out to be unnecessary, as the *Herald* never published the interview, only reinforcing Serrano's and the ASCP's belief that most American papers were not interested in reporting the pro-Spanish side (AGA 1 Jun. 1897).

Two months later another letter to the editor, signed "Justice" but likely penned by Serrano, chastised the *Herald* for its sensationalist news on the case of Evangelina [Cosio] Cisneros, and for its bias against Spain, due, in her view, to the paper having put its Cuban news department "in the hands of agents of the [Cuban] Junta." Apparently, the ASCP doubted that the *Herald* would publish the letter; a note in red pencil across the document read: "Copia de un comunicado que no se publicará" (AGA 19 Aug. 1897).

Evangelina Cisneros was the daughter of a supporter of Cuban independence jailed by the Spaniards. Her story occupied the front pages of most newspapers in the summer of 1897. They claimed that she had been abused by Spanish officers and taken prisoner to a women's jail in Havana, accused of involvement in a revolutionary plot. A campaign to free her, organized by Hearst's *Journal*, received the support of thousands of American women, including the widow of former Confederate president Jefferson Davis, who directly petitioned the Queen Regent of Spain. This prompted Dupuy de Lôme to respond in an open letter to Mrs. Davis, where he presented the case against Cisneros and asserted that "a shameless conspiracy to promote the interest of one or more sensational papers is at the bottom of the romance that has touched your good heart." He also informed Mrs. Davis that, since the trial was still pending, the Queen "[is] not allowed by the law to interfere, but that instructions [had] been communicated to the Governor-General of Cuba to bring a speedy trial and to grant to Miss Cossio all possible consideration" ("Spain's Answer to Mrs. Davis").¹⁴

Cuyás and Serrano were instrumental in getting Dupuy de Lôme's letter published in the main New York newspapers and the Associated Press. But, privately, Cuyás recognized the credibility gap Spaniards had vis-à-vis the claims of the sensationalist press. He wrote to the Spanish Minister:

Lo peor es que aquí todo el mundo con quien yo he hablado cree ese cuento del *Journal* y he tenido muchas discusiones con hombres y mujeres para hacerles comprender que es mentira. Pero estoy convencidísimo de que, no obstante de conocerme y estar persuadidos de mi sinceridad, no me creen y prefieren dar crédito a lo que ven en letras de molde. "When all these persons have taken an interest in the matter, there must certainly be some reason for it," me dicen . . . Está ya tan arraigada aquí la idea de que cuanto dicen los españoles es mentira y son capaces únicamente de todo lo malo, que cualquiera negativa que parta de nosotros merecerá el descrédito (AGA 26 Aug. 1897).

There was one newspaper, however, that Mary J. Serrano hoped could help give a voice to the Spanish side: the *New York Evening Post*.

Henry Villard, a German-born railroad magnate, purchased the *Evening Post* and *The Nation* in 1881. He had been a journalist in his youth, and under his leadership and that of its three editors (E. L. Godkin, Carl Schurz, and Horace White) the *Evening Post* maintained a reputation as a serious and independent newspaper. Like Dupuy de Lôme and Serrano, Villard had also participated in the Columbian celebrations. As chair of a committee organized by the New York Chamber of Commerce to welcome foreign guests attending the World's Fair, he had helped fund the festivities honoring the Spanish delegation (including the Infanta Eulalia, aunt of King Alphonso XIII, and the duke of Veragua, direct descendant of Columbus) on their way to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Villard 365–67). But Serrano had a personal connection to Villard and the *Post* as well. Her eldest daughter, Mariquita, had met Villard's eldest son, Harold Garrison Villard, in the fall of 1895. They got engaged a year later and married in New York on April 29, 1897. Dupuy de Lôme and the Spanish Consul in New York attended the wedding ("Harold Villard," "World of Society").

The Villard-Serrano marriage offered Mary J. Serrano another opportunity to help the Spanish Legation and the ASCP. A month after her daughter's wedding, Serrano invited Cuyás and a small group of Spaniards to visit Dobbs Ferry, the Villards' summer home. In a letter to Dupuy de Lôme, Cuyás stated that the invitation had allowed a "*rapprochement* entre españoles y americanos estableciendo relaciones sociales, pues, como dice Mrs. Serrano, la razón de que nos quieran mal y tengan mala opinión de nosotros es que no nos conocen" (AGA 26 May 1897). While vacationing at Dobbs Ferry, Serrano also asked Cuyás for data on Spain that she could share with the *Post*. She wrote:

As the Cuban question is, naturally, often discussed here I think it would be a good thing if you would write me, for the general benefit, the very best news there is about the matter. You know there is nothing [that] succeeds like success, and next to success, like the certainty of succeeding. I have done my best to convince Mr. Garrison of the abundance of Spain's resources, but some authentic data on that subject also would not be amiss. (AGA 1897)

Her request also reveals the reluctance of many in the press to believe in the success of the Spanish cause as Weyler and the Conservative Party pursued a war of total destruction in Cuba.¹⁵

After the assassination of the Conservative Spanish Prime Minister, Cánovas del Castillo, in August of 1897, a new government, led by Sagasta's Liberal Party, moved swiftly to grant Cuba autonomy in hopes of ending the war and forestalling American intervention. Cuyás and Serrano translated the new legislation for the American public. The agency also prepared one last booklet. The *New Constitution Establishing Self-Government in the Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico* included the translation of the Royal Decree granting autonomy to the islands, as well as "comments by Cuban autonomists on the scope of the plan and its liberality as compared with Canadian autonomy and Federal State rights" (in capital letters in the original).

In the following months, the Spanish Legation started to support a fledgling pro-autonomy movement among Cuban exiles in New York around the leadership of Cuban lawyer Manuel Rafael Angulo. In November, Angulo became the founder and editor of *Cuba*, the organ of the Autonomist Party in the United States. To secure the widest possible readership, the weekly newspaper appeared in two editions, Spanish and English. Cuyás, however, was not happy with the English edition, and he wrote to Dupuy de Lôme: "La señora Serrano . . . tampoco está satisfecha, pues le hacen traducir cosas que no sirven para los Americanos" (AGA 10 Dec. 1897). Apparently, Angulo was persuaded; a week later Cuyás and Serrano took over the production of the English edition. In his report to the Spanish Minister, Cuyás highlighted the importance of considering not just the language but the peculiarities of the American character:

Para dar mayor interés al periódico y que los americanos lo busquen y conserven, . . . he pensado dedicar una página a una Guía y Directorio de Cuba que saldrá en todos los números y será de interés a turistas, fabricantes y comerciantes, pues contendrá, además algunos datos estadísticos sobre producción y comercio, así como un extracto de la nueva constitución autonómica. (AGA 18 Dec. 1897)

The goal of the paper was to emphasize the modernity of the Spanish administration and its advantages to the American people, and to shore up support for Cuban autonomy.

This collaboration was short-lived, however. Following the inauguration of the autonomist regime in Cuba on January 1, 1898, riots in Havana promoted by pro-Spanish sympathizers seemed to confirm the perception by Cuban insurgents and their American supporters that the new government had failed. The publication of Dupuy de Lôme's letter to José Canalejas, critical of President McKinley, and the destruction of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor a few days later, escalated tensions between the two countries. The nationalist fever made it almost impossible for the press to remain neutral. In March, Cuyás relayed to the Spanish Legation his conversation with Serrano on the situation faced by the *Evening Post*:

Villard se ve obligado a ceder ante la presión de los demás accionistas y del público que piden un cambio de actitud en el fondo del periódico. Como prueba del espíritu hostil a España que hoy domina, me dice Mrs. S. que el Post ha perdido en estos días 11,000 suscriptores y la redacción recibe diariamente infinidad de cartas y telegramas censurando el tono conservador del periódico. (AGA 31 March 1898)

As a last effort, Cuyás wrote, Villard was preparing a print run of a letter against American intervention in Cuba written by American diplomat Edward John Phelps, “en inglés y español para enviarla y distribuirla profusamente por su cuenta, en varios países.” He added that “Esto es muy de agradecer, pero me temo que ya es tarde para que haga efecto” (AGA 31 March 1898).

Both Villard and Serrano left the United States as war with Spain approached. In his memoirs, Villard wrote that he was so dismayed by the prevalent pro-war sentiment, that he and his wife decided to travel to Europe (Villard 374). In 1921, in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* marking the recent passing of Emilia Pardo Bazán, Serrano recalled meeting the Spanish author at the home of an ailing Juan Valera during her stay in Madrid in the spring of 1898 (“Emilia Pardo Bazán”). Following the declaration of war in April 1898, the office of the Associated Spanish and Cuban Press was closed, and the Cuyás brothers, denounced as spies, left for Canada, eventually returning to Spain (“The Alleged Spanish Spies”).

Arturo Cuyás never forgot what Villard and Serrano had done in the volatile days leading to the Spanish-American War. When the newspaperman died in Dobbs Ferry in 1900, an obituary published in Madrid (anonymously, but most likely written by Cuyás) recalled:

Mr. Villard hizo de España tan brava como desinteresada defensa desde las columnas del *Evening Post*, periódico de su propiedad, hasta donde era consistente con los intereses del periódico, y bastante más allá, pues su conducta antisensacional le costó miles de suscriptores cuando mencionar á España sin persignarse constituía crimen de lesa patria según los *jingoes*: y cuando defender abiertamente nuestra causa se hizo incompatible con la vida, gastó un capital en reimprimir y distribuir por Europa y América la famosa carta en defensa de España de Mr. Phelps, ministro americano en Londres durante la primera administración de Cleveland. (“Henry Villard” 8)

In the same article he mentioned Serrano as a renowned translator and “la cultísima escritora que nos honra con su benévola amistad.” Upon her return to New York, Mary J. Serrano resumed her work of interpreting Spain to the United States. In 1910, she published her second book of poems, *Asphodel*. She remained active reading and writing about Spanish culture and literature well into her seventies.¹⁶ She died in New York on July 1, 1923.

Conclusion

This article has sought to recover the figure of Mary J. Serrano/María Juana Christie de Serrano through the study of her role in a relatively unknown chapter of the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Further research will help us draw a fuller picture of her life and work, but this initial investigation offers a window into some of the challenges faced and the opportunities encountered by women who tried to balance the demands of motherhood and family life with the pursuit of a literary career. The silence in the historical record, despite Serrano's relative success as translator at the turn of the twentieth century, reflects not just the customary invisibility of women as historical agents but also the perception of their literary activities as the product of amateurish dilettantes. Serrano's biography illustrates the vibrancy of this female literary culture and the crucial role that women played in translating and popularizing European authors in the United States.

As a translator of Spanish authors, lecturer on Spanish literature, literary critic, and overall interpreter of Spain to the United States at a crucial historical and cultural moment in the relations between the Anglo-American and Hispanic worlds, Serrano also deserves a place in studies of the development and dissemination of Hispanism in the United States. Equally important was her engagement with relevant cultural and political discussions of the time, such as the role of propaganda and "fake news" in the presentation of national narratives. Her support for Spain was in great measure shaped by her own experience as an Irish immigrant witnessing the struggles of her homeland against England. While some identified the plight of Cuba with that of Ireland, Serrano looked at Ireland and Spain as victims of a black legend perpetuated by England. In translating Spain to the United States in the late-nineteenth century, she sought to challenge and reframe that narrative and allow Americans to encounter Spanish culture on other terms..

NOTES

¹ While the *Journal* was the only newspaper to publish a facsimile of the letter (with the headline "The Worst Insult to the United States in Its History"), its contents appeared on the front page of most papers in the country. On De Lôme's letter see Wisan (380–83).

² For the origin and use of the term, and the meaning and legacy of yellow journalism, see Campbell.

³ On the work of the ASCP see Varela-Lago (124–36).

⁴ The biographical information on Mary Jane Christie Serrano has been obtained through searches in genealogical and newspaper databases including Ancestry (www.ancestry.com), Family Search (www.familysearch.org), Find a Grave (www.findagrave.com), Genealogybank (www.genealogybank.com) and Newspapers (www.newspapers.com).

⁵ According to Quintero Guzmán (168), Juan Emigdio Serrano Delgado was born in Buga on August 11, 1827, the son of Don Vicente Emigdio Serrano Balderrutén and Doña María Ignacia Delgado Gil.

⁶ A number of newspaper notices, including his obituary and Mariquita Serrano's engagement and obituary refer to Juan E. Serrano as involved in the coffee trade, sometimes as a "merchant," others as a "planter" ("Mrs. Harold C. Villard"; "Villard's Son"). This might help explain the family's connections to Costa Rica and his later work as importer and city weigher in New York.

⁷ "Juan E. Serrano, Dentista Hispanoamericano, ofrece sus servicios a sus compatriotas en la casa de su propiedad." *La Crónica*, 6 Aug. 1864, p. 5. The house stood at the corner of Second Avenue and 20th Street in Manhattan's Gramercy district.

⁸ Ancestry.com. *1870 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009.

⁹ He was related to the family of Lewis Hine, the famous photographer of the Progressive Era (Duerden 16).

¹⁰ These diplomatic connections remained important for Mary J. Serrano's family. When her eldest daughter became engaged, newspaper notices mentioned her relation to Carlos Holguín, a Colombian lawyer and diplomat who had been President of the Republic ("Harold Villard"). Serrano's son, Vincent, also worked for a time as Second Secretary of the Colombian Legation before he became a well-known theater and motion picture actor of the silent movie era ("Vincent Serrano"). Mary J. Serrano's grandson, Henry Serrano Villard, also became a diplomat.

¹¹Serrano's translation of Nuñez de Arce's poem "A Darwin" appeared in *El Repertorio Colombiano* in 1882. She wrote an article on the poet in the *Critic* upon his death in 1903 ("Gaspar Nuñez de Arce").

¹²In 1893 the *New York Herald* reported the passing of Juan E. Serrano in Tocaima, a health resort in Colombia. The death had occurred on Dec. 29, 1892. ("Obituary Notes").

¹³In 1916 Arturo Cuyás published a Spanish translation of Lummis's book in Spain. It was funded by Juan Cebrián, another prominent Spanish migrant and promoter of Hispanism in the United States. (Varela-Lago 27–30).

¹⁴Two months later, a correspondent from the *Journal*, Karl Decker, organized Cisneros's escape to New York. For a discussion of the case in the context of the gender politics of the time see Hoganson (esp. chapter 2).

¹⁵The literature on the conflict is vast. John Lawrence Tone provides an excellent narrative and analysis.

¹⁶See a selection under Works Cited.

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