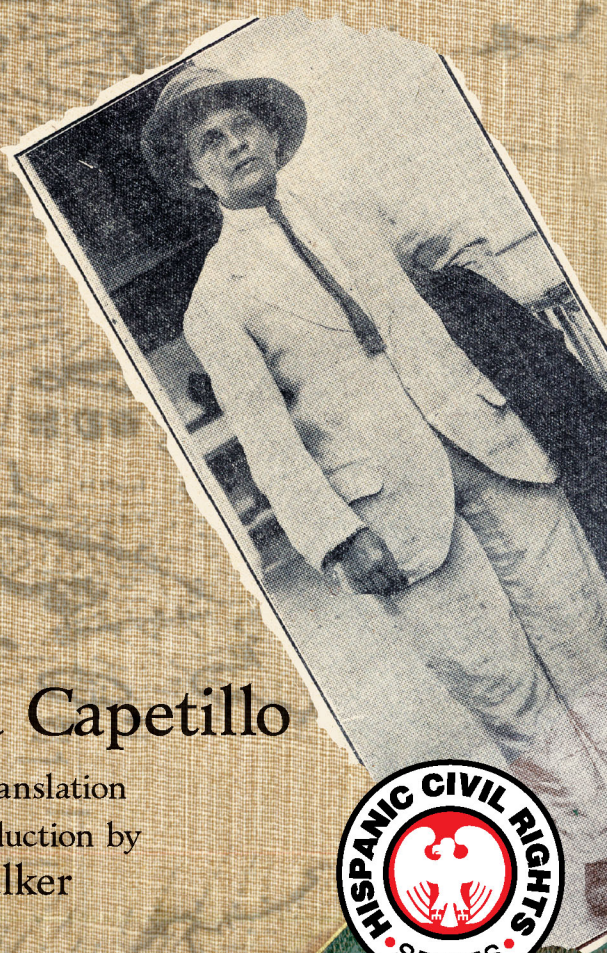


Absolute Equality

An Early Feminist Perspective

Influencias de las ideas modernas



Luisa Capetillo

English Translation
and Introduction by
Lara Walker



ABSOLUTE EQUALITY

AN EARLY FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

INFLUENCIAS DE LAS IDEAS MODERNAS

BY / POR Luisa Capetillo

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION BY /
TRADUCCIÓN AL INGLÉS E INTRODUCCIÓN DE**

LARA WALKER



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INTRODUCTION¹

Up until the last two decades of the twentieth century, most of what had been written about Luisa Capetillo had focused on two incidents of her life. One, that she was the first Puerto Rican woman to wear pants and two, that she was subsequently arrested for that transgression in 1915 while in Havana, Cuba. The photograph of Capetillo dressed in men's clothing—a suit and Panama hat that documents these events—has become emblematic of her work and ideology. As we enter the twenty-first century and begin to mark one hundred years since Capetillo's work was first published, it is poignant that we re-discover her writing as well as her contributions as a historical figure.

Capetillo participates in the early-twentieth-century Puerto Rican diaspora along with other working-class exiles, immigrants, and activist nomads who were the result of the social movements of the 1890s; they left behind significant bodies of work.² Although a few of her contemporaries, such as Bernardo Vega and Jesús Colón, have been categorized as the *pionero* generation of Latino working-class writers and activists in the United States, others (and their work) have received less study or have been ignored.³ Additionally, other early-twentieth-century, working-class exile, immigrant, and activist work from the Latino diaspora, as well as from native Latino writers, has been left unstudied or at least “under”-studied, leaving a space for their recovery and re-construction work to be done.⁴

The recovering and re-reading of Capetillo's texts is part of the need for a renewed critical and historical recovery and exploration of women's working-class literature and the subsequent “discovery” of a working-class intellectual community of Latinas in the United States allowing connections with other working-class intellectuals, literatures, and feminisms. In this sense I group Capetillo with other Latina⁵ working-class women writers and activists whose political and literary work flourished at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States.⁶ In doing so, I hope that her work can be explored along with other different forms of struggle that will add to the voices, as well as the study of, early Latina working-class feminist practices. Through this recovery

and re-reading, I believe that Capetillo's texts, along with others, provide historical grounding for later generations of Latina writing and cultural production in the United States.⁷

Capetillo, as a working-class intellectual and writer, assumes and appropriates the power and authorization of writing, intellectual, and artistic production. During her life she published four books that contain a variety of propaganda, essays, speeches, fiction, letters, plays, experimental prose, journal entries, and translations of anarchist principles: *Ensayos libertarios*, written between 1904 and 1907, published in 1907 in Arecibo, Puerto Rico; *La humanidad en el futuro*, published in 1910 in San Juan, Puerto Rico; *Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer*, published in 1911 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and an expanded version published in Tampa, Florida in 1913; and *Influencias de las ideas modernas*, published in 1916 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The texts cover topics that range from marriage to free love, from child-rearing to sexuality, from education to women's roles in society, social justice, and relations of power. In all situations she offers critical examples of corruption and exploitation from the elite and dominant class fractions. She denounces the ideologies generated by hegemonic social and cultural forces as she lays bare the ironies present in their exploitative logic and beliefs. Hegemony, as Stuart Hall indicates, "is accomplished through the agencies of the superstructure—the family, education systems, the church, the media, and cultural institutions, as well as the coercive side of the state—the law, police, army, . . ." (Hall 333). Therefore, Capetillo strives to make her public—the working-class and women—cognizant of these power relations, offering them an alternate vision of social justice and equality. For Capetillo, subversion of any and all hegemonic interests is clear throughout her writing and practice.

Capetillo's *Influencias de las ideas modernas* (*IIM*) has never been republished in its entirety until now as *Absolute Equality: An Early Feminist Perspective*. Several excerpts of *IIM* were printed in Norma Valle Ferrer's seminal biography of Capetillo, *Luisa Capetillo. Historia de una mujer proscrita* (1990), and in her recent edition in English with Gloria Waldman, *Luisa Capetillo, Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist* (2006).⁸ Additionally, Julio Ramos' groundbreaking study and anthology of Capetillo's writing, *Amor y anarquía* (1992), incorporates a variety of Capetillo's work, including several selections from *Influencias de las ideas modernas*.⁹ Other anthologies that feature selections of Capetillo's writing from *Influencias de la ideas modernas*, are Rubén Dávila Santiago's anthology of working-class Puerto Rican theater

1900-1920, *Teatro obrero en Puerto Rico 1900-1920: Antología* (1985) which contains two short plays, “Cómo se prostituyen las pobres” and “En el campo, amor libre,” and Nicolás Kanellos’ editions of *En otra voz: Antología de la literatura hispana de los Estados Unidos* (2002) and *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States* (2002), which both include the two short plays, “Cómo se prostituyen las pobres” and “Cómo se prostituye una rica” published in Spanish and then translated into English, respectively.¹⁰

This edition is an important contribution to Caribbean, Latin American, Latina/o, Women’s, Working-Class, and Anarchist studies. For the first time, Capetillo’s hybrid-genre text will be accessible to scholars and students in both English and Spanish.

Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922)

Luisa Capetillo was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, in 1879 to immigrant working-class parents and grew up in the center of radical working-class culture. Her mother, Luisa Margarita Perone, was of French descent and she immigrated to Puerto Rico during her youth to work as a governess for the wealthy Zeno family in Arecibo and later as a domestic (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 39). Luisa Capetillo’s father, Luis Capetillo Echevarría, was a Spanish immigrant from the Basque Country who arrived in Puerto Rico around the same time as Margarita Perone to seek his fortune as a director and promoter of traveling amusement fairs. He was unsuccessful and then became a migrant worker of sorts (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 40, 44). Both Luis and Margarita, who never married (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 39), were influenced by the lingering revolutionist ideologies present in Europe after the French Revolution of 1848 and brought those ideologies with them to Puerto Rico (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 41).

Margarita instilled in her daughter a sense of self, a passion for learning, and a knowledge of work as a reality for daily survival. As a young girl she accompanied her mother who was working as a domestic in the homes of wealthy families in the area. Her mother also taught her French and encouraged her to read and study. It has been documented that Margarita attended *tertulias* or literary gatherings to discuss the pertinent news and topics of the day, even though she was the only woman among a group of all men (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 45). Luis was also an avid reader and political thinker who consistently gathered with friends in their homes or in cafés to discuss politics, ideology, and current events (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 44-45).

Needless to say, education and learning were important aspects of Luisa Capetillo's upbringing: they are frequently mentioned throughout her work. Capetillo was taught by her parents and later attended a private school for girls under the direction of María Sierra Soler in Arecibo (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 45). Even though she received this formal education, the majority of her instruction came from her parents. There she was encouraged to read the great literary works of authors such as Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and George Sand, the political philosophy of Kropotkin and John Stuart Mill, among many others (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 46).

While accompanying her mother in her domestic work, Luisa Capetillo met Manuel Ledesma, the son of a wealthy family in Arecibo. In 1898, Capetillo gave birth to her first child, Manuela Ledesma, and in 1900 they had a second child, Gregorio (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 54). They never married, and Luisa was never accepted by Ledesma's wealthy family. Their illicit relationship proved difficult for Capetillo who was censured by the social and class norms of the times (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 54). Later, after each went their separate ways, Capetillo and her two young children went to live with her mother. The children were recognized legally by the Ledesma family, and Manuel provided financially for his children in some way. Manuel later went on to become mayor of Arecibo and continued to have contact with his two children. While living with her mother, Luisa Capetillo supported her children as a worker in the garment industry and later, during her activist years, entrusted their care to her mother (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 56, 59).

Capetillo's ideology, development, and historical context

At the turn of the twentieth century, Capetillo began to collaborate and write for some of the local newspapers in Arecibo as she was further developing her political thought, which was especially steeped in socialism and anarchism (Valle Ferrer, *Historia* 59). The changes and unrest at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century in the international context had particular effects in Puerto Rico, specifically with regard to the U.S. invasion in 1898. Therefore, although Puerto Rico was no longer a Spanish colony after the Spanish American War, the U.S. involvement was still problematic, to say the least. These changes caused the working class to question their rights and even their understanding of democracy as it had been ambiguously laid out by the United States. The importance of organized

labor was coming to a head, and in late 1898 Puerto Rico's working class formed the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (FLT or the Free Federation of Workers), which came to be the largest labor movement organization on the island and eventually the leading labor organization into the first part of the twentieth century; Capetillo became an active member (Suárez Findlay 138; Matos Rodríguez xv). The FLT was not without internal and even external conflicts with other labor organizations, but it was still able to create alliances on and beyond the island with other groups, such as the U.S. Socialist Labor Party and the American Federation of Labor (Matos Rodríguez xv). The first decade of the labor movement created a space for working women and men to articulate their ideologies and express their own political discourse (Ramos; Suárez Findlay 139). It was during this time that two important areas of intellectual and artistic production came to the forefront for working-class political organizing, the Centros de estudios (Study Centers) and the tradition of readers in the tobacco factories. The Centros de estudios worked with both men and women, as well as study groups on worker's issues, and included a cross-section of workers such as unionists, anarchists, and socialists (Suárez Findlay 139; Dávila Santiago 201). Artistic production was combined with activism as the workers "wrote essays, novels, poetry, and plays, which they read out loud and performed to large, enthusiastic audiences across the island in theaters, union halls, worker demonstrations, and town squares" (Suárez Findlay 139).

Ángel Quintero Rivera's detailed study of the tobacco economy in Puerto Rico describes the formation of an intellectual working class by way of readers, *lectores*, who introduced workers to political ideologies and literatures. Bakunin, Kropotkin, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, Nietzsche, and Zola were only some of the many authors who were read to the workers in the factories (Ramos 27; Valle Ferrer 43). This provided a source of access to education and intellectualism for workers. Political working-class leaders and intellectuals such as Bernardo Vega, Jesús Colón, and José Santana, were also "schooled" in the tobacco factories.¹¹ Capetillo began her intellectual work as a *lectora* in a tobacco factory in Arecibo in 1906 (Sánchez González, *Luisa Capetillo* 151). The factory was, among other things, a cultural space where artisans—many with anarchist and socialist tendencies—received an alternate education from a very young age.¹² The significance of Capetillo's role as a reader in the tobacco factories is not to be overlooked. As Matos-Rodríguez has pointed out, "being a reader was an extremely presti-

gious public role for a worker and one that immediately placed them among the worker's elite" (xvi).

In addition to her work as a reader in the factories, Capetillo participated in protests, strikes, and organizing meetings locally and around the island. She participated in strikes, affiliated with FLT (1905) and also with La Cruzada del Ideal (The Crusade of the Ideal) which strove to involve workers in union politics (1909). Through these public manifestations she, as well as others, were met by police opposition and attacks (Matos Rodríguez xvii).

From 1912-1916 Capetillo traveled from Puerto Rico to New York City and Ybor City/Tampa, Florida, to work with the *tabaquero* groups in the tobacco factories, to advocate union organizing, and to work with other working-class Hispanics. It is during this time that Capetillo participates in the Caribbean diaspora and in expanding her transnational vision in New York and Ybor City (Tampa's Latino enclave), as well as Cuba. Perhaps coupled with her international vision was also the suppression of anarchists in Puerto Rico by U.S. colonial officials during 1911-1912 (Suárez Findlay 165). This self-imposed exile and emigration in the United States had a great impact on her writing, activism, and personal life. The majority of texts included in *Influencias de las ideas modernas* were written during her time in U.S. cities. It is of interest and important to note that Capetillo, unlike many of her compatriots, was not a nationalist nor did her writing reflect a nationalist project, despite nationalism's heightened strength at the turn of the twentieth century (Hewitt 2; Ramos; Sánchez-González, *Luisa Capetillo* 156). Her vision of *patria* was more closely aligned to a global imagined community of workers, where freedom and equality reigned (Sánchez González, *Luisa Capetillo* 155).

In Tampa, Capetillo worked again as a reader in the tobacco factories and continued her propaganda for anarcho-syndicalism and women's freedom. Tampa, as Hewitt has pointed out, "was not a typical southern city" (6). A plethora of conditions had created an immigrant and industrial city, as well as a creative and intellectual epicenter for progressive thought (Dworkin y Méndez; Hewitt; Pozzetta). Due to U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico, many tobacco factories had moved to southern Florida to escape taxation and to be closer to buyers (Rodríguez Matos xxi).

Capetillo also traveled to New York City where she collaborated and organized with other working-class Hispanics, wrote articles for Hispanic and unionist newspapers, owned and operated a vegetarian

restaurant, and continued her anarcho-feminist writing and praxis. Her mission and ideology remained the same no matter where she went: to fight for women and workers' equality and freedom. Capetillo claimed that "the present social system, with all its errors, is held in place by the ignorance and the slavery of women" [el actual sistema social, con todos sus errores, se sostiene, por la ignorancia y la esclavitud de la mujer] (*Mi opinión* viii). To create social change and "correct" these problems and ills she employed didactic, artistic, and activist practices.

This culture of informal education and real-life praxis formed her intellect and thought. In her texts Capetillo writes about this alternative form of education in opposition to the formal, university education of the upper classes as a way to legitimize her knowledge and intellectual participation. Always aware of the various structures of power that are constantly in play, she addresses issues of access to learning and knowledge and the hegemonically accepted sites of such activities. Capetillo elucidates this position by stating:

I speak with perfect understanding of that which I say, with a profound intuition that guides me. I have not been able to study anything according to the precepts of the schools, universities, or halls of higher learning [. . .] Now I have introduced myself as a propagandist, journalist, and writer, without any authorization other than my own vocation and initiative, without any recommendation other than my own, or any help other than my own effort. I care little about the criticism from those who have been able to procure a formal education that allows them to present their written observations, protests, or literary narrations . . . (*Absolute Equality* 60)

Capetillo's writing, like other texts of working-class literature, employs bourgeois literary conventions and elements, subverting not only elite culture, but also anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism's phallogocentrism and orthodox Marxism. In this sense Capetillo's "literature of resistance" in this context signifies writing directed not only against dominant culture, but also against restrictive elements within a subculture—in this instance, the working-class and union organizing. Urban growth and modernization brought both sexes into the factories and sweatshops and consequently increased the number of women in urban labor; however, as Asunción Lavrín points out, "at the turn of the twentieth century most changes in the social and political structure were defined and undertaken by men" (4).

Another important concept tied to anarchism that Capetillo discussed in her work and in her life experiences was that of nature and the natural way of life. The anarchist idea believes in man's natural state and that the closer she can be to this "natural" state, the closer man comes to creating a just society—a belief rooted in romanticism and utopianism (Horowitz 63; Valle Ferrer 47). Throughout Capetillo's text *Mother Nature* is humankind's perfect example.

Capetillo, in accord with many anarchists, does not believe in religious rites or dogmas. She sees them as another form of enslavement and oppression. Many times she writes against the institution of the Church, its hypocrisy and enslavement. This theme is not new to her 1916 text; it was also seen in her previous writings. In her first book, *Ensayos libertarios* (1907), she exhorts her public not to baptize children; she asks, if it were really necessary, why then are there millions of beings that don't do it or believe in it (19). Later in her book, *Mi Opinión* (1911), in a letter she wrote to her daughter, Manuela, she tells her that "she never taught her to pray . . ." and that she didn't baptize her in any religion (83). In *Influencias de las ideas modernas*, she continues denouncing the problems and social ills of the Church and anticlericism. At one point she reflects back on her life and refers to Catholicism stating that she "protested that degrading mark, because I was not a slave, I did not carry my children to the infected baptismal font" (63).

However, Capetillo was not an atheist; to the contrary, she believed in a Supreme God, in Jesus Christ and even in certain passages of the Bible. In her play, "Influences of Modern Ideas," the protagonist, Angelina, comments that even though "true anarchists will find the history of the Bible doubtful and will reject institutions with selfish objectives," she footnotes that statement saying, "in the Bible there are written sublime truths, let us practice them" (30). Capetillo's spirituality is rooted in Spiritism, influenced by the teachings of Allan Kardec from France, reincarnation, Christianity, and Asian beliefs that created a syncretic and unique belief system. For Capetillo, spirituality should be something that enables human beings to love one another and is synonymous with anarchism. In the same play the protagonist explains that by studying spiritism she became a revolutionary:

I was studying Spiritism [. . .] I felt a desire to know something of the afterlife [. . .] and to understand the diversity of inhabited worlds and to fully accept diverse existences. This made me

a revolutionary, because it explained to me that all men are brothers, that no one has the right to hurt others, misery or to impose their ideas on them or to enslave them, and that luxury was a crime as long as there was misery. (29)

The protagonist later continues by saying, “The word ‘religion’ has been confused. The least religious have been the priests” (29). After discussing the important teachings regarding brotherly love taught by Krishna, Jesus, Yao, Confucius, and Philon, she states that they were “true anarchists,” because they were “‘humane,’ in every sense of the word” (*IIM* 34). As Matos-Rodríguez has noted, Kardec’s Spiritism was taught in Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century (xix) and Hergiz Shannon’s study of Spiritism in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico underscores its important impact on women and their role in society. “Based on the beliefs and philosophies of the French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-1869), better known by his *nom de plume* Allan Kardec (a name supposedly based on previous reincarnations ascertained from mediumistic communications), Spiritism was a moral philosophy rather than a religion, incorporating the ideas of Romanticism and the scientific revolution to bridge the gap between the material and spiritual worlds” (Fernández Olmos 172). In this sense it inscribes a Christian morality, the importance of charitable acts, and the Christian golden rule, and simultaneously rejects other key precepts, such as the divinity of Christ. For Kardec, Spiritism “bridged the gap between science and religion, provided a rational basis for faith, linked social progress to spiritual progress and equilibrated natural laws with moral laws,” (Fernández Olmos 173) especially during this era of scientific breakthroughs, such as Darwin’s theory of evolution,¹³ which contested traditional Christian beliefs.

Capetillo’s ideas and writing about spirituality and what she termed “true Christianity” make her quite different from other anarchists (Valle Ferrer 48). In one of her reflections on politics and religion she states, “being a Christian is not to hate one another, or offer Mass and charge for it, or baptize and do the same. These are simply rites invented in order to speculate in the name of Christianity” (45). Later in another reflection, she writes about religion being solely based on the teaching “to love one another.” She explains by saying that when humankind can truly understand that concept and do it, then there will be no borders or distance between anyone and justice can be attained (47). She ends by saying that “the idea of Jesus was the most revolutionary idea that the

human mind ever could conceive” (45). Capetillo invokes Christ as an example many times in her writing, calling attention to his life and teachings. In a reflection written while looking out over the cityscape of a small town with a silver domed church she questions the need for churches if people can keep Christ’s teaching in their hearts, minds, and actions (57-58). As Valle Ferrer has pointed out, Capetillo’s understandings of Christianity and religion also stemmed from a Russian writer, Tolstoy, who in the latter part of his life had a spiritual crisis and from then on believed in a Christianity that was founded upon brotherly love and non-resistance (50).¹⁴

Capetillo was often attacked for her antireligious ideas. While in New York City in 1912, she writes an autobiographical sketch of her attacks and discrimination for her ideology and propaganda. In it she compares the situation to Christ and says, “you don’t need redeemers, you yourselves can be them . . . search for the truth, do not worship anyone, explore nature, study its effects, and you will see the cause. We are Gods and sinners. Let us endeavor to be gods and the sinners will disappear” (64).

The beginning of the twentieth century marks an era of social unrest and turmoil. Immigration and subsequent urbanization and industrialization lent themselves to the denouncement of oppression and injustice and the search for social movements that facilitated, although not without struggle, minority voices with a space in which to insert themselves in dialogue with the hegemony. These social movements challenged hegemony’s status quo and by extension also challenged the relationship between authority and power. Angel Rivera Quintero posits:

It is fascinating to explore how a conflictive situation such as was produced in the first decade of the century could give rise to new forms of relationships between men and women of the working class, forms which began to break old patterns of domination/subordination. (5)

Analysis of writing and texts from the early twentieth-century working class allow for exploration of rupture, change, and struggle. A particularly fascinating and complex site of investigation is that of migration between the Caribbean and the United States. Historical research of working-class migration (both voluntary and forced)¹⁵ illustrates that Cuban and Puerto Rican workers brought with them to the United States “an activist tradition” and that by the end of the nineteenth

century they had organized workers in both Tampa and New York (Poyo and Díaz-Miranda 310). In Tampa, the first three decades of the twentieth century were replete with conflict and “confrontation between management and labor” in the flourishing tobacco industry (Poyo and Díaz-Miranda 311). It is within, and because of, this historical context that we find the texts and writings of Luisa Capetillo. A militant feminist anarchist, labor leader and strong proponent of social justice, Capetillo dedicated her life to fighting for women’s rights and anarcho-syndicalist principles. She was a respected voice in the worker’s movement at the beginning of the twentieth century and a passionate defender of women’s agency.

Influencias de las ideas modernas (1916)

Influencias de las ideas modernas / Absolute Equality: An Early Feminist Perspective is a hybrid-genre and genre-defying text.¹⁶ It includes long and short plays, fiction, essays, propaganda, letters, poems, philosophical reflections, and journal entries. The title piece is a long theatrical play that was written in 1907 in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, while the other writings were written between 1912 and 1916 in Tampa and Ybor City, Florida; New York City; and Havana, Cuba. They are divided into sections and the next one entitled, “Philosophical, Naturalist, Psychological and Moralistic Notes, Annotations, Thoughts, Concepts, Definitions, Maxims, and Reflections,” was begun in Ybor City on July 24, 1913. In addition to all the items mentioned in this section’s title, there are also short fictional writings and fragments of letters, all of which articulate Capetillo’s ideology and propaganda of women and workers’ rights. The following section is entitled, “Interesting Letters from a Panamanian Anarchist,” which contains letters written to Capetillo while she was union organizing and disseminating propaganda in Tampa, Florida. It is interesting to note that this section only contains “one side” of their correspondence, as Capetillo’s responses are not included here. These are followed by five short plays and a poem.

Before providing a more detailed examination of these texts, it is interesting to explore the hybridity of the book’s composition. According to Iris Zavala’s study of modernist writers:

It is significant that since the turn of the [twentieth] century some women modernists were consciously elaborating and repositioning language and discourse. Poetry, letters, and diary writing, which used to reflect the previous forms of hegemonic

private literary practices, no longer constitute the main and sole activity to verbalize women's ideas, as more and more women begin to intervene in the cultural struggle to transform hegemonomies. (187)

Ramos, as well, argues that Capetillo's writing consists of heterogeneous "minor" literary genres because those styles (letters, translations, proclamations, autobiographical notes, fragments of speeches, short articles and essays) fit the lifestyle of an emerging working-class propagandist and writer (39), many times due to not having the time to dedicate solely to one project or book-length literary text. Additionally, the text as a whole can be read as an insight into Capetillo's activities: writing essays and propaganda for the union newspapers, writing correspondence to both her supporters and attackers, writing due to a creative spirit that almost compels her to do so, writing plays for the union halls and mutualist clubs, and so on.

In her play, "Influences of Modern Ideas," Capetillo employs many of the tenets of her ideology and propaganda. Anarchism, socialism, free love, feminism, anti-clericalism, disillusion of class structures, and philosophical ideals based on modernity and progress, among others.

This "Three-Act Play" as she calls it, is a long, multi-character piece with stage directions and scenery descriptions. The protagonist is a young, bourgeois woman who lives with her widowed father. In Capetillo's writing the moment of becoming conscious of the social system is always described, whether it be someone from the bourgeoisie or from the working class. She includes protagonists from various levels of social class, thus emphasizing her belief that social change will involve all levels of society. The protagonist, Angelina, is made conscious of society's inequalities, both of class and gender, through her own personal study of European writers, philosophers and anarchists such as Tolstoy, Zola, Malestesta, Malato, and Kropotkin, to name a few. The play opens with Angelina reading *The Slavery of Our Times* by Tolstoy.

The first scene presents the ideological thought that will continue throughout the drama. A dialogue between the protagonist, Angelina, the daughter of a rich businessman and landowner, and the house servant, Ramón, presents the explicitly didactic nature of the play.

RAMÓN: Miss, do you not remember that today is your birthday?

ANGELINA: Actually, I didn't remember I've been concentrated these past few days on reading Tolstoy's *The Slavery of Our Times*, which has convinced me that the slavery of our

times is the inflexible wage law. (SHE *takes the cards, looks at them, and leaves them on the table.*)

RAMÓN : (*Winks an eye to obtain the young woman's opinion.*)

And how could we live without receiving a wage?

ANGELINA: By educating the poor that no one has the right to place a value on one's work, nor should fixed working hours be established; work should be free and spontaneous, and there should be equal consumption. Each individual should work according to their potential and consume according to their needs.

RAMÓN : That is an anarchist maxim, but how do we put it into practice . . . through violence?

ANGELINA: No, through instruction and education; the majority of injustices and crimes are committed through ignorance. The capitalist class, for its own sake, should have tried to suppress the crimes and diseases created by the misery born of exploitation. (9)

And thus the stage is set. The problem is presented with promises of not only solutions, but concrete examples of how to put theories into practice. Angelina will cross all social class divisions between herself, the servant Ramón, and the peasants that cultivate the land owned by her father. At one point the protagonist asks, "Do you agree with those ideas? Would you dare to break from tradition?" (14). The question places the "tradition" of capitalism and the exploitation of workers at the forefront of concern. The final line of the scene is a call for action, "The working class will have to gain their freedom themselves" (15). This statement made by the wealthy landowner, after he shrinks from commencing a social revolt, not only indicts the dominant culture but also suggests the complicity of the working class in its social and economic subjugation when it does not resist. The working-class audience members are to be inspired to rise up and act for themselves.

The female protagonist even breaks class barriers to the point of falling in love with Carlos Santana, the labor strike and union leader. At each other's side, *compañeros* and equals, Angelina and Carlos lead the workers in revolution. As Ramos has indicated, "one of the key projects that forwards Capetillo's writing is that of producing contacts, intersections between classes, almost always achieved through the intervention of the woman" (53; my translation). Capetillo's feminist practice and class equality propose places of contact,¹⁷ alliances between women and

men of heterogeneous backgrounds, which in turn are corollary to her keen observation of the oppressive effects of social difference. Capetillo consistently creates characters who incorporate her political ideals and utopian visions, forging female working-class subjectivities that are leaders and instruments for change and equality.

As signifying and resignifying practices, Capetillo's dramas reinforced the values and beliefs of the anarcho-syndicalist movements and created a space for women and gender issues while directing the audience to take social action. As with later generations of social protest theater, Capetillo intended her plays to be transformative and regenerative. They affirmed cultural and class unity while demonstrating that the spectators' own oppressive social circumstances were ultimately transformable. The subversive action of these social protest dramas was to revitalize the struggles of the working class and to confirm the urgency and logic of their cause.

The next section, entitled "Philosophical, Naturalist, Psychological, and Moralistic Notes, Annotations, Thoughts, Concepts, Definitions, Maxims, and Reflections," states that it was started in Ybor City (Florida) on July 24, 1913. It is here where the reader can see Capetillo's thought processes and how she connects her ideas and philosophies to create her unique ideology. As she articulates her thoughts on capitalist exploitation, women and children's rights, the need for moral and ethical parenting, motherhood, respect for all living organisms and Mother Nature, even the irony of a society that cares more for animal rights than protecting children, the elderly, and the sick. Through these reflections, ponderings, and exercises in creating her own ideology and beliefs, Capetillo begins a process of unraveling monolithic or hegemonic thought in order to expose the inherent flaws and false logic present in these systems of domination. She then reconstructs a world in which all persons are respected and sexism, classism, racism, ageism, and all other forms of discrimination are abolished. Humankind and Mother Nature work as one in a utopian eco-friendly society and where "life in its diverse and various manifestations is governed by love" (54).

The act of writing and what it means to be a writer is a topic of great importance to Capetillo and the basis of many essays and letters included in this text. While claiming for herself the titles of "propagandist, journalist, and writer" (60) and referring to the desires of her "poetic mind" (70), she inscribes all women into the creative, intellectual space of writers and creators. The female characters she creates in her fiction and plays espouse the maxim of woman as artist and intellectual.

Angelina, the protagonist of the play “Influences of Modern Ideas,” studies anarchist and socialist theory, theology, and literature. Esmeralda, the protagonist of the play “Marriage Without Love, Consequence, Adultery,” refers to her “artistic imagination.” Gizelda, the dead mother of the orphaned youth in the short story, “Loves,” was a great artist and diva of the theater. The absent-present protagonist of the play, “After her Death,” is a poet. She argues with those who would claim that writers, artists, and philosophers are not producers, pointing out the primordial role of creativity as the necessary beginning for all forms of production from agriculture to architecture to poetry. She contests those who would not take her social ideas seriously or would dismiss them because they weren’t popular with the majority (51-52). She writes that she must continue in the struggle, which is both artistic and activist, even though she is being attacked, rejected, and misunderstood. In the essay entitled, “I” which is directed to an artist friend, Manuel García, Capetillo calls herself “una equivocada” (66), which I translate to mean “a woman out of place,” “misunderstood,” and “mistaken.” As Capetillo tries to negotiate between her marginalization as female artist and activist and her desire to create real social change, she often becomes frustrated. She writes, “in spite of all my frankness, I have not been understood, but instead, slandered, and misinterpreted” (66). This title she gives herself, “una equivocada,” is representative of her writing and praxis, especially its use in the context of her essay, “I,” and read in conjunction with daily activist “performances.”¹⁸ As she asserts her “right to enjoy” (66) all that nature and mankind have to offer, she places those rights within a capitalist society based on commodities, exchange, and inherent exploitation. As such Capetillo remarks that clothing and style of dress can be forms of female artistry, but are too tightly enmeshed in the monetary system. Capetillo then relates her strategic and manipulative processes of public image and use of the body, especially the female body, to “speak” to her audiences in order to disrupt certain spaces and subvert power structures.

Sometimes, in order that they don’t forget that I possess an artist’s soul, like most women, I dress up without ostentation. And if I were not such an anarchist, that is to say, such a “Christian,” I would dress splendidly, with true art, and with exquisite taste; but, the unfortunate who lack all necessities? The hungry and the naked? . . . What cruelty! What sarcasm! (66)

This use of the body and clothing as artist and activist expression is then situated against the capitalist system and those who are disenfranchised through this system of exchange.¹⁹ Additionally, this artistic act of fine taste and beauty can also be read against Capetillo's notorious cross-dressing habit in a suit and tie.²⁰ Echevarría posits that Capetillo, "in claiming for herself both the identity of the artist and the identity of the woman, in uniting both identities with her claim that all women are potential artists, Capetillo is redefining the traditional understanding of the 'artist' and the 'woman.'"

Creativity and power are not reserved for men only, and Capetillo takes aim at those who would disregard any and all female artists, writers, and scholars. While referencing George Sand she denounces those men who give little regard to the French writer or who think of her as an immoral or "loose" woman. She refutes these comments stating that these men must be intimidated by women as artists, thinkers, and creators and that it is only with exaggerated flattery that they console themselves into thinking that women are not capable of original intellectual work. It is significant that Capetillo reinforces the notion that women are a locus of power, creativity, and intellect. She must continually assert herself as a participant in the artistic and intellectual discourses of the time. Woman as artist and intellectual was not embraced by the literary elite. Such characterizations as French sculptor Pierre-Auguste Renoir's "I consider women writers, lawyers, and politicians (such as George Sand, Mme. Adam and other bores) as monsters and nothing but five-legged calves. . . . The woman artist is merely ridiculous" (Ctd. in Chadwick 215), or of Latin American modernist poet, Rubén Darío referring to French suffragists as "ugly" and as unwomanly and even masculine, in the most pejorative sense,²¹ are indicative of the disdain and resistance toward women as creative intellectuals. Perhaps this is why Capetillo repeatedly writes of herself, famous women, and her female characters as artists and intellectuals—to counter those who would attack and dismiss any and all women in these roles.

Restrictive gender roles, societal norms, and gendered imaginaries are again questioned and contested in the essay entitled "The Opinion of Many Men and My Opinion." In this short essay, through a strategic, creative use of hegemonic thought and a clever interpretation of power, Capetillo blurs the borders and spaces of gendered social roles while unmasking their inherent problems. The essay begins with remarks and opinions regarding women, their role and place in society. She lists the patriarchal, societal norms and opinions of men regarding women in

order to then deconstruct them and thus subvert and change society's structures of power. Capetillo's style to use logic and common sense are seen throughout this piece which begins:

Women should be women! Women's work is in the home! They shouldn't be macho! Mend stockings and underwear! Doze by the heartwarming fire knitting socks! Who asks them for their opinions, or to become involved in politics, or to aspire to be an elected candidate? This cannot be tolerated! Haven't we already permitted them to enter the lecture halls to become lawyers and doctors? But they are not satisfied: now they want to be judges, mayors, chiefs of police, legislators. Is that why we have allowed them to study, so they can cast us aside, aspiring to monopolize our positions and desiring to surpass us? I do not know how these women forget their weakness and their indiscretion; one cannot trust them at all, or teach them anything because immediately they want to take over. But how can a woman imitate a man? She can't, she's inferior! Even Mother Nature condemns her to be secluded during childbirth and breastfeeding! (66-67)

Through the act of writing, by putting these opinions and concepts on the page, by creating a textual space she is able to demystify their power, the power of the male, patriarchal opinion and, in turn, create her own interpretation of power. The working class and especially working-class women participate in public spaces differently than other social classes, and it is important that the public spheres referred to in the essay are othered. That is, they are not only leadership positions but also governing institutions. The hegemonically marginalized public space of the factory, the streets and even the schools have already been "sexed." It is the threat of women in other public spaces and the desire to protect that space that becomes an urgent necessity. In the title of the piece Capetillo states that there will be (at least) two opinions presented, but the reader is unaware (at the onset) as to who is voicing the first opinion. The opening line, "Women should be women," could just as well encapsulate Capetillo's feminist stance. It is this sort of strategic manipulation of hegemonic thought that characterizes Capetillo's discourse. As she unravels the patriarchal argument, she counters the opening remark in the second part of the essay with "A woman will *always* be a woman" (my emphasis). It is this unraveling of binary logic that pushes Capetillo's argument beyond a "he says, she says," to a theoretical

and revolutionary paradigm for social change. She continues to explain by stating that “being a woman isn’t only being powdered and covered in ribbons and lace,” just as a man does not stop being a man when he “learns to cook, mend, sweep, and sew” (67). Again, Capetillo refers to the body, adornments, sexed and gendered activities, and spaces. In doing so, she performs another act that shifts boundaries and projects the possibility for something different.

Critic Lisa Sánchez-González claims that Capetillo’s writing:

undoes the binary logic that her essentialist method implies, because she derives her theory from the scene of practice, despite her positivist impulses. She cannot help but to de-essentialize and de-romanticize social constructs, because her feminist and anarchist epistememes require that she dwell on the very seams of the binary split; and dwelling on these overlapping edges, the contractions become apparent, even glaring. (“Luisa Capetillo” 160)

The remainder of the essay is devoted to this “de-essentializing.” In the end, women will supersede men because of their superior moral conduct and sense of duty. And it will be because of men’s own weakness and vices that they are replaced by women. Women will replace them in the workplace and in politics due to their better judgment and strength against vice. Capetillo offers as example the woman who replaced a man in the position of a stoker in a steamer because the boss acknowledged that the woman did a better job, plus she didn’t drink whiskey (67). From this example Capetillo supposes that “in the future, woman will be preferred and men will have to abandon their vices in order to obtain employment” (67).

The essay ends making mention of many great women from history in various professions and areas who have brought about important change and betterment for society, including Joan of Arc, Madame Curie, the empress of Egypt Semiramis, Diana of Poitiers, Saint Teresa, and Mary Magdalene, among many others. Capetillo, while reminding her audience of strong and important women also performs an (en)gendering of history, of (re)writing women into the field in the same way that contemporary historians and critics such as Emma Pérez and others have done.²² Capetillo’s approach of integrating women into the past, present, and future insists that a “sexing” occur and that it “will benefit the human race” (67). By offering her opinion to create change

in the “opinion of many men,” in society in general, Capetillo endeavors to revolutionize social structures.

The questioning of the status quo and social norms is continued in a quick-paced fictional stichomythia-style dialogue about free love, blatant inequalities in the prevailing honor and fidelity codes between the sexes, female sexuality and autonomy, men’s sexual ownership of women, and inequitable child care and responsibility. Capetillo presents the story from various perspectives. It begins with a dialogue between the young couple, Elena and Andrés, and then moves to a dialogue between two “busybodies” who discuss what they have seen. As in many of Capetillo’s texts, she is able to capture the opinions of contrasting views in order to unveil the double standards and illogical, restrictive social norms. Capetillo clearly hears her public and her critics, she presents those voices through her characters and essays, ultimately demonstrating the “logic” of her ideology while simultaneously displaying the ridiculousness of her opponents’ arguments.

The story begins with a man driving down the street and, upon seeing a woman he knows, stops to ask her if she needs a lift. The dialogue ensues and he presents her with the option of living with him in a free love union. After discussing the situation he drops her off at her destination with plans to meet each other the next day. The next section introduces two busybodies who see Elena waiting on the street corner. It seems strategic that the busybodies are male and not the stock characters of neighborhood female gossips. Not only does it dismantle that stereotype, but it also allows the argument about women’s rights and social inequalities to take place between men. One of those men is in favor of the social change that would free women from patriarchal, social, and sexist oppressions. They begin to question her actions, and, after watching her get in the car with Andrés, the sexist and patriarchal assumptions begin. The busybodies don’t have names but rather are only referred to as “one” and “the other one.” Their argument stems from the dominant belief that women are to remain virgins until marriage, that she should not express any sort of sexuality or engage in physical intimacies, that she should not work outside the home, and that a man is not required to adhere to any of those standards. Each of the sexist statements is questioned and countered, allowing the reader to do the same. In the end Elena and Andrés have united together in a free love, happily surrounded by nature and the children who are the fruits of their union, free from the social systems that bind and oppress. Elena acted in accord-

dance with her own desires—physical, emotional, and mental—and was better off for having done so.

Free love unions are present in all Capetillo's texts as well as in her own life experiences. As previously mentioned, her parents never married, nor did Capetillo marry Manuel Ledesma, her lover and the father of her two children. This concept of mutually monogamous relationships is detailed in her 1911 text, *Mi opinión*, and is a reoccurring theme in *Influencias de las ideas modernas* as well. Suárez Findlay has noted that "Capetillo's vision of free love coincided in many ways with that advanced by her fellow male anarchists. Unlike her male comrades, however, Capetillo was careful to point out that conflict within couples arose not only because of the permanence and coldly contractual nature of marriage but also because of men's failure to treat women properly on a consistent basis" (158). Although Capetillo insisted on the rights of both men and women to end a relationship that was no longer viable, she did understand that within the patriarchal and capitalist system women were more susceptible to economic, as well as social, obstacles. She therefore demanded male and paternal responsibility for children while advocating the importance of self-sufficiency, financial, and otherwise, on the part of women.

Economic trappings are not the only oppressive barriers women may face in asserting their independence and emancipation. Throughout her text Capetillo creates female characters from bourgeois and elite social classes. They must overcome and demand equal rights and participation in society, the right to explore and pursue their desires as subjects and not mere objects, and become a locus of power and a catalyst for change. If they don't, they continue to be subjugated to the sexist and patriarchal systems with no hope for revolution. Capetillo recalls an American movie she once saw about a princess; she uses it as a point of departure for the short fictional piece she titles "Two Cages" to stress her point saying, "[we] fear freedom. We run from it as if it were a disease, even though we desire it" (58). For Capetillo, desire was meant to be acted upon, not repressed. One could not, should not shrink from their "duty"; one must act, continually reminding her audience that indeed, "desire is power!" (Capetillo, *Mi opinión* vii). Her characters (both female and male, both working-class and bourgeois) are applauded for asserting themselves, acting on desire, and appropriating power. At the end of the long play "Influences of Modern Ideas" a chorus of workers chants, "Long live free union! Down with exploitation!" while the young, bourgeois, but enlightened Angelina is united with her lover,

Carlos, the union organizer and strike leader (42). When Marina runs off with her lover instead of obeying her parents and marrying the young marquis, the play ends with a member of the community saying, “Excellent for valiant women!” (33).

In addition to Capetillo’s discourse on feminism and female emancipation, she also articulates notions of modernity and its relationship to progress and civilization. Moreover, Capetillo elaborates on the “backwardness” (Sánchez-González, “Luisa Capetillo” 159) of so-called “modern” and “civilized” society. She emphasizes that the positivist view of “progress” and “civilization” has been tainted and manipulated by the social system of the bourgeoisie. It represents a classist view of society that excludes and moralizes through hypocrisy and ignorance coupled with the widely accepted idea that “progress” is to “civilize” the unruly or savage. According to Capetillo, “progress” is to strip away hypocrisy and hierarchies of power in the name of freedom and liberty. Her project and purpose is to displace and dismantle the hierarchies and hegemonies that oppress and undermine human life. In a way that recalls her own use of cross-dressing, perhaps because she understands its strategy, she is able to see through it and unmask it. In one of her reflections she writes:

There are well-dressed thieves that they call gentlemen and thieves dressed in rags that they call beggars. Some rob from the stock exchange and others from businesses; others pickpocket in the streets, plazas, or houses due to poverty or vagrancy, which the present social system engenders, while others speculate because of selfish ambition. The second ones mentioned are more admissible than the first.” (45)

In a capitalist society, crimes are disguised and “admissible” through class markers such as clothing and occupation.

Modernity and civilization are similarly masked as she describes in an essay on hygiene or the lack thereof, as practiced by the middle classes entitled, “Exaggerations”:

An infinite number of people believe that to be civilized is to wear patent leather shoes, a new collared shirt, and tie even though the undergarments stink of sweat, and one doesn’t bathe not even once a week, and furthermore they overeat like cannibals, and they lose control like satyrs. (75)

Clothing, therefore, according to Capetillo is a strategic vehicle of masking and unmasking. Hygiene and its importance to modern-ness and civilization becomes the message of the essay. In fact she goes so far as to say, “in order to call oneself or believe oneself to be civilized, one must be clean” and “civilization, modern progress rests upon hygiene” (76).

Other ruminations on civilization, progress, modernity, and hygiene are present in her autobiographical or journal entry-style writings where Capetillo explains her daily routine of calisthenics, bathing, vegetarian diet, and intellectual production. Civilization and social change are themes espoused in her experimental prose and visions of future society.

Capetillo returns to the themes of exploitation, desire, social change in her short fictional piece, “The Cashier,” which is, as Ramos has indicated, both the story of the perfect anarchist robbery and an allegory of the role of money in a capitalist society (44). Capetillo’s astute manipulation of fiction and narration allow her to express her ideological beliefs through various levels of storytelling and symbolization. According to Sánchez-González it is through fiction that Capetillo finds her “best method for coming to grips with the ineluctable modality of revolutionary praxis” (“Luisa Capetillo” 161). Written while in Ybor City in 1913, “The Cashier” presents Ricardo, a young man whose mother, Ramona, is sick and dying after having almost worked herself to death in order to raise her son on her own. Ramona wants her son to receive an education in order to live a productive life without the poverty and misery that she had experienced working as a piecework seamstress and at other low-paying jobs. She is able to convince Don Castro, a local wealthy businessman, to sponsor Ricardo’s education. He agrees and sends Ricardo to New York where he will study accounting.²³ In the meantime, Ramona dies of tuberculosis after too much work and exploitation, while Ricardo secures a middle-class job in New York at a bank. The trope of the orphaned adolescent as commonly seen in nineteenth-century European literature is presented here in Capetillo’s writing, but instead of overcoming all odds to attain access to the middle class and in so doing, happiness, Capetillo’s characters are aware of the social ills and emptiness of the bourgeoisie.²⁴ Therefore, Ricardo is not satisfied, aware that he is still an exploited worker in the capitalist system, just as his mother was. In a moment of consciousness and realization (a moment shared by all of Capetillo’s protagonists) he sees how the system had institutionalized the mechanization of human life, how capitalism had turned him (and the rest of society) into a slave to the all-important dollar, unable to enjoy any

profits from it—always working with no time left to spend with loved ones or family.

Ricardo says, “What a life!” He passes money from one side to other, millions of dollars without being able to make use of one cent. He is corralled, muzzled, made into a counting machine without no aspirations other than to be careful not to make a mistake, to be condemned to have a fortune in his hands, and have nothing more than a meager wage; he is treated with indifference, as if he does not feel, as if he does not have the right to enjoy himself like everyone else. And he studied for this, and his mother suffered so many hardships in order for him to be where he is today. (85)

Besides being a “counting machine,” voiceless, and suffering inequality, Capetillo’s protagonist, Ricardo, also underlines how capitalism is the cause and root of the destruction of “family values” and fidelity.

It was torture to be born and grow up hearing cries and seeing miseries, to depend on others for an education, and finally to live among gold all day without aspiring for more happiness than to marry, to leave the wife always alone. Should she want to go to the theater or some other place, to entrust her with a friend, so that later—as happened to the cashier from another bank—while he was working, his wife would go and spend time in the country with another man who ended up being her lover! “No, no way! I have the right to live and to be happy. I won’t leave my Matilde always alone, no!” he tells himself. The man that marries should take his wife with him or stay with her. Those marriages in which the woman, bored from being alone gives herself to the first friend, is desperate; they are not to blame. We are the ones who expose her to that. It would be one thing if they do it because of love, but no, woman has a terrible struggle to stay faithful. (86)

Deciding that he cannot tolerate the situation and capitalist system any longer, he devises a plan to rob a million dollars from the bank and escape with his wife, Matilde, by sailing off to St. Petersburg, an obvious utopia in the anarchist imaginary at the turn of the twentieth century. It is also a site familiar to Capetillo’s own imaginary from reading famous nineteenth-century Russian literature (Ramos 47). Ricardo is, of

course, successful and after touring through Europe's cultural and intellectual centers in St. Petersburg, Italy, and Paris, the couple settles in Granada in order to make a home for their soon-to-be-born first child, safe and assured from becoming once again embroiled in the institutionalized slavery inherent in the bourgeois and capitalist system.

In the fictional piece, "Loves," Capetillo weaves another tale of orphaned youth, but this time with a soon-to-be-absent-present protagonist. It begins with the sad, unnecessary and undeserving death of a young, beautiful widow who dies of hunger with her small baby still in her arms. The remainder of the story is about her orphaned son within the over-arching theme of love. Capetillo criticizes social constraints and repression of the bourgeois class in a "star-crossed lovers," Romeo and Juliet trope. Jacinto, the orphaned son of the once lovely and adored theater diva, Gizelda, grows up never knowing who his parents were. Later he meets and falls in love with Alina, daughter of the wealthy and well-known Count and Countess del Prado. But although Jacinto has become a model citizen and perfect gentleman, Alina's parents refuse their union because the young man has no social title or knowledge of his lineage. While Jacinto is searching for information on his parents and lineage, Capetillo takes the opportunity to highlight the repressive social structures that squelch and dismiss female desire, subjectivity, and autonomy. An argument between Alina and her father demonstrates this point.

"He will come bringing his social ranking or his fortune."

Alina replied, "I don't want either of them, I love him."

"Even if he is a nobody?"

[. . .]

"What do you mean, a nobody! Perhaps a cultured, educated, intelligent young man with a secure future, is a nobody?"

"But, daughter, you are a child to be talking like that."

"At sixteen years of age I am not a child, father."

"Well, if he doesn't bring name or fortune, I can't make a decision, because I don't want to be at the mercy of criticism and gossip."

"You will kill me."

"Don't ask me for the impossible."

"I want my happiness. No one has the right to question or to tell what sort of happiness I should desire."

"You are much too young to know how to look for happiness. You do not have any experience."

"Happiness and love are children, not old folks." (103)

Again, happiness is not predicated on economic or social wealth, but rather desire. Capetillo's own life story as a working-class woman in love with the son of a wealthy and socially powerful family also seems to be used a fodder in her fiction and plays.

The last section, which includes five short plays with female protagonists, explores Capetillo's ideology and propaganda against the oppressive capitalist and patriarchal social systems. As short pieces without many characters or explicit stage designs (except for the highly detailed "After her Death"), they seem to lend themselves well to union meetings or *juntas*. As both Kanellos and Dworkin y Méndez have shown, U.S. Hispanic working-class theater in Tampa was an important and thriving cultural tradition and expression. This assumption is based on research and recovery work done by both scholars regarding Hispanic theater in the United States, especially in Tampa/Ybor City, Florida.²⁵ This area became the home to the cigar-manufacturing industry and an enclave of Hispanic cultural production before the turn of the twentieth century. In addition, the historical and biographical research of Valle Ferrer on Capetillo discusses the probability of these works being presented in front of working-class audiences, most likely in the union halls in Tampa. She states:

We do not know if these works were staged in any theater during the moment of their creation; but, we cannot doubt that they were probably performed during a dramatic evening sponsored by the Free Federation of Workers or the Federation of Tobacco Rollers, during strikes or union activities. (38; my translation)

Capetillo's plays were therefore presented to inspire and educate audiences already politicized, at least to a certain degree, in syndicalist ideology and social oppression.

Through her dramas, Capetillo created utopian and radicalized visions of female and working-class subjectivity. Implicitly, in her theatrical projects she exposed the inherent "constructed-ness" of all political systems, social communities, historical narratives, as well as social and cultural identities. These ideologies were heavily steeped in anarchism and contributed greatly to her feminist consciousness and practice. Definitions of anarchism always include the concept of domination, which in all of its forms is the source of all social problems. Whether exercised by governments, religious institutions, or through economic relations, domination is unacceptable. Although anarchism shares with many socialist traditions a radical critique of economic

domination and an insistence on the need for a fundamental economic restructuring of society on a more egalitarian basis, it goes beyond Marxist socialism in developing an independent critique of the state, of hierarchy, and of authority relations in general. Where socialists have traced the roots of all domination to the division of labor in the economy, anarchists have insisted that power has its own logic and will not be abolished through attention to economic relations alone.²⁶ Capetillo's writing highlights this anarchist ideology and notion that any abuse of power is unjustified and is the root of all oppression.

In her plays, Capetillo articulates connections between politics, culture and gender that anticipated Stuart Hall's conceptualization of a "politics of representation" as well as the designs and desires for cultural resistance proposed by contemporary cultural critics, such as bell hooks, Cornel West, Henry Giroux, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Capetillo rejects the limits imposed on women by the roles assigned to them from patriarchal society and insists that these roles are not part of women's "natural" life. Instead, she reveals how they are merely social constructs that impose on their inherent freedoms.

By predicating revolutionary victory, Capetillo's dramas could renew the audience's commitment to struggle. The success of the social protest cause was shown to be distinct, specific and attainable. Capetillo's plays also presented empowering images of working-class people and gave workers a medium for disseminating the lessons of organized labor. These counter-hegemonic social protest performances interrogated and repositioned the power of theatrical representation and manipulated power as a creative force. The goal was to unite the audience and characters/performers in imagining a radicalized vision of gender and class equality that would motivate them to anarcho-syndicalist organizing.

The first section of plays is placed together under the title, "The Corruption of the Rich and of the Poor or How a Rich Woman and Poor Woman are Prostituted." They explain and illustrate Capetillo's concept of free love unions and female desire and criticize class division and gender inequality. In the first piece a young, bourgeois woman is forced by her father to marry a man she doesn't love in order to save her family from financial ruin. She is saved from this legal form of prostitution due to her own consciousness and strength of will. Together with her true love, a working-class young man who helps convince her that traditional norms do not serve either her or society, she is able to run off with him (and her inheritance) the night before the wedding.

Marina, an eighteen-year-old young woman, is forced to marry Don Filiberto, the Marquis de Azuria, a man she does not love so that her family can acquire the rank of nobility. Her real love, the youthful Roberto, sees her situation clearly and asks, "Because he is your father? And because of that he has the right to sell you, but you don't understand? It is the selling of your body for a title? . . ." (168). This question, placed in the mouth of a male protagonist, provides the example of not only women envisioning a liberation from patriarchy, but men as well. It dismantles the acceptance of marriages based on monetary convenience and women as exchanged commodities. It also reiterates Capetillo's precept of female sexual liberation as one of woman's natural rights.

In true Capetillo form Marina acts for herself, against the wishes and demands of her father, and goes off with Roberto. The drama ends with a meta-theatrical social commentary of two characters in a café. This didactic coda, like a Greek chorus, concludes the play:

ONE. (*Arriving.*) Do you know about last night's play? Well, simply put, a banker wants to marry off his daughter to the ruined Marquis. The daughter accepts the proposition but loves another. The night of the wedding, when everything is prepared, she gathers her inheritance and flees with her lover, leaving everyone waiting.

OTHER. Excellent for valiant women!

ONE. This is why parents should not make business deals using their daughters; getting married without loving one another is a corruption. (133)

Once again Capetillo sets up a melodrama with all the usual conventions, only to turn it on its head, making it appear as if it has finally turned right-side up. She subverts cultural, societal traditions and conventions of arranged marriages of convenience to create a new social harmony and sense of poetic justice. Raymond Williams has said of theater that it presents the "dramatic possibility of what might be done within what is known to have been done" (11). Capetillo's plays also perform the function as explained by Baz Kershaw. He states that "the efficacious social protest performance challenges the spectators' ideological community, but at the same time, dialectically, it comforts the spectators and confirms their social purpose" (33). Capetillo's subversion, always based on the collectivity of the working class, challenges the gender status quo within her class community while at the same

time confronts that status quo in the dominant classes as well. Capetillo offers an alternate reality to her audience, a different mode of empowerment and happiness only found through the freedom from gender and class oppression.

The second piece, entitled “Marriage Without Love, Consequence, Adultery,” is also about a young, bourgeois woman, but in this play she is already married. Even though the characters’ names are different, one could read the plot as if the protagonist from the previous play hadn’t been a “valiant woman” and had married the man her father had chosen for her. It is as if we catch up with her now, in an unhappy marriage, prostituted. As with all these short plays, Capetillo demonstrates her genius and quick, concise storytelling. All the important themes are there in this “social drama,” as she calls it. The title alone plays an important role in the significance and message. Perhaps at first to her audience (and readers) the title explains what necessarily occurs in a loveless marriage—that the unhappy spouse will look elsewhere, outside the marriage bond to find happiness, resulting in adultery. But by the end of the play the title clearly has another meaning, a meaning that is directly aligned with Capetillo’s concept of free love and the evils of oppressive social norms. At the end the receptor is made aware that a marriage or union based on love is not a marriage at all, therefore the marriage, although it is legal and licit for the courts, according to the concepts of free love, is adultery. This is yet another way in which, in this case, a “rich” woman is prostituted.

The very brief, one-act, one-scene play, “The Prostitution of Poor Women,” is a dialogue between a prostitute and a young man. Once again it is Capetillo’s genius at subversion that unravels the play’s message. When the prostitute is questioned about her so-called “career choice,” she responds by describing the miserable factory scene with a lewd foreman. In this way the social dilemma is presented and conventional thought is skewed: problems associated with prostitution are now the acute problems of the factory worker. In the end it is this “backward” society that has corrupted the poor and forced women into prostitution, which can be found in various exchanges of bodies and production and is comparable to being “sold” into legal marriage. What these three plays do is express succinctly the concept of free love, the social ills that oppress humankind, especially women and, most importantly, demonstrate a solution to these problems. By way of these short plays, Capetillo attempts to explain women’s situation and the unequal distribution of privilege and power using gender, coupled with class, as

elements in her analysis. Patriarchy crosses all class boundaries and affects all women.

The play that follows, the two scene drama “In the Country, Free Love,” demonstrates the idyllic possibilities for a couple that can escape the artificiality of modern life, an influence of Bakunin and Kropotkin’s ideas of anarchism. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin “disapproved morally of the complacent, dull, and repressive bourgeoisie, and also of the results of industrial life; the anti-industrialization was part of the major concern with oppression, and a return to the Middle Ages that represented, at least to Bakunin and Kropotkin, a return to collectivization, not a nostalgia for the past” (Zavala 111). In the play the protagonists, Victor and Aurora, represent a freer human life working in conjunction with Mother Nature. They both work the land and after acknowledging their mutual attraction they unite in free love and make a home together in the country where they are free to enjoy and become one with Mother Nature. All their hopes and dreams seem possible and they plan to have many happy children together. Liberty is the overarching theme, whether referring to women’s agency and gender equality or the social collectivity. When Victor asks Aurora if he can guide her through life’s “torturous path” she replies “that woman should walk alone, that is to say united, yes, but that there be mutual protection” (149). To which Victor clarifies his response by stating:

It hasn’t been my intention to try to impose my will. I offered you my help in order for us to love each other mutually but it didn’t occur to me that you could imagine that I was trying to inhibit your natural activities and your personal initiatives. In that I do not meddle. You are completely free to do whatever you please. (149)

By abolishing gender inequities they are able to create a social utopian vision that includes free property, free work in a wage-less social structure of agricultural exchange and they become the parents of children in this free society. The play ends as they vow to “go after our dream” and to make love in order to “sow seeds of freedom” (151).

The last play, which takes place in the tropics, in a “city in the Antilles,” entitled “After her Death: A Play from Real Life in Verse and Prose,” offers a different female protagonist, one who is already dead. In this sense it is the absent-present protagonist who speaks posthumously through her poetry, who is finally able to articulate the social inequalities forced upon women. The play underlines the senselessness

of men's (socially acceptable) sexual ownership of women and the fatal and irrecoverable consequences of such actions.

Influencias de las ideas modernas ends with a short poem composed in Ybor City entitled "Your Blonde Hair" with the nostalgic emotion of human touch and affection. Because Capetillo left her children in her mother's care while she was in the United States, the poem could be read as a moment of reflection, thinking of her daughter and missing those sweet moments a mother can have exemplified in the braiding of her daughter's hair.

Capetillo's descriptor, "soy una equivocada" or "I'm a woman out of place, a woman misunderstood," seems to be something that Capetillo never stopped struggling with or negotiating, no matter where her artistic and activist migrations took her. This out-of-place space that she found herself in, misunderstood and subversive for not adhering to gendered social spaces, was also a creative place and a vantage point. Contemporary theorist and critic, bell hooks, describes this marginal space as a "space of radical openness" that depicts marginality as opposition to deprivation, as "the site of radical possibility" (149). Once understood in this manner, the marginalized can reclaim the space as a "position and place of resistance that is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people" (150). Perhaps in the context of this analysis, "la equivocada" is she who understands her precarious position among established social structures and, therefore, resourcefully and strategically takes advantage of it to interpret and subvert power on her own terms to create social change, to enact revolution. She is neither categorized nor contained. For Capetillo, she crosses spatial boundaries and borders in order to blur, disrupt, and resist them. In doing so, she crafts other spaces and interstices or finds access to spaces that attempt to deny her and all women in general. Thus, woman is the catalyst to create a utopian society of equality and progress in which, "woman will always be a woman" (*Absolute Equality* 67), an instigator of social change, radical possibility, and revolution.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Nicolás Kanellos for the experience of "discovering" Luisa Capetillo and her work during my graduate study at the University of Houston, and for allowing me the incredible opportunity to translate her final published text, *Influencias de las ideas modernas* (1916) and introduce this bilingual edition. I am also grateful for his constant support and patience. I would also like to thank the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project and Arte Público Press, as well as Dr. Gabriela Baeza Ventura, executive editor. I must also thank those who offered their support and

- insight during this project. Many thanks go out to Viviana Tapia, Heather Bigley, Therese Tardio, and Catherine Nock.
- ² For example, Bernardo Vega's, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega*; Jesús Colón's, *A Puerto Rican in New York*; Arthur Alfonso Scholmburg's, *A Puerto Rican Quest for his Black Heritage*.
- ³ Lisa Sánchez-González discusses the work of Vega, Colón, Schomburg, and Luisa Capetillo in her book, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora*.
- ⁴ The Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, founded and housed at the University of Houston under the direction of Dr. Nicolás Kanellos, has taken on this overwhelming and important task to recover and archive all the writing by Latinos in the United States prior to 1960.
- ⁵ The ethnic label "Latina" or "Latino" is a broad term that includes diverse ethnic groups of Latin American descent and therefore also elides difference and variance among individual groups (see Suzanne Oboler's *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives* for a discussion on ethnic labels and terms). I use the term here with no intention to disregard difference but rather to utilize its unifying connotation in regards to literary and cultural production by Latinas/os of varying backgrounds, ethnicities, races, classes, etc. in the United States. Also insightful and useful is Nicolás Kanellos' "Introducción: Panorama de la literatura hispana de los Estados Unidos" to *En otra voz: Antología de la literatura hispana de los Estados Unidos* in which he unites the writing by Latinos in the United States under the rubric of native, immigrant, or exile writing.
- ⁶ I am specifically looking at working-class women writers and activists of Hispanic descent whose work in the United States was based on anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and anarcho-feminist principles and advocated for women and minorities' rights, along with the need for social revolutionary change. Examples are Lucy González Parsons (African-Mexican-Native American), Luisa Moreno (emigrated from Guatemala), Emma Tenayuca (Tejana-Chicana), and Josefina Fierro (Chicana).
- ⁷ It is important to note the literary and cultural production (and even presence) of Latinos in the geographical area of what is now the United States during the past centuries and not just since the 1960s social movements. For excellent discussions on U.S. Latino production and presence prior to the 1960s, see Nicolás Kanellos, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Luis Leal, Genaro Padilla, Rosaura Sánchez, Walter Benn Michaels, Kirsten Silva Gruesz, among others.
- ⁸ The selections from Capetillo's *Influencias de las ideas modernas* included in this book are: "Por qué decir;" "Visiones;" "Yo;" and "La opinión de muchos hombres y la mía."
- ⁹ Ramos includes the following selections from Capetillo's *Influencias de las ideas modernas* in his text: an autobiographical essay that describes Capetillo's intellectual upbringing *Formación intelectual de Capetillo*; *El cajero*; *A un amigo bárbaro*; *Influencias de las ideas modernas*; *Los relojes*; a contemplation while looking at a cityscape with a church dome *Arquitectura y pobreza*; a selection denouncing child exploitation *Explotación infantil*; a selection pondering nature and ecology *Paisaje y ecología*; a selection about the survival of all living organisms *Sobrevivencia de un gusano*; a selection reflecting on the relationship between intellectual work and daily life *Trabajo intelectual y vida diaria*; *Exageraciones*; *Fragmentos de una carta*; a reference to George Sand and historians of women *Jorge Sand y los historiadores de la mujer*; a story of free love, *Amor libre: un relato*; and two short plays, *La corrupción de los ricos y la de los pobres o Cómo se prostituye una rica y una pobre*.
- ¹⁰ It is important to note that in 2004 the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project and Arte Público Press published a bilingual edition of Capetillo's complete 1911 text, *Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer*, under the title, *A Nation of Women: An Early Feminist Speaks Out*, with an introduction by schol-

ar Félix V. Matos Rodríguez and an English translation by Alan West-Durán. Also, selections from Capetillo's other books—*Ensayos libertarios* (1907), *La humanidad en el futuro* (1910), and *Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer como compañera, madre y ser independiente* (1911)—have been republished in Valle Ferrer's biographies (Spanish and English), Ramos' edition of *Amor y anarquía*, and most recently Gloria da Cunha's, *Pensadoras de la nación*, which only includes a selection of texts from Capetillo's *La humanidad en el futuro* (1910) and *Mi opinión* (1911).

¹¹Both Julio Ramos and Frances R. Aparicio refer to the importance of the *lectores* in the tobacco factories to the intellectual and political development of these men.

¹²A. Quintero Rivera in his article, "Socialista y tabaquero: la proletarianización de los artesanos," explicates the impact the readers, and the material being read, had on the workers and their working-class formation, intellect, and even revolution.

¹³Darwin's theory of evolution was published in the same period as Kardec's *The Spirits' Book* (Fernández Olmos 172).

¹⁴Tolstoy and his anarchist writings were of continual inspiration for Capetillo, especially in her play, "Influences of Modern Ideas."

¹⁵Virginia Sánchez Korrol explains the different forms of migration between Puerto Rico and the United States during the early twentieth century. She points out that although earlier documentation cites overpopulation of the island as a reason for voluntary emigration, "recent scholarship in Puerto Rico and the United States challenges the overpopulation thesis, rejecting the notion that migrants exercised free choice motivated by a desire to better their condition" (285).

¹⁶Lisa Sánchez González uses the term "genre-defying" to describe Capetillo's fiction ("Luisa Capetillo" 158).

¹⁷This concept is also reminiscent of Mary Louise Pratt's term, "contact zones," as defined in her 1992 text, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

¹⁸I am employing the term performance here as proposed by contemporary theorists and critics such as Judith Butler and Marjorie Garber.

¹⁹Ana M. Echevarría analyzes this connection that Capetillo poses between women's use of clothing and fashion as artistic expression and its concomitant relationship with commodity exchange and the capitalist system in her dissertation, "Performing Subversion: A Comparative Study of Caribbean Women Playwrights."

²⁰Perhaps Capetillo's most famous image is her photo—also reproduced on the cover of this book—that was taken in 1915 while she was in Havana, Cuba, in a man's suit, tie, and Panama hat. This photo was Julio Ramos' point of departure for his critical introduction of *Amor y anarquía: Los escritos de Luisa Capetillo*. The photo is also analyzed in conjunction with Capetillo's essay "I" in my unpublished article, "Sexing the Space of Resistance: Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922)."

²¹Darío referring to French suffragists writes, "Tengo a la vista unas cuantas fotografías de esas políticas. Como lo podréis adivinar, todas son feas; y la mayor parte más que jamonas. . . . estos marivarones —suavicemos la palabra— que se hallan propias para las farsas públicas en que los hombres se distinguen y que, como la Durand, se adelantan a tomar papel en el sainete electoral, merecen el escarmiento." ("¡Estas mujeres!" 549-50)

²²Pérez posits that "[in Chicano history] women are conceptualized as merely a backdrop to men's social and political activities, when they are in fact intervening interstitially while sexing the colonial imaginary" (7).

²³Ramos notes that Capetillo is also criticizing the paternalism as a patriarchal construct relegated to the orphaned youth, citing Juan Gelpi's study, *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico*.

- ²⁴According to Sánchez-González, "'The Cashier,' revises the usual 19th century romantic realism of authors such as Dickens, Charlotte Brönte and Zola, by appropriating the trope of the orphaned youth [. . .] But unlike Jane Eyre, for example, who uses her mysteriously granted fortune to establish a bourgeois paradise, Ricardo is disgusted with his middle-class lifestyle" (162).
- ²⁵According to Kanellos, "Unlike Los Angeles, San Antonio, and New York, there was very little truly commercial theatrical activity in the Tampa-Ybor City communities. [. . .] For the most part, the audiences were made up of tobacco workers and their families. The tobacco workers prided themselves on their literary and artistic tastes; they were considered an intellectual or elite labor class that had gained an informal education from the professional *lectores*, or readers, they hired to read aloud to them from literary masterpieces, newspapers, and other matter while they rolled cigars" (258).
- ²⁶For an excellent description and study of anarchism in relationship to women, see Martha A. Ackelsberg's *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women*.

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