
LOLA BALDONI PÉREZ

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Biography of Lola Baldoni Pérez

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Dolores (Lola) Baldoni Pérez (1871-1939)

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Translated by Henry Hirschfeld

Dolores (Lola) Baldoni was a Puerto Rican writer, activist, and spiritist from the end of the nineteenth century. She was the granddaughter of Luis Baldoni, a French official who, fleeing from a terrible massacre in the Dominican Republic, moved to Puerto Rico at the end of the eighteenth century. Lola was the second daughter of Eduardo Baldoni and Dolores Pérez, a freethinking and anti-Spanish family that professed Spiritism. They resided in Arecibo until a fire destroyed their home in 1890 and Lola, along with her four sisters —Juana, Genoveva, Isabel, and Ángela— had to move to Utuado to live with their brother Luis, who owned a local grocery store.¹ By then, at the age of twenty, she wrote in her book *Impresiones (Impressions)* (1894), recalling the destruction of her childhood home:



It is all over! Wherever I look for a cherished memory, a ruin jumps into my view, my childhood home destroyed, the noisy fig and avocado trees that lent their shadows to my games, today they are silent skeletons; the roses and pomegranates cultivated by the loving hands of my sweet mother, everything, everything was consumed by the ferocious flames of the terrible fire.²

The five Baldoni sisters were Kardecian spiritists and they led their lives in accordance with that doctrine. In

Fig. 1: Photography of Lola Baldoni Pérez.³

¹ Ramón Morel Campos, *El Porvenir de Utuado: Estudio histórico, descriptivo y estadístico*, Edición facsímil, 2002, Ponce: Imprenta El Vapor, 1896, p. 237.

² Lola Baldoni, *Impresiones: Colección de Artículos*, Ponce: Tipografía El Telégrafo: 1894, pp. 10-11.

³ Thanks to Dr. Sandra Enríquez Seiders for granting us access and use of these photographs and other materials.

Utuaado they dedicated themselves to sewing, spiritist study, and works of social charity. They would sew pajamas and other clothing for the San Rafael hospital, which was built by a spiritist group.⁴ None of them ever married, they went out very rarely, and every evening they would read, sew, and meditate.⁵

Lola stood out as a writer and activist. She published the novel *María Mercedes*, a book of reflections that she titled *Impresiones*, and essays in spiritist newspapers and periodicals within and outside of Puerto Rico. Her articles were published in *La Luz del Porvenir* (*The Light of the Future*), a Spanish spiritist periodical led by the internationally recognized writer Amalia Domingo Soler.⁶ She also collaborated with the periodical *La Mujer* (*The Woman*), which was directed by Ana Roqué de Duprey, a spiritist, feminist, and pioneer of women's suffrage movement in Puerto Rico.⁷ She was also published in the Ponce periodical *El Estudio* (*The Study*), a forum for free thought where articles about topics like Spiritism and Freemasonry were spread. Lola Baldoni also stood out as an editor and collaborator of the important Puerto Rican periodical *El Iris de Paz* (*The Iris of Peace*), which was published in Mayagüez between 1900 and 1912, under the direction of Agustina Guffain Lanzón de Doittau.⁸

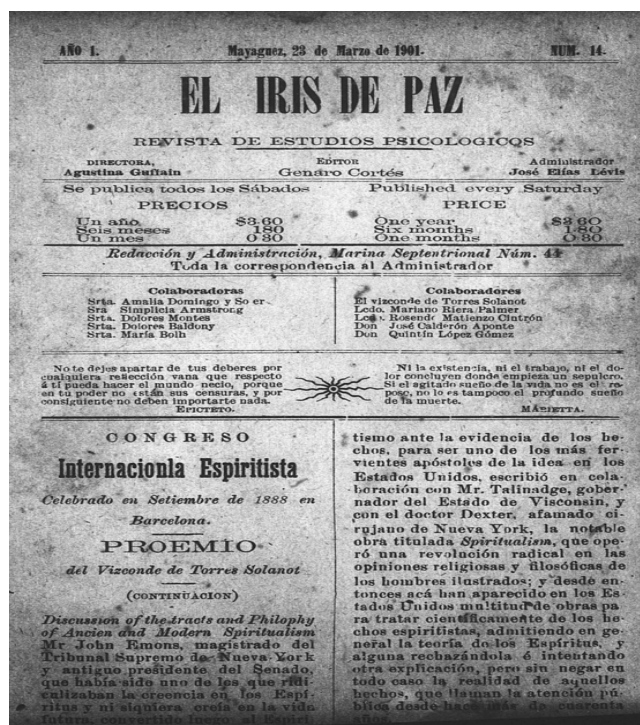


Fig. 2: Example of *El Iris de Paz*, March 23, 1901.⁹

As a fervent defender of the moral values professed by Spiritism, she joined the 1904 spiritist campaign against the death penalty.¹⁰ She participated actively in the activities of La

⁴ La Correspondencia, 30 de septiembre, 1892, p. 3.

⁵ Interview with Ileana Baldoni Rosario by Sandra Enríquez Seiders.

⁶ Spanish writer, journalist, and advocate for Kardecian Spiritism during a very difficult time period of human intolerance. Although she was practically blind, she wrote various important books of essays, poems, treaties and novels. She maintained correspondence with many spiritist leaders, philosophers, educators, and intellectuals from Europe and America.

⁷ Nancy Herzig Shannon, *El Iris de Paz: El espiritismo y la mujer en Puerto Rico, 1900-1905*, Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 2001, p. 83.

⁸ Gerardo Aponte Hernández, *El espiritismo de Allan Kardec en Puerto Rico (1860-1907)*, Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Historia, 2010, p. 82.

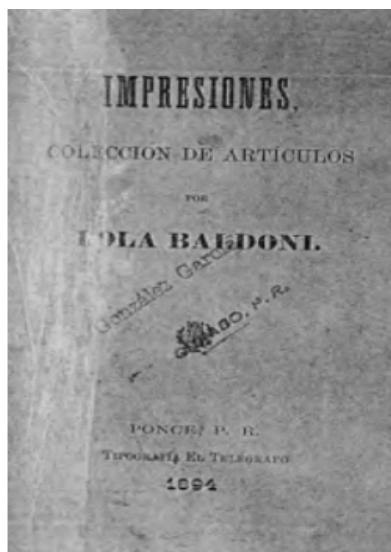
⁹ Thanks to Dr. Sandra Enríquez Seiders for granting us access and use of these photographs and other materials.

¹⁰ *Memorias de las Asambleas Espiritistas celebradas en San Juan, Lares, Ponce y Arecibo en los días 18 y 19 de abril de los años 1904, 1905, 1906 y 1907*, Ponce: Tipografía el Sol, 1907, p. 16.

Federación de Espiritistas de Puerto Rico (Spiritist Federation of Puerto Rico) and, in its convention held in Arecibo in 1907, she contributed to the creation of the Sociedad Abolicionista de la Pena de Muerte (Society to Abolish the Death Penalty).¹¹ Apparently, Lola Baldoni's participation in that crusade was widely recognized thanks to an article called "Ante el caldoso" ("In the Face of Torments"), published in *El Iris de Paz*, as well as in a philosophical periodical that she herself published with the title *La pena de muerte* (*The Death Penalty*).¹² Two years later, at the convention for the Spiritist Federation of Puerto Rico, held in San Germán in 1909, it was announced that the prisoner Basilio Forastier López was pardoned by the then governor of Puerto Rico. These were López's words of gratitude:

With such a powerful and energetic impulse
the Governor of P. R. felt possessed by
mercy for Basilio.
And the pardon was granted!
Basilio Forastier López has been awarded freedom!
Glory to the good Spirit who supported this good action!
Glory to Lola Baldoni, initiator of the victory!
Glory to the Spiritist Federation of Puerto Rico!

Eternal glory to all people of good will!¹³



The exclusive recognition of Lola Baldoni demonstrates her indisputable and effective work for the campaign against the death penalty.

Her book *Impresiones* addresses a variety of themes including: women, friendship, progress, nature, pain, and national identity. She highlights the Kardecian spiritist doctrine in all of her works as she addresses charity, reincarnation, progress, education, and the church. The figure of Jesus emerges in "Crepúsculos" ("Twilight"); the myth of feminine beauty in "La mujer" ("The Woman"). She praises her homeland as well as the United States, which she calls "a free, happy, and sovereign nation, ruled by an intelligent and just government."¹⁴ Lola, along with

Fig. 3: *Impresiones: Colección de artículos*,
Lola Baldoni, 1894.¹⁵

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 105.

¹² María Cadilla de Martínez, "Del ayer que debemos recordar costumbres y valores femeninos," *El Mundo*, domingo, 21 de abril de 1946, p. 2.

¹³ Teresa Yañez Vda. de Otero, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico*, San Juan: Cooperativa de Artes Gráficas Roumaldos Palacios, 1963, p. 82.

¹⁴ Lola Baldoni, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Thanks to Dr. Sandra Enríquez Seiders for granting us access and use of these photographs and other materials.

many other Puerto Ricans, were weary of the Spanish colonial regime and saw in the United States a great nation and an example of progress, civilization, and democracy; a nation that presented itself as a defender of human rights like freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. It was the year 1894, and the United States had not yet invaded the Island.

Impresiones was prefaced by Félix Matos Bernier, journalist, essayist, novelist, and great poet and patriot who, although he was from Coamo, lived in Ponce. Matos Bernier, just as Limón de Arce, compared Lola Balondi to the beauty of the violet, perhaps because it is small, shy, and hides within green foliage. He resented that Lola did not occupy a more prominent place among the writers of the country and did not stand out like others who, without having her merits, shone like dahlias. Apparently, Matos Bernier was also a spiritist, since he argues that those essays are the pure writing of a Spirit of progress. His admiration moved him to label Lola Baldoni as a lady who studied and meditated without ceasing and did not belong to the great masquerade of uncultivated people who mock all that is noble. Regarding her book he expresses: “In it you have her heart. She empties herself in those pages and she emerges like an iris.”¹⁶

In addition, José Limón de Arce, historian, poet, essayist, playwright, and composer from Arecibo, published the work *Poetas Arecibeños 1852-1904 (Poets from Arecibo 1852-1904)*. Limón de Arce intended his work to have three volumes. The second would be dedicated to writers from Arecibo, and the third to its popular musical performers. His greatest desire was for the second volume to feature those who dedicated themselves exclusively to daily journalistic activities, novels, and works of other merits. He comments:

These pages will honor: José Coll y Cuchí, Emiliano Astor Ramos,
Manuel Astor Balseiro, Francisco Cadilla Colón, Carlos Pérez Avilés,
Manuel D. Morin Fernández, Sebastián Siragusa de la Huerta,
Manuela Fernández Muñoz, Dolores C. Baldoni Pérez, and others.¹⁷

In 1939, Dolores (Lola) Baldoni died as the result of a stroke.

¹⁶ Félix Matos Bernier, “Dos Palabras,” *Impresiones de Lola Baldoni, Op. Cit.*, p. I.

¹⁷ José Limón de Arce, *Poetas Arecibeños 1852-1904*, Arecibo: Editorial Harry C. del Pozo, 1926 pp. 1- 2.