When José María Heredia arrived off the coast of Cape Cod in 1823, his first impression was desolation. He did not see one man, not one animal, not one insect, he wrote in a letter to his beloved Emilia, who had remained behind in Cuba as Heredia escaped from authorities pursuing him for plotting to overthrow the Spanish colonial government. Off the coast of Massachusetts, a ferocious December wind tormented the thin Heredia as he made his way to...