

**Reconsidering the Case of María de Zayas: Readings  
through the Optic of the Monstrous**

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA BY

Alyssa Sanan-Estudillo

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Professor Nicholas Spadaccini, Advisor  
Professor Ana Forcinito, Co-advisor

January 2014

© Alyssa Sanan-Estudillo 2014

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who helped me through this process. First and foremost, I would like to extend gratitude to my advisor, Professor Nicholas Spadaccini, whose constant guidance and support were fundamental in crafting this dissertation and in seeing it through to the end. I also thank the other members of my committee, Professor Michelle Hamilton, Professor Ana Forcinito, Professor Raul Marrero-Fente, and Professor Patrick McNamara, who aided me in the editing process. My dear friend, Professor Joyce Aji was central in reigniting my desire to finish the dissertation with her kind encouragement and insightful comments. And most importantly, I thank my family—David, Emi, Paula, Omer, Barb, and John—who cheered me on and pushed me to accomplish this feat. I am eternally grateful to you all.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loves of my life—  
David and Emilio.

## Table of Contents

Introduction: In Remembrance (and Forgetting)	1
Chapter One: Where Lies María de Zayas (Con)Textual Remains	15
Chapter Two: Building a Monster: Tortured Bodies in María de Zayas' <i>Desengaños amorosos</i>	54
Chapter Three: María de Zayas' Baroque Labyrinth of Horror	95
Chapter Four: Enfreaking the Monstrous Hybridity of the Feminine in "El juez de su causa" and "La esclava de su amante"	135
Chapter Five: The Art of the Ephemeral: Novellas as Performance Art	175
Conclusion: The Resurrected/Reconstructed Body of María de Zayas	209
Works Cited	220

## **Introduction:**

### **In Remembrance (and Forgetting)**

An aristocrat, a respected poet, and published and celebrated author of two novellas, María de Zayas was an anomaly in her day. Seventeenth century Spain did not prove to be fertile ground for the pen held in female hands. There is a meager scattering of published works by female authors that were contemporaries with our Madrid-born author. Yet fascinatingly, María de Zayas was able to overcome the gender bias existent in her socio-political milieu, and to become one of the most commercially successful authors of her day. Why, then, had this author been ousted from literary holdings and almost completely forgotten for centuries? Why was her work deemed as not worthy of more than a cursory glance in academic institutions?

There are various reasons for this negligible existence within the Hispanic literary canon, which have been posited by all of the scholars that have been at the forefront of resuscitating her oeuvre.

María de Zayas' status as a writer has been, for the longest time, a cold case. Only recently disinterred from history, literary critics have swarmed her textual body and

have developed a bewildering array of leads for critical readings of her work. Is Zayas a protofeminist and social reformer, or rather are her views profoundly conservative and status quo? Is the sexualized violence in her work a deliberate and subversive technique, or just a way to cash in? Does she use her baroque sensibilities for particular ends, or does she merely use the prevailing norms? It appears that the recent academic criticism of Zayas has sought to pigeonhole her into one of these categories; these ideas will be further developed in chapter one of this study. Yet it is important for a reader to abandon these extreme views, and, instead of choosing one side or another, to challenge the binary thinking often underlying these questions. I see using the optic of the monstrous as a useful and distinctive tool to view the work of Zayas, especially considering the fact that Zayas herself has employed monstrosity to challenge common assumptions in her own day.

In an age when gore is ingested on a daily basis by a voracious viewing public—one need only peruse the best-seller's lists rife with vampires and werewolves, or peek at the offerings on the cable channels where zombies are rampant—it is key to outline parameters as to what exactly is "monstrous." Throughout history, the monster has been

defined, in its most general terms, as that which is different, or other. The monster is almost never characterized in terms of the qualities that it shares with the dominant community, but in its anomalies or deviances from the norm. From its beginnings in Latin (*monere*), the word links the ideas of abnormal with bad omen, signaling a sense of repulsion and a fear of that which is different: "By definition unrecognizable, they defy our accredited norms of identification. Unnatural, transgressive, obscene, contradictory, heterogeneous, mad" (Kearney 4). Underscored in Kearney's passage are the points of departure from that which is deemed as the model—the natural, the accepted or the homogenous. Indeed, that which is impossible to define or categorize has often throughout history provoked fear and the evocation of the term "monster." Fascination with the monstrous other was in vogue in Europe throughout the middle ages, with its apex in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Kings amassed dwarfs that were kept in their company in order to amuse and draw curiosity. Stories of abnormal births were carefully recorded in grotesque detail. Alterity was both revered for its novelty, and rejected for its repugnance<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, monsters were everywhere. Princes collected them; naturalists catalogued them;



The merging of physical malformations with religion demonstrates a yearning to gain an explanation for the aberration. It was often assumed that the deformations were somehow seen as punishment, thereby alienating the "other" even more. Later, with the birth of modern science, these beliefs would be foregone and attributed to natural causes. Yet in María de Zayas' milieu, "monsters" dominated not only her own imagination, but also that of the public to whom she wanted to appeal.

In utilizing the monstrous as an optic through which to view the oeuvre of María de Zayas, I am draw upon the work of Jeffrey Cohen and Margrit Shildrick, both of whom theorize about the monstrous, to see how it might bring

---

theologians turned them into religious propaganda. Scholars charted their occurrence and their significance in exquisitely illustrated books. [...] In an age in which religious feelings ran high, deformity was often taken as a mark of divine displeasure, or at least of an singularly bad time in the offing. Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses*, which is especially rich in demonic creatures, has a fine account not only of the unfortunate Monster of Ravenna but also of the Monster of Cracow--an inexplicably deformed child who apparently entered the world in 1540 with barking dogs' heads mounted on its elbows, chest and knees and departed it four hours later declaiming 'Watch, the Lord Cometh' (Leroi 6-7).

relief to the novellas of the multifaceted Zayas, which I also read in their historical context. Cohen cites the monster as an expression of, as well as a message to, the particular culture from which it emerges. He encapsulates his approach by formulating seven theses on the nature of monsters and the monstrous. While seemingly simplistic or even obvious in some respects, these theses point to the inescapable and ever-recurring resurfacing of what a culture represses. And this exercise, according to Cohen, allows for self-reflection: “[...] the monstrous offers an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world. [...] The monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system” (7). Margrit Shildrick is less concerned with larger social or political structures, and instead focuses on the capacity of the monster to deconstruct the concept of the singularly contained self: “[...] the notion that the relationship between self and other is a vulnerable, non-binary, and non-containable state that promotes a ‘constant condition of becoming” (Gordillo and Spadaccini 5). She sees the mutability of the monster as transgressive and thereby capable of questioning the norms of thought.

I find these optics useful to a reading of Zayas, since I am reading the works of an individual author in/through her cultural contexts while being conscious of the various types of readings of Zayas today. My thesis is that María de Zayas' work challenges the cultural norms that embrace violence toward women as well as explores the effect of that violence on women's "enmonstered" senses of self. This pair of lenses, like binoculars, provides the distance to see the whole as well as a close up focus on the specific, serving to liberate the work of Zayas from some of the limited perspectives to which it has been subjected since its reappearance on the literary scene since the last third of the twentieth century.

In deploying these theoretical approaches, which seem to be on a continuum, I work through two primary strategies to flesh out the various embodiments of monstrosity in Zayas' work. The first is to re-read Zayas within her cultural contexts, since she, and her work, has been positioned as monstrous and thus repressed from literary and cultural memory. Sometimes, the monster is not so completely different, but rather appears to be a deformation of that which is familiar, or normal. Women, after all, were seen as distortions of men: as inferior anomalies of the norm, the male--in Aristotelian terms, the

female is the misbegotten male. Freud identifies this simultaneous familiarity and revulsion of the unfamiliar in his essay "The Uncanny:" "[...] the Unheimliche is that phenomenon of strangeness which curiosity re-evokes what is 'known of old and long familiar'; a phenomenon already intimated by the etymological links between the terms, Geheim (secret), heimisch (native) and Heimlich (homely)" (Kearney 73). The quality of being strange is connected with that of the quality of being acquainted, in seemingly paradoxical terms. Our author fits perfectly into this monstrous baroque. She is in certain aspects "acceptable," in that she is a noblewoman of proper, high standing. Her stances on class issues that are treated in her collections of novellas are largely conservative in tone, upholding of the status quo. She therefore is a known entity. Yet she also ventures into the realm of the dangerous and threatening in her role as a public woman, converting her into an "uncanny" monstrous figure. To this end, one aspect of this study examines Zayas in her immediate baroque milieu as a female author and member of the lower nobility.

The second strategy, embracing Shildrick's perspective, analyzes how Zayas is trying to challenge the binaries that riddled her society—especially that of men/women, by creating creatures that are both alive/not

alive, and one/another. Maria de Zayas can thus be seen as creating her own gendered, social, and literary space by taking some of the givens of her contexts: male domination, female inferiority and status of mutant or misbegotten beings, the danger of women's bodies/sexuality, and exploiting them to, and beyond their logical extremes, forcing readers not just conceptually, but emotionally and viscerally to challenge and collapse the binaries which disallow her voice and her female protagonists their agency and well-being. The reader is exposed to a constantly playing and repeating reel of violent images, pushing the reader to re-think the divide between normal and deviant. The battered women often break the boundary that exists between alive and dead.

With the intent of examining the monstrous nature of Zayas' work, the order of the chapters also traces the storyline of a monster, from its genesis to its ultimate demise (and implied impending return). The trajectory of my study follows the archetypal pattern of monster, with chapters alternating from a cultural (macro, wide-lensed) perspective to a focus on the effects on the individual (micro, narrow-lensed). Chapter One, "Where lies María de Zayas," features the creation or the emergence of the monster from its cultural contexts. I establish the

groundwork for a contextualized reading of María de Zayas' physical, social, and textual body by keeping in mind the culture of baroque Spain-- in Maravallian terms--and how Zayas' view of that world and her place in it was to become an important aspect of her writing. Conceiving of the baroque as a traditional, urban, mass-oriented and guided culture, I position Zayas as a participant in the creation of the narrative of her time choosing as a vehicle the literary genre of the novella, which in Spain, had also engaged no less a literary figure than Cervantes, whose work also becomes a point of reference for María de Zayas. In addition, I reference how her textual body has spawned scholarship that, like a monster, continues to proliferate today.

Chapter Two, "Building a Monster: Tortured Bodies in María de Zayas' *Desengaños amorosos*" narrows the view to take note of the specific results of the monster's entry into society via female victims. I focus on Zayas' continued insistence on the abuse of female victims, yet here the violence is stepped up. Elaine Scarry, an authority of the subject of torture, details different elements that are included in the process of inflicting pain in a torturous manner. Her work can be useful in illuminating the escalation of violence that Zayas depicts

in *Desengaños amorosos*. Using several of the aspects of torture that Scarry outlines, I show that some of the women of *Desengaños amorosos* are not merely stabbed, or poisoned and thereby given a relatively fast exit, (as is the case with those analyzed in the next chapter). Rather, the women are ritually terrorized, sometimes for years, and, in one case, for eternity. Their bodies resist death, yet continue to suffer. They are converted into zombified versions of themselves as a consequence of the torture that they suffer.

Chapter Three, "María de Zayas' Baroque Labyrinth of Horror," returns to a wide gaze to take in the whole of the landscape rendered monstrous. It takes up how I define Zayas' version of the baroque. Corpse here, deformed body there, stabbing to the right, poisoning to the left, deformed body here--as each tale reflects each other, as if in a hall of mirrors, Zayas forces her reader to engage with this violent world by her persistent presentation/persecution of victims. While many have claimed that Zayas is accusatory in *Desengaños amorosos*<sup>2</sup>, I contend that she does not necessarily vilify, but rather insistently holds up a mirror to demand self-interrogation on the part of the reader, to ask readers not to perform a

---

<sup>2</sup> See further evidence in this direction via studies by Marina Brownlee (8) and Vila (81), among many others.

conceptual reading, but a more visceral one. By investigating Zayas' vision of the baroque as a dark spectacle of horrors, it becomes apparent that in some ways, the content of her stories is secondary to the way she presents them as a recurrent nightmare.

In Chapter Four, "Enfreaking the Monstrous Hybridity of the Feminine in 'El juez de su causa' and 'La esclava de su amante'" the counterpoint to Chapter 3, the focus again narrows to examine how the monster escapes--by blending in with the monstrous landscape and thus deflecting attention/recognition. She provides her audience with two case studies in which the heroines are able to rematerialize (nearly) unscathed after being victims of disillusionment. While Zayas gives no recipe for avoiding falling victim in the first place, she offers her readership two alternative ways in which to deal with the disillusionment, and, most importantly, to recover.

Chapter Five "The Art of the Ephemeral: Novellas as Street Performance" merges the two perspectives, blending the focus, to highlight the ever-impending return of the monster. I envision and investigate Zayas on the threshold of literary performance art. We see such theatrics and spectacle in her tales, which harken the reader to see connections with the established baroque theater



(especially the cruel honor plays) and the performances of other types of popular plays common at the time. There is a definite feeling of fleeting in the tales of Zayas. She wants to leave her mark, but is aware that to do so, as a woman in her context, is a nearly impossible task. Yet she does so. In every tale, she reconstructs her stage, sets up the scene, gives her players directions, and dismantles it all, only to begin again in the next tale. The public sphere was reserved for men, and Zayas was trespassing into this realm. A man's pen held more weight and was more permanent, while the woman's was ephemeral. Her work evokes the rhetorical and metaphorical strategies of popular theatre that create a particular liminal niche for her work.

The ultimate effect is to deconstruct the original "unified" cultural vision by forcing in the repressed view as part of it. The baroque worldview is also and necessarily the view of violence against individuals/women. The two cannot be separated. The "monstrous" view that contradicts or challenges the prevailing cultural perspective, is reinstated as part and parcel of prevailing cultural narratives. Cultural narratives enfreak repressed narratives; Zayas reverses this by including repressed narratives, and thus enfreaks the larger cultural

narrative. She blows apart the binaries by demonstrating that no separation is truly possible. One is the other, as David Castillo similarly observes. He notes in several of his studies that Zayas "uncovers the dark side of conventional (patriarchal) forms of Self-containment" (*Horror (Vacui)* 90) and "[...] I view Zayas' Bodyworks as anamorphic figures that resist our critical attempts to make sense of them from univocal or totalizing explanatory schemes" (*Baroque Horrors* 134). Castillo and I coincide in our evaluation of Zayas as a destructive force to the dominant discourse of her day.

Given these considerations, I conclude with an examination of the resurrection of Zayas' authorial and textual bodies. The monstrous optic through which Zayas' work has been viewed throughout this dissertation hopefully opens her work to new interpretative lines. What are the legacies of her work, both directly and indirectly? Ultimately, one of the surest messages that is transmitted by Zayas in her two collections of novellas is an invitation (or perhaps stronger, a challenge) to remove the lenses of certain ways of seeing and thinking. Whereas binary thinking has often diminished the importance of Zayas, my work follows in the footsteps of those who have sought to free her from this constraint, thus

simultaneously allowing for a reconsideration of her place within the canon. This call to question the standard thought of the time—not only that of the treatment of women of her period, but also the much more universal and philosophical issue of self—makes the work of Zayas much more appealing in an academic forum. It transforms her from a lone woman on a soapbox with a singular message to a more complex figure with transgressive abilities. Is it possible, or even desirable, for María de Zayas to rest in peace?

## Chapter One:

### Where lies Maria de Zayas: (Con)textual Remains

Popular culture today is swarming with monsters. One can cite endless examples of television shows that portray yet another apocalyptic end of the world brought on by creatures that are not human. There is currently an overwhelming interest in vampires and zombies, demonstrating a preoccupation with the dead coming to life. There have also been numerous revisions of "classic" literary texts—*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Graham-Smith), and *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monster* (Winters). The undead and the repressed seem to be leaking out to all cultural aspects as of late. Perhaps, then, it should be no surprise that there is a renewed cultural interest in unearthing the body and bodywork (Castillo in *Baroque Horrors*) of María de Zayas, a long-dead and forgotten literary figure. Her voice is like a ghost coming to haunt feminist advocacy of women writers, and her novellas themselves are populated by the walking dead. It is thus appropriate and fitting to begin the work of disinterring her remains and those of her work for a post-mortem exam.

Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra's body was laid to rest in 1616 in a convent of Trinitarian nuns. Francisco de

Quevedo's remains were buried in the Convent of Villanueva de los Infantes in Ciudad Real in 1643. Félix Arturo Lope de Vega y Carpio was entombed in the Iglesia de San Sebastián in Madrid in 1562. María de Zayas' whereabouts are uncertain. We can speculate that she would have been buried in either a church or a convent, as was the common practice among those of supposed aristocratic blood in baroque Spain. We can also conjecture that she was most likely buried in her hometown of Madrid, since it was not until 1787 when King Carlos III banned the practice of burying the dead in churches, and even later, in 1808 when Joseph Bonaparte instituted the notion of constructing cemeteries located on the outer rim of the city. Today, María de Zayas' remains are conceivably piled in a dusty, perhaps forgotten niche in the underground crypt of a Madrid church.

The date, location, and circumstances of the deaths of María de Zayas' literary counterparts were recorded in detail. Internationally, Cervantes's death, commemorated together with that of Shakespeare, is celebrated on the 23 of April. Quevedo's tomb was desecrated and raided one day after his burial, September 8, by robbers in search of gold. Lope de Vega died of scarlet fever on August 27 in Madrid. The precision with which this information was

collected and recorded is emblematic of the times. What is atypical is the vacuum of information on María de Zayas. Even the exact year of her death is nebulous-- based on the names listed on death certificates issued in Madrid, some speculate that she died in 1661, others in 1669. Just as we have no date for Zayas' death, we similarly have no cause<sup>3</sup>. The chart-topping author of graphically violent stories disappears from all records without a trace.

Just as little is known in regards to the manner and time of the death of Zayas, so too, the details of her life are sketchy and incomplete. The death of Zayas, presumably sometime in her seventies, was preceded by a life that

---

<sup>3</sup> And yet we cannot attribute the lack of biographical information to the fact that María de Zayas was a lesser-known figure in her historical moment. She was, in fact, a best-selling author. Zayas congratulates herself on the commercial success of her first set of tales: "Si unos le desestimaron, ciento le aplaudieron, y todos le buscaron y le buscan, y ha gozado de tres impresiones, dos naturales y una hurtada" (Zayas in Greer and Rhodes 29). In fact, only Miguel de Cervantes, Francisco de Quevedo and Mateo Alemán surpassed Zayas' number of editions published during their lifetimes (Brownlee 6). Therefore the question to be pondered is why our author is absent from official records at the time of her death.

began in Madrid in 1590<sup>4</sup>. It is known that Zayas was baptized in the Parish of San Sebastián, and that her father was a member of the elite military, a captain, who was eventually given the highest honor of the Order of Santiago in 1628 (Rhodes 27). It has also been speculated by Margaret Greer, Elizabeth Rhodes, and others that María de Zayas probably enjoyed a life of travel. Rather than the typical sedentary life of a noblewoman, Zayas most likely travelled throughout the Iberian Peninsula, and even to what is now southern Italy due to the favorable position of her father with the Court and its officials. Fernando Zayas, María's father, maintained a working relationship with Pedro Fernández de Castro, the Seventh Duke of Lemos, who was stationed in Naples, Italy from 1610-1616. It is presumed that Fernando Zayas, and even perhaps his family, lived in Naples, thus providing Zayas with fodder for her later tales that are set in the bustling metropolis of the eastern end of the Spanish empire. If indeed María did travel across the Mediterranean with her family, she did so in her early adulthood, perhaps igniting a passion for

---

<sup>4</sup> Much of the biography of María de Zayas was compiled by Manuel Serrano y Sanz in *Apuntes para una biblioteca de escritoras españolas desde el año 1401 al 1833*, published in 1975.

traveling—at least in the pages of her novellas<sup>5</sup>. And while there is no concrete evidence tying María de Zayas to the coast of Italy, we have on record that she enjoyed a close friendship with and esteemed patronage from the Seventh Count of Lemos and later, from his descendants, proving that her stay in Naples was more likely than not: “[...] cuando compuso, en 1646, los *Desengaños*, mantenía cierta relación con la familia del IX conde de Lemos, sobrino del anterior, pues llama a su mujer ‘mi señora’” (Yllera 17).

The Zayas family certainly did not want for anything. Fernando and his wife, María (or perhaps Catalina) de Barasa belonged to the privileged class and came from Madrid pedigree, as can be ascertained by birth and baptism records. Yet they did not belong to the highest echelon of the noble class. Although he enjoyed a plush lifestyle and esteemed position, he was still an employee: certain services were expected of him. María de Zayas and her family, therefore, belonged to what Nieves Romero Díaz deems as the “local (middle) nobility” (171). Elizabeth

---

<sup>5</sup> Several scholars have pointed to the likelihood that Zayas’ own personal travels to the cities that inhabit her fiction contribute to the familiarity with which she describes areas outside of Madrid. Others claim that her characterization of the cities is “too formulaic to offer convincing proof of personal acquaintance with them” (Greer and Rhodes 6).



Rhodes further posits that the absence of a documented presence of the Zayas family in Madrid records points to the family's lack of clout and standing relative to the elite nobles (28). We can assume that they lived a comfortable life of advantage in the urban center of Madrid, or perhaps for a time in Naples. From here, the trail goes cold for a number of years. We know nothing of the childhood or upbringing of our protagonist. Was she formally educated or was she self-taught? Did she marry or did she dedicate herself to a religious life? Did she have children? All of these questions remain unanswered, but many have speculated and tried to fill in the voids of her shadowy biography.

Zayas does officially reappear to the public eye due to her participation in the literary salons of Madrid. We can pinpoint her whereabouts in 1617 with the presence of her signature, along with that of numerous other urbanites on a document stamped in Madrid (Greer and Rhodes 6). While not it cannot be proven that María de Zayas was an actual established member of one of the literary academies—sponsored by Francisco de Mendoza or Sebastián Francisco de Medrano, for example (Greer in *Baroque Tales* 20)—that were the rage amongst young, noble, creative minds of the time, it is a given that she participated in the poetry

competitions that were held, and that she enjoyed a collegial relationship with several of the important figures of the time. Evidence linking Zayas to this elite world of exclusive writers is two-fold: first, we have Zayas' own references to her participation in the clubs, and second, we have proof of established rapports between Zayas and other prominent writers of her period, namely, Lope de Vega, Ana Caro, and Pérez de Montalban. The exchange of praise between Zayas and her literary peers is logged in the form of flowery poems. Some have speculated that the (sometimes) over-the-top laudations could have been read in "tongue in cheek" fashion (Greer in *Baroque Tales* 22). Yet maybe Zayas was not the victim of Lope's or Castillo Solórzano's ironic or perhaps hyperbolic approval, but also was in on their jokes and a self-serving accomplice who repaid the favor by writing similarly exaggerated tributes of their respective works. Their anointing of Zayas as the "Sibyl of Madrid" undoubtedly did wonders to promote her first collection of novellas, published in 1637<sup>6</sup>. In the very same year, four additional editions were published in Madrid (Yllera 18). A commercially appealing writer had been born.

---

<sup>6</sup> The second chapter of this dissertation will go more in-depth in analyzing the relationships between our author and her peers.

Zayas rematerializes, in reference only, in a playful roast of Catalonian poets in Barcelona in 1643 (Greer and Rhodes 10). Here, we are offered the first and only physical description of our protagonist; her body is unveiled. Yet we are hesitant to accept wholeheartedly the portrayal presented of Zayas by her peer, Francesco Fontanella, who sets his sights not only on Zayas, but also on other poets of their circle. In what has been argued to be a mocking and humorous tone, Fontanella gives a caricature-like description of Zayas and his other targets. We do not know if Zayas was present at the event held in Barcelona, nor what her reaction would have been to hearing herself as having a "haughty mustache" and looking like a "gentleman" with a "sword [...] hidden beneath feminine 'skirts'" (Greer and Rhodes 10). Zayas' body is thoroughly de-feminized and devoid of any and all womanly referents. It is difficult here to refrain from mentioning the episodes of cross-dressing that pepper some of Zayas' tales. Locating the body of Zayas is a difficult task; so too is the gendering of her body. Perhaps Zayas enjoyed the ribbing that placed her on the same plane with her male counterparts. Perhaps the male attributes bestowed on Zayas made little or no reference to her actual physical state, but more to her status as an equal to men—at least

in the eyes of the other poets. Alas, we will never know how Zayas truly looked, nor will we ascertain how she dealt with criticism and goading. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Zayas in this group of poets proves her standing as an important and recognized literary figure in her historical moment.

Ten years transpire before the publication of Zayas' second volume of work, *Desengaños amorosos*. In the interim she may have published a play, *Traición de la amistad*, her only surviving drama, which is undated. In addition, we can assume that she continued her participation in the literary circles; she contributed poems to pay homage in death to Pérez de Montalban and Lope de Vega. These are the last known and recorded facts of María de Zayas. After coming up for air with the final fruits of her labor, she again descends to the depths of the sea of oblivion. And while the approximately twenty years that remain of her life are completely erased from all documentation, and even her earlier biographical information is marred with holes, an entire literary industry has emerged around this author during the last several decades.

María de Zayas was certainly a product of her time, and in order to try to get closer to her literary work, it might be useful to sketch out, along Maravallian lines,

some of the main characteristics of the Baroque as a conservative, guided, urban, and mass-oriented culture (*La cultura del barroco*) which saw the elites (the so-called monarcho-seignorial segments of Spanish society) use all means at their disposal, from repression to socio-political propaganda to preserve their privileges.

Similarly, the historian J.H. Elliot was to speak of the persuasive pessimism observable in the works of authors who reflected on the changes and instability that were to precipitate a sense of abandonment by God and an uncertain future:

It was the misfortunes that overcame Spain in the last ten or fifteen years of the century which somehow suddenly brought the picture into focus, and gave to Spanish authors their acute realization of the unutterable complexity of existence, as they watched with disillusionment and incomprehension the shipwreck of a nation that appeared to have been abandoned by its God (Elliott in *Imperial Spain* 239).

In "From the Renaissance to the Baroque: The Diphasic Schema of a Social Crisis," Maravall emphasizes the importance of conceiving of the baroque as "one phase of a more extensive whole," (3) whereby it is impossible to see the seventeenth century in a vacuum without reflecting on

its past—a past that included demographic, economic, geographic expansion, as well as expansion in social aspects—education, labor, and mobility that reverberated in subsequent centuries. All of these elements that converged at the beginning of the new century contributed to the inherent pessimism that can be noted in the attitudes of the day: “[...] pero sí es cierto que con ella se difunde un pesimismo inspirado por las calamidades que durante varias décadas se van a suceder. [...] Se observa por todas partes una existencia sombría (Maravall in *Cultura* 309–310). In sum, it was a time of great change, which provoked a nostalgic look backwards by many and, on the part of the privileged, a redoubling of efforts to maintain their privileges and conserve their values.

The gloomy outlook that permeated Zayas’ milieu undoubtedly played a role in her work. We can see this especially in her depiction of the noble family as structurally unsound and fractured by the absence and/or frequent departure of the male heads of the household, which many times leads directly to the vulnerable exposure of the females, a principal premise of so many of her tales. Thus, for example, Inés in “La inocencia castigada,” is all the more defenseless by the regular absence of her husband, who has to attend to his commercial

obligations: "Mi marido ha de partir mañana a Sevilla a la cobranza de unos pesos que le han venido de Indias" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 273).

Octavia, the female protagonist of *La más infame venganza*," falls prey to the guiles of Carlos after her father dies abroad while fighting for the crown: "Ocasionáronse en este tiempo las largas y peligrosas guerras de aquellos reinos, que no solas lloran ellos, sino nosotros, pues de esto se originó entrárselos en España y costarnos a todos tanto como cuesta" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 179). The author's contempt for the "long" and "dangerous" wars is not masked. She laments the cost of the wars—both in societal and economic terms. She draws a direct and clear line between the death of Octavia's father and the loss of her protection. She is now vulnerable, and, ultimately, suffers a public death in that she retires from her upper-class lifestyle to the convent. Don Martín, the witness to the strangeness of the tale entitled "Tarde llega el desengaño," is forced to put his life on hold and nearly loses his life by order of the king: "[...] habían ausentado de su patria y apartado de una gallarda y hermosa dama, prima suya, a quien amaba para esposa, navegando la vuelta de España [...] acrecentado de grandes servicios en

Flandes, donde había servido con valeroso ánimo y heróico valor a su católico rey" (*Desengaños amorosos* 232).

After fighting for the king in a distant land battle, don Martín is nearly denied the chance to reunite with his love due to a fierce tempest that brings him to Sardinia. And while it is mentioned that he will receive accolades from the monarchy for his service, Zayas demonstrates yet another relationship that is nearly derailed by the monarchy's expectations on the noble class. The extra-marital responsibilities of the nobles, whether at home or abroad, seem to wreck havoc in Zayas' world.

For some, this new century with its "novelty" presented uncertain and thereby dangerous ground: "Cuando de una situación de espíritu favorablemente esperanzada se pasara a la contraria [...] el choque tenía que ser de una fuerza suficiente para que muchas cosas vieses amenazadas" (Maravall in *Cultura* 64). This was especially true for those conservative factors within baroque society, including María Zayas and her well-born family, who found their interests, both economic and social, to be threatened by the seismic shifts reverberating through Spanish daily life. This segment of society—namely, the elite class with intimacy with and influence at court—is of interest to this study, as María Zayas belonged to this group, and due to



her persistent portrayal of (and outspoken support of) said class in her works.

Maravall notes that a call to return to a nostalgic status quo of previous times seemed to have been a prevalent literary theme in the baroque, for "certain terms—'conservation', 'restoration', etc. —appear with great frequency" (in "From the Renaissance to the Baroque [...]" 31). Several contemporary commentators lamented the evils of trying to change one's lot in life. One such thinker, Suárez de Figueroa, stated: "all evils, it is certain, coincide with those who are neither content nor at ease in any estate or condition and whose end is constituted not by what they have but by what they intend to have" (Maravall in *Culture* 132). If you were born the son of a miller, chances were that you were going in end up living with the same occupation, or at least one equal in social standing. It was not in the mind-set of these generations to aspire to more; there was no opportunity to do so. There was little distribution of wealth. The peasants remained peasants and the nobles, nobles. This was felt to be the natural state of the Spanish world; indeed, it was an ordering that was mandated by God. Of course, it is also important to keep in mind that the nobility was by

no means homogenous and that social behavior was influenced by the hereditary nobility<sup>7</sup>.

María Zayas and her family could be said to have belonged to the nobility via birthright, but also through her father's position as an "elevated bureaucrat." We thus see her as straddling the upper and middle-elite. And like many in her position, we see her tendency to emulate the fashion, behavior, and etiquette of the upper elite in both her literary expression and in her characterization of the participants of her soiree: "Almost the highest elite, the middle nobility identified with the highest elite, to whose status they aspired and whose interests they protected as their own" (Rhodes 28). The characters in Zayas' novellas are, unlike the author herself, firmly steeped in the highest level of elite society, candid in their staunchly conservative stance, and are unequivocally and stubborn in upholding the traditions and beliefs of the status quo.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Maravall uses the term *nobility* to mean individuals of an upper and privileged estate position (nobility of lineage, priests, elevated bureaucrats, the rich who had numerous servants at their disposal), although it was the hereditary nobility who set the guidelines as to social behavior" (*Culture* 27).

<sup>8</sup> And defend their interests they must, for in the Sixteenth Century, principally with the birth of new economic opportunities, accumulation of wealth became a possibility to more of the populace, and therefore new doors were opened. The reasons for these new prospects were two-fold: First, the numerous wars necessitated the creation of a working and merchant class to produce and distribute the weaponry and supplies, and second, there was an exodus from the rural zones to the urban city-

The appearance and rise of this elite was simultaneously liberating for some, and highly disruptive to others. The previously established and firmly grounded sectors of society felt endangered and vulnerable to these changes, and reacted in differing ways. Some used administrative means to gain the upper hand and to financially weaken those sectors that they felt were undermining their influence and authority. Parades, ornate ephemeral monuments, fireworks displays, festivals and other methods of diversions were used to "provoke a pleasing awe and suspension of the mind" (Maravall in "From the Renaissance to the Baroque [...]" p. 38) in order to eliminate "negative feelings toward the greatness of power and in producing a certain sensation of fear" (Maravall in "from the Renaissance to the Baroque [...]" 38). The populace was channeled toward popular forms of entertainment, including chapbooks or "pliegos sueltos," sacramental plays or "autosacramentales," the popular "comedia," and the comedic interludes or "entremeses," much of which reinforced the established system of values.

---

centers that spurred the new, dynamic metropolitan economy. Here, we can trace the emergence of an influential sector of the economic, social, and political strata of the Habsburg empire; namely, the lower-mid nobility, or, to borrow from a later-created term, the *nouveau-riche*, which coincided with the philosophical belief that was growing amongst the "enlightened" individuals, that a man was not relegated to his social rank due to a mandate from God, but via his own works. As Don Quixote exclaims: "Dulcinea es hija de sus obras, y la virtud adoba la sangre." Here, Cervantes' thinking is in line with that of the Erasmian humanists.

From the picaresque novel of Mateo Alemán to the *comedias* of Lope de Vega, we see cautionary tales aimed at relating the pitfalls of disrupting the settled order of things. Moralizing and conservative in their tones and (sometimes unsubtle) messages, these authors conveyed with a strong sense of urgency the feelings of vulnerability in the upper echelons of society. At risk were the pillars of a strictly hierarchical society, where the often-distant monarch relied on his/her representatives to maintain order. The fear, therefore, cut straight to the core of power and was even felt by the king: "At issue were classes that could give rise to the threat of dissolution; to avoid this, there was no remedy other than trying to control them, in some way incorporating such layers toward the order's preservation" (Maravall in *Cultural* 28).

It is useful to pause here and ask pertinent questions, as Maravall suggests that we do, as to the rationality of the fears of the upper classes; were their fears founded, or were they examples of paranoia? Were the nobles truly justified in feeling threatened by the masses? Was the social mobility truly so massive and powerful as a cohesive force as to warrant reasonable trepidation? Maravall seems dubious that this relatively new group would be capable of working together to topple the institutions

that had been in place for centuries, if not millennia (30). Yet even if the fears of the monarcho-seignorial segments of Spanish society seemed somewhat irrational, they still existed, and lead to remedial actions from outright repression to socio-political propaganda to quell their fears. In the realm of art, the popular theater of the 1600s, was to play an especially important part in the promulgation of social myths, namely, the notion of the integrated "labrador rico," love as universal justification, the value assigned to honor as reputation, the reiteration of the notion of blood purity ("pureza de sangre"), and so on. And, in fact, it was precisely the "mass-oriented" formulaic nature of the comedia of Lope de Vega and his school that was to propel Cervantes to direct his plays temporarily to the private sphere of reading "para que se vea de espacio lo que pasa apriesa" (so that one could see and examine slowly and critically what is missed from the specularly of the performance)" (Spadaccini in *Shattering Glass*). Cervantes in his work and María de Zayas in hers were to understand writing as a sight of experimentation which ultimately reaffirmed and tested tradition.

In Zayas' case, her novellas are framed within an urban landscape and the stories have a particular appeal

for their shock value, while also containing a series of reflections, through various voices and angles of vision to reveal a master storyteller at work, one that reframes the space of the novella to bring to the fore questions that transcend her own cultural milieu to get at issues of more universal interest.

Zayas' tales are set in large metropolitan sites at a time when the practice of urban migration became so commonplace and so toxic that the King was forced to deal with his "groupies," and sign a mandate that they return to their estates.<sup>9</sup> The emptying of the countryside by the nobles meant unworked and therefore unproductive plots of land, which had repercussions throughout the kingdom. Moreover, a surplus of indigent people flooding the cities must have signaled a breakdown of the system for the monarchy:

The Court acted as a great magnet, drawing to it from all over the country the rootless, the dishonest, and the ambitious. Recognizing this, the Government ordered the great nobles in 1611 to return to their

---

<sup>9</sup> "Inevitably, therefore, as grandees and lesser aristocrats drifted to Court, they were followed by thousands who either possessed, or aspired to, a place in their service. At a time when the population of Castile had fallen, that of Madrid continued to grow" (Elliott in *Imperial* 310).

estates in the hope of clearing the Court of parasites (Elliott in *Imperial* 310).

This is not to say that the Court only appealed to the self-promoters of society, or to the "leeches," who strove to fulfill their own interests rather than that of the kingdom. There were indeed artists and musicians, writers, and all classes of help that served the monarchy. Maria Zayas' father could be counted as one of these educated and useful members of the Court. Yet as the Court and its followers ballooned in size, so too did the Monarchy's (and the elite's) debt. Thus we may conclude that the nobles, rather than providing the King's Court with financial aid, added to his burden.<sup>10</sup>

It can be contended that the near constant wars became taxing on the nobles. Depending on the monarch, the kingdom was either engaged in active warfare, or flexing its diplomatic muscles for a truce (which was usually short-

---

<sup>10</sup> The nobles also fell short in their military responsibilities. In previous times, the landed gentry could be counted on to defend the empire. Yet the end of the Sixteenth Century saw the elite's reluctance to participate in the numerous battles in which the King was involved:

The upshot was that the hardening of the structure of privileges in the baroque freed the nobility even of practically their sole obligation, which was military service; in violation of the very bases of the traditional system. [...] we know that the nobles excused themselves from entering into battle, and since they availed themselves of the excuse that they were without necessary funds to finance the expedition's expenses, the king ordered them to abandon the court and go to their rural lands—there they could cut back their expenses and save money, so that the next time they would find themselves with the funds to fulfill their obligations (Maravall in *Culture* 49).

lived). Suffice it to say, it was probably difficult for the nobles to maintain their lifestyle of excess and opulence while being constantly supplanted to calls from the frontlines. In several of Zayas' tales, we see mention of wars. In "El juez de su causa," from *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, we see the heartbroken don Carlos escape to the battlefield in order to cure his sentimental wounds. Husbands are at times deployed and absent, leaving their womenfolk exposed and vulnerable. The lamentations about the effects of war on the relationship between men and women, or husbands and wives, do not seem to translate into an oblique questioning of the politics of war or the decisions that precipitate conflicts and their consequences. One has the sense that the thrust of the criticism is directed to gender inequality, within people of privileged rank and, more often than not, of economic well being.

Thus, she joins a sort of smudge campaign against the attraction of novelty, associating it with the lesser factions of society: "those who lacked knowledge, who were poor, youths, women, or foreign groups such as Indians or other peoples" (Maravall in *Culture* 127). Thus, as with others in her social rank and economic means, the idea was, on the one hand, to discourage "the masses" from flocking



to the newest ideas. Yet at the same time, as with other elites, she understood the appeal of "novelty," which as Maravall would argue, could well have the effect of soothing the underprivileged multitudes that had flocked to the cities: "It can happen that there is a need to rely on the attraction of the 'new' precisely to effect the desired results, in line with conservative aims, in the mentality of the city's restless multitude" (Maravall in *Culture* 127).

The notion of somehow luring the masses via spectacle, ("shock and awe") into a hypnotic (and hopefully), flaccid and static state figures into what William Egginton would call a "major strategy" of the baroque monarchic-seignorial complex. The idea to use the appeal of novelty, something that they themselves were highly resistant to, in order to draw the crowds and dupe them was genius. As Egginton contends, in line with Maravall, the baroque elite mentality sought to use the powers of marvel, either via fiery sermons, hilarious plays, sensational newspapers, or provocative prose, to placate the "vulgar" populace beneath:

The use of the media to rally support behind policies that would founder without that support is a clear case of baroque manipulation of appearances for the

purpose of political gain [...] the Baroque becomes pertinent when, in the very midst of the performance, and in full knowledge of its artifice, the viewer becomes convinced that the artifice in fact refers to some truth just beyond the camera's glare (Egginton 4).

Egginton insists that the masses not be relegated to being an easily pacified and thereby deceived group, but one that is almost complicit in its subjugation. And while we today are hesitant to negatively portray a group of individuals according to their class ranking, this sensitivity was foreign in the baroque period. It was commonplace to associate one's behavior with one's place within society, and it was of utmost importance to preserve the kingdom in its traditional ways. If the monarchy is the heart of the governing body, María de Zayas and her fellow conservatively-bent literary counterparts were the writing hand, propagandizing its message with their own noble interests at heart.

Yet how did this woman make her way into being a participant in the male-dominated club? How did she succeed in making her voice part of the creation of the dominant discourse? Taking into account the historical, cultural and social circumstances present during the

lifetime of María Zayas, we are able to fill-in some, albeit via assumption, of the missing pieces of the puzzle needed to create a fuller picture of our protagonist's life. We can assume that María Zayas was educated. Belonging to her privileged class did not necessarily guarantee her with access to education, as it was denied to many. Zayas herself continually harangues the disparities in the education of men and women. She constantly laments the fact that women are provided with sewing needles rather than books:

[...] empezando a tener discurso las niñas, pónenlas a labrar y hacer vainillas y si las enseñan a leer, es por milagro, que hay padre que tiene por caso de menos valer que sepan leer y escribir sus hijas, dando por causa que de saberlo son malas, como si no hubiera mucho más que no lo saben y lo son, y ésta es natural envidia y temor que tienen de que los han de pasar en todo (Zayas en *Desengaños* 228).

Was her insistence on this topic fueled by a personal experience in which her own access to education was stifled? Was her own father resistant to the idea of having an educated and published author as a daughter? Would he have preferred to see María marry well and give birth to his heirs? We will never know of the thoughts of

the Zayas family in regards to their daughters chosen career and life path. But it is obvious that Zayas, whether autodidactic or not, was well versed in Greek and Roman mythology, a close reader of the classics, and is engaged with the work of many of her contemporaries. She is also a bit of a name-dropper, and sprinkles her texts with references to famous texts and characters—Faetón, Ícaro, Fineo, Mongribelo, etc., almost as if to give herself a seal of approval.

Beyond this, there are few tidbits left to collect to complete our picture. Perhaps she married. The two María de Zayas listed in the death certificates of Madrid were both married. Perhaps she had children, although these two Marías left their estates to non-familiar heirs (Greer 34-35). Some speculate that we must broaden the search for biographical information to extend beyond Madrid, as there is evidence that she may have moved to Cataluña for the publication of her second set of tales, but to this day there has been little advancement in this area. Did she retire to the convent, as did her nom de plume at the end of *Desengaños amorosos*? Did she enjoy the safety of the company of women, a group that she seems to idealize in her frame tales? There are so many unanswered questions, but in reality, so few paths that María de Zayas could have

taken considering her gender and social position in the Spain of her time.

Regardless of the exact date of Zayas' death, she enjoyed tremendous success posthumously, well into the early nineteenth century, when her books were largely abandoned. Scholars have cited different reasons for this rebuke of Zayas' novels, claiming changing literary tastes, the birth of a new generation of female writers that replaced the dated seventeenth-century novelist, and alternatively, a stuffier, more rigid socio-political milieu that was not keen on celebrating the explicit works of María Zayas. She was relegated to the forgotten corners of library shelves until her two principal works, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* and *Desengaños amorosos* were undusted, reread, and repositioned to take a place in the literary canon. Zayas' body of works has been revived from death. She is celebrating a renaissance that began initially on the insistence of Emilia Pardo Bazán in the late-nineteenth century, but which was brought into full swing within the last thirty years. What, then, is to be gained from reading her oeuvre? Why have her works been unearthed and given another examination after nearly a century of non-recognition? Is it because in the second half of the twentieth century scholars of the feminist

persuasion sought to find female voices that had long been forgotten and abandoned? If Zayas had not been a woman, would we be revisiting her works? I believe that these questions have been thought, if not voiced, by scholars in the past three decades.

Admittedly, I also had doubts as to the literary value of the potential subject of my dissertation when it was in the initial stages of conception. Indeed, I did not want to dedicate my energy to a writer whose work did not engage me. Moreover, I did not want to be pigeonholed and/or constrained into framing her novellas solely through a feminist perspective, which seems to have been prevalent in the last quarter of a century. Ultimately, one wonders whether Zayas is worthy of this newfound celebration of her works, or whether she is merely the fortunate female body that was rescued from oblivion by a mixture of chance and the right socio-political circumstances?

The exhuming of Zayas' works in the second-half of the twentieth century has spawned numerous scholarly examinations. And while I earlier purported that a majority has taken a feminist angle, more recent studies have partially departed from this approach. The notion that the work of María Zayas can be read as being proto-feminist is one that gained strength and supporters in the

1980s. Her biting and unforgiving criticism of "most" men for their alternatively benign dismissal of women and their intellect, and/ or their violent and cruel treatment of (sometimes) innocent women seems to clearly support this thesis, at least superficially. It may be argued, reasonably, that Zayas had a specific pro-women agenda, a "defensa" of women, when writing, especially in the case of her second collection of novellas, *Desengaños amorosos*. It is impossible to dismiss Zayas' perhaps overstated insistence on this topic:

Y digo que ni es caballero, ni noble, ni honrado el que dice mal de las mujeres, aunque sean malas, pues las tales se pueden librar en virtud de las buenas. [...] Y como he tomado la pluma, habiendo tanto años que la tenía arrimada, en su defense, tomaré la espada para lo mismo (Zayas in *Desengaños* 506-507).

It is nearly impossible to read even a page of one of Zayas' works without encountering a reference to the lamentable situation of women in her position.

It seems, in fact, that many of the literary critics who have participated in the re-discovery of Zayas did so in response to a glaring absence of a female voice in the canons put forward by graduate schools. Margaret Greer and Elizabeth Rhodes, in their introduction to their

translation of several selected pieces of Zayas' *Tales*, admit to actively collaborating in the inclusion of Zayas into the lists of celebrated authors of her time, while simultaneously citing sexism as one of the contributing factors in her earlier exclusion from said catalogs: "[...] by the end of the nineteenth century, Zayas had been excluded from the Spanish literary canon because of her gender and the sociopolitical changes that swept Spain and Europe" (backcover). Following the publication of Agustín Amezúa y Mayo's complete edition of Zayas' two greatest works in 1948 and 1950, consciousness of the existence of Zayas within university communities took hold, yet there still pervaded a sense of devaluation of her capacity: "As a graduate student, Ms. Greer read other writers from the so-called 'Golden Age,' but never encountered Zayas. 'If they didn't have the clear literary polish of Cervantes or Calderón, other works were dismissed as just popular literature'" (Chronicle of Higher Education 15). Yet although the formalized study of María Zayas did not initially take hold in many academic institutions, numerous budding scholars took the leap and attempted to tackle her oeuvre without the (wholehearted) blessing of their (sometimes) hesitant advisors. Most of these foundational studies in the early years of her reemergence in the



literary realm focused on Zayas as a champion of women's rights in her paternalistic period. She is endowed with the discerning tools of a twentieth-century thinker, which is perhaps risky, and delving into problematic territory. Yet these preliminary studies paved the way for later, more cohesive analysis of Zayas' tales.

Margaret Greer and Marina Brownlee, perhaps the foremost authorities on Zayas viewed through a feminist lens have published numerous articles as well as two pivotal books *María Zayas Tells Baroque Tales of Love and the Cruelty of Men* and *The Cultural Labyrinth of María Zayas*, respectively, that use twentieth-century tools and approaches, for example, psychoanalysis, to illuminate areas of Zayas' alleged proto-feminist agenda. Greer's work is very comprehensive and looks at Zayas' work through the framework of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva. Brownlee emphasizes the contradictions within the narrative of Zayas and problematizes binary conclusions to her works. These discussions, which endow Zayas with our contemporary wherewithal and categorical theoretical constructions have been productive, and have germinated new studies. Studies on Zayas have been gaining in popularity in the past decade, and her works have withstood the weight of numerous ideological and theoretical lenses. The departure from the

strictly feminist viewpoint has opened Zayas to new, interesting examinations. These studies do not ignore the fact that Zayas is an exception in Baroque society in that she is a woman writing in a male-centric world, yet they do not remain pinned to this point. As Eavan O'Brien has lamented,

Considerable critical attention has been directed towards the question of Zayas' Spanish proto-feminism; studies that examine this issue have an impoverishing tendency to under-explore her texts' same-sex relationships and to confine their field of study to hetero-relations ("Female Friendship Extolled: Exploring the Enduring Appeal of María Zayas' Novellas" 1).

Pigeon-holding our author into any single framework is "impoverishing," and should be avoided. Yet it is fascinating how her work has been read through so many different theoretical lenses—feminist, psychoanalytic, queer theory, Marxist, etc.; she has been resurrected for different means. Her work has proved to provide a fertile ground from which to cultivate interesting and persuasive new roots of research, especially in the last few years. Piggybacking on the embryotic studies on our author, new researchers have illuminated new paths of research, proving

that Zayas is indeed a worthy subject of study and deserving of the relatively newfound celebration of her works.

Along the lines of O'Brien, several authors have sought to focus on the importance of female solidarity in Zayas' own life, especially demonstrated in her close correspondence with Ana Caro. Monica Leoni, Mercedes Maroto Camino and Patricia Grieve, to name a few, have illuminated the importance of female communities in Baroque Spain, and have shown a certain idealization or contrarily, as contends Leoni, a utilitarian view of female friendships and female spaces (the convent) demonstrated in Zayas' works.

Much has been made of possible literary influences for María Zayas. Since her biography is so surprisingly and unfortunately penurious, it is difficult to speculate as to Zayas' formal education. Given the fact that her father held a position at court, one can assume that she enjoyed the traditional education of a typical young, privileged woman of her day: namely, the learning and mastery of how to run a household. We do not have the luxury of viewing Zayas' ascension to become one of the most heralded and published authors of her time, bested only by Cervantes (Greer and Rhodes 29), but we do have well-informed studies

that point to Zayas' literary affiliations with her peers. Mercedes Maroto Camino's study entitled "María Zayas and Ana Caro: The Space of Woman's Solidarity in the Spanish Golden Age" details the stark contrast between male and female participants in the literary circle of Baroque Spain. She posits that while men were rivals, as is evidenced by the tensions between, for example, Lope de Vega and Miguel de Cervantes, female poets were openly complementary to each other, and were likewise admired by the men of the period. Patricia Grieve in "Embroidering with Saintly Threads: María Zayas Challenges Cervantes and the Church" convincingly establishes that Zayas was an informed reader of Cervantes's work; moreover, she suggests that Zayas engages with Cervantes regarding the issue of women and their place in society. Margaret Greer, Lisa Vollendorf, and Marina Brownlee flesh out the dichotomy between the private and public spheres that were so limiting in baroque Spain. Establishing Zayas' place within these public spheres and problematizing her position comfortably in a baroque Spanish context has been a field that has yielded several key studies, but I believe that there is still more to be examined in this area. I would be interested in seeing further research in the lines of

how María Zayas navigated so seemingly effortlessly in her quite limiting socio-political context.

Was she, as some have purported, an expert public relations agent who cleverly manipulated the system? Valerie Traub and Dympna Callaghan claim that Zayas subverts the dominant discourse by denying the reader a "fully integrated, uniform presentation of the female subject," (Brownlee 12) because to do so would have been problematic. Instead, they argue, and I concur, Zayas "fragments" her protagonists in order to dull the sharpness of her message. Or contrarily, was Zayas a supporter of the status quo, who extolled the values of the class to which she belonged, as Alicia Yllera, along the lines of Marvall, has argued? Was she indeed a "conservative feminist?" Or contrastingly, as David Castillo has observed, could we conceive that Zayas' critique of the nobility and men's propensity for excess and fascination with novelty and violence in fiction responds to a different logic, which is "the logic not of a postmodern liberalism, focused as it is upon issues of gender equality, but of seigniorial organicism, of eminently feudal extraction, based on a hierarchy of 'blood' and 'lineage'" (*Baroque Horrors* 171)?

Moving beyond the insistence on the importance of gender in Zayas are literary critics who are more concerned with the Baroque nature of her works. Such scholars do not supplant her gender, but rather see beyond it. They have focused on Zayas' portrayal of honor, social ascension, ethnic differences, bloodlines, and relations of power. This research has been fruitful in placing Zayas largely on par with her contemporary counterparts in thematic terms. Yet there are also thematic departures. David Castillo emphasizes the elements of graphic horror in Zayas' works. He focuses on the detailed descriptions of the bodies of victimized women that are so carefully drawn in Zayas' *Desengaños*. Here, according to Castillo, we see evidence of a merging of possible literary and artistic influences: "As we have seen, Zayas draws from contemporary literary and theatrical models, especially Calderonian dramas, Christian narratives of martyrdom, and the well-established artistic traditions of the *vanitas*" (Castillo in *Baroque Horrors* 120). And while Castillo may not be the first to point to the hagiographic undertones present in Zayas' novellas, his contributions to viewing Zayas as a groundbreaking author of proto-gothic fiction is substantial. Most compelling to Castillo's book is his placement of Zayas at the helm of his study and as a

protagonist in the literary activity in Baroque Spain. Zayas is no longer placed in the corner as the token female voice in contemporary studies of the literature of the Early Modern Spain.

Elizabeth Rhodes in her intriguing study *Dressed to Kill: Death and Meaning in Zayas' Desengaños*, focuses on Zayas' second set of novellas not as a sequel to her previous work, but rather as a freestanding entity. In illuminating the singularity of *Desengaños*, Rhodes is able to highlight the "baroque-ness" of her text: "[...] a fundamental order in her second book, a baroque order, extremely violent, highly encoded, and rendered negatively, but ultimately and rigidly consistent" (Rhodes 9). Rather than focusing on the points of departure from what has traditionally been seen as the first "volume" of tales, by reading *Desengaños* on its own, Rhodes is able to bring to light new research areas. Most interesting is her informed rejection of the historicity of the domestic violence that some scholars have pointed to, along the lines of fellow critics Matthew Stroud and Marina Brownlee. She also coincides with Nieves Romero-Díaz in linking Zayas' destruction of the female body with the collapse of the height of Spanish imperial hegemony: "[...] observing the direct relationship between social crisis and the female

body, in which Zayas symbolizes 'the fissures, rupture, and dismemberment of traditional order'" (Rhodes 88), an idea which will be further developed in chapter three of this dissertation. Romero-Díaz goes on to pinpoint the novellas of Zayas as being key participants in the dominant discourse of the new urban nobility: "The post-Cervantine novella becomes the cultural space for the ideological debate surrounding the definition of the urban nobility a debate in which dominant discourses that reinforce authority enter into a dialogue with discourses that subvert it" (Romero-Díaz 76). This placement of the works of Zayas amongst those who both participate in the creation of a hegemonic, centripetal discourse while at the same time problematizing her role is intriguing. While many have positioned Zayas firmly within her conservative shoes, here we see Romero-Díaz pointing to a step in the other direction. Along these lines, David Castillo in "Horror (Vacui): The Baroque Condition," sees Zayas as being at once a social critic-- "[...] María Zayas y Sotomayor consistently staged supernatural prodigies and preternatural marvels, including an array of incorruptible bodies, to interrogate, even to denounce, the code of honor which is one of the fundamental pillars of the social system" (94)—while simultaneously supporting the very



system that propagates these values: “[...] Zayas’ interrogation of the honor code does not result, as one might expect, in an explicit questioning of the monarchical-seigniorial system, or a problematization of the notions of cultural centrality shared by the moral majority” (Castillo 97). Along the same lines, I share the sentiments of those who see Zayas as, like her famously debated protagonists, a contradictory baroque figure.

And finally, it is Marina Brownlee whose book *The Cultural Labyrinth of María Zayas* who has provided me with the richest fodder for my work on Zayas. Standing on the shoulders of Brownlee has provided me with the vantage point from which to visualize my theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation. Brownlee reads Zayas through a thoroughly, inherently baroque lens, especially concentrating on the troublesome baroque subject with his/her shifting identities and allegiances. According to Brownlee, Zayas relishes in deliberately clouding the vision that she projected to her reader: “[...]Zayas seems to enjoy this threat, reveling in the ambiguity of discourse, of perception—in the ambiguity of epistemology itself. And she does so in keeping with her interest in creating a text that will appeal to a wide readership, one that will *engolosinarse* (become tempted by, addicted to) her text”

(Brownlee 133). I take these thoughts from Brownlee and expound upon them in the ensuing chapters of the dissertation.

## Chapter Two:

### **Building a Monster: Tortured Bodies in María de Zayas' *Desengaños amorosos***

'If it bleeds, it leads' runs the venerable guideline of tabloids and twenty-four-hour headline news show-to which the response is compassion, indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view (Sontag 18).

The women of María de Zayas' *Desengaños amorosos* are not only murdered, but are also imprisoned, brutally tortured--sometimes for years--and then later desecrated in death; in some cases, the bodies of the victims appear to continue suffering even after they have been relieved of pain through death. Doña Mencía's devastated corpse, for example, oozes fresh blood from her unhealable gashes for years.

Yet it is not easy to conceptualize the meanings inscribed in these bruised and battered bodies and corpses, that once shone with beauty and life. Like piñatas, the (always) beautiful victims are given more protagonism when they are dealt blows that devastatingly shatter their bodies than before the pivotal scene where the violence occurs. In "La esclava de su amante", before being violently raped by her suitor, Isabel, narrating the story

of her ruin, says of her own beauty: "[...] salí única en todo, y perdonadme que me alabe [...]" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 128). She glosses over her other attributes, but emphasizes the singularity of her beauty, which we are to conclude, is the most laudable.

The male protagonist of "Tarde llega el desengaño," don Martín, is initially astounded by the exceptional attractiveness of the imprisoned wife of Jaime de Aragon: "[...]hermosísima, con tan grande extremo, que juzgó don Martín con haberlas visto muy lindas en Flandes y en España, que ésta les excedía a todas" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 236). Her beauty blinds Don Martín, for he fails to notice her condition as a frail, sickly captive of her own husband. He initially only sees her as a flawless vessel. It is only later, after the spell that her beauty has cast on him wears off, that he is able to take in the cruel novelty of the situation. And again, in "La perseguida triunfante," we see that the heroine, Beatriz, is extoled for her unparalleled physical attributes: "[...] era de las más perfectísimas damas, en hermosura" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 411). Beatriz is "perfect" because of her beauty. The women are hollow silhouettes or puppets that serve solely to populate the ever-growing body farm that Zayas is harvesting. As the body count grows and the tales of

terrifying assassinations are told is increasing detail, one cannot help but wonder as to what Zayas is trying to communicate to the reader. As stated in the first chapter, many studies have tried to point to Zayas' intentions in her creating her tales. It is not my contention to do so in this study, but rather to examine what effects the display of the barefaced yet beautiful, hollow, yet utterly brutalized bodies of Zayas' women has on the readers—both of her time and of our own.

The bodies in pain that are splayed across the pages in Zayas' work beg the reader to ponder the prevailing theories that existed in Zayas' period to explain the presence of pain in the world. Modern-day readers are privy to the knowledge that pain is caused by noxious stimuli that sends nerve signals to the brain via the spinal cord. This information was garnered after thousands of years of study and speculation. We can logically assume that pain has always accompanied humankind, as it has all life forms in one way or another. Indeed, the first known written reference to pain that remains to today is inscribed on a clay tablet from the Sumerians in 5000 B.C (Ghosh 1). And without surprise, the preoccupation of the tablet is how to *rid* the body of pain; for it is precisely its presence that brings the discussion of pain to the

forefront. Without pain, one is blissfully unaware of its existence. Yet since pain is unfortunately a common denominator to all humans, we have for millennia sought analgesia as a solution. Opiates have been found in the tombs of the pharaohs of the civilizations of Ancient Egypt. Homer in 800 B.C. writes of opium's ability to numb pain. All cultures, it seems, have tried to cope with pain in varying degrees, usually by trying to flee from the effects of pain via drugs. It was later that proto-doctors and philosophers grappled with the reasons for the existence of pain. For Aristotle, pain was directly related to evil, for he believed that malicious spirits would physically invade the body and provoke the sensation of pain. He merged the perceptions of pain and pleasure to be considered as emotions that were related to the heart, as did Hippocrates, who coincided in believing that the body suffered from an emotional imbalance when pain was felt (Ghosh 1). The concept of pain arising from a malevolent force was initially thought to be of *foreign*, or *exterior* origins. The Romans coined the word from which we now derive the word pain, *poena*, which evoked punishment. Here we see a shift from the notion that pain was an invader to the idea that pain was a disciplinary reaction in response to an act that the individual had committed.

Pain now could be deserved. One was no longer the innocent victim of pain, but it was brought on as chastisement. And while inevitably later philosophers, most notably René Descartes in 1664 in his famous *Traité de l'homme*, posited theories that we today would deem to be more "scientific," in trying to explain the origins of pain, these advances pre-dated María Zayas and her baroque thought. Pain and punishment were intricately linked in the world portayed in *Desengaños amorosos*.

The power of the image of a body enduring pain is one that has captivated audiences since the beginning of time. We only have to think back to the days of public executions and gladiators to recall the impact of such spectacle throughout history. And yet while the reasons for such overt parades of suffering bodies are so divergent—from advocating violence for public consumption and an appetite for violence to serving as a deterrent for allegedly deviant behavior—the effect induces a similar response. Susan Sontag writes of human reactions to being exposed to images of pain in *Regarding the Pain of Others* as being an interesting standpoint from which to make commentaries about human nature. And while Sontag is referencing principally the power of visual (photographic and pictorial) depictions of pain, her observations can

illuminate Zayas' very visual *verbal* descriptions of the torments of the bodies of her victims. We, the modern-day readers and observers, just like the viewers of Robert Capa's photographs of the Spanish Civil war, are shocked by the lifeless and bloodied bodies. And the injuries inflicted upon the bodies take on different significations depending upon the reasons for such actions.

Sontag focuses her lens on the ways in which physical pain inflicted principally in the theater of war are received and *devoured* by a viewing public. In *Desengaños amorosos*, there is no war being waged, but there is the careful and vivid description of bodies being put through mortal pain. And even more intriguing is the fact that these bodies are unequivocally beautiful, both before and after death. Elena, the slave-wife of don Jaime is described as being of captivating beauty, although she is essentially a walking cadaver: "[...] más tan flaca y sin color, que parecía más muerta que viva, o que daba muestras de su cercana muerte" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 236). When he murders his wife, Arnesto falls in love again with her bleeding corpse: "[...] enamorado de tan bella muerte [...]. Por esta hermosura merece perdón su atrevimiento" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 363). He is so touched by the sight of her



flawless dead body, that he is willing to forgive her for what he was mortally punished her.

Later, the public is witness to the incorruptibility of her body which remains picturesque after death: "También sacaron el cuerpo de doña Blanca para traerle a España, que estaba tan lindo como si entonces acabara de morir" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 365). Her body has not suffered the rigors of death, but has been untouched by the passing of time. The grotesque release of bodily fluids and the stiffening of the flesh after death are kept at bay in the case of doña Blanca. Her lovely corpse is resistant to the normal process of decay that the body endures after perishing.

In "El traidor contra su sangre," Doña Ana's severed head is disinterred six months after being buried in a cave, and remains in stellar condition: "sacándola tan fresca, y hermosa como si no hubiera seis meses que estaba debajo de tierra" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 398). There is no mention of bloody viscera that one would imagine would accompany such a morbid discovery. Instead, the image with which the reader is left here is that of a head that, while disconnected from its body, is still beautiful. Moreover, the use of the word "fresh" encourages the reader to imagine the opposite, or natural reaction of the body to death: *not* fresh, and thereby decomposing. The entire

scene is utterly macabre, yet the reader, and the rest of participants of Lisis's soiree are pulled in and incapable of diverting our curious stares.

A beautiful body in the throes of misery and eventually lapsing into death provokes the reader to transgress the comforts of decorum. The voyeur continues to look, even though she knows that she shouldn't. The onlooker is transfixed by not only the suffering, but by the impossible beauty. Sontag sees the intermingling of beauty with torment to be pornographic in nature:

Most depictions of tormented, mutilated bodies do arouse a prurient interest. (*The Disasters of War* is notably an exception: Goya's images cannot be looked at in the spirit of prurience. They don't dwell on the beauty of the human body [...]). All images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic (Sontag 95).

As Sontag contends, we, as humans, are all naturally inclined to slow and rubberneck when "going past a horrendous car crash" (95). One need only peruse the magazines lining the checkout lanes of a supermarket to measure the level of our universal obsession with stories of the macabre. There is an entire cable television channel now dedicated to the retelling of true crimes.

With programs such as "Fatal Vows" and "Wives with Knives" we see that little has changed in our appetites for the consumption of such tales since the times of Zayas. The mysterious and brutal murder of a child beauty queen, Jon Benet Ramsey, in 1996 captivated public interest to near obsessive levels, spawning several books and numerous television dramatizations and miniseries. Even now, nearly twenty years after the Christmas-day homicide, magazines that dedicate their title articles to the young beauty prove to be the best annual sellers. And while we recognize that there exists an inherently morbid curiosity when it comes to the suffering of others, it is, as Sontag notes, peaked and somehow more titillating when the pain is inflicted on the bodies of the beautiful, especially beautiful women.

The novellas of Zayas ruthlessly seem to shed their façade as literature to reveal themselves as arenas of torture, with readers/onlookers horrified by morbidly transfixed. Maria Warner sees a direct link between "women's torn and broken flesh" and the Catholic "obsession [...] with sexual sin" (Brownlee 128). Similarly, Marina Brownlee, in *The Cultural Labyrinth of Maria Zayas* interprets the suffering bodies of women in the *Desenengaños amorosos* as a hagiographic pornography. While

both Brownlee and Warner quite rightly point to the link between the pain inflicted on women and the pleasure (albeit pornographic and sadomasochistic) it seems meant to evoke for the reader, the question remains that why would Zayas emphasize, and linger upon not just the imperatives of pain and humiliation, but that the pains and humiliation inflicted are of seemingly interminable duration, lasting in some cases even beyond life itself? What is the ultimate function of such determined efforts toward dehumanization through pain, which renders these victims into monstrosities, into almost zombified versions of their former selves?

Susan Sontag reminds us that one function of pornographic violence is the sensationalism that results. However, it is clear that Zayas, while she exploits sensationalism to build a popular readership, also uses the violence against women in her texts as a sort of code with symbolic resonance. One way to interpret Zayas' text-as-torture technique is to read it in light of Elaine Scarry's eight-step analysis in *Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Scarry details eight phases of torture, with three of her identified stages to be present in two of the tales that I analyze in this chapter. In using Scarry's treatise on the procedure of torture, I

argue that Zayas goes beyond the simple re-telling of a martyrdom, thus making the victimization of her victims even more compelling. I will examine case two cases: First, "La inocencia castigada" and second, "El traidor contra su sangre" in the light of Scarry's approach, first providing a summary of each tale, highlighting details that will be examined later in the chapter.

In Zayas' most cited work, "La inocencia castigada," the reader is made privy to our author's most sordid, grotesque story of torture. Narrated by Laura, the mother of Lisis on the second night of the soiree, the tale begins, in typical fashion, following Zayas' prototype, with a beautiful protagonist. Doña Inés, like all of Zayas' female protagonists, has a beauty that is superlative. The fact that María de Zayas creates women that are exceptional in their beauty (their physical packaging) is not accidental. These women have very few other described attributes. Their outer shells are their most extolled characteristics.

Doña Inés, for example is heralded by all for her unparalleled beauty: "Este tenía una hermana de las hermosas mujeres que en toda la Andalucía se hallaba [...] aquella dicha sólo venía del cielo" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 265). Here, in typical hyperbolic proportions suiting her

time, Zayas places Inés on a pedestal or, perhaps more fitting, a circus stage, where her looks are unfitting for this world, making her some sort of an anomaly or freak.

Yet the narrator warns of the dangers of being so physically attractive: “[...] porque su esposo hacía la estimación de ella que merecía su valor y hermosura; por ésta le vino la desgracia” (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 266). The finger of culpability for the tragedies that will later befall our heroine points clearly to her beauty; Inés is seemingly doomed due to her pleasant looks. Interestingly, no finger is yet pointed at the perpetrators of the violence against Inés that is instigated as a consequence of her beauty.

Inés is blessed with both beauty and a fortunate life: “Gozaba la bella dama una vida gustosa y descansada, como quien entró en tan florida hacienda con un marido de lindo talle y mejor condición” (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 266). The emphasis on the fortune and exquisiteness of Inés is a clever storytelling device in that it highlights the steep and sudden fall in prosperity of the protagonist. In addition, one must take into account the audience for whom Laura is telling her tale: a group of well-bred nobles who would be empathetic to a story starring a protagonist of their own caliber. Raised by her brother in her

father's absence, doña Inés is unparalleled in her beauty in her hometown of Seville. When a worthy suitor demonstrates interest, her brother, don Francisco, approves, and the couple is married. Doña Inés and her husband live happily for two months, and then the reader is made aware of the fleeting nature of their bliss via the narrator's insistent forewarnings of trouble to come: "Fue vista por todos, unos alabando su hermosura y la dicha de su marido en merecerla, y otros envidiándola y sintiendo no haberla escogido para sí, y otros amándola ilícita" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 266). Since Inés is now married, laments the narrator, her brother and husband are no longer so guarded with her, and seem to now parade her around town without taking the care to protect her honor.

The reader is introduced to dangerous elements that lie beneath the pretty veneer of the baroque world. The women are hidden and shielded from the ever-present and lurking hazards of desperate men who are capable, at the very least, of (merely) staining their honor. Even the simple insinuation of an illicit affair can ruin a woman's future prospects and happiness. Inés, for example, under the careful eye of her (male) protectors, lies beyond the grasps of the man who will later become her torturer. It is only when her bounds are loosened, that Don Diego, a

well-born bachelor of the city spies doña Inés. He falls desperately in love with her. Although he is aware of the fact that she is married, he is still resolute in his quest to show her his affections. He begins his wooing by sending a trusted servant to sing of his forlorn love beneath her window. Doña Inés and her husband hear the song, and speculate that it must be for a neighbor—it does not even cross their minds that he might be singing for Inés: “Alabó doña Inés y su esposo, el romance, porque como no entendía que era ella la causa de las bien cantadas [...] no se sentía agraviada” (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 268). The inclusion of this detail is important, because both Inés and her husband fall prey to the trickery of Diego; she is not alone in her disillusionment.

The lovelorn Diego is crestfallen and unable to function due to the unrequited love. It does not go unnoticed: a female neighbor of Inés sees Diego’s desperation as a financial opportunity. She approaches Diego and offers herself as a go-between capable of initiating contact with a seemingly untouchable Inés.

For a price, she will contact Inés and proposition a meeting: “Pues ido don Diego, muy contenta la mala mujer, se fue en casa de una mujeres de oscura vida que ella conocía, y escogiendo entre ellas una, la más hermosa [...]



llevóla a su casa" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 269). As is typical in several of Zayas' tales, women are not always inculpable victims. Many times, they are the catalysts that ignite the main external conflict within the tale. Interestingly, usually these women belong to a different social class than the attendees of the soiree. The meddling neighbor distances herself from the nobles in her open quest for money: "Only defective characters desire or esteem money for itself, and the perfect noble individual communicated meaning in terms of more ancient markers of worth such as bloodline" (Rhodes in *Dressed* 73). The baroque reader is instantly repugnant to this "other" who schemes to dishonor Inés for financial gain. The woman claims to be capable of accomplishing this feat due to her close relationship with the desired beauty. Don Diego, blind in his utter lust for Inés, agrees to the arrangement. She hurriedly chooses a prostitute from a local brothel that vaguely resembles doña Inés and schools her on the circumstances of her hiring and the responsibilities of her new employment. She then goes to the home of Inés and manipulatively pulls on the heartstrings of her neighbor. She implores Inés to lend to her daughter the very dress that Inés is wearing for her daughter's upcoming nuptials. Her plan is to dress the

prostitute in clothing that is recognizable (in sight and smell) to don Diego, and thus to make him believe that he is actually with Inés. The mirage that she is carefully creating will be even more believable in the cloak of the night. She insists that the meeting take place at his house, with only one candle, which she claims is to safeguard her mistress's honor.

Don Diego falls prey to the trickery of Inés's neighbor. He truly believes that the woman who visits him for two weeks is his beloved Inés. Yet when the neighbor must return the dress to Inés, the nightly visits are terminated, and don Diego is left even more despondent than before. Believing that Inés has either forsaken his love, or that he has committed her some unintended wrong, he approaches her in a safety of a church and speaks to their romance. She is utterly shocked and taken aback by his familiarity with her, and by the dangerous accusations that he points in her direction. Yet ever practical and careful, Inés does not address the situation rashly, and instead chooses to act defensively to protect herself: "Cuerda y discreta era doña Inés [...] hizo llamar al Corregidor" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 273-274). She calls upon the chief magistrate of the town to be witness to the sully of her character by don Diego and her

neighbor. The following day, when her husband is safely out of town, a meeting is arranged between don Diego and Inés under the watchful (yet hidden) gaze of the magistrate. When the truth is revealed, the neighbor woman is given two hundred lashes and is sentenced to be expelled from the city for six years: "granjeando de la burla doscientos azotes por infamadora de mujeres principales y honradas" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 274). The woman receives her punishment, yet don Diego is treated as a victim as well. Even though he willingly participated in what he thought was the dishonoring of Inés, and, would have done so gladly, he is dismissed and forgotten. The incredulous don Diego is left even more resigned in his need to embody Inés than previously. Inés, perhaps naively, thinks the situation resolved and returns to her life.

Don Diego is unable to let Inés disappear from his life. And the torture begins. He needs to possess her, whatever the costs.

In desperation, he turns to a Moorish necromancer who offers him a magical solution: "[...] habiendo oído decir que en la ciudad había un moro, gran hechicero y nigromántico, le hizo buscar, y que se le trajesen, para obligar con encantos y hechiceras a que le quisiese doña Inés" (Zayas

in *Desengaños amorosos* 276). Again don Diego seeks the aid of an[other] in his quest to gain affections of doña Inés. Since his behavior is deviant—he is seeking to take the wife of another—he must seek accomplices that inhabit the underbelly of society. He has already aligned himself with a lower class woman, and now he is making allegiances to a Moor. Don Diego, in essence, has abandoned his place in society and taken refuge in/with the subaltern.

In his desperation, don Diego resorts to employing the magic of this new ally, the Moor. He is given a candle that bears uncanny resemblance to the object of his obsessions, Inés. He is instructed to light the candle in the evening when he would like to summon Inés. She will then leave her home, walk through the streets, come to his home, and be at his mercy until he tells her to leave. On one such sojourn the hapless Inés is spotted in the street by a group of local officials, including her brother, don Francisco. The puzzled men watch as the pajama-clad and response-less Inés makes her way to the home of don Diego. They watch in disbelief as Inés enters Diego's house and goes directly to his bed. The incriminating candle that is shaped in Inés's form illuminates all of the room, and Diego is forced to confess. They come to the conclusion that Inés is entirely guiltless. Don Diego is jailed, the

moor is executed, and don Francisco assures the officials that he and his family will respect the judgment of the court that had verified Inés's innocence in the matter.

Yet poor Inés's torture is not complete. Now, at the hands of her own family, she is subjected to more physical and emotional torment. Allegedly to avoid the gossip that pervades Seville on the topic of this sensational story, the family moves to the countryside: "[...] le dijo el cauteloso marido cómo su hermano y él estaban determinados y resueltos a irse a vivir con sus casas y familias a Sevilla" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 282). Doña Inés believes her husband, brother, and sister-in-law when they paint a positive picture for a new beginning in a new setting. Yet they have other plans, plans to revenge what they see as their family's shamed name.

They build a small enclosure in the back wall of their home and there entomb Inés: "[...] en el hueco de una chimenea que allí había o ellos la hicieron, proque para este caso no hubo más oficiales que el hermano, marido y cuñada, habiendo traído yeso y cascotos y lo demás que era menester" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 283). The scene of torture has been pre-planned. They had conceived of this horrific prison for Inés for some time—at least enough to measure and construct her tomb. She is neither able to

full stand, nor to sit nor lie down and repose. She is given enough food and drink to sustain her alive for nearly six long years of solitude and misery. Finally, her lamentations are heard. A neighbor hears the tired and whimpering pleas of Inés. The authorities are alerted and the nearly dead body of Inés is extracted from its jail cell. Her tortured body is nearly unrecognizable. Her eyes are blind after being unexposed to light for so many years. Her flesh has literally rotted off of her body. Yet when she enters the convent, her previous physical form is fully restored, all except for her eyesight. Her captors were each sentenced to death suitable to their status. They were unable to buy a pardon. According to Laura, doña Inés still inhabits in the monastery living the life befitting of a saint.

Our second case study is Zayas' eighth tale of *Desengaños amorosos*, "El traidor contra su sangre," narrated by doña Francisca. Perhaps the most rambling and unbalanced of Zayas' tales due to the fact that she welds two tales together into one, creating a veritable body farm that spans over at least a decade, and two countries. Doña Francisca's story begins in in the mountains of Andalucía, in the provincial city of Jaen. Don Pedro, the widowed patriarch of a wealthy, noble-born family, seeks to contain

the family name and riches by resigning his only daughter, doña Mencía, to a religious life, thereby making his son, don Alonso, the sole, and rightful heir. Both father and son are extremely cautious to ensure doña Mencía's chastity; her entrance into the nunnery unscathed is of utmost importance to the family.

Yet even though she is carefully guarded at nearly every instance, she is still seen by a bachelor who is enchanted by her beauty. Her equal in financial terms, don Enrique is the town charmer who is beloved by all.

His only flaw is in his lineage, which does not boast noble blood: "[...] esto nacía de saber no sé qué mancha en la sangre de don Enrique, que don Pedro no ignoraba, que a la cuenta era haber sido sus abuelos labradores" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 373). He is discarded as a suitable suitor to doña Mencía because his blood is not seen as being wholly of noble quality. Don Pedro is unable to look at don Enrique's other attributes because this glaring fault is too blinding. We can also concede that doña Franciscan's viewing audience also would have found fault with the union of don Enrique and Mencía, for they would not have been keen with a marriage of unequals. As Eavan O'Brien states, Zayas remains true to her conservative nature throughout her novella: "[...] Zayas' narrators defend

the strict demarcation of class boundaries" (105). Yet defying these boundaries, don Enrique sets his sights on doña Mencía, who is quite receptive to his wooing, as she is young and inexperienced in the practice of courtship. She knows that her future is trapped in the nun's habit, and she astutely advises don Enrique to avoid broaching the topic of marriage with her father or brother. The two carry on a chaste, innocent relationship through the grids on doña Mencía's window. Don Enrique is respectful of the situation and never pressures his young "wife" to ever endanger herself by making herself more available physically to him: The intention is to be married officially with the permission of her father when the timing is right.

Yet don Enrique's jealous previous lover, a married woman, is spiteful of his waning attentions, and investigates the cause. Yet another malicious woman is introduced into the plotline to stir trouble.

And while she is of noble birth, she associates with those beneath her, thus vilifying her more to the viewing audience: "Tenía esta dama amistad con unas señoras, madre y hija, de la ciudad, de lo bueno y calificado de ella, aunque en su modo de vida, no se portaban con la atención competente a su sangre" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 378).



Her allegiance with the lower classes sullies her reputation. It is as if the audience is cued into the deficient nature of a character via his/her association with those of a lesser social ranking. When this woman, Clavela, finds out that he is courting the young Mencía, she plots to reveal the secret to her brother, don Alonso. She gains confidence with the naïve brother, and eventually exposes the hidden relationship between Mencía and Enrique. Don Alonso, furious, relates the information to his father. The two conspire and carefully hatch a plan to gain their revenge. Don Pedro leaves their primary residence for Sevilla, presumably for work, and takes most of their wait staff with him, thus vacating the house. The young Mencía is wary of her brother's accusatory glance, but still writes a letter to her beloved Enrique, beckoning him to meet her. The letter is intercepted, and Mencía's enraged brother locks her in her room. He meanwhile summons a priest to confess her before her death. When the priest is brought up to speed on the details that surround the upcoming murder of Mencía, he tries to intervene, but is quickly threatened by Alonso, who wants no one to interfere with his plans. After she has confessed, Alonso savagely stabs his sister multiple times. He leaves her body strewn and bleeding in the room, and begins the second part of his

plan—to avenge the honor of his sister by killing her suitor.

When don Enrique approaches the grid on doña Mencía's window, he is already cautious, since a different servant than usual had delivered her letter. When he calls for his love and is answered with silence, a divine intervention occurs, and the windows are suddenly opened, revealing the macabre scene inside. Horrified, don Enrique is interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps, and the windows are abruptly closed again. He is cornered on the street by don Alonso and a friend, who proceed to stab him several times. Don Enrique, completely surprised by the turn of events, is defenseless, and falls to the ground in a heap. Yet before they are able to deal the fatal blow, a passerby, who works to save don Enrique, interrupts the two assailants in the act.

Don Enrique is saved and chooses to live out the rest of his life as a monk. In his monastery is housed the body of his beloved doña Mencía, whose body miraculously continuously bleeds fresh blood, and whose visage is completely uncorrupted by the passage of time and death. Don Alonso flees to Naples, where he creates a new life for himself.

He surrounds himself with seedy company, including the *jenízaro*, Marco Antonio: "Ayudóle a dares tanto al vicio tomar amistad con un jenízaro, hijo de español y napolitana, hombre perdido y viciosos" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 386). Guilty of fratricide, don Alonso can only associate with the lower elements of society. Yet with the help of his father's connection to the Count of Lemos, he establishes himself in the city. He quickly forgets about the circumstances that led to his sister's death, and falls in love with a young woman, Ana, who is the granddaughter of a Spanish infantry captain. Though not of noble birth and not blessed with riches, Ana initially appears to have no flaws to the love-sick Alonso: "Noble, honesta, recogida y hermosa era doña Ana. Mas, ¿qué le sirvió si nació desgraciada? (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 387). Alonso overlooks her lack of wealth, and sees only her attributes. With her father's permission, they are married. Alonso knows that he must hide this relationship from the judgment of his father. He is successful until news of the arrival of a grandson reaches don Pedro. Furious, he disinherits the family, prompting Alonso to reexamine his feelings towards his wife. In a quick reversal, he begins to blame her for his problems and plots to kill her. With the help of his friend Marco Antonio, he lures her out of the safety

of their house (where her family also lives) to the residence of Marco Antonio and ruthlessly slits her throat to such an extent that she is decapitated. They dispose of her body in the garden well, and bring her head to a cave, where they bury it.

In the meantime, Ana's family realizes that she is missing. A maid in the household of Marco Antonio finds the headless corpse in the well, and her family identifies her body. Alonso and Marco Antonio try to flee to Spain on a convoy of the viceroy. They are apprehended when they disembark the ship in order to buy tights. They are both sentenced to death for the murder of Ana. Before he is executed, Alonso discloses the location of the head of Ana, which is flawlessly preserved in death. When don Pedro hears of his son's beheading, he states that he would rather have a dead son, than an "ill-married" one: "Más quiero tener un hijo degollado que mal casado" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 398). He dies shortly thereafter, leaving his entire estate to his grandson, of whom he never approved.

One of the three aspects of torture as explained by Scarry that we can see demonstrated in the physical destruction of the body of the three female victims is the "dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside" that "[...] gives rise to [...] the felt experience of physical

pain, an almost obscene conflation of private and public" (p. 53). In perhaps no other scene in the entire collection of stories is an intensely private and taboo act such as the sexual affair between Inés and Diego put on public display as when the hypnotized woman is forcedly walked through the streets in her nightclothes:

[...] privada con la fuerza del encanto y de la vela que ardía de su juicio, y en fin, forzada de algún espíritu diabólico que gobernaba aquello, se levantó de su cama, y poniéndose unos zapatos que tenía junto a ella, y un fadellín que estaba debajo de su cabecera, y saliendo fuera, abrió la puerta de su cuarto, [...] salió a la calle, y fue en casa de don Diego (Zayas 277).

The narrator emphasizes the complete lack of control that Inés has over her body. The heroine has lost all autonomy of her body. She has yielded total control to don Diego, who commands here every move. It is therefore not only her physical body that is forced to perform acts, but also her thoughts, emotions, judgment, and intentions have been invaded and appropriated by this torturer. She is "forced" by the spell to emerge from her bed, the very epicenter of intimacy, and to venture out into the public streets in her bedclothes. Inés, under the control of Diego, leaves the

sanctuary of her residence and walks the nighttime streets alone—a significant act considering that she is nearly always in the company of a chaperone during her entire life, be it her brother or her husband. This was the case for all women of her standing, since they were deemed vulnerable when left without the company of a trusted male figure. Inés, here, is left utterly exposed. Her guarded interior life is blatantly put on display due to the torturous act of Diego. There is no longer a borderline between the public and private spheres of her life; Diego has erased it, thus putting her life at perilous danger. Interestingly, Inés's life is threatened in the act of walking through the streets alone not by some unknown stranger prowling for victims; it is in the shame of such an act rather than the act itself that poises her to become a victim of those who allegedly know her best—and those who have the most to lose from her disgraceful exposure in public.

In addition, the creation of a nude replica body made of wax of Inés again demonstrates the tortuous nature of the desecration of her body. The Moorish necromancer sculpts wax in her likeness, exposing her not only to don Diego, but later, to all her "rescuers," including her own brother:

[...] le trajo una imagen de la misma figura y rostro de doña Inés, que por sus artes la había copiado al natural, como si la tuviera presente. [...] La figura de doña Inés estaba desnuda, y las manos puestas sobre el corazón, que tenía descubierto, clavado por él un alfiler grande (Zayas 276).

The moor has, through the powers of magic, been granted the ability to gain carnal knowledge of the naked body of Inés so as to create an accurate image of her. He has trespassed the boundaries between her exterior and interior, and has given access to this private realm to others. When the rescuers enter the bedroom—or, in this case, room of torture, they all intrude upon the interior of Inés by gazing at the candle that betrayingly puts on display her naked body: “Ella se fue a la cama donde estaba don Diego, y ellos a la figura que estaba en la mesa con la vela encendida en la cabeza” (Zayas, *Desengaños* 279). The twenty-first century reader may underestimate the scale of such a very public demonstration of the female body and what this meant in baroque Spain, within a well-established and positioned family. In our contemporary social milieu, we are barraged daily with examples of public nudity of public personas. Yet there still exists a boundary between

those who chose to make their lives public—celebrities, for example, who often parade their nude or semi-nude bodies for public consumption—and the private sphere of the home front. Even today, the home normally symbolizes an untouchable sanctuary, where what goes on there is shrouded from the outside. Yet even this asylum is being turned inside out in some cases, with the emergence of reality television, where cameras follow the everyday lives of the willing participants. The viewer is witness to the utterly mundane everyday humdrum routines of these protagonists and is also privy to the more intimate happenings, even in the bedroom. The wide spectrum of this intrusion—from an “insiders” look into the new decorations in Oprah Winfrey’s latest home to being a witness to Kim Kardashian’s wedding vows on live television—is so pervasive in our modern culture, that the present-day readers of Zayas’ collection of stories may be jaded in their perception of what constitutes public versus private. The difference, of course, is that our modern-day exhibitionists *chose* to participate in such behavior; Inés does not. She is involuntarily involved, thus proving her to be the victim of don Diego’s torture. And almost over-emphasizing the point—the depth of Inés’s pain—Zayas provides the reader with the image of the wax heart, pierced by a pin. Such an



obvious image leaves the reader with little doubt as to the rupture of Inés interior life. Let us recall that the reception of this tale works on several levels. We must be conscious of the fact that the story is being told within the narrative and that it is also read by the reader of Zayas' time and of our own. Thus, when stating that the reader is left with a certain impression due to the cruel acts of don Diego, I mean to address all levels of the readership included in this multi-level audience.

In "El traidor contra su sangre" we are again exposed to a very private scene in a public arena. The deaths of doña Mencía and doña Ana are both extremely violent in nature, but carried out in such a way as to peel back the boundary between the two spheres. Doña Mencía's body, literally saturated with blood, is initially obscured from the public's prying eyes. Don Alonso leaves her tormented body within the enclosed room while he busies himself with the task of exacting his revenge. Yet when don Enrique approaches the window to the room where she lies expired, the room magically opens, and all of her intimacy in death has been revealed: "[...] cuando las puertas se abrieron con grandísimo estuendo" (Zayas, *Desengaños* 382). The act of opening the doors is violent and grandiose. The reader can almost see the blinding spotlight illuminating her body

under its unforgiving and piercing glare: “[...] sino una luz que sólo alumbraba en la parte de adentro” (Zayas, *Desengaños* 382). The privacy of death has been made public, and now her body, as if that of a corpse in a morgue, is ready to be analyzed. And analyzed it is—not only immediately after doña Mencía’s death, but also for years to come, as a relic.

Due to the unparalleled beauty of her corpse that is, in typical saint-like fashion, incorruptible, Mencía’s body is placed on display under the careful guise of her “husband:” “[...] donde pasó el cuerpo de su esposa, habiendo muchos testigos que se hallaron a verle pasar, que con haber pasado un año que duró la obra, estaban las heridas corriendo de sangre como el mismo día que la mataron” (Zayas, *Desengaños* 385). The wounds that pierced her broken body and continue to bleed are again continually pierced by the eyes of onlookers, who carry on the job initially started by her torturer.

Inés not only suffers due to the painful publicity of her intimate life to the public sector, but also due to the obliteration of her senses by her captors. Scarry identifies this aspect of torture as deliberately causing the “obliteration of the contents of consciousness” and eventually leading to “‘blinding pain’ by destroying one’s

ability simply to see" (54). In "La inocencia castigada" we see a literal interpretation and reenactment of this feature of Scarry's thesis on torture.

Encaged within walls that prevent her from seeing the light of day for six years leads Inés to lose her capacity to see: "[...] aunque tenía los ojos claros, estaba ciega, o de la oscuridad (porque es cosa asentada que si una persona estuviese mucho tiempo sin ver luz cegaría). O fuese de esto, u de llorar, ella no tenía vista" (Zayas, *Desengaños* 287). It is interesting to note that Zayas' narrator, Laura, is speculative and unsure as to the reasons for the blindness of Inés. She takes on a nearly scientific or medical tone when detailing the wounds suffered by Inés. But the two reasons posited by our narrator point to two different ways to interpret Inés's torture. In Laura's first assumption—that Inés is blinded by being denied access to light—the blame lies directly on her imprisoners. They block her ability to experience a basic human necessity, thereby committing a torturous act. By incarcerating Inés in darkness, they literally take away her ability to see the light. Yet in Laura's second conjecture as to the reasons for Inés's state, it is Inés's *reaction* to the conditions of her imprisonment that lead her to blind *herself*. She cries herself blind. In this

reading of Inés's unfortunate condition, the protagonist is seen as weak and somehow implicitly responsible for causing her own impairment, which, coincidentally, is the only physical damage that is permanent in Inés case. All of the other physical wounds heal, but the damage to Inés eyes is irreversible. Whether or not Laura is somehow pointing the finger of blame at the victim, it is striking to see that she even posits this hypothesis, whether simply in passing or not.

The enclosed wall is a torture chamber in that it excludes light, thereby blinding Inés. It is also physically restrictive, never allowing her the luxury of even resting her legs in a sitting position for six years.

Her physical suffering is such that even such a sensationalist writer such as Zayas outdoes herself in her detailing of the decrepit body of the barely-alive Inés: "[...] descalza de pie y pierna, que de los excrementos de su cuerpo, como no tenía dónde echarlos, no sólo se habían consumido, más la propia carne comida hasta los muslos de llagas y gusanos [...]" (Zayas, *Desengaños* 287). Deprived of proper clothing or a proper latrine, she is converted into a living corpse. Her body is in the process of decay that logically follows death, yet she is still alive. Worms and larvae that aid in the decomposition of organic waste are

consuming her flesh while she awaits death. She is denied, in her imprisonment, even the basic necessities of a human being. She is given the minimum insofar as her nutrients in order that she may remain alive to somehow cruelly repay her sins. Yet her body is restored after the torture is complete. For the first time in the collection of stories, we see the restitution rather than the destruction of a female body: “[...] Zayas has taken Inés’s body to the depths of degradation and corruption, walked it to the edge of life, and finally raised it to be a paragon of loveliness” (Rhodes 110). And the refurbishment is almost complete, except for the sight. It is for this reason that I believe that Zayas is emphasizing the staying power of this facet of torture. While the rest of the body may be able to be put back together, once blinded, one can never regain that sense: “[...] sanó; sólo de la vista, que ésa no fue posible restaurársela” (Zayas, *Desengaños* 288).

Scarry’s third characteristic of torture that can be seen in *Desengaños amorosos* is again, like the denial of access to light, a privation of a basic necessity rather than an overt physical abuse. Limiting or obstructing one’s ability to verbalize is, according to Scarry, a powerful tool of the torturer. The victim of torture has lost the ability to use speech in an empowering way—either

to protest the wrongs of the situation, or to verbally try to make sense of the situation and find some sort of refuge or explanation. They are unable (whether due to physical or psychological restraints or threats) to use their most powerful (and threatening) weapon, their voices. Scarry defines this point as follows: "A [...] dimension of physical pain is its ability to destroy language the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension, a vehicle through which the pain could be lifted out into the world and be eliminated" (54). Without a voice, which has been appropriated by another seeking to silence the victim, one has no power and no ability to escape. Perhaps even more encompassing and paralyzing than physical pain is that which muzzles and suppresses the victim of torture, almost making the entire ordeal somehow unreal until one has regained the capacity to speak freely.

Doña Mencía, the hapless victim of fratricide, is literally silenced when don Alonso savagely stabs her. Yet her words, in the form of a love letter to don Enrique, live on. It is here that don Alonso tortures his sister—in appropriating her voice—the letter—he is able to silence the true sentiment of the letter by turning it into a trap for her beloved: "[...] le dio el papel de doña Mencía, y le mandó se le llavase a don Enrique, diciéndole que dijese

que se le había dado su señora" (Zayas, *Desengaños* 381). The voice of doña Mencía in the letter beckons her lover to join her at their usual haunt, but this time, there will be no sweet voice calling from the barred window: only silence, a bleeding body, and a brother bent on revenge await don Enrique.

While many of Zayas' women are summarily silenced when they are murdered, doña Inés suffers the most prolonged torture in this aspect. Trapped within the framework for the house, she is literally muffled from the outside world. There is no one there in whom she can confide, no companionship nor camaraderie—she is tortured with complete seclusion from the outside world. Although accustomed to a cloistered-like existence in her daily life before being imprisoned, Inés enjoyed the company of her family or of her servants. Moreover, although limited in her freedoms when living at her home in Sevilla due to her husband and brother's collective protective net: "[...] siendo doncella, jamás fue vista" (Zayas, *Desengaños* 266), she was not physically restrained within a miniscule confinement. She is now sequestered alone, and without lifeline or connection to the outside world. Inés's torturers, in placing her within such a segregated area, have taken away her voice. No one can hear the stifled screams that she

cries in the first days, months, or even perhaps years of her confinement. The narrator comments that even her tormentors are unmoved by her woeful weeps: “[...] sin que sus lágrimas ni protestas los enterneciese” (Zayas, *Desengaños* 283). Laura, the narrator, seems to emphasize the inhuman nature of Inés family by using the verb “enternecer.” They are utterly unfazed by her suffering and completely incapable of being even remotely touched by her painful cries. The three guilty parties have become mechanized in carrying out their position as torturers: “[...] sin que ninguno de sus tres verdugos tuviese piedad de ella” (Zayas in *Desengaños* 284). To them, Inés has lost all resemblance to the pre-scandal Inés who sullied their reputation. They treat her like an animal because in their eyes she is but an animal due to the shame that she has (in their eyes) heaped upon the family. Even though her case has been cleared by the local authorities who have declared her to be guilt-less, they are unable to rectify the stain that has sullied their family. While Zayas’ narrator provides no direct dialogue between the characters that could point to their individual opinions on the shame incurred by the scandal, the narrator once and again reminds the reader that the public is insatiable in its curiosity for this type of scandal: “[...] estaba el caso



público" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 282); "vivía afrentada de un suceso tan escandaloso" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 283). The insistence on this topic is typically baroque, for the honor of the family and the upholding of this sacred element was paramount to the preservation of the noble lineage. Surely María Zayas knew of the importance of this in her lifetime.

Without human companionship, Inés turns to God and engages in and cultivates a spiritual relationship with him. In the context of baroque, Catholic Spain, we can also see that Inés's inability to communicate with a priest in order to have an intermediary with whom to converse with God is another privation of her freedom.

She is not allowed to confess, one of the principal pillars of the Catholic faith: "[...] es carecer de vivir y morir como Cristiana, pues ha tanto tiempo que no oigo misa, ni confieso mis pecados, ni recibo tu Santísimo Cuerpo" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 285). Although she personally reaches out to God in this dark hour of desperation, she feels that she has been denied access to him in her solitude. Her prayers go unanswered for many years. She begs to be released from her suffering, but feels not respite: "[...] siempre llorando y pidiendo a Dios la aliviase de tan penoso martirio" (Zayas, *Desengaños* 283)

until she is finally granted a voice that is actually heard. Inés's torturers have successfully achieved her silence (at least beyond the walls of the torture chamber) for six years; they have made her deaf, but not mute.

By the time that she is finally heard—six years later—her shrieks of panic are subdued to quiet lamentations. Her voice had been cut off from being heard by the outside world, but her attackers never fully succeed in gagging her. Indeed, when Inés's voice is first heard, it is thought to be the voice of a ghost; which it nearly is, since Inés is already half-dead: “[...] oía los ayes y suspiros, y al principio es de creer que entendió era alguna alma de la otra vida” (Zayas, *Desengaños amorosos* 284). Having suffered so much, it is almost as if Inés is speaking from the grave when the neighboring widow happens to hear her ethereal prayers. Yet when it is ascertained that the woman responding to her actually exists and is not in on the conspiracy to torture her, Inés is very capable and comfortable with her newly re-established voice. She gives clear, concise directions on how to remedy the situation. Ultimately, although stripped from her for six years, it is Inés voice and its power that saves her from her tormenters.

Inés, Mencía and Ana are rendered into deformed, denatured, monstrous, and zombified versions of themselves. But to what ends? Ultimately, the women are resistant to death. They simply can't die and can never go away. As Jeffrey Cohen asserts as one of his central theses in *Monster Theory*: the monster always returns. Here, the monster is the woman, and simultaneously, the men are monstrous perpetrators of violence. And although the men would try to eliminate them, they are ever present. The women are de-selfed, emptied, and violated, but never are fully erased. If the social order depends on the dehumanization of women, Zayas novellas become a symbolic rendering of the wounds that are psychically and socially inflicted on all women, wounds that bleed without end, without hope of healing. They are pornographic in terms of women's bodies exposed and sadist from the pleasure of observing their pain and humiliation. Also pornographic, and perhaps even more damningly so, of the most interior psychic wounds exposed, splayed, before the eyes of any and all readers. Reading, therefore, becomes a form of rape.

### Chapter Three:

#### Maria de Zayas' Baroque Labyrinth of Horror

In tale after tale after tale in Maria de Zayas' *Desengaños amorosos*, the reader is barraged with a seemingly endless series of bloodied, stabbed, strangled, crushed and mutilated—and mostly female—cadavers. Rather than killing her outright, Carlos poisons Camila. The body of this blameless wife swells and billows to monstrous proportions before succumbing to a slow, miserable death. Laurela is deliberately buried alive and crushed under the rubble of the walls of her uncle's home. With an already bloodied dagger, the husband of Doña Magdalena savagely and repeatedly stabs her while she sleeps. Although Doña Inés is one of the few to survive, she does as the walking dead, with her flesh rotting and falling from her frail bones. Why leave such a grim trail of blood for the reader to follow? Why does she pull her readers through scene after scene, room after room, of torturous violation and gory remains, as if her text was not a collection of stories, but really labyrinth of horror?

The narrative structures of the novellas do not offer any insight. The ten plots are almost eerily identical, like a recurrent nightmare the reader can't shake. A woman

of a certain standing exposes herself unintentionally to the attention of a man that has motives other than marrying her. She usually rebuffs his advances, at least at the outset. If she succumbs to him, he quickly loses interest and moves on. He either cuts himself loose by killing his former lover, or by driving her to the convent. If she does not fall for his trickery, he is persistent and won't stop until he possesses her. In the end, the fate is the same--most are sacrificed after they have been possessed--in some circumstances brutally raped --while the others have no choice but to seek refuge in houses of God. And while there are indeed subtle differences in the stories to differentiate them from each other, they are hypnotizing in their circular nature.

Similarly, the characters that inhabit *Desengaños amorosos* offer no clues and no way out. Any reader of Zayas would be challenged to distinguish between the forgettable characters of each tale. The female protagonists--Estela, Isabel, Magdalena, Roseleta, to name a few --- each initially innocent and chaste, but then summarily and brutally disillusioned--blend into each other so easily that they are rendered practically anonymous. The "don Diego" of "La inocencia castigada" is barely discernable in his character traits and actions--even if these are

horrifically and terrifyingly violent in nature--from the "don Gaspar" of the following tale, who is not unlike "don Carlos" in "La más ínfame venganza." In some ways, it is precisely the hollowness of Zayas' characters that is their most striking characteristic, more like empty silhouettes in a shadow puppet play, devoid of any real individuality.

David Castillo might answer that Zayas hoped to create "shocking exposés of the dark and dirty secrets of the rich and honorable" (34). A number of scholars, like Ursula Jung and Margaret Greer suggest that she was seeking a form of social justice by calling attention and giving voice to those crushed by a profoundly patriarchal culture?

Elizabeth Rhodes suggests that perhaps Zayas was emphasizing the need for noble reform. However, what if she was simply writing grisly tales in order to feed the macabre appetites of her reading public? One cannot doubt her ever-constant insistence on the injustice of women, or her mass appeal. However, the extremes of the violence that Zayas depicts seems to suggest that there is more that motivates her besides the plight of women and her own claim to fame.

Readers of Zayas are even more perplexed by the lack of a clear-cut moral lesson to be gained. Brownlee applauds Zayas for her "perspectivism" rather than faulting

her unclear message: [...] Zayas offers several examples of such oppressed male subjectivity, at the hands of male and female oppressors alike. [...] Zayas is committed to exploring perspectivism in all its complexity—biological, racial, social, and intellectual—with a degree of intensity that is hard to equal. [...] Once Zayas' text is understood in this light, the necessary contradictions become the vehicle for her discursive tour de force (24). Brownlee sees the obscurities in Zayas' writing as a characteristic to be lauded—it proves that hers is a world vision that is resistant to pigeonholing. Other scholars coincide with this observation, including Laura Gorfkle, who asserts, "Even to the casual reader of the *Desengaños amorosos*, the ambiguity and contradictions in Zayas' indoctrinating project are immediately observable" (75). These critics applaud Zayas for her ability to navigate the male-dominated, patriarchal society in which she lives, and to create a condemnation of said society without oversimplifying her work into a mere diatribe. The complexities in *Desengaños amorosos*, while not indifferent or unique to those of her male literary counterparts, serve to Zayas as a blurring agent—a fog in the mirror that she holds up to her class. With the obscuring fog, the sting of the critique is not so harsh or so brazen: "The rhetoric

of excess becomes a thing of beauty, with tropes and conceits that transform and poeticize the grotesque, and that distract readers from the brutal acts by encoding obscurity into the text" (Friedman 295).

The dark pleasure of reading these tales lies in her deliberate obscuring of easy answers, for the stories lend themselves to multiple interpretations. As with a labyrinth, every turn seems to lead to another, until the reader finds herself lost circling the same bits of evidence and unable to find a way out. In some ways, the inherent "difficulty" in reading Zayas' texts, which are often excruciatingly far from being what we today would deem as "user-friendly," are quite emblematic of their historical moment. The writers of baroque Spain touted intricate and complicated writing as a barrier of access to the "vulgo," or indiscriminate reader. Baltasar Gracián, rhetorician extraordinaire of the seventeenth century writes of the benefits of creating labyrinthine word play: "The more difficult the truth is, the more pleasing, and knowledge that costs effort is more esteemed" (Rhodes 22). In this case, the more inaccessible the literary piece—that is, the more difficult to discern the meaning—the more pleasing to the reader who is charged with the task of solving the puzzle. A game involving the author and reader



evolves, where the reader tries to decipher the meaning: "The method raises the level of poetic intensity and ensures the participation of the reader, co-opted by the decoding process and by the contest of interpretation" (Friedman 295). Even in the introduction to her *Desengaños amorosos*, where the reader is in familiar territory, since it is presented as a sequel to *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, Zayas' inherently difficult and therefore baroque writing is on display:

Mas, cuando las cosas no están otorgadas del Cielo, poco sirven que las gentes concierten, si Dios no lo otorga; que como quien mira desapasionado lo que nos está bien, dispone a su voluntad, y no a la nuestra, aunque nosotros sintamos lo contrario; y así, o que fuese alguna desorden, como suele suceder en los suntosos banquetes, o el pesar de considerarse Lisis ya en poder de extraño dueño [...] (Zayas 115).

The extreme vagueness of the above quote, which refers to the convening of a second soiree at Lisis's behest, is paralyzing to those not belonging to Zayas' social and literary context. A contemporary first-time reader of Zayas' novellas is befuddled by her lexical convolutions, her manipulations of words to perplex, to create double meanings, and to ultimately obscure. Access into Zayas'

literary world is denied to those who lack the patience to comb through her tangled sentence structures and bizarre imagery.

Yet while Zayas obscures her authorial intent by holding up a fogged-up mirror, it is also an ever-present, inescapable one. In each tale, an innocent woman is pushed before the reader's eyes--shifting unwillingly from the private to the public sphere--and her body is viciously debased. Here lies the innovative aspect of each tale, for each victim is ceremoniously injured in different, titillating ways. The recurrence of the grisly violence against women is Zayas' systematic approach to inculcate the reader/audience, and to induce her to not only witness the pain, but to wince at it and thereby recoil with the victims. Perhaps one way to make sense of Zayas' possible motives for heaping a collection of corpses in her tales is to examine, beyond the usual baroque theatricality of shock, spectacle, and gore, the effect of such repeated, seemingly inescapable horror on the reader. Like the experimental behavior modification program in which the protagonist of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* is forced to keep his eyes open while witnessing violent behavior on film, so too is the reader of Zayas' tales powerless to turn away. Trapped in a nightmarish hall of

mirrors where each plot and each character reflect all the others, the reader is forced again and again to examine and reexamine the violent reality of Zayas' time where soulless, lifeless victims are omnipresent, but true villains are rare. Ultimately, the gaze of the reader is subtly manipulated from the object of vision (the "dead" text brimming with cadavers) to the subject of vision: the mind that seeks entertainment and distraction from reading such horror. It is no longer the author who bears responsibility for the vision that appears in the mirror, but the reader who avidly consumes such visions of graphic violence. The self-aware reader becomes forced to self-interrogate, forced to confess that they bear the responsibility for the proliferating dead in Zayas' tales, forced to take on the role of villain. Going beyond the usual aesthetics and modes of baroque expression of her context, Zayas breaks new ground. The horror of her baroque goes beyond words and images and becomes visceral, in an insidious attempt to inhabit, or perhaps even possess, the reader.

In the pages that follow, I plan to give the reader a guided tour into the world of *Desengaños amorosos*, concentrating on several baroque strategies employed by Zayas to construct her tales. I will then give a close

reading of "El verdugo y su esposo," where we see deliberate attempts to continually refocus, and artfully control the reader's attention. By examining one tale, I mean to exemplify in detail what can be seen in the other tales--namely, that the characters, while lacking in depth and presented as prototypes, are surprisingly not unequivocally good or bad, contributing to possible misinterpretations of Zayas' works. The inherent baroque-ness of Zayas-- her complicated characterization of the protagonists in the world that she creates, perhaps obscures her message. The protagonists of Zayas' tales are puppets on a mirrored stage whose actions or inactions force the reader to look interiorly. We will notice how Zayas, like a dominatrix, continually calls the attention back to the violence.

Upon first examination of the ten tales that make up Zayas' follow-up to her first "best-seller" *Novelas amorosas*, the reader finds herself in familiar territory: She is again in the home of the "lovely" Lisis, the protagonist of the frame tale in Zayas' first publication. Lisis, a young noblewoman who passes her days in typical fashion of women of her time, station and age, has again convened a "soiree." Whereas her previous assembly of friends was initiated on the behest of her mother to

entertain her during her feverish illness, Lisis herself is the coordinator of this second and more somber storytelling gathering. Although Lisis has recuperated from her nearly year-long ailment, brought on by her unrequited love for don Juan, she reconvenes the group for a second soiree under the premise of celebrating her impending engagement to don Diego:

Comunicó la discreta señora con su hermosa hija lo que don Diego le había propuesto, y la sabia dama dio a su madre la respuesta que se podía esperar de su obediente proceder, añadiendo que, [...] tenía gusto de que se mantuviese otro entretenido recreo como el pasado, [...] para que el último día se desposase, y que lo diese licencia para que lo dispusiese (118).

The narrator comments that Lisis is “sabia” for displaying her perceived compliance of the arrangement to her mother. The reader is therefore tipped off to the possibility that perhaps Lisis will not follow through with her marriage to don Diego at the conclusion of the “sarao.” In fact, it appears that Lisis is being capricious in calling for another “entretendido recreo” to suit her whims.

Yet while the reader is from the outset hesitant to trust in Lisis, she is the most developed character that Zayas creates, and thus worthy of an examination. Several

scholars, like Margaret Greer and Elizabeth Rhodes, have rightly pointed to the possibility of Zayas' use of Lisis as her nom de plume: "Zayas' only autobiographical narrator" (O'Brien in "Female Friendship [...]" 43). Zayas uses Lisis as her mouthpiece to voice her agenda. Ruth El Saffar challenges this idea, by noting that Lisis, unlike María Zayas herself, was "[...] still hopeful of marriage and apparently content to let her poetry serve occasional, decorative purposes" (200). El Saffar fleshes out the figure of Lisis, separating her from the very public Zayas, who seeks "however possibly ironic, for profit from her writing" (200). Even if Zayas never needed or wanted to truly make a living from her writing, there is still an inherent desire to have her work disseminated and read in the public realm, not just in the tucked away living rooms. Lisis, contrarily, seems to be content with this limited audience/readership. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore a blurring of the borders between the author and Lisis. Similarly, we see this trend in several of the frame-tales and the tales themselves, where the narrator of the tale is also a character in the tale. William Egginton chalks this technique up to "baroque trickery":

The play between the frame or border separating these two spaces and the dissolution of that frame is

paramount in baroque artifacts, and represents what is perhaps most recognizable about baroque style, what Orozco Díaz calls the 'overflowing of borders' (Egginton 16).

This "overflow" is most apparent in the tale told by Zelima/Isabel on the first night of the soiree. The slight of hand of Zelima/Isabel in telling her own story, entitled "La esclava de su amante" and concluding with the revelation of her true character is ubiquitous in its baroque character. It is, in fact, a very dramatic scene. Zelima has just finished telling a story of lost love, betrayal, abuse, and dishonor. But while she is narrating her own story, she stays in character. She largely remains on the outskirts of the frame-tale. In Zelima, Zayas has created a character that is, "thoroughly theatrical, and hence thoroughly baroque" (Egginton 17). Egginton goes on to detail the ability of this baroque figure, (here, in the context of the theater) to "stay in character": "[...] to convince the greatest number of people possible that his character is his character *all the way down*—that there is no other self, or actor" (Egginton 17). We the readers see the same composure in Zelima/Isabel. While she is telling/reenacting her tale, she is completely believable as a mere narrator, which only serves to make her

revelation even more dramatic. Greer comments on the development, in *Desengaños amorosos*, of a trespassing between the world of the frame tale and the fiction that the characters of the frame tales create:

Zayas repeatedly blurs narrative levels, particularly in the second volume. [...] Montesa is certainly right to assert that they are a deliberately chosen technique, one that works to reduce the distance between fiction and experience to bring the message of her thesis novel to her public and to immerse her public in the world of her sarao (Greer 342).

The verisimilitude of the sarao is much stronger here due to Zayas' blending of the frame tale with the narrated tale. She reduces the space between the characters and the spectators, thus making her judgments more personal and less distant.

Moreover, the rules that Lisis puts forward in this, her second, soiree, demonstrate the shift in direction of Zayas' own focus. In Zayas' *Novelas amorosas*, Lisis calls upon the participants of her party to partake in what seems to be merely entertaining storytelling, "[...] después de haber danzado, contasen dos maravillas [...] Y porque los caballeros no se quexasen de que las damas se les alzaban con la preeminencia, mezclando a los unos con los otros



[...], feneciendo la Pascua con una suntuosa cena" (Zayas in *Novelas* 31). The select ten partygoers who are asked to compose "maravillas" for the pleasure of the rest of the group gathered during the five evenings that make up the entire holiday festivities are given little direction from their event coordinator. Lisis has set out a strict schedule for her budding novelists, but gives them no thematic guidelines; she provides no details on what sort of stories she expects them to tell. It is therefore difficult to assess where her intentions lie, other than to offer entertainment. The emphasis on this first nighttime gathering is on distracting a Lisis and restoring her back to health. The tone is initially, in the conception of the plan, light-hearted. Indeed, the narrator dwells on the décor of the room where the tales are to be told as well as on the dresses worn by the protagonists. Zayas' narrator specializes in providing the reader with myriad detail as to the intricate patterns and fabric draping the women and their physical surroundings, but lacks in expounding upon their interiors:

"Estaba ya la sala cercada de muchas filas de terciopelo verde y de infinitos taburetes pequeños, para que sentados en ellos los caballeros, pudiesen gozar de un brasero de plata, que alimentado de fuego

y diversos olores, cogía el estrado de parte a parte”  
(Zayas in *Novelas* 32).

The room described is rich and ornate, bursting with vibrant colors, smells, and exquisite materials. All five senses are attuned to the description, for it is so encompassing, that one feels that he/she can imagine lounging in the plush velvet fabrics next to a raging fire. The reader is more informed as to the physical setting for the soiree than to the qualities—be they superficial or not, of the participants.

Moreover, the description seems to be disconnected from the story’s development: “La descripción que hay es convencionalmente elegante, y no tiene ningún papel en el desarrollo de la acción” (Foa 154). There is a glaring absence of descriptive words referencing the partygoers, yet we have the colors, fabrics, and even smells of the environment in which the storytelling will take place.

Critics such as Melloni, Wells, and Vasileski, have commented on the tendency of Zayas to dwell on miniscule details, and some contend that she gives an accurate and believable window into the world of the upper classes: “podemos reconstruir bastante fielmente la vida hogareña de estas personas, sus condiciones físicas de vida en cuanto a vestidos y peinados [...]” (Vasileski 131). Others, such as

David Castillo, see Zayas' obsession with details in a more sinister light.

Castillo proposes that Zayas is engaging with the "voyeuristic" aspects of the paternal society: "Close-ups of garments and intimate apparel commonly contribute to the voyeuristic objectification of the female body in sentimental novellas as much as they do in pornography" (114). Is she using these "pornographic" images in her favor in order to titillate a broader public, or is she demonstrating how women are being "objectified"?

Although her motives are hazy, we see that Zayas' pen again dwells on the minute details of the setting of the second soirée. The introduction of one of the most fascinating characters of Zayas' creation, the noblewoman disguised as a moor turned slave, turned servant, turned confidant to Lisis, Zelima, is rich in reference to the mysterious woman's clothing:

Traía sobre una camisa de transparente cambray, con grandes puntas y encajes, las mangas muy anchas de la parte de la mano; unas enaguas de lama a flores azul y plata, con tres o cuatro relumbrones que quitaban la vista, tan corta, que apenas llegaba a las gargantas de los pies, y en ellos unas andalias de muchos lazos y listones de seda muy vistosos; sobre esto un

vaquerillo o albuja de otra telilla azul y plata muy vistosa (*Desengaños* 123).

Zayas provides a detail-laden portrayal of Zelima's outer appearance in order to defy the reader's expectations for someone of her stature and ethnicity, a topic which will be developed more in chapter four of this dissertation. We are also informed of Zelima's talents with music and poetry, her physical beauty, her soothing and convalescing powers as Lisis's companion. We are never provided with such a comprehensive vision of Zelima in her entirety as we are of the frock that she dons to tell her (own) story.

We cannot ignore this oversight in Zayas' focal lens, nor can we chalk it up to an overpowering interest in the décor of her times. Zayas is indeed a descriptive writer—she pays heed to details time and time again. In “Tarde llega el desengaño”, for example, we have a very complete depiction of a gentleman encountered by chance on the road: “Tenía sobre un vestido costoso y rico un gabán de terciopelo carmesí, con muchos pasamanos de oro al uso español” (*Desengaños* 234). In the same tale, she provides myriad details as to the vestments of the black lover of the wealthy homeowner:

[...] tan resplandeciente y rica, que una reina no la podía tener mayor: collar de hombros y cintura

resplandecientes diamantes; en su garganta y muñecas, gruesas y albísimas perlas, como lo eran las arracadas que colgaban de sus orejas; en la cabeza, muchas flores y piedras de valor, como lo eran las sortijas que traía en sus manos (*Desengaños* 237).

The reader is nearly overwhelmed by the painstakingly thorough portrayal of what may seem to be unimportant (or at least non-essential) detailing of her characters' outward appearance. We have a head-to-toe description of the unconventional mistress of the "caballero" of the Fourth Tale, Jaime de Aragón. And while it is obvious that Zayas communicates at least some of these details in order to demonstrate the exorbitant wealth (or contrastingly, the poverty) of her characters, the precision with which she describes her protagonists' garb goes beyond the necessary to convey their socio-economic standing. What would provoke Zayas to concentrate so intently upon the outward appearance of the people populating her stories? Why does she not provide the same thoroughness when treating her characters' inner selves? Why are we given very few clues as to their inner workings when she provides such a plethora of minutiae on their surface qualities? There is a desire, on the part of the reader, to move beyond the

superficial, and to be given more clues as to the interiors of Zayas' protagonists, but Zayas disappoints.

Zayas cannot be dismissed as an author of purely action-driven tales. Yet she chooses to deny her readers the opportunity to gain access to anything more than a very limited and frankly impoverished description of her protagonists. We, the readers, are forced to come to our own conclusions based almost exclusively on her character's actions and words rather than any conclusive judgments dished out by the narrators. If there is any indication at all as to the narrators' opinions of their characters, we are given merely scant glimpses. To find an adjective that makes reference to one of the character's non-physical (and tellingly, non-socio-economic status) traits is a challenge in Zayas' tales. The characters are to be judged, therefore, by their actions, and, interestingly, by their ability to pay heed to the warnings of the narrators of their tales.

Keeping in mind Zayas' shortcomings her tendency to construct one-dimensional beings in her novellas, let us now focus on an examining one couple from one of the tales presented during the second soiree of Lisis, namely, "El verdugo y su esposa." The two characters that will be under our examining lens are aptly referred to in the

title—the husband/executioner is condemned from the outset, and his wife is relegated to the space of a nameless, referent-free character, only important via her association with her husband. The suspense of the story is sapped by a title that is perhaps too revealing; yet it simultaneously captures the attention of the bloodthirsty reading public. The decision to give her tales colorful and thrilling names is a conscious one on the part of Zayas. It exposes her desire to appeal to a broad public—not necessarily to a critical audience, but to a voracious one that would be enticed by her juicy titles: “La inocencia castigada,” “La más ínfame venganza,” y “La esclava de su amante,” to name a few of the racier examples.

“El verdugo y su esposa” is narrated by Nise, cousin of Lisis, who, in the previous *sarao* contributed, albeit unintentionally, to Lisis’s illness by capturing the heart and affection of Lisis’s love interest, don Juan. Before launching into her story, Nise makes comments that are revelatory of her character. She emphasizes the importance of narrating a story that is true, “[...] supuesto que la Hermosa Lisis manda que sean casos verdaderos los que se digan,” (Zayas in *Desengaños* 199) but at the same time, she distances herself from having had any experiences with disillusionment personally:

Y aunque pudiera esta audiencia cerrarse con los referidos, pues son bastantes para que las damas en estos tiempos estemos prevenidas, [...] a guardarnos de no caer en las desdichas que ellas cayeron, [...] por que no me tengáis por alguna de las engañadas (Zayas in *Desengaños* 199).

Nise follows the instructions that have been set forth by the host of the soiree, Lisis, and she produces a tale that is a true, first-hand telling. Yet she also is protective of her honor. She wants to make clear that she does not count herself as one of those women who have fallen prey to the *desengaños* herself. The emphasis on the veracity of the tale again demonstrates Zayas' desire to merge the private and the public spheres:

In thematic terms, the focus on intimacy is also at the core of the new reading practice and of Zayas' text. We read about the bedroom and marital relations and their transgressions in tale after tale, and the divulging of such details has a double effect. On the one hand it endows the narrative with the appearance of truth, on the other it constitutes a violation. The private affair warrants belief because it has been made public (Brownlee 77).



And yet our narrator, Nise, reluctant to participate in this blurred world. She does not want to implicate herself by telling of the follies of others. Nise distances herself from the characters in her story in order to emphasize her chastity and wisdom—she has not fallen prey to the tricks of men. Yet while Nise takes herself out of the equation, she instructs her crowd to take heed to lessons that can be learned from her story. She emphasizes the didactic importance of the retelling of these tales:

Y como nuestra intención no es de solo divertir, sino de acosenjar a las mujeres que miren por su opinión y teman con tantas libertades como de día profesan, no les suceda lo que a las que han oído y oirán les ha sucedido (Zayas in *Desengaños* 200).

Gleaned from the sense of urgency with which Nise (and the other female narrators) tell their stories, the world in which they inhabit seems to be bursting with aggressors who are out to deceive them. Zayas has created a perfect context in which the cautionary tales can be shared amongst a group of women who fall into the category of possible victims of the deception that is detailed in the stories. The female readers are to learn from the mistakes of the women in her tale so as not to fall prey nor to commit the same foolish act in their lives: “The narrative ritual

Zayas created with which to kill her perfect victims begins with tests of the wife's worth, creating in her an ironic hero whose heroic nature must be proven for her death to have any impact" (Rhodes 89). Rhodes points to a deliberate creation, on the part of Zayas, of a victim that is sacrificed in order to prove a point and in order to disseminate her message and thereby to instill social change.

Moreover, Nise condemns the men of her class and social ranking of being reckless in their pursuits of pleasure. They suffer minimal consequences while ruining the lives of the women that they initially profess to love. She beckons these men to abandon their predatory behavior:

Caballero que solicitas la doncella, déjala, no la inquietes, y verás como ella, aunque no sea más de por venganza y recato, no te buscará a ti. Y el que busca y desasosiega la casada, no lo haga, y verá cómo, cuando no la oblique la honestidad, el respeto y temor de su marido, a hará que no te solicite ni busque (Zayas in *Desengaños* 200).

As her tale suggests, even when women are protective of their chastity and deny the advances of men, the eagerness and persistence of their male aggressors can be impossible to overpower. She defends her fellow females as not to

blame for their demise in her defamation of men. Yet she is careful to make clear that she is speaking of women of her same status and upbringing: "Esto es un cuanto a las mujeres de honor" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 200). It is a given that the majority of the participants in the tales are from the same social class as Zayas herself. It is not surprising; therefore, that Nise should make a quip to remind the reader that she is not defending all women, but all of *her* women.

Nise's tale, which she modestly, and perhaps insecurely deems to be inferior to those of her peers, "aunque mi desengaño no sea de tanta erudición" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 199), is, like many of Zayas' tales, inconsistent in its characterization of the protagonists. It is a ubiquitously baroque tale. I will provide the reader with a brief synopsis of the tale so as to facilitate the discussion of the protagonists.

In Palermo, Sicily, two best friends, don Juan and don Pedro, live a contented life befitting of their status as noblemen. They spend all of their time together until don Pedro is married to a beautiful woman, his equal in her fortune and class, Roseleta. Don Juan initially distances himself from the couple, thinking that he should give them their space, but is reassured by don Pedro that his

presence is welcome in their house as much as it was prior to his marriage to Roseleta. Soon, don Juan becomes jealous of don Pedro, and finds that he is in love with Roseleta. The couple notices don Pedro's sadness, and when pressed as to the cause, don Juan feigns love for another woman, Angeliana, with whom he is indeed having an affair. He blames Angeliana for not reciprocating his affection, thus giving him an excuse for acting so forlorn in the presence of don Pedro and Roseleta. Roseleta and don Pedro console their friend, with Roseleta often spending time alone with don Juan, unknowing of his true feelings. During one of these moments alone with Roseleta, don Juan confesses his love to her. Roseleta rebuffs his attention once and again. Yet don Juan is relentless, and continues to barrage her with love notes. Tired of his persistence, Roseleta turns to her husband for help with the matter. She challenges him to perform his duty as the protector of their honor, and to murder him. They conceive of a plan: Roseleta will write don Juan an encouraging letter, asking to meet with her in a wooded retreat, far from the reaches of her husband. Don Juan receives the token and embarks days later on a journey to meet with his love. As he is leaving town, Juan hears the bells toll an "Ave María," and he immediately gets down from his horse and prays to the

Virgin to forgive the transgression in which he is about to partake, and asks that she protect him during this adventure. Not long afterwards, he stumbles upon the bodies of three recently hanged men. As he is passing by them, he hears one of them calling his name, asking that he help him. The hanged man, it seems, has somehow, miraculously, avoided death by hanging; he needs don Juan to untie the noose and secure his safe landing on the ground. Don Juan, although excited by the prospect that awaits him with Roseleta, takes the time to help the injured man, who, in turn, seems indebted to don Juan. The two walk together to the place in which don Juan is to meet Roseleta, but the hanged man insists that don Juan hide in a tree while he takes his place, entering the menacingly darkened house where the assassins await. In the shadows, the murderers mistakenly identify the hanged man for don Juan, and brutally shoot and stab the man before throwing him into a deep well, pelting his body with stones. Don Pedro and his aides leave the area, satisfied with the restoration of their honor. Don Juan is stunned when his new friend returns bloodied from the place in which he was to meet Roseleta.

The true intentions of don Pedro and Roseleta are revealed, and don Juan realizes that the hanged man was

sent to save him by the Virgin. Don Juan returns to Palermo, begs forgiveness from don Pedro and Roseleta, and enters a monastery, where he remains devoted to Mary. The scandal dissipates, and rather than be contented with the outcome, don Pedro grows tired of Roseleta and begins an affair with Angeliana, partially in order to spite his friend. The affair is brazenly public, and soon Roseleta is showing her displeasure. She sends a letter to Angeliana, threatening her to end the relationship with her husband. Angeliana reads the letter to don Pedro, and tricks him into believing that Roseleta had had an amorous relationship with don Juan in the past. The two begin to plot the murder of Roseleta. Don Pedro feigns love for his wife, and when she fortuitously falls ill and needs to be bled, he removes her bandages and bleeds her to death, removing all traces of his culpability in her seemingly accidental death. Her body, even in death, is revered for its beauty. Don Pedro publically mourns his wife in a dramatically theatrical way:

Pedro not only bleeds Roseleta to death, but in addition, exhibits the grotesque ability to feign laments and tears of mourning. His exclamations of grief are accompanied by similarly false gestures—

frenetically embracing her lifeless body and kissing her hands (Brownlee 119).

Here, we see the importance of appearances in baroque society. Pedro's ridiculous theatrics demonstrate Zayas' distain for the falsities that permeated her culture and class.

The hypocritical weeping of Pedro at his wife's death points to one of the most fascinating aspects of this tale: the narrator's choice to portray Roseleta's murderers as weak, ineffectual, and easily malleable men, and the woman, Roseleta, as the instigator and unaware accomplice in her own murder. In the case of this torrid tale, the male antagonists are indirect participants in the protagonist's demise. Don Juan, the catalyst for Roseleta's tragic fate, is initially portrayed by Nise, the narrator, as an envious, calculating and pathetic yet persistent antithesis to the object of his affection, Roseleta. He is seen as being the less appealing of the two men. He has no (decent) marriage prospects. Indeed, after the marriage of his dear friend don Pedro to Roseleta, he seems to be at a loss of what to do with his time alone.

His entire identity had been linked to his friendship with don Pedro: Eran [...] tan grandes amigos, por haberse desde niños criado juntos, mediante el amistad

de sus padres, que en diciendo 'los dos amigos', ya se conocía que eran don Pedro y don Juan" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 201).

Thus, when his friend begins his new life as a married man, don Juan is abandoned and jealous. It is don Pedro, however, who also laments the days when the two had a closer relationship, and who reaches out to his friend. He longs to return to his bachelor days, not in order to philander, but to be able to return to his companion, don Juan: "[...] sentíalo ternísimamente, y con este sentimiento, la vez que veía a don Juan, le daba sentidas quejas, diciéndole que si entendiera que por casarse le había de perder, aunque los méritos de su esposa eran tantos, lo hubieran excusado" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 202). The language that the narrator uses here to describe this relationship between two grown men is surprisingly sentimental and emotional. The narrator chastises don Pedro for not adjusting well to his new role as husband. Rather, his is returning to his infantile ways. Moreover, he seems to be implying that he preferred the company of his friend to that of his wife, thus fanning the fires for homosexual connotations. The narrator chooses to emasculate her male protagonists.



We see a further development of the intimately close relationship between the two men when don Juan becomes the perceived "third wheel" of the married couple. Upon the urging of don Pedro, don Juan frequents the house of Roseleta and her husband.

Roseleta is permissive in regards to this behavior, "[...] viendo lo mucho que su marido amaba a don Juan, le recibía con un honesto agrado" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 202). Perhaps the narrator faults Roseleta for not being more guarded and reticent to the close friendship of the two men. Roseleta is therefore unprotected and exposed to the advances of her husband's best friend. Almost immediately, as can be predicted, don Juan falls in love with Roseleta and is stricken with debilitating sadness and envy: "De aquí le nació una envidia de no haber él merecido tal prenda, no faltando en él partes para haberla alcanzado, y de todo esto enamorarse de todo punto de la mujer de su amigo" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 203). Don Juan is passive in his initial pangs of affection for Roseleta. He struggles with feelings of guilt and betrayal for his friend. He feels that perhaps he can will himself to abandon these feelings, but he is unable to do so. He is completely consumed by thoughts of Roseleta: "[...] andaba tan triste y divertido, que si comía, se le olvidaba el bocado desde la

mando a la boca, y si le hablaban, parecía que no entendía o respondía a despropósito" (Zayas in *Desengaño* 204). He becomes feeble and unable to function, a common malady due to unrequited love that was a popular literary trope during this period.

Yet even when don Juan grows bold and finally issues his declarations of love for his friend's wife, he does so in a very emotional way: "temblándole la voz con un suspiro que parecía render entre él el alma" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 205). He seems insecure and unsure of himself. He gives Roseleta the position of power; she is to be the determiner of his fate: "No te digo esto por que me des remedio, que morir por tie s mi apetecida vida, y amando pienso llegar al fin de ella" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 205). He surrenders himself to her in a teary soliloquy that leaves Roseleta entirely responsible for his death, if she choses to do so. He does not even challenge Roseleta to accept him as a lover. He merely informs her of his intentions, and puts the ball in her court as to the next step to take. And while don Juan does take further steps and becomes more assertive in his courting of Roseleta, writing her love letters and reciting poems in her (and her husband's presence), he does so in a submissive way: "Pónesme pena de muerte;/ mas qué importa que me mates/ pues morir a causa

tuya/ muerte es que pueda envidiarse" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 210). The inversion of typically masculine and feminine roles is interesting here.

Roseleta's angry response also unhinges the reader's expectations. Rather than surrender herself to the weepy and passive advances of don Juan, Roseleta chastises him once and again. When it is first revealed that don Juan is suffering due to his feelings for her rather than Angeliana, our female protagonist is furious: "Roseleta estaba fuera de su sentimiento de enojo [...] se retiró, rabiando de cólera" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 206). She is upset about his audacity and his lack of respect for her husband and herself. Whereas before she was sympathetic to don Juan's alleged sadness provoked by Angeliana, now she is utterly unmoved. Moreover, the narrator seems to impart some of the blame for this situation developing on Roseleta herself—perhaps she should have been more defensive and less available to don Juan. She did, after all, offer herself to don Juan as a condolence: "Consolaban don Pedro su esposa a don Juan" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 205). It is even more important, therefore, for Roseleta to be an integral participant in the destruction of this threat. When don Juan becomes too brazen in his attentions, Roseleta rashly tells her husband of the treachery: "Fue

tan grande el enojo que Roseleta recibió on este ultimo papel, que sin mirar riesgos, ni temer peligros, con una crueldad de basilisco, [...] se fue a su marido" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 211).

The narrator seems to inject a sense of doom and lament at Roseleta's decision. Nise is clearly judgmental of Roseleta's decision to inform her husband of don Juan's betrayal; moreover, it seems to be implied that Roseleta has played an integral part in her own eventual murder. Roseleta is active in her own defense. She determines how to proceed, and shifts the responsibility to her husband: "[...] poniéndoselos todos en las manos" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 211), Roseleta is the puppet master. It is upon her recommendation that don Pedro conceives of a plot to murder don Juan: "Ahora, ved qué remedio se ha de poner, porque yo no hallo otro sino quitarle la vida. Yo he cumplido con lo que me toca; ahora cumplid con lo que os conviene a vos" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 211). Roseleta astutely plants the seed for this idea, but she puts the ultimate decision in her husband's hands. She challenges him to act, almost as if questioning his ability to do so, thereby questioning his masculinity.

Don Pedro opts to act. He conceives the plan, but fails in its execution due to divine intervention. Yet

curiously, don Pedro is more forgiving of his friend's transgressions than he is of mere allegations against his wife. When don Juan returns from his experience in the woods, a changed man seeking redemption, don Pedro is quick to accept his apology and to see his friend enter into the monastery. Roseleta does not see the same forgiving side of don Pedro; first, because he has grown fond of another, and second, because this new lover accuses our protagonist of having initiated and participated in the affair with don Juan. In addition, don Pedro is easily influenced by others, and therefore is unable to ignore the gossiping voices around him: "[...] viendo que se había divulgado por la ciudad, que no se hablaba en otra cosa" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 219). Our antagonist is not satisfied with the words and promises neither of his wife nor with the confession of his former best friend. Instead, he pays credence to the "vulgo" that devours any and all scandals, and feels like such a wretched failure for being unable to defend his honor, that he begins to see his wife as the cause of all of his misery. She is converted into a monster to him, and thereby a formidable foe: "[...] ante sus ojos era un monstruo, y una bestia fiera" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 220).

Our heroine does little to combat this distortion of her former beauty. When she finds out about her husband's affair with the infamous Angeliana, she again moves rashly and threatens her life in a letter.

The narrator derides Roseleta's impetuous response: "[...] se determinó a escribir un papel a Angeliana, amenazándola, si no se apartaba de la amistad de su marido, le haría quitar la vida" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 220-221). Again, Roseleta sets into action a course that will lead to her eventual death. Yet again, Roseleta is not passively accepting of her situation. She willingly chooses to face her husband's lover (and preferred companion) in an openly aggressive move. She stakes her territory and expects that Angeliana, her inferior in nearly all senses, will resign.

But Roseleta is up against an impressive enemy and her equal in some senses: Angeliana will not step aside. She is no pushover, and, just like Roseleta did with her husband in an earlier episode, so too does Angeliana manipulate don Juan into yet another deadly plan: "[...] la traidora Angeliana lo dispuso de modo, pidiéndole la vengase de los atrevimientos de su esposa y de haber sido causa de que ella no lo fuese don Juan, dándole crédito, se lo prometió" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 221). Again, don Pedro is forced into action not by his own will, but by the

beckoning and insistence of a woman. Don Pedro is seen as impressionable and malleable. He is easily duped into performing these wicked acts when his honor is called into question. Moreover, even the way in which he ultimately ends the life of his wife is passive. Roseleta is already ill and is bled in order to alleviate her symptoms. Rather than brashly ending her life in a direct way, our antihero merely removes the bandaging that had been aiding in the clotting of her blood. Although don Pedro and Angeliana had conceived of another plan to murder Roseleta, in the end it is done in a very non-aggressive manner: "Y esa misma noche el ingrato y cruel marido, después de recogida la familia, viendo que Roseleta dormía, le quitó la venda de la sangría, y le destapó la vena, por donde se desangró hasta que rindió la hermosa vida a la fiera y rigurosa muerte" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 221). Even the fact that don Pedro faces his opponent while she is sleeping is another reminder of his cowardice. If ever there were a passive murder, our narrator, Nise, provides us with one here in her tale.

Nise presents her audience (and reading public) with a tale that has no clear-cut victims or aggressors. It is a story that contains telltale baroque difficulty; the characters are not black and white, but a blurred grey.

Even the saint-like and miraculous preservation of the body of Roseleta after her death does not obscure the fact that she participated in strategizing the death of don Juan, and openly threatened the life of Angeliana. She is not free from sins. Her image is not untarnished.

It is therefore interesting that Zayas chooses to introduce the hagiographic images of Roseleta: “[...] hallaron la hermosa dama muerta, que como se había desangrado, estaba la más bella cosa que los ojos humanos habían visto” (Zayas in *Desengaños* 221). Is she trying to vindicate her after her death? Does she imply that her actions were necessary in her situation? In my opinion, she places the halo on her heroine a little too late to cause much affect in her audience. In fact, the listening public at the soiree debates the issue of Roseleta’s seeming martyrdom: “Los caballeros le disculpaban, alegando que un marido no está obligado [...] Las damas decían lo contrario, afirmando que no por la honra había muerto la sin culpa [...]” (Zayas in *Desengaños* 223). Zayas’ texts manipulate the reading public with the (mostly) dead bodies of women, as argued by Vollendorff:

To the extent that Zayas’ politics rely on the display of the body, she seems to count on the reader to be voyeuristic, to be conditioned to the contact with



women's bodies, and even to their violated bodies, in art. In this sense, it would be absurd to deny that the texts do not use the body manipulatively (86-87). The fact that Nise's story provokes mixed reactions between men and women at the party reflects the mixed message that is put forth by the tale. And one may entertain the idea that the discussion between the partygoers would have continued were it not for Lisis who coopts the conversation and turns the microphone over to the next narrator. Lisis's clean yet dismissive conclusion at the end of Nise's tale leaves the reader unsatisfied. The characters inhabiting this tale are at once aggressive and victimized; at once saints and sinners, thus proving again that Zayas, creator of fictions, is difficult to categorize.

Zayas' two collections of tales, published ten years apart, place the reader at the center of a zoetrope, with image upon image of savagery. The repetition of such gruesome events forces the reader to experience a self-reflective gaze, perhaps one of needed introspection and even, in some, self-loathing. Zayas' characters are one-dimensional cutouts of the participants in her society. She pins up their lifeless bodies on the zoetrope and spins it around for the reader trapped at the center. Her character's hollowness and her lack of a clear condemnation

of many of the characters demonstrate Zayas' desire for the reader to at once be repulsed by, and to take responsibility for the ever-present violence. The readers are beckoned to embody the empty silhouettes—to see themselves in the roles portrayed on Zayas' stage. Yet it is important to reference the reception of Zayas' tales in her lifetime, for the reader of today differs greatly from the one from the Seventeenth Century. The rise of bawdy, pulp fiction and the *relatos de sucesos*, popularized by the wide dissemination offered by the printing press, created a bloodthirsty readership. Zayas' readers were quite accustomed to stories of horrific murders and torture: "Thousands of these proto-newspapers survive, and they indicate that, unlike the honor plays which were tremendously popular at the time, the *relatos* lack the social or ethical dimension, offering narratives of unredeemed lawlessness and debauchery instead" (Brownlee 78). And while the incidence of domestic abuse represented in Zayas' novellas is subject to a variety of explanations, we may still conclude that baroque society was one of brutality, even in the hushed corners of the upper class. The non-discriminating reader of her time could be characterized as being numb to violence. It was therefore necessary for Zayas to trap the reader in the nightmarish

labyrinth, being exposed to violent imagery again and again in order to elicit a response and possible revulsion. In a world in which violent imagery seemed to be the norm, she could not shock and awe with the mere display of violated bodies. This was commonplace. She had to go further to continually poke the reader to keep her eyes open.

Does this reading of "El verdugo y su esposa" alter our conceptualization of María Zayas' vision? I argue that it does, and that it opens up new ways to reinterpret her work. Whereas Elizabeth Rhodes and others have argued that Zayas is preaching for a change in society based on the content or conceptualization of her tales, I argue that Zayas' project is much more visceral. It is a felt sense that she communicates, like a subliminal harmonic. This micro-study of one of her tales demonstrates a clear project that Zayas set forth. She was conscious of the need to make her brand of spectacle even more vivid and memorable and *feeling* than that of others. She had an agenda, which, arguably, can be attributed to her gender. The female, gendered version of storyteller (dominatrix) of gore that Zayas concocts deserves further study, and perhaps has implications in studies of gothic literature and gender studies.

#### Chapter 4:

##### **Enfreaking the Monstrous Hybridity of the Feminine in "El juez de su causa" and "La esclava de su amante"**

To a reader so accustomed to bloodied cadavers, the end images of the female protagonists of "El juez de su causa" and "La esclava de su amante" are shocking in their absence of bloodshed. "El juez de su causa" ends in fairy-tale fashion, with a triumphant Estela reunited with her beloved don Carlos. Theirs represents the ideal marriage for Zayas—one of social and financial equals, but with the addition of mutual and passionate affections. It is remarkable that in a collection of tales that regularly satisfies the appetite of even the most bloodthirsty public, there should be offered a tale that portrays a "happily ever after." Zelima/Isabel, similarly, does not end her tale with a broken, violated body like so many of her fellow protagonists, but rather we see her as the honorary first storyteller at a soiree of noble folk. She confidently recites the circumstances that have brought her to this end.

Incredibly, and finally, the reader is exposed to survivors. How is it possible that these two women, one from Zayas' first collection, *Novelas amorosas* and the other from *Desengaños amorosos* survive the bloodbath that

is so seemingly inevitable and unavoidable to the dozens of other female victims? What accounts for these tales of survival, success, freedom, and the attainment of whole subjectivity for the women who typically are denied these realizations? Estela and Zelima/Isabel escape the terrifying fate that awaits so many of their counterparts and are able to achieve the fulfillment of whole selves by becoming "other" than what they are (or were).

The search for a whole self is the quest of the incomplete baroque subject, in this case, the female. The woman is necessarily lacking and fragmented. She is, after all, a freak of nature. As Aristotle posits, she is a "misbegotten male." Her very existence, then, is a consequence of a blunder, or a freak accident: "The creation of a female was always a mistake, therefore, resulting from an imperfect act of generation. Every female born was considered a 'defective' or 'mutilated' male [...] a monstrosity of nature" (Greer and Rhodes in *Exemplary Tales* xi). Therefore, the woman will always be conceived in terms of the man, to whom she can never adequately measure up. She will always be substandard in comparison to the male. The women of María Zayas' literary world are born into a society that expects them, paradoxically, to inhabit an unattainable space. The

female zone is unreachable due to the impossible expectations placed on the woman. She is at once a moral thermostat representing at one extreme, purity, and on the other, pollution. Moreover, this unattainable space is simultaneously an unsafe space, as can be seen in the majority of Zayas' tales.

Zayas addresses this dilemma in two different stories that propose two divergent strategies to deal with this reality and to subvert the troublesome space offered to women. While both women make the decision to "other" themselves as way to achieve wholeness, they do so in differing and ways. Camila adopts the identity of a man, thereby gaining access to the all of the privileges allowed to this sex. She corrects her monstrous birth by becoming male, and thereby saves herself. She moves to extreme purity in her embodiment of a male identity, and ultimately attains fulfillment. Zelima/Isabel moves to the other extreme. Unable to situate herself within her dictated societal space, she chooses to inhabit that of the marginalized other, the moor. She opts to occupy the space of the disenfranchised, the space of the dissident elements; in other words, the polluted. In the pole of feminizing power, she has reached the lowest rung. And she succeeds in this realm. By estranging themselves from

themselves, Estela and Zelima are able to move to new spaces where complete subjectivity is possible, a feat that is inaccessible in the traditional female space.

Touted as a heroine for her ability to create her own destiny via a change in identity is Estela, the protagonist of "El juez en su causa." In one of the only tales that ends happily, Estela, like Zelima/Isabel alters her persona in order to remedy her situation. Yet here we have an example of a woman who is completely successful in her gamble. Like Zelima/Isabel, Estela dons the disguise of another in order to correct the wrongs that have been done to her. It is a tale of female agency, demonstrated from the outset with the title that places the power of a judge, a position of prestige, wisdom, and reason, within the hands of the protagonist herself. She is given the opportunity to argue her own case—the opportunity to explain and justify her actions, just as Zelima/Isabel had done in narrating her own tale.

The tale is narrated by don Juan, the object of Lisis's affections and provoker of jealousy between Lisis and her cousin. It is interesting to note that unlike his predecessors, don Juan narrates with sheer confidence; he is the least self-conscious of the partygoers. Several other participants in the soiree, like Matilda, premise

their tales with declarations of uncertainty as to the quality of their tales.

Others, like Lisarda, are hesitant to offend, and therefore begin their narrations with heavy apologies: "[...] temerosa de haber de mostrarse apasionada contra los hombres, estando su amado don Juan presente; más, pidiéndole licencia con los hermosos ojos, como si dijera: 'Más por cumplir con la obligación que por offender hago esto'" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 171). Lisarda demonstrates her uncertainty at being the creator of a tale. She is concerned about the reception that she will receive from her viewing audience. She is insecure and meek, which is a brash contrast to her suitor, don Juan, who barely pauses to acknowledge his readership before launching into his tale. Don Juan simply comments on the fact that he had composed the tale the previous evening—demonstrating perhaps the little importance that he has placed on this, his task for the party.

Yet the story that don Juan so precipitously creates is one that gives immense agency to its female protagonist. It is no coincidence that don Juan, the unrequited love of Lisis is the author of one of the only tales in which love is triumphant, due, in large part, to the innovative initiatives of the strong female protagonist, Estela.



Considering that Lisis has been presumed to be the *nom de plume* of the Madrid-born author herself, one would assume that she would imbue Lisis's beloved with the attributes that she would most esteem: don Juan is a gifted storyteller who constructs the only protagonist that successfully combats the stereotype of a damsel in distress and makes her own destiny.

Don Juan's well-spun tale begins in Valencia, where a fair-matched prospective husband, Don Carlos, woos a beautiful noblewoman, Estela, who couldn't be more pleased with the match. Estela, like a nearly all of the females that populate the tales, is, incomparably beautiful: "[...] *sin par belleza*" (Zayas in *Novelas amorosas* 487). While nearly every story begins with this affirmation about its lead female, the storytellers are still insistent that theirs indeed are the most beautiful, without comparison. Yet the superfluous laudations of all of the women become a tired literary motif after so much repetition. It seems like a tried and tread pattern that the narrators are following. Therefore, the reader/audience is almost dismissive about the claims to beauty, especially after four nights of hearing similar assertions as to the allegedly unprecedented physical attractiveness of each woman.

While the story begins by following the standard design, it later develops into a tale that is divergent from the others. After being introduced to the lovely protagonist and her suitable suitor, there arises an archetypal dilemma to invoke drama to the story. The love-story is not allowed to come to fruition because while Don Carlos waits to seek his lady's grace, another suitor, a duke, goes straight to her parents, who see the benefits of such a union. When Estela finds out that she has been promised to the Duke, she and Don Carlos plot to elope: "Concertaron que de ahí a ocho días, previniendo don Carlos lo necesario, la sacase y llevase a Barcelona donde se caesarian" (Zayas in *Novelas amorosas* 491). This is the first demonstration of Estela defying the dictates of her parents and of society. She determines that she will marry the one that she loves, rather than the suitor selected for her by her parents. To be clear, it is not Estela, but her suitor who conceives of the solution. She has not yet demonstrated her skills as a survivalist in this dangerous baroque world, for she is still relying on her lover to pave the way to their future together. Yet it cannot be claimed that Estela is uncharacteristically rebellious in her plans. Several of the other protagonists of other

stories, including many who suffer death as a consequence, also defy their father's wishes for their mates.

In the background, however, lurks a usurper who will stop at nothing to ruin this coupling. Claudia, a woman of much "freer" habits, desires Don Carlos for herself. She disguises herself as a page in order to assure close proximity and therefore some intimacy with the subject of her affections: "[...] se halló Claudia paje de su amante, granjeando su voluntad de suerte que ya era archivo de los más escondidos pensamientos de don Carlos" (Zayas in *Novelas ejemplares* 489). Claudia, in adopting a new identity, has gained intimate access to the company of her beloved. Interestingly, Claudia, like Zelima/Isabel, and later, like her rival, Estela, dons a disguise in order to achieve her desires. Yet this example of transvestitism is secondary to this novel. The character of Claudia/Claudio is barely developed, and serves little more purpose than as an instigator or catalyst for the real drama to begin. Moreover, her disguise is merely that—a disguise. She differs from the other women who chose transvestitism<sup>11</sup> as a path to salvation in that hers is only skin-deep. She never fully takes on the persona of Claudio, but rather drops that identity when it suits her interests.

---

<sup>11</sup> Zayas is certainly not innovative in her inclusion of cross-dressing characters. This literary device was quite commonplace in her period.

When she is taken captive by the very moors with whom she had negotiated a deal, Claudia quickly abandons her temporary disguise and morphs into yet another one, that of an appealing mate to one of her captors:

De estos dos el mayor se aficionó con grandes veras de Claudia, la cual segura de que, [...] la tratarían como a ella [Isabel] y [...] cerrando los ojos a Dios, renegó de su santísima fe y se casó con Zayde, que éste era el nombre de su hermano de Amete" (Zayas in *Novelas amorosas* 497).

Claudia is calculating and propelled by her own selfish desires. She is willing to go to any lengths; even abandoning her religion, to triumph. Yet it cannot escape the reader that Claudia has less at stake. She is, after all, a member of the service class. Her fall from the social ladder is from a far lower rung. Moreover, the audience present at the soiree would have viewed Claudio/Claudia as a mere villain, not worthy of further thought or development, unlike the title character, Estela. Claudia/Claudio is capable of temporary metamorphosis. We may conclude, therefore, that she is merely a cross-dresser, and not capable of accomplishing the feats of her master, Estela.

The women settle in Fez, with Claudia calculatingly deciding that she will be better treated if married to the brother of Amete, and Estela trying to maintain her threatened honor. After a botched plan to rape Estela (with the help of Claudia) goes awry, and the prince of Fez, Jacimín, frees her and punishes the villains with death, Estela is sent back to Christian lands. It is here at Estela takes matters into her own hands. She creates her own destiny by converting herself into male. Estela not only has a beautiful appearance, but she also is up-to-date on the happenings in her surroundings. Rather than remain relegated to the confines of the home in the designated "female" space, Estela is aware of the goings-on in the "male" domain of the exterior world. Estela is aware of the military campaigns of her king: "Carlos V, Emperador y Rey de España, estaba sobre Túnez contra Barbarroja. Sabiendo, pues, Estela esto" (Zayas in *Novelas amorosas* 501). Even before she takes on the physical appearance of a male, she has already trespassed into the traditionally "male" territories.

Her physical conversion to a male is therefore not so drastic, since she has already demonstrated her pervasive nature: "[...] mudando su traje mujeril en el de varón, cortándose los cabellos, [...] hallándose en servicio del

Emperador" (*Novelas amorosas* 502). The process of Estela's transformation is merely glossed over. Zayas does not linger on possible emotional pain associated with the cutting of her hair, nor does she give much description of Estela's new masculine duds, which is atypical of Zayas, who enjoys detailing the clothing of her characters with extreme precision. Estela's rise in the ranks of the King's troops is swift and largely unexplained. She finds herself in the king's company, and gains favor with him by offering him her horse after his dies. She introduces herself with her new identity, don Fernando, and with this small gesture becomes one of the king's favorites: "[...] con el nombre de don Fernando era tenuta en diferente opinión" (*Novelas amorosas* 502). Estela immediately recognizes the different treatment that she receives as a man.

She further develops a relationship with the king in his foreign campaign, where she protects the Emperor: "[...] le acompañó y defendió hasta ponerle en salvo" (Zayas in *Novelas amorosas* 502). From this brief line, the reader can assume that Estela/don Fernando is referring to having fought others in order to protect the king. When the issue of allowing women to officially participate in combat is still a point of contention in the United States, it is astounding that Estela/don Fernando doesn't emphasize

her/his participation in this aspect of the military tour more. We must imagine that Estela/don Fernando is physically as able as a man in the company, since there is no question as to her identity by other troops. She holds her own—even militarily—in the male dominated world. The king feels so indebted to Estela/don Fernando, that he bestows titles and honors to the mysterious, newly arrived wo[man]: “[...] y fue la una un hábito de Santiago y la segunda una gran renta y título, y aún le parecía que no le pagaba, porque si le pidiera la mitad de su reino, se le diera” (*Novelas ejemplares* 502). Unfortunately, the reader/audience is not made privy to a further development of this groundbreaking relationship between the king and a woman disguised as a man. It is only revealed that the king feels great respect and gratitude towards the newest member of his company; so much so, that he bequeaths him the highest honor.

As soon as she is able, Estela/don Fernando is reunited with Don Carlos. She sets the terms of their meeting. She sends for him, and asks him to report to her the circumstances of his recruitment into the military campaign: “Mandóle llamary disimulando la turbación que le causó su vista, le preguntó de dónde era y cómo se llamaba” (*Novelas amorosas* 502). The use of the verb “mandar” is

telling, since the traditional gender roles have already been turned upside down. It is Estela who makes the decisions, and Estela who demands answers from don Carlos. She interrogates him as to his past, and he unquestionably divulges the information. Moreover, Estela, although very emotionally effected by seeing her lover again, is able to control her response. Yet don Carlos recognizes in don Fernando the beauty of Estela, and even though he doesn't quite figure out the ruse, he craves the company of Estela/don Fernando. In several scenes that highlight possible homoerotic imagery, don Carlos struggles to grapple with his need and desire to spend his every moment with Estela/don Fernando: "[...] pareciéndole no haber visto en su vida cosa más parecida a su dama, mas no llegó su imaginación a pensar que fuese ella; [...] se le humilló, pidiéndole las manos y ofreciéndose por ser su esclavo" (*Novelas ejemplares* 504). Don Carlos is unable to control himself in the presence of Estela/don Fernando. Even though it is outside of the appropriate decorum, he surrenders himself to Estela/don Fernando in a hyper-romantic gesture. This interaction between two men would have surely caused eyebrows to rise. Yet Estela is unwavering in her adoption of her male guise. Rather than immediately falling into the arms of her lover and



explaining everything, she maintains her position of authority, even though she and don Carlos abuse the decrees of professional distance. She is still a male, and his superior, even though she enjoys his company.

When the viceroy of Valencia dies, the king immediately selects Estela/don Fernando to occupy the post. It is important to note the confidence with which the king nominates Estela/don Fernando. He is unquestioning in his support for his newly appointed viceroy. Estela/don Fernando is obviously a very capable and astute in the affairs of the state. Yet Estela/don Fernando does not wait for the king to inform her/hm of the post: "[...] no queriendo perder de las manos esta ocasión, se fue al Emperador, y puesta de rodillas, le suplicó la honrase con este cargo" (*Novelas amorosas* 504). She herself goes before the king, and requests the position. She/he is an agent in her/his own destiny. Furthermore, Estela/don Fernando is ambitious. She sees the opportunities that will be available with this position, and she is determined to gain access to them.

Upon arriving in Valencia, he/she is appointed as the judge in hearing Don Carlos's case, for after Estela disappears from Valencia, he is implicated in her disappearance and presumed death, since she never turns up

again. The night before the sentence is to be delivered, don Carlos visits Estela/don Fernando in her/his bedroom, further demonstrating the intimacy with which the two interact. Don Carlos puts himself into a submissive position, kneeling on the floor, and begs his master to vouch for his innocence. His future, after all, is in the hands of his judge, his former lover. Estela/don Fernando is quite reassuring in her response: "Soy tu amigo y tu dueño, causas para que no temas" (*Novelas amorosas* 505). While maintaining her power, both physically, by occupying the bed, and verbally, by reminding don Carlos, that she is his owner, she softens her discourse by characterizing their relationship also as being based on friendship. Yet the following day, the day in which his case will be heard, Estela/don Fernando, in front of an audience of officials, is much more formal and biting in her/his criticism on don Carlos. She challenges his dedication to Estela, and openly wonders if he has been true to his love. During the entire courtroom scene, Estela/don Fernando is commanding. She is the ultimate authority, and goes through the proceedings with utter confidence: "[...] few things other than anatomical detail, distinguish the capacities of men and women" (Brownlee 70). Her arguments are concise and well argued. In one instance, she even chastises don

Carlos, who, in his own defense, questions the chastity of Estela: "Calla, Carlos, no respondas" (*Novelas amorosas* 507). Her reproach of Carlos is undeniably an embodiment of power. In response, the soldiers, who are under her command, begin to take don Carlos into their custody as a prisoner. He is literally disarmed by his former lover. The phallic undertones cannot be ignored.

But Estela/don Fernando is not ready to remove her disguise yet. She thoroughly enjoys the position in which she finds herself, for she is finally able to make her own decisions and to create her own destiny. In addition, she has not achieved all that she had set out to do—she ultimately wants don Carlos to admit that Estela is inculpable, and to hear him admit to his continued love for her. She insistently interrogates don Carlos, even threatening him, in order to get the responses that she so wants. It is only when she deems it as absolutely necessary that she removes her disguise and divulges the truth. Estela/don Fernando has complete control of the courtroom, and makes the decision as to the ordering of the proceedings. When she deems it time to disclose her true identity, she does so, in a measured fashion: "Yo soy la misma Estela" (*Novelas amorosas* 510). She calmly redacts the circumstances leading to her decision to take on a new

persona. Yet she does not alter her voice. Her discourse remains authoritative as she reoccupies her place as a woman.

Estela leaves her seat of power and embraces don Carlos literally and figuratively: "Y bajándose del asiento, después de abrazarlos a todos se fue a Carlos, y enlazándose al cuello los valientes y hermosos abrazos, le dio en ellos la posesión de su persona" (*Novelas amorosas* 510). It is here that she truly leaves her identity as a male behind. She leaves her position as a magistrate, and fully embraces her role as a wife. She returns to the fragmented existence of the female. Yet the description of the embrace emphasizes her strength and bravery as well as her beauty. Unlike the other women of the tales who are mere empty vessels, albeit beautiful, here we have an example of a beauty who has taken a risk and achieved her goals. Although her post is taken from her, and is given to her husband, her case is cleared by all, and accounts are published in the press exonerating both Estela and don Carlos: "Salió la fama publicando esta maravilla por la ciudad, causando a todos notable novedad oír que el virrey era mujer y Estela" (*Novelas amorosas* 511).

Estela has truly come out on top—she is the talk of the town not for her tragedy, but for her ingenuity.

Moreover, due to the proliferation of her story, she is heralded for all as a model. Even the king is incredulous: "más admirado que todos los demás, como quien la había visto hacer valerosas hazañas, no acababa de creer que fuese así" (*Novelas amorosas* 511). He is very impressed by the success of his protégée, Estela/don Fernando, and unbelieving in the fact that all of this could have been orchestrated by a woman. Still, he is unyielding in his decision to take away the post from Estela. It is completely out of the question for a woman to hold such a ranking. Even though don Fernando was the mere page to Estela, he replaces his previous superior. Regardless of Estela's capacities, which are so lauded in the last three pages of the tale, she must relinquish all of her power.

The ending is quite precipitous, so much so, that there is little indication as to where the protagonist is left. Will she return to her female self, and become the proper wife of don Carlos, or will she yearn to return to the dynamic of domination that she enjoyed with don Carlos when she incarnated don Fernando? The narrator insists, nevertheless, that the two are married and they presumably live happily ever after.

The first narrator at the commencement of the second round of storytelling at Lisis's soiree is introduced as

Zelima/Isabel, Lisis's most recently acquired handmaiden. Yet while the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of Zelima/Isabel--straightforward initially--become more problematic and clouded as Zelima/Isabel discloses her complex autobiography for the entertainment of the group, the reader is taken aback by the confidence and intimacy with which Lisis treats her servant. Zelima/Isabel enjoys no ordinary relationship with her master, but rather is Lisis's favored slave. The use of the term "slave" is a stretch in defining the relationship between these two women, for theirs is one not founded in servitude, but rather in friendship: "cobrándose tanto amor que no era de señora y esclava, sino de dos queridas hermanas" (*Desengaños amorosos* 117). In evoking the word "hermanas," the narrator is tying the two women together in kinship, which is problematic due to the fact that they are apparently *not* of like blood (nor religion, to further complicate the matter).

Although it will become apparent later in the tale that Zelima/Isabel has another identity altogether, and that the two women are indeed well-matched as equals in all senses, at this point in the frame-tale, the fact that Lisis is claiming familial ties with a Moorish slave is thought-provoking, especially when considering Zayas'

consistently conservative bend when speaking to class issues. It is almost as if the narrator is trying to dupe us into believing that Lisis is somewhat precocious in her seeming rejection of the social norms of her time. The modern-day reader with her twenty-first century mindset is immediately attracted to the "tolerance" of Lisis. She is seen as being somehow free from the shackles of baroque thought and able to contravene the strict hierarchical categories that ruled her epoch. Yet when the reader later learns that Zelima/Isabel has duped her, she also feels that the unconventional friendship that had been presented was a farce<sup>12</sup>.

Regardless of the societal taboos that may be being transgressed in their intimacy, Lisis and Zelima/Isabel present a united front at the second soiree. When Lisis delivers the opening greeting to her gathering, she emphasizes the impact that Zelima/Isabel has had on her recovery: "se alegró tanto Lisis, que [...] casi se olvidaba de la enfermedad" (*Desengaños amorosos* 117). She has been, in fact, principal in the mending of Lisis's broken heart, and solely responsible for bringing her back from the brink of death, a death brought on by her unrequited love for don

---

<sup>12</sup> Zayas' contemporary readership and the viewing party of the frame-tale doubtlessly had different reactions to the relationship between Zelima/Isabel and Lisis as well as to the revelation of Zelima/Isabel's true identity.

Juan: "Aumentábase el mal de Lisis, faltando en todos las esperanzas de su salud [...] pues unas veces se hallaba ya entre las manos de la muerte" (*Desengaños amorosos* 116)<sup>13</sup>. Only Zelima/Isabel has had the capability of resuscitating Lisis. The soothing affects that Zelima/Isabel has on her master are relatively standard in a relationship between peers, but quite particular when seen in the light of an unequal bond. The blooming friendship between master and slave is quite uncouth, not to mention the fact that Zelima/Isabel is allegedly a moor.

Yet this aspect seems to be merely glossed over, as it seems that Zelima/Isabel would be open to converting to become a Christian: "[...] y aunque pudiera desdorar algo de la estimación de tal prenda el ser mora, sazónaba este género de desabrimiento con decir quería ser cristiana" (*Desengaños amorosos* 117). The fact that Zelima/Isabel is not devout in her beliefs seems to lessen the gap between these two women who seemingly have such divergent lives.

What links the two kinswomen is not—at first glance—a shared background, but rather an affinity for creating verses. Zelima/Isabel and Lisis are vibrant women who do

---

<sup>13</sup> The hyperbolic suffering of the host of the party is by no means singular to Lisis. The over-the-top and exaggerated lamentations brought on by love, especially love that is not reciprocated, is symptomatic of the times. Zayas' book is over-populated by characters—men and women—who are at death's door as a consequence of love's apparent injustice.



not cower in their rooms behind their sewing needles. They are both prominent participants in the creation of two out of the ten narrations that are presented during the gathering<sup>14</sup>. They are gifted storytellers and, Zelima/Isabel, more than any other of the contributors in both of Zayas' works, is the most prolific poet in terms of quantity. It is, in fact, Zelima/Isabel's poetic prowess that Lisis regards most: "de gallardo entendimiento y muchas gracias, como eran leer, escribir, cantar, tañer, border, y sobre todo, hacer excelentísimos versos" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 117). The Moorish slave has many other attributes, but that which is most interesting to Lisis is her ability to create with words. At several points during her telling of her tale, Zelima/Isabel seeks approval from her audience, and apologizes for being long-winded: "si no os cansa mi larga historia, diré con los demás que se ofrecieren en el discurso de ella" (Zayas in *Desengaños* 132). Zelima/Isabel, however, seems to be quite confident in her talent for spinning a story, so her catering to the audience seems to be feigned. Indeed, she gets the expected response from her "sister," Lisis, who insists that she continue: "¿Qué podréis decir, señora doña Isabel, que no sea de mucho agrado a los que escuchamos? [...] os

---

<sup>14</sup> And let us not forget, as I mentioned in chapter one, that Lisis is the speculated nom-de-plume of Zayas, who injects Lisis with the characteristics that she most esteems.

suplico que no excuséis nada" (*Desengaños amorosos* 132). Moreover, the fact that she is asked to participate in the festivities with the other noble-born guests demonstrates her elevated position of esteem.

The relationship between these two women is an anomaly in Zayas' tales. We, the readers, are rarely witnesses to female affections, as the majority of the female relationships in Zayas' literary world are beset with rivalry—neighbors are conniving conspirators, servants are malicious accomplices, and supposed friends are turncoats<sup>15</sup>. Even familial relations, such as that between Lisis and her cousin Lisarda are flawed. Yet the fact that these two women have such a functioning relationship is noteworthy. Zayas is walking a fine line in undoing or reconstructing the master/slave relationship, which is the primary relationship paradigm in Antiquity. One must wonder if Zelima/Isabel and Lisis would have such a healthy relationship if it had been founded on entirely equal footing—once Zelima/Isabel's true identity is revealed, she is whisked away to the convent (albeit on her own accord), and thus the future of her friendship with Lisis is not further developed. Is the reason for which their

---

<sup>15</sup> Eavan O'Brien would refute this statement, since part of her research hones in on what she sees as female solidarity in the work of María Zayas. I would argue that the cases in which this is seen are exceptions to the rule.

friendship works due to the imbalance of power and influence? Would Lisis be capable of befriending such a formidable rival? The readers will never be privy to this possible scenario because once her story is told, the fascinating Zelima/Isabel is gone: "Besaba doña Isabel las manos a Lisis [...] y dando lugar a las damas y caballeros que la llegaban a abrazar y a ofrecérsele, se levantó, y [...] pidió arpa" (*Desengaños amorosos* 167). She bids her new (and shocked) friends goodbye, performs a *romance*, and leaves the world that she had only rejoined minutes before.

Since her transformation to being [an]other, Zelima/Isabel is unable to reinstate herself into society, and thus chooses her only other option, the convent: "Y así, divina Lisis—esto dijo poniéndose de rodillas--,te suplico como esclava tuya me concedes la licencia para entregarme a mi divino Esposo, entrándome en religion" (*Desengaños amorosos* 167). Zelima/Isabel, perhaps uncomfortable with having reentered into her previous world, albeit only briefly, insists on relegating herself back into her more comfortable position as an "esclava." Moreover, she is so reluctant to join Lisis and the guests at the soiree that she departs immediately. One might venture that she is leaving to take on yet another identity—that of a nun, for the reasons for which she posits her decision to enter into

the religious life are not devout in their grounding, but rather escapist. She is choosing the companionship of God, because she is fleeing from other less reliable companions: “[...] porque tengo elegido Amante que no me olvidará, y Esposo que no me desprejará” (*Desengaños amorosos* 166-167).

Sequestering herself into the secure walls of the convent offers Zelima/Isabel a refuge from society—principally from falling victim to the disenchantments of the men that inhabit said society.

The fact that she uses terms of human relations with which to characterize her proposed one with God is telling. As Elizabeth Rhodes posits in *Dressed to Kill*, the women of *Desengaños* may enter the convent, but, like Zelima/Isabel, they still long for male companionship (142). This man, presumably God, is divergent from the men with whom she has had experience in society. The narrator is asserting that it is futile to search for a man that is guiltless of the many evils that Zayas enumerates in her tales.

A union with a man is a must, but only one with God assures that the woman will not fall victim to man’s follies. Stephan Leopold, on the other hand, sees the convent as a singularly feminine space: “[...] un enclave de autonomía femenina: una *heterotopía* de desviación en el

sentido doble de la palabra [...] un suntuoso palacio donde vive con su madre, sin que entre hombre que la mande" ("El aplazamiento de la mujer" 151). While Leopold may be correct in claiming that this is what the convent may theoretically represent to women, it is certainly not what the women of Zayas' novellas conceive it to be in practice. The feminine is always defined in terms of the masculine in the world of Zayas. It is impossible to abandon the descriptor. Elizabeth Rhodes also observes the vacuum of a spiritual "calling" in inducing the women of *Desengaños* to enter into religious life: "The narrators describe them there are engaged in decidedly human concerns that draw the reader not to the spiritual realm, but back to the worldly reasons that drove them there" (*Dressed* 141). Left without the option to marry in her society, Zelima/Isabel has few options at her disposal. Rather than take on a traditional husband, she will take God. Her above statement is revealingly and surprisingly defeatist in nature. She defines her relationship with God in negative terms--she chooses the religious life because of how it will *not* be similar to her life in society.

Yet by the end of her narration, when Zelima/Isabel announces her decision to enter into the religious life, the reader is already aware of her transformative powers.

She is a monstrous changeling that possesses the capability of surviving under different guises. She has previously done this as a survival technique, but now she is presumably taking on her last cover. The reader is assured that Zelima/Isabel will thrive in her new role, just as she has in her previous two incarnations. The tears that are shed lamenting the circumstances that have driven Zelima/Isabel to this end; for it certainly is an end<sup>16</sup>, are cosmetic and performed in accordance with decorum:

Aquí dio fin la hermosa doña Isabel con un ternísimo llanto, dejando a todos tiernos y lastimados; en particular Lisis, que, como acabó y la vio de rodillas ante sí, la echo los brazos al cuello, juntando su hermosa boca con la mejilla de doña Isabel (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 167).

The physical intimacy with which the two women now interact is novel. Until her true identity is exposed, the women reveal a close kinship, but never is the physical barrier between the two breached. Perhaps the Christianization and the improvement in her social standing make Zelima/Isabel now "touchable," and somehow more worthy of sisterly affections. Moreover, one cannot ignore the homoerotic

---

<sup>16</sup> The convent has symbolized divergent meanings for literary critics. For some, like Margaret Greer, it represents a utopian refuge, while for others, like Elizabeth Rhodes, it is deemed to be dead-end and the very truncation of possibility.

imagery present in the description of the embrace between Zelima/Isabel and Lisis. The scene that portrays the physical exchange between the two women highlights their endogenous zones.

The relationship continues as at the end of *Desengaños amorosos*, Lisis chooses to follow her friend Zelima/Isabel into the convent: "Otro día, Lisis y doña Isabel, con doña Estefanía, se fueron a su convent con mucho gusto" (*Desengaños amorosos* 510). The three allegedly retreat to the convent with pleasure, but it is impossible not to also note the resignation with which they do so. The convent cannot either represent an idealized female sanctuary nor a theoretical death, but rather a combination of the two. The convent is a place of transformation, where these women can leave behind their identities—troublesome or troubled at times—and take on a new persona. They have a symbolic social death, for they will never again grace soirees like the one that they are departing. Their previous selves are cast aside, and they morph into religious women. Yet no matter how they try to convince the reader that it is with "mucho gusto" that they enter into this metamorphosis, it truly does represent their only option because these female survivors are driven to the convent out of necessity, and not out of choice, for the most part.

Zelima/Isabel has no future prospects, especially if she'd like to reestablish her former self. No one would accept her, she'd be shunned due to her past misfortunes, and she would be unable to find a suitable partner to marry. Greer theorizes that the woman's search for the phallus is answered when she enters the convent, which may sound contradictory, but is arguably because it is not really the search for a man for which these women yearn, but the associated stability (*María Zayas Tells* 354). She sees the convent as an ideal resting place for these women, an oasis free from the troublesome males, but offering the economic and social stability, thereby replacing men's role. This is the reality of the moment—it is not necessary for the women to engage in soliloquies about their lack of prospects because the intended audience—those at the soiree, and Zayas' larger reader public—would have been aware of the options left open to such women.

Since Zelima/Isabel is the only autobiographical storyteller of the group, the reader/audience is able to see the product of disenchantment. The veil is ultimately lifted as Zelima/Isabel reveals the circumstances of her transformation. From the onset of Zelima/Isabel's tale, even before it is revealed that she has taken on multiple identities, it is clear that her self is divided, the



victim of the circumstances of being a woman. On numerous occasions when she is narrating the tale of her own demise, she emphasizes divisive factors within herself. These passing remarks foreshadow Zelima/Isabel's complete hybridization later in her tale. When confronted with the advances of the persistent suiter don Manuel, Isabel, the original identity of Zelima/Isabel, is divided. Her feelings vacillate, and she is unable to ascertain her true position in relation to don Manuel: "[...] no sé si triste o alegre; sólo sabré asegurar que me conocí confusa" (*Desengaños amorosos* 132). Isabel is fraught with doubt and unable to trust herself. She lacks the ability to read her own emotions, and is ultimately left in a state of utter confusion. She is like a horrific clown in conflicting facial make-up—with one half smiling, and the other frowning. One self is giddy with love, the other forlorn and despondent from the unwanted advances. Later, she again confesses to be having the same conundrum: "[...] causaban varios efectos, ya de alegría, y ya de tristeza" (*Desengaños amorosos* 133).

Isabel's emotional responses reveal a fragmented sense of self. The repetitions of observations of this type demonstrate Isabel's preoccupation with the disjointed state of her psyche. Isabel further exposes her

schizophrenic emotional responses to don Manuel's attentions, when she divulges that her inner dialogue is similarly fragmentary, making her a monstrous entity: "había entre mí hecho varios discursos" (*Desengaños* 135). Mikhail Bakhtin would qualify this character to be polyphonic, and demonstrative of the unfinalizability of individuals, for Zelima/Isabel represents a truly modern construction of a character—one that is incomplete and hyper self-aware of this state. Yet our narrator, Zelima/Isabel, is obviously uncomfortable with her precociously modern subconscious, thus the constant recurrence to her internal discord. As her tale further develops, it is not only discomfort that is felt by Zelima/Isabel, but repugnation: "[...] y como esto se fu, dejándome divertida en tantos y tan confusos pensamientos, que yo misma me aborrecía en tenerlos" (*Desengaños amorosos* 136). She is disgusted with the discrepancy in her self, and in her inability to create a consistent and united self. So distraught is Isabel/Zelima with her battling sentiments, that she evokes monstrous imagery to describe herself: "[...] es posible que en cuerpo tan lindo [...] se aposenta alma tan cruel?" (*Desengaños amorosos* 134). Our narrator is at once beautiful and cruel—her inner-self, here portrayed as defective in its unpleasantness, is

sharply contrasted against her flawless exterior. She is simultaneously repellant and attractive.

Through the divulcation of these admitted cracks in Zelima/Isabel's selfhood, the reader is given a taste of what will later be complete abandonment of her fragmented self in favor of the adoption of her new, whole self. The decision to renounce her previous identity as a member of the elite noble class and to don the guise of a Moorish servant is entirely Isabel's decision. She is indeed pushed to make some sort of a decision as to her future when don Manuel forces a sexual encounter, which consequently sullies her honor. Her first response is to try to take her own life, but she is intercepted by her attacker: " lo que en otra mujer pudiera causar lágrimas y desesperaciones, en mí fue furor diabólico [...] arremetí a la espada que tenía a la cabecera de la cama, [...] se la fui a envainar el cuerpo" (*Desengaños amorosos* 137). It is important to note the credit that Isabel gives herself here. She mentions the reactions that other victims might have to the same violence, yet she deems theirs to be passive in comparison to hers. She is, indeed, laudatory of her action, even if it is interrupted before it takes fruition. Since she is unable to resolve the problem by

taking her own life, Isabel grows determined to espouse her rapist, since she does not see any other viable way out.

When Manuel's reluctance to marry becomes exceedingly obvious, especially when he literally flees from him promises and departs to go Sicily, Isabel makes the drastic decision to transform herself. She magistrates a plan to follow him aboard his vessel disguised as a servant. She has created an alter-ego, "Zelima/Isabel": "Y fue que, fingiendo clavo y S para el rostro, me puse en hábito conveniente para fingirme esclava y mora, y poniéndome por nombre Zelima/Isabel [...]" (*Desengaños* 153). Isabel has shed the physical entrapments of her social class. By converting herself into a Moorish slave, she is able to enjoy relative liberty and to undertake certain actions that would not be befitting of a woman of her standing. As a slave, Isabel is able to follow her lover, and to make him take responsibility for his transgressions—had she remained in Murcia, she would have suffered from her disenchantment far sooner as a scorned woman without future prospects. Yet Isabel, as she continually insists, is not like other women. She is willing to explore other options—even that of abandoning her former privileged self in order to explore the opportunities and possibilities of taking on a new persona. Yet it seems that the disguise is only

skin-deep initially. She is quickly snatched up by a family to whom Isabel recognizes that she is lucky to belong: "[...] en encontrarlos fui más dichosa que en lo demás que hasta aquí he referido" (*Desengaños amorosos* 153). Her luck doesn't end there, as she is quickly enjoying a very close relationship with her owners: "[...] todos me querían como si fuera hija de cada una y hermana de todas" (*Desengaños amorosos* 154). Although her garb defines her as a slave, Zelima/Isabel is unable to fully embrace her new character. She still possesses the comportment befitting a noblewoman, and she is thus able to navigate this world from a special space—she is not bound by the dictates of her crowd, but she is able to enjoy their company. She has one foot in high society, and the other in the lower class. She has made herself into a hybrid in order to better her situation. Very astutely, from this unique vantage point Zelima/Isabel is able to at least try to resolve her situation.

Eventually, the transformation is complete—Zelima/Isabel has completely taken over the identity of Isabel, and from here, as we can see from the conclusion of the tale, there is no turning back. Isabel is recognized as her former self by Luis, a former admirer who seeks revenge on don Manuel for the wrongs done to Isabel, and by

her former lover, don Manuel. They are both shocked and puzzled by her transformation. Luis, Isabel insists, cannot fathom that Isabel would be capable of such a lowly act as she has committed: "[...] mientras más me miraba, más se admiraba, y más oyéndome llamar Zelima/Isabel, no porque me había conocido, sino de ver al extreme de bajeza que me había puesto por tener amor" (*Desengaños amorosos* 155). It is utterly inconceivable to Luis that the object of his affections would stoop so far as to take on the trappings of a Moorish slave. Zelima/Isabel herself admits the farfetchedness of the situation, and confesses that she herself laughed at Luis's stupefaction. Yet this reaction is atypical of Isabel/Zelima/Isabel. She lacks the luxury of levity due to her circumstances. Indeed, it is quite refreshing to see her reference a laugh, especially considering that the majority of her narration is so gloomy and foreboding. When don Manuel questions Zelima/Isabel's identity, the wronged lover confirms her dedication to this, her new incarnation: "Zelima/Isabel soy, no doña Isabel; esclava soy, que no señora; mora soy" (*Desengaños amorosos* 157). In her own words, Zelima/Isabel has affirmed that her new identity is permanent and unchanging. She has seen herself through the eyes of don Manuel, and like looking in a mirror, she sees that her identity is

alienated from herself. As Lacan would presuppose, she is embodying the realm of the imaginary, and in doing so, she rejects her former self and fully takes on her disguise. In negating her previous self, she ensures that a return to society is impossible. Moreover, her lover has shunned this new persona. If previously don Manuel had abandoned Isabel in a cowardly, non-confrontational way by fleeing, now he rejects her openly from the outset: "[...] es imposible que yo me fiase de mujer que sabe hacer y buscar tantos disfraces" (*Desengaños amorosos* 163). Don Manuel's rebuff of Zelima/Isabel is two-fold in its nature. First, and perhaps foremost, he sees her as a damaged entity. She has breached the confines of that which is acceptable according to the dictates within the baroque Spanish noble class. While her reputation as a respectable young noblewoman had already been tainted thanks to the actions of don Manuel, now, in the eyes of the very man that caused her to abandon society, she is repugnant and untouchable. Moreover, don Manuel sees the danger in the character of Zelima/Isabel. He is wary of her ability to morph into another persona, and aware of the power that is associated with this know-how. He can no longer see Zelima/Isabel as a woman; he sees a hybrid monstrosity that will not cease to "atormentarme" (*Desengaños amorosos* 163). He is haunted

and threatened by the multiplicity inherent in Zelima/Isabel/Isabel.

Don Manuel is uneasy with the duplicity of Zelima/Isabel. His mindset is anxious to pin her down and define her in real, concrete, and fixed terms. Yet she insists on moving and changing. The malleability of her self—both physically and psychologically—is disconcerting to those in her social and historical milieu. To the baroque mindset, her conversion from socialite to branded slave is scandalous. Yet Zelima/Isabel is able to explain her actions. She is the only character given the opportunity to defend herself. And her viewership understands her justifications; moreover, she is ultimately seen as a heroine who has overcome great grievances.

After display after display of bloodbaths and tortured broken bodies, with the shock and titillation of humiliation, pain, and brutal physical violations wearing thin, Zayas doesn't disappoint her readers. Just at the point where the inevitable might become too redundant, she offers a new venue, a kind of side show to the main arena, where in each collection of her novellas, there is one tale, one female character, who through acts of great daring, escapes the traps laid for her in the deadly confines of baroque society. Emphasizing the complete



impossibility of existing, both physically and psychologically, in the spaces allotted to women, Zayas makes it her task to follow various trajectories of women vainly seeking a way out. Most of course, do so through death, but, as if the exception proves the rule, the two that survive do so only by a process of radical self-transformation to the degree that they are utterly dead to their old lives and identities.

To create a space of feminine survival, Zayas pushes the treacherous liminal spaces of the feminine, fraught by contradictions of purity and pollution, sinfulness and saintliness, beauty and horror to their ultimate extremes to the point of embodying otherness: Estela becomes don Fernando; Isabel becomes Zelima. If women, as misbegotten males, inherent deformities of nature, are not permitted to survive, Zayas suggests that the only path to survival lies in pushing the process of female enfreakment to logical extreme. By extension, she thus directly confronts the reader with the consequences of the social realities that exist for women.

Readers become not only complicit spectators in slaughter (an approved erasure of the feminine which preserves masculine hegemony); they also become an audience for these enfreaked female survivors, these monstrous hybrids, who

demand recognition and applause.

Instead of controlling the show, the reader (identifying with the masculine), must acknowledge that they have been duped: the power of the performance relegates them to consumers and not creators (their assumed rightful place). The extreme self-othering of these two heroines into opposite poles of social power (the Moorish slave woman and the esteemed male judge) also radically disrupts social hierarchies. If one could assume/become the identity of the lowest of the low as easily as the highest of the high, it stands to reason that identities are not inherent, not linked with birth or sex, but are constructed. It also then stands to reason that if some identities are constructed, then all are constructed, and that, again, taken to a logical extreme, the adoption of any identity is in fact a process of enfreakment: an embellishment or intensifying "to to produce a human spectacle whose every somatic feature was laden with significance before the gaping spectator" (Garland Thomson 5).

The horror of the baroque forms replicates itself as the horror of baroque de-formity, where texts function as a circus mirror where every image is rendered strange, opaque, and familiarly unfamiliar. This emphasis on

horrific displays of female mutilation, with attendant sideshow freaks who survive, repositions Zayas work not just as literature, but as a dark carnivalesque echo chamber, as a kind of theater translated into the only creative outlet available to a woman of her class and time: as words.

## Chapter 5:

### The Art of the Ephemeral: Novellas as Performance Art

Although immensely popular in their time, the novellas of Maria de Zayas seemed to simply disappear shortly after 1800, despite clear peer recognition of her literary worth--even Lope de Vega noticed and lauded her remarkable talent.<sup>17</sup> This disappearing act is most likely due, at least in part, to her gender. The names of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Tirso de Molina, who were all public literary figures, have survived, while Maria de Zayas' was initially resurrected due mainly to feminist interest in women's writing. Another likely reason, as indicated in previous chapters, was the fact that she did write texts that had widespread appeal and met the appetites of her reading public, rather than strictly for the refined palates of the literati. However, the gender of the author and the popularity of the writing address merely issues of creation and consumption, and have no real bearing on evaluation of the novellas as literary texts.

If entry into the canon (understood as literary

---

<sup>17</sup> "The implication is that Zayas, clearly a member of the Madrid nobility [...] had attracted Lope's attention with her skill at writing verse" (El Saffar 198).

memory) has traditionally rested upon the "timelessness" of a work in a specific genre, it becomes more understandable why Zayas' novellas have been put on an interminable waiting list. Although she presents her texts ostensibly as novellas, the individual stories and the two collections as a whole read more like a kind of literary performance art, as if Zayas were performing her tales in her own imaginary *comedia dell'arte*. Ephemeral like a dream, recurrent like a nightmare, her work evokes the rhetorical and metaphorical strategies of popular theatre that create a particular liminal niche for her work. Her violent dramas are elaborately staged for maximum emotional and visceral effect, while at the same time, we can feel her pacing in the wings frantically writing, setting up scenes and giving players directions while she simultaneously seems to be dismantling it in order to begin again, the same story, in yet another tale-performance. In a kind of literary backstage, Zayas' young beauties parade back and forth in their elaborate costumes in various stages of distress, often abandoned behind the curtains and unable to take their final bow, while their lovers and tormentors smooth their mustaches and plot new horrific schemes. Hovering somewhere between literary and performance art in a baroque Spanish "floating world," Zayas' novellas are

caught in the intersection of genres: one that privileges “timelessness” and one that privileges the effervescent and ephemeral, and thus rendering her texts resistant to easy placement within the canon. After reviewing the spectrum of public performance art of Spain during her lifetime as well as examples of other authors, such as Cervantes and Lope de Vega, who have successfully—and more predictably—occupied literary spaces between textual and performative, this chapter focuses on Zayas’ versions of bending gender and genre to create her own narrative spaces.

In order to demonstrate possible intersections between the theater and Zayas’ novellas, it is important to review the spectrum of contexts of public performance art of her period. From the highest tier of sophistication with Spanish Golden Age theater, to the lowest rung, the carnival, the entertainment world of baroque Spain was extremely vibrant and varied. Thus, the extraordinary baroque comedias and autosacramentales of Pedro Calderón de la Barca, respectfully reinforced the power of the monarchy and the teachings of the official teachings of the Church. Royal pageants played a similar-type function:

The former [the royal pageant] presents for all to see, and to some degree to participate in, official

society vertically arranged. Social and political structures join in such parades to objectify what many considered real and necessary. Each segment of society, each rank, has its place exquisitely mapped out in the orderly procession. The parade expresses difference, degree, and control, social, religious, and political harmony; that is to say, what is 'natural' within the reigning ideology (Blue 1).

The auto (meaning "act") was a theatrical representation of one of the seven Catholic sacraments. A hybrid genre dependent on allegorical figures merging the sermon with street theater, the auto sacramental was able to communicate its conservative message to large audiences while simultaneously being appealingly entertaining. Usually consisting of several carts, which served to carry props and costumes, as well as physical stages, the productions were meant to be mobile and provisional, ready to dismantle and reconstruct rapidly. Upon the stage, costumed actors would perform "[...] the dramatic embodiment of religious signs with a transcendental or hypostatic substance" (Nelson 108). In other words, the auto gave clear messages that were resistant to any subversive

interpretations<sup>18</sup>.

Lope de Vega was perhaps the most successful writer of the "comedias" in the early 1600s, one who understood that to be commercially successful the playwright had to meet the exigencies of a new consumer of plays ("el vulgo"). His ideas were to circulate in a short manifesto titled "El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo" (1609), a playful treatise in which he demonstrates a clear awareness that to be successful in the marketplace, the playwright had to forego the rules imposed by classical poetics and write instead for a new audience, one that was socially differentiated but largely in synch ideologically. Lope created a conservative-minded set of plays that instilled in the mass public a notion of security in the status quo: "The case for Spanish baroque theater as a vehicle for social and political propaganda is well known and has been argued by various scholars (Maravall, Díez Borque, and Noël Salomon) in conjunction with the popular *comedia* of the early 1600s whose manifesto was Lope de Vega's *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*" (Spadaccini in *Hispanic Baroques* With themes such as a harmoniously idyllic life

---

<sup>18</sup> Spadaccini and Martín-Estudillo coincide with Maravall in his interpretation of the *Auto Sacramental* as being paradigmatic of many of the 'mass oriented' cultural products of the 1600s [...] that were staged in the thousands in the urban centers of Spain" (*Hispanic Baroques* xv).



promoted by solidarity with a strong and moral monarchy, which was upheld by a deeply ingrained honor code, Lope's staged performances served a propagandistic function with its mass-oriented theater. Thus, the socially heterogeneous public was spoon-fed an ideologically homogenous diet that sought, via

[...] special effects (*tramoyas*), a recognizable character typology, constant twists of the plot, extraordinary emphasis on action rather than characterization, the repetitive uses of certain themes [...] and the ultimate resolution of conflict often through the intervention of the Monarchs or their representatives (Spadaccini in *Hispanic Baroques* xvii).

Seen in this light, the *comedia* functions as an arm of the monarchical-seignorial complex. This is not to say that all playwrights followed the path paved by Lope de Vega and functioned as puppets of the ruling elite. In an open feud with his prolific nemesis, Cervantes, in several plays, including *Pedro de Urdemalas*, reflects upon the contrivances of theater as a medium for propaganda. He opted for narration of the spectacle rather than performance, whereas competitor Lope was resistant to the idea of publishing his plays: "Unlike Lope, Cervantes

displaces his plays from the public stage, away from the impressionable vulgo and onto the printed page in search of a thoughtful reception" (Spadaccini in *Hispanic Baroques* xvi)<sup>19</sup>. Cervantes thought little of the vulgo, which he deemed to be incapable of escaping the power of the medium.

Cervantes proves to be a pivotal figure in his capacity to straddle the different genres of his time period. Effortlessly transitioning between the novel and the *comedia*, (both in its written and performed form), he provides an interesting counterpoint to a figure like Zayas, who, rather than creating a pure novel, combines elements of both in order to write a hybrid of the two. Cory Reed, in his work entitled *The Novelist as Playwright: Cervantes and the Entremés Nuevo*, draws clear distinctions between the two genres. Principal in Reed's thesis of departure between the *comedia* and the novella is the "formulaic" structure of the play, in stark contrast to that of the novella. As has been cited by numerous scholars, the *comedias* usually follow a very predictable sequence--that of order, disorder, and then a restoration of order-- that is repeated time and time again<sup>20</sup>. Under

---

<sup>19</sup> Cervantes thought little of the masses, which he deemed to be incapable of discerning and interpreting messages within the dramas. Rather than have his works misinterpreted, he sought a different venue--the written word instead of the spoken one.

<sup>20</sup> "[...] *comedia*'s plot often ends with the restoration of a previously-disrupted order and the meting out of poetic justice to punish those

restraints due to its very nature (given that it has a viewing audience only for a limited time), the entire production of a *comedia* must come to a conclusive ending within the time and space allotted. And while today it has been in vogue in cinema to construct endings that leave the viewer suspended and without a proper tying of the loose ends, in baroque Spanish theater, this option was rarely used. The crowd expected to leave the theater with a feeling of comfort in the reinstatement of the proper power relations. The novel, in contrast, is much freer in its thematic structure. The author has the liberty to fiddle with the chronology of events, and is more at liberty to experiment: "It is not necessarily more complex, but is a freer, more flexible form that often explores the internal conflicts of its characters and favors the discussion of serious themes and issues in a consistently open fashion" (Reed 13). Precisely as Reed notes here, the novel offers the author a forum in which he/she can, as Cervantes does, speak in a discursive way that can be lead to multiple interpretations by the "lector avisado."

Central to this differentiation between the *comedia* and the novella is the character development. Rife with stock characters that are easily identifiable and

---

responsible for the initial disturbance. In other words, closure and thematic resolution are frequently present in the *comedia*" (Reed 13).

understood by the mass audience, the Lopean *comedia* is often populated with characters that are often predictable. The audience, from the outset of the play, knows the behaviors and, ultimately, the outcomes. Reed establishes a difference between the "comedia" and the novella when it comes to characterization:

[...] the implication is that characterization in Golden Age drama typically serves to advance the plot and that, generally speaking, a unified action is of central importance to the successful *comedia*.

Conversely, novelistic prose examines the character as an individual and endows plot action with psychological and socio-historic relevance, the plot often serving to elucidate the complexities of character and its position in society (Reed 13).

As Reed states, the novella allows the author the space to create more complex, multifaceted characters that went beyond the stereotypical run-of-the-mill ones that starred in popular formulaic *comedias*, although one must also allow that there are many exceptions to the rule. In this respect one can cite Calderón's *La vida es sueño* and the extraordinary power and complexity of some of its hybrid characters. In any case, it is clear that a newly emerging

genre, the novella of baroque Spain, was not bound by the conventions that laid heavily upon the *comedia*.

A. A. Parker coincides with Reed in his assessment of the characteristics of the *comedia*. Yet he also highlights several other elements that are key in demarcating Zayas' connection to the theater of her age. Fundamental in Parker's evaluation of the *comedia* is in its insistence to the maintenance of a thematic unity. No matter how harried the plot, or superficial the characters, the theme is always explicitly stated. There can be no possible way to misconstrue the moral of the play: "Here the normal criterion of unity of action must be replaced by that of unity of theme" (Parker 685). By the end of the play, the audience should have no doubt as to the message that the dramatist has been trying to convey. There is no space for subtlety or implicitly delivered undertones. The theme has retained its form throughout the entirety of the play and the message has been delivered and disseminated.

According to Parker, the predominant theme conveyed by dramatists of *comedias* was that of poetic justice, which is telling, considering the violence that dwells in most of the dramas of the period, and is rampant in Zayas' tales. Yet we are cautioned to avoid our modern conceptions what today we deem this brand of justice to mean. Rather,

Parker notes that we must hearken back to what this term meant in this time context. In essence, the punishment must fit the crime: "The 'punishment' of a character who has erred, [...] need not be punishment by any outside agent; it may be only a failure or frustration brought about by events, but the failure must be felt by the audience to be fitting" (Parker 686). It is seen as unjust by the audience for one to escape without repercussions. In order to reestablish a sense of calm after the turbulence that is often portrayed in a theatrical production of a *comedia*, the villain must suffer the consequences, thus leaving the audience relieved and placated.

The novella, in contrast, is free from this thematic constraint. There is no need to tie up the loose ends at its conclusion, since the reader, in contrast to the viewing *vulgo*, is able to reach his/her own conclusions. The reader is adept at interpreting signs, delving below the surface of the obvious, and discerning hidden meanings. The average audience at a *comedia* is underestimated by the playwright—either correctly or not—and not given the opportunity to go about this process.

Yet let me take caution to not privilege one genre over the other. Jenaro Talens and Nicholas Spadaccini in *Through the Shattering Glass: Cervantes and the Self-Made*

World take great pains to remove the hierarchical categorizations that have pitted the two genres against each other:

As a written text, the work is established by a framework of verbal signs that include linguistic, literary, and cultural codes. As performance, its framework includes other kinds of signs related to corporeal expression, color, lights, sounds, scenery, costumes, makeup, and so on. The privileging of one category over the other in hierarchical value leads to [...] a literary fallacy and a performing fallacy (66). Theater, which is often dismissed as secondary due to its ephemeral nature, is analyzed on equal footing with what has been considered more worthy of scholarship, the written narrative form. In this study, I similarly estimate the two as equally valid, but inherently different.

Where, then, can we situate the work of María de Zayas? Today, we label her as a writer of two collections of novellas. Yet does she fit comfortably in this category? It must be mentioned that Zayas did indeed, on at least one occasion, contribute to the ever-popular genre of the *comedia nueva*. Today, the only existent original manuscript from the seventeenth century of María de Zayas' *La traición de la amistad* sits housed beneath glass in

Madrid's National Library (Hengstrom 14). The heralded "greats" that helmed what would later be termed the "Golden Age" of Spanish theater—Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, and others not only laid the groundwork for what would become one of the richest periods of drama production (thousands of plays including comedias, autosacramentales, entremeses and other subgenres were written and respresented on the Spanish stage in the seventeenth century), but also altered the entertainment landscape of the country.

Although the publication date of Zayas' play is tenuous at best, most scholars, based on written observations by her biographer, Pérez de Montalbán, have posited that she wrote *La traición de la amistad* around the 1630 (Hegstrom 16), putting this play's public reception several years before her first commercially successful *Novelas amorosas*. There is no record of the play ever having been performed, nor is there any mention of its reception in her time period. Even contemporary scholars have tended to disregard Zayas' *comedia*, as secondary to her true contributions to the canon, namely, her collections of novellas: "The only known example of Zayas' writing for the theatre is *La traición de la amistad*. Today, her fame rests primarily upon twenty short prose



narratives distributed evenly in two collections" (O'Brien in *Women* 3). A search for secondary research on *La traición de la amistad* turns up scant sources, for it seems to be viewed by most as a mere precursor for her life's work, *Novelas amorosas* and *Desengaños amorosos*.

Often, Zayas' only play is read as if it were merely another novella, with little attention paid to the form of the work, as is the case with Matthew D. Stroud's "The Demand for Love and the Mediation of Desire in *La traición de la amistad*." Seen in this light, Zayas' foray into the world of the *comedia* illuminates an affinity for this genre present in Zayas prior to the writing of her first collection of tales in 1637. It can be conjectured, therefore, that Zayas, perhaps due to the failure (or at least poor reception) of her play, abandoned this literary form, and instead opted to try her hand at a novel.

However, the argument that she simply switched genres is not completely convincing when one pays close attention to the structure and dramatic narrative techniques she employs in the novellas. Another way to interpret what happened is that Zayas performed a kind of literary sleight of hand, implementing and excluding elements of both genres, to construct a kind of unique hybrid somewhere at the intersections between theater and the novella. Because

the theater was impossible—perhaps due to her position as a woman—that her only true option was the liminalized/liminalizing space where drama was rehearsed and played privately (in the theater of the reader's imagination, rather than publicly on stage.

What exactly is the nature of this hybrid, a monstrosity in form as well as in content? To what degree does she follow borrowed formulas and recipes—a cup of *comedia*, a sprinkle of farce, a dab of auto sacramental, and how much can be considered truly improvisational? How does her work read through the perspective of performance art?

Upon opening the second collection of tales, the transformation of the reader into the viewer is achieved by Zayas' construction of a theatrical frame tale. Even the tone with which Zayas begins the frame tale calls to mind a trailer to a sequel of a blockbuster at a movie theater: "Para el primero día del año quedó, en la Primera Parte de mi <<Entretenido Sarao>>, concertadas las bodas de la gallarda Lisis con el galán don Diego, tan dichoso en haber merecido esta suerte, como prometían las bellas partes de la hermosa dama" (*Desengaños amorosos* 115). Zayas brings the reader up to date on the happenings of the characters, almost as a quick reminder, in the spirit of a television

episode ("previously, on...", or "what you missed last week"). She provides a quick recapitulation of the essential information so as to quickly reconstruct her stage. She spends little time on the details, and only sketches the background information as if in a hurry to begin. This precipitous reentry into the world of the soiree is possible due to the overwhelmingly positive reception of the prequel, *Novelas amorosas*—she can confidently assume that her readership is familiar with her work. She thus meets the reader at the door of the theater, and, like a well-known and successful director—the vain James Cameron is brought to mind—seats her guest in a chair.

Zayas is not a director who is unseen, shielded by the curtains, hidden in the shadows. This is especially true in her first collection of tales, *Novelas amorosas*. Rather, she consistently calls attention to herself, usually to wax poetic on her attributes, which could be indicative of her need to seek accolades in a literary environment that a few years earlier had rejected her play. Directly following the stamps of approval by the official censors, as well as the poems dedicated to Zayas by accredited hands, there are two short prologues, presumably written by Zayas herself (although one appears in the

third-person), that vouch to the value of the work. She winks at the reader/public when she states of herself: “[...] este libro te ofrece un claro ingenio de nuestra nación, un portento de nuestras edades, una admiración de estos siglos y un pasmo de los vivientes” (*Novelas amorosas* 163).

With all modesty out the window, Zayas proudly presents her work, like the ringmaster of the circus: “Unlike any other show in the world, folks! Step on up to witness the incredible!” And although she finds it unnecessary to laud herself in the same manner in the second collection, for she has already gained commercial success, she is still maintains a strong presence in her frame tale as the narrative voice. Like the voice-over in a movie, or the spotlight of the theater the narrative voice of Zayas constantly illuminates what she deems to be of importance to the reader/audience. Again, and again, she makes statements regarding the lamentable situation of women: “[...] (en esto no sé si los satisfizo, porque como ellos procuran siempre engañarlas, sienten mucho se desengañen)” (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 118). She usually accomplishes this by placing the male noblemen square in her crosshairs, as she does above. The frame tales are riddled with asides of this manner by the author, disguised as a narrator. She is unable, or unwilling to

take herself out of the novella-performance, for even when her protagonist from the frame tale, Lisis, speaks, it is the voice of Zayas that is heard.

In conceptualizing her novella as a staged performance, I imagine Zayas as standing to the side of the stage and narrating the events that lead up to the beginning of each tale, when the actors take their places and the story begins to be performed. Thus Zayas is simultaneously an actor and a director in the play. We can imagine that she would have cloaked herself in the same opulent costumes that her female protagonists donned, for she too is a performer. As she narrates the tales, she gives her characters/actors of the frame tales, her "acting troupe," stage directions. She prods them to perform on her terms. From the outset, we see a recreation of Lisis's terrible and crippling illness, as well as her deep-set grief: "[...] castigando con verter perlas a sus divinos ojos, que amaneció otro día la hermosa dama con una mortal calentura" (*Desengaños amorosos*116). The lights shine on a bed-ridden Lisis, who has fallen ill due to her broken heart.

On Zayas' prompt, she sheds tears. Next, the audience's attention is drawn to the beautiful slave, Zelima, who proves to be fundamental in Lisis's recovery:

"[...] le trujeron a Lisis una hermosísima esclava, herrada en el rostro, mas no porque la S y clavo que esmataba sus mejillas manchaba su belleza, que antes la descubría más" (*Desengaños amorosos* 117). The actress (or actor, for that matter), who painstakingly applied makeup backstage in order to disguise herself as a marked slave, claims the center stage in all of her brilliance. The frame tale that precedes the first tale ends with the two women, Lisis and Zelima, performing a tableau of scenes from their blossoming friendship.

With the recapitulation of the backstory ended, the narrator now switches hats and becomes the stage director. Zayas places heavy emphasis on the physical directions of her actors/characters. The readers/audience settle in their seats as Zayas' core group of actors, her frame tale audience, is ushered on a stage adorned with extravagant props befitting of the setting: "[...] entoldaron lass alas de ricas tapicerías, suntuosos estrados, curiosos escritorios, vistosas sillas y taburetes, aliñados braseros [...]" (*Desengaños amorosos* 120). The emphasis on the visual elements inhabiting this physical realm demonstrates the inherent theatricality of the work. The reader can easily envision how the stage would have been festooned. Likewise, the elaborate descriptions of the costumes make

Zayas' role as a writer and director of a visual performance more substantial. The night following her autobiographical tale, Zelima/Isabel is granted a melodramatic entrance onto the stage, with great weight placed on her vestments: "[...] siguiendo a Lisis, que traía la mano a doña Isabel, muy ricamente vestidas y aderezadas, y muy bien prendidas, y con tantas joyas, que parecía cada una un sol con muchos soles" (*Desengaños amorosos* 259). The two women saunter on the stage and soak in all of the admiring stares of the awed-audience.

Beyond the physical description of the stage set and the costumes, the actors/characters are also given strict directions as to their body movements. Zayas, almost as if taping the stage in order to designate the actions and use of space of her troupe, pronounces in detail the exact placement and movement of her characters. The entire troupe, on the first night of the soiree, settles into the constructed venue, taking their seats around the stage, simulating an audience, paralleling that of the reading audience: "Acomodados todos en sus lugares" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 120).

Don Diego and Don Juan, the sources of Lisis's sorrow, are highlighted from the beginning with a spotlight. They are marked, and stand out from the crowd of partygoers: "[...]

sin que faltase de los suyos el ingrato don Juan y el dichoso don Diego" (*Desengaños amorosos* 120). Just as the director of a movie drops clues as to the important characters via close-ups, so too does Zayas in her accusatory underscoring of these two. The information as to the posture and position of the characters seems superfluous in the milieu of a novella—one could argue that it is irrelevant whether or not Lisis is standing or sitting when she welcomes her guests to her soiree. Yet Zayas nearly always includes this information, clearly highlighting her insistence on performance aspects in her novella.

Following Zayas' specific instructions, for example, Zelima: "se levantó, y hacienda una cortés y humilde reverenica [...] se entró en una cuadra" (*Desengaños amorosos* 120). Almost robotic in her rehearsed movements, Zelima prepares to narrate her story. The writer/director leaves little to chance. Each movement is carefully plotted out. Another narrator, Nise, follows almost the exact same movements of Zelime when she takes the stage in order to begin her tale: "[...] se levantó la hermosa Nise de su asiento, y haciendo una cortés reverencia, se pasó al del desengaño" (*Desengaños amorosos* 199). Again, in narrating the fourth tale, Filis shadows nearly the exact actions of



her precursor storytellers: "Acabada la música, ocupó la hermosa Filis el asiento que había ya dejado desembarazado" (*Desengaños* 227). One after another—Luisa, Matilde, Laura, etc.—approaches her designated space on the stage, in this case, a chair, and recites a tale of her creation. Each invited speaker at Lisis's soiree is zombie-like in the repetitive nature of her performance, and also completely un-individualized.

There is very little feeling of improvisation in Zayas' drama, which proves to be a point of dissent from the typical *comedia*, which flourished on ad-libbing. Zayas chooses to limit her character's creative freedom; she controls their every movement. Even though one would suppose that at a gathering such as Lisis's, there would be more of a jovial environment where spontaneous comments would perhaps be made. Yet there is very little banter between the guests. There are no interruptions. No story is pierced by an utterance from the gathered crowd, which creates a feeling of artificiality in the ambiance. No male interjects his objections to the open criticism that he hears from the female storytellers. In fact, the male voices are nearly entirely silenced in this second collection of tales.

The men have not been allowed the opportunity, at this get-together, to participate: "[...] en primer lugar, que habían de ser las damas las que novelasen (y en esto acertó con la opinión de los hombres, que siempre tienen a las mujeres por novelar)" (*Desengaños amorosos* 118). It is almost as if Zayas places tape over the mouths of the men—they have been gagged. But at the same time, they are present, and must ingest all of the criticisms without being given the chance to defend themselves. The only moment in which there is an exchange of opinions regarding the tales is in a brief moment at the end of each tale. Almost as if awaking the audience and reminding them that they have been listening to a *composed* tale, Zayas brings the stage-audience back into the light, and allows a few discussions in reference to the content and quality of each story. Yet even these interactions seem staged and feel timed, as if Zayas is rushing to begin the next tale.

The minimal conversations marked with dialogue, (rather than a mere summary by the narrator), that occur during the *sarao* are generally complementary of the storyteller's capabilities. Never is there a harsh word doled out: " 'Lo cierto es'—dijo doña Isabel—'que si como es éste sarao entretenido fuera certamen, la hermosa Lisarda merecía el premio'" (*Desengaños amorosos* 196). The

praise continues to be sprinkled on Lisarda, first by don Juan: "Cierto, bellísima Lisarda, que habéis tenido tanta gracia y donaire, tanto en el desengaño que habéis dicho, como en las reprensiones que a las damas y caballeros habéis dado" (*Desengaños amorosos* 196), and again by Lisis, who claims: "[...] mi prima Lisarda ha dado a todos documentos tan cuerdos, que por ello le doy las gracias" (*Desengaños amorosos* 197). The commentary is brief and polite, in general, with very little engaging debate. If there is indeed any debate at all, it is usually between the female characters, and done so not in the form of a dialogue, but rather presented in summary form by the narrator: "Y como vieron que ya había dado fin, empezaron las damas y caballeros a dar sus pareceres sobre el desengaño dicho, alegando si don Pedro fue fácil en creer lo que Angeliana le dijo contra el decoro de su esposa [...]" (*Desengaños amorosos* 223).

It is interesting that Zayas chooses not to put into dialogue form the majority of the conversations between the members of her gathering. It could be said that she is in some way silencing them, or neglecting them the voice to debate. The males, especially, are relegated to only courteous chatter. She then summarily pushes the next storyteller to the front of the stage, interrupting any

possible true reflections on the tale. Like an impatient master of ceremonies, she takes out the cane and clears out the remnants of the previous performance to make room for the next.

This transition between tales allows for pauses, or breaks in the narrative. They can be seen as mini-intermissions spaced evenly throughout the entire collection. At times, Zayas only calls for a momentary interlude to allow for the next "speaker" to approach the metaphorical podium: "Pues viendo la hermosa doña Isabel que la linda Matilde se prevenía para pasarse al asiento del desengaño, hizo señal a los músicos que cantaron este romance [...]" (*Desengaños amorosos* 290). Usually the transition period is marked by a musical intermezzo that marks the end of one tale and the beginning of the next: "Mas viendo la linda doña Isabel que era tarde y faltaban otros dos desengaños para dar fin a la noche, y también que doña Luisa se prevenía para dar principio al que le tocaba, hacienda señas a los músicos, canto así [...]" (*Desengaños amorosos* 335).

The reader imagines the music in his/her head, for there are no notes on the page. Indeed, even musical instruments are mentioned, especially the harp, demonstrating an inherent performative quality in the

novellas. The musicians offer up romances that are presented in their written form rather than their performed form. Why does Zayas choose to incorporate these elements of performativity on the written page? The romances, no matter how lovely composed, fall flat on the pages. With no soaring voices, no strumming melody, and no impassioned face to read, the songs are reduced in their capacity to induce reaction. Although it may be said that some of Zayas' attempts at threading her work with theatrical aspects fall short, the presence of the theatrical is clearly evident in her collection.

A case study of the tenth tale provides the reader with a "scene" from one of Zayas' more dramatic "plays". In bringing to life one episode in her work, I hope to remove the dust off of the characters from the stuffy pages in which they've been housed for centuries, and give them a place on the stage. The tenth and final tale is centered on the heroine, Lisis, who has played host to the revelries since their conception. She has masterminded and organized the entire production, and now will give close to the festivities by finally taking the stage and telling the tale of her composition. The taking of the primary place on the stage is given more veneration in the case of Lisis, and, while still retaining a formulaic quality, is more

theatrical than the puppet-like maneuvers of her predecessors:

Ya cuando doña Isabel acabó de cantar, estaba la divina Lisis sentada en el asiento del desengaño, habiéndola honrado todos cuantos había en la sala, damas y caballeros, como a presidente del sarao, con ponerse en pío, haciéndola cortés reverencia, hasta que se sentó (*Desengaños amorosos* 469).

Isabel is given an honorary applause for having convened this successful social event—for even more partygoers than had originally been invited arrived after the first night upon hearing of the exciting story of Zelima/Isabel: “Y por esta causa huba esta noche más gente que la pasada; que unos a la fama de la hermosa esclava [...] venían” (*Desengaños amorosos* 257–258). One can imagine Zayas herself receiving the applause from the side of the stage, for in the end she is celebrating her own success rather than that of the soiree.

After being congratulated, Lisis, in a similar fashion to her fellow storytellers, introduces her tale with a preface that summarizes her views on the unhealthy relationship between the sexes (of her social class). Her aim is simply stated: “Así, noble auditorio, yo me he puesto aquí a desengañar a las damas y a persuadir a los

caballeros para que no las engañen" (*Desengaños amorosos* 470). Her message is derivative of that of her counterparts. Yet her tone is rather more striking and dramatic. In statements punctuated with accent marks, Lisis calls her fellow women to action: "¡Ánimo, hermosas damas, que hemos de salir vencedoras!" (*Desengaños amorosos* 470). The reader can envision the narrator, Lisis, standing strong with her arm high in the air with this call to arms.

"Estragos que causa el vicio" is not unlike the other tales collected and retold during the *sarao*. A gallant and noble young man, don Gaspar, is immediately taken with the one of the highest-born and most beautiful woman that he spies in Lisbon. He cannot gain access to her, as is the case with most women of this class ranking, and instead admires her from a distance. One night, while passing by her house, as was customary due to his unrequited love, he finds her bloodied body on the street. She is nearly dead, and he takes her battered body to his home where he has a medical doctor treat her. It is then that the audience enters into yet another tale—the story of how the young Florentina had ended her life in such a tragic way. Here, it is as if Lisis draws herself into the shadows, and gives the center stage to Florentina, who is the narrator of her

own terrible biography. The reader imagines a secondary set, replete with bed-befitting a noble of don Gaspar's stature—but stained with blood from the stab wounds of Florentina. Between fits of pain and unconsciousness, Florentina painstakingly details the circumstances of her demise. The peripheral characters—don Gaspar, the doctor, and several other witnesses, sit around her, their incredulous expressions illuminated by a dim candlelight. The tale that she recounts, one of the most macabre of all of the tales included in the second collection of novellas, is shocking in its body count. One can imagine the faces of shock that Florentina's small and intimate audience would produce in finding out that Florentina herself was the perpetrator/catalyst of the majority of the crimes committed : "[...] dejando a don Gaspar suspenso y espantado de lo que había oído" (*Desengaños amorosos* 499). Jealousy prompts Florentina to plot the murder of her own sister, doña Magdalena. In a series of misunderstandings, nearly the entire house is brutally murdered, with no one coming out unscathed, even the instigator of the violence herself. Florentina ends her bloody tale dramatically, in a description that would be ideal for the stage: "Calló con esto la linda y hermosa Florentina; mas sus ojos, con los copiosos raudales de lágrimas, no callaron, que a hilos se



desperdiciaban por sus más que hermosas mejillas, en que mostraba bien la passion que en el alma sentía" (*Desengaños amorosos* 499).

The fallen beauty is reduced to tears. Her body has been pierced and battered; yet she is still flawless in regards to her beauty. The audience is drawn to her beauty, and repulsed by her actions. The tears and theatrics are even further punctuated with a perfectly timed fainting spell: "[...] ella se dejó caer con un profundo y hermoso desmayo" (*Desengaños amorosos* 499). It is in this moment that I imagine Lisis intervening in the tale again. The bedside scene is dimmed and the characters quietly exit the stage. She steps in in order to conclude the tale, and to give the reader/audience a synopsis of the futures of the characters. In the end, it is decided that Florentina, with few other options, will retire to a convent. Don Gaspar returns to his home in Madrid, and marries.

The theatrics do not end with the termination of the tenth tale of disenchantment, but rather is heightened by Lisis's well-rehearsed exit from the stage (and from the societal stage as well). When the tale ends, Lisis is joined on stage by her faithful friend, Isabel: "Apenas dio fin la hermosa Lisis a su desengaño, cuando la linda doña

Isabel, como quien tan bien sabía su intención [...] porque ya Lisis había comunicado con ella su intent, y dejando el arpa, y tomando una guitarra, cantó sola [...]" (*Desengaños amorosos* 500). The audience is expecting the usual musical interlude performed by the lovely Isabel. It follows the format of "play" that has flowed smoothly since its inception, five days earlier. When the musical composition has ended, Lisis attempts to reiterate some of the themes that have been salient throughout the gathering, mostly concentrating, again, the dangers of being a woman. First she warns the women that none of them is shielded from this threat: "¿Pensáis ser más dichosas que las referidas en estos desengaños? Ése es vuestro mayor engaño" (*Desengaños amorosos* 507). We imagine her staring down at the female partygoers with a serious and accusatory gaze. She points her finger at each and every woman, making her point visual as well as verbal.

She next points her finger at don Diego, her alleged fiancé. Rather than discuss the very private matter of their future in *private*, Lisis takes it public, to the entire audience at her soiree: " 'Y así, vos, señor don Diego' [...] 'advertid que no será razón que, deseando yo desengañar, me engañe'" (*Desengaños amorosos* 507). And while one could argue that this inversion of public versus

private is a motif rampant throughout Zayas' texts, here it can be seen, yet again, as a moment of and opportunity for performativity in written text.

She announces her rejection of her fiancé before the entire crowd, and states clearly the reasons behind her decision: "[...] porque no me siento más firme que la hermosa doña Isabel, a quien no le aprovecharon tantos trabajos como en el discurso de su desengaño nos refirió [...] Considero a Camila [...]" (*Desengaños amorosos* 508). She enumerates the tales of her female narrators as reasons for which she should deny don Diego's proposal. This is also a clever tool for bringing the entire collection of novels to a close. Lisis provides the reader with a quick recapitulation of each tale, creating a neat and orderly conclusion.

Lisis's final exit couldn't be more melodramatic. In an act that leaves her gathered audience in heightened suspense, she exits the stage, leaving the partygoers to usher themselves off. Upon witnessing the rejection of don Diego, who'd all but been promised a wedding by the end of the five-day festivities, the public is even more awed by the precipitous departure of Lisis:

Dicho esto, la discreta Lisis se levantó, y tomando

por la mano a la hermosa doña Isabel, y a su prima doña Estefanía por la otra, hacienda una cortés reverencia, sin aguardar respuesta, se entraron todas tres en otra cuadra, dejando a su madre, como ignorante de su intención, confusa; a don Diego, desesperado, y a todos, admirados de su determinacion (*Desengaños amorosos* 510).

The reader/audience can imagine the three women, lavishly dressed, grasping each other's hands in solidarity, turning their backs on the audience, and taking leave, their heeled shoes echoing in their departure. We are left, then, with an incredulous mother, and a thwarted fiancé. The fiancé presumably exits the stage in a huff, humiliated and irate at the turn of events. The mother most likely puts on a façade of normalcy as she bids farewell to her guests before she hurriedly interrogates her daughter. The stage goes black for a moment, only to illuminate once last time, showing the three women entering the convent together. Again, their backs are to the reader/audience, as they are turning their backs on society: "Otro día, Lisis y doña Isabel, con doña Estefanía, se fueron a su convent con mucho gusto" (Zayas in *Desengaños amorosos* 510).

Zayas' choices, her creation of her own liminal narrative-performance space, makes her "unfindable" with regard to how there is no established place for her in well-defined genres. The nature of the hybrid that she creates in her two collections of novellas is a monstrosity in form as well as in content. The degree to which she follows borrowed formulas and recipes from the *comedia*, the auto, and farce does not diminish her work, nor detract from her originality. Rather, it demonstrates that she is being truly improvisational in her creation of a unique blend of genres that ultimately result in *Novelas amorosas*, and later, *Desengaños amorosos*. Reading Zayas' work through the perspective of performance art frees her work from the constraints of being bound to one genre, and explains the ephemeral quality that can't be ignored in her work. Her stage is erected, and then dismantled, just like a play in a theater. We can make a further and more modern comparison of Zayas' version of the baroque with the Japanese "floating world." With an emphasis on ephemeral beauty and the in-betweenness of things—especially those things that escape the limits of cognitive in favor of the intuited—a future study could outline parallels, and posture Zayas as a predecessor.

## **Conclusion:**

### **The Resurrected/Reconstructed Body of Maria Zayas**

*Where lies Maria de Zayas?*

When I first began to read the secondary research focused on Zayas that has been produced in the past thirty years, I felt compelled to take up a defensive stance in reference to her work. Like others scholars, I lamented what I thought had been her marginalization within the literary canon; it appeared that she'd been slighted, and I wanted to recuperate her deserved position among her male counterparts. Yet the more that I investigated, the more I came to realize that María de Zayas has indeed become more of a presence within the canon, which seemed so elusive and out of touch initially. She is now being studied at many institutions on the graduate-level, on par with her contemporaries. My initial query into Zayas had proved to be too shortsighted; I was focusing on secondary literature from her reappearance in the 1980s rather than the newest research.

I also found myself transfixed, in what I later discovered to be a limiting way, on a singular aspect of

Zayas' novellas—namely, her defense of women. Once I moved out of charted territory and into my own investigation of María de Zayas' works, I realized how much more Zayas offers to the conversation on baroque Spanish literature than she has been given credit for—and not solely due to her ascribed posture as a “proto-feminist.” While we still cannot be sure about many of particulars of her life and death, how present or absent she was among other authors of her time, and about her precise motives regarding her narrative choices, we can have some insight into the seemingly irresolvable nature of the initial question of this study.

Where lies Maria de Zayas? If we consult literary history and the canon prior to the renewal of interest in her work, the answer is nowhere. Since then, however, she occupies a sort of liminal “everywhere,” since no definitive place for her textual remains have been found. However, it is precisely this liminality, this literary “no-man's land” which has needed investigation. As a female author of lower nobility in baroque Spain, she is, by definition, exiled within her own context, and thus forced to create a ground for herself where none existed. How does she perform this daredevil tightrope act between acceptable norms of female propriety and seclusion and her public acts

of displaying sexualized violence in her novellas? Her genius is her insistence on remaining in-between and in mid-air, dangling tempting possibilities but never allowing readers to seize, or be satisfied with any, forever wavering between a both/and and a neither/nor.

The first chapter of this study concentrated on collecting the scattered remains of Zayas to see if they could be stitched together into some coherent, recognizable form. What resulted was not a neat biographic sketch, but a monstrous re-creation of them. Her physical body, as well as her textual body, was ultimately resurrected as a series of fissures and gaps, in a state somewhere between present and absent, and alive and dead. From Zayas' broken body, the focus shifted to the highly sexualized violence against women that is present in nearly every tale of *Desengaños amorosos*. Zayas forces the reader once and again to bear witness to the brutal destruction of the body of one female protagonist after the next. Prying our eyes open and denying us the luxury, as readers, to look away, Zayas not only compels us, albeit compulsorily, to see the violence, but like a monstrous dominatrix, also to identify with the victim and flinch at her pain. Her status as monster is thus projected onto the reader, who avidly consumes her work and urges her to go on to victim after victim. The



third chapter features the monsters she and her readers have created on display in a kind of literary freak show: the women of *Desengaños amorosos* are tortured, maimed, deformed. Some are left for dead, and some are left to linger indefinitely, like zombies, at the edge of death. The monstrosity of being born female is thus seconded by the monstrosity of which they are broken, deformed, and mutated into the horror they have become. The fourth chapter investigates what is left of these women, fragmented in body and mind. As an incomplete subjectivities which are further traumatized into erasure, most of Zayas' decimated beauties are lost, however two of them manage to survive by turning the process of reducing them to monsters or freaks upon itself. Instead of restricting themselves to the constrictive space allowed for them as women, they take it upon themselves to continue the process of enfreakment to become and inhabit the space of an/other, and in this way, paradoxically, achieve a coherent identity, autonomy, and social standing. The last chapter focuses on the ways in which Zayas presents the dramas of her novellas to the world. Although the two collections of texts studied here are clearly narratives destined for private reading, they are structured as though they were meant for a kind of reading which unfolds as if

it were being performed on the page. Neither novella nor *comedia*, her hybrid model is, in its context, itself a monstrous creation, hovering between the permanency of the written word and the ephemerality of action on a stage.

*Where sits Maria de Zayas?*

Knowing where Maria de Zayas lies/does not lie has been one focus of inquiry. The other has been to find where she sits at the table among her literary peers. In previous work, it appears that the work of Zayas has been read in a vacuum, void of her literary counterparts. She is looked at as an anomaly that does not fit comfortably in her context. Given what I present in this dissertation, I hope that the reader will be able to make clearer links between her contemporaries, such as Cervantes and Lope de Vega. She should now be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with these literary heavyweights in light of the observations that have been made here.

In that regard, how can she best be understood in the context of the literary canon? As it stands, one is either in or out of the canon; one cannot have one foot in, and the other out. There are no figures straddling the boundary of the literary canon. However, one must question the value of making Zayas try to fit in the canon. If she

is a literary "freak" by her gender, or if she "enfreaks" her work to make a place for it, would it not imply that her position in the canon is still that of domesticated exile? Or would she have to somehow be "de-freaked" and thus her work denatured, rewritten? In including her in the canon, we would either have to de-freak Zayas, or enfreak the other literary figures, like Miguel de Cervantes and Francisco Quevedo, in order to put them on the same footing, and to create the homogenous, neat, and orderly group of accomplished writers of Hispanic Literature. And would not Zayas, champion of hybridity and resistant to the dualistic binary, be opposed to the idea of the hierarchical canon?

When we remove the canon and its hierarchical nature, María de Zayas is freed from adopting roles peripheral to the canon. She is neither inside, nor outside, but rather is her own voice. In the end, Zayas defies being erased. Like the few women in her tales that survive, she remains, albeit in a monstrous form. Like Inés and Estela, she discovers that in order to survive (and to avoid obliteration), she needs to embrace the very means of that which renders her "other" while at the same time striving to blur the lines in the sand drawn by literary historians.

*María de Zayas Rises Again...*

The monstrous optic through which the work of María de Zayas has been viewed is not only appropriate, but proves to be fruitful to approach her oeuvre. Cohen asserts that the monster is a cultural artifact, born of a certain time: "The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (Cohen 4). In fact, using very visual and visceral images, he reminds the reader of how the stake is driven through the heart of Dracula, forever pinning him to his time and context. The monster cannot escape his/her background and surroundings. David Castillo, in the forthcoming volume in *Hispanic Issues*, similarly cites that the fact that the monster is inextricably bound to the context of its conception, which is usually one of tumult: "[...] born in the context of the culture of curiosities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the meeting place between certainty and doubt, and between apprehension and fascination" (page forthcoming). While Castillo locates the "dwelling place" of the monstrous in a specific period, the Baroque, his ideas can be broadened, bringing him in line with Cohen. Likewise, Cohen observes, the monster is usually born in a time of great disruption of the social fabric: "Like a

letter on a page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits a gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again" (Cohen 4). We can see these theses running prominently through the work of Zayas. Both of her collections of novellas are rooted strongly in her time period—she often references historical moments, battles, rebellions, wars, etc.—and there is never reference to either the past or the future. Likewise, as has been examined in chapter one of this dissertation, her work was born in a period of great social instability, which brought with it a great deal of discomfort with change and, with it, as argued by Maravall, the use of repression and socio-political propaganda by the ruling elites in order to maintain the status quo. Zayas' monstrous work is born in this context, disappearing for centuries, seemingly dead, only to return in a similarly turbulent environment. We can argue that Zayas accomplishes just this feat. She disappears for centuries, seemingly dead, only to be reborn and return in a reincarnated monstrous form: "No monster tastes of death but once. The anxiety that condenses, like green vapor into the form of a vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns. And so the

monster's body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift" (5). Similarly, the capacity of her work to appeal to different audiences and contexts demonstrates its ability to perform a monstrous shift.

Lastly, Cohen underlines one of the central factors in the creation of the monster—its inherent "otherness." The monster is relegated to the peripheries and held at arms length from the rest of society. A pariah, the monster is completely ostracized from the society that birthed it. The reasons for this complete separation between "us" and "them" is the fact that many times there exist points of resemblance between the two groups. Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of the monster is the fact that it is also familiar. Even Frankenstein, comments Cohen, is created by sewing together parts—*human*, recognizable parts. Zayas holds the mirror to her audience in a provocative manner, insisting that we the readers not only see the monsters on the paper, but also see the monsters within ourselves.

Zayas similarly evokes the monster in her depiction of fractured selves. In so, she threatens society's sense of security: "By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual

members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed" (Cohen 12). Zayas, as I have argued, seems to place this same set of preoccupations on the forefront of her study of her culture. Her monstrous work and her hideous creations call into question some of the very core elements of thought in her society. Her work, like a monster, is capable of destroying and obliterating them.

Yet, like all monster-hunters, we must be satisfied to only have piecemeal segments of the subject of study: "[...] a work that must content itself with fragments (footprints, bones, talismans, teeth, shadows, obscured glimpses—signifiers of monstrous passing that stand in for the monstrous body itself)" (Cohen 6). I have tried to accomplish just this feat in the current study—to collect the scattered body (of work) of Zayas, and stitch the pieces together so as to bring the monster back to life.

Upon reading Zayas' two collections of novellas and this dissertation as a companion-guide, I hope that the experience brings the reader to an understanding of Zayas' accomplishments as a novelist of her own right, not just as an anomaly, or as the token female author.

## Works Cited

- Albers, Irene and Uta Felten, eds. *Escenas de transgression: María de Zayas en su context literario-cultural*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2009.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Brownlee, Marina S. *The Cultural Labyrinth of María de Zayas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Callaghan, Dympna, Valerie Traud and Lindsey Kaplan, eds. *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Castillo, David. *Baroque Horrors: Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- . "Horror (Vacui): The Baroque Condition." *Hispanic Baroques. Reading Cultures in Context*. Eds. Nicholas Spadaccini and Luis Martín-Estudillo. *Hispanic Issues*, vol. 31. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, ed. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Egginton, William. *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo) Baroque Aesthetics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- El Safar, Ruth. "Ana/Lysis and Zayas: Reflections on Courtship and Literary Women in the *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*." *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*. Eds. Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack. Madison: Associated University Presses, 1995.
- Elliott, J.H. *Imperial Spain: 1469-1716*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963.
- . *Spain, Europe, and the Wider World: 1500-1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Friedman, Edward H. "Afterward: Addressing the Baroque." *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context*. Eds.



Nicholas Spadaccini and Luis Martín-Estudillo. Nashville: Vanderbilt, 2005.

Garland-Thomson, ed. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Gorfkle, Laura. "Re-Constituting the Feminine in 'Amar sólo por vencer.'" *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*. Eds. Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack. Madison: Associated University Presses, 1995.

Godzich, Wlad, and Nicholas Spadaccini, eds. *Literature Among Discourses: The Spanish Golden Age*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Gordillo, Adriana and Nicholas Spadaccini, eds. "Introduction: 'Monstrosity and its Changing Faces.'" *Hispanic Monstrosities*. Writing Monsters: Essay on Latin American and Iberian Cultures. Forthcoming in *Hispanic Issues Online*, vol. 15 (Spring 2014).

Grahame-Smith, Seth. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. New York: Quirk Books, 2009.

Greer, Margaret. *María de Zayas Tells Baroque Tales of Love and the Cruelty of Men*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

Greer, Margaret and Elizabeth Rhodes (eds.). *Exemplary Tales of Love and Tales of Disillusion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Grieve, Patricia. "Embroidering with Sainly Threads: María de Zayas Challenges Cervantes and the Church." *Renaissance Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 86-105.

Jung, Ursula. "¿La honra manchada? La reescritura de *El médico de su honra* en los *Desengaños amorosos* de María de Zayas. *Escenas de transgression: María de Zayas en su contexto literario-cultural*. Eds. Irene Albers and Uta Felten. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2009.

Kearney, Richard. *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Leopold, Stephan. "El aplazamiento de la mujer: la escritura femenina de María de Zayas." *Escenas de transgression: María de Zayas en su contexto literario-cultural*. Eds. Irene Albers and Uta Felten. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2009.

O'Brien, Eavan. "Female Friendship Extolled: Exploring the Enduring Appeal of María de Zayas's Novellas." *Romance Studies*, Vol. 26 (1), January 2008.

----- . *Women in the Prose of María de Zayas*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2010.

Parker, A.A. "The Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Method of Analysis and Interpretation." *The Great Playwrights*. Ed. Eric Bentley. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Maroto Camino, Mercedes. "Spindles for Swords: The Re/Discovery of María de Zayas' Presence." *Hispanic Review*, 62:4 (Autumn 1994), pp. 519-536.

Maravall, José Antonio. *La cultura del barroco: Análisis de una estructura histórica*. Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1975.

----- . "From the Renaissance to the Baroque: The Diphasic Schema of a Social Crisis." *Literature Among Discourses*. Eds. Wlad Godzich and Nicholas Spadaccini. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Nelson, Bradley J. "From Hieroglyphic Presence to Representational Sign: An Other Point of View in the *Auto Sacramental*." *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context*. Eds. Nicholas Spadaccini and Luis Martín-Estudillo. *Hispanic Issues*, vol. 31. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.

Rhodes, Elizabeth. *Dressed to Kill: Death and Meaning in Zayas's Desengaños*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Romero-Díaz, Nieves. "Revisiting the Culture of the Baroque: Nobility, City, and Post-Cervantine Novella." *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context*. Eds.

Nicholas Spadaccini and Luis Martín-Estudillo. *Hispanic Issues*, vol. 31. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with Vulnerable Self*. London: Sage Publications, 2002.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.

Spadaccini, Nicholas and Luis Martín-Estudillo eds. *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context*. *Hispanic Issues*, vol. 31. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.

Stroud, Matthew. "The Demand for Love and the Mediation of Desire in 'La tracción de la amistad.'" *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*. Eds. Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack. Madison: Associated University Presses, 1995.

*Through the Shattering Glass: Cervantes and the Self-Made World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Thomson, Rosemarie Garland, ed. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Vasileski, Irma V. *María de Zayas y Sotomayor: Su época y su obra*. Madrid: . Colección Plaza Mayor Scholar, 1973.

Vila, Juan Diego. "En deleites tan torpes y abominables: María de Zayas y la figuración abyecta de la escena homoerótica." *Escenas de transgression: María de Zayas en su contexto literario-cultural*. Eds. Irene Albers and Uta Felten. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2009.

Vollendorf, Lisa. *Reclaiming the Body: María de Zayas's Early Modern Feminism*. Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Department of Romance Languages, 2001.

Williamsen, Amy R. and Judith A. Whitenack, eds. *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*. Madison: Associated University Presses, 1995.

Winters, Ben H. *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*. New York: Quirk Books, 2009.

Zayas, María de. *Novelas amorsas y ejemplares*. Ed. Alicia Yllera. Madrid: Edición Cátedra, 2010.

----- . *Desengaños amorosos*. Ed. Alicia Yllera. Madrid: Edición Cátedra, 2009.