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The Aesthetics of Rape, and the Rape of Aesthetics

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The writing of this essay coincides with the closing of the French, Italian, classics, Russian, and theater programs at SUNY Albany. In light of this and the more generalized massive cuts in university education in the last several years, the theme for this volume could not be more relevant, or more urgent.¹ At my own institution, a public comprehensive university, we have been dealing with fiscal challenges for the last six years. In response to the systematic underfunding of higher education throughout Quebec, the upper administration has been redefining how programs are assessed and funded according to a paradigm of “best practices” consistent with current corporate ideologies, which stress strategic prioritization based on measurable outcomes, i.e., metrics concerning teaching “success,” research production and dissemination, funding, and so on. As a representative from one of Canada’s largest faculties of Arts and Science on the Provost’s Academic Planning Working Group, I have been directly involved with a planning exercise whose main goal is to convert the university’s strategic plan for the next five years into an “action plan.” This action plan is meant to provide operational guidelines and procedures for the creation, assessment, and funding of programs for administrators, faculties, programs, and ultimately professors.

One of the most important discussions in the planning exercise has focused on the coordination of resource allocation with the identification and promotion of “signature areas.” In the effort to raise the institution’s national and international reputation in a climate of static provincial funding, the strategic plan makes provisions for diverting funds from programs of lower priority to programs of higher priority. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the exercise has been the Working Group’s attempt to negotiate notions of symbolic, cultural, and financial capital in defining what constitutes a *signature area*. In an era that has seen the amassing of enormous deficits to rescue supposedly profitable banks and financial corporations, it is not

surprising that fiscal deficits are also the norm in our most recognized university programs. This is where the similitude ends, however, because while Wall Street bankers and global corporations are rewarded for a strategy of deficit leveraging, according to what Paul Krugman has called a “new economics of inequality” (*The Conscience of a Liberal* 7), social institutions are shackled by what the Nobel laureate economist calls a “fashionable” attempt to balance the books, resulting in serious cuts to education, such as the aforementioned humanities programs in Albany (“British Fashion Victims”). In broader terms, what we are seeing is a double standard that rewards banks and corporations for what used to be called irresponsible financial planning while punishing the victims of their predatory lending and investment practices. Like Krugman, what I find interesting, and disturbing, about this situation is the disjunction between underlying economic conditions and their politico-aesthetic representation.

In the U.S. political scene, the situation has become intensely combative, as a consortium of media moguls and corporate giants has resorted to funding “nonprofit” political advocacy groups whose primary *raison d’être* is the redirection of the massive—and understandable—backlash against the aforementioned Wall Street bailouts against so-called Washington elites, in the interest of producing even greater economic windfalls for the wealthy (Rich). A major rhetorical thread running through this phenomenon, which has become synonymous with the amorphous political program of the Tea Party, is a dark form of populist anti-intellectualism that paints more liberal-minded politicians as financially irresponsible, out of touch with the concerns of “regular” Americans, and sympathetic to the dark forces threatening the civilized nations of the world: in other words, terrorists.

A psychoanalytical reading of this situation would find that the major players behind “movement conservatism” (Krugman, *Conscience* 8–12) are projecting the symptoms of their own social and economic pathologies onto the political *other*. Indeed, this timeless use of political rhetoric to divide the world into black and white is not just complicated but actively encouraged by the aforementioned social dynamic at play, whereby financial elites use their substantial media and organizational resources to increase the sense of social unease and instability brought on by epochal crises, redirecting it against government policy and public institutions in the interest of exacerbating the social and economic inequality that gave rise to the crisis mentality in the first place. In short, what we are looking at is a classic case of blaming the victim, in which the crisis in university education, and public education in general, is blamed on what are seen to be the unreasonable and irresponsible demands of educational laborers, such as tenure, health care, and, ultimately, collective bargaining itself.²

This crisis mentality is a strong indication that we inhabit a particularly baroque space as defined by José Antonio Maravall, as crises both erupt and

are manufactured and aesthetically codified to elicit fearful, reactionary responses among the populace. In a spectaclist world where political decisions and policy depend more on the aesthetic power of simulacra than on the material experiences of political subjects; or, better stated, in a world in which simulacra *have become* the material experience of political subjects (Baudrillard), a liberal education, especially one that focuses on the research and analysis of the relationship between aesthetic wit and political obscurantism, would effectively bring the penetrating gaze of the liberally educated subject to bear on her reality in a critical and productive manner.

In recent years, two of the most critical gazes to penetrate the intimate relationship between a sensationalistic media, government paralysis, and the corrupt world of international finance belong to Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander, the main protagonists of Stieg Larsson's noir trilogy, the *Millennium Series*. Salander's feminist rage and Blomkvist's relentless pursuit of financial corruption are useful optics through which to study the current attack on liberal social policies and political thought. In many ways they constitute a postmodern refraction of María de Zayas's critique of early modern sexual violence and upper-class corruption among the "monarchical-seigniorial" elements of baroque Spain (Maravall). And my intent here is to use Larsson's novels as the *frame story* for a detailed analysis of Zayas's *El traidor contra su sangre*. The goal is to bring together the current attack on liberal thought, Larsson's scathing portrait of financial corruption and institutional misogyny in contemporary Sweden, and Zayas's feminist manifesto, the *Desengaños amorosos*, in order to demonstrate how a materialist analysis of aesthetic practice can be useful for negotiating the complex historical moment we inhabit.

We begin with the longtime companion of deceased crime fiction author Larsson, Eva Gabrielsson, who has been legally divested of one of the largest literary (and cinematic) estates in recent memory. According to Swedish law, Larsson's brother and father are entitled to the entire estate of the author of the *Millennium* trilogy (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*) for the simple reason that Larsson and Gabrielsson never married. Charles McGrath explains that in Sweden, unlike in the United States, common-law spouses have no right to the estates of their spouses (4). Still, Gabrielsson does have possession of Larsson's laptop, where it is believed that at least one unpublished novel is stored, along with the outlines and notes for as many as two additional books (McGrath). For those of you not familiar with the novels that have monopolized the *New York Times* bestseller list for the last several years, Larsson's detective series delivers one of the most gripping, hardcore feminist diatribes in recent memory. The fact that the author's lifetime companion has been legally separated from his financial and literary legacy only adds more urgency to the feminist message of the books. But the story does not end there. There are rumors that Larsson, an

investigative reporter who focused his research on fascist and rightwing extremism in Sweden before turning to fiction, co-authored the novels with Gabrielsson, as well as conspiracy theories concerning the untimely death of a reporter who received death threats from Swedish neo-Nazi organizations throughout his journalistic career.³ As McGrath explains, speculation on the social vision, aesthetic production, and untimely death of Larsson has spawned an entire industry of its own.

Zayas has also been the object of speculation of critics who seek to close (or open) the distance between the historical author and the feminist aesthetic of her novels. In a statement that can easily be related to the sensation surrounding the Larsson estate, Lisa Vollendorf observes that “the intense urge to explain Zayas’s existence is closely related to the voyeurism that often accompanies interest in women intellectuals” (21). I can already see eyebrows rising at what has been up to this point an untheorized comparison of a seventeenth-century female author and a twenty-first-century male author, even if the oppressive presence of sexual violence, misogynistic social institutions, and melancholic cultural landscapes in the works of both authors practically begs for comparison. Logical objections will be raised concerning the temporal, cultural, linguistic, and sexual disjunctions of such a project; but I will maintain that foregrounding the contemporary “state of emergency” (Benjamin 257) that Larsson’s novels describe with respect to financial and government corruption, institutionalized misogyny, and sexual predation in contemporary Sweden allows us to recognize more clearly the historical relevance and urgency of Zayas’s texts with respect to baroque Spain. In the words of David Castillo and William Egginton, “Walter Benjamin hit the nail right on the head with his thesis against ‘historicism,’ when he suggested that a historical reading must convey a sense of urgency and immediacy to the extent that the past is alive in our dreams and aspirations, as well as in our nightmares” (48). Conversely, our approach to the past is irremediably motivated, mediated, and obfuscated by our own historical unconscious, and any attempt to bracket ourselves off from our present moment in order to move toward a more *objective* and therefore accurate look at the past is simply a symptom of our desire for historical presence. In the words of classicist Sean Gurd, “We inform it; it informs us; this is a time of times, as it was then also” (8).⁴

As a case in point, consider Vollendorf’s characterization of the ambivalence with which contemporary feminists approach Zayas:

Some scholars claim that reading Zayas as a feminist is to read anachronistically (Perry, *Gender and Disorder*), to be duped by her rhetoric (Griswold), or to underestimate the sophistication with which she uses language (Brownlee, “Postmodernism”). Others (such as Boyer, Greer, and Maroto Camino) point to the privileging of the feminine in her fiction as testimony to her feminist ideologies. Some

critics in this camp call her feminism conservative (Foa and Yllera) or claim that Zayas contradicts her own commitment to feminism (Redondo Goicoechea, “Introducción”). (24)

Vollendorf does well to frame her own groundbreaking study of Zayas’s corporeal aesthetic, *Reclaiming the Body: María de Zayas’s Early Modern Feminism*, in the more militant feminist language of Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell’s *Femicide*, which defines sexual violence in the following terms: “Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of antifemale terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery . . . physical and emotional battery . . . [and] forced heterosexuality . . .” (Caputi and Russell 15). What is important about both books is that, contrary to the more generalized ideology surrounding rape, sexual violence against women is not defined as a deviant behavior per se, but rather as a logical and necessary component of a patriarchal social, economic, political, and, yes, aesthetic order (see also Bosch, Ferrer, and Alzamora). To echo Krugman, the patriarchy depends on the cultivation and (violent) maintenance of a (*gender*) *politics of inequality*.

According to this understanding, framing sexual violence as socially unnatural or deviant contributes to the maintenance and legitimization of a symbolic order in which it is a banal part of daily existence.⁵ One could say the same thing about the financial excesses associated with the recession of 2008: attempts to persecute individual ‘sinners,’ i.e., Bernie Madoff, obscure the legalized plunder of the U.S. Federal Reserve under the TARP program. Recent work by the sociologist Stephanie Paterson on Canadian public policy on sexual violence against women strongly suggests that policies that focus on the criminalization of sexual violence without attending to the broader contexts in which such violence takes place worsen rather than improve the lives of women, who are left with no choice but to follow through on criminal charges: “By not problematizing gender inequality and the structural causes of violence, the Canadian anti-woman abuse policy framework limits the choices of many women” (127). As Bosch, Ferrer, and Alzamora argue, traditional psychological or sociological analyses of the micro-causes of sexual violence miss the same point by blaming individual aggressors, or victims, rather than focusing on the institutionalized behaviors, attitudes, and practices that inevitably produce sexual violence.

Getting back to Zayas, Vollendorf’s position is closer to that of Amy Kaminsky, who chides those whom she considers to be more tentative critics of Zayas’s fiction for “protect[ing] themselves against its most threatening aspects: the revelation of men’s violence against women and the uncompromising rejection of romantic love” (in Boyer 54). What both Vollendorf and Kaminsky perceive in these *softer* approaches to Zayas are the same problems underlined by Bosch et al. in traditional psychological and sociological approaches to sexual violence: to wit, the characterization

of sexual violence against women as an anomaly of historical progress rather than as a basic, necessary structure at the heart of modern constructions of identity.

What I find most compelling, and useful, about Larsson's novels is the contrast between the radical ethical bottom line of Salander herself, a repeated victim of both legalized and criminal sexualized violence, and the reporter Blomkvist's graying of the line between right and wrong, at least where sexual violence is concerned. It reminds me of the movement between the more conservative social and aesthetic rejoinders of Zayas's aristocratic spectators and the unapologetically critical attitudes of her storytellers, most of whom, like Salander, end up living *off the grid* after their amorous disappointments, entering the convent. Salander's personal history must be fed piecemeal to the reader due to its horrifying unveiling of the absolute inequality and violence of gender roles in Swedish law enforcement, correctional, judicial, and even medical institutions. As a consequence, men who violently and perversely exercise their power on female victims are not reformed, reeducated, or rehabilitated, because the cause of their perverse and often psychotic behavior is their absolute hatred of women, a hatred Larsson finds firmly rooted in all of the previously mentioned modern institutions: "In [Salander's] world, this was the natural order of things. As a girl she was legal prey, especially if she dressed in a worn black leather jacket and had pierced eyebrows, tattoos, and zero social status" (*Dragon Tattoo* 182). Starting from the age of twelve, she is systematically converted into a simultaneously abject and sexually desired object of "rehabilitation." The epigraphs for many of Larsson's chapters cite statistics concerning the prevalence of sexual violence in Sweden. For example, Part 2 of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* opens with: "Forty-six percent of women in Sweden have been subjected to violence by a man" (103). Salander's answer to this impossible and seemingly permanent situation is to use her unequalled skills in camouflage, computer hacking, and surveillance to take absolute control over men who have imposed their will on her, sometimes in incredibly violent ways. In the words of Zayas's Lisarda, "I assure you that if all women avenged the offenses done to them . . . there wouldn't be so many women who get seduced and end up aggrieved" (102)⁶

In *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, we learn that Salander, for reasons not entirely explained until the second novel, was made a ward of the State, a situation not unlike the familial enclosure of the early modern Spanish noblewoman (Perry, "Magdalens and Jezebels").⁷ What this means is that the State appoints a guardian, who has complete control over his ward's finances and an absolute right to any and all information about her life. This situation does not end with her reaching adulthood; it can only be terminated if the appointed guardian, who seemingly has to pay little heed to his own supervisors, or ethical standards for that matter, initiates a process that lasts years. At the beginning of the novel, Salander's guardian for the last several

years suffers a serious stroke, which results in the appointment of a new guardian. The first guardian had managed to modify her heretofore swift and violent reactions to sexual harassment—and to male authority figures in general—cultivating a more strategic and thoughtful mode of self-defense and, as a result, setting the young woman, labeled at the age of twelve a schizophrenic sociopath, on the road to independence.

In his first meeting with Salander, the new guardian Nils Bjurman senses an easy victim for his sexual predation, since she has no family of note, no friends of any consequence, and holds what seems to be a menial anonymous job. She is, in other words, a nobody; and he compels her to visit his apartment, where he ties her to the bed and brutally rapes her over the course of several hours (197–200). Interrupting this scene is a brief amorous interlude between Blomkvist and a woman who invites the journalist to her house and seduces him, a juxtaposition that forces the reader to contemplate the differences between the two scenes. Unbeknownst to Bjurman, Salander has recorded the rape with a hidden camera. In her second visit to the apartment, the sadist thinks he has defeated her resistance; however, when he bends over to kiss her, Salander pulls out a taser, electrocutes him, ties him to his own bed, sodomizes him with the same instrument he used on her and, finally, brutally carves a crude tattoo onto his stomach that reads: “I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT AND A RAPIST” (203–09). She also hacks his computer so that she can see everything he writes, installs cameras in his flat, and threatens to send the recording of the rape to his superiors and the news media if anything happens to her, or if he ever sees another woman.

One of the most interesting aesthetic structures of these two rape scenes is the way in which Larsson develops and intensifies the perspectives of the two victims. Both scenes are arguably pornographic in their portrayal of sexual violence and victimization (Dworkin), but the perspectives from which the violence is regarded are more in line with Angela Carter’s definition of “moral pornography,” since as readers we experience the helplessness and rage of both Salander and Bjurman: “A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes . . . Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it” (in Castillo, *Baroque Horrors* 124). Perhaps most disturbing, from an affective point of view, is that while the reader is outraged at the perversions committed on Salander’s innocent body, we experience a disquieting enjoyment at the violation and torture of Bjurman, which reframes discourses of victimization in a radical way. This uneasiness is exacerbated by the fact that Bjurman feels no remorse, only an intensified hatred for his object of desire.

On the other side, it is revealing that Salander's plotting of revenge exploits her invisibility as a marginal female subject as well as her hard-earned knowledge of information networks and surveillance technology. Persecuted by state apparatuses of control since the age of twelve, she has firsthand knowledge of what it means to be panoptically mapped and controlled (Foucault). Her strategies of self-defense are a logical if violent reaction to Bjurman's deployment of his connections to the medical community and the Swedish secret police to facilitate and hide his own violent pursuit of Salander. As extreme as they are, Larsson presents both characters as logical manifestations of modern society, which is where I turn my attention to *Zayas*.

I am often struck by how flawed the female protagonists of *Desengaños amorosos* are. I recognize that the doctrine of *desengaño*, based in large part on the Augustinian body-soul dialectic, dictates that all human subjects are categorically imperfect and sinful antitypes of Christ's and the Virgin Mary's immaculate marriage of spirit and flesh (Read, Rodríguez de la Flor). Nevertheless, the female nobleman's willful resistance to her passive and static role in the traditional social hierarchy has become something of an obsession in my reading and teaching of *Zayas's* extravagant fiction. Her fantastical Iberian romances are not reducible to a Manichean division of the world into Good and Evil, where innocent and helpless damsels are repeatedly subjected to inhuman suffering by smirking and inhumanly cold, sadistic males who torture women because they are psychopaths. This is not to say that such extreme scenarios are not used by the baroque artist—they most certainly are—but her victims are more complex than the genre normally allows (Vollendorf, *Reclaiming*; Castillo, *Baroque Horrors*). And it would be hard to argue that her male characters, as abusive as they are, are seen as mentally deranged by the spectators at the *sarao*.

Isabel Fajardo, also known as Zelima from *La esclava de su amante*, is an excellent example of a complexly flawed character. Intelligent and beautiful, not to mention vain, willful, and completely narcissistic, here is a young woman who steals not once but twice, bribes every servant she knows, and runs away from home in pursuit of her "lover" Don Manuel, an act that results in the death of her own father. My favorite line of the *desengaño* concerns Isabel's reaction when Don Luis-Felipe, her servant-stalker, kills her rapist Don Manuel, after the latter confirms what the reader has figured out long before: Don Manuel will never marry the woman he raped:

I, who was the most experienced in misfortune, was the most courageous one. In part I felt grief-stricken by the event but I also felt satisfaction in being avenged. When I saw everyone in turmoil and people beginning to come in from the street, I went to my room and gathered up the least bulky and most valuable of Zaida's jewels that

were in my keeping. Then I slipped out into the street, fleeing so the police wouldn't force me to reveal don Felipe's identity. I also wanted to find him so that the two of us could reach safety. But I never found him. (78)

We don't really have time here to unpack all of the sociopathic impulses contained in Isabel's serpentine logic, so let it suffice to say that Isabelima, or Zelimabel, is the kind of character who would be right at home in Larsson's modern Sweden.

Zayas's critique of early modern Spain is vast and, moreover, completely in tune with the lengths to which her female protagonists are compelled to go in order to save or recover their honor—or, as happens just as often, to justify and rationalize morally questionable desires and actions. In *Esclava*, Isabelima is such an extreme character that as a reader it is hard to take issue with Manuel's fatigue at her relentless pursuit of him. She is, after all, a consummate liar. On the other hand, she is no more extreme than the male characters in her egotism, deception, and violent tendencies, which places an interesting spin on the question she directs at the male members of the audience at the beginning of her story: "Men! How can you, being made of the same form and flesh as us and having no more soul than we have, how can you treat us as if we were made of different substance?" (51). The answer to this question would seem to have a lot to do with the particular *virility* of Zayas's female characters, especially where their sometimes violent modes of self-assertion are concerned, which is why I find the less saintly characters so intriguing. Their saintliness would seem to exist in inverse proportion to their ability to take action as subjects in the world around them.

Zayas's assault on the aesthetic construction and reception of femininity also depends on her male characters, which is why I would like to shift my focus to the internal reception of the novellas, since I believe it is here that Zayas's power, both in the baroque and postmodernity, becomes most clear. There are many explicit references to *taste* in the *Desengaños amorosos*; for example, the frequent aesthetic evaluations of the poetic competition between the storytellers. One of the most telling indications of the central role of this emergent aesthetic—and epistemological—category appears in the Introducción, when the narrator paints, with marked sensuality, the stage on which the storytellers will perform:

Arrangements were made for the musicians, and the halls were adorned with rich tapestries, magnificent benches, unusual writing desks, splendid chairs, and taborets. Braziers were prepared to provide varied lighting and delicate aromas, as were bright shining lanterns and numerous oil lamps. Most importantly, extravagant and savory suppers

were ordered, not overlooking our friend chocolate (which like misfortune is found everywhere). (38–39)

Zayas evokes a totalizing ambience through the enumeration of a hierarchy of senses, beginning with the ear and ending with the palate. The mention of chocolate, a new oriental delicacy, underlines the decadence of the scene and its protagonists. In the words of William Clamurro, “The social space and social moment of the *sarao* are simultaneously apart from and critical of the aristocratic world of its participants, and yet are subtly indicative of the temporary, limited liberties made possible by an aristocracy’s material power and idleness” (in Brownlee xiii). The relation between the sensually grotesque spectacles that feed and provoke the hunger for the surprising and the novel in the readers, and the reception—or consumption—of the excessive tortures and deaths in this exquisitely appointed space is where the central role of aesthetics in the construction and perpetuation of sexual violence becomes most clear.

Various critics have commented on Don Juan’s observation concerning the similarities between the material practices of misogyny and taste:

It does seem true that we’ve all taken up the vice of not speaking kindly about women just like the vice of tobacco used by noble and commoner alike. Some users speak ill of others who use it as they clutch their own tobacco pouches tighter than a rosary or a prayer book. (199)⁸

As Amy R. Williamsen observes, this comment underscores the intimate relationship between taste and morality by juxtaposing the tobacco pouch and the rosary (“Challenging the Code” 145). In another place, Zayas’s narrator links taste to the law: “ellos viven tan exentos de leyes, que no las conocen si no son a sabor de su gusto” (258) ([men] live so free from laws, that they do not recognize them if they are not modeled to their taste [my translation]). To take a closer look at this problematic, I will focus my analysis on the eighth *desengaño*, *El traidor contra su sangre*.

I will analyze two moments from *El traidor*, in which the nobleman Don Alonso kills, first, his sister Mencía and, then, his young and noble, if impoverished, wife Ana. In the scenes most germane to this essay, the Eucharistic motif of the (last) supper, in addition to connecting the two murders within the play, also connects the diegetic world of the fable to the extradiegetic world of the *sarao*. In the first scene, Don Alonso, aided and abetted by his friend Marco Antonio, brings his innocent victim to a hidden and enclosed garden, where the servant of Marco Antonio has set a table with “una empanada y otras cosas” (394). Doña Ana has hardly taken a bite from the empanada when “[Don Alonso] went around behind her and with a large knife he’d brought for this very purpose and had had sharpened that same day, he slashed her across the throat with such force that her head

crashed down onto the table” (296). If the erotic subtext in which a man with a phallic instrument approaches a young woman from behind is missed by the reader, the more obvious juxtaposition of an intimate rendezvous between man and wife in a garden with such a violent decapitation suggests more explicitly the perverse relationship between the aesthetics of romance and the grotesque entrées that are served up throughout the *sarao*. In this case, the motif of the biblical patriarch Abraham, his knife raised for a sacrifice required by the law of the Father—Alonso kills Ana because his father, Don Pedro, threatened to cut him off financially for marrying poorly—leaves little doubt as to the sacrificial or, better stated, Eucharistic intertext of the scene, as the victim, with bread still in her mouth, sprays blood from her neck. It also recalls the grotesquely sacramental and miraculous elements that surround Alonso’s stabbing of his sister Mencía for similarly mercenary reasons (he did not want his future inheritance affected by the dowry that would go to her new family). After receiving the dubious confession and last rites from a priest who is threatened by Alonso, Mencía’s many knife wounds bleed for hours on end, creating a veritable “lake of liquid blood” (286).

Before introducing the second scene, it is worth pausing to comment on Zayas’s razor-sharp irony with respect to the ambience of the scene of the second femicide, whose predominant characteristic seems to be its disturbing juxtapositions and contradictions. After the death of Doña Ana, Alonso and Marco Antonio throw her dead body into a well and take off with her head. The idea is to separate the head from the body and thereby avoid the identification of the victim. (Something should probably be said here concerning the Augustinian body-soul dialectic, but I will leave this morsel for the reader to ruminate on.) When Marco Antonio’s servant shows up the next morning to clean up the dishes, she sees blood on the table; and when she tries to retrieve water from the well to clean up the mess, she discovers Ana’s dead body and hauls it out of the improvised tomb. Here is the description of the cadaver:

Tenia vestido un faldellín francés con su justillo de damasco verde, con pasamanos de plata, que como era verano, no había salido con otro arreo, y un rebocino negro que llevaba cubierto, unas medias de seda nacarada, con el zapatillo negro que apenas era de seis puntos. (395)

(She had on a French slip with its bodice of green damask, with silver straps, and as if it were summer, she had not gone out with anything else, and a black veil to cover her, some pearly silk stockings, with a black slipper that barely measured six inches. [my translation])

The narrator states that the servant recognized Doña Ana because of her clothes; nevertheless, this small clarification does not explain how she

identifies these clothes in particular nor why Zayas feels it is necessary to describe in such detail, and so deliciously, the fashion of the day and the measure of the foot of the decapitated body. More to the point, what is described is the *underwear* worn by the cadaver, including the adolescent size of one of the most erotic members of the female body: her foot. (I am reminded of Lope de Vega's foot sonnet in the first act of *El caballero de Olmedo*.)⁹ Castillo has noted the suggestion of necrophilia in this scene and others throughout the collection: "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" (*Baroque Horrors* 114). He also suggests that the detailed description of the materials and workmanship of the garments as well as the small size of Ana's foot help establish the nobility and innocence of the victim. I agree, but I would add that the contrast between the very young woman's violated body and the tasteful, even erotic, description of its clothes throws a curious and grotesquely sexual hue onto the excessive violence of Don Alonso.

Zayas's acerbic irony, quasi-Quevedesque, is literally raised to the surface by the servant, and it explodes completely when the two assassins are captured by the authorities when they attempt to rob some silk stockings just like the ones worn by their victim: Don Alonso "pocketed a pair of blue ones and his friend a pair of brown ones" (298). In this way, *taste* is unveiled as an aesthetic structure based on the slaughter, dismemberment, and tasteful preparation of the female body, all channeled toward provoking and feeding the perverse hunger of the aristocratic consumer. The tragedy of the victims is not what is underlined here in the first instance, but rather the rabid hunger at the foundation of a culture of ostentatious and grotesque consumption that serves the interests of social and economic elites. Exploiting Castillo's apt application of Gilles Deleuze's concept of the *fold* (*Baroque Horrors* 112–15), one can envision a rippling fabric containing the various faces of sexual violence waving in the face of Zayas's reader. On one fold we may see conventional aesthetic dismemberment and idealization; on another, the corporeal sanctity of the martyr; on another, the horrific tortures of female protagonists; on yet another, the forbidden sexual attraction of the budding (and mortified) adolescent body. In the end, however, what the folds all conceal and reveal is the structural necessity of sexual aggression and violence in early modern society and culture.

I will now turn to the second (and last) supper with which Zayas's narrator marks the end of *El traidor* in an appropriately grotesque way. Although there are several motifs relayed in the fascinating transitions between storytellers and stories throughout the *Desengaños*, in most cases we find some sort of intervention either by the storyteller or by one of the listeners: variations include moralizing harangues directed against the bad opinion in which men hold women; tears produced by the pathos of the stories; or aesthetic judgments concerning the manner in which stories are

told or songs sung. In this case, Zayas's narrator intervenes with the following:

When Doña Francisca finished her disenchantment, nobody moralized about it, because it was so late. The music began and Lisis rose to her feet, as did everyone else. They went into the next room, as beautifully furnished as the room they were leaving. They sat at the tables where a rich and elegant buffet was laid out, from which they were served a sumptuous and lavish supper. (300)

We have just witnessed Doña Ana, with an empanada in her mouth, killed with such violence that her head—together, one imagines, with the empanada—plops onto the table, leaving the supper table (and the supper itself) completely covered in the blood that shoots from her open neck. And now, a mere four pages later, the first thing the listeners do after the story is finished is to sit down at tables set with a sumptuous supper. After two sacrifices, one featuring blood and the other bread, and both motivated by greed, the spectators sit down for supper during carnival (*carnestolendas*). As stated previously, the Eucharistic echoes are hard to tune out.

If this interpretation of the novella seems a bit hard to swallow (sorry), it will be useful to take a look at what Baltasar Gracián has to say about taste in *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. Taste has generally been seen by philosophers and critics like Hans Georg Gadamer and Anthony Cascardi as primarily a modern and, therefore, secular phenomenon. In *Discurso XXIII, de la agudeza paradoja*, however, Gracián reminds us of the explicit connection between taste and the Eucharist: “tenía este manjar Eucarístico todos los gustos, y delicias que se podían desear; sólo parece que le faltaba aquel sainete que lo es grande, del ser hurtado . . . Pues para que se entienda que nada de gusto y de regalo le falta, le llama manjar robado, de pillaje” (220) (this Eucharistic dish had all the flavors (*gustos*) and pleasures that could be desired; it seems, that it only lacked that great delight, which is to be stolen . . . So that it is understood that it lacks nothing of taste or of pleasure, it is called a stolen dish, plundered). A man of his time, Gracián does not suggest that there is anything lacking in the Eucharist itself; rather, he points out that the imperfect taste of man is incapable of fully enjoying the holy host without spicing it up in some way (Nelson, *The Persistence of Presence* 168).¹⁰ And what man adds to the transubstantiated morsel precisely corresponds to his ontological shortcomings: this tasty dish must be stolen from God, a situation that erects a transgressive bridge between an ontologically perfect meal and the filthy palate of man: “¡Oh, con qué gusto, oh, con qué hambre, oh, con qué *aprecio* se ha de comer!” (220; [my emphasis]) (Oh, with what gusto, with what hunger, with what *estimation* it must be eaten!) And if Gracián's territorialization of Eucharistic taste seems insufficiently worldly, Covarrubias brings us all the way back to the

marketplace in his first definition of *apreciar*: “Poner precio y tasa en alguna cosa” (107) (To put a price and measure on something). What this suggests is that the aesthetics of taste are ultimately a sacramental phenomenon; or, dialectically speaking, the sacrament of the Eucharist is ultimately an aesthetic matter. In either case, Zayas is exploring fundamental mysteries of the Christian faith and their interaction with a cultural marketplace.

In the end, she presents us with an *anamorphic* spectacle of the tasteful consumption of tales: from one viewpoint, we see the sacrifice of an innocent bride; from another, the eroticization and grotesque swallowing up of the spectacle itself.¹¹ The self-conscious, ethical criticism of the popularizing aesthetic practices of the baroque and the moral chastisement of the aristocratic “readers” compel us to focus on the excesses imposed by a voracious public, and not just in the aesthetic world. The aesthetic game of Zayas revolves around the taste of consumers for the extreme, the grotesque, excessive violence, pornography, etc., but her manipulation of these generic conventions refuses to allow the reader a distanced and comfortable space from which to judge with certainty the moral, social, or aesthetic meaning of the novellas. If, on the one hand, as Castillo describes, “the *Desengaños*’ nightmarish parade of bleeding corpses is a shocking reminder of [the honor code’s] arbitrariness and violence” (“Horror (Vacui)” 96–97), on the other, the ironization of the violent spectacles themselves along with their reception by a cultural aristocracy provides an acerbic critique of the baroque taste for the extreme, and the exploitation of this taste in the propagation of retrograde social and political ideologies. The answer of Zayas’s female protagonists to this impossible social predicament is to flee to the convent, even if it means using stolen jewels (*Esclava*) to finance one’s escape.

Returning to our frame story, it is worth noting that at the end of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Lisbeth Salander leads a corrupt and violent financier to a violent death through the use of her computer hacking skills, and then transfers his ill-gotten wealth into her own bank account, which allows her to live comfortably and anonymously. Both Zayas and Larsson reject discourses of victimization in their attempts to imbue their readers with a more (pro)active, aggressive posture in the struggle to resist social, economic, juridical, and sexual inequalities and violence. As a final point, it is useful to consider the politics of translation. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is not Larsson’s original title: the literal translation from the Swedish is *Men Who Hate Women*, which provides a modern and very frank transduction of Isabelima’s question to the male members of her audience. It also says a lot about how books are marketed, since the English title definitely plays to modern, patriarchal, sexual sensibilities. A dragon tattoo is, in Paris Hilton’s parlance, *hot*. In the end, what I find most striking about Larsson’s and Zayas’s representation of the horrors of sexual violence is its banality, which is why I think it is important to analyze how Zayas’s

storytellers' attempts to question gender relations in a serious way are inexorably redirected toward discussions concerning the aesthetic quality of their performance by the male participants in the *sarao*. These aesthetic critiques often take place when the guests turn from cultural consumption to the consumption of extravagant refreshments and delicacies. It is as if Zayas were suggesting that the problem goes beyond a reordering of discursive power, arising instead from a more basic, corporeal dynamic grounded in more primitive appetites, fears, hatreds and desires. What she adds to Larsson's avenging feminist is her understanding of the intimate links between regressive ideologies and a culture industry that serves up tasteful reinforcements of unequal social relations even as it trivializes its own participatory role. As educators, we would do well to emulate Zayas's attack on conservative aesthetics and the regressive drives they provoke and channel in their relentless provocation of fear and loathing in the political sphere. One way to do this is to channel our own aesthetic inquiries through what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has called the "materialities of communication," analyzing the violent encounters between political, institutional, and material bodies, and unveiling how corporate ideologies and their aesthetic trappings contribute to said violence and make it palatable.

Notes

1. The successful effort to maintain the prestigious and influential Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto was accompanied by the amalgamation of language and literature departments into the new School of Languages and Literatures (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/toronto-u-of-t-abandons-plan-to-close-famed-school/article1777093/>). See also the October 2010 exchange of views in *The New York Times* regarding this issue and, more generally, the role of the humanities in university education (<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/10/17/do-colleges-need-french-departments>).
2. See also Stanley Fish, "We're All Badgers Now," which appeared when I was revising this essay (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/21/were-all-badgers-now/>).
3. In a *New York Times* article, Charles McGrath writes: "A question that keeps coming up, though, is the role of Gabriellsson, an architect who is said to be a good writer and who, to make extra money years ago, translated Philip K. Dick's novel 'The Man in the High Castle' into Swedish. Gabriellsson herself has been evasive, in at least one interview hinting at something like co-authorship and in another backing away from that position. She now says that she has been misquoted so often that she will no longer discuss the issue and that the whole story will come out in her own book, to be published in France this fall" (2).
4. In his introduction to *Philologies and Its Histories*, Gurd writes: "To be sure, there was a world before us: that is our scholarly interest. But that world, like ours, was produced from a confrontation between the materials of the past and the poetic

capacities of the present, and neither our time nor the time before can be viewed as a simple, serene, or stable and unchangeable synchronic slice” (8).

5. One universal finding of studies of sexual violence against women is that the most dangerous place for women is the home, and the most violent social institution is the family (Radford and Russell; Bosch, Ferrer, and Alzamora).
6. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Zayas’s text into English are taken from Boyer’s translation *The Disenchantments of Love*.
7. Mary Elizabeth Perry writes: “They increasingly restricted economic activities open to women as they moved to smooth out the dislocations of developing commercial capitalism and the pressures of imperial interests on local economies. Concerned with epidemics, famines, vagrancy, and abandoned women and children, they called for a stricter enclosure of women in the convent, home, or brothel” (“Crisis and Disorder” 23).
8. Boyer writes: “Interestingly, the arrogant Don Juan immediately trivializes the attack on male writers by comparing men’s negative opinion of women to the vice of using tobacco: everybody does it” (58).
9. Here is Don Alonso’s sonnet to Doña Inés:

I saw the most beautiful peasant girl,
 in the famous carnival of Medina,
 that the sun has ever seen where it is most inclined
 from pale dawn’s laughter.
 A red slipper that gilds
 the brief base of a beautiful and crystalline
 column, was the ardent passage
 that lifts the soul to the region it adores.
 That a slipper was victorious,
 the eyes of Love being angered,
 I confessed to be a miraculous feat.
 But I told her, ceding the spoils,
 “If you slay with your feet, beautiful Inés,
 what do you leave for the fire in your eyes?”

(Yo vi la más hermosa labradora,
 en la famosa feria de Medina,
 que ha visto el sol adonde más se inclina
 desde la risa de la blanca aurora.
 Una chinela de color que dora
 de una coluna hermosa y cristalina
 la breve basa, fue la ardiente mina
 que vuela el alma a la región que adora.
 Que una chinela fuese vitoriosa,
 siendo los ojos de Amor enojos,
 confesé por hazaña milagrosa.
 Pero díjele, dando los despojos:
 “Si matas con los pies, Inés hermosa,
 ¿qué dejas para el fuego de tus ojos?” [vv. 503–516])

Lope literally turns the aesthetics of female beauty on its head by lifting the feet of the female object of desire toward the gaze of the reader and leading the voyeuristic gaze up her “beautiful and crystalline” legs to the region adored by the soul. It is

already evident here in the first act that the love of the star-crossed lovers has little to do with metaphysics. Covarrubias notes that “color” is often used to refer to the *blush* or *rouge* women used for cosmetic purposes in the baroque, both variations of which carry sexual connotations (334).

10. See also Nelson, “A Ritual Practice for Modernity.”

11. For an illuminating reading of literary *anamorphosis*, see Castillo, *(A)wry Views*.

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