

◆ CHAPTER TEN

## Early Modern #MeToo: María de Zayas's Response to Women's Confined Lives

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The #MeToo movement caught the world by surprise in the fall of 2017. After the revelations of the widespread sexual misconduct in Hollywood, thousands of women started posting on different social media the now popular hashtag to denounce the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in society, particularly in the workplace. A stream of empathy and support made this movement extremely successful in denouncing sexual violence and spreading the message that women should not feel embarrassed for being victims in these situations. In particular, the #MeToo movement is characterized by a general urgency to not only create awareness of this problem, but also to encourage women to discontinue their feelings of shame by breaking the silence and telling their stories. It is still too early to know the reach of this social revolution, but for now, it is evident that a cultural shift is starting to take place at least in the form of a widespread discussion about not only sexual harassment and abuse, but also regarding the general discrimination against women in all spheres. One of the most relevant events that have taken place as a result of #MeToo is the women's strike that took place in 177 countries on March 8, 2018. The celebration of Women's International Day took a more protesting tone this year, as for the few previous months, the constant revelation of stories of unfair treatment of women continued to grow around the #MeToo umbrella. The demonstrations covered many newspapers' front pages the following day, and it was precisely in Spain where a larger number of women and men took to the streets. This activism prompted a political debate in which different political parties had to define their position in response to the heated discussions that took place about this issue. Interestingly enough, some of the most important Spanish political leaders redefined their discourse after realizing that what had been understood by some as a radical left-wing movement

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supported by a minority of the population, was in reality a widespread cause bringing together different social classes, ages, genders, and political orientations.

The United Nations considers violence toward women an international epidemic, defining it as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” The poorest as well as the richest areas throughout the world share this problem, which runs across all social classes, professions, ages, and any other variant. It is estimated that one-third of all women have been victims of some kind of physical or sexual violence, and in over half of the cases, the perpetrator was a relative or someone that the victim knew. More than 2.6 million women and girls live in countries where rape by a husband is not explicitly penalized (only fifty-two countries have penalized this crime explicitly); approximately half of European women have suffered sexual harassment; in some countries, up to one-third of teenagers declare that their first sexual relationship was forced; ninety-eight percent of the 4.5 million victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls.

Kidnapping and isolation are a sub-type of violence against women that prevents their contact with the outside world beyond the familiar or domestic realm, with different degrees of violence being used to attain this goal, in a variety of conditions, places, and with different duration for the actual kidnapping. This is one of the most disturbing examples of violence against women explored by María de Zayas in her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637) and particularly in *Desengaños amorosos* (1647), where kidnapping and confinement are instruments often used to physically and psychologically torture women, subjugating them. I will focus on some of Zayas’s stories from *Desengaños amorosos* (“La inocencia castigada,” “Amar solo por vencer,” “Tarde llega el desengaño,” and “La perseguida triunfante”) paying attention to the treatment of space and its relation to gender especially in the domestic sphere, and also to the representation of torture mechanisms and their impact on victims and on the social system organizing women’s relations with their abusers. As Amanda Flather states in her study on gender and space in early modern society, “space was the basis for the formation of gender identities” (1) and “space and gender were intimately linked in early modern theoretical constructions of patriarchal order” (17). Spaces were given social and cultural meanings and therefore it is worth exploring the links between space, social relations, and power (2), and how they are transformed since “normative notions shaped individual perception and experience of space in early modern society, but the links between them were far from straightforward. Men and women might accept, negotiate, manipulate or even ignore normative boundaries, just

as they do today” (8). Whoever controls the space has the handle of power in the relationship and, even though the home was the domestic realm where the wife could exercise domestic authority, it is also true that legally the property of the house where women lived was usually the husband’s or the father’s, and therefore he held the real control of that space too. The home was then a mixed space with slippery meanings where the woman could find protection and security; but, at the same time, it was the most dangerous space for her when her father, brother, or husband felt that she had trespassed the limits of appropriate behavior, had disrupted domestic order, and had therefore tainted the domestic (male) space.

As is widely known, violence occupies a central place in Zayas’s texts. The scenes containing physical, sexual, or psychological abuse are constant in the lives of female characters in her stories. The impact of these scenes in the perception of violence by the reader is undeniable, and Zayas pushes this violence to the maximum to place the female body at the center of her narrative, eliminating the possibility of ignoring these bodies, and with them the abuses suffered by concrete characters, individualized largely through the rapes and specific tortures they experience. But it is precisely when the bodies are enclosed, set aside, and confined that their presence is more evident, when their absence reveals the presence of the violent act.

Zayas’s stories introduce the reader to a universe characterized by suffocating cruelty, unlimited violence, and a paralyzing helplessness where female characters are enclosed, confined (sometimes physically and always symbolically) in a patriarchy prison that literally destroys and eliminates them. Zayas builds spaces for her stories that limit women’s world to a very controlled set of locations where their movements are also constrained and limited to their homes or close surrounding areas. The insistence on describing the spaces where women can conduct their normal activities and on emphasizing the different relation that men have with those same spaces adds to this awareness of the limitations on women’s movement and of the constant threat of transgressing those constrictions.

The domestic environment in which these women live does not offer a possibility of escape. Their stories are permeated by a heavy presence of repression and control that seems impossible to dissipate. As Noelia Ciriagliaro explains, “es necesario abordar la casa críticamente, no como el exclusivo dominio de lo femenino y de lo fino, sino como el escenario de una tensión entre el poder patriarcal y las formas de resistencia que todo poder genera” (17) (it is necessary to approach the house critically, not as the exclusive domain of the feminine and the fine, but as the scenario of a tension between the patriarchal power and the forms of resistance that all power generates).<sup>1</sup> The home is “la encarnación del estatus social y económico del varón y, por lo

tanto, también la arquitectura dramatizada de su experiencia” (17) (the embodiment of the social and economic status of the male and, therefore, also the dramatized architecture of his experience). Domestic space is used by patriarchy to control the female body enclosing it, limiting it, walling it in. David Castillo goes a step further emphasizing the feeling of fear that grows in those unfriendly spaces, which he appropriately sees as “galerías de horror”: “the shadows that lurk in our closed spaces are symptoms of the baroque horror (vacui) that continues to haunt the architecture of modernity. In this sense, one of the most important lessons we can learn from facing our baroque horrors (fictional as well as historical) is that the monsters come with the house” (xiii). I see the domestic space as the locus of a (voluntary or compulsory) captivity that even when it seems to be designed for the female protagonist’s protection, is in reality the cruelest prison and torture chamber. In these stories, domestic, bodily, and psychic spaces experience a process of conflation that make them reflections of one another. These three entities work simultaneously toward the portrayal of an association of home, body, and psyche that confirm and resist not only women’s physical and psychological abuse, but also their silencing and loss of a representative voice. At a physical level, women are confined to progressively smaller spaces where they are increasingly isolated from the world, sinking their bodies and their lives in the depths of loneliness and isolation. Elena (in “Tarde llega el desengaño”) ends up enclosed in her house in Gran Canaria (an island itself isolated in relation to the Iberian Peninsula): “ha dos años que la tengo, no comiendo más de lo que hoy ha comido, ni bebido, ni teniendo más de unas pajas para cama, ni aquel rincón donde está es mayor que lo que cabe su cuerpo echado, que aun en pie no se puede poner” (249) (For two years now I’ve kept her as you have seen. She eats and drinks no more than you saw her eat and drink today. She has only straw for a bed in that small cell scarcely as long as she is tall and not high enough for her to stand upright) (Boyer 158). In this passage, her husband describes an extremely small space that can only be accessed after crossing different stages that increase the distance with the outside world. The space is designed as Chinese boxes that eventually reveal at their center the isolated and tortured body of the female protagonist. As Amy Williamsen explains, “*Desengaños* . . . portrays the house as an instrument of torture employed against women” and the “house is the ‘architecture of patriarchy’” (646). In “La inocencia castigada,” Inés is locked up in a hidden, isolated room that her family buys, a torture chamber inside an apparently normal home: “En un aposento, el último de toda la casa, donde, aunque hubiese gente de servicio, ninguno tuviese modo ni ocasión de entrar en él” (283) (In a little room in the highest part of the house where not even servants would ever have occasion to go) (Boyer 192). She is hidden behind a wall inside a house in Sevilla: “en el hueco de

una chimenea que allí había, o ellos la hicieron . . . no dejándole más lugar que cuanto pudiese estar en pie, porque si se quería sentar, no podía, sino . . . en cuclillas, y la tabicaron, dejando sólo una ventanilla como medio pliego de papel” (283) (in the chimney space that was there or that they made . . . They left her only enough space to stand upright, and if she tried to sit she couldn't, except maybe to crouch a little. They walled her in leaving only a tiny hole the size of half a sheet of paper through which she could breathe) (Boyer 192). This type of walling-in is a punishment used since the Middle Ages against women accused of tarnishing their family's honor with their sexual behavior. Their bodies were understood as the origin of the “stain,” and the social reaction is to reduce them to isolation and annihilation once the woman has lost her right to be part of that society that has been violated with her transgressive “crime.” Even though on some occasions the *emparedamiento* was a voluntary decision, exercised by the victim herself (mostly for religious reasons), most often it was her family who decided to apply this type of punishment.<sup>2</sup> Zayas may have found the inspiration for her stories in several cases that took place in Spain as late as the sixteenth century, some of them discovered hundreds of years after they occurred. In fact, the so-called *emparedamiento* or walling-in did not disappear until the seventeenth century, and it was explicitly forbidden by the Synod of archbishop Ayala (Valencia, 1693). One of the victims was Ana or Antonia de Orozco, a woman confined behind a wall in the mid-sixteenth century in the palace of Las Torres, in the city of Úbeda (Jaén, Spain). According to a popular legend now collected in a book by N. Exvil, Ana was enclosed, dressed in a nun robe by her husband Andrés Dávalos, knight of the Order of St. James, *regidor* and *comendador* of the city, when he felt betrayed by his wife, much younger than him. In the first years of the twentieth century, a construction worker found Ana's bones, clothes, and rosaries behind a double wall.

The practice of violently confining women in their own homes is far from disappeared, even in the midst of social and legal systems where it is largely rejected and legally punished. Today, there are plenty of examples of women being kidnapped by their partners and in their own houses. In September of 2017, a woman and her one-year-old child were rescued by deputies while being held as prisoners in their Riverview (Florida) home. The woman's husband and his parents were taken to jail after being accused of beating her and holding a knife to her throat. According to the *Tampa Bay Reporter*, “Her husband had contacted his parents to tell them his wife was disobedient. The parents had come from India to help counsel and discipline her.” In Robertsville, Missouri, a UPS driver showed up to retrieve a package at a residence in December 2016 whereupon a woman who answered the door handed over a package with the words “Call 911” written upon it. Police rescued the woman,

who was being held captive by her husband along with their child for days without food or water. In July of 2012, West Virginia authorities arrested Peter Lizon, thirty-seven, on accusations that he kept his forty-three-year-old wife, Stephanie Lizon, captive and tortured for the better part of the decade, including leaving her shackled during childbirth. She showed burns on her back and breasts from irons and frying pans, and scars on her wrists and ankles. A Jackson County Chief Sheriff's Deputy stated that "This appears to go beyond abuse to what I would consider torture" (Goldman). In 2009, a woman lawyer was abducted at gunpoint in a parking lot and held hostage by her husband during a twelve-hour standoff with police in the home they once shared in South Windsor, Connecticut. During that time, she was handcuffed to an eyebolt on a basement wall, and he told her the house was rigged to explode and repeatedly held a gun to her head while he recited countdowns to what was to be her death. When he torched the house and it was literally burning down above their heads, the wife managed to unscrew the bolt while he was distracted and escaped. In July 2016, an Atlanta woman declared that she was tortured for days by her husband, who allegedly poured hot water into her ears so she couldn't hear her newborn and tried to blind her so she couldn't see the baby. Her husband drugged her with beverages before torturing her in front of their two-week-old baby boy and was also accused of tying the woman to the bed and cutting off her hair when she tried to escape. He also allegedly tried to remove some of her teeth and bite off her lip, and was likewise accused of stabbing her in the chest so that she couldn't feed her baby.

Visibility and denunciation of this type of violence are nowadays the most powerful tools that de-authorize it. Writing in a world that downplayed and normalized it, Zayas showed that the violence suffered by women was not normal and should not have been readily accepted. She proposed that society (and women themselves) cannot accept the status quo that tradition and custom dictate. She denounced what we know today as femicide (the killing of a woman or girl on account of her gender). She gave visibility to the unlimited violence that women suffered and the social impunity for these crimes. Few (male or female) authors from any time period have carried so eloquently the banner for the change of gender norms in her society, and her brave and determined voice leaves the reader with a lasting taste of being fed up with women's pain, suffering, and blood. And her indignation does not subside with the passing of time, like the evolution in her treatment of violence against women in the *Desengaños* clearly shows.

In Zayas's works, forced disappearances introduce a totalizing fear, because the confinement reproduces and refers to the more general confinement and isolation that society approves of for women. As the domestic spaces prescribed for women are scary and threatening, the wider world in which

women live is also a scenario of controlled and unavoidable fear. In their study concerning terror and violence, Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart point out,

Terror may consist in the realization, on the part of the witnesses who identify with the victims, that an act of violence is seen as legitimate by its performers and those “on their side.” This is particularly so when the act is concatenated with a perception that it is executed in pursuit of revenge and revenge is by the performers of violence equated with, rather than separated from, justice. (6)

In Zayas’s stories, violence originating in confinement is delegitimized. The narrators, who are introduced as the only authorized voices to tell these stories, identify with the tortured women and denounce the illegitimacy of the committed acts of violence, claiming that the power structures that validate violence are also illegitimate. The act of violence is therefore pulled apart from the concept of justice and it is equated to revenge, which reinforces the illegitimacy of the mistreatment. In this characterization of societal violence, it is pivotal that the spectacle of violence is built as the site of irreconcilable confrontation instead of as conciliation. Zayas’s *Desengaños* are marked by a dead-end pessimism and they do not offer solutions based on the perpetrators’ change of behavior. The last resource for the victims is to choose for themselves the conditions of their own confinement, seeking refuge in a convent that protects them from heterosexual relations and violence. The spectacle of violence in these texts works as a denunciation, but it also simultaneously cancels the possibility of transforming paradigms presented as inalterable or at least very hard to transform. Strathern and Stewart explain that “whether as acts of resistance, of torture, or of tyranny and subjugation, have played an important role in the reproduction of violent relations themselves, whether mimetically or dialectically. These spectacles may themselves embody political or cultural power and act to break down or reproduce senses of identity” (10–11) because “spectacles are indeed instruments of control reinforced by aesthetics” (12). What Zayas tries to do in her *novelas* is to invert the threat of the spectacle of violence as a power mechanism and instrument to destroy women’s sense of identity. This aesthetics of violence works in the *desengaños* as a tool to regain the power and the control lost in the violence itself. Overcoming the fear, literally re-writing the history of violence against women, transforming it from a destruction mechanism into an instrument to reconstruct an identity in



danger of dismemberment or annihilation, like the mutilated, dismembered, confined identity of the protagonists.

Zayas's novels denounce and encourage women to leave their state of victimization, accusing the real guilty parties and taking the lid off the secrecy and the guilt. As is well known, one of the most common myths that surrounds violence against women is that the victim is responsible for her own victimization. This is especially blatant in regards to the social understanding of rape, associated often with the image of the flirtatious, enticing woman, completely at odds with reality. Nowadays, we also know that rape, for example, is a crime commonly committed by an assailant that is known to the victim. According to the 2007 *Campus Sexual Assault Study* funded by the National Institute of Justice, at least one in five women will experience a rape or an attempted rape at some point during college, and 90 percent of these rapes will be perpetrated by acquaintances. However, only 12 percent of college rape survivors will report their experience to law enforcement authorities.

Against these misunderstandings, false accusations, and prejudice in general, Zayas proposes to take charge of language, of telling women's stories, breaking the silence and transforming the pain into a weapon that is re-born with each textual act. Elaine Scarry points out that "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Pain resists objectification in language, and Zayas pursues the goal of representing the un-representable with her insistence on placing female bodies struggling to survive torture and isolation before the reader. She insists on analyzing the nuances of bodily pain by introducing women in distress due to physical violence, and she hints at deepening the understanding of pain caused by psychological mistreatment of women in involuntary confinement situations. While Zayas succeeds at finding ways to effectively describe physical pain, she opens up the space to define what actually constitutes domestic/familial/marital violence, and her analysis of physical abuse is continually tied to concurrent psychological abuse. Since "*Psychological* suffering, though often difficult for any person to express, *does* have referential content, *is* susceptible to verbal objectification, and is so habitually depicted in art" (Scarry 11), the intermingling of both psychological and physical violence offers visibility (and even more important, referentiality and verbal expression) to often-suppressed female realities (both in early modern society and in our own contemporary world). Moreover, Zayas's stories create a textual scenery in which physical space offers a concrete and defined environment where pain can be located, contained, limited, visualized, and therefore also conceptualized and effectively portrayed and expressed.



The house (the walls, the floor, and so on) materializes the actual pain and psychological distress that the character suffers, making the pain visible and allowing its verbalization. “In torture, the world is reduced to a single room . . . It is itself converted into another weapon, into an agent of pain. All aspects of the basic structure—walls, ceiling, windows, doors—undergo this conversion” (Scarry 40). The fluid space where life happens (the streets, the church, the pre-torture home) disappears in Zayas’s stories and is substituted by a room where women are confined as punishment, planned and executed by their torturers. Physical and psychological pain take place in these sceneries where there is no easy way out for the victim who is in the room, and also for all other women, who are vicariously placed in a constrained, limited world. In “Amar solo por vencer,” the space is literally converted into an instrument of torture and annihilation when a wall is thrown upon the dishonored Laurela and her servant: “los que estaban de la otra parte derribaron la pared sobre las dos, y saliéndose fuera, cerraron la puerta, y el padre se fue a su casa, y el tío dio la vuelta por otra parte, para venir a su tiempo a la suya” (329) (the two men who were behind the wall knocked it down on top of the girls. The men left the pantry and closed the door. Laurela’s father went home and her uncle went for a walk so he could return home at the right time) (Boyer 236). The silencing, annihilating effects of torture expand further away from the actual room where it happened to affect other women and therefore position all of them in that room, under that wall: “Las hermanas de Laurela entraron, a pocos meses, monjas, que no se pudo acabar con ellas se casases, diciendo que su desdichada hermana las había dejado buen desengaño de lo que había que fiar de los hombres” (331) (Within a few months, Laurela’s sisters became nuns. They could not be persuaded to marry, saying that their unfortunate sister had disenchanted them about what they could expect from men) (Boyer 237). Laurela’s sisters and mother, even though at the beginning “pasó por desgracia la que era malicia” (330) (wickedness passed for mere misfortune) (Boyer 236), learn later from a maid the active role that their father and uncle had in Laurela’s death, “que fue causa de que su sentimiento y dolor se renovase, que les duró mientras vivieron” (331) (this intensified their grief and sorrow, which lasted the rest of their lives) (Boyer 237). The meaning of space mutates and expands as the pain and abuse that was caused by and inside that space is revealed to affect all women.

Therefore, pain in these stories achieves a preponderant status that pushes the reader toward the realization that the suffering transcends the individual case that is told in the story and permeates the sociological analysis that Zayas intends to move forward with her writing. Paradoxically, the concretion of the expression of a particular female character allows the realization of a systemic issue, the unfairness of a variety of manifestations of violence against women,

and the multiple confinements that women are subject to. The writer is herself also confined in a variety of ways that limit her ability to fully participate in the cultural tapestry of her world, and with these stories, she also vindicates the pivotal quality of her voice, her writings, and her often silenced creative ability to portray that world. The private and the public, the body and the mind, the personal and the political all come together to confront and counteract the goal of the violent acts against women, that is, “to make . . . the body emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it” (Scarry 49). In Zayas’s stories, pain (the big, blatant destroyer of language) is re-conducted through language toward the celebration of precisely that language. It specifically comes to celebrate and make visible not only women’s bodies and experiences, but especially women’s language itself and its capacity to resist its confinement.

In her analysis of pain and the effects of violence on women, Zayas proposes that the main function of domestic torture is depriving the victim of a voice of her own. Torture in this context plays a political role (eliminating women who question male power and control), and also a linguistic role, suppressing language through pain, as Scarry argues. This pain negates women’s humanity and manifests itself more often at a time of crisis of masculinity, depriving them of language and with it also of the ability to continue to destabilize the gender system. Gender instability translates into domestic uncertainty in this context. The house is a mixed space, where the public and the private overlap and where masculinity and femininity coexist, with a constant negotiation derived from the need to maintain differentiated roles in a necessarily shared location. Edward Behrend-Martínez explains that being a man in this Spain “includes keeping one’s word, supporting one’s family, heading a patriarchal household, demonstrating sexual prowess, sobriety, maintaining one’s independence of thought and action, and defending family and personal honor” (1074). The household is a pivotal space in the constitution of male power structures in this period, and the main scenario of the performance of gender power relations, and when those power relations enter a crisis, the space must be repossessed in order to attempt to recover the lost stability. This space is repossessed through violence, since violence was a determining factor associated to an acceptable male subjectivity. The display of violence in general, but especially after a public humiliation, were tolerable acts when performing a masculinity that has been questioned or is in crisis. Anthony Clare links this understanding of violence to a male honor culture that idealized a dominating, controlling male prototype who feels the obligation to respond with a violent act to a threat to his honor (and therefore to his masculinity): “Their very honour as men is at stake in every challenge, in every act of disrespect. Such men are truly men only if they are prepared to fight like

men” (36). When patriarchal hierarchies are questioned, violence is the first resource employed to re-establish male control. And this violence is linked in the texts to the control of the main space where male-female relations take place, which is re-possessed through imposing violent confinement and eliminating any agency associated to that space.

According to Scarry, “Although the torturer dominates the prisoner both in physical acts and verbal acts, ultimate domination requires that the prisoner’s ground become increasingly physical and the torturer’s increasingly verbal, that the prisoner become a colossal body with no voice and the torturer a colossal voice (a voice composed of two voices) with no body” (57). Zayas’s writings invert this imbalance using verbal acts, resisting in this manner the hyperextension of the torturer’s verbal control. Her texts are acts of resistance to the imposition of physical pain and verbal annihilation not only for her characters but in general, for victims of acts of torture and destruction, large and small, by physical or symbolic confinement.

A solution to escape the suffocation of a limiting and repressing space is confinement in another enclosed, supposedly liberating space that offers a desperate exit to an unsolvable situation. In the texts by Zayas that I am discussing, the convent is not a choice selected in freedom but a “lesser evil,” an escape to the precipice. As victims of rape/violence/murder culture, Zayas’s female characters can only find refuge and safety in a space where that culture cannot be carried out, where heterosexual sexuality cannot happen. In this context, heterosexual sexuality and rape culture are indistinguishable because “the image of heterosexual intercourse is based on a rape model of sexuality” (Herman 46). That is why marriage is the worst of confinements, where the most cruel and violent acts against women take place. Zayas understands marriage as a limiting confinement of which it may be impossible to escape alive:

no sé cómo tenéis ánimo para entregaros con nombre de marido a un enemigo, que no sólo se ofende de las obras, sino de los pensamientos; que ni con el bien ni el mal acertáis a darles gusto, y si acaso sois comprendidas en algún contra ellos, ¿por qué os fiáis y confiáis de sus disimuladas maldades, que hasta que consiguen su venganza, y es lo seguro, no sosiegan? (289)

(I do not understand how you can give yourselves to the enemy under the name of husband, to one who takes offense not only at your behavior but also at your thoughts, whom you can never please no matter whether you’re good or bad. Why do you entrust yourselves to them and trust in their dissembling corruption when if, by chance, you are caught in some offense

against them, you can be sure they won't rest until they've had their revenge?) (Boyer 198)

The husbands in Zayas's stories are normal men who can reach the highest levels of violence when their honor or their masculinity are threatened, showing what Dianne Herman summarizes: "rape evolves out of a situation in which 'normal' males feel a need to prove themselves to be 'men' by displaying dominance over females" when "maleness is automatically tied to a violent repudiation of anything feminine" (49).

Telling one's story of violence is one of the hardest experiences for a victim. The humiliation, the scrutiny, the mockery, and the indifference that these women often suffer are a continuation of the already-lived violence, reliving the trauma and re-enacting it in the telling itself. What in other traumatic experiences is an empowering act, in the violence against women, it turns against them, working as an excuse to deprive them of authority and using their story against them. That is why Zayas's discursive act is especially worthy, as it offers a protected and safe space where the stories of violence can develop and can be understood in a way that is not a new victimization for either victims or narrators. These stories have a testimonial component, since they appropriate individual torture in order to provoke a collective effect that transcends concrete experiences. Recovering the voice and the power that has been lost is the crucial mechanism that moves the action forward. Pain is re-elaborated through discourse, giving back to the subject in pain not only her humanity but also her capacity to interpret reality and re-appropriate her voice. Through what Primo Levi has described as "neither the lamenting tones of the victim nor the irate voice of someone who seeks revenge, but the calm sober language of the witness" (196), the text is a mechanism to infiltrate and transmit reality when all other forms of knowledge have been closed. The ultimate goal of Zayas's writing is not only recording the events, but more than anything re-thinking them and, as a result, transforming them for herself and for the reader, who will ultimately give final validation to the violence registered in the stories. The readers are put in the position of witnesses of the violence, and Zayas tries not only to elicit their compassion, but mainly to also shake them up, placing them in front of their own unstable corporality and of the injustice that plagues their world. In *The Anthropology of Violence*, David Riches explains that violence is "an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses" (57). The spectacle of violence surrounding Inés, Laurela, Elena, and Beatriz searches for witnesses who delegitimize those acts in order to discredit the performers, who represent the actual system that allows that same violence and that validates the misogyny supporting it. Zayas's main instrument in the construction of this discourse of domestic cruelty is the suffering female body, which reflects the

instability and the crisis that create that violence and allow it to happen. In Zayas's stories we can find resonances of what Hélène Cixous states:

Now women return from afar, from always: from "without," from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond "culture"; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to "eternal rest." The little girls and their "ill-mannered" bodies immured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves, in the mirror. (877)

Women must take the lead and tell their stories because this may be their only chance to conquer their own social space and question their confinement to the victim's role. This involves the occupation of the creative space by women: "With this purposeful exclusion of men from the narrative act, in other words, a certain liberation takes place and the imperiled female body becomes the focus of the tales. . . . Unleashed by the exclusion of the male narrative voice, violence against women reaches epidemic proportions" (Vollendorf 275–276). Women are not liberated from their many confinements (literal or symbolic) by the society that put them there, by their family or by the (so many times incomplete and unfair) laws. Their liberation must thus come from their discourse, from the voice narrating their stories and denouncing a reality that is hard to change, and that many times is not even recognized:

es género de pasión o tema de los divinos entendimientos que escriben libros y componen comedias, alcanzándolo todo en seguir la opinión del vulgacho, que en común da la culpa de todos los malos sucesos a las mujeres; pues hay tanto en qué culpar a los hombres, y escribiendo de unos y de otros, hubieran excusado a estas damas el trabajo que han tomado por volver por el honor de las mujeres y defenderlas, viendo que no hay quien las defienda, a desentrañar los casos más ocultos para probar que no son todas las mujeres las malas, ni todos los hombres los buenos. (Zayas 289–90)

(It's even a kind of passion or obsession in the geniuses who write books and invent plays to follow the popular misconception that, as a rule, casts all blame for all misdeeds on women. There is, however,

just as much to blame men for, and if men wrote about how men really are they would have saved these ladies the trouble they've taken to vindicate women's honor and come to their defense because there's no one else who does defend women. They've had to research the most extreme cases to prove that not all women are evil nor are all men good) (Boyer 199)

Women do not find solutions at the textual level of the plot. All of Zayas's protagonists either die or end up with great physical/psychological damage or, in the best of cases, choose a non-imposed confinement (but still confinement, even if we try to justify how this might improve their lives). It is in the text itself (in the act of telling and re-telling these stories) where Zayas, fighting against the injustice that relegates or undervalues women's writing, also proposes the possibility to confront other injustices, even as she seems to be aware that it will not be possible to eradicate them: "harta gracia fuera que si una mujer profesara las letras, no se opusiera con los hombres tanto a las dudas como a los puestos; según esto, temor es el abatirlas y obligarlas a que ejerzan las cosas caseras" (228–29) (It would be even better for women to profess in letters, for then they would cost men fewer doubts and more jobs. Because of men's fears, women are put down and obliged to do only household tasks) (Boyer 140). The writing of the story, the narration of women's suffering from an understanding (and activist) voice are the only possible paths from where paradigms can be changed and new sceneries can be tried where women are not only victims but governors of their destiny, while also governing the narrative created around that destiny. Beatriz, the protagonist of "La perseguida triunfante," writes her own life and exemplifies in one of the last stories in the *Desengaños amorosos* the powerful proposal that Zayas makes to truly break with women's social confinement. She is only one example of what would happen if all women followed this type of role model:

la señora doña Isabel de Ribadeneira, dama de mi señora la condesa de Gálvez, tan excelente y única en hacer versos, que de justicia merece el aplauso entre las pasadas y las presentes, pues escribe con tanto acierto, que arrebatada, no sólo a las mujeres, mas a los hombres, el laurel de la frente; y otras muchas no nombro, por no ser prolija. Puédese creer que si como a estas que estudiaron les concedió el cielo tan divinos entendimientos, si todas hicieran lo mismo, unas más y otras menos, todas supieran y fueran famosas. (230–31)

(Doña Isabel de Ribadeneira, lady-in-waiting to the countess of Gálvez and so outstanding and unique in her poetry that with reason she's earned the applause of past and present generations. She writes with such a touch that she wins the laurel wreath not only from women but from men as well. There are many others I don't name to keep from being tedious. You can be sure, however, that as heaven endowed these women with superior intelligence and they studied with great success, if all women could do the same, they would all have knowledge and be famous, some more than others) (Boyer 141)

We have recently witnessed how a number of women have denounced a prevalent culture of sexual harassment in the cinema industry. Many actresses at different stages in their careers were and are victims of powerful men who openly or subliminally threatened with destroying their careers unless they complied. A number of Hollywood directors, producers, screenwriters, and so on, have been revealed along with women's stories who reveal for the first time the harassment that had been silenced, sometimes for decades. This silence made them invisible and, even though this problem was an open secret, it is not until now that the protagonists have been able to tell their stories; these facts have gained a real entity and have acquired a centrality in the news world. The moment when the victims took control of their stories is precisely when they were finally able to abandon their role as victims and regain control of their past and of their lives. The writing of the violence their bodies suffered, of the physical and symbolic confinement and of the stories that have been inscribed in their memory and in their lives places their bodies on the spotlight, defying silence and forgetfulness. As Lisa Vollendorf notes, "Zayas's attack on the patriarchy reaches to the very core of this social system: the fundamental definition of patriarchy as a cultural system which deems the father head of family and state is criticized and its weaknesses exposed" (273). Zayas's protagonists have an unfortunate ending, but they walk through their mistreatment and martyrdom with dignity. The perpetrators are those who end up paying a terrible price for the violence they committed against their wives, daughters, or relatives.

Zayas calls into question the values of a society in which she is also trapped, as a woman and as a writer, in a world dominated by ideas such as those expressed by Luis de León:

es justo que se precien de callar todas, así aquellas a las que les conviene encubrir su poco saber, como aquellas que pueden sin vergüenza descubrir lo que saben; porque en todas es, no sólo condición agradable, sino virtud debida, el silencio y el hablar poco . . . Porque, así como la naturaleza . . .



hizo a las mujeres para que encerradas guardasen la casa, así las obliga a que cerrasen la boca. (190–91)

(it is just that they should be careful to be silent, those who wish to conceal their little knowledge, as those who can shamelessly discover what they know; because in all it is, not only pleasant condition, but due virtue, silence and speaking little . . . Because, just as nature . . . made women to keep the house locked up, so they are forced to shut their mouth)

The house that female training manuals like *La perfecta casada* (1583) prescribed as the female space par excellence, is transformed in Zayas's works into a locus of annihilation that contradicts the normative messages and leaves women without a refuge. With no escape, no safe place, with the home walls closing in around them and smashing their bodies and their subjectivities, Zayas's protagonists epitomize the suffocation of a time that can only offer a precarious solution to this confinement: the convent, which protects but also isolates, saves, but it does so at the cost of symbolic disappearance in order to avoid complete physical disappearance or death. Zayas portrays particularly well the transformation of the domestic space in these situations and plays with the protheic dimensions of domestic space to show how it can very quickly transform from a refuge to a prison.

Through her analysis of how space determines and reflects gender relations, Zayas defends the need to find a proper space for women in society, questioning and challenging cultural practices that confined women to a few controlled, limited locations. She denounces the violence that places a limitation on women's ability to move around and also to recover the capacity to control their own bodies, rescuing them from the literal and symbolic confinement they are subjected to. Telling women's stories of violence and pain, giving life to an alternative narrative that questions the well-established paradigms that determine gender relations inside and outside the home, is the proposal Zayas makes to overcome an unbearable situation. Between the lines, she also claims a space for women writers like herself and for female creativity in general, confined also to the margins of cultural life and condemned to irrelevance and disappearance, like the suffering bodies in her stories. The power of fiction is the key to opening up physical and symbolic spaces for women and to re-inscribing them in a new narrative. The cave where Beatriz is locked up in "La perseguida triunfante," the second to last *desengaño*, symbolizes women's reclusion and their lack of freedom in a visually powerful way, underlining at the same time one of the main themes in this collection of stories: the possibility of re-reading and especially re-writing those experiences in a way that favors women. Even without reading the autobiographical

account written by Beatriz, the reader can sense that it is a story of growth and liberation, not destruction and annihilation. “La inocencia castigada” reflects and mimics the dynamics of these stories and their role in Zayas’s writing. The meaning of the house is subverted with the telling of Inés’s story, from a male-dominated space to an instrument that validates Inés’s identity. As Judith Drinkwater points out, we can discern in Inés and in the mirror built in the story itself not simply the woman-victim, but the woman who survives her fate, who reintegrates herself as social being, and who re-creates her identity recognizing herself in the mirror of the text (158–59). Zayas creates a precedent of the #MeToo movement in her own way, denouncing the situation of women, creating alternative stories, challenging the ones that annihilate their subjectivity, and claiming wider, more meaningful spaces for them at home and in society. Reading Zayas and some of her female contemporaries, we realize that seventeenth-century Spanish women writers offer valuable stories that movements of today may benefit from recovering and reflect on from an informed perspective that illuminates a path to the end of gender violence and the confinement of women.

#### NOTES

1. All translations are mine, with the exception of Zayas’s texts, whose English version comes from the translation by H. Patsy Boyer.
2. See Cruz for an analysis of women’s voluntary walling-in in medieval and early modern Spain.

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