



FEMINISM AND MARÍA DE ZAYAS'S  
EXEMPLARY COMEDY, *LA TRAICIÓN EN LA  
AMISTAD*

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Over the last two decades, María de Zayas's *La traición en la amistad* has been transformed from a little-known and hard-to-find curiosity to a truly canonical play, available in multiple editions, anthologies, and translations, and included in both undergraduate and graduate reading lists and course syllabi. To be sure, this revival is in part related to Zayas's popularity as a novelist, although readers of Zayas's prose fiction will find that the presence of what Lisa Vollendorf has called "María de Zayas's early modern feminism" (*Reclaiming the Body*) is comparatively obscure in the play. Whereas the didactic notion of exemplarity as it was understood in the seventeenth century is central to the structure and discourse of Zayas's two *novela* collections, her only extant theatrical piece seems more ambivalent and ambiguous about what the playwright would have her audience learn. Scholarship on the play has thus far presumed of it a mode of exemplarity that resonates comfortably with the more explicitly stated purpose of Zayas's prose fiction, pressing the play's inherent ambiguity into the service of a protofeminist reading of all cultural production by women in the period. A fresh look at the play and its current reception among scholars suggests a state of the scholarship on early modern women writers that needs to be opened up to alternate methodologies and points of view. New lines of inquiry promise to shed light on what has thus far been occluded or marginalized by scholars,

including Zayas's keen awareness of the aesthetics of comedy that guide her satirical representation of early modern Madrid.

This study will address both the prescriptive and descriptive functions of exemplarity as they apply to Zayas's only extant play, a comedy of amorous intrigue conversant with the theatrical conventions institutionalized by Lope de Vega at the turn of the seventeenth century. As a case study of the relationship between early modern Spanish women dramatists and the feminist scholarship that has spurred the recovery and dissemination of their works in recent decades, critical reception of *La traición en la amistad* exemplifies the extent to which the lens of feminist critical theory has thus far dominated contemporary research on early modern *dramaturgas* to the exclusion of other concerns, such as their relationship with the aesthetic sensibilities of their male models for the dramaturgy of popular comedy. The feminist orientation of existing scholarship on Zayas's play is logical, as feminism's reshaping of the academic landscape since the 1970s is largely responsible for the publication of this and other previously ignored women-authored plays. By the mid-1990s, a number of anthologies and critical editions of previously understudied early modern Spanish texts of female authorship were published, an indication of the extent to which women's voices have come to play an important role in current early modern Hispanic studies.<sup>1</sup> We have feminist scholarship to thank for this unprecedented access, and new feminist readings of *La traición en la amistad* and other woman-authored dramatic texts continue to identify the myriad ways in which authorial gender inflects their composition.

Thirty years of research does not erase four hundred years of oblivion, however, and the dearth of contextual information available on Zayas and her female contemporaries limits what we can say about their reception in the seventeenth century, or about their participation in their contemporary Spanish popular theater industry. Apart from the exceptional case of Ana Caro, little evidence exists to suggest that the early modern women dramatists that we study today ever saw their works publicly performed. Until we uncover evidence of a public performance of *La traición en la amistad* in the

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1. The most important of these anthologies include Amy Katz Kaminsky's *Water Lilies*, Bárbara Mujica's *Sophia's Daughters*, Elizabeth Boyce and Julián Olivares's *Tras el espejo la musa escribe*, and Teresa Soufas's *Women's Acts*. Critical editions of Zayas's *novelas* and of *La traición en la amistad*, as well as of Ana Caro's plays, also appeared in the 1990s. A similar publishing "boom" has occurred in the area of monastic writings, including the work of Teresa de Ávila.

seventeenth century, then, reading the play in terms of its ostensible prescriptive exemplarity must remain provisional, to the extent that didactic discourse constitutes an act of communication between author and audience. As we see performances today of *La traición en la amistad* at theater festivals and academic institutions, it is natural to want to treat such performances in the same way as we do modern stagings of plays by Lope de Vega and his male contemporaries. But whereas our spectatorship of a classical play like *La vida es sueño* may be seen as a way to imagine the experience of seeing the play performed in the early modern *corral*, insofar as we know that such performances did indeed occur, we can only speculate as to the nature (and even the existence) of an original public audience of Zayas's play.<sup>2</sup>

Such speculation does, however, raise some productive critical questions that need further attention. If a didactic intent can be identified in the text, precisely what is the *exemplum* from which Zayas would have her audience learn? Indeed, who was Zayas's intended audience for this play? Of what importance is the possibility that *La traición en la amistad*, by all appearances a script for theatrical performance, was never publicly performed in Zayas's lifetime? When we read the play, are we reading a voice that was actively involved in the market-driven theater industry and later silenced by the patriarchy's master narratives of literary history, or something more like a closet drama, whose reception was from the beginning a private matter with no discernible impact on the public profession of theatrical performance?<sup>3</sup> If

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2. While such material evidence regarding the reception of Zayas's play remains elusive, it is noteworthy that the broader field of scholarship dealing with early modern Spanish women writers has increasingly turned its attention toward addressing our need for a more properly historicized interpretation of women's cultural production in the period. See especially Catherine Connor (Swietlicki) and Lisa Vollendorf (*The Lives of Women*).

3. My use of the term market-driven refers to the financial dependence of the emerging professional theater industry, including its playwrights, on ticket sales rather than on royal or aristocratic patronage. My use of the term closet drama is necessarily tentative in reference to Zayas. The political and cultural circumstances surrounding theatrical production in early modern England, which limited the participation of women in public spectacles, fostered a tradition of closet drama led by such women writers as Margaret Cavendish and Anne Finch. In subsequent centuries in such countries as France and Germany, the term becomes applicable as a proper international literary tradition. Early modern Hispanism, however, has identified no such tradition in which to contextualize *La traición en la amistad*. A related group of works may be identified in plays written by cloistered women, but in the case of María de Zayas, a seventeenth-century Spanish layperson, we have no evidence of a private community of readers for whom she may have composed her play. Marta Straznicky's *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550–1700* is an excellent study of early modern English closet drama, while Lisa Vollendorf's *The Lives of Women: A New*

so, who constituted the play's implied private community of readers or listeners, particularly in terms of gender? I pose these questions here not to attempt to conclusively answer them all, but rather to call our attention to the fact that the existing scholarship on Zayas's play has left such questions more or less untreated. Without a documented performance history, critics have shied away from questions regarding the play's reception. These circumstances may well explain why the issue of aesthetics has remained at the margins of the critical conversation about Zayas's comedy.

If we cannot know such details as would be necessary for a well-informed understanding of how Zayas's play descriptively exemplifies a woman's participation in early modern cultural production, ample scholarship has been produced dealing with the play's implicit prescriptive exemplarity. Understood in the wake of the medieval *exemplum* tradition as the moral profit that art offers to its consumer, the early modern notion of exemplarity is ideologically loaded, insofar as one's definition of "moral profit" is inevitably framed by her or his ideological, historical, and cultural circumstances. In early modern Spain, cultural circumstances and longstanding ideological conflicts created a literary environment that George Mariscal has characterized as "an intense competition between rival discourses" (*Contradictory Subjects*, 3). The ideological contest implicit in such discursive rivalry suggests that writing in the early modern exemplary mode entailed a negotiation of discursive authority, a notion that for such scholars as Mariscal and Anthony Cascardi is key to understanding the process of subject formation in the early modern Spanish state. While neither Cascardi nor Mariscal venture beyond the masters of the male canon in their studies, they do provide a critical framework for the analysis of early modern dramatic texts as polydiscursive sites of ideological negotiation—a framework that has intersected well with feminist, queer, and other gender-focused readings of the *comedia*.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, Donald Gilbert-Santamaría (*Writers on the Market*) has reminded us of the importance of considering the individual subject/reader/spectator also as a consumer, as a paying customer whose aesthetic demands exercised considerable influence over literary supply. Among the lessons to be learned from this fresh perspective is the importance of reception for our

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*History of Inquisitional Spain* is among the most comprehensive and current studies of the period's cloistered literary production.

4. An excellent example of such innovative scholarship is Sidney Donnell's *Feminizing the Enemy*.

understanding of aesthetics in the *comedia*. Lope de Vega's famous treatise *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* codifies for Gilbert-Santamaría the need to tailor dramatic composition to the tastes of the early modern *corral's vulgo* audience. The comic codes and conventions that Lope institutionalized were market driven, and early modern *dramaturga* scholarship has identified these same discursive practices as targets for both imitation and subversion by women authors. Like Cascardi and Mariscal, Gilbert-Santamaría does not explore these dynamics as they apply to women writers, but his omission is a necessary one, as we lack sufficient knowledge of their material relationship with the patriarchal professional theater industry. It is at this point, then, where the investigative trail goes cold: Was a *dramaturga's* inversion or subversion of gendered *comedia* conventions meant to be a publicly performed, ideologically subversive spectacle, or was it intended to be consumed by a private readership beyond the purview of public scrutiny?<sup>5</sup> Insofar as Gilbert-Santamaría's emphasis on consumption applies to the male-dominated theater industry initiated by Lope de Vega, for which ample evidence exists of commercial success and royal patronage, his argument is compelling. When such evidence is not available, as is the case with most early modern women dramatists, questions of consumption and reception are more problematic.

If we know little about how Zayas's play was received and consumed in the seventeenth century, we do know that her two *novela* collections, the *Novelas ejemplares y amorosas* and the *Desengaños amorosos*, earned her best-seller status. In this literary context of the fictive *novela*, Miguel de Cervantes offers ample evidence of how an author's understanding of his exemplary or didactic function can be difficult to pin down. That Cervantes's ideologically elusive *Novelas ejemplares* enjoyed considerable commercial success is indicative of how the literary marketplace for Baroque exemplarity did not necessarily depend on ideological orthodoxy. Along similar lines, Marina S. Brownlee has characterized Zayas's *novelas* as a departure from "Renaissance exemplarity" toward a more pluralistic "Baroque excess" (129). Notwithstanding such a reading, Zayas the *novelista* has been analyzed in terms that suggest that she was less interested in obfuscating her intentions than was

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5. While feminist theory now questions and problematizes the traditional public/private binary, the distinction I make here is less about public versus private resistance than it is about the potential audience inscribed in Zayas's text.

Cervantes, but that her interests were still far from an affirmation of the patriarchal status quo. Lisa Vollendorf, Margaret Rich Greer, and many others have consistently and persuasively linked her didactic intent to an emerging feminism or feminist consciousness in early modern Spain.<sup>6</sup>

I would argue that the feminist exemplarity we have found encoded in Zayas's *novelas* has impacted our reception of *La traición en la amistad* in a way that has displaced critical focus on the codes and social context of seventeenth-century Spanish theater. As we lack a clear picture of the play's reception and consumption in relation to the popular theater industry, it is difficult to address the extent to which Zayas's dramatic composition was influenced by the same market pressures that guided Lope's *arte*. Her own aesthetic appreciation of Lope's model is evident, in my view, in the play's comic sensibility, but there are elements at work in the play, such as conventional misogynist humor and nuptial closure (often read as feminine enclosure) typical of early modern comedy, that are not easily reconciled with the play's standard feminist interpretation. By omitting such issues from the ongoing critical discussion of the play, we fail truly to understand Zayas's relationship to the male-dominated *comedia* tradition whose codes and conventions she found worthy of imitation, even if often for the purpose of subverting them; we also fail to recognize the nuanced and complex negotiation of gender that makes Zayas's play so intriguingly different from her prose fiction. This lacuna suggests a need to engage critically the play as not just another *novela ejemplar y amorosa*, but as a drama fully conversant with the cultural *milieu* of the *comedia*. To be sure, Zayas's conversation with *comedia* culture (its literary conventions and material practice) is not unrelated to her more forceful engagement of the patriarchy in her *novelas*, but my reading of the play suggests a complex relationship that includes both imitation of her male models and critique of their codified representations of women.

For readers unfamiliar with *La traición en la amistad* but aware of Lope de Vega's formula for popular comedy as outlined in the *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, the plot of Zayas's play will sound familiar. The young bachelor Liseo arrives at court and inspires the desire of Marcia, a

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6. The bibliography on Zayas's *novelas* is extensive and still expanding, but the book-length studies by Greer and Vollendorf (*Reclaiming the Body*) remain standard references—and good examples of how Zayas's two framed *novela* collections are often read as a macrotext critical of the patriarchy.

*dama* who herself has been pursued relentlessly by Juan. When Marcia shows Fenisa a portrait of the newcomer, her friend is immediately smitten and plots to steal Liseo from her. We soon learn that Fenisa's betrayal is but one instance in a larger pattern of treachery, for no eligible male is off limits to her, regardless of any relationship he may have with one of her female friends. While the libertine Liseo reciprocates interest in Fenisa, Marcia discovers that he has already promised his hand to another woman, Laura, as a means of seducing her. When Laura begs for her help, Marcia renounces her love for Liseo and plots with her new friend to restore her lost honor, and to punish the traitorous Fenisa in the process; they are helped by Marcia's cousin Belisa, whose own lover (Gerardo) is yet another object of Fenisa's desire. A series of clandestine nocturnal meetings between Liseo and Laura, who is disguised as Marcia, procures a signed declaration of intent to marry: in effect Liseo is duped into honoring his prior commitment. The play ends both conventionally, with multiple betrothals (Marcia to Juan, Belisa to Gerardo, Laura to Liseo), and also unconventionally, with Fenisa conspicuously left alone.

The behavior of the play's *dramatis personae* leaves little doubt as to the satirical nature of the play, but further explanation is needed to consider the possibility of it performing any ostensibly prescriptive function. The same cultural context that conditioned the problematic notion of novelistic exemplarity is germane to the professional theater industry, insofar as playwrights hoping to profit from the public performance of their works needed at least to appear to both please and instruct, as the Horatian maxim prescribes. Increasingly since the 1980s, the methods and theoretical perspective of the new historicism have shed new light on the cultural circumstances surrounding early modern Spanish theatrical production.<sup>7</sup> We now know that the legitimacy of this cultural activity was hardly taken for granted in the seventeenth century, and that the more conservative voices of church and state authority considered it their duty to eradicate secular professional theatrical practice and close the public theaters out of fear of the moral peril it

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7. While neohistorical studies have provided invaluable "thick description" of early modern theatrical practice, their primary emphasis thus far has been on male writers. A newly published collection of essays edited by Rina Walthaus and Marguérite Corporaal, *Heroines of the Golden StAge* [sic]: *Women and Drama in Spain and England, 1500–1700*, is evidence of an ongoing shift in critical focus on *dramatargas* like Zayas, from an exclusively feminist analysis toward a more theoretically diverse array of approaches.

presented to the theatergoing public. The questions posed in a variety of legal and public documents can be summarily paraphrased as follows: How can the people of Spain (in particular women) be expected to behave as Christian morality dictated while attending public spectacles that extolled disobedience, dishonesty, and lust? In the face of such attacks, and under the continual threat of official prohibition, defenders of the theater (comprised of both clergy and theatrical professionals) countered with arguments for the public good and moral edification that the *comedia* offered. These pro-theater arguments often focused on the charitable destinations of profits from the *corrales*, including the funding of public hospitals, but they also countered the attacks against the moral content of plays performed with counterarguments attesting to the positive moral example that they set, in particular by privileging the holy sacrament of matrimony as their conventional means of closure.<sup>8</sup>

Over the course of the seventeenth century, then, the public theater developed amid controversy, and its practitioners were no doubt aware that lurking in the shadows of the audience at each performance was a functionary of the state charged with monitoring the spectacles being produced. It stands to reason that such a climate promoted the selection (for production) of plays that would be crowd-pleasers but that also were sensitive to the theater's precarious situation and reputation. In this context it seems no coincidence that many of the more celebrated male dramatists (Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Calderón de la Barca) also practiced a religious vocation in their lives, often at the same time that they were composing secular plays. The staging of the *comedia* was filtered through a common moral standard, that is to say, a standard defined and enforced by the hegemony through censorship, with a desire to demonstrate not only moral harmlessness but indeed to claim moral exemplarity. Whether this moral imperative (an imperative that the theater *have* a moral imperative, so to speak) should be read as a response to authoritarian standards and pressures or as the result of a sense of civic and moral duty on the part of the artist is not a question that could be answered easily or conclusively four hundred years after the fact; indeed, any ostensible notion of morality is highly situated in its historical and cul-

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8. The most comprehensive source for the documents that were produced in this polemic remains Emilio Cotarelo y Mori's *Bibliografía*. My own reading of the debate waged through this documentation is informed by the thorough analysis of this nonliterary discourse presented in Thomas O'Connor's *Love in the "Corral."*



tural circumstances. What is apparent in Zayas's play, as it is in many plays by early modern Spanish *dramaturgas*, is ideological ambivalence, despite the fact that feminist critical readings of their plays describe outright defiance, thus aligning them ideologically with the more explicit denunciations of male abuse of women expressed in Zayas's prose. Regardless of the extent to which any given *dramaturga* writes against the grain in ways reflective of her gender, we have yet to consider fully if she wrote for a mode of consumption that would have involved public (and hence hegemonic) scrutiny.

Nonetheless, in the case of *La traición en la amistad*, critical judgments regarding the coherence of the play's didactic message have sometimes been a function of its relationship with contemporary feminist theory. While some are more satisfied than others with the play's articulation of such a message, the general critical consensus has identified the play's "woman-centeredness" or gynocentrism as a distinguishing feature. Gwyn Campbell, Matthew Stroud, Catherine Larson, and others have pointed to Fenisa as a feminized Don Juan, reading her performance as a form of gender-bending negative exemplarity, while Valerie Hegstrom and Constance Wilkins have focused on the play's privileging of female friendship, in effect suggesting that Zayas represents the bonds of solidarity between Marcia, Laura, and Belisa as a kind of model behavior. Teresa Soufas has linked the play's dramatic focus on women to the work of other women playwrights of the period, both in terms of their common method of subverting *comedia* conventions and their carnivalesque inversions of patriarchal cultural norms. This comparative method of implicating Zayas's play with those of other women dramatists in a larger profeminist design has been adopted more recently by Lisa Volendorf, whose reading of the text as a dramatized exploration of female homosocial and homoerotic desire has significant points of contact with her readings of Azevedo and Caro, but also with her more extensive work with Zayas's *novelas* (cf. "The Future of Early Modern Women's Studies").

What stands out in the ongoing critical conversation about *La traición en la amistad* is the shadow cast over it by the synchronic and often more theoretically driven critical conversation about Zayas's prose fiction. As the title of Greer's book attests (*María de Zayas Tells Baroque Tales of Love and the Cruelty of Men*), Zayas the novelist offers numerous *exempla* of the amorous deception, the violent abuse, and the culturally pervasive victimization of women, a pattern that has been received by critics as an unequivocally harsh criticism of the patriarchy, especially of the men whose abuse of power comes at the expense of women. Zayas frames the *novelas* with a Boccaccian

running narrative of the interactions between the collection's male and female narrators and their own sexual dynamics—a frame that leaves little doubt as to Zayas's desire to make a strong statement in defense of women and in defiance of the patriarchal system that would prefer her, and all women, to remain silent. An oft-cited instance of such declarations through the frame characters is the final decision of the *sarao's* hostess Lisis, after listening to the various *exempla* of female victimization by the hand of jealous and misogynist husbands that constitute the *Desengaños amorosos*, to reject secular marriage and instead enter the convent with several of the group's other female participants. No doubt as a result of such an explicit authorial agenda, feminist critics interested in early modern Spanish women writers have found in Zayas a galvanizing figure. The benefit of such scholarship for expanding our knowledge of and access to early modern women's writing is self-evident. Its influence, indeed, has extended beyond the contextual barriers between literary genres and into our work with Zayas's theatrical production.

It is precisely these contextual generic differences—in other words the cultural circumstances of seventeenth-century theatrical activity, as opposed to those of its contemporary book market—that suffer, in my view, from reading *La traición en la amistad* alongside Zayas's *novelas* and the persuasive critical studies dedicated to them. Knowing her novelistic feminism as we do, we run the risk of applying similar expectations to her comedy; to this I would attribute the dissatisfaction of some critics, such as Soufas and Stroud, with the play's resolution, in which Liseo is duped into marrying Laura in order to restore the honor that his seduction and subsequent abandonment had taken from her. Would a contemporary audience in the habit of seeing popular comedies that end with betrothal, even an exclusively female audience, have been so dissatisfied? Is the play's conclusion a concession of some sort to the aesthetically and ideologically determined conventions of the *comedia*? Does the possibility that Zayas wrote the play at least a decade before publishing her more explicitly polemical *novelas* have anything to do with the apparent ideological discrepancy? In the absence of inquiry into such matters, current readings of the play often substitute our own arguably anachronistic expectations. An even riskier possibility is that, driven by our sense of what Vollendorf (as noted above, *Reclaiming the Body*) has called “María de Zayas's early modern feminism,” we apply this critical method as a procrustean bed—that is to say, that we distort the gender dynamics of Zayas's *comedia* to fit the mold of her novelistic feminism.

As I have already emphasized, this tendency is understandable given the dearth of information available about a play whose only extant manuscript from the seventeenth century was written by another hand. We know that contemporary male playwrights and poets praised Zayas's talents, and that, without naming the play, recognized that she had written at least one dramatic text. Even if we accept that Zayas wrote *La traición en la amistad* with the goal of its public performance, there has yet to be discovered any evidence of such a performance having taken place. In this contextual vacuum, the solid scholarship dedicated to her prose fiction has understandably filled the void. What remains to be accomplished, I would argue, is the messy task of reconciling the play's adoption of patriarchal dramatic conventions, including its treatment of a scorned *mujer varonil*, with its author's well-deserved reputation as a feminist novelist.

An excellent case in point is the problem that the character of Fenisa has caused for literary scholars. On the one hand, the ingredients of a prescriptively exemplary reading of the play are offered by numerous studies that have cited her isolation at the end of the play, punctuated by León's closing comments of metatheatrical derision, as evidence that her character is represented as a *pharmakos* or scapegoat, in other words, a negative example of female behavior. That the play's title refers most directly to her behavior would seem to support this line of reasoning. Such a reading of Fenisa as a kind of *figurona* is also compatible with arguments frequently made about the play's positive example, the bonds of female solidarity modeled by the ultimately triumphant triumvirate of Laura, Marcia, and Belisa.

A closer look at studies that have focused on Fenisa, however, shows such an "antiexemplary" take on her character to be more problematic than one might think. To the extent that she may be read as a female version of the Don Juan figure or "Doña Juana," as Stroud, Larson, and others have called her, her negative exemplarity is straightforward enough, and intertextual references in the play to Tirso's masterpiece offer persuasive evidence to that effect. For others, however, Fenisa's transgressions are read as precisely the textual manifestation of Zayas's feminist design. Campbell, Soufas (*Dramas of Distinction*), and Vollendorf ("Desire Unbound") have all shown the extent to which Fenisa destabilizes the cultural binary constructed around gender, a notion that resonates well with feminist critical theory; but if we are conscious of her role as the play's antagonist and antiexample, we are aware that it is precisely that defiance of the limits imposed upon her gender that get Fenisa into so much trouble. We are thus presented with two seemingly

incongruous readings: either Zayas would have her intended audience (or implied reader?) take up the cause of protesting the patriarchy's containment of women, or she would have us share in the derisive laughter that León offers at Fenisa's expense as the final curtain is drawn. In the game of not "musical chairs" but "musical lovers" that typically resolves itself symmetrically in male-authored *comedias*, Fenisa is conspicuously left alone when the music stops.

In my view this incongruity of readings reflects the complicated position of the early modern woman dramatist. Reading Fenisa as a positive proto-feminist *exemplum* (as Campbell and Vollendorf ["The Future of Early Modern Women's Studies"] have done) suggests that some connection exists between the play and Zayas's more explicit "early modern Feminism" as it appears in her prose fiction. Reading Fenisa as a cautionary anti-*exemplum* reflects the theatrical practice of her contemporaries, and possibly the *dramaturga's* desire to see her work performed for a paying public (regardless of whether or not such a performance ever materialized). That the play appears to want to have it both ways, so to speak, is indicative of the kind of internal psychological conflict that structures Stephanie Merrim's reading of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Los empeños de una casa*. Such is the nature of "female authorship" in early modern Spain, an oxymoronic notion within the ideological climate of the Counter-Reformation. Given the very public nature of the *comedia* and how controversial the participation of actresses was, it is logical that Zayas's representations of feminine desire and female behavior within the Spanish nobility are very different and perhaps more complex in *La traición en la amistad* than they are in the *Novelas amorosas* and the *Desengaños*.

In short, problems arise when we allow our readings of Zayas the playwright, with her ironic twist to typical *comedia* closure, to be defined too much by the Zayas that we have constructed from reading her prose through the lens of feminist theory. Symptoms of this tendency can even be seen in a broadly accepted reading of the play, namely, that it offers a positive model of feminine homosocial solidarity alongside Fenisa's treacherous and antisocial negative *exemplum*. In my view such a reading makes sense, but it begs the question that of course we cannot answer definitively: Who was the audience that Zayas had in mind when she wrote the play? If the play's triumvirate of loyal women is proposed as model behavior set against the *pharmakos* Fenisa, the implication is that Zayas wished to communicate her exemplary message to women. Was Zayas then imagining an exclusively female audi-

ence? Did she write only to entertain the *cazuela* and the *damas* seated above, *mosqueteros* and *caballeros* be damned? Or, was the play written for private consumption, such as an exclusively female closet-reading, or even a *sarao* such as that which framed her *novelas*? Does male readership (or spectatorship) therefore imply a voyeuristic experience, an unintended third-party witness to an early modern *écriture féminine*? Again, in the absence of any contextual detail, the familiar notion of Zayas's novelistic feminism seems to have filled the void. Zayas the defiant protest-novelist was a bestseller in the seventeenth century, when an unprecedented rise in female literacy was occurring; she was later silenced by the patriarchy's process of canonical exclusion in the nineteenth century. It is a compelling narrative that would suggest a mode of feminine exemplarity at work in the play, a didactic message that the patriarchy would prefer remain unpublished—as it did until the late twentieth century.

Of little use to such a narrative, however, is an alternate mode of prescriptive exemplarity at work in the play regarding its male characters. While Liseo stands out as the treacherous seducer of women for personal pleasure (the male role that actually is often included in standard feminist readings of the play and, tellingly, the male role that most closely resembles the men in Zayas's *novelas*), little has been said of the other two *galanes*, Gerardo and Juan. Both men begin the play as eligible bachelors playing the field, so to speak, and who show interest in the promiscuous villainess Fenisa. As the friendly alliance of *damas* plots to force Liseo to honor his obligations to Laura (a plot that also works against Fenisa's polygamous desire), both Gerardo and Juan come to reform their ways and dedicate themselves to winning the hand of a more respectable lady (Belisa for Gerardo and Marcia for Juan). After extended dialogues in which they profess their constancy and commitment, both men are rewarded. Between the three principal male characters, then, Zayas paints a varied picture of men at court, describing and prescribing both positive and negative examples of male conduct.

These and other considerations of Zayas's representation of masculinity by no means debunk the notion that Zayas wrote a play primarily about women for a primarily female audience, but they do suggest that the critical conversation about the play should not stop there. An exclusively gynocentric "exemplary" reading does not answer to all of the play's layers of intrigue, sexual dynamics, and especially its humor, which I consider to be unduly excluded from the discussion. Because it is of little rhetorical value to a reading of the play in line with our knowledge of Zayas the novelist, this

aesthetic dimension has often been swept under the scholarly rug. Here I am thinking in particular of León, whose misogyny seems disappointingly typical of a *gracioso* in the mold of the patriarchal *comedia*. His Act I tirade against Liseo's hypocritical praise of Marcia for her chastity (ll. 281–403) includes a celebration of the sexual favors he enjoys from Galician kitchen-maids (the Castilian servants, all mistresses of noblemen, are unavailable to the men of León's class). The male buffoon appears to generate comic humor at the expense of the women he disparages, just as when at the end of the play he offers to share Fenisa's address with the gentlemen in the audience. His first-act antichastity argument concludes, interestingly, with an *exemplum*:

Si no, mira el ejemplo: a cierta dama  
 cautivaron los moros, y queriendo  
 tratar de su rescate su marido,  
 respondió libremente que se fuesen;  
 que ella se hallaba bien entre los moros;  
 que era muy abstinente su marido  
 y no podía sufrir tanta Cuaresma;  
 que los moros el viernes comen carne  
 y su marido sólo los domingos,  
 y aun este día sólo era grosura,  
 y el tal manjar ni es carne ni es pescado.  
 ¿Entiendes esto? Pues si Marcia sabe  
 que eres tan casto, juzgará que tienes  
 la condición de aqueste que quitaba  
 a esta pobre señora sus raciones,  
 o entenderá que eres capón, y basta. (388–403)

Implicit in the *ejemplo* are the same essentialist and misogynist assumptions regarding woman's inherent sensual, sinful, and inconstant inclinations that dominate classical and premodern Judeo-Christian thought—an implication further complicated by the story's racial overtones. Explicit in the story's *moraleja* is the recommendation that Liseo aggressively pursue sexual gratification, lest his virility be questioned. In seventeenth-century Spain, as David Gómez-Torres notes (apropos of Edward Said), the *moro* is regularly employed by writers as a vilified "other" against which the national, cultural, and religious identity of Spain is defined, often through narratives of rape and violence against Spanish women. By choosing to teach his lesson

through a tale of *moro* aggression, León speaks subversively from the margins of his patriarchal Christian society in order to urge his master to abandon the rhetorical strategies (praise of the chaste lady, a topos of courtly love) practiced by that society's most privileged members. Insofar as he speaks from the bottom of the social hierarchy in humorous contrast to the *galán* that he serves, this *gracioso* is, in effect, conventional, but his is the convention from which one would least expect a protofeminist Zayas to draw for comic relief. Despite the play's clear focus on women's efforts to correct male error and female "treason," the aesthetics of the *comedia* are invoked by the play in a way that can only reflect a certain fondness for the male institution.

Along similar lines, when in dialogue with Liseo, León's misogyny serves as a carnivalesque and lowbrow gloss on his master's courtly rhetoric. This point-counterpoint exchange between the play's male antagonist and his lackey is in itself a fascinating presentation of alternate male discourses of desire that merits further critical attention. For every idealizing euphemism by which Liseo cloaks his womanizing desires, León's bawdy humor counters with a grotesque reply, echoing from below the master's lofty Neoplatonic and Petrarchan expressions of desire. This dialogic exchange between social registers, represented through the ironic juxtaposition of the disparate literary discourses of spiritual and physical desire, exploits for humor the same discursive tension from which a long line of Spanish literary masterpieces has drawn: the *Libro de buen amor*, *Celestina*, *Don Quijote*, and innumerable *comedias*.

Including Zayas with this illustrious (and conspicuously male) company has not been of interest to scholars when dealing with *La traición en la amistad*, and understandably so. We recognize that her gendered authorial perspective cannot be put aside in an effort to fit her more comfortably into patriarchal literary tradition, just as her male contemporaries did by labeling her the "décima musa" and "síbila madrileña" for her literary talent, which was to call her a creative genius able to rise above her sex to be worthy of male inclusion. What the present study suggests is that we should be wary of seeing the *dramaturga's* relation to her literary context only as in opposition to it, subverting its codes and conventions from the ideological periphery. Zayas's femininity does mean that she must write from the *comedia's* margins, but it does not exclude her from being an enthusiast of the theatrical activity of her day. Her manipulations and ironic juxtapositions of male discourse demonstrate a keen awareness of the craft of comedy and the methods that Lope de Vega had made a national institution. Her own aesthetic inter-

ests may not always help those of us who continue the important work of refining our feminist readings of the play, but they do help to explain those aspects of the play that seem to resist such a reading—aspects that point to the complex negotiation of gender that occurs in a play that, I suspect, has been read more often than not as an unequivocal rallying cry. Locating María de Zayas's own conception of *comedia* exemplarity requires that we separate it from our own ideologically informed expectations of the woman we know as a novelist and pioneer of an emerging feminist consciousness in early modern Spain. This is at least one example from which we may learn: Zayas the *dramaturga* challenges our prescriptive descriptions of her just as in the seventeenth century she challenged the patriarchy's descriptive understanding and prescriptive demands of her and her sex.

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