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### Love, Friendship, and Deceit in *La Traición en la Amistad* by María de Zayas

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LOVE, FRIENDSHIP, AND DECEIT  
IN *LA TRAICIÓN EN LA AMISTAD*,  
BY MARÍA DE ZAYAS

María de Zayas' play, *La traición en la amistad* is, like her novellas, a tale of amorous intrigue and conflict between the sexes.<sup>1</sup> The plot is based on several triangles made up of three *galanes* (Gerardo, Juan, and Liseo), four *damas* (Fenisa, Marcia, Belisa, and Laura), and a pair of servants (Lucía and León). For the most part their relationships are guided by the traditional treatment of love in the *comedia*. At the outset only Marcia and Liseo love each other, but their love is complicated by other characters. Gerardo also loves Marcia, and he spends a great deal of the play trying to be with her and complaining when she rejects him. While she does not dislike Gerardo, she perceives his love as a threat to her independence. Fenisa, Marcia's friend, also loves Liseo and, despite her friendship, she tries to disrupt Liseo's courtship of Marcia. In addition, Liseo is haunted by his prior dishonorable treatment of Laura, whom he seduced then abandoned. Her appearance and resulting friendship with Marcia is an even greater barrier to Liseo's love.

Moreover, there are other triangles, both real and feigned. Belisa loves Juan despite his abandonment of her, but he loves Fenisa. Even Lauro, whom we meet only once in his role as Liseo's friend, loves Fenisa (615a-b). Liseo is more in love with Marcia, but, as a *burla*, he leads Fenisa to believe that her love for him is reciprocal. Fenisa, while preferring Liseo, also expresses real love for Juan. In revenge for Liseo's affection for Marcia, she even tries to seduce Gerardo. These complications allow for an examination of various ways in which men and women approach the exigencies of love as well as a topic not often considered in the *comedia*, friendship among women.

The background for these actions is the conventional theme of love and the evils of passion, a favorite subject of Zayas (Foa 94-95). Love as passion is perceived by the characters as an external force over which they have no control (608b-9a). It enters through the eyes, generally as a result of the perception of beauty; all the *caballeros* idealize the beauty of the *damas* (602a, 604b). Passion confuses the senses and blinds reason, and leads characters to madness or jealousy or both (cf. 604b, 608b). Not all the characters react the same way, however, when confronted with the deceptions and exigencies of love. Of particular interest is the difference in the approaches to love taken by the male and female characters.

In general, the *galanes* are in competition with each other for the attention of the women. As a result, they treat each other as rivals, and they are possessive and jealous of the women whom they court. With regard to women, the *galanes* display three attitudes. First, Liseo and Juan try to maintain simultaneous relationships with women. As Belisa explains it,

“... también los hombres tienen cien mujeres/sin querer a ninguna” (616a). Second, Liseo and Juan have the additional masculine trait of having used love as a lure by which to deceive, seduce, and abandon Laura and Belisa, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Despite the awareness of male deception on the part the women, they still fall prey to the belief that a *galán* will honor his promise of marriage. The men’s attitudes towards women before and after conquest are quite evident in Liseo’s feelings about Marcia (his current love interest) and Laura (his past conquest). At one extreme, he idolizes Marcia as the incarnation of perfection:

¡Ay, mi León! que (en) sola Marcia veo  
 un todo de hermosura, un sol, un ángel,  
 una Venus hermosa en la belleza,  
 una galana y celebrada Elena,  
 un sacro Apolo en la divina gracia,  
 un famoso Mercurio en la elocuencia,  
 un Marte en el valor, una Diana  
 en castidad. (593b)

With Laura, after he has enjoyed her favors and replaced her as a love object, his love has turned to hate (595a-b; 603a). There appears to be no middle ground. As a result, these gentlemen (for indeed they represent the hypocrisy of the male-dominated world of nobility and honor) spend as much time escaping from Laura and Belisa as they do pursuing the favors of their new love interests.

The third male response to love is wounded pride and melancholy resignation when the object of his love spurns him. At one time or another, all the men suffer rejection. Juan is rejected by Fenisa (592b), and Liseo by Marcia (612a-b), but the character most representative of the *amante despreciado* is Gerardo. He, too, idolizes Marcia, but his love for her has been rejected at every turn. He spends most of the play complaining of his bad luck at being helplessly in love with a woman who doesn’t love him (596a-b, 597a, 606a). He is so determined to win Marcia’s affections that he even asks for Fenisa’s help in arranging a meeting with Marcia, rejecting Fenisa’s flirtations in the process (606a-b). It should be noted that, in a sense, he represents merely another side of the same masculine attitude represented by Liseo and Juan. There is no assurance that he would not abandon Marcia if she were to have sex with him before marriage. The principal difference is that he, unlike the other two, has been unsuccessful in his courtship of Marcia.

While the *galanes* represent the melancholy of the unrequited lover or the deceit of the man who has convinced his lover to have sex with him before marriage, León embodies traits common to *graciosos*: he is realistic and cynical, and he opposes the grand gestures, lofty speech, and idealized vision of the courtly lovers. As a representative of the misogynistic tradition, he believes that women are untrustworthy, greedy, unfaithful and lascivious (593a-94a, 612b), although he does not consider all these traits to be

completely negative. Indeed, he doesn't really understand why Liseo puts so much importance on chastity (593b). His many intercalated stories are unabashedly sexual and almost always imply criticism of those who profess chastity: they are either liars, hypocrites, or defective as men.<sup>3</sup> He also comments on the vices prevalent at court (593a-b) and the decline of civilization since the Golden Age (616a-17a), making him not only the chief proponent of *desengaño* in the play but also one of the most philosophical characters.<sup>4</sup>

If the *galanes* are noted for their rivalry, the *damas* are noted for their friendship. When they discover that two women like the same man, they react with shock and horror rather than rise to the challenge as the men do (591a-b). It is much more common that the women band together to help each other when confronted by the threat that men and their deceptions pose. Women in the Golden Age are often victims of men's deceit and faithlessness. They begin by believing the promise of marriage, thus having sex with the man before getting married. Once they are abandoned, they must suffer the consequences and, in the case of this play, attempt to regain their lost honor (598a, 600a-601a, 608b-609b). Curiously, Belisa and Laura appear to be still in love with the men who abused them (598a-b, 601a-b), so that the plot motivation is doubled: not only will their honor be restored but they will also marry the men they love. They complain about their unjust lot, as does Marcia, “Bien dijo quien decía/mal haya la mujer que en hombres fía” (611b; cf. 607a, 608b-9a). However, once the damage is done, they work diligently to achieve justice; they are not helpless (cf. Vasileski 54). Marcia, Laura, and Belisa work together to get Liseo to honor his promise of marriage; Liseo is caught by means of a deceptive trick. Having informed him that Laura has entered a convent (600b-601a),<sup>5</sup> Marcia and Laura disguise themselves as Belisa and Marcia, respectively, and coerce from him a signed pledge to marry Laura, whom he believes to be Marcia (610b-11b). Although both men and women use deceit in the game of love, there is a substantial difference between the two. The men use the deceptive promise of marriage as an offensive tactic to lower the resistance of the women. Once he has sex with her, he abandons and despises her. Women use tricks as a defensive mechanism to induce the men to honor their promises to marry them. In other words, they fight *engaño* with *engaño*, as Belisa explains to Liseo:

Laura será tu mujer  
a quien (es) tu fe deudora,  
que si engañando has vivido  
y de ti engañada ha sido,  
hoy tu engaño pagarás,  
y por engaño serás  
a tu pesar, su marido. (613b)

Men use deceit to dishonor in a selfish and socially disruptive effort to gratify their passions. Women use deception for honorable purposes to maintain

social harmony; it is one of the few tools at their disposal given the limited power of women in the society.

Marcia, unlike Laura and Belisa, uses the other tool of the honorable woman; she says “no.” She is not a true *mujer esquiva* because she is willing to entertain Liseo. Her rejection is limited to Gerardo, whom, if the world were just and perfect, she would love (591a-b). While she doesn’t actually dislike Gerardo, she is overwhelmingly attracted to Liseo. Since passion is not rational, she cannot easily create a corresponding love for Gerardo through logic and reason, although she does come to sustain a reasoned love for him (607a, 609b-10a). Too, Marcia resists Gerardo’s love because to succumb to his overtures just because he is a man who loves her would be to abdicate much of her control over her own life (591a).<sup>6</sup> Fortunately for her, she is able to pursue her love for Liseo without losing Gerardo’s.

At last we come to Fenisa, clearly one of the most interesting characters in her remarkable ability to manipulate others. Fenisa, as she states repeatedly, loves many men:

... a todos cuantos quiero yo me inclino,  
 los quiero, los estimo y los adoro;  
 a los feos, hermosos, mozos, viejos,  
 ricos y pobres, sólo por ser hombres.  
 Tengo la condición del mismo cielo,  
 que como él tiene asiento para todos  
 a todos doy lugar dentro en mi pecho. (614b; cf. 592a, 594b, 605a-b, 614a)

It is not, in her own opinion, hypocrisy, because the love she feels is real (614a-b). As a result of her love, she is also prone to jealousy (614b), now magnified because of the many men of whom she is possessive. With respect to Liseo, she is jealous of Marcia (604a-b, 614a-b); with Juan, she is jealous of Belisa (613b-14b, 618a-19a.). Because she is a *comedia* character, it is no surprise that her jealousy should lead her to take revenge on other characters for their inattention to her. She threatens to punish Juan for his jealousy by not returning his love for her (592b), she attempts to use Gerardo as an instrument of revenge against Marcia and Liseo (606a-b), and, in a jealous rage, she even threatens to kill everyone (614a).

Love is not the only reason Fenisa entertains many men, however. She also wishes to avenge the deception that men habitually perpetrate on women:

Gallarda condición, Cupido, tengo,  
 muchos amantes en mi alma caben,  
 mi nuevo amartelar todos alaben  
 guardando la opinión que yo mantengo.  
 Hombres, así vuestros engaños vengo;  
 guardémonos de necias que no saben,  
 aunque más su firmeza menoscaben,  
 entretenerse como me entretengo. (605a)

She is thus not only a *burladora* but a *vengadora de las mujeres*, placing her in the tradition of the *mujer varonil*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, there are many ways in which

Fenisa acts more like a man than a woman, given the conventional roles assigned to each sex in the *comedia*. Men are notorious for engaging in multiple amorous liaisons, much to the distress of the women involved. Fenisa, too, aggressively manipulates and deceives others to maintain several simultaneous love interests (592a-b, 594b, 604a). Like Liseo, she tries to maintain exclusive relationships with more than one person without abandoning any. Too, Fenisa exerts real power over the other characters, seducing men with promises of love (sex) and betraying her women friends in the process. She is, in short, a kind of Doña Juana.

One distinguishing mark of Don Juan is his ability to deceive and humiliate women and the men who love them by using sex and the promise of marriage.<sup>8</sup> A female Don Juan, in order to trick and shame her victims, would not necessarily need to use the same sexual strategy. Indeed, a woman who had sex with many men in a *comedia* would not only bring disrepute upon herself, but would in the end enhance the reputations of the men as lady-killers. Instead, she would take advantage of the other side of the sexual coin in the male-dominated world of the *comedia*: the vulnerability of male pride. Because all men are expected to pursue women relentlessly, a woman could most easily scorn a man by building up a man's hopes and then dashing them in rejection. As Lucía points out, Fenisa loves many men but she also loves none of them; she uses men's desire for her own purposes, as does Don Juan, but only to a point. Unfortunately for Fenisa, what is perhaps acceptable for a man creates added problems for a woman. Men who pursue many women are merely discharging their roles as *galanes*; Fenisa runs the risk of losing her honor just by encouraging more than one man (608a-b).

Fenisa's actions do more than displease the male characters; they are treasonous to the other women. While men who compete with and manipulate each other are merely fulfilling their roles as rivals, women who manipulate each other betray the friendship that exists between women. Friendship among women, “amistad santa” in Fenisa's own words (594b), is more than a pleasant emotion. It is bond of loyalty and virtue. Marcia immediately renounces her love for Liseo when she hears Laura's story; as a *dama principal* she cannot help but resent Liseo's dishonorable affront to all women (600b). Friendship, unlike love, is still considered a pure emotion not yet corrupted by deceit and distrust. Fenisa breaks ranks with the other women in their united struggle against men's deceptions; she betrays their trust as she attempts to manipulate the men. What is worse, she betrays them knowingly; she is quite aware of her decision to prize love over friendship:

... el amor y la amistad  
furiosos golpes se tiran;  
cayó el amistad en tierra  
y amor victoria apellida;  
téngala yo, ciego Dios,  
en tan dudosa conquista.

(591b; cf. 594b)

Fenisa is guilty of a serious social crime; in military terms, she has committed treason (601a, 606b). Throughout the play we are told that what she is doing is bad, and that false friends are contemptible and deserve the punishments they receive (601a, 606b, 608a, 614a-615b, 618b, 619b-20a). That her own efforts are in fact revenge against men's deceptions does not absolve Fenisa of her betrayal of friendship.

The resolutions of the amorous complications are not on the surface surprising. Belisa convinces Juan to marry her and forget about Fenisa. As she tells him that she still loves him and that he should fulfill his obligation to marry her, he falls more in love with her than ever. It seems that her expressions of righteous anger excite him, and he accepts his responsibility to marry her (601b-3a). Laura's triumph over Liseo comes during an ironic moment in the last scene. When Fenisa asks Liseo to marry her, he says that he cannot because he is obliged to marry Marcia. Laura then reveals herself and tells him how he has been tricked. Seeing the paper he signed, he agrees to marry her. Marcia, noting Liseo's untrustworthy nature, realizes that she will be better off by accepting the love of Gerardo (607a, 609b-10a). To make the final scene of multiple marriages complete, Lucía and León too will wed. For Gerardo, Belisa, and Laura, marriage is the culmination of their love desires, the joyous bonding of love subject and love object, and, for the women, the restoration of the honor they lost when they gave themselves too easily to Juan and Liseo. Fenisa alone is denied this reward; according to León, her punishment for her betrayal of her friends and her sex role is to remain unmarried (620a).

This moral lesson, however, has a rather hollow ring to it. Implicit in the outcome of the play is the idea that marriage is a good thing; it represents order restored (Reichenberger 307). Unspoken but equally important, however, is the subordination of personal desire to social harmony.<sup>9</sup> For individuals, marriage is not always equally good (or bad). For Juan and Marcia, marriage symbolizes their resignation to love the one who loves them and to forget any other love interests they had. Their marriage is the triumph of reasoned love over passion. For Liseo, having been tricked into marrying Laura, marriage is punishment for having abandoned her earlier. Moreover, there is little basis for us to assume that Liseo will abide by a paper bearing his name when his verbal promise is not to be trusted. His acceptance of Laura as his wife is weak, his promise hinging as it does on a begrudging “pues:” “Esta es mi mano, y con elle/el alma, pues, será tuya” (619b).<sup>10</sup> Laura may still love Liseo, but it is hard to believe that she will be happy married to a man who does not love her and who has a proven record of philandering.

With marriage as a force more for fulfilling social obligation than for an expression of mutual love, we must ask about the nature of Fenisa's punishment. For someone like Fenisa, the denial of a marriage partner seems like light punishment indeed, as though Don Juan's punishment were to remain a bachelor all his life. Throughout the play, she has shown little

inclination toward marriage. We have seen that her interest in men was two-fold: she enjoys being in love with many men, and she enjoys humiliating them in revenge for the deceptions they perpetrate on women. Neither motivation results in marriage. Despite her protestations in the final scene, Fenisa only begins to want marriage when she realizes that the men with whom she is in love will no longer be available. Moreover, Liseo is hardly a perfect marital choice considering his past history. Finally, given the nature of the Court in the *comedia*, Fenisa would only have to set her sights on another man if she is really intent on marriage. Thus, the moral of the final scene is quite weak if we consider the loss of marriage to be Fenisa's entire punishment.

There are three possible interpretations of such a weak ending. First, we might conclude that Fenisa's isolation has more to do with the women than with the men. By this reasoning, Fenisa is deprived of something more valuable than marriage, her friendship with the women. Marriage appears seen to be mixed blessing; people get married for many reasons, and not always because they want to. Friendship, on the other hand, is an unalloyed virtue. Fenisa betrayed her friends; for that she is to be utterly condemned. At the final curtain, Fenisa has lost much more than the possibility of a husband. She has lost her place in the society of her acquaintances. Friends are not easy to come by, as she, in her isolation, will discover.

Second, the ending may be intentionally weak to underscore Zayas' contention that women, regardless of their individual mistakes, are victims of men: “Y lo cierto es que no hubiera malas mujeres si no hubiera malos hombres” (*Desengaños* 10). Fenisa can never be fully to blame for her actions because the deceit and manipulation on the part of the men drove her to imitate their actions. Too, there is the implicit criticism of the disparity in the standards of action for men and women. Liseo and Juan, male Don Juans, are reassimilated into society. Fenisa, whose actions are less aggressive and destructive, is punished by exclusion. Because she is a strong woman, she is a *pharmakos* to be expelled from society because of her potential for social instability.

Third, there is the question of genre. Compared to prose fiction, the *comedia* appears to allow for much less diversity in plot development. Avalor-Arce (346-47), regarding Lope's wife-murder *novela*, *La prudente venganza*, noted that Lope's argument in favor of pardon rather than revenge would have been wholly unacceptable on the stage, where audiences demanded certain conventions of dramatic plots. But, because he was writing prose, Lope could undertake a dialogue with the reader and indulge in the luxury of reasoned contemplation. The prose author in general could express personal opinion much more freely than the *comediante*.<sup>11</sup> The same may be the case with this play. Zayas' feminism, so apparent and forceful in her *novelas*, is subdued and only implied in the *comedia*. To succeed, the Golden Age play had to end with a death or a marriage or both, regardless of the personal wishes of the author or the



effect of such an ending on the thematic structure of the play. Feminist thought as Zayas presented it in her novelas was simply not possible in the *comedia*.

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### Notes

1. Foa (84-86) notes the prevalence of plot material based on the tension between the sexes in Zayas' novelas (cf. Vasileski 51). Because there is so little critical bibliography on Zayas' play, studies of her prose works, such as those by Foa, Place, Sylvania, and Vasileski, are the best sources for discussions of Zayas' works in general. Both Foa and Vasileski contain bibliographies of other studies of Zayas' novelas.

2. Although pale by comparison, the abandonment of a woman might be considered an example of masculine cruelty and lasciviousness, favorite themes of Zayas (Foa 95-98; cf. Levisi). In the play, Belisa uses “crueldad” to describe Juan's actions (608a).

3. León's first story (594a) concerns a woman captured by the Moors. When her husband came to rescue her, she preferred to remain with her captors because her husband did not have sex with her often enough. The second tale (595b-96a) is about a priest (León's grandfather) who was so given to carnal pleasure that at his burial all the children of the town cried “¡ay, mi padre!” He had at least twelve children, that is, one less than the bishop. The third story relates that the same grandfather liked young women so much that he traded a fifty year-old housekeeper for two twenty-five year-old maids. His fourth narration presents a man complaining about the decline in morals and standards (616a-17a), which is followed by Belisa's fable of the lion, the wolf, and the vixen in which the female outwits the male (617a-18a).

4. The theme of *desengaño* and rejection of this world is another prominent Zayas theme. León is an opponent of the artificiality of courtly love and the hypocrisy of the cult of chastity, especially in light of the sordid reality at court.

5. Zayas often has women enter convents after they have been abandoned by their lovers or when they wish to hide from irate husbands (Foa 88; Vasileski 38-40). It is interesting that in this *comedia* Laura does not actually take the veil but instead uses the idea of the convent to catch Liseo. Since Laura is not the only female protagonist, her entering a convent would effectively remove her from the play and would therefore be a poor choice dramatically.

6. It is quite typical of Zayas to emphasize the rights which a woman should have had that were so often denied to her (Sylvania 7-17; Foa 85, 106-110).

7. McKendrick discusses not only the avenger of women but also the *mujer esquivia* whom Fenisa somewhat resembles. Usually the disdainful woman wants a relationship with no man; in Fenisa's case she wants all men and no man at the same time. Place (55) makes the rather superficial observation that Fenisa is a “real flesh-and-blood coquette of the times.” A coquette would not have pursued men so actively. Place further asserts that Marcia, not Fenisa, is the heroine of the play. He describes her as headstrong and romantic, but sensible and kindhearted.

8. This characteristic is by no means the only one ascribed to Don Juan. See Weinstein, whose concept of Don Juan as trickster I have used here.

9. Foa considers Zayas' less than idealized concept of marriage to be a considerable departure from tradition (86). As we noted above, Zayas' heroines often prefer the convent to marriage (88).

10. Liseo's reluctance in the final scene points out the irony of this earlier assertion that he would have married Laura if she hadn't already entered a convent (610b). Considering the circumstances under which he makes such a statement, we can say that it is motivated more by frustration with Fenisa than by desire for Laura.

11. Cf. Menéndez Pidal 154. For more on the importance of audience taste in the production of *comedia* plots, see Green.

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