

2001

# Artistry and Irony in María de Zaya's *La inocencia castigada*

Matthew D. Stroud  
Trinity University, [mstroud@trinity.edu](mailto:mstroud@trinity.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/mll\\_faculty](http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/mll_faculty)



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

---

## Repository Citation

Stroud, Matthew D. "Artistry and Irony in María de Zaya's *La inocencia castigada*." *Zayas and Her Sisters, 2: Essays on Novelas by 17th-Century Spanish Women*. Ed. Gwyn E. Campbell and Judith A. Whitenack. Studies on Spanish Classical Literature 1. Binghamton: Global ICGS, 2001. 79-95.

This Contribution to Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Languages and Literatures Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).

## Artistry and Irony in María de Zayas's *La inocencia castigada*

MATTHEW D. STROUD

By the time María de Zayas published her *Desengaños amorosos*, the honor scenario, due in large part to the dominance of the *comedia* and especially of Calderón, had taken on a number of characteristics that today seem inseparable from the familiar plotlines. A noblewoman, usually innocent of adultery but loved by another man, is believed for one reason or another to have dishonored her husband. He proceeds to verify that the affront has indeed been committed, and, upon (wrongly) coming to believe that his wife is guilty, undertakes to have her killed in secret so that his honor will not suffer from even the faintest whisper of scandal. The thematic conflicts of this scenario are subtle but powerful: truth versus appearance, justice versus revenge, love versus honor, the freedom of men versus the constraints on women. An extraordinary amount of *comedia* criticism has dealt specifically with what an audience is to make of this plotline: is it an affirmation of the oppression of women by a patriarchal system, or is it an ironic condemnation of the husband who, too quickly and therefore erroneously, punishes his wife for deeds she did not commit? Zayas's story, *La inocencia castigada*, poses anew a number of these questions, but her *novela* is utterly unlike any Calderonian plot.

This story, like the others in her *Novelas* and *Desengaños*, is told in the context of a soirée in which women tell tales designed to warn of the terrible treatment men inflict on them, and much of the criticism of these stories has accepted the feminist, or at least proto-feminist, perspective. Seen from this point of view, this *sarao* is no idle pastime; for the women who tell these stories, it is a “guerra contra los hombres” (145)<sup>1</sup>, a phrase, among many others, that has led numerous critics to view these stories first and foremost as a feminist argument against the abuses of women by men. For these critics, Inés, like the other women who suffer at the hands of men, embodies the inevitable oppression of women who try to create their own discourse in a society that does not recognize their existence as subjects; Inés is repeatedly reduced to an image or an object to be dominated and violated by men (Routt 620). For Whitenack, Inés's tragic plight serves to warn males that a neglected wife is susceptible

---

<sup>1</sup> All citations to *La inocencia castigada* and its prefatory *Noche segunda* are from the anthology *Zayas and Her Sisters*, 1, ed. Judith A. Whitenack and Gwyn E. Campbell.

to seduction; many of the unfortunate turns in the plot arise due to the unfulfilled sexual needs of the beleaguered protagonist (186). In a more general sense, the didactic purpose of all of Zayas's novels is paramount (Foa, *Feminismo* 101). Men are uniformly evil; they exemplify lust, anger, pride, cruelty, and deceit (Foa, *Feminismo* 95, 96, 116); there is "a pervasive masculine paranoia of female freedom, especially sexual freedom" (Vollendorf, "Reading" 277). As a result, there can be no possibility of a harmonious relationship between women and men (Foa, *Feminismo* 78, 85); love is reduced to lust, violence, unbridled desire, and perversion (Foa, *Feminismo* 94). Zayas "contests openly the masculine idea of order epitomized by the quasi-cosmic social harmony of the *comedia*'s happy marriages" (Maroto Camino 530). Her novels are peopled by strong female characters in the *Novelas* and "pervasive victimization and terrorization" (Vollendorf, "Our Bodies" 95) in the *Desengaños*, the latter allowing a unique opportunity "to allow women's voices to be heard" (Vollendorf, "Our Bodies" 98) as they provide shocking testimony of "the violated female body as a testimony of misogyny" (Vollendorf, "Reading" 277). Zayas is so perceptive that she is even able to present cases of psychological abuse, a very modern concern only recently taken into account in the struggle to protect women from men (Vollendorf, "Reading" 277). Worse yet, these *novelas* are taken to be more than mere fictional entertainment; they accurately and realistically represent a hellish contemporary society marked, in Foa's words, by "crueldad, lascivia, traición, odio, guerra, y, sobre todo, desengaño" (*Feminismo* 73; see also 74, 85). The horrible treatment of women in these plots is nothing less than the "verdadera situación de la mujer en la época" (Foa, "María de Zayas" 129); Zayas's *novelas* have a "condición propia y singular suya: un constante y profundo realismo" (Vasileski 113; see also Amezúa xv-xxvi, xxv).

At first glance, *La inocencia castigada* is indeed a powerful cautionary tale about the evil men do even to completely innocent women. Unlike the situation in similar *comedias*, here we know for sure that Inés knowingly had no part in the dishonor of which she is accused. She is victimized by four different men: her brother, who kept her virtually in prison, a "terrible condición" (153), before marrying her off to a nobleman of Sevilla without regard for her desires; a young nobleman, Diego, who sees her and falls immediately and insanely in love with her, leaving him in a state of "loca desesperación" (153), "sin juicio" (153); a Moor, "gran hechicero y nigromántico" (162) who uses his black arts to help Diego fulfill his desire to be with Inés; and her husband, more of a tyrant than a loving companion. The poor Inés, although anxious to leave the house of her oppressive brother, did little better with her marriage: "antes de dos meses se halló, por salir de un cautiverio, puesta en otro martirio" (152). These four men serve quite well as examples of the evil men do, as embodiments of the generalizations the narrator and the storyteller make about men: they are driven by their own desire (145), they are fickle (151), they speak ill and lasciviously of women (151), they are cruel (151, 173) and arrogant (152), and in general un-

trustworthy: "Pues en cuanto a la crueldad para con las desdichadas mujeres, no hay que fiar en hermanos ni maridos, que todos son hombres" (173). For Vasileski (84), the men, especially Inés's husband, deserve all the blame for her suffering.

Inés, on the other hand, is a "perfecta casada," to use Fray Luis's term: she is obedient and does everything she is supposed to. She accepts her marriage graciously: "como no tenía más voluntad que la suya, y en cuanto a la obediencia y amor reverencial le tuviese en lugar de padre, aceptó el casamiento . . ." (152). When Diego begins to follow her around and even serenade her, she is so innocent that she cannot imagine that he is courting her; since she is married, she assumes that it must be some other woman on her street who is the object of his attention (154). Diego, as the typical lovesick young man, cannot bring himself to respect her honor or that of her husband; his insane desire drives his actions, setting up the familiar conflict between the desire of the lover and the honor of the married couple. After he is deceived by a neighbor, he reproaches Inés for her coldness to him. He simply cannot believe that she does not love him as much as he loves her (159), and he employs the Moor to devise an enchantment to bring Inés to him whenever he wishes. By lighting a candle in order to invoke dark forces, Diego can summon Inés to his house; she, completely unaware, cannot resist.<sup>2</sup> He brings her to his house several times until one night Inés is spotted en route in a nightdress by the *corregidor*, his ministers, and Inés's brother (165-66). The spell and Diego's plot are uncovered, but to make sure that Inés is not a willing participant in these nocturnal trysts, the authorities order the candle lit in several different places. Each time Inés, in a trance, goes to the location of the candle. She is absolved of any wrongdoing because her actions sprang not from her own will but from dark forces over which she had no control.

Inés's brother responds to his sister's predicament with anything but compassion. "[L]oco de pena" (167), he harbors the suspicion that Inés was only pretending to be in a trance in order to avoid punishment for her affair with Diego. Inés's husband naturally feels an affront to his honor; after all, even the appearance of impropriety was supposed to bring dishonor. More importantly, however, his suspicions are inflamed by Inés's brother and his wife. These three decide to move to a relatively isolated part of Sevilla. In this new house, Inés is confined to a small closet, the entrance of which is sealed up by the three conspirators who wall in the opening with bricks. Only a small opening is left in the wall through which one can pass meager food and water to Inés. This cell is so small that Inés cannot lie down or even sit down; the best she can do is lean or squat. Her incarceration lasts several years, until one night a neighbor in an adjoining house hears her cries for mercy, alerts the authorities, and helps free Inés, who by this time is in miserable condition:

---

<sup>2</sup> Stackhouse notes three different uses of magic in *Zayas's novelas*. The Moor's use of an effigy to enchant Inés is an example of his third category involving the "virtues of symbols—effigies, glyphs, and words . . ." (68).

aunque tenía los ojos claros, estaba ciega, o de la oscuridad . . . , o fuese de esto, o de llorar, ella no tenía vista. Sus hermosos cabellos, que cuando entró allí eran como hebras de oro, blancos como la misma nieve, enredados y llenos de animalejos, que de no peinarlos se crían en tanta cantidad, que por encima hervoreaban; el color, de la color de la muerte; tan flaca y consumida, que se le señalaban los huesos, como si el pellejo que estaba encima fuera un delgado cendal; desde los ojos hasta la barba, dos surcos cavados de las lágrimas, que se le escondía en ellos un bramante grueso; los vestidos hechos ceniza, que se le veían las más partes de su cuerpo; descalza de pie y pierna, que de los excrementos de su cuerpo, como no tenía dónde echarlos, no sólo se habían consumido, mas la propia carne comida hasta los muslos de llagas y gusanos, de que estaba lleno el hediondo lugar. (172)

Inés, forever blind, goes to live in a convent, hope for happiness as a married woman behind her as a result of the cruel treatment of men.

That would be the end of it if this story were a true moral *exemplum* rather than a Baroque *novela*. Because it is the latter, however, the narrative is much more complicated, and, as a result, the moral lesson more diffuse and confused. An essential ambivalence suffuses the entire story, including the prefatory introduction. It turns out that the “guerra contra los hombres” is not against all men, but only the ones who mistreat women. Not all men are evil; not all women are good. Not all men deceive women; not all women need a “desengaño” (145). There are many good men who need no reproach in their treatment of women (“ . . . hombres muy nobles, muy sabios, muy cuerdos y muy virtuosos. Cierto es que los hay, y que no todos tratan engaños . . .” [151]). Some women are deceivers just as some men are; some men are deceived just as some women are: “las mujeres se quejan de sus engaños, y los hombres de los suyos” (150). Moreover, part of the reason that men have a low opinion of women is due to the actions of women themselves, and not just common women, but noble women who act foolishly. Griswold (106, 110) notes that these *novelas* are full of antifeminist sentiments, and Welles detects the presence of a “negative Feminine . . . manifested in the figure of a sorceress, a seductress, or a wicked older woman” (307), the “temptress Eve” as opposed to the “virginal Mary.” In short, this battle of the sexes is not quite so black and white as one would expect from a moral *exemplum*.

Indeed, the particulars of Inés’s story also include women who are not just less than virtuous, but who actually contribute in significant ways to Inés’s woes. Perhaps Diego would not have pursued Inés to the extent he did if her neighbor, a woman who had watched Diego pass by Inés’s house, had not intervened in order to make some quick money. Claiming to be a good friend of the family, she promises Diego, with the implicit expectation of monetary gain, to bring Inés to him. In this familiar plot twist, the woman borrows a dress from Inés, finds a prostitute who looks like her, dresses her up and passes her off to Diego as his beloved Inés. For her trouble, she receives a chain and money. After the brief period, the dress is returned and the woman goes on her way, but Diego is forlorn that Inés has stopped seeing him. He re-

proaches her in church and she protests that she has no idea what he is talking about. Naturally, he believes that she is merely protecting her honor. The actions of this neighbor woman cause his irrational passion to increase to the point that he engages the Moor who can bewitch the object of his desire. There is no doubt in the narration what we are to think of her as she is described variously as “astuta” (156), “mala” (156), “mujercilla” (156), “engañosa” (157), “vil tercera” (158), and “infamadora” (161), all of which can certainly be taken as descriptions of disapproval.

By far the more important woman to contribute to Inés’s suffering is her sister-in-law. From her initial appearance in the story, we are told that this woman is a menace. One of Inés’s motivations to marry is to get away from the “rigurosa condición de su cuñada” (152) as well as the “terrible condición” she shares with her brother (153). She is rarely mentioned without an additional description such as “traidora” (168, 169), “cruel” (169, 172), or “mala” (169), with additional mention made of the “crueldad” that she shares with her brother-in-law and Inés’s husband (171). She is a “rigurosa leona” (173) who treats Inés badly and fails to believe Inés’s (and the *corregidor*’s) assertions of Inés’s innocence in the enchantment scenario, preferring to assume that Inés is as evil as she is and is lying about what happened (167). One of the most damning assertions of the narrator is that the sister-in-law thought ill of Inés only because she was her sister-in-law (“como al fin cuñada,” [167]), a shocking indictment of an entire class of women. When the three conspirators devise the plot to punish Inés, the sister-in-law is right in the middle of the discussions and decisions. She is every bit as cruel as the men, although the narrator believes that, as a woman, she should have been more compassionate: “Y de quien más pondero la crueldad es de la traidora cuñada, que siquiera por mujer, pudiera tener piedad de ella” (168). Throughout Inés’s incarceration, the sister-in-law has a more than equal role as her jailer: “la llave la tenía la mala y cruel cuñada, y ella misma le iba a dar la comida y un jarro de agua, de manera que aunque después recibieron criados y criadas, ninguno sabía el secreto de aquel cerrado aposento” (169). To make Inés’s suffering even more unbearable, she heaps verbal abuse on her captive with every visit: “la traidora cuñada, cada vez que la llevaba la comida, le decía mil oprobios y afrentas . . .” (169). In a very real sense, the sister-in-law is more of an antagonist than either Inés’s brother or husband. If this moral lesson is indeed about cruelty, hers cannot be ignored.

Next, let us consider the good men in the story. If her husband and brother failed Inés, other men, especially those representing the (phallogocentric) authority, repeatedly step in to save, protect, and exonerate Inés. The *corregidor* comes on the scene after Inés figures out that her neighbor borrowed her dress to deceive Diego for money. In fact, far from fearing this man with extraordinary civil authority, she sends for him (160). Inés has the *corregidor* hide to overhear her conversation with the neighbor and the latter’s confession of her deception. The *corregidor* appears a second time when he sees the bewitched Inés in the streets and discovers the spell that

Diego has cast over her. In both cases, the *corregidor* goes to great lengths to prove the truth of the matter, to punish the neighbor and Diego (with 200 lashes and banishment for six years in the case of the former, and with incarceration in the case of the latter), and to exonerate Inés. When Inés still feels dishonored after the enchantment episode and asks for death, the *corregidor* insists that she is innocent: “Sosegaos, señora, que vuestro delito no merece la pena que vos pedís, pues no lo es, supuesto que vos no erais parte para no hacerle” (167). Similarly, it is the *arzobispo* and the *asistente* who come to Inés’s aid when the neighbor reveals to them her situation in the walled-in closet. Not only do they extract her from her miserable predicament, modestly taking care to cover her nakedness, but they also get her three persecutors to confess their crimes, for which they are sentenced to death. These men are the closest thing one has in the story to representatives of truth and justice. Without them Inés’s persecutors would be able to abuse her freely with no expectation of punishment.

The method, established by Alexander Parker in *comedia* criticism, of establishing responsibility by examining chains of cause and effect has fallen into disuse, and usually for good reason. But if it is valid at all, it should be in the case of a moral example. What are the crimes of which these characters are guilty and how are they punished? Diego is quite clearly at fault for pursuing a married woman recklessly, for using the services of a go-between and, worse, of a necromancer. For similar reasons, the crime of the *tercera* is equally provable. These two are subject to lashes, banishment, incarceration, and investigation by the Inquisition. The three conspirators (Inés’s husband, brother, and sister-in-law) are guilty of taking matters into their own hands and cruelly imprisoning a woman who suffered through no fault of her own. Their punishment is a swift death. Is their crime, the defense of family honor so familiar to *comedia* audiences, worth so much more dire a punishment? After all, they did not kill Inés, and they appeared to believe that she had indeed sullied the family name. What else is going on here? What other factors are in play?

As is in the case of the Calderonian wife-murder plays, central to the outcome of the plot is the search for the truth (Stroud, *Fatal Union* 119-40). The guiding notion of the murderous husbands, frequently ironic, was that one must know the truth before one can know what action to take. Was Inés guilty of adultery? She was indeed in Diego’s house, but was she herself? The *corregidor* goes to great lengths to prove the power of the incantation, including repeated tests to make sure that Inés had no say in her own actions (167). The narrator insists on her lack of free will: “privada con la fuerza del encanto,” “forzada de algún espíritu diabólico” (164), “no tenía facultad para hablar” (164). We also know that she did not love him and rejected every advance. It is on these grounds that the *corregidor* exonerates her. The *corregidor* makes a remarkably modern assessment of what currently could be called date rape. In a way, Inés was deprived of her senses the way unsuspecting modern women are;

for Inés, enchantment rather than a drug was the instrument of control and abuse. Today, we consider these victims to be wholly innocent of any responsibility for their plight, but such was not the situation until a few decades ago. The more traditional response to a charge of rape was that the woman surely did something to provoke the action, "she was asking for it."<sup>3</sup> The fact that the man drugged her would not have erased the fact that she had had sexual relations with him; likewise the fact that Inés was not acting of her own accord does not alter the fact that she was physically present in Diego's bed.

Of course, the *corregidor's* exquisite sense of justice does not prevent Inés from being punished. Honor is not legal justice and does not place importance on the same facts and circumstances. In addition, there are always those more intent on revenge in order to achieve some sort of egoistic triumph than on acceptance of the edicts of the civil authorities and the resulting social peace through law and order. As far as Inés's brother and sister-in-law are concerned, she got into Diego's bed, where she remained the greater part of the night, repeatedly, for more than a month. Although the narrator is silent regarding what went on during these trysts, it is hard to imagine Diego satisfying his lust by merely watching her sleep. Within the context of the story, it is true that Inés was discovered in a compromising situation with Diego. As is so typical in the Baroque view of the universe, the truth can have multiple, even contradictory, consequences. For considerations of honor, it really doesn't matter whether Inés actually had sexual intercourse or not: her mere presence in Diego's bed is damning to her husband and brother, and they believed they had the right to cleanse their honor by punishing her, at least as far as the literary tradition of wifely infidelity is concerned. Of course, the literary world of the *comedia* is not the same as that of the *novela* or even of historical reality, in which husbands who killed their wives certainly did not get off scot-free. In the seventeenth century, while the Medieval law allowing a husband to kill his wife and her paramour was still on the books, the social reality was quite different. Men who took punishment for adultery into their own hands were routinely questioned by the authorities and punished for their own actions (Stroud, "Further" 21-23). In this story, too, there is a definite dichotomy between public justice (the sentences meted out to the woman, Diego, and the three conspirators), and private revenge (the treatment of Inés). Both the authorities and the conspirators are interested in the truth, and both have a claim to be acting based on the facts at hand, but there is an additional implied assertion that not all uses of the truth are equally valid.

---

<sup>3</sup> Paun de García (50) notes the modern psychological position that, regardless of her enchantment, Inés could not have gone along had there been no desire on her part, conscious or unconscious, the position taken by her sister-in-law and husband (although without the psychological reasoning). The attitude toward magic and spells of the era would seem to preclude the notion that Inés could be found guilty for actions committed while she was under a spell, which is borne out when the *corregidor*, who presumably would know about such things, declares her completely innocent and not subject to any punishment.

The truth and its consequences as discovered and enforced by the civil authorities is clearly intended to be applauded, with the truth as understood by the conspirators, and their subsequent torture of Inés, can only be deplored. In other words, the discovery of truth leading to exculpation is privileged over that leading to punishment. Rights under the law take precedence over rights under the honor code; the social reality of the application of the law supersedes, at least in the way we are to interpret Inés's punishment, the Medieval and literary practice of the honorable revenge.

At the same time, Zayas's description of Inés's incarceration appear to serve purposes other than those of laying out a legal case against the trio of conspirators who disregarded the authorities and took the matter into their own hands. The horrific descriptions of the torture inflicted on Inés are drawn directly from the ideals of Neo-Senecan *admiratio*, which is accepted as an important aesthetic principle in Zayas's work even by those who insist on the historical accuracy of the *novelas*.<sup>4</sup> The lurid, minute detail lavished on her confinement, how she could neither sit nor lie, how she was fed, the imprecations hurled at her at every turn by her sister-in-law take this story beyond moral sermonizing. It is not difficult to see in this description techniques used by modern horror stories or films. Zayas has included several well-known fears that are the stock in trade of the horror genre: loss of freedom and control over one's body; punishment even though one is innocent; claustrophobic confinement with the additional touch of having the door walled in; being covered with insects, worms, and other animals; being blinded; being naked; and having one's flesh rot off one's bones while still alive. The function of the horrific here is surely no different from its function in other genres: an excess of emotion on the part of the reader, a vicarious fear that this kind of unprovoked torture could happen to anyone. Of course, the use of horror techniques is not antithetical to the purposes of the cautionary tale: be good or these terrible things will happen to you too. But there is always the danger that the nature of the horror will overwhelm the moral lesson. By the time we reach the end of the description of Inés's misery, we are completely immersed in sympathy for her, as are Lisis's guests when the story is over. The force of the description places the reader

---

<sup>4</sup> Foa studies Zayas's rhetorical techniques (*admiratio*, contrast, etc.) in some detail (*Fem-inismo* 104, 115, 119). In particular, she goes on to note (117) that the *grand guignol* description of Inés when she leaves her cell is intended to awaken our pity and compassion by using the grotesque and repugnant to control the reader's reaction. Grieve (92, 103) points out that this literary technique of horror is part and parcel of the hagiographic histories. For Welles, *admiratio* was a primary motivation for Zayas, who even went so far as to call the tales in Part One "maravillas" rather than "novelas" (303). Indeed, as López Pinciano noted, exaggeration for effect was the literary ideal of the time; a plot should be both "prodigioso" and "espantoso": "porque la cosa nueva deleyta, y la admirable, más, y más la prodigiosa y espantosa" (11, 58). Oltra ("Zelima" 181-82) discusses the literary debate between "lo admirable" and "lo verosímil" in both Cervantes and Zayas as part of the larger philosophical debate on the relative merits of *historia* and *poesía*. The insistence on the truth of the stories is merely another technique to enhance the shocking and scary nature of the tale; the illusion of credibility adds to the overall enjoyment of the story.

entirely on the side of Inés against her husband, brother, and sister-in-law, meaning that the most likely moral lesson has to do with the evil inflicted by carrying out an honorable punishment or revenge, not just with the poor treatment of women by men. Furthermore, a cautionary tale usually involves something that one could have done to prevent the bad outcome, but Inés was innocent. How could she have prevented her fate? Perhaps she could never have left the house, but more realistically, she could not avoid her fate, which leads us to conclude that this *novela* is no dry moral *exemplum*. Especially when we view the story in light of the various Baroque complexities and dichotomies, we are led to the conclusion that this story is intended to serve literary purposes at least as much as social ones. Moreover, there is additional evidence of the purely literary motives of the story by the remarkable artistic distance and irony suffused throughout its telling.

If one takes the story and its introductory section as a whole, one is immediately struck by what can only be described as a narratological framework worthy of, and even reminiscent of, *Don Quijote*. Consider the opening description of the time of day: “A la última hora de su jornada iba por las cristalinas esferas el rubicundo Apolo, recogiendo sus flamígeros caballos por llegar ya con su carro cerca del occidente, para dar lugar a su mudable hermana a visitar la tierra . . . ” (145). Yllera dismisses this florid prose as that of a trivial image, noting Cervantes’s burlesque of the style without implying any similar such parody on the part of Zayas. It is hard to say with certainty, but it seems most unlikely that anyone familiar with Quijote’s famous line, “Apenas había el rubicundo Apolo . . . ” (I, 2: 22), could ever again take the reference seriously, even within a well-defined, conventional literary genre. Also prevalent in this story and its genre, and also ironized by Cervantes, is the insistence that what is reported here is the plain unvarnished truth. The narrator sets up a dichotomy between truth and gossip, the latter of which is much more popular: “desengañar y decir verdades está hoy tan mal aplaudido, por pagarse todos más de la lisonja bien vestida que de la verdad desnuda . . . ; mas eso tienen las novedades, que aunque no sean muy sabrosas, todos gustan de comerlas” (145). But the women who narrate, called “desengañadoras” (145), will speak only truth: “diciendo verdades, no hay que temer, pues pueden poner falta en lo hablado, tanto en verso como en prosa; mas en la misma verdad no puede haber falta, como lo dijo Cristo, nuestro Señor, cuando dijo: ‘si verdad os digo . . . ’” (146). The truth of Christ? Such an exaggeration is indeed worthy of the *Quijote*: “basta que en la narración de él no se salga un punto de la verdad” (I, 1: 19). It is simply not possible to take such assertions at face value considering not only their inherent irony by exaggeration but also their highly inflected literary context.

Furthermore, not all of Lisis’s guests have come to be instructed; they have come for many reasons: “unos a la fama de la hermosa esclava, que ya se había transformado en señora, y otros, por la hermosura de las damas convidadas, por gozar de la novedad . . . ” (145). In fact, they are, despite protestations to the contrary, a typi-

cal audience more interested in being titillated by a juicy story than in learning dry moral lessons. There seems to be an additional difference between the attitude of the men and that of the women, who, even as they attempt to prompt the men to treat women better, present themselves as objects of beauty for the men's pleasure. There is detailed mention of the artificial enhancements of beauty of the "desengañadoras" ("muy ricamente vestidas y aderezadas, y muy bien prendidas, y con tantas joyas . . .," [147]) and its effect on their listeners ("Aunque más mal digáis de nosotros, os lo perdonaremos, por el bien de haber visto tanta hermosura" [147]). Not surprisingly, the men are more willing to accept what the women say because of their beauty, not because of the truth they speak: "si habían entrado con ánimo de murmurar y censurar este sarao, por atreverse en él las damas a ser contra los hombres, se les olvidó lo dañado de la intención con la dulce armonía de su voz y la hermosa vista de su belleza, perdonando, por haberla visto, cualquiera ofensa que recibiesen de las demás en sus desengaños" (150). Of course, the lure of beauty is itself an *engaño*: "Lástima grande / que no sea verdad tanta belleza," according to the famous Argensola sonnet (Wardropper 100). These women undercut their message of *desengaño* by still engaging in the beauty-based deception of men by women. In the final analysis, it appears that people want to be deceived. Especially a person in love is "dulcemente engañada" (150), and both men and women are subject to the flattery and pleasant delusion derived from certain deceptions: "no quieren dejar de estarlo [engañado]; porque paladea tanto el gusto esto de amar y ser amados que, aunque los desengaños se vean a los ojos, se dan por desentendidos y hacen que no los conocen . . ." (150).

Perhaps most interesting is the artistic distancing established by the multiple layers of narrators and interlocutors, each one removing us a bit further from the "pure truth" of the story of Inés.<sup>5</sup> Within the narrative structure, the story is told by Laura, Lisis's mother, a woman who, again, swears that her tale is true ("Todo este caso es tan verdadero como la misma verdad" [173]), averring that the facts of her tale happened twenty years ago. She did not witness the events herself, but heard the story from one of the people involved who not only is not present at the telling of the story, but is not even named.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the true first narrator is lost and is, in fact, no one who could have been present for all the scenes of the story (including, for

---

<sup>5</sup> Griswold (103) also notes the ironic artistic effect of multiple layers of narrators, although she places the voices into different categories based upon other criteria: 1) *Zayas* in the preface and postscript; 2) the anonymous omniscient narrator of the frame story whose opinions are frequently different from those of the *desengañadoras*; 3) Lisis and her companions; 4) a listener within the narrative frame to whom a character relates her adventures; 5) the narrators of autobiographical stories. Either way one chooses to look at the different voices, the ironic effect on the narrative structure has an important bearing on its reception by the reader.

<sup>6</sup> Stackhouse (74) posits that the storyteller is most likely the young neighbor who heard Inés through the wall, although he also admits that she could not have been present when the activities in the first part of the story occurred.

example, the conversation between the neighbor and Inés about the dress, the instructions given to Diego by the Moor, and the whispered utterances of Diego to Inés in church) unless it was Inés herself, in which case she could not have rendered faithfully the description of her miserable state upon release because she was already blind. In addition, in the same paragraph with the “tan verdadero” remark, Laura proposes a moral of the story couched in terms of a quote attributed to Alfonso el Sabio, “que el corazón del hombre es bosque de espesura, que nadie le puede hallar senda, donde la crueldad, bestia fiera y indomable, tiene su morada y habitación” (173). Although Maroto Camino (528), in her excitement to prove Zayas’s feminist point of view, notes that the remark clearly refers to men as a sex rather than “man” as humankind, Grieve points out that Alfonso el Sabio “never said anything of the kind” (93). Given the other uses of ironic distance in the *novela*, and assuming that Zayas was indeed a master storyteller, Zayas’s misattribution of a quote must surely be seen to be more than carelessness or ignorance. Finally, one can scarcely get past Laura’s opening line without conjuring up Quijotesque ironic distance: “En una ciudad cerca de la gran Sevilla, que no quiero nombrarla . . .” (152). While one can find much merit in Stackhouse’s assertion that the verisimilitude of these stories is “more moral and psychological than either scientific or historical” (66), the act of will (or malice) on the part of this narrator claiming to bring us the truth can only throw into question everything that comes afterward.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Laura, about whom we have no particular evidence of her trustworthiness, but who is willing to misquote to suit her purposes, claims to speak for an eyewitness who could not possibly have seen all the events described.

Laura’s story, like all these *desengaños*, comes in the context of the meeting of friends called by Lisis, herself a woman in a love quandary and who ends up choosing a convent over marriage. She asserts repeatedly that this is a “guerra contra los hombres” and that only women may speak. This is no objective way to arrive at the truth, but, in fact, a formula for literary compromise. Indeed, as Griswold notes, Lisis is motivated not by a principled, philosophical feminism, but by “a very specific fury at having been scorned by her erstwhile suitor, Juan, and a very selfish desire to manipulate her second suitor, Diego, for her own purposes” (107). There may be truth here, but it is the “truth” as told by these women, not necessarily the truth agreed upon by everyone. Of course, from a political and social point of view, Lisis and her friends have as much right to their opinion as the men (and that is one of the more remarkable facets of both of Zayas’s books). Nevertheless, any such bias undermines the notion of a story “as truthful as truth itself,” a goal that is perhaps an unreachable fantasy

---

<sup>7</sup> In other *desengaños* Zayas employs such narrative strategies as the highly intrusive use of “I” or “we” pronounced by the narrator controlling the direction of the story. Foa (*Feminismo* 128) gives several examples: “Goce Beatriz este favor tan deseado, mientras que yo pondero este misterioso suceso” (*Desengaños* 458) and “Ahora volvamos a Beatriz” (*Desengaños* 459). The latter example certainly calls into question exactly whom the narrator includes in the “we” of the verb form.

under any circumstances, but one especially suspect here. Lisis can be no guarantor for the truth; her credibility is too compromised.

Despite this kind of ironic distance from the truth, many critics believe the *novela* to be an accurate reflection of the situation of women in Zayas's day. Vollen-dorf ("Reading" 275) notes the case of a real woman, Prudencia Grillo, who feared being "locked in a castle" by her husband as "proof" that the shocking treatment of Inés represented real fears for seventeenth-century Spanish women. As with the case of those who have used the wife-murder *comedias* as "proof" that men went around killing their wives in seventeenth-century Spain, the general approach in trying to prove that Zayas's novels are historically accurate has been to assume that because history has shown any *specific* incidence of the kind of treatment seen in the *novelas*, then the *novelas* must therefore reflect society *in general*. Yes, some women, battered by the men around them, entered a convent to live a more peaceful life, and yes, some men did abuse, and even kill their wives. But what about the additional evidence, previously noted, that wife-murder was not countenanced by the society, and that all husbands found guilty of such an act were subject to punishment?

No one has argued more forcefully against reading these *novelas* as historical documents than Susan Griswold, who believes that these assertions "confuse the actual world with the illusionary world of literature" (100). For Griswold, Zayas's tales are part of a "recognized and vital literary tradition" (100), meaning that Zayas is first and foremost writing *literature* rather than moral treatises.<sup>8</sup> The main outline of the story can be found in Bandello as reworked by Pierre Boiastuau and Juan Millis Godínez (Foa, *Feminismo* 139), with additional debt owed to the traditions of novella, *romance*, hagiographic history, and Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* (Foa, *Feminismo* 110; Grieve).<sup>9</sup> This literary quality of the *novelas* undercuts both the presumed historical and biographic nature of the works as well as their alleged feminist point of view. That authors did not often tell the truth, even when claiming to be bound by a sacred oath to the reader that the material narrated would be nothing but the truth, is well-known: "fingen los poetas." Even one of Zayas's characters remarks, "Y tengo

---

<sup>8</sup> Griswold goes on to note that Zayas's feminism is a literary *topos* (99), adding that the feminist and antifeminist counter-themes provide a literary structure of the work (113). For Griswold, however, this is not a condemnation of her work, but rather a compliment, because it rescues Zayas from being "dismissed . . . as a 'feminist'" (97).

<sup>9</sup> For Grieve, "hagiography functions as the structural and thematic underpinning of *Amorous Disillusionments* by giving the collection a strong unity" (88). Regarding *La inocencia castigada* in particular, Grieve places Inés in a long line of female penitents: she "lives in her own filth, deprived of food, light, and even sufficient space in which to recline . . . and it is precisely fornication that Zayas' heroine is accused of" (91-2). Grieve also finds interesting parallels between Cervantes's *El celoso extremeño* and Zayas's *La inocencia castigada*, noting that, while the "essence of the works is the confinement of women," the "confinement of Cervantes' heroine leads to the consequential inability to exercise free will, while Zayas' heroine exercises her free will and chooses correctly by rejecting persistent suitors, only to be led into a brutal imprisonment" (90).

por sin duda que no todos los poetas sienten lo que escriben; antes imagino que escriben lo que no sienten . . . ” (*Desengaños* 408).

The friends represent the next level of reception and commentary, and they too present problems in establishing a trustworthy voice. The male friends, especially but perhaps not surprisingly, also do disservice to the serious nature of Inés’s case. First, as has been noted, the men comment more on the beauty of the narrators than on what they have to say. Then, after the tale, although all are moved to tears, Juan appears to have learned his lesson, but his comment on it is couched in terms of humorous *agudeza*: speaking ill of women is like tobacco, a vice shared by noble and commoner alike. All disapprove of the vice in others while holding dear their own sins, excusing themselves by saying merely, “se usa” (175). The joke provokes gales of laughter and completely changes the emotional color of the meeting from sad to gay. Of course, this could in itself be an additional criticism of men, who are unwilling to take seriously even the horrible tragedy suffered by Inés.<sup>10</sup> But the women also participate in the laughter, and there is no reproach for Juan’s witticism. The participants in the *sarao* do not take Inés’s story to be one of historical accuracy and moral weight. They seem to be perfectly happy to leave the tale behind and move along to the next story that will excite, move, and even alarm them. But even if there were grave moral lessons pronounced by these discussants, there is no indication that this group of friends has the ethical authority to serve as arbiters of morality.

Finally, there is the level of the narrator, the one who describes Lisis and her friends. This narrator is often identified as María de Zayas; indeed, the final paragraph of the *Desengaños amorosos* is a comment signed by Zayas herself. At least in Yllera’s edition, however, there is a break between this last paragraph and the narrative that precedes it, which conclude with a “Vale,” usually the signal that a narration has ended (510). Griswold (102) is quite correct in assuming that the author can be appropriately said to be speaking in her own voice only twice: in the preface to Part One and in the postscript to Part Two. Everyone else who speaks is a fictional character. But even if one were to take the narrator to be “doña María de Zayas Sotomayor” throughout, it is too great a leap to assume that what is written necessarily and accurately represents Zayas’s everyday, non-literary thoughts and feelings, and that there is no fictional content to these opinions at all. Zayas clearly exists as the ultimate author of the work, but

---

<sup>10</sup> Williamsen argues convincingly that the male and female characters within the stories receive them differently: “References to the differing expectations and reactions of the narratees based on their gender encircle all the *novelas*” (642). This difference is related to Williamsen’s larger point about the critical reception of these stories, that one dismisses at one’s own peril study of gender-based literary irony. She argues that “. . . the divergences in interpretation [are] directly related to the audience’s perception of textual irony” (643), noting in addition that male readers tended to read her works more literally, while female readers read her works more ironically. Unfortunately, a full consideration of the implications of her assertion lies beyond the scope of this current study.

we cannot assume that she and the narrator are identical.<sup>11</sup> The evidence against assuming that all the voices in the *novela* are Zayas's is impressive. First, as Griswold notes, so little is known of Zayas's life that connections made between details of the *novelas* and Zayas's life might justifiably be accused of "psychoanalytic flights of deductive biography" (108). Second, the narrators themselves do not approach their material in the same manner. Sometimes they are omniscient, sometimes they do not know everything that their characters say and think, and other times they intervene to state their own ideas or make comments that may or may not have a direct bearing on the narrative (Foa, *Feminismo* 121-22). Griswold believes that the reduction of these literary voices to one deprives the *novelas* of much of their literary interest: "To reduce to one voice—the real (flesh and blood) author's—the sentiments expressed by such a variety of fictional voices on various levels is to do a terrible violence to the book and to eliminate its narrative complexity" (104). Zayas, through her narrators and listeners, is clearly manipulating her narration and playing with the reader (see Foa, *Feminismo* 180).

Moreover, the "omniscient" narrator herself presents a dual voice regarding the truth of these matters. On the one hand, she pronounces sociological truths (that men are cruel to women, that gossip is more interesting than the truth) and gives ethical support to the narrators by referring to them as "desengañadoras," but, on the other, she undercuts the value of the solemn truths not only by the use of the wildly satirical "rubicundo Apolo" but also by her description of the emotional, rather than pedagogical, effect Laura's story had on the listeners. Although she may insist on the truth of the stories, only an omniscient *fictional* narrator can tell us what characters are thinking and feeling; even if Zayas were the narrator, she could not really know that the listeners condemned the male conspirators less than the sister-in-law. Finally, like the characters who listen to Laura speak, this narrator dismisses Inés's travails quite lightly and gets on with the narration at hand after all laugh at Juan's comparison with tobacco.

In addition to Inés, who allegedly lived the story, the lost original narrator of the tale, Laura, Lisis, the narrator, and Zayas, there is one additional participant to round out the levels of artistic distancing: the reader. Again as in the *Quijote*, there is the notion of the *discreto lector*: "Que trabajos del entendimiento, el que sabe lo que es, le estimará, y el que no lo sabe, su ignorancia le disculpa . . ." (146). We are supposed to know how to read fiction. Neither Inés, nor Laura, nor Lisis exists. If we,

---

<sup>11</sup> Many critics assert that every word in both collections of stories are what "Zayas says." Extrapolating remarkable generalizations from scanty evidence, Foa claims, in as positive a manner possible, that all the various narrators whose voices are heard in the *novelas* are mere stand-ins for Zayas herself: ". . . los narradores son claramente los portavoces de María de Zayas. . . . Donde más se confunden la ficción y la realidad es en la persona de Lisis" (*Feminismo* 118). Among others who ascribe to Zayas the thoughts of her characters are Yllera (57), Vasileski (58, for example), and Kahiluoto (37, for example).

as readers, are so "indiscreet" as to be unable to tell the difference between fiction and fact, then we are no better than Quijote following his chivalresque fantasies or, for that matter, Inés's brother, husband, and sister-in-law punishing her based on their beliefs rather than legal authority. The reader has the final authority to judge and learn from the actions of the story and its reception among the listeners within the narrative framework, as well as to evaluate and appreciate the framework as a whole and Zayas's artistry in creating it.

The narratological structure of the tale, with its multiple authorial levels, its ironic assertion of truth while denying the reader any way to corroborate the evidence, its use of satiric allusion to the *Quijote*, and the incorporation of the horror genre all take Zayas's tale far beyond the realm of moral *exemplum*. That is not to say, however, that there is no lesson to be learned, only that the lesson may have as much to do with the nature of Baroque literature as with Inés and her predicament. At some level, despite claims of "realism" in the criticism, there is considerable evidence that Spanish Baroque literature is frequently, if not mostly, more about literature than about life. *Don Quijote* is a book about reading books. The *comedia* is more often about inherited literary and historical *topoi*, including the theater as studies of metatheater have shown, than about the daily life of contemporary theater-goers. Zayas's stories, likewise, are part of a tradition of the ironic assimilation of previous literature. In one sense, it might seem that this assertion undercuts her "pro-feminist" assertions, but, in fact, she proves through her talent that a woman is every bit as capable as Cervantes of writing highly inflected, ironic *literature*, appealing to men and women across the centuries, raising her far above the level of a woman writing moral sermons to enlighten her female friends. *La inocencia castigada* takes the entire wife-punishment-in-the-name-of-honor scenario and pushes it beyond the limits of belief, highlighting its outrageousness both with the deaths of the honor-bound conspirators within the plot and, aesthetically, with multiple, even supernatural causes, shocking scenes of horror, and layered narrative irony. Perhaps her purpose was to ironize the entire honor scenario, thus improving the lives of women by negating the literary "truth" of a genre that took itself most seriously. Or perhaps, by underscoring the very literary nature of the genre itself, María de Zayas is able to bring us ultimately to Lisis's promised truth: that women in Baroque Spain, despite the essential discrimination they suffered, were equal to men in terms of their talent and ability to write complex Baroque stories, and, as our continued interest attests, in terms of their literary success.

### Works Cited

Amezúa, Agustín González de. Prólogo. *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*. By María de Zayas y Sotomayor. Madrid: RAE, 1948. vii-l.

- Cervantes, Miguel de. *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. 21ª ed. México: Porrúa, 1985.
- Foa, Sandra M. "María de Zayas: Visión conflictiva y renuncia del mundo." *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 111.331 (1978): 128-35.
- . *Feminismo y forma narrativa: Estudio del tema y las técnicas de María de Zayas y Sotomayor*. Valencia: Albatros Hispánofila, 1979.
- Grieve, Patricia E. "Embroidering with Saintly Threads: María de Zayas Challenges Cervantes and the Church." *Renaissance Quarterly* 44 (1991): 86-106.
- Griswold, Susan C. "Topoi and Rhetorical Distance: The 'Feminism' of María de Zayas." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 14 (1980): 97-116.
- Kahiluoto Rudat, Eva M. "Ilusión y desengaño: El feminismo barroco de María de Zayas y Sotomayor." *Letras femeninas* 1 (1975): 27-43.
- López Pinciano, Antonio. *Philosophia antigua poética*. Ed. Alfredo Carballo Picazo. 2 vols. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1953.
- Maroto Camino, Mercedes. "Spindles for Swords: The Re/Discovery of María de Zayas' Presence." *Hispanic Review* 62 (1994): 519-36.
- Oltra, José Miguel. "Zelima o el arte narrativo de María de Zayas." *Formas breves del relato*. Ed. Yves-René Fonquerne y Aurora Egido. Zaragoza: U de Zaragoza; Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1986. 177-90.
- Paun de García, Susan. "Magia y poder en María de Zayas." *Cuadernos de ALDEEU* 8 (1992): 43-54.
- Routt, Kristin. "El cuerpo femenino y la creación literaria en *La inocencia castigada* de María de Zayas." *Romance Languages Annual* 7 (1995): 616-20.
- Stackhouse, Kenneth A. "Verisimilitude, Magic and the Supernatural in the *Novelas* of María de Zayas y Sotomayor." *Hispanófila* 62 (1978): 65-76.
- Stroud, Matthew D. *Fatal Union: A Pluralistic Approach to the Spanish Wife-Murder Comedias*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1990.
- . "Further Considerations of History and Law in the Wife-Murder *Comedias*." *Hispanic Journal* 8 (1987): 21-38.
- Vasileski, Irma V. *María y Zayas y Sotomayor: Su época y su obra*. Madrid: Plaza Mayor, 1973.
- Vollendorf, Lisa. "Our Bodies, Our Selves: Vengeance in the Novellas of María de Zayas." *Cincinnati Romance Review* 16 (1997): 93-100.
- . "Reading the Body Imperiled: Violence against Women in María de Zayas." *Hispania* 78 (1995): 272-82.

- Wardropper, Bruce W. *Spanish Poetry of the Golden Age*. New York: Irvington, 1971.
- Welles, Marcia L. "María de Zayas y Sotomayor and Her *Novela Cortesana*: A Re-Evaluation." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 55 (1978): 301-10.
- Whitenack, Judith A. "'Lo que ha menester': Erotic Enchantment in 'La inocencia castigada.'" *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*. Ed. Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP; London: Associated University Presses, 1995. 170-91.
- Whitenack, Judith A. and Gwyn E. Campbell, eds. *Zayas and Her Sisters, 1: An Anthology of novelas by 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Spanish Women*. Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 2000.
- Williamsen, Amy R. "Engendering Interpretation: Irony as Comic Challenge in María de Zayas." *Romance Languages Annual* 3 (1991): 642-48.
- Zayas y Sotomayor, María de. *Desengaños amorosos*. Ed. Alicia Yllera. Madrid: Cátedra, 1983.