

The Future of Early Modern Women's Studies: The Case of Same-Sex Friendship and Desire in Zayas and Carvajal

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In the prefaces to their novella collections, María de Zayas (1590-?) and Mariana de Carvajal (c.1610-?) leave ample clues about the difficulties faced by women writers in seventeenth-century Spain. Zayas adopts a self-denigrating pose when she introduces her stylistically complex and thematically varied volume of ten novellas as “mis borrones” (*Novelas* 21). She then defends women's intellectual capacities and criticizes men for denying women the education they deserve. In recognition of the challenge she faces, Zayas retreats at the end of the preface, claiming that since she was born a woman, she has no obligation to write well.¹

Less prolix and less direct, Carvajal uses different techniques to place gender at the center of her own brief preface. Carvajal refers to her willingness to field criticism about her novellas. She also uses a jolting turn of phrase to discuss creativity when she calls her book “[un] aborto inútil de mi corto ingenio” (5). Invoked again in the second paragraph, motherhood does more than provide the basis for metaphor; Carvajal uses it to oblige the *destinateur* to read with a kind eye. She pleads for a sympathetic reading of the tales involving a widow and an orphan, informing readers that “obligación precisa es de un pecho noble el suavizar tan penoso desconsuelo” (5).

The similarities between Zayas and Carvajal can be traced to their use of femininity in the dual tropes of humility and *noblesse oblige*. That is, both authors call attention to femaleness as a way to adopt a humble attitude before their literary production, and both remind nobles of their obligation to treat women well. Conveying the authors' self-con-

sciousness about their gender, these prefaces belie a need to justify women's place in the book market, to convince consumers that they should read women's writing.

This claim about the obligation to read women's literature resonates with many of us in early modern Spanish studies. For over two decades, Hispanists have been studying women, so one might assume that we do not need to be reminded of our commitment to teach, study, and edit women's writing from the early modern period. While we should recognize that excellent work has been done, we also need to take stock of certain realities and trends that might affect the future of the field adversely. One of the most disturbing reports relates to the literary canon in U.S. universities: in spite of our efforts, only Santa Teresa appears on a significant number of graduate reading lists.² Outside of the classroom, the situation is more promising, yet the focus of scholarship also causes some concern. As conference papers, dissertations, and recent publications suggest, research in this field remains somewhat limited to a small number of women and texts. While a minority of scholars is studying lesser known secular and religious women, the majority of scholarship continues to focus on a few high-profile women, namely Santa Teresa, Sor Juana, Zayas, and, of late, Ana Caro and Catalina de Erauso.

This is not to deny the importance of research on a variety of other women—including Sor Marcela, Ana and Isabel de Jesús, Luisa de Carvajal, Mariana de Carvajal, and Leonor de Meneses—nor the importance of the modern editions that have helped us incorporate women authors into our classes.³ By calling attention to an imbalance, I mean to encourage us to continue our recuperative efforts and consciously expand our lines of inquiry so as

to avoid the same limited canonization that occurred during the process of canon formation in the nineteenth century.⁴ In order to build on the solid foundation of research and editions, we need to continue to include a larger spectrum of women's texts *and* a larger range of approaches both in our teaching and our scholarship. We also need to consider the implications of the popularization of certain authors (e.g. Santa Teresa, Sor Juana, Zayas, Caro) and certain critical questions (e.g. about the construction and performance of gender). If we only teach texts that appeal to student sensibilities and exclude others because of their difficult style or less flashy themes, we narrow student knowledge of women's history and writing. And if we limit scholarship to a relatively small group of authors and issues, we run the risk of engaging in self-referential critical dialogue. That is, we risk canonizing our own critical discourses and concerns rather than the texts and histories of the women we initially set out to study.⁵

In terms of sheer reading pleasure, I think that our somewhat narrow focus has caused us to overlook the fact that more than just a handful of women authors have the potential to appeal to postmodern readers. In this regard, the juxtaposition of Zayas with Carvajal offers an instructive comparative case. Both authors are available in modern editions. Even though Carvajal has received some critical attention, much of this commentary views her as a second-rate, conventional author who pales in comparison to her more recognizably 'feminist' predecessor.⁶ As Noël Valis has indicated in one of the most thorough, even-handed articles to date on Carvajal, literary histories have portrayed the two as opposites:

Zayas was the aberration; Carvajal confirmed the rule. Yet this lesser

talent is of no less interest to us today, for surely the quiet voice of womanly submission inscribed paradoxically upon the assertive act of writing itself also speaks a language worth learning, tells us something about ourselves and the cultural past out of which we still operate. (251-52)

The issues of ideological conformity and literary quality raised by Valis help explain why Carvajal has not figured more prominently in the recent Renaissance of early modern women's studies. Valis correctly dismisses concerns over Carvajal's "lesser talent," and advocates instead that we read Carvajal because her "quiet voice of womanly submission" has the potential to teach us something about women's position vis-à-vis patriarchy, to illuminate the tensions and contradictions that surfaced when women wrote for publication in the seventeenth century.⁷

The following analysis of Zayas's "Amar sólo por vencer" and Carvajal's "Celos vengan desprecios" attempts to resolve the critical division between the 'lesser' Carvajal and her highly praised literary sister. As Teresa Soufas's *Dramas of Distinction* has shown, a comparative, thematic approach to women's writing promises to enrich our understanding of women's literary history by helping us move beyond the relatively small group of writers that has received intense attention. I would suggest that if we read different women authors in conjunction with each other and focus on the representations of women's spaces, desires, and relationships, we stand to gain a better understanding of how early modern women viewed the act of literary creation, as well as how they viewed the world around them. Illustrating some potential rewards

of this line of inquiry, in this analysis I focus on the depictions of women's sexuality and friendship and argue that the novellas—and, by extension, these authors—can be *better* understood when analyzed together. Considered apart, each text only yields a partial examination of women's sociality and desire. Considered together, the novellas offer a richly layered portrayal of the broad spectrum of women's desire.

I. Re-Structuring Desire

Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* (1613) popularized the novella genre, which enjoyed a large readership in Spain during the first half of the seventeenth century. Codified in its plots, themes, and characterizations, the Golden Age novella heavily relied on reader expectations; in Juan Goytisoló's estimation, readers knew the structure of the novella before they even opened the books (71). Evangelina Rodríguez Cuadros specifies the nature of these expectations when she notes that novellas, along with *comedia*, expressed dominant ideologies (24-25). By announcing their gender and infusing their prefaces with woman-centered language, Zayas and Carvajal thwart (or at least challenge) reader expectations from the very start. After all, the references to their own identities as women writers explicitly confront readers with the anomaly of the authors' gender and implicitly suggest that the narrative will be different from male-authored texts.

The defense of women's intellectual capacities in Zayas's *Novelas amorosas* (1637) sets the stage for the pro-woman rhetoric of this volume and, in particular, of its straightforwardly feminist second part, the *Desengaños amorosos* (1647). The absence of a politically charged tone emerges as a ma-

major difference between Zayas's collection and Carvajal's shorter, one-volume *Navidades de Madrid* (1663). In spite of an abundance of differences—including Zayas's criticism of men, her focus on violence, and her direct calls for social change—these framed novella collections share a fundamental concern for foregrounding women at all levels of the narrative. By shifting our attention to this important aspect of the texts, we can encourage a more serious consideration—on behalf of critics and students—of the commonalities between these writers. While this model, which focuses on similar thematic elements in women authors' works, might be applied to many other texts with different results, in the case of Zayas and Carvajal it allows us to see that the positioning of women at the fore leads both writers into a compelling exploration of the landscape of women's friendship and desire.⁸

Situated in women's homes and centered on the daily life of female protagonists, the frame tales unquestionably privilege the feminine. Zayas depicts Lisis as an unmarried woman trying to overcome her own disillusionment with love, and Carvajal portrays a widow, Lucrecia, as the protagonist of her frame tale. Storytelling has a curative function for both protagonists. Directed by Lisis, the soirees in Zayas's two-part collection help the protagonist overcome illness (in the *Novelas amorosas*) and celebrate her upcoming wedding (in the *Desengaños amorosos*). Carvajal's Lucrecia, whose husband dies in October, spends the Christmas holidays with friends, telling stories during a five-day party similar to the soirees held in Lisis's home. Lavishly detailed descriptions of the frame characters' domestic settings permeate the collections (cf. Bourland and Kaminsky), creating a feminized space in which the stories will be told.

Perhaps more important than the overlap in style and setting, the frame tales trace characters' interactions with each other. This interaction centers on male-female relations, but it extends to include mothers and daughters and female friends. Lisis, for example, acts as an obedient daughter to her mother, Laura, and forms a strong friendship with her slave and companion, Zelima/Isabel. Accompanied by the nun Estefanía, Lisis, Zelima/Isabel, and, later, Laura, join the convent at the end of the *Desengaños*. Widows, mothers, and their children populate Carvajal's frame tale as well. Both collections pair men with women from the beginning, describing courtship in terms of matched clothing of men and women (in Zayas) or in the descriptions of gift exchange and characters' amorous intentions (in Carvajal).

The depiction of women as decision-makers in control of storytelling, entertaining, and parenting locates women at the center of the frame tales and encourages readers to follow this focus through to the novellas proper. Moreover, the circulation of desire structures the plots of the frame tales, and, in true Italianate tradition, the novellas themselves flesh out variations on this theme. Zayas's and Carvajal's novella collections are similar to other female-authored texts, such as the plays featured in Soufas's *Women's Acts*, in that they place women front and center, giving readers a glimpse into women writers' perceptions of women's worlds. If the prefaces re-orient the genre toward the feminine, at least two novellas—Zayas's "Amar sólo por vencer" and Carvajal's "Celos vengán desprecios"—restructure the possibilities of female desire.

These tales of young, single women emphasize the importance of female homosocialism and explore the meanings of fe-

male homoeroticism. In terms of pedagogy, reading for these issues encourages students to question the configurations of women's friendship and sexual relationships in the period. A comparative methodology in which two women's texts are placed side by side also helps students grasp the fundamental, yet often elusive, truth about women's history: no single text or author can speak for all women living during a given period. On the other hand, as the case of *Zayas* and Carvajal suggests, women's cultural production does sometimes share a concern for similar issues. As we will see, in spite of significant stylistic and apparent ideological differences between the authors in question, the tales offer complementary conceptualizations of the polymorphism of women's desire.

In its structure and thematics, *Zayas's Desengaños* explicitly demands a woman-focused reading. Changing the storytelling rules from the less ideologically-charged *Novelas amorosas*, Lisis says that only women may narrate tales and that these must be true stories of men's deception of women (*Desengaños* 118). Extremely violent, these pessimistic tales about women's relationships with men give Lisis justification for leaving her fiancé and withdrawing to a convent at the end of the volume. The sixth tale confirms the despairing mood; like the female protagonists of the majority of the *Desengaños*, *Laurela* is killed by her family members in "Amar sólo por vencer," and what we now refer to as heterosexual (male-female) relations result in the woman's deception, disillusionment, and death.⁹

As readers of *Zayas* know, the first part of this novella seems strangely disconnected from the violent ending. Before *Laurela* falls victim to betrayal and violence, the tale focuses on the infiltration of this fourteen-

year-old's home by a crossdressed male suitor. Disguised as *Estefanía*, *Esteban* enters the house with the excuse that s/he needs employment. Impressed with *Esteban/Estefanía's* appearance and musical abilities, *Laurela* welcomes 'her' as a sister and a friend, kissing and hugging *Estefanía* with such fervor that the intruder announces 'her' displeasure at not having been born a man (*Desengaños* 306). *Laurela's* interest is piqued and will remain so throughout the charade. Portrayed as a sheltered girl whose education has consisted of dancing, singing, and sewing with other women, *Laurela's* lack of worldly experience seems to justify her heightened curiosity and naivete.¹⁰ At one point, for instance, she asks what *Esteban/Estefanía* would do if 'she' were a man. *Esteban/Estefanía's* response is as straightforward as the subsequent discussions of female-female love:

Amarte y servirte hasta merecerte, como lo haré mientras viviere; que el poder de amor también se extiende de mujer a mujer, como de galán a dama. (*Desengaños* 306)

Working first as a servant then as a handmaid, *Esteban/Estefanía* spends over a year in the house as *Laurela's* confidante and companion. Dodging the father's advances, *Esteban/Estefanía* constantly expresses love for *Laurela*. As critics have noted, the interaction among the characters during this period constitutes an unprecedented defense of women's love for each other (cf. Boyer ["The War"] and Gorfkle ["Re-Constituting"]). Or, as Mary Gossy states in response to those who see incoherent characterization and narrative in the tale, "What I would argue here is that *Zayas's* first concern is not to tell a good

Aristotelian story, but rather simply to represent a possibility” (24). The possibility is, of course, that of women’s desire for each other.¹¹

Esteban/Estefanía’s defenses of female-female love reach the level of all-out debate. Playing the role of cultural interpreter, Esteban/Estefanía speaks knowledgeably about the validity of female-female love and men’s ignoble behavior in courtship and sex:

[...] supuesto que el alma es toda una en varón y en la hembra, no se me da más ser hombre que mujer; que las almas no son hombres ni mujeres, y el verdadero amor en el alma está, que no en el cuerpo; y el que amare el cuerpo con el cuerpo, no puede decir que es amor, sino apetito [...].
(*Desengaños* 317)

Following this defense of spiritual/emotional love, Esteban/Estefanía takes great pains to denounce men for ‘loving and leaving’ women and for speaking ill of them (*Desengaños* 317-18). As in other moments in the text, Esteban/Estefanía’s declarations of same-sex love provoke general mocking and laughter. Suspicious both of the outsider’s true gender and of ‘her’ designs on Laurela, the other maids want to know if Esteban/Estefanía really is a woman and, if so, what ‘she’ expects to gain from this undying love.

The negotiation of ambiguous gender identity—questioned or mocked by almost everyone except Laurela—raises the issue of reader and critical response. Many modern readers are quick to identify the lesbian tones of this story. On the other hand, the extent to which homoeroticism, particularly female homoeroticism, was intelligible to early modern readers cannot be known with any precision. Nor can we

know for sure whether our own readings of early modern sexuality (of any sort) accurately decipher the erotic codes present in the texts. As Mario DiGangi has pointed out in *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, we cannot expect to decipher the codes of sexuality with exactitude (6-23). We cannot know, for example, which acts were considered more sexual than others, nor which expressions of sexuality were acceptable within the language of friendship (10-16). However, the mocking and doubtful attitudes of Zayas’s other characters certainly provide a measurement of possible reactions to expressions of female-female desire. As Gossy indicates of the scene when the characters “procuraban ver si era mujer o hombre” (*Desengaños* 318), “They cannot fully accept that a woman could love another woman, and so keep looking for a male body to resolve their doubt” (26).

Insofar as Zayas inscribes a range of responses to the homoeroticism of the tale, she goes much further than merely exploring the possibility of female-female desire. Ranging from skepticism and playfulness to serious discursive exploration, these reactions give us various measures of the ways female homoeroticism registered and signified in the early modern imagination. The absence of any visceral reaction to female homoeroticism in “Amar sólo por vencer” suggests that the characters do not perceive female homoeroticism as a significant threat: even if the father, Bernardo, is discomfited by his inability to convince Estefanía to have sex with him, the characters do not (and perhaps cannot) see the homoeroticism expressed by Esteban/Estefanía as anything more than a non-threatening extension of female friendship. In contrast to the violently negative portrayal of male homoerotic acts in “Mal presagio casar lejos,”

no character in "Amar sólo por vencer" rejects the possibility of women's love for each other outright. Indeed, Zayas's portrayal of men's sexual relations with each other in "Mal presagio"—in which the protagonist discovers her husband having an affair with his male page and subsequently burns her marriage bed—suggests that male homoeroticism registered negatively in the imagination of seventeenth-century Spaniards. This abject depiction of male homosexual acts corresponds to what we know about legal and Inquisitorial prosecution of sodomites, a category that could (but usually did not) include women.¹²

In "Amar sólo por vencer," the father Bernardo's reaction upon discovering Esteban/Estefanía's true sex provides yet another suggestion of the negative role of male homoeroticism. While Bernardo allows the handmaid to show extreme fondness for Laurela, his ire over Laurela's liaison leads him to kill her. The text gives no indication as to whether this vengeful attitude has more to do with the father's confusion over his own attraction to a woman who ends up being a man, or with the loss of honor a daughter's illicit affair implies. The possibility remains, of course, that both factors play a part in Laurela's tragic murder.¹³

In contrast to the unease with male homoeroticism, female homoeroticism avoids any signs of vilification in this tale, and the young Laurela emerges as the most willing of all the characters to entertain ideas about women's love for each other. Laurela's intense curiosity about female-female love contrasts with the others' dubious comments. She stands out because, unlike her father and the others, she does not consistently laugh at Esteban/Estefanía's declarations of woman-woman love. Her innocence entails a lack of prejudicial apparatus

that might inspire her to react with criticism or scorn to such statements. She and Esteban/Estefanía emerge as the only characters genuinely interested in the articulation and defense of female homoeroticism. Laurela's pre-sexual, narcissistic innocence seems to allow for this curiosity: the depiction of this character as an adolescent girl interested only in her own world of women takes the edge off of her (purportedly naive) interest in female-female desire. Ignorant of all matters sexual because "[n]o había llegado a su noticia qué era amar, ni ser amada" (*Desengaños* 296), Laurela remains in a purely homosocial stage, and therefore represents the perfect foil for Esteban/Estefanía's homoerotic courtship. Laurela only wants to spend time with other girls or women; she has no interest in male suitors until her father arranges a marriage contract on her behalf. Above all, she supposedly has no knowledge of sexuality. The threat of male sexuality (what Esteban/Estefanía calls "apetito") and the potential threat of homoeroticism (the love promoted by Esteban/Estefanía) are practically nonexistent because of the protective environment in which Laurela, in spite of her fourteen years of age, lives as an indulged child with her family and attendants.

The isolation of Laurela's unrealistic world is thrown off by Esteban's entry into the household, and the fiction of innocence comes to a halt with the awakening of desire. It is not Bernardo's announcement of the marriage contract that creates havoc. Indeed, Laurela reacts happily to the proposed marriage, suggesting that she will make the 'natural' transition to a heterosexual union. But the subsequent interaction with Esteban/Estefanía sends Laurela into a tailspin. Esteban/Estefanía destroys the feasibility of Laurela's gentle easing into

adult sexuality through contractual marriage when he confesses that he is a man, then lies about his nobility so as to gain Laurela's favor. At this point he also undermines the previous arguments he had made about homoeroticism, confronting Laurela with the impossibility of female homoerotic love when he asks, "¿Quién ha visto que una dama se enamore de otra?" (*Desengaños* 320).

For Laurela, the knowledge of Esteban's male identity brings a new consciousness about her own mixed sexual feelings. Angry and disturbed, she decides that she has so compromised herself and her honor that her only option is suicide (*Desengaños* 321). Esteban/Estefanía prevents Laurela from killing herself and, in a moment critical to Laurela's sexual confusion, takes pity on Laurela by saying that the gender confession was a joke, that 'she' really is a woman and not a man. Confronted with these contradictory statements and her own awareness of sexual desire for this woman/man, Laurela spends a feverish night of indecision. The outcome of the story then follows the pattern of the other novellas in the *Desengaños amorosos*. After a month of illness and recovery, Laurela flees with Esteban and has sex with him. Following her abandonment, Laurela's relatives impose their own punishment, pushing a wall over onto her and her handmaid and killing them both.

Before deteriorating into a tale of betrayal and violence, "Amar sólo por vencer" constructs an intimate domestic world that privileges women's homosocial interaction and allows for a relatively open exploration of female-female desire. Esteban's cross-dressing functions as one of the major factors that allows for the many dialogues and declarations about women's love for each other: since readers know he is really a man, they probably read Esteban's discussions of

same-sex love as veiled declarations of his own (heteroerotic) feelings for Laurela. As mentioned, the open nature of Zayas's exploration of female homoeroticism suggests that such eroticism was not perceived as threatening to the social order. Zayas gives us more clues about the intelligibility of this desire through comments about Laurela's and the others' reactions to Esteban/Estefanía's declarations:

[...] ella y todas lo juzgaban a locura, antes les servía de entretenimiento y motivo de risa, siempre que la veían hacer extremos y finezas de amante, llorar celos y sentir desdenes, admirando que una mujer estuviese enamorada de otra, sin llegar a su imaginación que pudiese ser lo contrario. (*Desengaños* 309)

According to this description, the characters do not wholly reject the notion of female-female love. Instead, in their amusement over the situation, the women are astonished by what they see as folly or "locura."

Beyond the tacit acceptance of homoeroticism expressed by the other characters throughout the tale, Esteban/Estefanía's defenses of female-female desire forthrightly reject the primacy of heteroeroticism. When Bernardo expresses his interest in Esteban/Estefanía, he explicitly declares his preference for women: "Más te quiero yo mujer que no hombre" (*Desengaños* 309). But Esteban/Estefanía endorses the freedom to choose the object of one's desire: "Cada uno busca y desea lo que ha menester" (*Desengaños* 309). While the characters view such statements as foolish jokes, the fact remains that Laurela comes of age in a homosocial environment in which situations charged with homoeroticism constitute her first introduction to sexuality, desire, and love.

Later in the tale, after Esteban's confession of his male identity, the homosocialized Laurela fights to come to terms with the complexities of sexuality. As she considers the implications of Esteban/Estefanía's male identity, Laurela begins to think of her handmaid as a man and, by morning, believes that she loves Esteban. By dawn, Laurela is so invested in the heteroerotic nature of this love relationship that she experiences a moment of panic about Esteban's identity: "Ya le pesara que fuera Estefanía y no don Esteban" (*Desengaños* 322). This statement reveals an awareness of the tensions created by the love interest's gender change. As readers, we see that in her admission of love for Esteban, Laurela must acknowledge at some level the homoerotic nature of their courtship. But, as her worries about Esteban's true identity confirm, Laurela has by now made what Zayas portrays as the *transition* to heteroeroticism.

Although the narrator still refers to Laurela as a "niña mal leída en desengaños" (*Desengaños* 322), the introduction of the dangerous, seductive power of desire into Laurela's life has propelled her into the adult world of male-female relationships. Filled with sex, lies, and violence, this world proves dangerous to Laurela, whose life is ended by her honor-obsessed father, uncle, and aunt. The dangers of the patriarchal sexual economy sharply contrast with the depiction of female homoeroticism and homosocialism as non-threatening and even nurturing. Indeed, whereas homoerotic desire did not compromise Laurela's honor or endanger her, heteroeroticism leads to her death.

Zayas's unprecedented endorsement of female-female desire in "Amar sólo por vencer" destabilizes the status of heteroeroticism as the only natural erotic arrangement. In a more veiled manner, Mariana de

Carvajal's "Celos vengán desprecios" engages similar issues of female friendship and eroticism through the portrayal of an older, wiser protagonist. As Shifra Armon has indicated in "The Romance of Courtesy," "social interaction" is a "thematic subject of the *Navidades*" (244). Specifically, *homosocial* interaction provides the focal point for this, the sixth of eight tales in the collection. In fact, Carvajal's Narcisa, an adult who constructs a homosocial life for herself, might be seen as a more savvy version of the younger Laurela.

The tale begins with Narcisa tiring of her two suitors, Duke Arnaldo and Count Leonido. These men's swordfighting and public denunciations of Narcisa's cruelty lead her to petition the viceroy for help. Unsuccessful in this venture, Narcisa "[q]uedó tan disgustada que, por vengar su enfado, los trataba con rigurosos desdenes" (*Navidades* 120). In contrast to her disdain for men, Narcisa is described as "amada de todas" (*Navidades* 121), and as someone who "[p]reciábase de ser tan cortés y afable con las mujeres como cruel con los hombres" (*Navidades* 121).

Narcisa's tight-knit relationships with women, particularly with her cousin Clori, develop primarily in the bucolic environment of her country house, a liminal space where Narcisa solidifies her relationships with women and seeks refuge from the men who pursue her. Indeed, these relationships structure much of Narcisa's travel in the tale. Her friends urge her to visit the country with them and, when there, they spend time making garlands and praising Narcisa's beauty (*Navidades* 121). And while she is beautiful enough to inspire many suitors, she is so nice to women that she inspires no envy, since "[...] con su amoroso cariño no daba lugar a la envidia" (121). The empha-

sis on Narcisa's relationships with other women recalls DiGangi's suggestion that we need to "acknowledge the homoerotic possibilities within the language of friendship" (10).

Among those who have highlighted the importance of female friendship in Carvajal's fiction, Valis has suggested that "Narcisa's initial dislike of men is counterbalanced by her loving relationship with women, though it would be risky to interpret an implied lesbianism in this case" (262). I would suggest that Narcisa's homosocialism does contain a current of homoeroticism insofar as her allegiances lie entirely with women and inasmuch as there is consistency to the pattern of Narcisa reacting positively to women's desire but negatively to men's. Specifically, when women make demands, Narcisa accommodates them, yet she rejects all but one man's expressions of desire. The narrative emphasizes this pattern of female-oriented affection: Narcisa takes Rosana's suggestion that they go to the country (*Navidades* 121), she enjoys the company of her female friends (121, 127-28), and, when they find themselves "muy solas sin ella," she promises to return to Milan after an extended absence (128).

As in Laurela's story, male desire endangers women in "Celos vengan desprecios." If Laurela found her honor compromised by Esteban's revelation and courtship, this man's treatment of her only led to more violence at the hands of her father and uncle, with the assistance of her aunt. Likewise, Narcisa is assaulted by the men who fight for her hand in marriage. Leonido trespasses on her property in the country, threatening to take revenge for her disdainful behavior. Arnaldo's offenses progress from the minor inconvenience (he steals her glove in church) to the physically threatening (he attempts

to kidnap and rape her). Only the interventions of the mysterious Spanish suitor, Duarte, save Narcisa from suffering real violence. Finally, Narcisa and Clori, whose friendship forms the emotional backbone of the tale, marry Duarte and Leonido, respectively. In the end, Narcisa's wedding is said to please her friends, and Clori and Leonido live peacefully and harmoniously for many years (*Navidades* 131). As in the other novellas in the *Navidades de Madrid* and in many of Zayas's *Novelas amorosas*, the marriage ending re-establishes the patriarchal order, putting the active female characters in their properly subordinate roles.

Armon has noted that "[e]ach of Carvajal's *novelas* delineates a set of obstacles to marriage and a corresponding set of strategies for overcoming them" ("The Romance" 241). In Narcisa's case, we might say that, in addition to the suitors' atrocious behavior, female friendship and the emotional investment in a female-centered lifestyle constitute further obstacles to marriage. While the narrative focuses on Duarte's efforts to stifle the other men's inappropriate, violent competition for Narcisa's hand, her own willingness to entertain Duarte's advances and to give up her homosocialism also form part of the transition toward the marriage ending. Described as living free from love (*Navidades* 119-20), Narcisa shocks her cousin when she expresses interest in the man who saves her from Leonido in the garden. Like the stock character of the *mujer esquiva*, Narcisa shuns men until the disguised Duarte comes onto the scene. In response to Clori's astonishment at this new-found love, Narcisa responds: "Pues no te espantes,... que si nací libre de amor, no lo estoy de haber nacido mujer" (*Navidades* 122). Recognizing that others view her as

disdainful of men, Narcisa asserts as indisputable the 'fact' of women's attraction to men. In a word, Narcisa's self-conscious declaration—"I am not free of having been born woman"—confirms heteroeroticism as the 'natural' state of desire.

While *Zayas* depicts the non-threatening arrangement of female-female desire in stark contrast to a dangerous patriarchal sexual economy, Carvajal represents heteroeroticism as a naturalized erotic arrangement. Carvajal's Narcisa experiences the transition to heteroeroticism as natural. Likewise, *Laurela* accepts the idea of a marriage contract, but we should keep in mind the absence of real desire in the narration about this arrangement. In contrast to the acceptance of the contractual marriage, *Laurela* experiences doubt and shock when Esteban/Estefanía confronts her with defining her own desire—with deciding whether she truly loves him/her. In this moment, *Laurela*'s apparently easy transition toward male-female relations loses its stability. At the heart of *Laurela*'s vacillation over whether she truly loves Esteban are questions far more difficult than mere contractual acquiescence; the situation with Esteban forces her to decipher her own feelings about friendship and desire, about homosocialism and homoeroticism.

Like *Zayas*'s "Amar sólo por vencer," "Celos vengán desprecios" fleshes out various aspects of women's homosocial interaction. In both tales, the female protagonists' desire centers for an extended period on the urge to please, entertain, and satisfy other women. With the exceptions of Esteban's performance of a feminine role and of Duarte's exemplary courtship, the tales present masculinity as needlessly violent and egoistic. The counterpoint to men's competitive, self-interested, and honor-driven

actions can be found in positive representations of women's affective alliances and, to varying degrees, homoeroticism.¹⁴

To decipher further the implications of these characters' female-centered affections, we must recognize that, in both novellas, women's devotion to each other is presented as a homosocial stage that precedes the normative sexual awakening. In this sense, *Zayas* and Carvajal depict female homosocialism and even homoeroticism as passing phenomena. DiGangi describes:

In the Renaissance, [...] same sex desire cemented normative bonds between men (e.g. through court patronage) and between women (e.g. through premarital friendship). (26)

The non-threatening aspect of pre-marital female eroticism and homosocialism relies on the representation of these phenomena "as a harmless, temporary dalliance preceding or subsumed under [the woman's] orderly desire for and subordination to a man" (92).¹⁵ The notion of female homosocialism and even homoeroticism as "a harmless, temporary dalliance" only partially applies to *Laurela*'s and *Narcisa*'s experiences. Identified primarily with women during the pre-marital stage, both characters occupy what we might call today a lesbian subject position and what we can call a woman-identified subject position for the early modern period. Neither character pines away in anticipation of a man's attentions; in fact, their attentions are focused on other women, with the introduction of heteroerotic desire providing shock (in *Laurela*'s case) and, for the older *Narcisa*—who was despairing of men's incompetence—a pleasant surprise.

These female allegiances, in other words, amount to more than a dalliance. The authors depict *Laurela*'s and *Narcisa*'s

lives as being organized primarily around relationships with other women and, importantly, around female desire. Zayas's rich representation of various reactions to the homoeroticism of "Amar" helps this tale transcend the standard depictions of female friendship. Like Carvajal, Zayas is interested in giving readers sustained access to the choices made by women characters by giving readers access to networks of friendship and forces of desire at work in characters' lives.

II. Women's Worlds Past and Present

Late twentieth-century discussions of lesbian and gay identity have spent much energy debunking the myth that homosexuality is perverse or derivative. From Judith Butler's defense of the parodic effects of gay identity vis-à-vis heterosexuality's fear of becoming undone (cf. "Imitation" and *Bodies*) to Teresa DeLauretis's attempt to theorize lesbian desire in psychoanalytic terms (cf. *The Practice of Love*), feminism and queer theory have provided new frameworks through which we might imagine and understand desire. Of particular relevance to the analysis of early modern female desire is Elizabeth Grosz's response to DeLauretis's *The Practice of Love*. In *Space, Time, Perversion*, Grosz rejects the viability of psychoanalysis and other male-oriented schemas to explain women's desire. Indeed, she suggests that feminists need to move beyond the psychoanalytic conceptualization of woman as lack and that we need to re-think eroticism: "Women's desire is inconceivable on models which attribute to desire the status of an activity: women function (for men) as objects of desire" (179).

Suggesting that we re-orient our

thinking about women's affective relationships, Grosz claims that we should not be asking whether or not someone is lesbian. Instead, we should interrogate the nature of our emotional investments, the nature of the worlds that we construct for ourselves (184). Grosz refuses to idealize same-sex relationships and acknowledges that, like opposite sex relationships, they are products of patriarchy. And, in a move reminiscent of Adrienne Rich, she rejects the complete differentiation of lesbian desire from other forms of sexual expression:

Unless there is a common structure of desire—or at least a very broad continuum on which both lesbian and hetero-sexual women's desires can be located—the openedness of desire in its aims, objects, and practices cannot be adequately explained. (170)

Likewise, it is the very openedness of Laura's and Narcisa's desire that makes Zayas's and Carvajal's tales read as complementary explorations of the mutability and variety of women's affective and erotic relationships.

Grosz's postmodern rejection of complete differentiation between lesbianism and heterosexuality serves as a potent reminder to twenty-first century readers that we cannot, as Valis also has suggested, discuss early modern literature's representation of homosexuality as an *identity*. More importantly, Grosz's suggestion that we question the nature of one's allegiances and investments, that we examine where one's physical and emotional energies are expended, provides a potentially powerful framework for the examination of women's literature from early modern Spain.

Rather than focus on the marriage endings in Carvajal or, in Zayas's *Desen-*

gaños, on the violent resolutions, we might turn to the broad range of relationships women have with each other and interrogate the aims, objects, and practices of these relationships. While Carvajal's positive representation of women's friendships has drawn critics' attention, *Zayas* has been seen as negatively portraying relationships among women.¹⁶ Yet both authors emphasize the feminine in their prefaces and in the frame tale, and both emphasize the interconnectedness of women's lives. With this in mind, we can see that the frame tales in the *Desengaños* and the *Navidades* encourage us to focus on women's bonding with each other, and that *Zayas* rejects the idea that female-female bonding represents only a temporary dalliance in women's movement toward sexual relationships with men.

At the end of the *Desengaños*, Lisis announces that the suffering of the female characters in the novellas has led her to decide to withdraw from her upcoming marriage and enter a convent. This rejection of the current state of male-female relationships is explicit and unequivocal. By taking Isabel's and Estefanía's hands and leaving the soiree, Lisis highlights the gravity of her announcement: not only does she refuse to marry, she also refuses to be in the company of men, choosing instead the safety and comfort of a woman-only environment. In her own, less dramatic style, Carvajal also endorses the importance of women's relationships with each other and portrays women as decision makers in the frame tale. The two widowed friends, Lucrecia and Juana, occupy central positions in the *Navidades*, even though much of the activity centers on courtship among the younger generation. Although the text begins with Lucrecia's family's move to Madrid, her husband barely figures as a character. His

primary function is that his death serves as the catalyst for the storytelling, and his confidence in Lucrecia's "amor y prudente gobierno" characterizes her from the beginning as a responsible head of household (*Navidades* 16). The ability of women to take over traditionally male duties surfaces in the widow Juana's story also. As a strict mother worried about her daughter's future, Juana does not allow the seventeen-year-old Leonor to leave the house, except to go to mass. The mothers' prudence pays off as they capably help arrange the younger generation's marriages. The volume concludes with characters anticipating more festivities and expressing good wishes for friendship, as they leave "dándose unos a otros gustosos abrazos de amistad" (*Navidades* 276).

The emphasis on friendship at the end of the *Navidades* and the *Desengaños* provides one point of entry into the interconnectedness of women's lives in both volumes. *Zayas* explores the fluidity of women's desire in "Amar sólo por vencer," where the trope of a crossdressed male provides an excuse for defending women's love for each other. In tracing the bonds between Narcisca and her female friends, Carvajal also speaks to the intensity of women's friendship which includes, in "Celos vengan desprecios," a protagonist who responds repeatedly and obediently to women's desires. Outsiders' laughter, men's frustration, and general curiosity are only some of the reactions we see to these characters' homosocial lives and, in *Zayas*, to a defense of female-female love. By inscribing such responses to women who live surrounded by women, who reject men, or who engage in discussion about homoeroticism, the authors give us clues about how we might decipher women's desire in early modern texts. By validating women's

homosocialism and suggesting a possible fluidity between women's friendship and eroticism, Zayas and Carvajal orient readers' attention toward intimate aspects of women's lives.

Without the more direct engagement with such issues presented in Zayas's texts, however, we might not be inclined to see similar patterns in Carvajal, who is known for her 'conservatism,' 'conformism,' and 'womanly submission,' and is applauded primarily for her representation of aristocratic lifestyles and codes of conduct. The history of criticism about Carvajal is instructive for the future of early modern Hispanic women's studies. If we can generalize about the choices we have made in our research and teaching, we might say that, interested in texts that challenge social and artistic norms, many postmodern critics, including myself, have gravitated toward more obviously subversive authors. One way to escape this tendency and to expand the body of texts with which we work is to place better-known authors such as Zayas next to less-studied women such as Carvajal. In this case, in which the frame tales firmly emphasize women's friendship and strength of character, Zayas's complex representation of homoeroticism is complemented by Carvajal's more contained depiction of one woman's female-centered identity.

Noël Valis correctly states that Carvajal's negotiation of female authorship "tells us something about ourselves and the cultural past out of which we still operate" (252). Considered in the larger context of women's literary studies, Valis's elegant defense of Carvajal takes on a slightly different valence, serving as a reminder of the many types of women's writing that remain to be studied or edited, and warning us against merely replicating our (modern)

oneselves in our criticism, against looking only for early modern authors or texts that validate our way of looking at the world. The tension and capitulation evident in women's texts do tell us a lot about the cultural past of the west. By limiting ourselves to those texts which overtly challenge the status quo, we run the risk of failing to understand the nuance and richness of this past. We should continue to expand the scope of our research to authors and genres that remain understudied. If we use the strategies and theories we have already applied to the women whose works have attracted our attention, if we struggle against the sense of alienation produced by women-authored texts that seem to replicate traditional models of femininity, we will learn to better appreciate the full range of ideologies, styles, and strategies of women's cultural production from Spain's early modern period.

Notes

I would like to thank Amy R. Williamsen for helping me think more rigorously about pedagogy, Valerie Traub for inspiring me with her model scholarship on lesbian history, and María Constanza Pérez for reminding me of the rewards of teaching.

¹At the end of "Al que leyere," Zayas states: "Te ofrezco este libro muy segura de tu bizarría, y en confianza de que si te desagradare, podías disculparme con que nací mujer, no con obligaciones de hacer buenas novelas, sino con muchos deseos de acertar a servirte" (*Novelas* 23). Citations from Zayas's *Novelas* are from Amezúa, since Olivares's new edition of the *Novelas amorosas* was in press during the writing of this piece. *Desengaños* quotes are from Yllera's edition.

²Based on their survey of 56 PhD and MA reading lists, Joan Brown and Crista Johnson conclude, "Women are largely absent from current required reading" ("Required Reading" 5). In "The Gender of Our Canon," the authors note that Santa Teresa and Emilia Pardo Bazán

are the only women to appear on more than 75% of the lists, with Rosalía de Castro and Carmen Laforet following at 52% and 50%, respectively (470-71). In contrast, Zayas appears on 16% of the lists, and medieval authors lag behind at 7% for Teresa de Cartagena and 4% each for Leonor López de Córdoba and Florencia del Pinar ("The Gender" 475). The same case holds for Latin American lists, where Gabriela Mistral and Sor Juana are the only women on the lists ("Required" 6, "The Gender" 470). Amy Williamsen has noted in "Charting Our Course," that, in 1993, women writers represented 2.8% of all authors listed for the early modern period; this marks a decrease from the 3.09% representation found in a similar study in 1973 (5-7).

³A conservative estimate based on the MLA Bibliography shows over 370 studies on Santa Teresa and over 240 on Sor Juana during the period of 1981-1999. Zayas follows at upwards of 80 books and articles; Ana Caro and Catalina de Erauso each have fewer than 20 publications about them. Work on these and other women is increasing steadily; these numbers serve only as a baseline estimate. Santa Teresa, Sor Juana, and Zayas have been the subject of numerous dissertations, and *representations* of women remain the focus of many others, but a review of dissertations in progress (cf. Eustis [in *Hispania*, May 1999 and May 2000]) and conference programs from 1998-99 suggests that only a small percentage of new work is being done on different women. It is an excellent sign that some graduate students have written on innovative topics and understudied writers in recent years (cf. Mary Blythe Daniels, Diana Mulrone, Susan Smith, Jane Tar, and Marta Walliser). Moreover, the Asociación de Escritoras Españolas y Americanas holds an annual conference that serves as a forum for new research. Finally, excellent editions of women's writing (cf. Arenal and Rivers; Arenal and Schlu; Hegstrom [with translation by Larson]; Kaminsky, *Water Lilies*; Olivares; Schlu; Soufas, *Women's Acts*; White-nack and Campbell; Yllera) have made texts available for classroom use.

⁴The publishing history of Zayas's novellas exemplifies the fate suffered by many fine au-

thors, who were judged vulgar, dull, or otherwise inferior or inappropriate by nineteenth-century literary historians and subsequently excised from the canon. Published with regularity from 1637 until the mid-nineteenth century, Zayas's collection did not appear in a complete edition until 1948-1950 (cf. Yllera 64-99). Also see Kaminsky (378, n. 5), Williamsen ("Engendering" 644-47), and Yllera (21-33) for discussions of previous criticism of Zayas.

⁵Although the lack of available modern editions presents itself as an obvious explanation for the absence of criticism on many women's texts, this only partially explains the problem of limited critical inquiry. In fact, this is a thorny issue: we do not study an author in part because her texts are not readily available; yet, texts do not become available unless someone—a publisher, an individual scholar—expresses initial interest in an author. In terms of availability of texts, we need to remember that the Chadwyck-Healey microfiche collection of women's writing from the Biblioteca Nacional is available at many U.S. universities (cf. *Autoras españolas*). Hegstrom and Williamsen's volume, *Engendering the Early Modern Stage*, exemplifies the rich possibilities for analysis of women's writing in the period.

⁶Until recently, most critics disparaged Carvajal's literary abilities (cf. Amezúa and Serrano y Sanz) but praised the *costumbrista* or realist aspect of her texts (cf. Bourland, J. Jiménez, Rodríguez Cuadros). See J. Jiménez (15-16), Valis (254), and Rodríguez Cuadros (39-40, n. 76) for discussions of previous criticism, as well as positive evaluation, of Carvajal's work. While there has been much debate about whether Zayas was a feminist, even critics who focus on different issues in her texts agree that her fiction advocates pro-woman social reform (cf. Brownlee, *The Cultural Labyrinth*; Greer, *María de Zayas*). Zayas's complex, and often problematic, feminism is the subject of my *Reclaiming the Body*. See Susan Griswold's "Topoi and Rhetorical Distance" for a reading of Zayas's feminism as a purely rhetorical stance.

⁷Another issue implicit in Valis's summary of the opposition between Zayas and Carvajal is

that of marital status. An 'aberration' in her chosen themes of violence and feminism, Zayas also fails to conform to the rule inasmuch as she is thought to never have married. In the same way that Zayas's single status has provoked much speculation and influenced criticism about her texts, Carvajal's status as a widow and mother of nine has guided scholars' readings of the *Navidades*. Read by many critics before the 1990s as valuable primarily for her *costumbrismo* or realism (cf. Amezuía, Bourland, Pfandl, and Serrano y Sanz), Carvajal's writing has been described more recently as 'chaste' or 'honest' (J. Jiménez 18), and she has been called a 'maternal writer' ("escritora madre" [L. Jiménez 169]). Even Valis's excellent article uses what little is known of Carvajal's life to discuss the author's intentionality, speculating about Carvajal's wish-fulfillment (256), sense of solidarity with female characters (257), and depiction of an alter-ego in Lucrecia (256).

⁸The ever growing bibliography on Zayas is too large to cite here. However, I refer the reader to the following works on her feminism and her place in the canon: Boyer's "Introduction," Sandra Foà's *Feminismo y forma narrativa*, and my *Reclaiming the Body*. For an overview of Zayas, see Whitenack's "Introduction" and, for a variety of theoretical approaches, see Williamssen and Whitenack's *Marta de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*.

⁹I follow the lead of others in the field (such as DiGangi, Masten, Smith, and Traub) who use the term 'homoerotic' to refer to erotic arrangements among members of the same sex in the early modern period. I only use the more familiar term 'heterosexual' in this sentence as a means of introducing the distinction between different sex and same sex relations. See Traub's review essay, "The Rewards of Lesbian History," for analyses of several books dealing with pre-twentieth century eroticism. For a collection of articles on these issues in early modern Spanish literature, see María José Delgado and Alain Saint-Saëns's *Lesbianism and Homosexuality*.

¹⁰In "Reconstituting the Feminine," Gorfkle explains Laurela's lack of suspicion about

Esteban/Estefanía in terms of the girl's own narcissism and inexperience (79).

¹¹In response to critics who have focused on the issue of male crossdressing and male desire, Gossy writes, "I would like to suggest that for lesbians, and for historians of female homoeroticism, Laurela's reception of a discourse of erotic love from a person who she believes is a woman in love with her is of primary importance" (24).

¹²See, for example, Pedro Herrera Puga's dated but informative *Sociedad y delincuencia en el siglo de oro* (246-69); and Perry's "The 'Nefarious' Sin." As Perry describes in *Crime and Society* in her discussion of contemporary accounts of prison life in Seville:

Lesbians were also severely punished in the prison. According to Chaves, the women in prison spoke the same tough language as underworld men. [...] Some made artificial male genitalia; those who were discovered were given 200 lashes and permanently exiled from Seville. (84)

¹³See Gorfkle for a discussion of this story as a love triangle between father, daughter, and the man/woman, Esteban/Estefanía ("Re-Constituting" 82).

¹⁴The strong emphasis on female bonding in "Amar sólo por vencer" helps explain the harsh criticism of the aunt who leads Laurela and her handmaid to their death (*Desengaños* 329). Throughout Zayas's collection, characters emphasize the need for women to stick together and defend each other, although in various cases women's betrayal of other women leads to violent scenes (e.g. "Tarde llega el desengaño" and "Estragos que causa el vicio"). As to Duarte's courtship in "Celos vengán desprecios," I should note one situation in which he allows his ego to get in the way of Narcisa's best interests. When she and her cousin are en route to the city, Arnaldo and his men attack the coach and tie the women's attendants to trees. Rather than immediately rescuing Narcisa, Duarte waits "por dar lugar a que el Duque [Arnaldo] quedara solo y que ella conociera lo mucho que le debía" (*Navidades* 129).

¹⁵As with DiGangi's study, the function of female homoeroticism in early modern literature has been discussed primarily in terms of drama, where crossdressed characters often played on gender expectations and codes of behavior. Perhaps because male-authored literature is more abundant and more heavily studied, male bonding, including male homoeroticism, has received far more critical attention than any aspect of women's sociality or eroticism. Male bonding and homoeroticism have been studied by Anne Cruz ("Homo ex machina"), Mario DiGangi, Sidney Donnell, Dan Heiple, Jeffrey Masten, Bruce Smith, and Harry Vélez-Quñones, among others. Valerie Traub's forthcoming *The Renaissance of Lesbianism* promises to be the most complete study on the topic of female homoeroticism to date. The extensive bibliography on the meanings of crossdressing in early modern literature includes Paula Bennett ("Gender as Performance"), Carmen Bravo-Villasante (*La mujer vestida de hombre*), Melveena McKendrick (*Women and Society*), Traub ("The (In)Significance of Lesbian Desire"), and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (*Feminism*). Also see Bullough and Bullough, and Marjorie Garber for more general, yet still historicized, discussions of crossdressing.

¹⁶Maria Grazia Profeti has commented on the lack of solidarity among women as a "constant law" in *Zayas* (241). In "Seduction and Hysteria," Gorfkle discusses the representations of some women as rivals and devouring mothers (21) and the competition between the ideal and the Oedipal mothers (23). In "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Search for the M/Other," Cruz has noted: "*Zayas's* fictionalized world of intrigues and amorous adventures leaves no room for feminine friendship or for intergenerational family attachments" (43). On the other hand, Carvajal's representations of women's relationships with other women—often in terms of their domestic roles or their obligations as noblewomen—have been mentioned by several critics (cf. Armon ["The Romance," 243-44], Profeti [244], J. Jiménez [18-21], Valis [261], and Walliser [331-32]).

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