María de Zayas y Sotomayor published two volumes of novellas, *Novelas amatorias y ejemplares* (1637) and *Desengaños amatorios* (1647), which enjoyed immense popularity in her day. She has recently been reinstated as a major figure of the Spanish Golden Age.

This study examines Zayas's prose through a gynocentric lens. Drawing on an extensive array of primary and secondary sources, and referring to the ideas of Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous, Raymond and Genette, O'Brien reflects on the interactions of Zayas's women in such relationships as friendship, sisterhood, and motherhood, analyzing these interactions through the collections as a whole, and connecting the novellas with the frame stories, an aspect of Zayas's writing which has often been overlooked by critics.

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WOMEN IN THE PROSE OF MARÍA DE ZAYAS

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ix
List of Abbreviations xi

Introduction: Zayas’s Prose, a Feminine World 1
1 Women’s Alliances and the Frame ‘Sisterhood’ 9
2 Women’s Perfidy and the Subversion of Sisterhood 56
3 The Intersection of Gender and Class in Zayas’s Feminine World 102
4 Absences/Presences: Mother-Daughter Relationships 158
5 Other ‘Mothers’: Surrogates and the Mother of God 203

Conclusion: A Gynocentric Ending: ‘No es trágico fin’ 242

Appendix 1: Women’s Interrelationships in Zayas’s Novelas amorosas y ejemplares 246
Appendix 2: Women’s Interrelationships in Zayas’s Desengaños amorosos 247

Bibliography 249
Index 277
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ABBREVIATIONS

BC      Bulletin of the Comediantes
BHS     Bulletin of Hispanic Studies
BSS     Bulletin of Spanish Studies
CI      Critical Inquiry
CRR     Cincinnati Romance Review
DA      Desengaños amorosos
HisJ    Hispanic Journal
HR      Hispanic Review
JHispP  Journal of Hispanic Philology
MLR     Modern Language Review
MonR    Monographic Review
NAE     Novelas amorosas y ejemplares
PMLA    Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
RCEH    Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos
REH     Revista de estudios hispánicos
RFE     Revista de filología española
RLA     Romance Languages Annual
RQ      Renaissance Quarterly
RR      Romantic Review
SCJ     Sixteenth Century Journal
Introduction  
Zayas’s Prose, a Feminine World

Quién duda, lector mío, que te causará admiración que una mujer tenga despejo no sólo para escribir un libro, sino para darle a la estampa, que es el crisol donde se averigua la pureza de los ingenios [...]  
Quién duda, digo otra vez, que habrá muchos que atribuyan a locura esta virtuosa osadía de sacar a luz mis borrones, siendo mujer, que en opinión de algunos necios es lo mismo que una cosa incapaz.¹

In this defensive manner, María de Zayas y Sotomayor first addresses the readership of her Novelas amorosas y ejemplares (1637) in the ‘Al que leyere’ prologue. Through her confident defence of female intelligence, she strips her captatio benevolentiae of even the barest veil of humility. By contrast, Maríana de Carvajal, one of her successors in the Spanish novella genre, would later adopt a more bashful stance, seeking allowances to be made for ‘los defectos de una tan mal cortada pluma’ and referring to her Navidades de Madrid (1663) as ‘aborto inútil de mi ingenio’.² Zayas’s audacity is all the more striking when one takes into account the context of her literary enterprise; her introductory discourse is that of a ‘Defensa de las mujeres’, pre-dating Fray Benito Jerónimo Feijoo’s 1726 essay by almost ninety years.

We possess very little information regarding the life of María de Zayas, most of which derives from the findings of Manuel Serrano y Sanz. Documentation suggests that she was probably baptised in the Madrid parish of San Sebastián on September 12th 1590. She was the daughter of Fernando de Zayas y Sotomayor, an infantry captain who was granted a knighthood in

¹ Zayas y Sotomayor, Novelas amorosas y ejemplares [NAE], ed. J. Olivares, p. 159; Desengaños amorosos [D4], ed. A. Yllera. Henceforth, page numbers from these editions of Zayas’s works will be included in parentheses after the relevant quotations.
² The modesty topos is also evident in Ana Caro’s Valor, agravio y mujer, the closing lines of which read: ‘Aquí, senado discreto, / Valor, agravio y mujer / acaban. Pídeos su dueño, / por mujer y por humilde, / que perdonéis sus defectos.’ Such measures may have been intended to make the publication of women’s writing more palatable to a broad readership. Caro, Valor, agravio y mujer, III. 2753; Carvajal y Saavedra, ‘Al lector’, in Navidades de Madrid, p. 5.
the prestigious military Order of Santiago, and of Doña María de Barasa.\(^3\) Apparently, she resided for most of her life in Madrid. Don Fernando served the seventh Count of Lemos during the period when the latter acted as Viceroy of Naples (1610–16). It is uncertain whether or not the Zayas family accompanied Don Fernando at this time; had the author experienced an Italian sojourn, it is conceivable that this could have exposed her to their popular novella genre, inspiring her creative interest.\(^4\) Certainly, she was in Madrid on 18th October 1617, when she added her signature to a book of the *Hermandad de defensores de la Inmaculada Concepción*.\(^5\) With regard to her literary output, she first became known as a poet, taking part in Madrid literary academies.\(^6\) From the 1620s, she composed verse eulogies to honour her eminent contemporary writers, including Miguel de Botello, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, Francisco de la Cueva, Antonio del Castillo de Larzával, and Lope de Vega. She evidently achieved recognition as a literary figure, receiving, for example, the hyperbolic praise of Lope de Vega in his *Laurel de Apolo* (1630):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{¡Oh dulces hipocrénides hermosas!} \\
\text{Los espinos pangeos} \\
\text{aprisa desnudad, y de las rosas} \\
\text{tejed ricas guirnaldas y trofeos} \\
\text{a la inmortal doña María de Zayas,} \\
\text{que sin pasar a Lesbos, ni a las playas} \\
\text{del vasto mar Egeo,} \\
\text{que hoy llora el negro velo de Teseo,} \\
\text{a Safo gozará miltenea} \\
\text{quien ver milagros de mujer desea;} \\
\text{porque su ingenio, vivamente claro,} \\
\text{es tan único y raro} \\
\text{que ella sola pudiera,}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^3\) Serrano y Sanz mistakenly calls the author’s mother ‘Catalina de Barrasa’, but ‘María de Barasa’ appears on her birth certificate (Serrano y Sanz, pp. 584–5).


\(^6\) Namely, she participated in Francisco de Mendoza’s *academia*, and possibly in that of Sebastián Francisco de Medrano also. See King, p. 59, note 81.
INTRODUCTION

no sólo pretender la verde rama,
pero sola ser sol de tu ribera,
y tú por ella conseguir más fama
que Nápoles por Claudia, por Cornelia
la sacra Roma y Tesbas por Targelia.7

She reciprocated this courtesy by glorifying ‘aquel príncipe del Parnaso, Lope de Vega Carpio, cuya memoria no morirá mientras el mundo no tuviere fin’ (DA 369).8 Scholars have postulated that she knew at first hand the cities that she enthusiastically describes in her novellas, although this is by no means certain; however, there is strong evidence to prove that she was in Barcelona in 1643.9 There are no further contemporary references to her after publication of the Desengaños amorosos in 1647, and the date and place of her death are unknown. Two death certificates (dated 1661 and 1669) bear her name – not an uncommon one – neither of which may be authentic. The paucity of information has led many scholars to lose their footing in the terrain of conjecture, speculating whether she spent the last years of her life in a convent, like many of her prose protagonists.

The only known example of Zayas’s writing for the theatre is La traición en la amistad.10 Today, her fame rests primarily upon twenty short prose narratives distributed evenly in two collections – Novelas amorosas y ejemplares and Parte segunda del sarao, y entretenimiento honesto, later known as Desengaños amorosos – which were first published in Zaragoza, in 1637 and 1647, respectively. Jaime Moll demonstrates that she had probably prepared a version of the former work as early as 1626, but the Consejo de Castilla’s suspension of licences for printing comedias and novellas (between 1625 and 1634) delayed publication.11 Once published, her prose was widely read in her lifetime, only lagging behind works by Miguel de Cervantes, Francisco de Quevedo, and Mateo Alemán in terms of commercial success.12

In La garduña de Sevilla y anzuelo de las bolsas (1642), Alonso de Castillo Solórzano lavishly praised her first prose work:

7 Lope de Vega, Laurel de Apolo, VIII. 579.
8 Zayas also composed panegyric poems to commemorate the deaths of Lope (1636) and Pérez de Montalbán (1639).
9 See Kenneth Brown.
10 There is much debate among scholars with regard to the composition date of this comedia. In Para todos (1632), Pérez de Montalbán mentions that Zayas ‘tiene acabada una comedia de excelentes coplas, y un libro para dar á la estampa, en prosa y verso, de ocho novelas ejemplares’ (Serrano y Sanz, p. 584). If we assume that he was referring to La traición en la amistad, we can estimate that Zayas completed this play not long before 1632. It pre-dates the complete version of the Novelas amorosas y ejemplares, which includes ten novellas.
11 Moll, ‘La primera edición’.
En estos tiempos luce y campea con felices aplausos el ingenio de doña María de Zayas y Sotomayor, que con justo título ha merecido el nombre de Sibila de Madrid, adquirido por sus admirables versos, por su felice ingenio y gran prudencia; habiendo sacado de la estampa un libro de diez novelas, que son diez asombros para los que escriben este género; pues la meditada prosa, el artificio de ellas y los versos que interpola es todo tan admirable, que acobarda las más valientes plumas de nuestra España.13

Famously, Cervantes had already claimed in the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613) to be ‘el primero que [ha] novelado en lengua castellana’, reinventing the Italian novella as a Spanish genre; Lope de Vega later brought his own creative genius to bear on his *Novelas a Marcia Leonarda* (1621/1624).14 The Italian novella had immoral connotations; for this reason, in Zayas’s *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, Laura names their stories *maravillas*, ‘que con este nombre quiso desempalagar al vulgo del de novelas, título tan enfadoso que ya en todas partes le aborrecen’ (*NAE* 168).

The genre to which Zayas’s prose pertains has belatedly acquired the title of *novela cortesana*, this being coined by Agustín González de Amezúa y Mayo in his *Formación y elementos de la novela cortesana* (1929). He described the genre thus:

\[
\text{La novela cortesana, tal como la desarrollaron la mayoría de sus cultivadores en el siglo XVII, tiene por escenario y campo de sus proezas [...] casi exclusivamente a la Corte y ciudades populosas, y esta circunstancia, tan peculiar, es la que me ha movido a denominarla así. El fondo de la intriga es también, invariablemente, con muy raras excepciones, el amor; sus protagonistas, caballeros, hidalgos, gente de viso, en fin, que vegeta en la ociosidad y opulencia de estas metrópolis. A su vez, la privativa condición social de sus personajes impondrá los valores morales que en ella juegan. Las dos ideas dominantes en todo caballero castellano de aquel tiempo, los dos polos en cuyo derredor gira su vida son el Amor y el Honor.}^{15}
\]

Zayas’s novellas share the genre’s common features: the urban setting, protagonists of noble birth, and amorous intrigues. By the time that she penned her novellas, the conventions of this seventeenth-century genre were well on their way towards becoming established. Nonetheless, she put her personal stamp on the stylised subject matter of the novella genre. Notably, as Amezúa

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13 Castillo Solórzano, p. 184.
14 Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares*, p. 45. The title of Zayas’s first volume may have been inspired by Cervantes’s *Novelas ejemplares*; the titular emphasis on the works’ exemplary qualities is probably designed to mitigate the detrimental effect of association with the salacious Italian novella genre.
observes, ‘el galán y la dama’ are the principal protagonists of the novela cortesana. In Zayas’s novellas, the importance of the dama expands, and she becomes more than a mere type. The complex ramifications of women’s interaction in her prose will be the subject of my study.

Zayas’s originality is undimmed by the fact that it was attained after having assimilated miscellaneous works by several authors, including Italian novelle by Giovanni Boccaccio and Matteo Bandello. Moreover, this knowledge of literary source materials demonstrates her remarkably extensive reading.16 In ‘Al que leyere’ (NAE), she includes a list of illustrious women, linking herself to her foremothers to legitimise her own literary endeavour.17 Perhaps this measure is also intuitively designed to alleviate what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar would later call women’s ‘anxiety of authorship’.18 The novella became a relatively popular genre for seventeenth-century women writers in the Spanish-speaking world, as evidenced by the Portuguese Leonor de Meneses’s El desdeñado más firme (1655), in addition to the aforementioned novellas of Zayas and Mariana de Carvajal.

The changing reception of Zayas’s novellas reveals much about the world beyond her text. In relation to the time-bound reception of the French Amadis de Gaule, Marian Rothstein observes that ‘a text requires completion by a reader and that reading is a non-neutral activity, strongly marked by the moment, by the world, in which it is performed’.19 Zayas apparently escaped immediate censure, despite writing under the strictures of post-Tridentine conditions, and the popularity of her prose continued unabated through the eighteenth century, declining thereafter.20 More than two hundred years later, critics schooled in Victorian standards of decency, such as George Ticknor and Ludwig Pfandl, condemned her works on moral grounds.21 They deemed her works to be inappropriate and immodest, as well as morally reprehen-

16 Edwin B. Place justifiably considers Zayas’s novellas to be ‘patchwork’ compositions. They continue to provide fertile ground for literary source studies. Place, María de Zayas, p. 10.
17 For an excellent study of the foremothers whom Zayas cites in her prologue, see Greer, María de Zayas Tells Baroque Tales, pp. 72–8.
18 This is the female author’s ‘radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a “precursor” the act of writing will isolate or destroy her […] Frequently, moreover, she can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible.’ Gilbert and Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic, p. 49 (Gilbert and Gubar’s italics).
19 Rothstein, p. 886.
20 Welles and Gossy, p. 508. For further information regarding the reception of Zayas’s collections, see Greer, María de Zayas Tells Baroque Tales, Chapter 2.
21 Pfandl and Ticknor were particularly appalled by Zayas’s El prevenido engañado, referring to it as ‘la obscena novela’ and ‘one of the most gross I remember to have read […] [a tale of] shameless indecency’. Pfandl, p. 369; Ticknor, II, 143, note 34.
sible. Later still, the emergence of the feminist movement induced a welcome surge of critical interest in Zayas’s works, leading early twentieth-century critics to view the novellas through the lens of feminism. Since the recent ‘rediscovery’ of Zayas’s prose, several studies have praised her exploration of the erotic in her novellas.\textsuperscript{22}

There has been a steady output of journal-length articles on Zayas’s novellas, many of which are worthy of merit, although short studies run the risk of losing sight of broad tendencies and patterns across the novellas. In particular, the novellas’ interconnectedness with the frame narrative tends to be overlooked by scholars, in favour of the tales’ more sensational events. Also, focusing on the novellas as a patriarchal world creates the inherent danger of sideling women. Relations of courtship and marriage are undeniable of import, although they do not solely populate the world of Zayas’s texts, nor can they be examined, in isolation, to explain how a conclusion that is almost devoid of heterosexual pairings is ‘el más felice que se pudo dar’ (\textit{DA} 510). By the final paragraphs of the \textit{Desengaños amorosos}, male protagonists are conspicuous by their absence. Thus, my study represents a new contribution to the study of Zayas’s prose, unearthing a neglected and innovative aspect: its gynocentrism.

María Jesús Fariña Busto and Beatriz Suárez Briones have observed astutely that ‘el universo emocional más importante tanto dentro de las \textit{Novelas} como de los \textit{Desengaños} es un universo femenino’\textsuperscript{23}. Relatively recently, the significance of women’s interrelationships has also come to the attention of psychoanalysts. For example, according to Nancy Chodorow’s female personality theory, a girl forms her gender identity positively, in becoming like the mother with whom she begins life in symbiotic merger, and the self continues to be defined through social relationships for the rest of women’s lives.\textsuperscript{24} Where apposite, I will make reference to the poststructuralist theories of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous, among others. Across five chapters, I will view the social world of Zayas’s twenty novellas through a feminine lens. This effectively represents a novel approach to Zayas’s prose works. In so doing, I will pay particular attention to the frame narrative, which binds these stories together. For the study of the texts’ narrative levels, I have recourse to Gérard Genette’s structuralist theory.

Specifically, the first two chapters will examine Zayas’s portrayal of women’s friendships and sisterhood and will also detail their subversion, conceptualising the novellas and frame narrative cohesively. Then, in the third chapter, I organise women’s interaction as represented by Zayas’s prose.

\textsuperscript{22} Goytisolo and Parrilla have focused on the erotic theme; also, several scholars have studied homoerotic undercurrents in the novellas.

\textsuperscript{23} Fariña Busto and Suárez Briones, ‘Desde/hacia la Otra’, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{24} See Gardiner, p. 352.
along the axis of class (and, to a limited degree, that of race). The fourth and fifth chapters analyse mother–daughter relationships, including secular and surrogate variants, as well as the divine role of Mary, as Mother of God. Thus, I will concentrate on the gynocentric aspect of Zayas’s ‘virtuosa osadía’ in publishing these two collections of novellas (NAE 159): her depiction, through literature, of a feminine world.
Women’s Alliances and the Frame ‘Sisterhood’

Cobrándose las dos tanto amor, que si no era para dormir, no se dividía la una de la otra. (DA 350)

Tomo por amparo el retiro de un convento [...] y así, con mi querida doña Isabel, a quien pienso acompañar mientras viviere, me voy a salvar de los engaños de los hombres. (DA 509)

This chapter will identify and explore a tendency within Zayas’s gallery of women’s interrelations or feminine world: the progressive emergence and consolidation of friendships among female protagonists in the novellas and frame narrative (i.e. the diegetic and metadiegetic narrative levels). Most importantly, I detect in Zayas’s prose an early example of what Janice Raymond has since termed ‘Gyn/affection’. In the latter part of this chapter, I contrast the burgeoning Gyn/affection among Zayas’s female protagonists with representations of friendship in other seventeenth-century Spanish works, including female-authored comedias. Several instances of woman’s perfidy towards her fellow sex in Zayas’s Novelas amorosas y ejemplares will be investigated in the second chapter; this represents the disintegration in social structure, as women betray their own kind. In parallel with this treachery, women’s friendships remain ineffectual and are largely underdeveloped in Zayas’s first volume; relations of courtship are patently the focus of female protagonists’ attentions and priorities. In contrast, the Desengaños amorosos emphasise Gyn/affection to a greater degree, against a backdrop of increasing violence. This suggests a limited social reintegration since

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1 Some of the material in this chapter originally appeared in my ‘Female Friendship Extolled’.

2 To aid my textual analysis, I employ Genette’s narrative-level terminology. At the extradiegetic level, a mysterious narrator introduces Lisis and her companions; in the closing paragraph of the Desengaños amorosos, a previously unknown extradiegetic listener is unveiled: Fabio. Immediately subordinate to the extradiegetic level is the diegetic level narrated by it, i.e. the sarao. Furthermore, stories are related by the diegetic sarao participants, constituting a metadiegetic level. Thus, narration is always at a higher narrative level than the story it narrates. Rimmon-Kenan prefers the term ‘hypodiegetic’ to Genette’s advocated ‘metadiegetic’, due to the confusion inherent in its ‘meta’ prefix.
women’s friendships act as a counterbalance to the corrosive disintegration of female solidarity; however, these friendships provide little protection for women in the secular world. Patriarchal and honour-coded values are omnipresent in these diverse female relationships, hampering women’s loyalties to each other and their cooperative agency. In this overall context, the developing frame tale will be discussed; its convent ‘solution’ optimistically offers an ideal ‘sisterhood’, although of a type which remains largely untested and unexplored within Zayas’s work.

Female Alliances in Zayas’s Novellas

Firstly, women’s alliances in two of Zayas’s novellas from her Novelas amorosas y ejemplares will be examined: Aventurarse perdiendo and El prevenido engañado. These are ‘weak’, opportunistically motivated friendships of only very limited duration. Then, I will turn to novellas within Desengaños amorosos, namely La esclava de su amante and Mal presagio casar lejos. The denouements of these novellas revolve around multiple female friendships; altruistic motives link these women in potent friendships, although impediments are posed by women’s honour predicaments and by violence stemming from patriarchy. It is not until the close of the frame narrative, however, that a truly effective form of female alliance emerges.

It is worthwhile to note that Zayas was not alone in cultivating the theme of women’s alliances in Spanish literature of the Golden Age. A novella by her successor, Mariana de Carvajal, also concedes the importance of women’s relationships. Lisa Vollendorf notes that, in Carvajal’s Navidades de Madrid (1663), women’s friendships form the backbone of her novella Celos vengan desprecios.3 Ultimately, Narcisa, the principal female protagonist, opts to forsake her female community for marriage, ostensibly in keeping with the literary conventions of both the comedia and novela cortesana; however, Nieves Romero-Díaz observes that, even from the confinement of the marital home, Narcisa continues her challenge to the patriarchal status quo.4 Women’s alliances appear with particular frequency in Zayas’s novellas, although they are similar to those of Celos vengan desprecios in respect of being short-lived.

Aventurarse perdiendo and El prevenido engañado

Aventurarse perdiendo, the first of the Novelas amorosas y ejemplares, counterbalances a woman’s betrayal by her female peer with the coexistence of

3 Vollendorf, ‘The Value of Female Friendship’, p. 428. This is an excellent thematic overview of female friendship in women’s seventeenth-century Spanish texts.
4 Romero-Díaz, ‘De la quinta a la ciudad’.
Women’s Alliances and the Frame ‘Sisterhood’ 11

Precarious female alliances. Lisarda narrates this tale of Jacinta’s travails.5 Within Lisarda’s novella, Jacinta recounts her life-story to a male listener, Fabio.6 The bucolic scene of Jacinta’s narration in Montserrat is laden with pastoral overtones, with which Zayas subversively experiments by presenting ‘a female-centred narrative where the heroine easily displaces the traditional male shepherd and becomes the primary focus of attention’.7 From the outset, Zayas manipulates the conventions of the traditionally male-dominated pastoral genre to accommodate the female voice by her revisionary inclusion of two female narrators, Lisarda and Jacinta, and by giving primacy to the latter’s experiential journey.

Isabel, a prominent protagonist early in the narrative, assists Jacinta in the pursuit of her brother’s hand in marriage. The two women were childhood friends – ‘muy amigas’ (NAE 183) – while Félix was serving Spain in Flanders. Isabel’s motivation being, ‘después de su amistad, el dar gusto a su hermano y servirle de fiel tercera en su amor’, she faithfully acts as the couple’s intermediary during courtship (NAE 186). Jacinta and Félix perform a clandestine wedding ceremony in the presence of a servant as witness; she boldly yields ‘la posesión de mi alma y cuerpo’, her sexual purity, jeopardising her honour in return for his promise (NAE 187). In so doing, Jacinta exchanges her virginity for a marriage that was not deemed valid in post-Tridentine Spain, at which time the novella is set; these covert, null unions often have life-threatening repercussions in Zayas’s novellas, implicitly supporting the Council of Trent’s ruling.8 While literary texts cannot be expected to represent the social reality of seventeenth-century Spain, Jacinta’s actions are highly plausible. Studying early modern Vizcaya, Renato Barahona has shown that there was considerable confusion regarding the nature of marriage after the Council of Trent. In recent years, historians have made valuable contributions towards the study of honour in seventeenth-century Spain, demonstrating that the loss of female honour and of reputation was regularly compensated through legal and monetary means.9

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5 Along with other protagonists belonging to the diegetic level, Lisarda will be discussed further in the second section of this chapter.
6 In Genette’s terms, Jacinta’s story is a ‘meta-metadiegetic’ narrative. She recounts her autobiography, making it also an ‘autodiegetic’ narrative.
8 The Council of Trent met during three periods between 1545 and 1563; Pope Pius IV formally confirmed its decrees in 1564. In its twenty-fourth session in 1563, with the promulgation of the decree of Tametsi (‘Decree on the Reformation of Marriage’, Chapter I), the Council ruled that, on pain of nullity, a valid marriage must have two or three witnesses, be publicly announced for three consecutive Sundays prior to the wedding, and be performed by the parish priest.
9 Honour is described by Scott K. Taylor as ‘fluid’, by Poska as ‘contextual and negotiable’, and by Barahona as ‘far more flexible and less delicate than has been commonly believed’, in
Synchronous with the burgeoning alliance of Isabel and Jacinta, the latter comes up against a female opponent: Félix’s cousin, Adriana. Adriana becomes ill due to her unrequited love for Félix. When he dashes her illusions by revealing that he has secretly pledged to marry Jacinta, she writes to Jacinta’s father to notify him of his family’s dishonour, prior to committing suicide. Jacinta exclaims: ‘en venganza de su desprecio, hizo la mayor crueldad que se ha visto consigo misma, con su primo y conmigo’ (NAE 188).10 Adriana’s veiled warning to the patriarchal figure that ‘había quien le quitaba el honor’ is potent enough to trigger a double-murder plot, exposing the potentially perverse and cruel nature of honour considerations in seventeenth-century Spanish society (NAE 189). Thus, as Vollendorf has commented, there is a ‘threatening subtext of violence’ even in Zayas’s earliest tale; rampant violence, which revolves around ideas concerning women’s sexual propriety, comes to the fore in Zayas’s second volume.11 Jacinta’s father’s ensuing reaction is to plot with Jacinta’s brother to murder both Jacinta and Félix. Jacinta’s male relatives demonstrate no mercy in their defence of the family’s honour, even though their manoeuvres directly arise from nothing more than a stratagem incited by a woman’s jealousy. However, they fatally miscalculate their ability to wreak vengeance on the couple; being attacked by Jacinta’s brother, Félix kills him and flees to safety.

Jacinta informs us that Isabel’s hopes have been thwarted: ‘pensaba ella, siendo yo mujer de su hermano, serlo del mio, a quien amó tiernamente’ (NAE 192). When Jacinta receives news of Félix’s death in a letter fabricated by her father, she and Isabel take nuns’ vows: ‘tomé el hábito de religiosa, y conmigo para consolarme y acompañarme doña Isabel, que me quería tiernísimamente’ (NAE 194). Their affectionate relationship resurfaces when both women think their chosen husbands to be dead. Jacinta’s active verb ‘tomé’ governs Isabel as well as the ‘hábito’, intimating that Isabel passively accepts Jacinta’s decision regarding their joint fates.

Jacinta spends only a temporary interlude in the convent, however, due to Félix’s unexpected return and the resumption of their sexual relationship. Through Jacinta’s disregard of her nun’s vows, Zayas radically departs from Catholic orthodoxy; as Irma V. Vasileski writes, ‘la doctrina católica requiere que la persona que tome órdenes religiosas escoja a Dios primeramente y ante todo’.12 Subsequently, the Pope ordains that the couple can live as husband

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10 Zayas’s contemporaneous readers would have assumed that Adriana would suffer eternal damnation because of her suicide. Thus, she inflicts the cruellest punishment upon herself.
11 Vollendorf, Reclaiming the Body, p. 96.
12 Vasileski, p. 38. Jacinta violates the Council of Trent’s rule of enclosure for nuns (twenty-fifth session, ‘On Regulars and Nuns’, Chapter V); it required the bishop’s permission...
and wife after abstaining from sexual relations for one year. In the interim, Jacinta goes to stay in the home of Guiomar and her mother, relatives of Félix. Jacinta leaves the convent ‘dejando escrita una carta a doña Isabel y dejándole el cuidado y gobierno de mi hacienda’ (NAE 197). It is an abrupt, impersonal conclusion to their loving relationship and intertwined destinies. Jacinta abandons her friend in order to marry Félix; fostering heterosexual love through honourable marriage takes precedence over their friendship. Nonetheless, ameliorating the reader’s opinion of Jacinta’s conduct somewhat, it is important to note that only marriage to Félix will remove the dishonour that she has incurred through their sexual relationship. The secret marriage ceremony lacked sacramental validity, and staying in a convent with Isabel would not have restored her honour.

In this tale, a second instance of female friendship arises: that of Jacinta and Guiomar; Jacinta is ‘en lugar de hija’ in the home of Guiomar’s mother (NAE 201). Within the year in which the couple have sworn not to consummate their love, Félix tragically drowns during a naval operation in Spain’s conquest of Mamora (1614). Isabel makes her final appearance in the novella when Jacinta reports that the former unsuccessfully urges her to return to the convent; it is telling that Jacinta does not seek solace from or offer succour to her long-standing friend upon their shared loss of Félix. Jacinta’s newfound friendship with Guiomar is a source of consolation; however, suggestions regarding Jacinta’s magnanimity discredit the selflessness and sincerity of the women’s alliance: ‘yo gastaba con ellas [doña Guiomar y su madre] mi renta, bien largamente’ (NAE 201).

Celio, a charismatic gentleman, visits Jacinta and Guiomar, issuing flattery to both women: ‘Igualmente nos alababa, sin ofender a ninguna nos quería: ya engrandecía la doncella, ya encarecía la viuda’ (NAE 202). Celio’s calculated wooing is such that hostile relations do not emerge between the two women who share his visits and attentions. Due to his seductive wiles, Jacinta falls in love with him, only for her to discover that he shuns marriage and instead intends to become a priest (a rare literary case of the hombre esquivo). Jealous and distressed by Celio’s philandering ways, Jacinta attempts to regain his favour by following him from Madrid to Salamanca. Guiomar and her mother select a travelling-companion for Jacinta’s

for nuns to leave the convent and the bishop or Superior’s written approval for lay people to enter the convent. The Council of Trent made provisions for cases of invalidity of profession, before five years have passed, on grounds of being underage or of compulsion (Chapter XIX); Jacinta’s case does not belong to either category. For the purpose of the novella, Zayas portrays Jacinta as having evaded these monastic reforms.

13 Jacinta is described as a ‘viuda’, despite her ambiguous marital status. Since Félix dies before the term that the Pope has ordained for their separation has elapsed, she never enjoys religiously sanctioned marital life with him.
safety; due to their inexpedient choice, Jacinta’s fellow traveller leads her in the direction of Barcelona, robbing and abandoning her. She is discovered by Fabio, and, on hearing her story, he assists her entry to a convent. On this occasion, she elects not to take vows due to her enduring, albeit futile, love for the religiously ordained Celio. Guiomar joins Jacinta in the convent, although friendship seems somewhat secondary to practical concerns: ‘murió su madre, y antes de su muerte le pidió [a Jacinta] que la amparase hasta casarse’ (NAE 210).14 Jacinta is again a source of financial support; it seems likely that Guiomar accompanies Jacinta only until a suitable marriage can be arranged for her.

The tale is striking for its inclusion of two pairs of female allies (Jacinta/Isabel and Jacinta/Guiomar), each coinciding with a key phase and a new paramour in Jacinta’s romantic history. Neither friendship flourishes, however; primarily, this negligence occurs because marriage is women’s principal concern in Aventurarse perdiendo.

El prevenido engañado, fourth novella of Zayas’s Novelas amorosas y ejemplares, portrays another case of female friendship’s subordination to heterosexual relationships. Alonso’s novella exhibits a cumulative structure of successive episodes involving the undiscerning Fadrique’s sexual liaisons and ensuing victimisation by cunning female characters.15 The third such episode, involving Ana and Violante, is unusual insofar as other occurrences in the tale show Fadrique and the corresponding, duplicitous woman each acting alone, without accomplices. The relevant episode takes place in Madrid, where Fadrique lodges with his cousin, Juan. The melancholic Juan reveals to Fadrique his love for Ana, whom he cannot marry since they are each promised to others in strategic, family-arranged marriages.

Juan portrays Ana and her cousin Violante to Fadrique in eulogistic terms:

Doña Ana, que éste es su nombre, es el milagro de esta edad, porque ella, y doña Violante su prima, son las Sibilas de España, entrambas bellas, entrambas discretas, músicas, poetas. En fin, en las dos se halla lo que en razón de bella y discreción está repartido en todas las mujeres del mundo. (NAE 313–14)

This description highlights the women’s intelligence, while their depiction as ‘las Sibilas de España’ links them with our author, who was pronounced ‘gran
Sibila mantuana’, ‘gran Sibila’, and ‘Sibila de Madrid’ by Ana Caro and by Alonso de Castillo Solórzano in poems that preface the *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (*NAE* 155–6). Despite Fadrique’s frequent exhortations that ‘me tienen tan escarmentado las discretas que deseo tener batalla con una boba’ (*NAE* 318), he immediately admires Violante. Captivated by her beauty, he dedicates a sonnet to her *hermosura*: ‘mata, enamora y alegra’ (*NAE* 319). She wears sumptuous attire: ‘una saya entera negra, cuajada de lentejuelas y botones de oro, cintura y collar de diamantes, y un apretador de rubíes’ (*NAE* 319). Since she is curiously first described as being adorned by this ostentatious garb and positioned decadently in a pose for immortalisation in a portrait, the reader immediately perceives in her a marked narcissistic, hedonistic streak.\(^\text{16}\) Contrasting with Juan’s precise analysis of the women’s mental capacities, Fadrique fails to detect or pay homage to Violante’s more remarkable trait: *discreción*.

Shifra Armon suggests that the term *discreción* was associated with a wide range of uses in the seventeenth century. It was considered an invaluable quality for the aristocrat, encompassing such vital attributes as learnedness, shrewdness, discernment, and circumspection; it is closest semantically to *prudencia* although, unlike the latter, ‘it may be unhinged from moral ends, becoming a malicious or dishonest astuteness’.\(^\text{17}\) In a later episode of the same novella, a duchess eloquently praises the same trait of *discreción* in women as essential for the preservation of their honour, regardless of their virtue: ‘¿Y cómo sabrá ser honrada la que no sabe en qué consiste el serlo? ¿No advertís que el necio peca y no sabe en qué? Y siendo discreta sabrá guardarse de las ocasiones’ (*NAE* 331). The duchess’s proclamation regarding the worth of women’s intelligence can be applied retrospectively to Violante; as the episode unfolds, it becomes evident that Violante epitomises the duchess’s view, astutely succeeding in guarding her reputation despite her covert indulgence in sexual relations. Fadrique’s gradual enlightenment regarding the desirability of intelligence in women may be designed in order

\(^{16}\) Portraits were prized objects of decoration associated with wealth and prestige, adorning houses, palaces, and churches in Golden-Age Spain. Unsurprisingly, they also inhabited the imagination of writers of the time and feature in many dramatists’ plays; for example, Rosaura’s picture in *La vida es sueño* and Serafina’s portrait in *El pintor de su deshonra* are both vital to Calderón’s plots. Melveena McKendrick observes that ‘the idea of the captured image, the beautiful woman fixed and contained within a frame to adorn man’s life, to be owned and gazed upon, is imaginatively exploited by the dramatists’. Zayas abandons the portrait device immediately after remarking that ‘[Violante] estásbase retratando (curiosidad usada en la Corte)’ (*NAE* 319). As a symbol of possession and a projection of male fantasy, the portrait can serve no further purpose in relation to the wilful Violante; refusing to be the passive adornment of a male ‘owner’, she cannot truly be associated with or represented by the painted artefact. McKendrick, *Identities in Crisis*, p. 157.

to convince men of the benefits involved in allowing women to cultivate their minds. Zayas’s defence of women in this case is very effectively constructed as she resists gender typecasting by having a male narrator, Alonso, crystallise into a female apologist. It is also significant that Zayas gives a male narrator this story, which illustrates the threat that the *mujer varonil* can pose to men.

While typically it is the lady’s maid who serves as go-between in Zayas’s tales, Fadrique selects Ana, Violante’s cousin and intimate friend, as his intermediary; Fadrique writes to Ana: ‘Lo que yo le suplico, / es, que siendo tercera, / diga a su bella prima que me quiera’ (*NAE* 322). Henceforth, the women take control of the scenario of seduction. Fadrique and Juan are soon subordinated in the affections of Violante and Ana through the arrival of Ana’s fiancé and his brother. The presence of three pairs of characters of equal social standing provides a symmetry that is not typically evident in Zayas’s tales. Furthermore, no character displays envy of his or her relative in any of these collaborative pairs or covets the other’s partner. In particular, the cooperative alliance of Violante and Ana is evident when they devise a *burla* for Fadrique. They suggest a scheme whereby Fadrique and Juan visit their house under cover of darkness, Fadrique taking Ana’s place in bed with her husband while she and Juan spend the night together. Somewhat implausibly, due to Juan’s exhortations, the foolhardy Fadrique agrees to take part in the dangerous mission. A comic scene follows, in which Fadrique fretfully passes the night avoiding the advances of Ana’s ‘husband’ – ‘el uno procurando llegarse y el otro apartarse’ (*NAE* 325). At dawn, Ana reveals the *burla*: his bed-partner is Violante, Ana’s husband being absent from home; Fadrique has unwittingly become the object of the women’s sexual humour. There is convincing evidence to suggest that Zayas based this erotic scene on Masuccio Salernitano’s forty-first novella.  

El Saffar highlights that the women’s trickery ‘has the effect of putting him [Fadrique] in the place of an adulterous woman, exposing him to the terror of spending the night in bed with a jealous man’. Thus, the women reveal the humiliation that attends powerlessness and the phallic control that cunning and intelligent women can exert over the men who presume to be their masters. The women’s mirth and Fadrique’s confusion are explicitly

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18 Mateo Alemán may have used the same source material for his *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599, 1604), in the interpolated novella of *Don Luis de Castro y don Rodrigo de Montalvo* from Part II. Donald McGrady explores Alemán’s modifications to the Italian model, concluding that he ‘transforms a Renaissance story of almost pagan exaltation of sensuality into a typical product of the Spanish baroque – bitter disillusionment with worldly pleasures’. Zayas imitates the joyful sensuality of her Italian source, reserving Fadrique’s disillusionment for a later scene. McGrady, ‘Masuccio and Alemán’, pp. 206–7.

portrayed: ‘Quedó con esta burla de las hermosas primas tan corrido don Fadrique que no hablaba palabra, ni la hallaba a propósito, viéndolas a ellas celebrar con risas el suceso, contando Violante el cuidado con que le había hecho estar’ (NAE 326). The *burla* demonstrates the subversive control that these clever female allies temporarily wield over their lovers. Fadrique’s chagrin does not endure, for he then commences a sexual relationship with Violante, which continues after the return of Ana’s husband. By portraying the assertive sexuality of such allies as Ana and Violante, Zayas destroys the myth of woman as sexually passive.

With the foregrounding of Violante’s burlesque assumption of erotic agency, the partnership between the female cousins is relegated to the background. Violante begins to operate independently of her married cousin; facilitating her sexual intrigues, she dwells ‘en un cuarto aparte, donde estaba sin tener que intervenir con doña Ana ni su marido’ (NAE 327).\(^{20}\) Having failed to win Violante in marriage, Fadrique correctly deduces that she has substituted him with a new lover, whose identity he discovers to be Ana’s brother-in-law. Romero-Díaz emphasises the daringly subversive nature of Violante’s unabashed, lone pursuit of sexual satisfaction: ‘La utilización del cuerpo femenino por parte de las mujeres para su propia satisfacción sexual es una manera de desafiar la ideología patriarcal que tanto énfasis pone en su control.’\(^{21}\) A second *burla* spontaneously occurs, in which Violante participates during Ana’s absence. Fadrique becomes a source of derision for Violante when her lover frightens him by wielding a shoe in the manner of a pistol.

However, the ‘*burla del zapato*’ backfires (NAE 328). Frustrated and ‘feminised’ by the woman’s laughter, Fadrique resorts to violence in a desperate bid to reassert his control of the situation: ‘la dio de bofetadas, que la bañó en sangre’ (NAE 328), erupting in frenzied choler as a result of his insecurity. Violante’s initial merriment suggests her expectation that she can act alone, toying with lovers in the same manner as she formerly did together with her ally, Ana. When Violante acts without Ana’s protection, she is beaten, in

\(^{20}\) Violante is portrayed as a zealous protector of her own independence: ‘verdaderamente aborrecía el casarse, temerosa de perder la libertad que entonces gozaba’ (NAE 322). Her bold determination to reject matrimony in order to protect her personal freedom reminds the reader of Cervantes’s Marcela, who embraces the autonomous life of the pastoral shepherdess. Marcela famously formulates the emancipatory declaration: ‘Yo nací libre, y para poder vivir libre escogí la soledad de los campos.’ Of course, the libidinous Violante diverges from the chaste life-path of Cervantes’s self-governing heroine. McKendrick uncovers in Golden-Age dramatists, in contrast with both Zayas and Cervantes, an ‘inability to conceive of any assertion of female independence other than that based on some reprehensible character trait’, citing vanity and arrogant pride as the recurrently ascribed motives to women’s *esquivez*. Cervantes, *El Ingenioso Hidalgo*, p. 197; McKendrick, *Woman and Society*, p. 145.

\(^{21}\) Romero-Díaz, *Nueva nobleza, nueva novela*, p. 133.