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GENDER, READING, AND INTERTEXTUALITY: DON JUAN'S LEGACY IN MARIA DE ZAYAS'S *LA TRAICION EN LA AMISTAD*

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María de Zayas's comedy, *La traición en la amistad*, could not, in many ways, be more distant and removed from Tirso de Molina's eschatological, moralizing *El burlador de Sevilla*. The comedy, written by a woman, deals with the amorous problems of the idle, noble rich; the serious drama, penned by a man, treats such weighty issues as human salvation. One focuses on social interaction; the other, on divine intervention. Yet, there are numerous points of contact between the two plays. The libidinous Liseo of Zayas's comedy sounds much like the infamous Don Juan Tenorio when he describes his plans for seduction: "si yo a Fenisa galanteo, / es con engaños, burlas y mentiras, / no más de por cumplir con mi deseo" (603b). In several guises, Tirso's words echo within Zayas's text; the classic examples are Marcia's complaint, "Bien dijo quien decía / mal haya la mujer que en hombres fía" (611b), and Fenisa's comic inversion, "Mal haya la que sólo un hombre quiere, / que tener uno solo es cobardía" (605a). To be sure, previous critics have noted the links between the two plays. Matthew Stroud labels Zayas's strong female protagonist (Fenisa) a Doña Juana, although Valerie Hegstrom Oakey modifies that view by noting that Fenisa is not a true *burladora*, since rather than humiliate and desert her lovers, she truly seems to love each of the men in her life and strives to enjoy the favors of as many of them as possible. Constance Wilkins reminds us of the connection between Don Juan and Fenisa but also warns us to resist the temptation "to identify with Fenisa in the validity of her bursting the constraints on women's freedom of sexual expression" ("Subversion" 114). I both agree with and take gentle exception to Professor Wilkins's argument, which leads me to the thesis of this essay. I would suggest that we need to be wary of dismissing too quickly the ways that the two plays enter into dialogue with one another, and

I would like to examine in greater detail how the two dramatists explore the relationships between men and women and between reading and writing. Don Juan's legacy is evident in the text and subtext of *La traición en la amistad*, but in addition, it survives in our own critical confrontations with Tirso's play and with its avatar.

The two dramas are most alike when they deal with the social issues of love, sex, seduction, and friendship. In its treatment of the interaction of the sexes, Zayas's *Traición* both echoes and challenges Tirso's *Burlador*. In both plays, we find duplicity and deceit used as tools to win sexual favors, and we see social rebels trying to manipulate their sexual partners; in both cases, the rebel appears acutely aware of performance, of his or her own theatricality, of role-playing within the role. Each drama also reveals examples of the betrayal of one's friends for the sake of love — or at least lust. Each also depicts female bonding, in which women join forces to find the men who had abandoned them so that they might coerce those men into marriage. Each play ends with the punishment of the rebel who attempted to subvert the system and with the marriages of most of the other characters.

We might say that Zayas's play is simultaneously an inversion, a subversion, and a comic copy of the *Burlador*, especially with regard to the relationships between men and women, power and authority, seduction and deception, subject and object. Even the key words of the titles of the two plays telegraph vital information about the theme of deceit to the reader, although, significantly, *La traición en la amistad* focuses on an act of bonding and connectedness, while *El Burlador de Sevilla* singles out the male subject, a gendered behavior that Deborah Tannen emphasizes in her recent work on the ways that men and women communicate.

Each of the two plays highlights one gender while utilizing the other in a secondary role to show how the principal seducer uses the opposite sex for pleasure or power. Tirso's Don Juan Tenorio is the universally acknowledged symbol of the seductive trickster/lover, for the *Burlador* reifies the male as sexual subject. In *La traición*, Fenisa echoes many of Don Juan's actions with regard to the opposite sex, claiming to have as many as ten lovers:

diez amantes me adoran y yo á todos
los adoro, los quiero, los estimo,
y todos juntos en mi alma caben, (605b)

* * *

á todos cuantos quiero yo me inclino,
los quiero, los estimo y los adoro;
á los feos, hermosos, mozos, viejos,
ricos y pobres, sólo por ser hombres (614b)

Even when compared with the personal conduct of other women in Golden Age comedy (much less the majority of Siglo de Oro theater), Fenisa's behavior

would have to be judged as liberal — and liberated — in the extreme. When her servant notes, “serás de amor infierno,” (615a) or calls her **temeraria**, Fenisa retorts, “¡Calla, que en esto he de ser / extremo de las mujeres” (606b), in yet other allusions to her Tirsian antecedent. Fenisa’s strongest link to Don Juan, however, is her manipulation of the opposite sex in order to satisfy her own desires. She acknowledges that by pursuing her female friends’ love objects, she is betraying their friendship:

¿Soy amiga? sí; pues, ¿cómo
pretendo contra mi amiga
tan alevosa traición?

* * *

el amor y la amistad
furiosos golpes se tiran;
cayó el amistad en tierra
y amor victoria apellida;
téngala yo, ciego Dios,
en tan dudosa conquista. (591b)

Throughout the play, Fenisa both affirms her role as authoritative and manipulative subject and illustrates her problems regarding solidarity with those of her sex. Because her actions are controlled by desire and because she tramples on her friends for her own selfish ends, Fenisa strongly resembles Tirso’s Don Juan, the social rebel who leaves behind a trail of women and betrays his male friends for the sake of his own ego.

Yet, there are also a number of significant differences between the two plays — even on this most social of levels.¹ A special quality of *La traición en la amistad* — and a quality seldom found to this extent in male-authored texts — lies in the idea of female bonding. Although in the *Burlador* the dishonored Isabela and Tisbea meet, commiserate, and agree to travel together to Seville in order to recuperate their lost honor, Zayas clearly emphasizes relationships between and among women, using the connectedness of female friendships as the essence of her play. These bonds between women may exact a high price, as more than one woman is tested and tempted. Certainly, Fenisa is not the only female character whose actions are motivated by desire; Marcia, for example, sees herself as a soldier in a **guerra de amor**, proclaiming, “a nadie estoy obligada / sino a mi gusto” (519a).² But when Marcia finds out that her beloved Liseo has dishonored and abandoned another woman, the bonds of friendship prove more powerful than her own desire, and she immediately resolves to help the unfortunate woman reunite with the man who had jilted her:

yo confieso
que le tengo voluntad [a Liseo];
mas, Laura hermosa, sabiendo

que te tiene obligación
 desde aquí de amarle dejo,
 en mi vida le veré. (600a-b)

A sense of sisterly solidarity joins with a moral consideration of what is right, leading these female characters to sacrifice personal satisfaction for the support and fellowship of other women. To accomplish their goals, the women metamorphose from passive objects to active subjects; they begin to act with authority, and they consequently assume greater control and power over the male suitors of the play. In that sense, the women characters of *La traición* invert traditional male/female roles, calling attention to the idea that women can actively control their lives and fates. In addition, as Wilkins rightly notes, Zayas highlights the notion of the multiple protagonist, in contrast to the phallic, unified "I" so evident in a text such as the *Burlador*, and provides evidence of a particularly female way of thinking — and speaking — about female relationships and moral responsibilities (110-11, n. 1).

Zayas accentuates the women's authoritative new roles by underscoring the metatheatrical nature of their enterprise: the women create a revenge play within the structure of the larger drama, self-consciously stating, "La traición en la amistad / puede llamarse este cuento" (601a). When we add that level of dramatic dynamism to the issue of female connectedness, we may well posit the idea that Zayas, in a distinctly female voice, presents her readers and audiences with a fundamentally different world view than that of most of her male counterparts.³ Finally, because the male characters of the play tend to be weak, passive, and whining, Zayas appears to stack the deck further in favor of her strong female characters. All of these elements suggest the creation of a female-inscribed alternative text, a concept that Elizabeth Ordóñez thoughtfully examines:

If we perceive difference in these works by women, we still cannot assume that Zayas or Caro, or any other women writer for that matter, necessarily made the conscious choice to create alternative texts.... Yet, women writers have always and inevitably experienced the constraints of their context — literary and social — if only on an unconscious or vaguely emotive level. At some time they all become the Other in search of their own discourse. The attentive reader can discern this often submerged quest for textual authority in the writings of women, and in so doing may discover not only plots about women, but plots about the theoretical difference of women struggling to write authoritatively about themselves. (13)

Ordóñez may well have hit upon the essence of the plots and discourse of women writers of the Golden Age. Nonetheless, we could also deconstruct her premise by examining exactly what the women desire in *La traición en la amistad*. Their goal is marriage, finding a mate, erasing the stain of dishonor

that would attach itself to them if it were generally known that they were sexually active. Ruth El Saffar describes these women's actions as typical of much literature of the Spanish Golden Age: a "desperate effort... to escape the fate of abandon, the fate of the woman whose lover has rendered her, whatever her social class, an outcast by virtue of his refusal to marry her" (2). In that sense, Zayas's "liberated" characters appear only to reaffirm the status quo, the honor code, and the traditional *comedia* ending.⁴ It could further be argued that in order to establish their authority and control, the women have only repeated the stereotypically negative female behaviors of manipulation and deceit, and that the female characters of Zayas's play ultimately merely reiterate the male gaze, the representations of women as seen by men. Clearly, the multiple marriages that take place at the end of the comedy leave the reader/spectator with questions regarding the play beyond the ending. How will these independent women, who controlled their men so well in the course of this play, handle their new roles as married women? How will Laura's marriage turn out, given that she is marrying a known philanderer who only agrees to marry her after having been tricked — and who has previously stated, "*sus penas estimo en nada*" (603b)?⁵ Moreover, Zayas punishes Fenisa, the only free spirit in the play, the female character who really does try to subvert the system and who challenges the submissive role that society traditionally prescribed for Golden Age women. At the end of the play, each of the men in turn rejects Fenisa for another woman, and Marcia scolds her, telling her that she has brought about her own downfall by being a disloyal and devious friend. Her ultimate shame, however, is the metaphorical public branding, which León emphasizes in his final words to the audience:

Señores míos, Fenisa,
qual ven, sin amantes queda;
si alguno la quiere, avisa
para que su casa sepa. (620a)

This confirmation of the double standard, created by offering the men in the audience the character's address, serves to illustrate the nature of Zayas's double-voiced discourse and the openness of the ending of her play. Although she may appear to be sympathetic toward her women characters, there is also inherent in her comedy a not-so-subtle disapproval of their challenge to traditional female roles.⁶ Of course, I could also subvert this reading by suggesting that the dramatist knew exactly what she was doing, and that by having her free spirit lose out at the end, she was actually challenging the era's notorious double standard of sexual behavior by calling attention to its inequities. All of these simultaneously contradictory readings create a tension between the Zayas who follows male models of dramatic theme, plot, characterization, and expression and the Zayas who challenges the patriarchy with her dynamic female characters, their assertive attempts to control their fates, and their strong sense of female community.

This doubly dramatic tension is intimately related to the issues of women's writing and reader/audience response. As we examine the open quality of her playtext, we may well ask whether Zayas possessed a female voice that clearly expressed a distinct world view, or if men and women see something different in Golden Age dramas written by men and those written by women. We might also wonder if women really identify better with the Zayas play, which seems to speak to women's ways of communicating, of perceiving the world, or we might question how a woman of the last decade of the twentieth century should react to plays that treat women as objects and reaffirm women's place at the bottom of social, gendered hierarchies. It may well be that the most important element of *La traición en la amistad* is that it asks us to ask questions about the nature of relationships between men and women. Our examination of the two plays should explore not only the images of woman that male and female dramatists produce, but the ways that modern readers have interpreted those dramatic texts. In doing so, we may begin to answer some of the questions I have just posed.

Both the *Burlador de Sevilla* and *La traición en la amistad* deal with the sexual interactions between men and women, and both have been examined by males and females from feminist and androcentric perspectives. The popular conception of Don Juan, the manipulative male who deceives and then abandons endless numbers of women, resonates throughout Zayas's comedy: Fenisa is clearly the avatar of Don Juan, and, like him, she suffers at the end of the play; yet, because this is a comedy — and because Fenisa has not toyed with God or tempted fate with multiple exclamations of "Tan largo me lo fiais" — she will suffer social humiliation rather than eternal damnation.

Fenisa is, of course, not the only "Doña Juana" in Golden Age theater. Even within the *Burlador* itself, Tirso offers a female parallel to his controlling protagonist. Tisbea, like Laura in Zayas's comedy, surrenders her virtue to a man who promises to marry her; she tells Don Juan:

Ven, y será la cabaña
del amor que me acompaña
tálamo de nuestro fuego. (1.950-52)

Both Zayas's Laura and Tirso's Tisbea suffer after being rejected by their lovers, and both follow the men who have abandoned them, hoping to get them to honor their spoken commitment. Yet Tisbea not only is Don Juan's victim, but is also his double, having treated the men who love her just as Don Juan treats her:

Yo soy la que hacía siempre
de los hombres burla tanta;
que siempre las que hacen burla
vienen a quedar burladas. (1.1013-16)

Tirso further underscores the parallels between the two characters with the motif of fire: the flames of their passion echo in the real or metaphoric flames of Tisbea's burning hut and prefigure the infernal flames that will consume Don Juan in Act 3.⁷ Throughout, Tisbea exhibits a tension between her words and their meaning — for example, rejecting the love of the devoted fishermen while couching her rejection in sensuous language.

Within the very structure of the *Burlador*, Tirso has blurred the lines separating victimizer and victim, subject and object, **burlador** and **burlada**. And this may well represent the closest point of contact between Zayas's and Tirso's dramas. Zayas seems both to uphold and subvert her literary model. Elizabeth Ordóñez observes that the female author "often suffers from what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have called 'anxiety of authorship,' as she struggles with the texts of male precursors, against their authority, their reading and misreading of her, to create an adequate text for her own story" (3). I would further suggest that Ordóñez's analysis of the relationship between writer, text, and reader in Zayas's prose fiction applies equally well to her theater: Zayas "shifts the text's emphasis away from the work itself to its effect on the reader, especially the female reader" (6).

The issue of women reading and writing about women is brought to the forefront in one of the seminal studies of Tirso's text. In her provocative article, "Tirso's View of Women in *El burlador de Sevilla*," Ruth Lundelius challenges the opinion held by Blanca de los Ríos and most other Tirsian scholars that Fray Gabriel Téllez was a feminist aligned with "the more extravagant admirers and champions of womankind" (5).⁸ Noting that the dramatist's misogyny and antifeminist diatribes were characteristic of his age, Lundelius suggests that each woman in the *Burlador* contributes to her own dishonor (7). She adds that "for each of his feminine characters, Tirso made it clear that it was her own weaknesses and failings that smoothed the way to, or even made possible, her seduction and dishonor. The description of Don Juan as 'el castigo de las mujeres' implies their guilt" (12). The women's sins, Lundelius observes, include pride, rebellion against paternal authority, flouting the precepts of church and state, and foolish social climbing: "the great care he gives to the tightly fused pattern of weakness — turpitude — retribution — restitution... marks the course of each woman through the dramatic development of the play" (12). This, Lundelius concludes, offers evidence of the "profound cynicism and pessimism" of the *Burlador*'s portrait of women: "Tirso could have ennobled their character and raised them to a higher moral plane by intensifying their struggle with their respective weaknesses. But significantly he did not; rather he has deliberately drawn them as all too easily corruptible" (13).

There is something seductive in Lundelius's reasoning. Her descriptions of Tirso's misogyny are intended to explode a popular critical myth, the view of Tirso as one of the great, liberated Golden Age males, and she suggests a democratization of culpability that readers could find appealing. But her

zealous depiction of Tirso-the-misogynist is, perhaps, a bit overstated: Lundelius's laundry list of female weaknesses in the *Burlador* states that they are "easily swayed by passion, lacking in moral courage, imprudent, foolish, irresponsible, devious, disobedient, incontinent, proud, rebellious toward their proper sphere in life, lascivious, frail, weak, and vain" (13). I am concerned that Lundelius's description of Tirso's (man)handling of women offers an even stronger castigation than that presented by the Mercedarian friar; note the critic's emphasis "As they are portrayed, I must reiterate, they are as much the victims of their own moral deficiencies as of the seductive skill of Don Juan" (13). The essence of this reading of the play is that the women got exactly what they deserved, which reduces the audience's sympathy, understanding, and compassion toward them, and lessens the likelihood that they will be viewed as anything other than cardboard cut-outs.

Whatever our own preferred readings, it would surely be fair to say that Lundelius has, by attacking misogyny, highlighted the object of her attack. And, whether or not we agree with her reading, we may find it useful as we analyze the links between the *Burlador* and Zayas's *Traición*. Lundelius focuses a great deal of attention on Tirso's didacticism and moral purpose. To that end, she sees the women's weaknesses of character as further indicators of Tirso's "blunt indictment of sinning humanity" (13). She mediates Tirso's representation of gender in the *Burlador* with a socio-religious perspective that underscores sin, and her critique of both the play and the dramatist emanates from that reading. Yet, if we can use Zayas's comic incarnation of Tirso's play as a guide, the author of *La traición en la amistad* seems to read the *Burlador* from another position. Zayas appears to use the interaction of the sexes as the pretext for exploring other topics, offering her readers an open play text, one that defies pigeonholing and allows for both the subversion and support of the status quo. The openness of Zayas's denouement — indeed, of the entire play — allows her readers the freedom to explore multiple sides of the issues she treats, so that they may determine for themselves whether Zayas applauds or challenges the socio-cultural realities of her time, whether her discourse is double-voiced or a slavish imitation of patriarchal models, whether the dramatist is successful in transforming Tirso's objects of desire into assertive female subjects, and whether Zayas accomplished what Sue-Ellen Case calls the construction of a "deconstructive strategy that aids in exposing the patriarchal encodings in the dominant system of representation" (121). Perhaps the relationship between *La traición en la amistad* and *El burlador de Sevilla* hinges less on sinning, guilt, and victimization and more on the issue of authority (textual and otherwise), on the inscription of power, and on the relationship between subject and object. If that is, as I propose, the ultimate point of contact between the two plays, the *Burlador* is not merely the immediate source and counter example for *La traición*. Don Juan's legacy may also be a first- and second-hand lesson on the ways that we read and think about texts.

NOTES

- 1 These differences even manifest themselves at the level of servant interaction. Catalinón, Tirso's *gracioso*, spends a great deal of time moralizing; Zayas's counterpart, León, talks endlessly about sex and encourages his master (Liseo) to pursue and deceive as many women as possible.
- 2 Marcia tells Fenisa that she intends to take full advantage of her father's absence from town: "y mientras mi padre asiste, / como ves, en Lombardía, / en esta guerra de amor / he de emplearme atrevida" (590a-b).
- 3 Act 3 of *La traición* opens with a scene treating the effects of gossip on women's reputations, as we see Laura's reaction to the inaccurate report that Liseo has already married Fenisa. This scene, emphasized by its position at a critical moment in the play, illustrates Zayas's interest in women's issues and her use of topics less-frequently treated in male-inscribed texts. It further illustrates Katharina M. Wilson and Frank J. Warnke's theories regarding the emerging sense of gender collectivity in the seventeenth century, specifically, the idea that the works of women writers of the Early Modern era exhibited an "awareness of shared, gender-specific experience and ideas" (xiii). In his related analysis of Zayas's *Mal presagio casarse lejos*, Paul J. Smith describes the author's obvious understanding of female bonding; he notes the "fluidity of circulation among women characters" and a "reciprocal female exchange, so different to the fitful and halting relations between men and women in the story" (237).
- 4 Nonetheless, Elizabeth Odóñez's comments with regard to the ending of Ana Caro's play bear repeating: "In this female-authored plot the inevitable marriages may be based on firmer bedrock than those in male-inscribed plots, plots in which more passive female characters accommodate to a hollow conformity more central and insistent than justice and love" (12).
- 5 For a more detailed discussion of this topic see Edward H. Friedman's "Girl Gets Boy," Bruce W. Wardropper's *La comedia española del Siglo de Oro*, and Dawn L. Smith's introduction to *The Perception of Women in Spanish Theater of the Golden Age*.
- 6 Merveena McKendrick observes that in Golden Age theater, if sin is punished, marriage as an institution is preserved and the double standard becomes a kind of natural law. With regard to Zayas's play, Valerie Hegstrom Oakey sees the women characters as active and dominant but also notes the suppression of Fenisa, the character who most tries to break out of traditional gender roles. Although the *gracioso* León is the speaker of these final words to the audience (which may well render his voice unreliable and his words ironic), Zayas has nonetheless ended her play with this indictment of the comedy's free spirit, leaving her audience with this final impression of the probable fate of her character.
- 7 Zayas employs similar imagery when she has Laura describe Liseo as Nero, who sets fire to her soul (600a).
- 8 Raymond Conlon's intriguing psychological analysis of male sexual behavior in *El burlador de Sevilla* disputes many of Lundelius's conclusions regarding Tirso's expression of the misogyny inherent in Golden Age culture.

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