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6. GENDERED MATTERS

Engaging Research on Early Modern Dramaturgas *in the Classroom*

After almost three decades of researching and teaching the many Early Modern women writers who wrote in Spanish across the globe, certain moments stand out in acutely vivid detail: A well-intentioned mentor, discretely pulling one of us aside after a conference panel to admonish, "You have real potential—I don't want you to waste it on these women writers—you'll only marginalize yourself." Or, a junior colleague who reacted to a proposed General Education course on *Women Writers of the Spanish Empire* by exclaiming, "Oh, how disappointing! I thought you'd contribute something important, on Cervantes or someone else who matters …." Spurred into action by many such experiences, in the mid 1990s, we began speaking about Early Modern Iberian and colonial Latin American women playwrights in formal and informal sessions at a series of academic conferences. One of us had seen a 1990 student performance of Ana Caro's *Valor, agravio y mujer* directed by Vern Williamsen, and the other was working on an edition of María de Zayas's *La traición en la amistad* and had looked at the manuscripts of several plays by women dramatists in Spain's National Library.[1] Inspired by these opportunities and perhaps naively enthusiastic, we soon realized we had entered relatively unchartered territory. When we compared notes, we found that in our entire undergraduate and graduate careers, we each had only been taught one Early Modern woman writer, so our combined experience was limited to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Santa Teresa de Jesús. In Joanna Russ's (1983) terms, we were taught that "She wrote it, but there are very few of her" (p. 76).[2] Sor Juana—and by extension Santa Teresa—was a "*décima musa*," supposedly an anomaly in the world. In response to this dearth of materials and the dominant critical position expressed at "Un escenario propio," a conference on women's theatre held at the University of Cincinnati in 1994—"Women playwrights writing in Spanish have no literary heritage … they write in a vacuum"—we joined forces with a talented group of researchers to promote greater awareness and understanding of the contributions of Early Modern *dramaturgas.*[3] We also

L. Gómez et al. (Eds.), Teaching Gender through Latin American, Latino, and Iberian Texts and Cultures, 99–124.

sought out other specialists who shared our interests and published a volume of critical articles on these authors (*Engendering the Early Modern Stage*). We hoped to ensure that *dramaturgas* would gain entrance into the literary canon by teaching their works and encouraging our colleagues to include them in their courses.

Despite the tremendous progress made since the early 1990s in the recovery of dramatic texts by these literary foremothers and the production of materials to support teaching them (see the appendix following this article), efforts to incorporate Early Modern women writers into curricula have yielded rather disappointing results.[4] Of equal concern is the fact that many Hispanists and literary scholars outside the field of *comedia* studies seem to remain relatively uninformed, if not disinterested, regarding the fundamental literary contributions of these playwrights and the substantial body of critical discourse now available about their works. In this essay, then, we will suggest some ways that the study of theatrical texts by women writing in Spanish during the Early Modern period may serve to enrich discussions of gender and discourse, both theoretical and practical, in the classroom and beyond.

We cannot deny that the culturally-constructed nature of gender affects (and often delimits) the ways that human beings experience life. One can argue that given this gendered context, a woman could write the exact same play, with the same characters, employing identical words as a man and the two texts could have very different meanings. While many of the works we mention here do question established paradigms, we do not mean to suggest that a female-authored text *has to do* something radically transgressive in terms of gender (or anything else) to matter. Even texts written by women in the Early Modern period that re-inscribe the patriarchy matter, because as Ruth El Saffar (1990) noted, "women transgress a major set of cultural codings when they take up the pen"—even if they do not directly challenge patriarchy or other social structures (p. 1). Even as we analyze specific instances of resistance, we resist the idea that male authors set the aesthetic standard and that female authors become significant only as they transgress that standard. In the largest sense, women authors, and the diversity of experiences—real and imaginary—that they represent, matter because they existed historically and women's history/herstory itself matters.[5] In order to gain a fuller appreciation of human experience, we must critically engage with *dramaturgas* and their legacy; moreover, we need to consider their beliefs and perspectives, even when, or perhaps especially when, theirs do not align with ours. We must, as Chandra Mohanty so cogently demonstrates, resist the homogenization of women's experiences.

Hence, we should consider alternative strategies, in our classrooms and in our scholarly practices, as Badía, Bernard and Gasior (2012) suggest in their work on teaching Early Modern women. We need to build on insights provided by feminist thinkers like Susanne Luhmann, Annette Kolodny and others who challenge commonplace educational practices. We must question unproductive structures that reify binary oppositions, including that between theory and literature. All too often, literary scholars bemoan the privileging of theory over texts; in this instance, however, theory may provide us a way to foreground the very texts we wish to promote. Rather than engaging in often counterproductive canon skirmishes regarding aesthetic value, we should campaign for inclusion from a position of strength. Many contemporary theories address issues that directly relate to works by our *dramaturgas*; even more significantly, these texts often illuminate contemporary theories by revealing their limitations. As we will demonstrate, engaging with works by these pioneering women playwrights clearly illustrates how gender matters in critical analysis; thus, we should advocate studying these contestatory texts across the curriculum, especially in literary theory classes. Barbara Simerka's (2013) recent and impressive volume *Knowing Subjects: Cognitive Cultural Studies and Early Modern Spanish Literature* explores the ways that cognitive science's engagement with Early Modern texts has enriched both fields. The volume provides insights into several woman-authored texts; it also highlights how those very texts lend nuance to the theories themselves. From a different angle, Catherine Connor makes a strong case for the *comedia* as a promising site for the study of embodied cognition. In a forthcoming article, she asserts that the dramatic works of Zayas and Caro "testify to the writers' keen perception of the complexity of human bio-cultural development" which enables them to anticipate "discoveries" of the twenty-first century relating to gender and gendered identity. Indeed, whenever we teach plays by Early Modern *dramaturgas*, gender issues inevitably enter the discourse: female and male cross-dressing, passing in its many forms, female subjectivity and agency, patriarchal authority, gendered violence, *écriture feminine*, the male gaze, and—in convent theatre—exclusively female casts and audiences all pose important challenges to many dominant stances.

CROSS-DRESSING AND GENDER PERFORMANCE

Contemporary considerations of transvestism and the performativity of gender profit from the examination of Hispanic classical theatre written by women and performed by actors of both sexes, since this tradition provides a crucial counterpoint for assumptions regarding drama and gender

dynamics based on all-male Shakespearean stagings. In some cases, as illustrated by Connor, *comedia* texts anticipate theory. When Leonor becomes Leonardo in the oft-quoted example from Caro's *Valor*, she affirms that "mi agravio mudó mi ser" [my betrayal changed my being] (I. 510). Current scientific studies of the impact of emotional trauma on brain chemistry and sex typing suggest that such a fundamental transformation is indeed possible (Moir & Jessel, 1991; Hines, 2004). Other *comedias*, including Sor Juana's *Los empeños*, proffer what could be considered primers on the performativity of gender, as in the comic scene when Castaño dons female garb, complaining about the restrictions of the garments to the audience as he transforms from *gracioso* to *dama*.

Cross-dressing has long been a favorite topic among *comedia* scholars. Part of the critical fascination stems from the fact that cross-dressing works differently in Spain than it does in England. Students and theatre practitioners alike often assume that the Shakespearean model, in which boy actors play all the female roles, is the norm for all theatre of the Early Modern age. However, as mentioned above, on the Spanish stage female, as well as male, actors performed. Women actors played the roles of women who cross-dressed as men. Cross-dressing female characters became a staple of male-authored *comedias*; even Lope de Vega (1609) mentions them in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*.

In terms of gender, cross-dressing matters, of course, because costume—the way we dress—functions as the most obvious outward marker of gender. The kinds of clothing that culture and laws (*pragmáticas* issued by the king) required people to wear set limits on their behaviours (in terms of both gender and of class). Nevertheless, cross-dressing women figured prominently in Early Modern Spain. Both Catalina de Erauso (1592–1650) and Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689) enjoyed a certain celebrity status—playwrights made them the title characters of some of their works. The king rewarded Erauso with money for her military services and she even received a special dispensation from Pope Urban VIII to continue dressing as a man. Correspondence from the same time documents how the Spanish people looked forward to a royal visit from the cross-dressing Swedish queen who had converted to Catholicism; unfortunately, plans changed and the visit was cancelled. Royals and rebels were not the only women who cross-dressed in public. Although forbidden to do so, actresses sometimes wore their masculine costumes outside the walls of the *corral* theatre. And cross-dressing female characters abound on the stage in *comedias* penned by men and women.[6]

When women playwrights write female cross-dressers, it means something different than when male playwrights do so because of the

inescapable gender dynamics involved.[7] Critics have long recognized that cross-dressing and other *"varonil"* female characters in the *comedia* break gender norms and become strong and independent individuals.[8] In comparison with Tirso de Molina's Juana from *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, who creates multiple roles for other characters and teaches three of them how to dress and act "male" like she does, Shakespeare's Rosalind, who simply teaches the man she loves how to love a woman, looks effeminate.

Mindful of the potential power cross-dressing offers female characters, Lope de Vega urged:

> Las damas no desdigan de su nombre.
> Y si mudaren traje, sea de modo
> que pueda perdonarse, porque suele
> el disfraz varonil agradar mucho.
>
> [Don't let your ladies be unladylike,
> and if they should disguise themselves as men,
> since such cross-dressing never fails to please,
> ensure they do in ways that may be excused.] (2009, vv. 280–83)

Lope wanted his women actresses and characters, even those who cross-dressed, to maintain gender norms, to behave like women. For the Lope of the *Arte nuevo*, the woman who dressed as a man did not please because of the ways she could transgress social and cultural norms, but because, as Carmen Bravo-Villasante recognized in her pioneering study, women in male costumes showed off their legs in a way that titillated audiences. As demonstrated by Lope's words and the many injunctions that warned against the lustful desires cross-dressed actresses could incite, playwrights and audience members could still objectify the women who portrayed these strong characters.

Many a cross-dressing woman written by a male playwright dons masculine clothing because her lover, the conquest over, has moved on. The jilted woman dresses as a man in order to move in the masculine spaces of city streets and country highways with the ultimate goal of finding her lover and winning back her honor through marriage. Though their female characters sometimes end up with the same conventional marriage commitments at play's end, *dramaturgas* give their cross-dressing women stronger motivations and more deeply transgressive desires. Ana Caro's Doña Leonor, who becomes Leonardo in *Valor, agravio y mujer,* could be a typical woman wronged, except that she has no marriage plans. Her goal is to find the man who left her behind, and she openly discusses

her plan to kill him.[9] In Angela de Azevedo's *El muerto disimulado,* Doña Lisarda, her virginity intact, rejects her female garb and her name, emphasizing that she is now Lisardo. She believes her brother dead, and her father has died of a broken heart, so she takes on the masculine role of defending her family's honor. She plans to find her brother's murderer and, like Leonor/Leonardo, kill him.[10]

The first Spanish woman to draw a parallel between her own transgressive act of writing and the act of a woman killing a man was the fifteenth-century nun Teresa de Cartagena. Sor Teresa believed that if Judith could take up the (phallic) sword and defeat Holofernes, people ought to believe that she (Sor Teresa) could take up the (phallic) quill and write a treatise:

> For clearly it is more within the reach of a woman to be eloquent than strong, and more modest for her to be skilled than daring, and easier for her to use the pen than the sword. (Seidenspinner-Núñez, 1998, p. 93)

Ana Caro and Angela de Azevedo reversed this logic in their plays. If they could wield their pens to write Leonor/Leonardo and Lisarda/Lisardo, then their characters could wield their swords to defend and restore their own honor. Both Leonor and Lisarda end up marrying their marks, but not before besting them in a sword fight. In Sor Marcela de San Félix's *Muerte del apetito,* the female characters Alma, Desnudez, and Mortificación do not stop until they have killed the male character Apetito twice: the first time Desnudez chokes him; the second time the three women work together to run him through with a sword. Breaking *comedia* conventions, both violent acts take place on stage.[11]

Plays by Early Modern *dramaturgas* also question the performance of gender by male characters. Male cross-dressers are rare in the theatre of the period, but Sor Juana's Castaño and Azevedo's Clarindo stand out among them. Castaño's onstage change from masculine to feminine apparel may have more to do with female gender norms than with male. In his article "Sor Juana as Feminist Playwright," Christopher Weimer (1992) argues that the *gracioso* in drag "criticizes … conventions of female identity and behavior" (p. 97). The nobleman Clarindo's cross-dressing as Clara allows him to move in female spaces from which men are typically excluded.[12] In the second part of Feliciana Enríquez de Guzmán's *Tragicomedia,* Yleda grows angry with her husband Birano, the prince's squire, for undervaluing her. She draws his sword, takes his helmet, and forces him to exchange his armour for her skirt. Next she gets him to wash in a spring that magically removes all of his facial hair, and both Yleda and Birano begin to refer to

him as Birana. Yleda also convinces Beloribo to wash in the same spring, and then leaves the two of them alone to woo each other. Pan and two other libidinous minor gods come upon the pair and try to seek their sexual favors. The ease with which the two men accept their new identities and rapid shifts in desire in these scenes underscore the performative nature of gender.[13]

As this overview of cross-dressing and gender performance demonstrates, these dramatic texts penned and performed by women often interrogate the intersectionality of identity, thereby providing multiple ways of initiating discussions of gender. In fact, we have found that one of the most fruitful ways to engage students in productive conversations about cross-dressing and breaking other gender norms is to involve them in performance in the classroom. When students represent scenes from female-authored plays (and for comparison purposes male-authored plays), they become verbally and physically invested in the meanings of those scenes. Such activities can easily be adapted to suit the level of any class; for instance, in co-convened groups, graduate students can sometimes serve as "directors" to help undergraduates grasp the complexity of the passages in question.

PASSING

Equally promising are the insights that our *dramaturgas* can yield into theories of "passing." Theoretical explorations of passing—the attempted transformation across lines of social identity categories—have, for the most part, analyzed the workings of race or gender in the United States. Most often passing is associated with the tensions between phenotype and racial categories in the post-Civil-War U.S., as represented, for instance, in Nella Larsen's 1929 novel, *Passing*. More recently, Judith Butler, Pamela Caughie, Nadine Ehlers and others have theorized passing and its relationship to the performativity of identity. As useful as it is for an understanding of individual subjectivity, the limited focus of current U.S.-based work on passing inevitably constrains and even predetermines the possible theoretical models of passing and its representations. Sean McDaniel and Joyce Tolliver's forthcoming book, *Writing Counterfeit Subjects: The Representation of Passing in Spain*, suggests that "passing stories arise at times of anxiety about changes in the reliability of certain social categories for determining social meaning and individual identity." They demonstrate that "passing tales are powerful: not only is tension created by the imminent possibility that the pass will be exposed, but the examination of how passing acts are represented and received reveals the

contours and power of the social categories that are transgressed" (p. 3). McDaniel and Tolliver's work reveals that race is not the universal fundamental category determining social station and privilege; in cultures such as that of seventeenth-century Spain, religion as an identity category takes on a crucial role. Even in cases where the social category most obviously transgressed is that of class, the workings of gender and religious categories impinge repeatedly on those of class, and at times become inextricable from them. When we think of gender passes in the *comedia*, attention immediately turns to myriad *mujeres vestidas de hombre*. Even more compelling in terms of what we learn about cultural construction of identity are the less frequent *hombres vestidos de mujer*. As mentioned above, in Azevedo's *El muerto disimulado*, Clarindo takes advantage of the fact that he is presumed dead. This nobleman dresses as a merchant woman named Clara, engaging in a double pass. Though women, including his cross-dressed sister, note her incredible resemblance to the dead man, they accept Clara as a woman; yet, they treat her as a fellow noblewoman despite her attempt to sell them wares. Perhaps this suggests that, in the period, a convincing class pass was more difficult to sustain than a gender pass—one need only think of historic figures from 16th-century Spain like Catalina de Erauso for possible precedents of successful gender passes. Or, this failed class pass could reflect the dominant culture's necessary fiction that one's nobility/one's blood will tell regardless of one's circumstances. No matter which interpretation one chooses, one cannot deny that this text provides fertile territory for exploring the boundaries of passing. By foregrounding the theoretical issues such as these raised in women-authored *comedias*, we will not only contribute to the elaboration of more inclusive theoretical paradigms, we will also create greater interest in the literary artistry of Early Modern and Colonial *dramaturgas*. This, in turn, should facilitate their inclusion in courses and classrooms across disciplines.

SUBJECTIVITY, MIMETIC DESIRE, AND FEMALE AGENCY

Female-authored plays often cast women characters in the role of subject instead of mere objects. Several convent plays by different authors include a character named Alma as protagonist. Alma becomes a female version of Everyman. She enjoys subjectivity and agency, and can choose among various suitors: el Esposo or el Pastor, and Apetito, Celo Indiscreto, el Universo, el Mundo, etc. These plays deal fundamentally with the meaning of a woman's life.

In many canonical *comedias*, women serve as nothing more than foils for male desire and male rivalry. This coincides with René Girard's (1976) theoretical construction of mimetic desire, based in part on analyses of Early Modern Spanish texts, in which he "posits women almost exclusively as the object of triangular desire" (Gorfkle and Williamsen, 1994, p. 17). Sedgwick (1985) convincingly argues that "Girard's reading presents itself as one whose symmetry is undisturbed by such differences as gender, although the triangles that most shape his view tend, in the European tradition, to involve bonds of 'rivalry' between males 'over' a woman …" (p. 23). Significantly, when triangular relationships emerge in plays penned by *dramaturgas*, they often highlight the rivalry between women over the same male objects of desire. At times, when the wronged woman cross-dresses to avenge her own honor as does Leonor in *Valor, agravio y mujer*, the woman actually courts her rival for her man's affections, thereby entering a second triangular relationship in which she becomes her galán's "male" rival. Thus, she is no longer relegated to the role of object but is portrayed as an agent of desire in two simultaneous relationships, which, in turn, question many dominant assumptions regarding "compulsory heterosexuality."[14] To borrow Judith Butler's (1994) phrase, these texts often serve to "contest the heterosexual matrix" (p. 10).

In María de Zayas's *La traición en la amistad*, Fenisa takes center stage as a desiring subject. She competes for the affection of every man in sight—just hearing her friend Marcia describe Liseo, a man she is interested in, suffices to whet her voracious appetite and incite her unquenchable desire. Throughout the course of the play, she blatantly pursues multiple men, openly declaring "Gallarda condición, Cupido, tengo: / muchos amantes en mi alma caben" ["Cupid, I am in quite a tate. There is room for lots of lovers in my soul"] (Hegstrom, 1999, vv. 1463–64). Although some have labeled Fenisa a "Don Juan in skirts," as others have demonstrated, she does not play the role of "burladora," interested in only deceiving. Hegstrom (1994) notes in her early article on the play,

> In Fenisa, Zayas creates her extreme example of a *mujer varonil.* This character takes on the masculine role of deceiver, loving every male with whom she comes into contact. Not quite a *burladora*, Fenisa's philosophy is not 'love 'em and leave 'em,' but 'love the one you're with.' (p. 63)

Interestingly, Fenisa evokes very strong reactions among contemporary college students. David Pasto's Oklahoma City University production of the play faced a tremendous challenge when, after months of rehearsal, the student playing Fenisa withdrew, stating that she could not represent such

an immoral character (Williamsen, 2012). In animated class discussions generated by the play, students often express open admiration for Fenisa and her relentless pursuit of her own satisfaction. Still others criticize her for her betrayal of her friends, citing that they all know a woman like her that "cannot be trusted." Interpretations of the play's ending, in which everyone is paired off except for Fenisa, also vary widely. Some see that she remains free—unfettered by marriage; others feel that she now faces being alone—the very fear they felt drove her earlier behaviour. All express astonishment that a figure like Fenisa could have existed—even if only in a dramatist's imagination—almost four centuries ago. In turn, this realization allows them to question accepted societal norms and to consider what has/has not changed.[15]

Despite the serious issues raised in these *comedias*, humor also plays a pivotal role. Tellingly, Caro and Zayas both employ sexual humor and innuendo throughout their works. In *Valor, agravio y mujer*, the inert body of one of the *graciosos* is the butt of several jokes at men's expense. When Flora examines his phallic shaped tobacco horn, quipping in dismay "¿Hombres, que aquesto os dé gusto?" [Men—to think that this could give you pleasure!], the point is well taken. In Zayas, joking references to cuckolds abound. Yet, one moment shifts from expected humor to the unexpected: Lucía counsels Fenisa, stating that her grandmother always advised having more than one man around—so if any one got away, there were more to take his place. Students often react with surprise and even shock when they realize that Sor Marcela de San Félix also includes ribald humor in her convent theatre, particularly in the innuendos and actions of her character Apetito.

Additionally, as others have noted, sometimes metatheatrical moments comically highlight the dramatists' awareness of the transgressive nature of their incursion into the public sphere. Critics often cite the exchange in which the two *graciosos* in *Valor, agravio y mujer* express their dismay at the audacity of women poets who now dare to write *comedias*, explicitly stating they would be better off to stick to weaving and sewing.[16] By expressly flouting her violation of the norm, Caro advocates for her own agency. Even the closing lines, "… Pídeos su dueño/ por mujer y por humilde/ que perdonéis sus defectos" [Its author, as a woman, and a humble one at that, asks that you forgive its shortcomings.], often disregarded as merely formulaic self-deprecatory remarks, highlight that the author is indeed a woman, thereby marking the stage as women's territory.[17]

PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY

The critical commonplace that there are no mothers on the Golden Age Stage has proven quite resistant to change despite growing evidence to the contrary. Templin's (1935) early inventory of mothers in Lope de Vega plays did little to change this misperception; other scholarly efforts have fared little better. Most recently, Judith Caballero's (2011) dissertation employed insights from cognitive science to demonstrate how the prevalence of this critical myth reveals the power of "selective attention." She combined this theoretical framework with painstaking archival research, yielding a corpus of hundreds of *comedias* that feature mothers. Interestingly, in several of the women-authored plays, the ever-present father figure is missing. None of the four leading ladies in *La traición en la amistad* has a father present seeking to control her actions; this allows them greater freedom to manipulate their circumstances and take charge of their own destinies. Rosa in Maria do Céu's *Clavel y Rosa* and Rosaura in Caro's *El conde Partinuplés* enjoy the same kind of independence. Although in many cases there is a brother who purportedly assumes the paternal role, fraternal efforts to exercise patriarchal authority are usually revealed to be ineffectual at best.

Even more significant, however, is the way that several of the female-authored plays illustrate bell hook's (2014) assertion that "Patriarchy knows no gender." In case after case, women characters themselves enforce patriarchal norms. At the end of *Valor, agravio y mujer*, it is the women who decide and enforce the conventional marriage pairings; however, the asymmetrical ending problematizes the formulaic ending. One *gracioso* initially refuses marriage, accepting only when money enters the bargain, thereby underscoring the materialistic nature of marriage transactions; the other *gracioso* ends up alone, bemoaning his fate. It is interesting that contemporary stagings of the play tend to "normalize" the ending by having everyone pair off at the end. When three different (male) directors were asked to explain this decision, they each stated that they were seeking an ending that would "satisfy" a contemporary audience. Disconcertingly, the transgressive force of Caro's work seems diminished by such choices.

Whereas a great deal of the criticism on *La traición en la amistad* has focused on the collective solidarity of the women who join forces against the renegade Fenisa, less attention has been paid to the way that Marcia and the others enforce societal standards.[18] As they punish Fenisa for expressing her own desires and/or for thwarting their own, they align themselves with traditional patriarchal structures. Awareness of women's collusion in patriarchy through their participation in the oppression of other women has

formed part of the critique of Zayas's prose works for some time, especially in criticism of her *Desengaños*. For example, in *La inocencia castigada,* the narrator highlights that of all the wrongdoers who collaborate in the cruel torture of Inés, the behavior of the sister-in-law was singled out as being especially egregious because, as a woman, one might have expected greater compassion from her. *La traición* operates in a similar fashion by foregrounding women who serve to enforce patriarchal norms in the absence of men. Ultimately, this play proves not to be merely ambivalent, but rather multivalent, inviting myriad contradictory interpretations. As the curtain falls, female solidarity reigns, yet it serves to reinforce patriarchal order by penalizing Fenisa for exercising her own sexual agency.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF VIOLENCE

In the same keynote address at the National Women's Association Conference in Puerto Rico where she repeated that patriarchy knows no gender, bell hooks (2014) spoke passionately about the need for feminist pedagogy and feminist practice to come to terms with the violence inherent in oppressive patriarchal systems. These remarks, in turn, prove to be a powerful lens for the consideration of violence in these Early Modern plays penned by women. In *comedias* by Ana Caro, Angela de Avezedo, and others, women often replicate the violence that characterizes their male counterparts. Yet, of all characters, Zayas's Fenisa proves the most disturbing in this regard. Undeniably, here was a woman who was exercising her agency and asserting herself as a sexual subject, yet feminist scholars often find her unsettling. Alison Jaggar's (1989) assertion that "only when we reflect on our initially puzzling irritability, revulsion, anger, or fear may we bring to consciousness our gut-level awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger" (p. 161) serves as a catalyst for a renewed examination of Fenisa that unveils a troubling aspect of her behavior towards others that criticism has avoided. León, the servant *gracioso*, actually has the greatest number of lines in the play, and steals the show in many scenes. His humor and wit enliven the moments when he takes center stage. Yet, he is marginalized because of his class. Those who outrank him treat him cruelly. First, one of the male characters hits him with little provocation. Then, in a subsequent scene, Fenisa violently abuses him, knocking out several of his teeth. Though the incident is milked for its comic potential in all its eschatological glory, the violence, once unmasked, underscores the cruelty perpetuated by the social structure of the time. Here, Zayas does not depart from theatrical convention, nor does she seem to transgress accepted norms or to question the treatment of servants;

rather, she capitalizes on the mistreatment of a member of a lesser social class as comic fodder. In contemporary stagings, this scene, in all its abusive glory, still elicits laughter; yet, upon further consideration, it renders visible uncomfortable legacies from Zayas's time that still persist in ours. We should resist the tendency toward homogenization that would gloss over this fissure in an attempt to render Zayas palatable; instead, we should confront this and other issues raised by the text so that we can move beyond the realm of unquestioned and unquestionable privilege.

ÉCRITURE FEMININE / WRITING THE FEMALE BODY

One might argue that Zayas, in creating Fenisa, explores "the in-between" when writing the "heterogenous," "erogenous," swimming, flying woman whom Hélène Cixous (1976) describes in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (pp. 883, 889). Nonetheless, Azevedo also comes close to creating a character who writes the female body in her brilliant student, Irene, in *La margarita del Tajo*. Like Cixous's gestation drive, Irene's desire for learning and her willingness to share that with other characters is a "desire-that-gives" (p. 893). But two male characters—a monk and a married man—symbolically penetrate and invade the female body. Her tutor, Remigio, poisons Irene with a potion that gives her body the symptoms of pregnancy. When others learn of her "dishonor," jealous Britaldo sends an assassin who stabs her and throws her body into the river. Azevedo seems to anticipate Cixous's critiques of Nietzsche's "systematic reducing of woman to the place of seduction," in which she calls seduction a "gift-that-takes" invented by men (p. 888). In *La margarita del Tajo*, the "gift-that-takes," which leads to death, is undeniably masculine. Irene does not seduce; Remigio and Britaldo are the men "who would like to take everything" (p. 888). At the play's climax, the curtain in front of the discovery space is drawn to reveal Irene's miraculously preserved, dead body.[19]

Irene's graphically depicted death forms part of a "long history of gynocide" (Cixous, H., 1976, p. 888), but Soror Maria do Céu's trilogy of *autos* about St. Alexis and her rosary of plays about the Virgin Mary approach—in their cyclical natures—*écriture feminine*. Cixous claims that a woman's "speech … is never simple or linear or 'objectified,' generalized." A woman's writing is bodily, made of menstrual blood, the "white ink" of "mother's milk"; rather than arriving at a single, linear climax, a woman's writing "never stops resonating" (pp. 878, 881). This view suggests that women's writing is cyclical, complex, multiple.[20] Soror Maria tells Alexis's story three times using three different literary modes, and her five Virgin stories will repeat again when they end, because the

rosary is circular. Cixous did not know about these *dramaturgas*, of course. She believed, just as we were taught in graduate school, that "after plowing through literature across languages, cultures, and ages, one can only be startled at this vain scouting mission" (p. 878). We need to insist on correcting their omission by including their writing, which begins to "inscribe femininity" (p. 878), in our undergraduate, as well as graduate, courses.

THE MALE GAZE

In *Feminism and the Honor Plays of Lope de Vega*, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (1994) problematizes the question of the "male gaze" in Early Modern Spanish theater, arguing convincingly that the diverse make-up of the *corral* audience would lead to fragmentation of meaning and to multiple readings of the same performance. Citing Julien and Mercer, she writes, "the very heterogeneity of the *comedia* audience argues for the possibility of competing meanings negotiated by 'conflicting identities within the "imagined community" of the nation'" (p. 242). Groups of audience members and individual spectators will not necessarily identify with the male gaze. Lope de Vega may have wanted his female characters to behave like women, but the playwright loses control of the performance when he sells his written text to the *autor* or *autora de comedias* (the managers of Early Modern theater troupes). The majority of male audience members may objectify women actors playing strong female characters, but the women spectators in the *cazuela* and the noblewomen in balcony windows view the play from a different perspective. The divided female gaze in the *corral* theater takes in the performance by the *mosqueteros* in the patio and the male spectators on the *gradas,* as well as the show staged by the acting company. The *dramaturgas* were aware of their divided audience. Both Sor Juana's Castaño and Zayas's Lucía speak in asides directly to the women in the audience.

Leonor de la Cueva y Silva's *La firmeza en la ausencia* focuses on the male gaze, but because Armesinda withstands King Filiberto's advances, rather than falling victim to them, he can become the object of the gaze in the play, the character who does not behave normatively and so stands out in the action of the play.[21] Some of the plays written by *dramaturgas* objectify male characters, positioning them as objects of the gaze within the play by allowing a *mujer esquiva* to choose among several suitors. In *El muerto disimulado,* Jacinta's father offers her this option—she can marry anyone she wants, as long as she agrees to marry. In *El conde Partinuplés,* Rosaura is able to gaze on her three suitors through magic without their

awareness. Similarly, in *Clavel y Rosa,* Rosa sets the terms of the competition between Lirio, Narciso, Bien-me-quiere, and Clavel.

Some of the *dramaturgas* found ways to eliminate men entirely from the theatrical equation. Azevedo served as lady-in-waiting to Isabel de Borbón and perhaps Azevedo and the queen's other female attendants performed her plays before the queen. In the convent, nun-actresses performed all the roles—female and male—in plays written by nun-playwrights before an all female audience. This arrangement allows female actresses to perform gender in ways that will create meanings that resonate with their female audience members.[22] Sor Francisca de Santa Teresa's character Mundo, a lascivious old man who tries to woo young nuns during their profession ceremonies, comes onstage stumbling without his crutches or eyeglasses, wearing make-up to try to hide his wrinkles. The actress and the audience must have enjoyed the role and the performance.

Even this cursory examination of the issues raised by the consideration of select Early Modern women playwrights reveals how much they have to offer contemporary scholars and students. If, as bell hooks (1994) contends, "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (p. 12), it is precisely here, in our classrooms, that we should engage our students in dialogue with these dramatists. Their literary works, their creative achievements, and their historical circumstances reveal complexities that are often hidden. Their voices, undiminished by time, destabilize established binaries that are often reified as cultural heritage or societal norms. Thus, we can employ their vibrant artistic legacies to enable our students to think beyond narrowly prescribed limits, so that education can indeed become a "practice of freedom."

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NOTES

[1] We would like to dedicate this article to Vern G. Williamsen, an inspiring educator who included María de Zayas and Ana Caro in the classes he taught at the University of Missouri-Columbia beginning in 1968. We also want to thank Michael Boglovits from UNCG for his invaluable assistance in the final preparation of this article.

[2] At the beginning of her chapter on "Anomalousness" in *How to Suppress Women's Writing,* Russ (1983) lists seven ways to dismiss women writers:

She didn't write it.
She wrote it, but she shouldn't have.
She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.
She wrote it, but "she" isn't really an artist and "it" isn't really serious, of the right genre–i.e., really art.
She wrote it, but she wrote only one of it.
She wrote it, but it's only interesting/included in the canon for one, limited reason.
She wrote it, but there are very few of her. (p. 76)

[3] Several studies now exist that treat the contributions of *dramaturgas* as a group and the gender questions raised by their works, including Teresa S. Soufas's (1996) *Dramas of Distinction: A Study of Plays by Golden Age Women*, Catherine Larson's (1996) "Valor Judgments, or Women Writers and the Comedia" and (2000) "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Gender, Voice, and Identity in Women-Authored *Comedias*," Hegstrom and Williamsen's (1999) *Engendering the Early Modern Stage* and Lisa Vollendorf's (2003) "Desire Unbound: Women's Theatre of Spain's Golden Age." Please see our forthcoming article, "Staging Gender in the Spanish Literature Classroom: Teaching Early Modern *Dramaturgas*" for a related pedagogical overview and strategies. Because of the limited scope of this article, we cannot begin to do justice to the extensive bibliography of criticism that now exists on the plays by Early Modern and colonial women playwrights.

[4] Although there has been a marked increase in critical activity on and theatrical productions of plays by Early Modern women writing in Spanish, their presence in the classroom is still somewhat limited. A recent informal inventory by William R. Blue (2014) indicated that many *comedia* courses at the graduate level include at least one work by a *dramaturga*; however, a survey of GEMELA members reveals that in our teaching we tend to focus on the same one or two works to the exclusion of others. In addition, undergraduate students rarely have the chance to study the playwrights unless they are taking a course specifically dedicated to gender. Moreover, the percentage of women-authored versus male-authored texts in anthologies has remained almost constant, just as Robinson (1991) found was the case for English anthologies. (See Williamsen, 1999, "Charting Our Course.")

[5] It also matters for Hispanism that, in literary history, Ana Caro is in fact the first professional woman dramatist, receiving paid commissions for her pieces at least a decade before Aphra Behn.

[6] For an extended discussion of Erauso and cross-dressing in Early Modern Spain, see Sherry Velasco's (1997) *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire, and Catalina de Erauso.*

[7] Robert Bayliss (2007) makes this very argument in "The Best Man in the Play: Female Agency in a Gender-Inclusive *Comedia*." See also Beatriz Cortez's (1998) "El travestismo de Rosaura en *La vida es sueño* y de Leonor en *Valor, agravio y mujer*" and Edward H. Friedman's (2008) "Clothes Unmake the Woman: The Idiosyncrasies of Cross-Dressing in Ana Caro's *Valor, agravio y mujer.*"

[8] Carmen Bravo-Villasante's *La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español del Siglo de Oro* first appeared in 1955, and Melveena McKendrick first published her ground-breaking study *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the* Mujer Varonil in 1974.

[9] Rosie Seagraves (2012) deciphers the conflict between Leonor's murderous motivations and the play's conventional happy ending in her article "Violent Masculinity Onstage and Off: A Rereading of Ana Caro's *Valor, agravio y mujer* through the Memoir of Catalina de Erauso."

[10] On gender questions in *El muerto disimulado,* see Maroto Camino, (2001) "Transvestism, Translation and Transgression," Múzquiz-Guerreiro (2005) "Symbolic Inversions," and Gabriele (2008) "Engendering Narrative."

[11] The best studies of gender in *La muerte del apetito* appear in the anthologies of Arenal, Schlau, Sabat-Rivers, and Susan Smith.

[12] On Clarindo and female space, see Hegstrom (2007) "*Comedia* Scholarship and Performance."

[13] See Reina M. Ruiz (2005) *Monstruos, mujer y teatro en el Barroco.*

[14] For an insightful analysis of feminized desire in Azevedo, Caro and Zayas, see Vollendorf's (2003) article "Desire Unbound."

[15] Many studies now exist regarding gender in *La traición en la amistad.* See, for example, Wilkins (1991) "Subversion through Comedy?," Soufas (1994) "María de Zayas's (Un)Conventional Play," Larson (1994–1995)"Gender, Reading, and Intertextuality," Stroud (1995) "The Demand for Love," Rodríguez Garrido (1997) "El ingenio en la mujer," Campbell (1998) "(En)Gendering Fenisa," Delgado (1998) "Lesbiagrafisis," Gabriele (2004) "El mundo al revés," Leoni (2007) "The Convenient Demonization of Fenisa," Bayliss (2008) "Feminism and María de Zayas's Exemplary Comedy," and Paredes Monleón (2013) "La fuerza de la mujer."

[16] Caro also interrogates class as well as gender. In a significant passage, Ribete, a *gracioso*, also rebels against the societal limitations of class and the literary conventions of his role, stating that although he was born of humble origin, he could still be brave.

[17] With reference to *Valor, agravio y mujer* and gender issues, please see also Soufas (1991) "Ana Caro's Re-Evaluation" and (1996) "A Feminist Approach," Williamsen (1992) "Re-Writing," Maroto Camino (1996) "Ficción," Gorfkle (1996) "Re-Staging Femininity," Dougherty (1996) "Out of the Mouths of 'Babes,'" Alcalá Galán (2001) "La cárcel del cuerpo," Leoni (2003) "Silence Is," Rhodes (2005) "Redressing," Ortiz (2005) "La mujer en hábito de comedia," Rodríguez-Jiménez (2006) "Writing Beyond the Ending," and Bates and Lauer (2010) "Performativity."

[18] For studies about female friendship in women-authored *comedias,* see Gorfkle (1998) "Female Communities," Wyszynski (1998) "Friendship," Maroto Camino (1999) "The Space of Woman's Solidarity," and Alcalde (2002) "La hermandad entre mujeres."

[19] Other approaches to gender in *La margarita del Tajo* can be found in Maria João Dodman's (2012) "Notions of Man and Manhood" and Christopher Gascón's (2005) "Female and Male Mediation."

[20] Alison Weber's (1996) *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* reveals St. Teresa's *écriture feminine.*

[21] Feminist readings of *La firmeza en la ausencia* include Soufas (1989) "Regarding the Woman's Response" and (2000) "The Absence of Desire," Voros (1993) "Calderón's Writing Women" and (1997) "Armesinda's Dream," and Aronson (2007) "The Threat of Rape."

[22] On the performance of convent plays, see Hegstrom (2014) "El convento como espacio escénico y la monja como actriz."

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