

# Open Iberia/América: Teaching Anthology

<https://openiberiaamerica.hcommons.org/>

## María de Zayas y Sotomayor, “The Power of Love,” *Amorous and Exemplary Novels* (Zaragoza, 1637)

*Pau Cañiguer Batllósera, 2019*

### Introduction

“The Power of Love” is one of the short narratives included in María de Zayas y Sotomayor’s *Amorous and Exemplary Novels*, first published in Zaragoza in 1637. This book contains ten autonomous stories, united under one narrative framework in which five women and five men gather together to tell stories to one another for entertainment. Zayas’ *Novels* weren’t published in her hometown, Madrid, prior to 1637 because she couldn’t obtain permission from the authorities. Instead, she decided to contact Pedro Escuder, a principal publisher in Zaragoza, who finally published her book and distributed it across the old kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon where censorship wasn’t as strict as in Castile. It has been suggested that Zayas originally titled her book *Honesto y entretenido sarao* (*Honest and Enjoyable Soirée*);<sup>1</sup> however, the publisher changed it to *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (*Amorous and Exemplary Novels*) in order to connect Zayas’ stories with Miguel de Cervantes’ *Exemplary Novels* (1613). By changing the title, Escuder also pointed out one of the singularities of this work, since the central theme of Zayas’ narrative is the conflicts originating from romantic relationships between women and men. However, neither of these two titles reflects the importance of Zayas’ feminine point of view. As a matter of fact, she was one of the first female writers in Spain who wrote both for the pleasure and education of women and the amusement of men.

### María de Zayas y Sotomayor and her Works

We know very little about the life of María de Zayas y Sotomayor. Her biography has been built upon a few historical documents, some references in the work of other writers, and autobiographical readings of key passages of her work. She was born in Madrid on September 12, 1590 to a privileged family with enough interest in arts and literature to either provide her with an education or to let her study on her own. It has also been suggested that, because of her father’s military career, she lived in Naples between 1610 and 1616. This information is consistent with the fact that the action of *Amorous and Exemplary Novels* takes place in Madrid and that some of the stories, including “The Power of Love,” are set in Italian territories. She only ever published under the name of María de Zayas y Sotomayor, which could indicate that she never married or, at least, that she kept her literary activity separate from her marital status. The date of her death is unknown, but it must be after 1646, when she finished the *Desengaños amorosos* (*The Disenchantments of Love*), a continuation to *Amorous and Exemplary Novels*.<sup>2</sup>

Although she is most known for her works in prose, María de Zayas actually made her first public appearance with poetry. Between 1621 and 1639, she participated in some poetic battles, was associated with prestigious academies of letters, and wrote laudatory poems for the preliminaries of important writers such as Lope de Vega. Zayas was not only a well-known writer; her work was also highly praised by her contemporaries. Indeed, she received the acclaim of many male writers. For instance, Lope de Vega, in his *Laurel de Apolo*

---

<sup>1</sup> “Sarao” (soirée) is defined as an evening gathering of noble people with dances and music.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to *Novels*, the male characters of *The Disenchantments* lose their role as narrators and all the stories reflect a very negative view of the relationships between women and men, mostly by presenting the terrible consequences that these relationships have for women.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). You are free to download, share, adapt and republish, provided you attribute the source and do not use for commercial purposes.

(1621), called her “the immortal María de Zayas” in praise of her poetry; and later, Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, in *La garduña de Sevilla* (1642), gave her the title of “Sybil of Madrid.”

In brief, the full body of Zayas’ work comprises of a collection of poems, two collections of short stories: *Amorous and Exemplary Novels* (1637) and *The Disenchantments of Love* (1647), and a play entitled *Betrayal among Friends* (ca. 1620). The fact that we don’t know a lot of Zayas’ life and that her corpus is small in comparison to other writers of her time shouldn’t undermine how extraordinary it was that, at the height of the Spanish Inquisition, a woman not only published multiple collections of short narratives, but that she also received the recognition of her literary community.

## Writing Prose Works in the Time of María de Zayas

Seventeenth-century Spanish society was characterized by strict moral values and a strong patriarchal organization. In this strict society, where honor was held in the highest esteem, the worst thing that could happen to a man was either that his wife would commit adultery or that his daughter would lose her virginity before marriage. These ideas not only reduced women’s sexuality to the good image of their fathers or husbands, but in practice could also cause a lot of frustration for all the family members: the husbands for the fear of being cheated on by their wives, the wives for being controlled by their husbands, and the daughters for having to put their love for their fathers over their own desires. Needless to say, prohibition increases desire, and, maybe for that reason, a good proportion of Spanish literature from this period depicts situations that derive from this familiar social structure.

Zayas’ narrative is not only an unprecedented and singular response to her patriarchal society, but also a denunciation of the injustice endured by women. *Amorous and Exemplary Novels* includes a prologue titled “To the Reader” in which Zayas constructs her narrative self. This prologue begins by pointing out the extraordinary fact that a woman wrote a book and decided to publish it. After that, it questions us about gender injustice in the realm of culture: “How, then, can men presume to be wise and presume that women are not?” Zayas’ answer couldn’t be more categorical:

men’s cruelty and tyranny [lies] in keeping us cloistered and not giving us teachers. The real reason why women are not learned is not a defect in intelligence but a lack of opportunity. When our parents bring us up if, instead of putting cambric on our sewing cushions and patterns in our embroidery frames, they gave us books and teachers, we would be as fit as men for any job or university professorship.

Zayas’ point is more than clear: women suffer injustice because they are being pushed aside and they don’t receive an education. In Zayas’ narrative, marriage is the most oppressive institution for women, since it is the tool that men use to lock women up in their houses and subdue them to the yoke of domestic work.

In order to enter the masculine world of Spanish letters, Zayas established a critical dialogue with two male authors widely read in her time: Boccaccio and Cervantes. In her *Amorous and Exemplary Novels*, Zayas imitates the narrative framework, or cornice, of the *Decameron*. Boccaccio is especially productive as a model for Zayas’ project since, in his own prologue, he addresses his book to women because, as he declares, they have very few resources to mitigate love’s struggles. One of the *Decameron*’s recurrent themes is the sexual agency of its female characters: the women of the *Decameron* are not only able to express their amorous passion and to pursue its satisfaction, but they also enjoy their sexuality. As we can observe in “The Power of Love,” Zayas’ heroines have the same sexual agency as Boccaccio’s; nevertheless, the final message of her stories isn’t a celebration of female sexuality, but rather a protest against the abuse to which male lovers subject their female partners.

It would be unfair to reduce Zayas’ stories to a manifesto in defense of women in an age when women weren’t allowed to participate in the public sphere. On the contrary, her *Amorous and Exemplary Novels* are built upon a complex universe filled with paradoxes and complexities, articulated by a narrative voice founded on ambiguity and that constantly points out the savage conflict between individual needs and the norms of behavior established by society’s code of honor.

## Commentary on “The Power of Love”

“The Power of Love” is the fifth of the ten stories of the *Amorous and Exemplary Novels*. The action of the narrative framework takes place in Madrid, some days before Christmas Eve, in the house of young Lisis who is secluded because of a fever. To distract her, four friends go to visit her (Lisarda, Matilde, Nise, and Filis) and, along with five other young men (Don Juan, Don Alvaro, Don Miguel, Don Alonso and Don Lope), they decide to fill the days before the holidays with a variety of entertainments, from playing music, to singing songs and telling stories. Even though most of the stories are related to the main amorous plot, played out by some of the cornice’s characters (Lisis, Lisarda, Don Juan and Don Alvaro), “The Power of Love” doesn’t seem to forward that plot. The narrator is Nise, a character who doesn’t show any interest for the gentlemen attending the party —nor them for her— and who doesn’t stand out for her beauty but rather for her rhetorical skills. By placing it in the middle of the book, Zayas seems to have wanted to give a special position to this tale. Although it is not related to the love triangles of the narrative framework, “The Power of Love” summarizes the most repeated themes of Zayas’ narrative and clearly states the main goal of her work: to denounce the injustice suffered by women in her society.

The story line takes place in Naples, the capital of southern Italy, and is focused on the character of Laura, a beautiful young woman of the Italian nobility who, having lost her mother, grows up under her father’s and brothers’ surveillance. When she is old enough to marry, she falls in love with charming Don Diego to whom, after a series of unpredictable events, she gets married. After marriage, Don Diego completely forgets about Laura, and he returns to one of his previous lovers, Nise (who has the same name as the narrator). Laura falls into a spiral of jealousy and, being desperate, she puts her trust in a witch’s dark arts in order to recover her husband’s love. As a result, she finds herself doing terrible things in fearful places, putting her reputation and honesty in risk.

## Fifth Enchantment: The Power of Love

*English translation by Pau Cañigüeral Batlloera, 2019*

Since Nise realized that it was her turn to tell the fifth enchantment on that third night, she took the seat that was laid out for such purpose, and she started in this way:

—No one does not know the power of love, especially if it consumes noble chests; for love is like the sun, its effects are noticeable wherever it goes. This will be clear in my enchantment that starts in this way:

Laura was born in Naples, the city of Italy distinguished and famous for its wealth, beauty and pleasant location, its noble citizens, dashing buildings crowded with gardens and decorated with crystalline fountains, and its beautiful ladies and handsome gentlemen. She was a new and outstanding miracle of nature, thus she was priced as a celestial extreme among the prettiest and most beautiful ladies. One time, the curious eyes of the city chose eleven ladies, and three among these eleven. Laura was one of the eleven, and also one of the three. She was the third one to be born, since she enjoyed the world after her two brothers were born in it, who were so noble and virtuous as pretty she was. Her mother died during childbirth, hence her father was in charge of the government and the protection of these three beautiful children; and even though the mother was missing, the good manners of the father moderately made up for it.

Don Antonio, her father’s name, was from the lineage and name of Garrafa, relative of the dukes of Nochera, and Lord of Piedrablanca. Don Alejandro, Don Carlos and Laura were raised in the greatness and with the care associated with their status, since their noble father spent on them what was required by his status and wealth. He educated the two gentlemen and such a beautiful lady in the good manners and exercises that they deserved, and our beautiful Laura lived with the prudence and honesty that were important for a rich and prominent woman to have. She was the apple of her father’s and brothers’ eyes, and the pride of the city.

Don Carlos, the youngest of the brothers, loved Laura the most. He loved her with such tenderness that he used to forget about himself. This wasn't too extraordinary, since Laura's gifts would make everyone love her, not only those closer to her, but also those far away from her sight.

Even though her mother was not there, Laura's seclusion remained intact. Her father and brothers were the guards of her beauty, but it was her honest thoughts that watched over her with more care. However, when she reached that age in which discretion is crucial, she couldn't avoid the company of important women, who were in debt to her, and, in doing so, she payed misfortune what she owed to beauty.

It is a custom in Naples that maidens go to soirées and parties in the palaces of the viceroy and other houses; however, in some other lands of Italy, they don't think this is a right thing to do. In most of them, indeed, women aren't even allowed in mass; and the torments that both clergymen and secular men inflict on them aren't enough to derogate this law that has become a habit for them.

Finally, Laura went out to see and to be seen, accompanied by her beauty as well as by her honesty; however, she was very aware of Dinah's example,<sup>3</sup> thus she didn't trust her own prudence. Her beautiful eyes were a basilisk<sup>4</sup> for the souls, her valor was a monster for the lives, and her wealth and noble dresses were a bait for the longings of thousands of brave and noble young men of the city who, through marriage, wanted to enjoy her beauty.

Among those who wanted to serve Laura, Don Diego of Pinatelo was the most ferocious. He was from the house of the dukes of Monteleon, and he was a wealthy and cautious gentleman. Finally, he saw Laura and he gave her his soul with such strength that he almost lost it, which didn't happen just because it was not the time for him to give up his life. (Such is the effect of beauty glanced in certain occasions.) During a festivity in the house of one of the city's princes, Don Diego had his occasion not only to see her, but also to fall for her, and, after falling for her, to tell her about his love. At that point, Don Diego's love was so great as he would have loved Laura for a hundred years.

It is traditional in Naples to bring a master of ceremonies to the festivities who chooses the ladies and the gentlemen for each dance. In this occasion, Don Diego took advantage of the master who attended that meeting (who doubts that it only cost him some money?), thus right after warming the master's hands with money, he saw in his own hands the ones of beautiful Laura just in time to dance a galliard.<sup>5</sup> However, he was only able to burn with her snow, since he dared to say: "My lady, I adore you," and after that, the beautiful lady, pretending to feel uneasy, left him and went back to her seat. These actions inspired suspicion in those who were looking, and pain in Don Diego, who was left sad and desperate since, for the rest of that day, Laura didn't favor him even with her eyes.

Don Diego spent the night tossing and turning with a thousand thoughts, sometimes cheered up with hope, others exasperated with fear, while beautiful Laura, profoundly affected but still mindful about her honesty, had in her eyes Don Diego's handsome courtesy and in her memory the words "I adore you" that she had heard; she was already determined to love, and realizing that both her freedom and fame were lost, judging that love was a mistake, she reprehended herself with remorse and thinking that if she loved him, she would fail the responsibility of her status; and, if she would despise him, she would put herself in the same danger. With these thoughts and considerations, she started to deny pleasant things to herself and conversation to the people of the house, desiring an opportunity to see the cause of her worries.

The days went by, and Don Diego did nothing but complain about the disdain of the lady he loved, who was not giving him any other favor than letting him see her even though she was in love with him as well; and she

---

<sup>3</sup> Biblical figure that appears in the book of *Genesis* 34. Dinah was raped by Shechem when she "went out to see and to be seen."

<sup>4</sup> Fantastic beast who can cause death with a single glance.

<sup>5</sup> Spanish dance.

was doing that with so much care and contempt that he had no opportunity to tell her about his suffering. Even though her pain could force her to allow Don Diego's courtship, she hid it with so much care that she kept the secret of her love even to her most beloved maids.

It happened that one of the nights that Don Diego woke up at the doors of Laura's house without having an opportunity to express his passion, he brought a servant to the street to be the third person there, for the servant had one of the sweetest and most pleasant voices of the city and he could proclaim, in a song, Don Diego's love and the jealousy that he had for a nobleman who, for being a dear friend of Laura's brothers, was often entering their house. In the end, the musician tuned his instrument and sang the following romance:

If the master that you chose,  
Higher thought,  
Is forced to answer to  
Another fortunate master,

Why do you lose yourself,  
Following his steps,  
Noticing his actions,  
Pretending to see him?

Why would you ask  
His favor to Heaven,  
Or impossible things to love,  
Or its effects on time?

If you want to see your master  
Missing, you are foolish;  
Since killing yourself just for killing  
Is not rational thinking.

If you ask discord  
To enter into his heart,  
It is because you well see that annoyances  
Certainly come with pleasantries.

If you tell your eyes  
To express their feelings,  
You will see that they cannot do much  
Even if they look with tenderness.

If the one who could give  
Remedy to your woes,  
A compassionate friend,  
Always gracious,

Is also a prisoner  
To that superb angel,  
How could he help you  
In your quest for love?

If he would give you any attention,  
You will take it as a price,  
Even though if your master would say:  
—I pity you.

You will look at your master, and  
You will look at him without love

And even this disillusion  
Will not change your intentions.

You seem like Tantalus,<sup>6</sup>  
Who looks the enjoyable crystal,  
Almost in his lips,  
And it never reaches them.

Oh God! If you deserve,  
For so much emotion,  
Some false trick,  
For I am afraid of your death,

Your sorrows will be from  
Purgatory, but I see  
That the sorrows of Hell  
Have no hope.

However, if you have already decided,  
To die is a good remedy,  
For to look back  
Will be a cowardly thing to do.

Laura listened to the music from the beginning through a little lattice, and she was determined to defend her honor, since Don Diego was taking it away from her by causing suspicion, as was clear in these verses. Thus, what love could not achieve was done by the fear of losing her reputation, and even though her shame fought against her love, she decided to defend herself as she did. Finally, she opened the window and she said to him:

—Master Diego, it would be a miracle that being a lover you were not jealous, since love has never existed without jealousy; however, the jealousy you have toward me is so false that it makes me do what I could not ever have imagined; for I am so sad to see my honor in the tongue of poetry and in the chords of this lute; and, even worse, in the mouth of this musician who, being a servant, must be an enemy. I won't forget you for anybody. If someone in the world deserves my attention, it is you, and you will be the one who will deserve me, even if I have to put my life on the line for it. Your love must forgive my audacity, and the fact that my honor was under attack must excuse my daring. Since today, you can say that you are mine, as I feel fortunate to call myself yours. Believe me when I tell you that I will have not say these things if it was not nighttime and its dark cloak was not covering the shame and the colors that bring me to say these truths.

Begging her to pardon his confusion, Don Diego, the happiest man on Earth, wanted to answer and to thank Laura, but at that moment, he heard the doors of the house opening and the brave drawing of two swords upon him; and if he would not have been alert and if his servant would not have drawn his swords, he might not have been given an opportunity to go ahead with his amorous desires. Laura, who saw the event and recognized her two brothers, was scared to be heard; she closed the window, and went back to her chamber, not with the intention to rest, but to cover herself up.

It happened that when Don Alejandro and Don Carlos heard the music, they stood up as soon as they could and, as said, they went out with their swords in the air, which if they were not stronger than those of Don Diego and his servant, they were, at least, more fortunate. Don Diego was injured in the fight and he had to move away from it, complaining about his misfortune. However, it would be better to call it good fortune, since this event made his parents know about what caused it. Seeing the gain that would come to their son

---

<sup>6</sup> Mythological character punished to suffer eternal hunger and thirst.



with such a noble marriage, and knowing that it was his will, they ordered a third party to go and negotiate with Laura's father. At this point, when our beautiful Laura thought that this enmity would cause eternal disagreements, she found herself being Don Diego's wife.

Who, seeing this fortunate event and considering Don Diego's love, his tears, his complaints, and the burning desires of his heart, would not consider Laura to be very fortunate? Who doubts that those who have hopes in their thoughts would say: "Oh, how fortunate I would be if my affairs had such a happy ending as those of this noble lady!" And especially women, who don't consider anything but their taste. In the same way, who, seeing Don Diego enjoying Laura, an amusement of beauty, an extreme in wealth, a height of understanding, and a miracle of love, would not say that Heavens have not conceived anybody else more fortunate than him? Hence, at least, being all the parts equal in everything, it would not be difficult to believe that this love had to last forever. And it would have, if Laura were not as beautiful as wretched, and Don Diego, as a man, were not fickle. Neither his love could overcome neglect, nor his nobility could stop lust; and Laura's wealth was useless against her misfortune, as her beauty against disdain, her prudence against contempt, and her love against ingratitude. In our age, all her qualities are both very difficult to find and not appreciated enough.

It was the case that Don Diego, before loving Laura, had spent his attentions with Nise, a pretty lady of Naples, if not the best of the city, at least she was not the worst, and she had enough natural qualities and good fortune that she inspired high thoughts among men, more than the worth of her quality. She managed to become Don Diego's woman and, with this title, she favored him as much as she could, and as much as he wanted. Since after the first days, and even months, of being married, Don Diego forgot about Nise (for men get bored of everything), she tried to know the cause of his coldness, and she made such an effort to know it that somebody told her everything. As the wedding had been public, and as Don Diego never intended to be her husband, he hadn't given a thought to Nise. Nise was extremely sad that Don Diego was married, but, in the end, she was a woman, a woman in love, hence she was willing to forgive all the offenses, even on the cost of her honor. She tried to enjoy Don Diego's company, if not as his husband, at least as his lover, since it seemed to her that she could not live without him. In order to achieve her purpose, she pleaded and cried out for Don Diego to return to her house; and this was Laura's downfall, for Nise knew how to make him fall in love again with so many gifts. Laura started to annoy him as his own woman, to be tiresome for being jealous, and to be forgotten because she was irritating. All this happened because the lover Don Diego, the caring Don Diego, the stubborn Don Diego, the same Don Diego who said at the beginning that he was the most fortunate man of the world, he did not only deny all of it, but he also denied what he owed to himself, since men who disregard in this way are giving wings to an affront, and when a man does that, he is close to losing his honor. He started to be ungrateful by not joining her either in bed, or at the table; and, not caring about the pain he was inflicting to Laura, he rejected her attentions and he disregarded her by saying hurtful things.

Since Laura recognized such changes in her husband, she started to show her sorrows with tears and to answer his rejection with words. When a woman feels confused by her husband's actions, one can say that she will not come back to him. Since she was forced to express her feelings, she gave a reason to Don Diego to mistreat her not only with words, but also with violence. He was only going to his house to fulfill his responsibilities, since seeing her was more annoying to him than death.

Laura wanted to know what was causing all these changes, and without having to beg too much, somebody told her extensively what was going on. Laura was determined to hear the mistakes of her husband, and she realized that there was no solution for this case, since there cannot be a remedy when the wills are stumbling. By knowing Don Diego's liberties, Laura gave him the opportunity to lose, even more, his sense of shame and to pursue his desires without restraint. Immoral people do not care if their vices go public.

Laura saw Nise in church, and she begged her with tears to give up her aspiration since her only gain will be to lose her honor and to be the cause of Laura's bad life. Nise, who was totally out of her mind at that point, and, as a woman who didn't care either about her fame or about failing to a worse place than where she was, answered Laura so brazenly that it was clear that there was no remedy for Nise and that she was even more determined to pursue her love affair in public. She completely lost her respect for God and for the world, and if, until that point, she had secretly sent letters, gifts, and other things to Don Diego, after that conversation,

she and her servants went publicly looking for him, which caused Laura to suffer new torments and ferocious passions as she realized that her misfortune was getting worse. She lived the saddest life, and she had lost all hope. She was jealous, what a miracle?, and jealousy affected her like a furious illness.

Her father and brothers noticed her sadness and lack of self-care, and seeing that Laura's beauty was fading away, they investigated what was going on. When they discovered Don Diego's bad actions, they had many arguments and they felt enraged about it, to the point that it was well known that they were enemies.

Laura spent some days in this way, and, as days came by, her husband's liberties increased as much as her patience decreased. As it is not always possible to cry about one's misfortunes, one night that she was awake because of her thoughts and Don Diego's lateness, she wanted to sing about her thoughts to entertain them. And, without doubting that Don Diego was in Nise's arms, she took a harp, in which Italian ladies are very skillful, and sometimes crying, and other times singing, covering up Don Diego's name with Albano, she sang in this way:

Why, tyrannical Albano,<sup>7</sup>  
 If you worship Nise,  
 And you offer your love's delicacy  
 To her beauty;

Why, if your soul  
 Is a prisoner of her eyes,  
 And, to yours, her face  
 Is a beautiful image;

Why, if you tangle your will  
 With her hair,  
 And she rewards you,  
 Grateful and willingly;

Why, if you listen from her mouth,  
 Box of beautiful pearls,  
 Pleasantries of love  
 That increase your pleasure;

To me, who I suffer great pains  
 For loving you,  
 You repay my tenacity  
 With disloyalty and lies?

Since you faked  
 Tender words with me,  
 Would you even let me  
 Live in my fantasy?

Don't you see that there is no  
 Right or rational reason  
 To wake up who is sleeping,  
 And less, who suffers the pain of love?

---

<sup>7</sup>In Spanish, the adjective "albano" refers to someone who is from Alba Longa, the old capital of the Roman Empire in Lazio. With this nickname, Laura only covers up Don Diego's identity partially, pointing out that the man who offended her is from the region of Rome.



Oh poor me, the most unhappy one!  
What remedy is left for me  
That will make my soul  
Return to its body?

Give me my soul, tyrant!  
Or maybe not,  
Since it is better that my body  
perishes for this cause.

A thousand times I curse  
Tyrannical Celio,<sup>8</sup> that woman  
Who, in prisons of love,  
Lets her soul burn!

Let us cry, eyes of mine,  
So many tender tears,  
That we will cover the sands  
Of the bottom of the sea.

And to the sound of this jealousy,  
Instrument of complaints,  
We will sing, while crying,  
Pitiful laments.

Listen attentively,  
High crags covered in snow,  
So your clear echo  
Will serve as my answer.

Hear me, beautiful birds,  
So your tongues, that are like harps,  
Will help my jealousy  
With sweet ballads.

My Albano worships Nise,  
And lets me suffer;  
These are real passions,  
These are real pains.

He, amorous, celebrates  
Her divine beauty,  
And, through Heavens, he adores  
The papers with her handwriting.

What will you say, Ariadne,<sup>9</sup>  
You who cry and lament

---

<sup>8</sup> Celio is another name used by Laura to cover up Don Diego's identity. Celio is also one of the seven hills of the city of Rome. Both nicknames used by Laura, Albano and Celio, suggest that Don Diego is originally from Rome.

<sup>9</sup> Mythological character who gave a piece of rope to Theseus to help him find his way out of the Labyrinth after killing the Minotaur. Theseus abandoned her in the island of Naxos where she committed suicide throwing herself to the sea.

Your lover's mistakes,  
Injustice, and absences?

And you, mournful Prometheus<sup>10</sup>  
Even though you see your meat  
Being eaten with such harshness  
By the fierce eagle;

An if, tied to Caucasus,<sup>11</sup>  
You suffer, you do not feel it as I do,  
Since my pain is greater,  
And my suspicions are stronger.

Oh wretched Ixion,<sup>12</sup>  
You do not hear the sad noise  
Of your wheel  
Because you are hearing my pains.

Tantalus, you who reach  
The waters without being able  
To taste them; you cannot catch them,  
Since, if you get closer, they flee from you:

All your pains are little,  
Even if they become bigger;  
Since I do not consider any other pain  
That is not inflicted by jealousy.

Ungrateful one, I hope it pleases  
To Heaven that jealousy overcomes you,  
And that you become furious as I am,  
And that you suffer terribly as I do!

And to this woman, enemy of mine,  
I wish that he gives you so much attention  
That you suffer with attention  
What Midas<sup>13</sup> suffered with gold!

Who will not feel moved by the sweet and properly suffered complaints of Laura, except Don Diego, who took pride in being so ungrateful? It happened that he arrived when she was singing her misfortunes. He heard them, and he understood their cause, and then he started to mistreat Laura with bad words, saying such harsh things that, while she was pouring crystalline currents down her beautiful face, he forced her to say:

---

<sup>10</sup> Prometheus is one of the Titans of Greek mythology. He stole fire from the Gods and gave it to humanity. Zeus tied him up and sent an eagle to eat his liver. As Prometheus was immortal, his liver regenerated every time, and his punishment went on for eternity.

<sup>11</sup> In Greek mythology the Caucasus was one of the pillars supporting the world and where Prometheus was chained to receive his punishment.

<sup>12</sup> Mythological character punished for trying to rape Zeus' wife, Hera, when he was a guest in the Olympus. Zeus tied him into a burning spinning wheel.

<sup>13</sup> Midas was a King of Greek mythology who had the power of turning everything he touched into gold. He starved to death because of this power that made him rich and powerful.

—What is this, ungrateful? How is it possible that you give all the freedom to your bad life that, without respect or fear of Heaven, you get mad about things that will only be fair to praise? It seems that you want the world to understand what you do and, in the city, your sins are already in the mouth of its people. You act with so much impudence that it seems you are trying to bring an affront upon you, and also upon my desires. If you do not want me to complain about this, you should end the cause I have to do it; otherwise, you can put an end to my weary life, so offended by your nastiness. Is this how you treat my love? Is this how you appreciate my attention? Is this how you thank my suffering? You are doing well, since I am not able to take the cause of this things with my hands and break it to pieces. What does a husband expect who acts like you? It seems he wants that his wife, beyond caring about honor, may destroy his honor for him. I am not going to do this, even if you give me more reasons. I will not be able to do this because of who I am, and because of the great love that, for my misfortune, I have for you. I am afraid that your evil ways will inspire other vicious men like you, to take up where you leave off. I am afraid that slanderous and defamatory people would imagine my dishonor and spread rumors. Hence, what man would see a woman like me, married to a husband like you, who wouldn't have a stronger nerve than your lack of care?

With these words, Don Diego should have opened the eyes of his soul and of his body, and should have seen Laura's reason; however, as he had his soul so filled with Nise, and also so empty of his duties, he approached her and, enraged with an infernal anger, he started to drag her by the hair and to beat her, in such a way that the pearls of her teeth took the shape of coral, covered up in the blood that his hands were pulling out of her. Not being satisfied with this, he took his dagger ready to free her from the yoke as heavy to him as it was to her; but, to this action, Laura's servants, who were trying to push him away from their lady, started to scream and to call her father and brothers who, confused and furious, went up to Laura's chamber. When they saw Don Diego's doing and the lady all covered up in blood, Don Carlos thought that he hurt her and he charged at Don Diego. He took the dagger from his hand and he was about to stab it in his heart, but the risky young man, realizing that he was in great danger, held Don Carlos, and Laura did the same, and also asked his brother to stop by saying:

—Oh brother of mine, be aware of what you do since your sad sister's life is in the one you are about to end!

Don Carlos stopped, and Laura's father stepped up to ease the quarrel and, after that, he went back to his lodging. Don Antonio started to fear that he will lose his mind if he had to see things like that every day; hence, he decided that he will not see how his dear daughter was mistreated. Another day, he took his house, sons and belongings, and he went to Piedrablanca, abandoning Laura to her dreadful life. She was so sad and she got so emotional of seeing them leave that she almost perished. Laura had heard that in her land there were women who could force a man to love with spells and, as she suffered her husband's disdain every day, she decided, with everything that happened to her, that she would find her remedy in such ways, so she ordered to call one of these women.

The person sent by our beautiful and afflicted Laura to bring her the trickster was not lazy and, very soon, the woman was in Laura's presence. Laura, giving her presents, the weakness of these women, moved her with tears and cheered her with promises while telling of her misfortunes. When they were talking about these things, Laura also asked her what she wanted:

—Friend, if you make that my husband gets tired of Nise and loves me again as he did at the beginning of our marriage, when he was more loyal and I was more fortunate, I will show you my gratitude and how much I appreciate his love; for this, I would think it is insufficient to give you half of my possessions. If this is not enough, you can match your desire with my necessity, and set your payment for this service. And, in the case that my possessions are short, I will sell myself to satisfy you.

The woman made sure that Laura trusted her knowledge, and she told her about miracles that happened in other people's businesses in a way that Laura already felt that her case would soon come to a good end. However, the woman said that in order to do what Laura asked, she needed certain things that Laura must bring her in a tiny bag. Those things were beard, hair and teeth pulled from a hanged man, and she said that with these relics, along with other things, she would change Don Diego's mind and would scare him of his

doings. The woman also said that she did not want a payment more valuable than the value of the things that were about to happen.

—And believe me, my lady —the false woman said— there are a lot of beautiful and rich women who are happy thanks to these sort of things. Only if you knew how many women have peace with their husbands because of me, you will certainly feel comforted.

Our beautiful Laura was confused because the woman asked her something that was very difficult for her, since she did not know how she could obtain those things. Finally, she gave her a thousand shields of gold and, saying that everything could be done with money, she told her to give the money to whoever may bring her what she needed. The cunning witch replied by saying (and with these words she just wanted to gain time to later obtain more money from the suffering lady and to cover up her trick) that she could trust nobody and, moreover, there was some sort of virtue in Laura finding those things and handing them to her. After that, she left Laura in so much sadness and confusion.

Laura put so much thought on how to find the things that the women asked, and finding a lot of difficulties everywhere, her best remedy was to start two flowing rivers from her beautiful eyes, since she had nobody to trust and she thought that it was an affront for a woman like her to be involved in such things. She couldn't stop crying while having these thoughts, and talking to herself with her hands joined, she said:

—Oh how miserable you are, Laura, and how much happier you would have been if, like your mother gave her life during your childbirth, your life would also be sacrificed to death! ¡Oh love, enemy to the people! You have brought so much pain to the world and, mostly, to women since, as with everything else, we lose ourselves with more passion and we are easier to trick. It looks like it is only against women that you use your power or, it would be better to say, your anger. I do not know why the Heavens made me beautiful, noble and wealthy since none of these qualities are useful against my misfortune; none of the gifts that nature and fortune gave me could take me away from the unlucky star under which I was born. And as I have all of them, for what reason do the Heavens keep me alive? The fact that my life is in the hands of such an ungrateful man is more an affront than good fortune. To whom could I tell my hardships who will give me remedy? Who will be moved by my complaints? Who, seeing my tears, will wipe them off? Certainly, nobody will, since my father and brother have abandoned me so they don't have to hear me, and even Heaven, solace of the sorrowful ones, is playing deaf with me. Oh Don Diego, who could imagine it! Now I see that I should have imagined it just taking into account that you are a man and that men's tricks belittle demons' power and that they do what the ministers of evil cease to do. Where can one find a truthful man? Which man will persist for a day if they are loved? Unhappy the woman who trusts them, since, in the end, she will get the same payment for her love as me! What foolish woman wants to get married seeing so many pitiful examples? How is it possible that my spirit is so effeminate and my cowardice so great that I do not kill not only the woman who is the enemy of my solace but also the ungrateful man who treats me so poorly? But alas, I am in love! And by doing one thing, I am scared of losing him; and by doing the other, I am scared that he will get mad at me. For what reason, vain legislators of the world, you chain our hands when we need to take revenge, and you diminish our strength by denying us both letters and guns? Is our soul different from men's soul? If it is the soul that gives courage to the body, who forces us to such cowardice? I assure you that if you would understand that we are also strong and courageous, you would not mock us as you do. In this way, to have us subject since we are born, you weaken our strength with the fear of honor and our knowledge with the modesty of shame; so you give us spinning wheels instead of swords, and little pillows instead of books. But, poor me! How useless are these thoughts since they will not remedy what is so out of remedy! Now I should be thinking about how to bring to this woman what she asked for.

As Laura said these things, she was also focused on thinking what to do. And, again, she began to lament. Whoever listens to Laura's complaints will say that she was an example of the power of love; however, the worse was yet to come. When the night was approaching, the darkest and most sinister night of all winter, she put her will first instead of her reasoning and, without caring about the danger she was getting in and what could happen if Don Diego would arrive and find her outside, she told her servants that, if he would arrive, they must tell him that she was in a house of one of the many ladies who lived in Naples. Then, covering

herself with one of her servant's cloaks, taking a little lantern, she went out to the streets to look for what she thought would give her a remedy. I will now tell you where she went, a place that I am scared of just thinking about it.

A mile away from the city of Naples, in the road to Our Lady of the Arca, a very devoted image of that kingdom, which is the same road to Piedrablanca, there is a shrine, fifty feet long and some other feet wide. Its door looks to the road and, in front of it, there is an altar with an image painted on the wall. The shrine is moderately high, and its floor is a pit more than four feet deep, spread all across the chapel. Surrounding the pit, there is a very narrow path that goes around the shrine. On the walls, there are some iron hooks no higher than a man where they hang those men executed in the public square; and, as the bodies start to decompose, their bones fall in the pit that, as it is blessed, is used as their tomb. Laura had let her steps into such horrid place where, at that time, there were six men who, some days ago, were executed for thieves. Once she arrived to the shrine, she entered it with all the courage that love gave her. She was not paying attention to the danger, since she was more aware about her misfortune; nonetheless, she could be scared, not so much of the people with whom she was going to negotiate, but of falling in the depth because, if that was the case, nobody would hear from her ever again.

I already told how Laura's father and brothers went back to Piedrablanca in order to avoid seeing how she was being mistreated and fighting with their in-law. There, they lived, if not having forgotten about her, at least without the intention of going to see her. When Laura arrived at the shrine, Don Carlos was laying in his bed and, all of a sudden, he woke up with fear, yelling so much that it seemed he was about to die. This disturbed the whole house; his father and his servants went to him very confused and in distress. As they were showing their despair with tears, they asked him about the cause of such pain, which was hidden even to the one who suffered it. After recovering a little, he got out of bed and said: "My sister is in some kind of danger," and he started to get dressed very quickly giving the order to saddle his horse, and when that was done, he jumped on the horse and, without waiting for any servant, he took the way to Naples so quickly that at one he was in front of the shrine where the horse stopped as if it was turned to stone. Don Carlos tried to keep going, but it was in vain, since the horse would not move, neither forward, nor back; to the contrary, as he was giving it his spurs, the horse was snorting so much that it got scary. Don Carlos realized that he was in the shrine and when he looked more carefully at it, he saw the light of her sister's lantern, and he thought that a witch was keeping him to move forward. As he wanted to know for sure, he tried to walk with the horse towards the shrine and, finally, the animal did as it was told. With his sword in his hands, Don Carlos got closer to the door, and he said:

—Whoever you are who are inside, get out and, if you don't, I promise you for the King's life that I will not leave until I can see with the light of the day who are you and what are you doing in this place.

Laura recognized her brother's voice, but she thought that he would go away. Then, changing her voice as much as she could, she answered:

—I am a poor woman and I am in this place for a particular case. As it is not your concern to know who I am, I beg you, for God's sake, that you leave; and, believe me, if you decide to stay around, I will throw myself to this grave, even if I lose my life and my soul.

Laura couldn't cover up her voice very well, and her brother, who had not forgotten about her as she had thought, yelled very loudly and, with a great sight, he said:

—Oh sister, it is so bad that you are in here; get out, since it wasn't in vain that my heart foresaw this event!

Since Laura realized that her brother had recognized her, she exited being as cautious as she could to not fall in the pit, and as she was leaving so close to the wall, she may have even touched some of the hang men. Once she finally reached where her brother was waiting for her, she threw herself into his arms all covered in tears. He moved a little bit apart so Laura could briefly recount what cause had taken her to that place; and then, he also told her what brought him there at that time. To fix his sister's situation, Don Carlos decided to take her with his horse back to Piedrablanca thinking that his arrival was a miracle. Laura felt the same way and she was also very sorry for what she had done.

They arrived to Piedrablanca in the morning where their father, who already knew what happened, had a carriage ready where he got in with his sons and his daughter and went to Naples, directly to the viceroy's palace. Don Antonio arrived and, kneeling at the viceroy's feet, he said that, in order to tell him about an extraordinary case that occurred, he begged him to order Don Diego of Pinatelo, his own in-law, to come there immediately, since the case was concerning his authority and peace. His Excellency ordered it that way, and when Don Diego arrived in the viceroy's chamber, where he found his father-in-law, his brothers-in-law, and his wife, he became absorbed; and, even more, when Laura, in his presence, told the viceroy all that is written about this case, finishing her tale by saying that the world and men disappointed her so much that she didn't want to fight with them anymore, since she was still astonished by the things that she had done and seen. For that reason, she wanted to enter a convent, a sacred and powerful place where women can overcome their miseries.

When Don Diego had heard all of this, he felt sorry for being the cause of so much pain. Finally, as a conscious man, loving Laura at that point more than he had ever done before and being afraid that she would execute her determination, without expecting to gain anything from talking to her, since she was so mad at him, he begged the viceroy to ask Laura to go back with him, promising that from then on he would compensate for his misbehavior.

The viceroy did it; however, Laura, who was scared of the things that happened to her, didn't accept it. Even more sure about her decision, she said that they were wasting their time trying to convince her, since she wanted to do for God, who was a grateful lover, what she had done for an ungrateful one. That same day, she entered the noble, rich and holy convent of the Conception.

Don Diego went home in distress. He took the jewels and money that he found, and he left without saying goodbye to anybody in the city. Not too many months later, it was known that his life came to an end during the war that Majesty Phillip the Third had against the Duke of Savoy.<sup>14</sup> As she was totally free, Laura received the religious habit and joined the order. Now she lives a holy life, so repentant of her adventurous determination that, when she remembers it, she trembles recalling the places she has been. I learned about this story from her mouth, and thus I tell it as truthful so everybody can know what the power of love can achieve and people can learn a new enchantment of its power.

Everybody listened with so much admiration this well-measured enchantment told by beautiful Nise. Some of them exaggerated Laura's love; others, her intelligence; and all of them, her audacity. They all agreed that nobody of the company would dare to go to the place where she went, and with this argument, Nise said that everything she told was true.

## Bibliography

- Brownlee, Marina S. *The Cultural Labyrinth of María de Zayas*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2000.
- Greer, Margaret R. *María de Zayas Tells Baroque Tales of Love and Cruelty of Men*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2000.
- Vollendorf, Lisa. *Reclaiming the Body: María de Zayas' Early Modern Feminism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001.
- Whitenack, Judith A., and Gwyn E. Campbell. *Zayas and Her Sisters: An Anthology of Novelas by 17<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Women*. Pegasus P / U of North Carolina at Asheville, 2000.
- Zayas y Sotomayor, María de. *The Enchantments of Love: Amorous and Exemplary Novels*. Translated by Patsy Boyer, U of California P, 1990.

---

<sup>14</sup>The Duchy of Savoy was a state in Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century that included territories that are now part of France and Italy. Phillip the Third (1578-1621), King of Spain, took military actions in Savoy as part of a campaign to secure the influence of his Kingdom in Europe.



- ---. *Honesto y entretenido sarao (primera y segunda parte)*. Edición de Julián Olivares, vol. 1, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2017.