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HARKING BACK TO OUR FOREMOTHERS: ECHOES OF MARÍA DE ZAYAS IN CARME RIERA

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In addition to her brilliant career as a creative writer, Carme Riera teaches Golden Age Castilian Literature at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. In her 1994 novel *Dins el darrer blau*, she adapts the Baroque style appropriate to the late seventeenth-century setting of the work as she recreates a historical episode from Majorca's past. The story is of a group of crypto-Jews who, fearing persecutions from the increasingly active Inquisition, try to forge a pact with ship captains who frequent the busy port of Palma in order to find safe haven in Livorno, another port city that had an established Jewish community at the time.

The novel opens with a young Portuguese sailor, João Peres, pacing nervously in a narrow street late at night, waiting for a mysterious garden gate to open and allow him to enter the chambers of his unknown beloved. As he waits, he recalls the story told by Captain Andreas Harts of a secret love he had experienced in Majorca. The tale, with lavish description and doses of braggadocio, corresponds in every detail to a recurring dream of the young sailor, so much so that he brashly decides to find the street, the garden, and the house of the mysterious woman. But no door is open to him, and instead of the anticipated love, he finds a wounded girl in the street, moaning in pain. An intruder into his oneiric fantasies, the hastily-dressed young woman is clearly in need of his help and he grudgingly tries to return her to home or family. The atmosphere of this double-tale is replete with dark figures wrapped up in capes, candles going out just when Peres might discover something, and more bleeding people in the girl's house. In addition to the ornate style in which the intertwined stories are told, the intriguing first chapter recalls several specific episodes from María de Zayas' two collections of framed narrations: *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637) and *Desengaños amorosos* (1647). First, I will discuss the events, situations, and descriptions occurring in the stories and the novel, and then I hope to build on that foundation to explore not only similar literary techniques, but also parallels in vision and purpose between the two writers.

The first Zayas tale, "Aventurarse perdiendo," is told by the frame character, Lisarda, and contains two prophetic dreams that enclose one of the stories-within-the story. Jacinta recites the basic elements of her first dream to Fabio:

[...] iba por un bosque amenísimo, en cuya espesura hallé un hombre tan galán, que me pareció...no haberle visto en mi vida tal. Traía cubierto el rostro con el cabo de un ferreruero leonado, con pasamanos y alamares de plata. Paréme a mirarle, agrada del talle y deseosa de ver si el rostro confirmaba con él; con un atrevimiento airoso, llegué a quitarle el rebozo, y apenas lo hice, cuando sacando una daga, me dio un golpe tan cruel por el corazón que me obligó el dolor a dar voces, a las cuales acudieron mis criadas [...] (47-8) 'I was going through a lovely forest and in the very depths of the forest, I met the most handsome man I had ever in my life seen. His face was shadowed by the edge of a fawn cape with silver hooks and catches. Attracted by his appearance, I stopped to gaze at him. Eager to see if his face looked as I imagined, I approached and boldly pulled aside his cape. The moment I did, he drew a dagger and plunged it into my heart so violently that the pain made me cry out, and all my maids came running in (trad. *Enchantments* 18).¹

Even though the dream itself is brief, Jacinta goes on at some length to explain its effects: in spite, or perhaps because, of the dagger's plunge, she falls so in love with her phantom that she suffers the usual physical maladies of loss of appetite and color and has imaginary conversations with him. In the midst of her long narration, she even stops to recite a poem in which she laments loving something that does not exist: "[...] mas amar a una figura, / que acaso el alma fingió, / nadie tal locura vio [...]" (49) 'But to love a face / that's an invention of the soul— / no one can imagine such madness!' (trad. *Enchantments* 19). But in typical Zayasque fashion, don Félix shows up, falls in love with Jacinta, and they have many adventures with all the bizarre elements imaginable. It almost seems that they will live happily ever after in spite of the treacherous machinations of her father and brother until one day another dream announces don Félix's death. Again, the dream is brief: "[...] recibía una carta suya, y una caja que a la cuenta parecía traer algunas joyas, y en yéndola a abrir, hallé dentro la cabeza de mi esposo" (64) 'I received a letter from don Félix and a box that appeared to contain jewels. When I opened it, I saw that it contained my husband's head!' (trad. *Enchantments* 35). This time, a voice that others do not hear follows the dream, assuring her that indeed, he is dead; and the official news arrives a few days later, ending the first part of this bipartite narration. An artful inversion of the prophetic dream motif appears in the next tale, "Aminta burlada y venganza del honor," where Aminta, disguised as Jacinto, describes in a song exactly how she plans to avenge herself, and then claims it was all a dream. She recites: "Que si como dormida

1. For Zayas, I have used *Novelas completas*, followed by H. Patsy Boyer's translations, *The Enchantments of Love* and *The Disenchantments of Love*. I am indebted to Patsy Boyer for the many discussions we shared about the work of Zayas.

/ despierta este suceso le pasara, / entre sus tiernas manos los matara" (99) 'If this story had happened / while she was awake as it did while she slept, / she would have killed them with her tender hands (trad. *Enchantments* 72), and within a few pages, she does exactly that.

Two tales depict a wounded female being thrown out into the street, and curiously, both feature a Portuguese man named Gaspar. Don Miguel tells the seventh tale of the first collection, "Al fin se paga todo," in which the lovely Hipólita tries very hard to be unfaithful to her husband with the handsome don Gaspar, but is thwarted at every turn. Raped by her brother-in-law, she stabs him and then turns to her Portuguese would-be suitor for help. But don Gaspar will have none of it; he believes she has been unfaithful to him so he beats her, strips off most of her clothing, and tosses her out. Her good fortune sends don García to the rescue, which is where the story actually opens, and in one of the few tales that ends in a happy marriage, she finally weds her noble hero.

The much commented change of tone between Zayas' two collections is apparent in the second body-tossing story, the final and most violent of the tales, "Estragos que causa el vicio." Patsy Boyer describes this as a "close revision" of "Al fin se paga todo," while at the same time it "serves to destabilize all the other stories, just as the *Disenchantments* unravels the *Enchantments*" (*Disenchantments* 22-3). Here it is Lisis, the protagonist of the frame story, who tells of Florentina's rescue by don Gaspar: he functions as implied reader as he listens to Florentina's tale, and then becomes the source of Lisis' information. The basic elements of plot certainly call into question the title of the earlier "Al fin se paga todo," or as Carme Riera and Luisa Cotoner beautifully sum it up, "[...] Florentina [...] después de cometer adulterio con el marido de su hermana, calumniar a ésta, provocar su muerte, ser inductora de una auténtica masacre y de un suicidio, se arrepiente, se mete en un convento desde donde se cartea con un galán [don Gaspar himself] [...] y aquí no ha pasado nada" (*Personajes* 157).

In the middle of the second collection is another grotesque tale that contains elements which will also be masterfully used by Riera. Filis is the teller of "Tarde llega el desengaño," in which don Jaime recounts to don Martín his erotic and lucrative affair with a mysterious woman who insisted on not being seen.² In this episode within the larger narration, as Juan Goytisolo explains, don Jaime spends a month:

2. Frederick A. de Armas traces the evolution of this plot from mythology to the Golden Age in his *The Invisible Mistress: Aspects of Feminism and Fantasy in the Golden Age*.

[...] llevando de día una vida de príncipe y encaminándose luego a sus "oscuras glorias" hasta el punto en que una curiosidad más fuerte que él le impulsa a reclamar una bujía y descubrir el rostro de su enamorada [...] Error fatal: la noche siguiente, en lugar del sórito cicerone, el mantenido galán encuentra una banda de sicarios que arremeten contra él, y se ve obligado a salir del país para evitar la venganza de la temible y emprendedora dama. (124)

Don Jaime is reunited only in a manner of speaking with his invisible mistress Lucrecia when he sees the beautiful Elena, her living image. Like Jacinta with her beloved phantom, he explains that "Y así que la vi, no la amé, porque ya la amaba" (474) 'I didn't fall in love with her the moment I saw her, as I'd already loved her for a long time (trad. *Disenchantment* 156). Zayas had already played with the blindfold motif in the bizarre magic of "El desengaño amando y premio de la virtud," in which the sorceress Lucrecia's power to keep her lover blinded from reality depends on keeping the eyes of her pet rooster covered.

A number of other elements can be seen in the two writers: secret gardens with their hidden gates, an unwanted baby, disguises and masks, slavery, magic and demons, grotesque enclosures and captivity, the most gruesome violence in contrast with extravagant elegance, passion and eroticism in contrast with depraved abuse. Some of these things, taken individually, make up a good deal of literature and maybe even life. But Riera goes well beyond reworkings of previous literature, as Zayas had also done with the work of some of her predecessors and contemporaries, particularly Lope de Vega's *Los comendadores de Córdoba*.³ In Riera's novel, João Peres has two sources for his own shadow lover since his recurrent dream is reproduced in all its detail by Captain Harts' story. The Portuguese sailor's importance, though, lies as much in the cohesion of the novel as in the plot, for Peres represents the frame of narration as well as the catalyst for certain pivotal episodes. While he does not find his lady in Majorca, he eventually ends up in her employ in Livorno, from where she sends him to try to rescue the Jewish prisoners. The mysterious setting of his erotic, repeated dream finally appears when he goes to Sebastia Palou, now living in Blanca Pires' former home. Further tightening the circle, so to speak, Peres tries to return Palou's ring, symbolic of several events in the novel: Palou's secret love for Blanca; Captain Harts' foolish efforts to identify her, for which he pays with a good beating; Costura's treachery. As Geraldine Nichols points out, Peres also functions as Mnemosyne: "[...] he is witness to

3. Zayas reworked a number of earlier works, as was customary in the period. See Boyer's introductions to her translations and also "The Ravages of Vice' And the Vice of Telling Stories."

the 'Cremadissa' and bearer of its history" (211), thus bringing both memory and desire to the foreground of the structure and interpretation of *Dins el darrer blau*.

The series of grotesque episodes in Zayas responds to life, literature, and also to iconography contemporary to Zayas, especially the art depicting martyrdom. The tone in which the gross events are told varies greatly, from the miserly don Marcos ending up with teeth in his beard ("El castigo de la miseria") to the innocent Laura entering a charnel house ("La fuerza del amor") to the brutal enslavements, torture, and murders in the later tales. In Riera's novel, the fictitious episode of the Viceroy's two Moorish slave women serves as foreshadowing of the strictly historical imprisonment and execution of the Jews, whose situation in the dungeons of the Holy Office becomes more and more grotesque as time passes. This episode of depravity also typifies historiography: the activity is always in the viceroy's control, followed by his cover-up and his telling (falsely) of the tale.⁴ Again, contrasts abound: the natural beauty of the island is already a prison for the unfortunate people who see the persecutions coming but cannot leave. Just as women were bound to the sexual economy with the grisly results Zayas describes, the Majorcan Jews of the late seventeenth century were trapped, at least in part because of their own successful business dealings: the wealthy Christian class had become dependent on them. Zayas' narrators tell us on many occasions that beauty and misfortune often go hand in hand. In Riera's novel, Isabel Taronji's loveliness and her husband's misguided devotion may be literary creation, but the fate of the person she is based on is strictly historical—a Catholic husband denounces his Jewish wife; since she refuses to recant, she will be burned alive, without benefit of the garrote, along with Gabriel Valls.

The multiplicity of voices in María de Zayas' work is dazzling, both within the tales and in the cornice, and many times information is contradictory, as when the frame commentaries misread the stories that have just been told. The development of character through monologue and the fact that a number of the women characters tell their own story is striking and varied; Doña Ines ("La inocencia castigada") survives six years of being imprisoned in a tiny space, and lives to tell the tale; Zelima/ Isabel ("La esclava de su amante") returns from slavery to recite her adventures and is the only frame character who is an autobiographical protagonist. Patsy Boyer has shown that the structuring also calls into question the interpretations of episodes: the tales tend to have two parts, the first in which the point of view is

4. For a study of the role of the chronicles in Riera's novel, as well as other questions of historiography, see María Pilar Rodríguez.

masculine, and the second in which the feminine experience is dramatized.⁵ In Riera's novel, characters such as Peres, Palou and Blanca Pires give structure to the novel while participating in the action. Moreover, the collectivization of the experience of the crypto-Jews adds resonance to the voice of the protagonist, Gabriel Valls. At the same time, Riera uses a number of documents, poems, prayers, and rituals to frame what is taking place; always related to the action at hand, her interpolations correspond to the extensive poetry in Zayas' work, which so often gives yet another voice to the narration. This is the case in "Aventurarse perdiendo," for example, when Jacinta lyricizes her woes without realizing that Fabio is listening. Riera's documentation of the historical events is detailed and extensive; to the findings of the Inquisition, she adds the formulaic language of church and state to create atmosphere and give weight to the tragic story. She explains some of the transformations of characters and manipulation of time in her final "Nota de l'autora," where she also manifests her own attitude in the history-fiction conundrum: "En els dominis de la història cap material no pot ser manipulable; en el de la novel·la, per molt històrica que sigui, mentre es mantengui la versemblança, la veritat de cohesió, tot és vàlid i es legítima, en conseqüència (431) 'No material should be manipulated in the historical text, whereas in the novel everything is permissible and legitimate no matter how historical the work is, as long as verisimilitude and the truth of consistency is maintained.'" Just as Zayas gave a voice to females, collectively and individually, not only defending their good name as Lisis tells us in the opening and closing frames, but letting them tell their own stories, Riera likewise gives a voice not only to the victims of this dark event in Spanish history, but also to their heirs, as she further explains in the "Nota": "[...] ja que, per ventura, pitjor que els fets del 1691 foren les seves tràgiques conseqüències que marginaren i humiliaren durant segles els descendents dels màrtirs cremats en els *Autos de Fe*" (432) 'Since perhaps the tragic consequences of 1691 were even worse than the events, marginalizing and humiliating for centuries the descendants of the martyrs burned by the *Autos de Fe*.' Neus Carbonell questions the possibility of denouncing repression of the Other without reenacting it, remarking that Carme Riera is not a member of the group she is describing, but she concludes: "*Dins el darrer blau*'s revision of history can be read as a narrative that discusses the present need for tolerance even though it is also a rewriting of the past" (229).

5. See Boyer's introduction to *The Disenchantments* for a lengthy discussion of the intricate structuring of the stories.

The past as a multiform event, told by a multiplicity of voices, may offer, as Riera wishes, new ways of understanding contemporary events.

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