

The "Evolution" of the Role of the Woman from *La Perfecta Casada* to
Desengaños Amorosos

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Introduction

The role of the female in Spanish society is a topic that has been addressed by anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists for many years. Each field has a different approach to the topic and has much to offer in an effort to build a complete understanding of why people have certain constructions of gender roles. There has been much progress in an effort to eliminate stereotypical representations of gender roles, but many of the constructs that were present 400 years ago are still prevalent today.

One of the most thoughtful ways we can study time periods is by examining the popular literature. Literature often delves into the aspects of culture that many historians do not analyze as closely. Instead of presenting a picture-perfect representation of a city or country, we can often find out about the lesser known aspects and the most realistic portrayals of areas by examining different works that were produced. However, one must be sure to look at different authors' perspectives of the same era in an attempt to avoid a one-sided interpretation.

The Golden Age of Spain was a time of much artistic, political, and social change. To analyze this rich era one must look at the progression of changes that occurred during the period. Two of the most prominent literary figures of the time partly frame the period. Fray Luis de Fray Luis (1527-1591) was a prominent figure who was involved in many religious and intellectual studies. His work, *La Perfecta Casada*, combines his ideals and religious beliefs about the ideal behavior of a proper Christian wife. Many readers try to analyze this from a modern perspective, and they often criticize Fray Luis's strong representation of the woman as the weaker, more uncontrollable sex. Fray Luis takes a religious approach in writing about the conduct of women, and his intention is not to demean them but rather to

have them work toward an ideal image of the perfect wife. His image of a woman strongly contrasts the one portrayed in María de Zayas's novel, *Desengaños Amorosos*.

María de Zayas y Sotomayor (1590-1661) was an extremely important literary figure in Spain in the early 1600s. She worked with other prominent authors such as Lope de Vega, who is often referred to as the Father of Modern Spanish Theatre. Her writings are vital to studying the role of women because she was one of the first women whose works were published in Castilian. During this period, women rarely received formal education, and it is often speculated that María de Zayas was self-taught. She wrote during a period where the female perspective was rarely appreciated, and people today consider her to be a feminist because she was able to make the female voice heard. Her most popular works, which happen to complement each other, are her *Novelas Amorosas* and *Desengaños Amorosos*. Her *Novelas Amorosas* was one of her first works published, and it provides ten stories that have happy endings between husband and wife, which enchant the reader. Its complement, *Desengaños Amorosos*, is meant to disenchant women by providing true examples of how women have been deceived and wronged by men. It gives voice to countless nameless women who have experienced the same misfortunes as the women in the tales (Boyer 24).

Traditionally, authors of the Golden Age are compared to others of their respective gender. Not often does one see a cross-gender comparison of the authors of this period, but it is necessary in order to build a more comprehensive picture of the treatment and views of women. There is much to be gained from looking at a problem from an insider's and an outsider's perspective, in this case with respect to gender differences. *La Perfecta Casada* and *Desengaños Amorosos* are contrasting works that exemplify how the role of women "evolved" during the Spanish Golden Age. However, though there are many key aspects in

gender differences that changed for the better, some ideals that were prevalent regarding gender roles still remained. For this reason, one must refer to the progression of more fair ideals regarding women as “evolution.”

Context

Before looking at the literature of this period, it is important to understand some of the dominant ideas and themes that influenced the writings of these authors. The time frame of the Golden Age usually spans from the mid 16th Century to the latter decade of the 17th, with Calderón de la Barca's death ("Golden Age"). The beginning of the Golden Age was categorized by Renaissance ideas, while the second half of the period was more influenced by a Baroque style. Though Spain was experiencing an economic and political decline, the Golden Age was a time that was characterized by a flourishing of the arts ("España Imperial" 63).

The ideas of the Renaissance profoundly influenced the way Fray Luis wrote. Humanistic ideas of the Renaissance emerged which referenced classical Greek and Latin works that instructed one how to lead a moral and prosperous life. People would inquire about their place in the world, and they would often turn to religious works (which were plentiful at the time) to help guide them along. The literature concerned with the practice of a proper Christian lifestyle was called ascetic literature, which was very popular at the time (Bleznick). The Renaissance also saw the development of cartography, a science that emphasized boundaries and a universally standardized way of living (Gamboa 192). Fray Luis's *La Perfecta Casada* embodies all of these ideas of the Renaissance. During the Renaissance there was a peaked interest in writing about marriage, which people tried to reaffirm as being a vital part of society (Jones and Lera xxxi). Erasmus also champions this idea, believing that one who did not want to marry was a rebel against nature and God (Rivera 25). Fray Luis wrote his novel to advise married women on their role and how to behave in a proper Christian manner. He did not write with the intention of producing

literature against women, but rather to write a treatise that would guide them (Jones and Lera x).

The Baroque style was typically characterized by its manifestation in art, but its characteristics cross over into other art forms as well. Baroque became a way to describe anything that deviated from the established status quo, often being referred to as irregular, emotional, tense, and dramatic (“Baroque Period”). Grieve identifies the word *desengaños* as being a “pervasive term of the Spanish baroque” because it embodied meanings of a lack of deception, learning from experience, and finding truth (87). Boyer believes María de Zayas’s literature appears to line up with conventions that are typical of Renaissance literature, but it actually overturns these ideas because María de Zayas’s work shows how men derive power through women's suppression (Boyer 1). María de Zayas’s work could certainly be characterized as Baroque in style because it is so unconventional, challenging the social norms of the time that painted this ideal relationship between a man and woman. She shows what a dramatically different turn a relationship can take, and any negative consequences that occurred were usually at the woman's expense.

During the Golden Age men and women also had certain roles which they were expected to follow. Men were supposed to exhibit control over themselves and their families, and it was believed that a man who could control those aspects of his life could also control society. Men were trained to exert influence over the outside world, and women were taught how to run their households. Women were seen as a danger to the social order, and incapable of exerting any influence in society because of their weakness in intelligence and emotion. Because of the dangers that they could cause for her family's honor, they typically had two options for what they could do with their life: they could either marry or

join a convent. This attitude continued to suppress women in their options, and prompted a response from many women such as María de Zayas (“España Imperial” 60).

The woman of Fray Luis de León's *La Perfecta Casada*

When writing *La Perfecta Casada*, Fray Luis was establishing the means for a husband and wife to have a harmonious relationship. This book was reviewed by Francisco Portocarrero upon order of the council of King Phillip II, and was approved for publishing since it "contain[ed] nothing against faith or morals, and much sound teaching for married people" (3). He believed that his writing would help wives have a better sense of their roles, which was basically to raise their children and run the household. Women needed wisdom to be able to do this, and this wisdom was best found in books such Fray Luis's own. Through the acquisition of wisdom, wives would achieve harmonious relationships with their husbands. A great responsibility falls upon the wife in achieving this harmony, and this is done by her fulfilling proper roles.

An important characteristic to note is that every chapter in Fray Luis's work begins with a quote from a Bible verse. Scripture was very important in determining one's role. Fray Luis strongly believed that everyone had their proper place in life, and they should not attempt to be or do something that deviated from that role (17).

Because of the many expectations that come with being a good wife, it is no wonder that not every woman is able to fulfill such demands. Fray Luis acknowledges that a good wife is rare, and a man who finds one must cherish her like a precious stone (31). There is interdependence between husband and wife that should not be overlooked. This ideal wife complements her husband because of all she can offer. However, not every man deserves a good wife. A man with vices and a bad disposition is not worthy of such a woman (197). Fray Luis makes it clear that women are valuable, but they have certain obligations that must be fulfilled.

The role of the perfect wife is one that is thorough and multi-faceted. Among the ways to fulfill her role is by making her husband a good person by being “a source of perpetual happiness” (59), by giving him confidence (39) and by rearing good children. Confidence is not in regards to the wife's chastity, which is an inherent quality that every wife should possess, but rather confidence that the couple has sufficient resources to provide them wealth, and the knowledge that the wife will look after and maintain those resources which the husband produces (45). The wife is responsible for always dealing with her husband's mannerisms, whether he is a drunkard or a tyrant (63). Fray Luis seems to contradict himself in this, because he also believes that a drunkard or tyrant is unworthy of having a good wife. However, it seems that by being a good wife, the woman should be able to make her husband a better person.

The wife is also responsible for raising her children herself and making sure that they grow up with proper values. The mother sets an example for her children, and through her actions manifests proper conduct and values. She must be the only one who teaches her children how to behave. If they develop a solid character because of the care of a nursemaid, then the children should not hesitate to treat her more as a mother than the woman who gave them life. If her children grow up improperly, it is because the mother did not teach them or care for them enough (229). Fray Luis places very high expectations and responsibilities onto women, and he even acknowledges that if women are to blame for something, such as improper rearing of her children “[she] pay[s] for it seven times over” (55). This exemplifies the pressure that was put on women to be successful in how they ran their lives, since they would be greatly chastised or punished for making bad decisions.

The roles and expectations of the wife are largely attributed to her function around the

household. Fray Luis makes hasty generalizations regarding women's nature when defending why wives have certain roles. One expectation of wives is that they must be hardworking and “not cause expense” (51). The logic behind this is that if they begin to spend money, they will be unable to limit their expenditures. Since “woman is by nature weaker and more fragile than any other creature” (33), she must have strict guidelines to follow so that she does not deviate from her proper function. She is the one solely responsible for keeping the house in order (215). Fray Luis establishes the importance of this role by comparing the household to a living body several times throughout his book (133). Like the living, a household is comprised of many parts that need to be maintained and cared for in order for it to run successfully. The wife is the one responsible for this maintenance and survival.

Not only must a wife maintain her household, but she must also be resourceful, being able to find use for any item in her possession (87). This includes being able to perform basic tasks, such as weaving, regardless of her importance or nobility (79). She must also be the first to awaken and the last to sleep, since she is the one who is in charge of running the household and making sure that it is equipped with everything it needs (93). Fray Luis believes that since women are more inclined to indulge and to be weakened by remaining idle, they should constantly work so that they may be industrious (111).

Interestingly enough, the longest chapter in *La Perfecta Casada* concerns the topic of how women should dress. A wife must maintain her appearance by “keep[ing] her body clean and treat[ing] it well” (137). To do this, she must be modest in her dress, only wearing clothes that are holy enough to be placed on an altar, such as linen and items that are purple (139). She must not dress lavishly by adorning herself with jewels and curling her hair, nor should she wear makeup in an effort to make herself more beautiful (141).

Fray Luis speaks at great lengths about the use of makeup and how it only makes a woman dirty. When calling a woman “dirty,” he means it in two ways. Physically, she is putting “dirty ingredients” that have foul odors onto her face, therefore making herself physically unclean (141). Psychologically, it is an indicator that her soul is sick (165) because makeup is an expression of a woman's ugly desires, such as the adultery that she wishes to commit (155). This is threatening to husbands because their wives will be drawing attention from men who desire them. Because of this, Fray Luis believes that the husbands would prefer that their wives look less attractive to others (171). Fray Luis assumes that women who wear makeup will be adulterous, and even if they are not they are influencing the women around them to have adulterous desires. Furthermore, using cosmetics is a sin even greater than the adultery that she emulates. To wear makeup is to express disdain for the way that God created her. His image and attempting to alter it is a sinful act (149). Fray Luis believes that all of a wife's actions should be done out of fear and respect for God, and that this fear will keep her in her proper place (253).

Though Fray Luis believes that married women have certain expectations and limitations, he believes that they are endowed with virtues as well. The two that he mentions in particular are wisdom and kindness (205). These virtues are what incline women to help those who are poor (123) and what enables them to effectively run the household (215). A woman that is virtuous and does things that are praiseworthy usually surpasses men that do similar things, since women have to overcome so many more limitations than any man (33). However, as soon as Fray Luis begins to elevate women he must bring them back down to their place as the “weaker creature.” Fray Luis believes that one of the most important virtues that must be instilled in women is silence (207). He believes that silence is important

because women were born incapable of learning difficult things such as business transactions, and were instead meant to execute simple, more domestic jobs. This role limited her abilities to speak and argue well. Women are also by nature more modest and shameful than their husbands, so they must remain silent so as not to contradict their natural inclinations (209). Women were incapable of dealing with matters of substance, and were instead better at handling things that were petty and worthless (219).

Just as they should be silent, women must also be isolated in their household without making many public appearances. Fray Luis says, “just as men are made for public things, so women are made to be shut away” (219). Since it is the wife's duty to run the household, she would not be needed in any public affairs, and to venture off outside of the house would only be a waste of time (219). This is probably the most stifling of all the expectations that he describes, since it goes beyond encouraging a homely attitude in women to downright restricting them to stay indoors. Wisdom cannot be acquired through books alone, but should be found through experience as well. Though he believes his work will help Christian wives acquire all the knowledge they need, by isolating them from half of the world he is still limiting them from acquiring more knowledge so that they may progress intellectually.

The women of María de Zayas's *Desengaños Amorosos*

The role of women changes significantly from the display in *La Perfecta Casada*. Whereas women were portrayed as more docile beings who must always be under control, in *Desengaños* the woman is a figure of power. The entire premise of the story is centered on Lisis, a prominent woman who hosts a series of soirees to tell the truth about the treatment of honorable women, and as a consequence clear them of their bad name. Men and women are both present at these affairs, and not a single male voice interrupts any of the stories that are told. The men are there to listen to the women tell their disenchantments, all of which are said to be true, in an effort to clear up misconceptions about women and to let women be heard without any restrictions. The fact that men play a secondary role at these affairs empowers the woman, and this status plays an important role in the progression of the female role.

The powerful female is an archetype that requires further examination in *Desengaños*. There are ten storytellers at the soirees, all of whom are women with prestige and honor. María de Zayas intricately describes them in all of their splendor, wearing their beautiful dresses with heavy jewels, and describing the undisputable beauty present in all the women, storytellers and protagonists alike. In this sense, the woman has evolved from being one who should not flaunt her physical features or attire, to one who is lavishly dressed, admired for her style, and praised for her inner and outer beauty. María de Zayas elevates women through her thoughtful descriptions, rather than presenting guidelines that demean women by objectifying them.

This elevation of the female role is presented further through the social status of the female protagonists. The protagonists in the stories are all virtuous women, and most of

them come from a very prestigious background. Doña Isabel, Lisis' closest companion, comes from a very prominent Catholic family, while Beatriz was the daughter of the King of England. The main exceptions come from the protagonists doña Ana, Elena and doña Octavia, who are the only impoverished ladies in the stories; however, as one of don Alonso's friends states, "[they are] no way inferior... in rank" (292). Even so, they and all the other protagonists greatly surpass all the women of their regions in their beauty, which is usually one of the most prominent qualities that make their suitors fall in love with them. Beauty gives the protagonists almost as much status as wealth and nobility, and the women in the stories are not only beautiful but also chaste, honorable, and humble. They are so sought after because these qualities elevate them to an extremely high status. Doña Francisca says it best: "It appears that it's remarkable to find nobility, beauty, wealth, and virtue in the same woman; it's not only amazing, it's also a magnet that attracts love" (275). The protagonists are often able to exercise power over their suitors because of their status. However, the most powerful women are the ones that have the most assertive attitudes. Their status is necessary, but not always sufficient, in determining how powerful the ladies are. Doña Blanca, for example, makes the prince of Flanders court her for one year, even though she is already promised to him as his wife. She wanted to make sure that the prince exhibited all the attractive qualities that she had been promised in him, wanting her relationship to be based on a real relationship. When Beatriz locks up Federico in a cage until her husband returns, she excels in handling state affairs, and her subjects are so happy with her rule that they neither missed the king or Federico. However, though many of these women are able to exercise power because they are virtuous, wealthy, and strong willed, their downfall comes because of the most uncontrollable inherent quality: they are still women.

In contrast to the powerful woman of high stature, María de Zayas also presents the unfortunate woman. The woman who is stripped of her fancy attire and is treated worse than a servant is one that is punished. Though she may still be virtuous in her intrinsic qualities, without her husband's respect or the power that comes with high stature she is easily manipulated and forcibly punished by the man that she has supposedly wronged. This is most evident in the disenchantment "Too Late Undeceived." Don Jaime falls in love with Elena, but after a female slave accuses her of adultery don Jaime unquestioningly throws Elena into a kennel, where she is treated like an animal for over two years until she finally dies. In "Innocence Punished," doña Ines was a very powerful lady, but the spell that was put on her by her admirer, don Diego, created such a scandal that it reduced her stature to that of a common prostitute, especially in the eyes of her husband. Because of that she was punished by being sealed inside of a wall where she lived for six years until she was finally discovered. Both of these instances reveal inhumane treatment of women that their husbands believed was much-deserved punishment for the damage that they had caused.

María de Zayas includes this dichotomy of power and incapacity to present the varying roles of women, and how their destiny was determined by how much control they had over their actions. Doña Blanca was powerful in her stature and her character, and she was virtually in complete control of her destiny. She knew that many of her actions would lead to her death, but she relished in the fact that she could still make a statement without standing by idly. The prominent example of this is when she burns the bed in which she caught the prince and the page, knowing full well that she would die for her actions. Her power comes from her stature in combination with her assertive nature. The protagonists that were more genteel in their mannerisms were the ones that met the most gruesome and

unexpected punishments. Though doña Ines knew she had not committed a sin against her husband, she still felt incredibly guilty and readily obeyed any request of his to make up for the "trouble" she had caused. Her virtuous behavior was used against her to plot her demise, since she would never suspect that her husband, who pretended to believe in her innocence, would plot her death. The punishment that the protagonists face is usually indicated by a decline in status.

The status of the female is important in determining how the course of events will take place, but regardless of rank there is still one important characteristic they share that did not discriminate against them based on wealth: each one of the protagonists had extreme injustices committed against her, most of which lead to her death. Committing murder was not an unusual practice, and it was often seen as the only way to prevent one's honor from being stained. Most of these women, with the exception of Florencia in the final disenchantment, were innocent of the accusations with which they were charged. There were for the injustices, most of them coming from spiteful and vengeful feelings. A common occurrence throughout the stories was how readily the husband or father would accept the protagonists' guilt, even though there was rarely any solid evidence to indict the woman. Fray Luis mentioned that one could identify a good woman because even those whom are envious of her cannot speak ill against her. Having the good name of a woman tarnished was very serious because it would also reflect badly upon her husband. It comes as no surprise then that the men were not willing to investigate the accusations against their wives and daughters, but rather they jumped on the chance to remedy the situation as quickly as possible in order to defend their good name. Honor was worth fighting for because it directly affected a person's reputation, and in turn how he or she was treated in society.

Men would often seek out a woman that they believed would be a worthy addition to his life. In this way women functioned as a complement to men. Don Jaime is very much in love with Elena because she is filled with traits that he finds desirable. He reflects that in addition to “her radiant beauty [she displayed] chastity, modesty, and intelligence” (156). The men who were able to find these women treasured them and genuinely loved them, but when they believed that their wives no longer possessed these traits then they attempted to rid themselves of the women. A woman's chastity was usually the most important trait that defined her as “good,” so when a man believed that a woman was no longer this way he found her to be dishonorable and often ungrateful, as don Jaime felt when his servant accused Elena of being unfaithful.

A number of reasons could be offered as to why vengeful acts were carried out against such honorable women, and it is important to note that both men and women committed these spiteful acts. When it was a case of a female wronging another female, the main motive behind the deceiving actions stemmed from jealousy. This is present in the tale "His Wife's Executioner," when Angelina lies to Roseleta's husband, don Pedro, telling him Roseleta had an affair with don Juan, his best friend. Angelina is angry that Roseleta is the object of don Juan's affection, even though Roseleta never wanted to be the recipient of that role. After Roseleta is murdered, Angelina promptly takes her place as don Pedro's new wife. A similar occurrence is present in "Too Late Undeceived," when the house slave creates a lie about Elena being unfaithful to her husband, don Jaime. Elena is reduced to the role of an animal, while the slave is treated like the mistress of the household, enjoying all the luxuries that had previously belonged to Elena. In both of these stories, the deceitful women attempt to acquire a position that could not have belonged to them in any other way.

Both Elena and Roseleta were beautiful, honorable women, and the only way to bring their demise was to tarnish their good names. Being the bearer of the "truth" also presented Angelina and the slave in a favorable manner to the men who believed they had been wronged. Don Pedro and don Jaime came to see these women as virtuous, even if they had been previously lacking in virtuous traits.

The vengeful acts that men committed against the female protagonists have similar roots as to why women would commit those same acts. In *Desengaños*, there were many stories in which a man would fall in love with a woman that was already wed, and her husband was usually someone with whom the man had a close relationship, such as a brother or a best friend. Though the man that longed for the forbidden women was aware that his feelings could not be returned (and they almost never were), he continued to pursue her. Being rejected by his beloved then created bitterness in the man, such as when princess Beatriz not only turned Federico away, but locked him up to keep him from pursuing her. Though she locked him away, Beatriz still provided Federico with all the comforts that he would find in the castle. She was not trying to punish him, but rather to take control of the situation between them. The wounded male though could not allow himself to feel so weak and rejected, so he plotted a scheme to take revenge upon the woman who hurt him. Such scheming would often result in the woman's death. The women were once again punished for upholding their honor and being good wives, though as María de Zayas says in *Desengaños*, "When misfortune pursues a person... one cannot escape it" (176).

The female protagonists in *Desengaños* make up an archetype that one might call the "tragic heroine." Reminiscent of the hero archetype, these women have a fatal flaw that leads to their demise. In most cases this flaw is an action that the woman takes in order to resolve

the uncomfortable situation in which she is placed. In the disenchantment "Most Infamous Revenge," Camila is raped by don Juan, who had previously made advances toward her in an effort to sleep with her so he could dishonor don Carlos (and as a result avenge his sister, whom don Carlos had deceived). Don Carlos becomes outraged, and in the end poisons Camila, who was not at fault for any of the actions that had revolved around her. She thought that she would be protecting her husband by not telling him about something unnecessary, never anticipating that it would go so far as to lead to her own rape. However, in the following disenchantment, "His Wife's Executioner," Roseleta angrily shows don Pedro the love letters that don Juan had been writing to her. Don Pedro attempts to kill him since he feels hatred and anger toward his former friend, but don Juan is guarded under "divine protection," so don Pedro instead grows to loathe his wife. Because of his disdain toward her he readily believes Angelina's lies about Roseleta's affair with don Juan, and he does not hesitate to plot her death and eventually kill her. Regardless of whether the woman is upfront to her husband or silent to avoid conflict, both actions ended with the death of the innocent woman.

This need for women to be punished is an action that the men in the disenchantments feel is necessary in order to achieve redemption. The redemption however, is not of the woman's good name, but of his. The man's insecurities of how he would be viewed among his fellow citizens (since in these tales the men were often of high stature) pushed him to resolve any of the conflicts that involved his name. Fray Luis emphasizes how a man must cherish a good woman, since they are comparable to rare and valuable jewels, but any of the female protagonists would be defined as good women. The men are looking for perfection, which is nearly impossible to find, but most of the female protagonists in the stories come as

close as possible to achieving such a feat. They are extremely beautiful, kind, honorable, and noble.

Tarnishing one's good name though is a very serious issue that was addressed through much of the literature of the Golden Age. This is even addressed in some of the oldest Spanish literature, such as in the epic poem "El Cantar de Mio Cid." El Cid looks to find justice for his abandoned daughters in order to restore *his* honor (19). Even in *Desengaños* the women are more concerned with dishonoring their family's name than they are with their own safety. In Doña Isabel's story, she does not mention her antagonist's last name because "he didn't know how to do it honor" (46). The matter of protecting one's name and honor was so important that men were willing to kill their own wives in an attempt to preserve their reputation.

The issue of honor is one that involved not only the husbands, but also the woman's family. The husbands were not the only ones that were willing to commit murder in order to preserve their good name; this was an action that the fathers were willing to do as well. One of the most noteworthy quotes in the disenchantments comes in the story "Traitor to His Own Blood," in which don Pedro, after learning about his son being put to death for killing Ana, utters the words "Better a son beheaded than one ill wedded" (300). He strongly disapproved of don Alonso falling in love with doña Ana, a woman he believed devalued his lineage and had nothing to offer his family. He immediately disowned his son, and don Alonso grew to resent doña Ana, wanting to get rid of her so that he might fall back into his father's good graces (as well back into his estate). Even a woman's own father would plot against her order in an effort to remove any disgrace. In "Love for the Sake of Conquest," Laurela runs away to marry don Esteban, and her father is willing to take her back into the family until he

finds out that don Esteban abandoned Laurela. This makes his daughter appear disgraceful, and for that he can no longer forgive her. He instead plots her death with his brother and sister-in-law because he feels the need to punish her for her mistake. This not only preserves his honor, but it restores his power as the patriarch because it puts her life and death in his control.

A few of the women in the disenchantments were lucky enough to walk away from the deceptions still alive, and there were different ways in which they found redemption. Even though most of them were innocent victims, they still felt guilty enough to want to redeem themselves to their husbands or to God. In *Desengaños*, women entered the convent to avoid further deception by males and to live a protected, fulfilled life. Lisis, the host of the soirees, calls off her engagement after telling the final disenchantment and announces that she is entering the convent with doña Isabel and doña Estefanía. Lisis believes men to be women's worst enemy, "for they cause [women] greater injury than any invading soldier" (404). Beatriz chooses the same route in "Triumph Over Persecution," even after she has been vindicated of all the wrongdoings that had been blamed on her. Not surprisingly, she wants to avoid having any more misfortune come her way. Her husband Ladislao is inspired by Beatriz and also chooses to lead a holy life. Though many of the men are presented in a gruesome fashion, those that learn of their wives' innocence usually repent for not having trusted them, and for jumping to faulty conclusions. Don Jaime runs to release Elena after learning the truth, but Elena dies as he is recounting his tale, grief stricken that her husband could have believed such a lie. Don Jaime would have readily killed himself had don Martin not intervened. In the final disenchantment, Florencia confesses to don Dionís that her servant lied to him about his wife's affair, never expecting that he would go on a killing spree

and murder every occupant of the house. Don Dionís is furious and tries to kill both women, and finishes by killing himself as punishment for the murders he committed. After telling don Gaspar her story, he advises her to go into a convent and live a religious life where she could avoid any further misfortune. Both men and women found different ways to avenge those that they had harmed. The men usually solved their problems by resorting to death, whether it be their own or that of others. The women chose to make a deeper spiritual connection to repent for the sins that they had committed. Religion was a very important part of the Spanish culture, and the only truly secular figure presented in *Desengaños* was Lisis herself. Resorting back to a religious way offered salvation to the women who were wronged, which is why entering a convent was such a popular option. María de Zayas also uses the convent as the only real form of protection that women have against men.

“Evolution” from Fray Luis's to María de Zayas's Female

The role of the woman reflects many changes when examining *La Perfecta Casada* to *Desengaños Amorosos*. These changes occurred in the expectations of women and of their role in society. María de Zayas's empowering women overcame many of the limitations that Fray Luis imposed on them in his book, but they did so in a way that was not radical. Most of the protagonists of María de Zayas's stories were noble women, and they were treated with high esteem from the people around them, which was something that is less evident in Fray Luis's work. They had earned respect by possessing virtuous traits, and they acquired an elevated status that the woman in Fray Luis's work could not obtain. However, even though women became capable of achieving a certain role and status that once seemed out of reach, María de Zayas's female still experiences many limitations that deny her equal status in society.

One of the main examples of a progression between the novels is in regards to a woman's capabilities. Fray Luis displays women as those who are intellectually and socially inept, and it is because of this lack of development that they are assigned menial tasks that do not require much cognitive skill. The matters that women deal with are “petty [and] trifling,” while men take care of “matters of substance” (219). Most of María de Zayas's women completely contradict these characteristics that Fray Luis establishes. The disenchanters are intelligent women who leave their listeners awestricken after telling their tales, and the women of their stories are also smart and very socially receptive. Laurela, for one, is very musically inclined, which is impressive for such a young lady. Beatriz is revered everywhere she goes for her gentle and kind nature which makes everyone that meets her love her. Smith points out that what María de Zayas believes overshadows women is not biological but

instead historical. They are very capable of intellectual pursuits, but they have always been given clothes to sew rather than books to read (233). The woman in María de Zayas's work is one that is desired by men because she complements them well. These women did not need to have a male present to complete their existence. Fray Luis also believes that women complement men, but he emphasizes that they have a dependency on men that is needed in order to properly fulfill their roles. María de Zayas shows how women are much more independent than men admit, and even suggests that they would be better off without men because of all the undue harm that they impose.

A main facet of the woman's role that is no longer applicable in María de Zayas's work is that of the working wife. A wife is no longer required to spend hours cleaning and caring for the house, but instead has been elevated to the position where she can have her own servants run the household without having to be the one to set the example. Fray Luis firmly believed that to have good servants the wife must be the one to show them how well and how hard they should be working. If a woman did not work, she would be inclined to be indulgent and would probably not appreciate how difficult it was to accumulate resources. María de Zayas's work portrays women of the latter part of the Golden Age as part of a class of nobility in which different roles and expectations sometimes countered those outlined in Fray Luis's treatise. These women did not perform the traditional domestic jobs, but rather proved that they were often capable of tasks that required higher cognitive functions, such as taking care of political affairs. These tasks were traditionally attributed to men, but women also completed these tasks successfully. María de Zayas exposes how women are endowed with many abilities, those of which are usually overshadowed by ones of her male counterpart.

The role of the mother is one that also changes drastically within this literature. Fray Luis's treatise emphasized the importance of the mother in teaching her children proper values and mannerisms, and how she is directly responsible (and consequently the one to blame) for how her children grow up. He strongly discouraged, and even chastised, the wife who allowed her children to be raised by another woman, such as a servant. In the disenchantments, few of the protagonists have a stable nuclear family. The women usually have a father and often a brother for siblings, but the presence of women in the household is underplayed. However, the women are still well behaved and virtuous, regardless of whether the mother is present in the stories. María de Zayas is not trying to imply that the mother is not an important figure, but rather that the women she writes about are strong and independent. She does not necessarily attribute these qualities to their upbringing, but rather their own intelligence. The mother is not a vital component in establishing the identities of these women. On the contrary, the mother is removed from her child's life before she has much of an opportunity to impact him or her, as was the case with Ana's murder shortly after giving birth to don Pedro. Many of the women live without any other female companions, except for servants that they grow close to and treat as family. The servants usually love their mistresses because they are respectable and admirable, qualities that one could say are inherent in these women. It is not something that necessarily had to be passed on from mother to daughter.

An important distinction between María de Zayas's and Fray Luis's works lies in the way they address a wife's physical appearance. Fray Luis denies women any real luxuries in his account, identifying the ideal woman as being resourceful, thrifty, and modest in her appearance. The appearance of the perfect wife from Fray Luis's vantage point sharply

contrasts the women that are portrayed in María de Zayas's tales. Whereas Fray Luis is completely opposed to the idea of women pampering themselves with dresses or jewelry, or even using any makeup while still being a chaste woman, María de Zayas relishes in the beauty of the women she portrays. A large number of her descriptions of women emphasize their natural beauty, whether alive or dead, and it is done to any given feature. When Doña Isabel reveals her true identity, María de Zayas describes how in awe the audience is of "her heavenly face... [which] reveal[ed] the radiant sun of her unclouded beauty." The audience proceeds to listen intently "to each word her beautiful mouth uttered" (43). María de Zayas does not emphasize the women's physical attraction, but rather implies that their beauty is more of an inherent feature. She also vividly describes the extravagant clothing worn by the disenchanters, full of "gold brocade[s] with silver and blue flowers and ornaments so dazzling that they were almost blinding" (41). María de Zayas allows the disenchanters to wear luxurious clothing because they are all women that are respectable and noble, and the clothing they wear is a reflection of their prestige. The protagonists in the stories are also all beautiful, and this empowers the women because they are easily desired by men who considered powerful, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the woman. The woman is able to use her beauty to move up the social ladder, whereas during Fray Luis's period the woman would stay in a stationary position and should never desire much more than what she possesses. It is also important to note that unlike Fray Luis, María de Zayas does not correlate the actions of a woman dressing herself nicely with her being disrespectful to God. Holy figures are actually fond of the protagonists in the story because they know that they are good women, as is shown with how the Virgin Mary watches over Beatriz through all the struggles that she encounters. The Virgin protects Beatriz and actually returns her beautiful

attire to her several times. This is not an action that would occur if the Virgin believed that elegant clothing disrespected God.

Though María de Zayas uses beauty and appearance as an attribute that empowers women and which women can use to their advantage, she and Fray Luis are in agreement that a woman should not spend a great amount of time making herself up. However, the reasoning behind this is quite different for both authors. Fray Luis considers makeup a dirty, adulterous tool that reveals a wife's true unchaste desires. He advises against women wearing makeup so that they make their husbands feel comfortable with the sacredness of their marriage, and so that she is not seen as a loose woman and a bad influence to other wives. This appears to be a rare occasion where Fray Luis is thinking more about the woman's honor than the harmony of her marriage. Nonetheless, he emphasizes that women who wear makeup should be punished, even if they are still honorable.

María de Zayas does not explicitly state that one should be prohibited from altering her physical appearance with cosmetics, but rather she points out that making oneself appear overly feminine contributes to a woman's social position. She believes that “if women did not devote themselves to their appearance, making themselves more feminine than nature intended, ... it might well be that they would excel men in every way” (140). Society reinforces that women are weak and “generally worthless” (140) so that they would not rise against the patriarchal system that has been in place for so long. Women are encouraged to learn how to make themselves up rather than to study any of the same tasks as men, assuring that women will remain in a lower position of power because they do not know how to partake in important matters.

From Fray Luis to María de Zayas's works, one notices that there is also a

progression in how much independence a woman gains. In *La Perfecta Casada*, a man and wife have a very interdependent relationship. She relies on him to provide sufficient resources for their well-being, and he depends on her to use those resources efficiently and to make sure that their home is running smoothly. The women of *Desengaños Amorosos* are not in that same situation. In almost every disenchantment, the female protagonist is sought by a man who wants her as his wife. She does not have to do anything to garner his attention, since he is already enticed by her superior traits, such as her beauty, chastity, and talents. In a few instances the woman does not even want to be married. They are successful and content with their pursuits before marriage, and unfortunately for them it is usually the marriage that leads to their demise. Blanca tried postponing her wedding as long as she could, dreading each day that brought her closer to being a wife. Being of a different ethnic identity than her husband's family, she was physically independent from him and his family. It is not until after she and the prince wed that there were many disputes that led to her eventually being murdered by her husband's family. A similar fate occurs with Laurela. As a young girl of fourteen years, she lives with her family and is content being at home with them and her nursemaids, partaking in her musical activities to make her happy. It is Esteban who seeks her out without her even knowing about it, then making it his mission to be with her no matter what it takes. He goes as far as to dress like a female nursemaid so he may be close to Laurela. She was perfectly fine living her own life before Esteban imposed his way into her home. These instances reflect how well women can manage their own lives, without being reliant on a husband to impose a schedule on her that he deems necessary.

Though there are many instances where it seems that women have made progress in the development of their social roles, they still find themselves subordinated in a patriarchal

society. The whole idea of the *Desengaños* is to restore women's good name by telling of the undue harm that males have caused them. This subordination of women occurs mainly through the punishment they encounter, even though most of them did not do anything that would merit such cruel deeds. Jehenson and Wells note that women are seen as either good or bad based on how much they adhere to or deviate from society's normative behavior (179). The harm done against them usually far exceeds the severity of the act they are accused of committing. Blanca knows that because she is Spanish and married to the prince of Flanders, she already has a rocky relationship with her husband's family. Her walking in on her husband and his page in bed simply gives the royalty of Flanders an excuse to execute her, as they had already wanted. Beatriz suffers the harshest of punishments in her story, being framed multiple times in an attempt to kill her. Her first punishment, and the one that catalyzes all actions to come, is when she is taken to a forest, blinded, and left behind to die. Beatriz is the recipient of these deeds because Federico told his brother that she had tried to seduce him, though nothing happened between them. Ana is murdered by her husband don Alonso because he held her responsible for their uncomfortable lifestyle, which was much different than the one he had enjoyed before meeting her. Before his death, he says to himself "with my vile life I pay for the life I took from you [Ana] who were without fault" (299).

Men often felt that women deserved the punishments they received, however harsh they may have been. These punishments usually occurred because women posed a threat to men in their society. If a woman is accused of infidelity, she is a threat to her husband's good name and honor. If she stumbles across something that she should not see or know, she has an advantage over her husband because she can release information that is undesirable. If

she is equal or superior to him in her talents, she threatens his social power. Camino suggests that men preserved their status by denying women knowledge, and as result power (2). Even if he deems her responsible for something, such as an overly modest lifestyle, he grows to disfavor her. Thus extreme measures are taken to assure a man's position of power. In his work, Fray Luis does not explicitly state how one should treat a woman who is not "perfect." Since Spanish society was heavily male-dominated in most respects, it is possible that this suppression of feminine qualities is seen as a defense tactic. To ensure that society will remain favorable to those who have dominated it, one must find a way to maintain this male order. Doña Isabel is disgusted that "there are some ignoramuses who are consumed by a woman's success, as if a woman, by being intelligent, could take away from their intelligence" (Zayas, *Desengaños*, 44). She calls this "barbaric ignorance" (44). Fray Luis and María de Zayas both acknowledge that it is much more difficult for a woman to stand out in a patriarchal society when so many limitations are imposed upon her (León 33; Zayas, "Al Que Leyere," 169). Therefore, if women display talent in an academic field, they should be praised for it; instead though, they are seen as a threat to a male's position of power. Preserving their dominance is why men have resorted to hastily punishing women for crimes they did not commit. They are more willing to defend the honor of a noble woman who has been wrongly accused as long as she does not blacken his good name. When she poses this threat to him, the man is no longer so forgiving, and he does what he feels is necessary to make her repent. The woman is then the undue recipient of an action that the male decides is necessary.

Hasty generalizations also serve to subordinate women because they only allow women to live by a stereotype, rather than individual circumstances. Stereotypes are

dangerous because it defines a group of people based on a single characteristic, and it hinders one's ability to think differently of that group. Fray Luis believes that women will always fall into temptation and indulgence, and if they are not controlled they will fall into patterns of adultery and excessive spending. María de Zayas's women disprove these expectations, but the men in the stories continue to believe otherwise. There are several instances where men readily refer to women as being treacherous. When speaking to his brother about Beatriz's seductions, Federico tells him not to be fooled by her words, since "women are remarkably astute when it comes to covering up their treachery and lying to prove their innocence" (327). Don Jaime would agree with this belief, thinking that Elena is treacherous because she betrayed him after he offered her a much more comfortable lifestyle than her previous one (158). These ideas of women being loose and deceiving allow men to believe false accusations. Even María de Zayas would say that there certainly are women who are "fickle, false, [and] loose" with bad reputations, but these women are more like wild beasts (38). She is standing up for the noble woman who is good and virtuous, but because she does not make men look stronger she is not as talked about as the woman who commits so many crimes and brings men harm.

Women in *Desengaños* show just how capable a woman is of success, but even those women have an imposed modesty. Even though she does not want to undermine her talents, Doña Isabel asks her audience to forgive her for praising herself. The disenchanters are in an elevated position in society, and in the soiree they are the ones in complete control of the events, as men and women listen to their stories. There is no reason why they should not be allowed praise every so often, especially if it is something that is usually denied to them. Instead they must hide their achievements because it is not something that is embraced in

their society. In her prologue to *Novelas Amorosas* titled “Al Que Leyere,” María de Zayas writes of the similarities between men and women, and how there is no reason for one to be favored over another because they have the same blood and soul. Men may have thought that women were incapable of doing things that they considered worthwhile, but many women had already participated in noteworthy tasks. The only difference is that they worked in the shadow of the men they were assisting, so they did not receive credit for any of their work. A noteworthy example is when she tells how Pythagoras's sister, Temistoclea, wrote her own book with moral doctrine, but she was overshadowed by her brother's work. She goes on to describe many other women who were well versed in philosophy, history, and politics (169). These women were never recognized for their capabilities, furthering this imposed modesty upon women who were as intellectually talented as men. These examples show that the suppression of women is not a new concept, but is something that has existed for centuries.

Conclusion

The portrayal of a woman's place in Spanish society exhibited great changes during the time frame of the Golden Age. In a little over a century, the woman progressed from being the keeper of the house to the ruler of a country. She was able to dress extravagantly and still be perceived as respectable, rather than have to wear modest linens as an outward display of her chastity. She was an independent woman who often did not seek a man, but rather was sought out because of her virtuous traits. Most importantly, she was recognized for her intellectual capabilities, erasing the notion that women were inferior beings that were not mentally capable of rigorous tasks, but that they had instead been conditioned to act in a different manner.

Though progress has been made in removing the outdated version of a woman's role, there are still many aspects of her role that have remained unaffected. Even with the Maria de Zayas's feminist viewpoint, women were still portrayed as the weaker-minded sex who could easily fall into tempting and adulterous acts. These stereotypes remained with women, regardless if they were able to disprove them. This image of women made it easy for men to hastily believe any negative things that were said about them. As a result, if she was accused of anything that would reflect badly upon her, she was often punished harshly in an attempt to retain the honor of her husband and family. Even though it is not accurate to make the generalization that all women will behave the same way, these generalizations reflect how society was taught to treat and think of women.

From the Golden Age to the present day, it is apparent that there are many expectations of women that have remained since they were originally imposed. Women still have heavy responsibilities as being the ones to care for the children, household, and her

husband, even while having to care for herself. These societal expectations have been implanted into women ever since they were young. It is strongly apparent countries such as the United States, as we give girls pink blankets and dolls, while boys are given blue backpacks and soccer balls. Society tries to force feminine qualities onto women, even though they should necessarily be attributed only to them. It is not uncommon for people to exhibit masculine and feminine qualities, rather to be defined by characteristics that are attributed to a specific gender.

The progression that has occurred for female roles is one that is favorable. People no longer expect the house to be only a woman's domain, especially as relationships have become much more egalitarian, as in the United States. It is no longer uncommon to see women in the workforce and in high positions of societal power, such as in the political and business arenas. However, a woman is still limited by her gender and the associations that it brings. Women in general still earn less on average than males, and she is often overshadowed by her male peers in political media. Though she has more opportunities allotted to her now than ever before, she must still fulfill all the societal expectations of how to be a woman.

Though a woman's role has evolved greatly from its simplistic origins, her role is still in much need for development. Feminism itself is defined by its advocating of social, political, and economic rights of women as being equal to those of men (“Feminism”). This definition itself implies that men have always held a favorable position in society. Women are worthy and capable of holding those same positions. We will finally know that there is equality between the roles of the sexes when words like “feminism” no longer exist.

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