

“The Infamous Prison of His Arms”: The Politics of Love and Domestic Space in María de Zayas and Mary Astell

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SINCE THE EARLY 1970s, feminist political thinkers have mined canonical works for their characterizations of the division of public from private life and the various ways in which this division, so important to liberal political thought, has constrained women’s participation in political life. The rhetoric of the sentimental family, Susan Moller Okin argued early on, performed an important political role in obfuscating the paradox at the heart of liberalism: the universal extension of rights and freedoms in theory, concomitant with the denial of these rights to women of all classes (and many men). Is this merely a gap between theory and practice, with the practice being slow to catch up to the ideal, or has the development of liberalism depended upon a reconfiguration of patriarchal social relations such that women’s lack of rights is obscured by the language of their proper, natural, and wholehearted dedication to the domestic sphere? While Lawrence Stone’s thesis suggesting that the eighteenth century marked the beginning of companionate marriage structured along more egalitarian lines has been widely discredited by social historians,¹ Okin’s analysis pushes political thought in the direction of investigating further the ideological significance and political purpose of this emerging familial rhetoric. In mapping the rhetorical trajectory of the family from Hobbes to Hegel, and from the authoritarian

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to the contractual to the sentimental family, she points to the ways in which the sentimental family form represents less of a shift toward equality in marriage than the same old wolf dressed in sheep's clothing.²

For the purposes of this essay, I want to extend the analysis of sentimentalism in political thought, changing the focus from the writings of male political theorists to consider how early-modern women writers demystify and challenge, not only sentimentalism, but false rhetoric of various sorts whose aim it is to perpetuate women's subordination. Using a comparative approach, I consider first the early-modern Spanish writer María de Zayas, whose novellas in *Disenchantments of Love* (1647) illustrate in graphic detail the dangers of overly passionate love attachments between men and women and strike at the core of the Spanish honor code with its associated expectation of extreme privacy for women. Although Zayas's place in the Golden Age literature of Spain is now well established, her political import is still being discovered.³ Writing before the ideological-political turn toward sentimentality, Zayas offers a critical look at the rhetoric and practices surrounding courtly love, a passionate discourse that mystifies women's subordinate status and masks male violence against them. In politicizing domestic space and the relationships within it, Zayas's writing resonates with that of early-modern British women writers, such as Margaret Cavendish and Mary Astell, both of whom express strong reservations about the security of marriage for women, and with that of later ones, such as Harriet Taylor Mill and Virginia Woolf, whose works detail in even more concrete terms the impact of false sentiment upon women's freedom.

Zayas's writing provides a foundation that allows us to see how women writers, within diverse genres, identify the concepts of public and private transnationally as potent political issues. When we juxtapose Zayas with her French and British counterparts, the Duchess of Mazarin and Mary Astell, we find significant differences in style, purpose, and context, but we notice shared emphases on masculine tyranny in the domestic realm. Astell was moved to write *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) in response to the dramatic events outlined in *The Memoires of the Dutchess Mazarine, With the Reasons of Her coming into England* (1675). In her *Memoires*, the duchess creates an image of the Duke of Mazarin as an excessively passionate, manipulative, and controlling husband, from whom she has no choice but to separate. While not in favor of the separation, Astell nevertheless uses the duchess's marriage as a springboard for a larger critique of marriage that centers on the abuses of power made possible in a system of inequitable gender relations. Astell's *Reflections* was written well in advance of Rousseau, and before the period in which sentimental familial relations are typically thought to have taken hold as an ideal in political thought, yet the text provides a fascinating glimpse into what Astell considers

¹ E.g., see Lois G. Schwoerer, "Seventeenth-Century English Women Engraved in Stone?," *Albion* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 389–403; Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); among many others.

² Susan Moller Okin, "Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11, no. 1 (1981): 65–88. Other early works that took up the issues of sentimental family relations include Jean Bethke Elshtain, ed., *The Family in Political Thought* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982); and Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), chap. 6; and Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

³ In her *The Cultural Labyrinth of María de Zayas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), Marina S. Brownlee suggests that Zayas's stories "disclose the decay of the Spanish Empire through the male-female relations of her day" (8). See also Lisa Vollendorf, "Reading the Body Imperiled: Violence against Women in de Zayas," *Hispania* 78 (May 1995): 272–82.

to be the fallacies of sentimental marriage, even as it validates marriage itself as a hierarchical union requiring women's obedience.⁴

In this comparative analysis of the writings of María de Zayas, the Duchess of Mazarin, and Mary Astell, discourses of passion and sentimentality take shape as forms of ideological enclosure, curtailing women's freedom of movement and, by extension, limiting their public, political personas in a period marked by the emergence of political rights. Zayas shows the consequences of women being falsely elevated as objects of male affect in a chivalric culture, while Astell, using Mazarin as a starting point, identifies the threat to women's autonomy when the intricacies of familial power relations are obscured beneath a veneer of love and consent. Yet the critical perspectives offered by these early-modern women writers are sealed over in the classic narrative of familial evolution from authoritarian to companionate marriage, and by the early eighteenth century, partly as a result of the success of sentimental discourses in proscribing women's roles, fewer female voices are audible in the public sphere.⁵ It is not until Mary Wollstonecraft responds to Rousseau in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), or, much later, in the work of Virginia Woolf, that we find a full account of the dangers that these mystifying discourses pose for notions of women's citizenship, along with an awareness of their persistence into the modern period.

MARÍA DE ZAYAS, HONOR, AND THE PERILS OF EXCESS PASSION

Feminist analysis of the sentimental family centers primarily on the political thought and literature of France and Britain in the long eighteenth century, carrying forward into the political rhetoric of the present. Classic texts that chart the course of this new emphasis on affective ties in the family between husband and wife and between mothers, fathers, and children include Rousseau's *Emile: or, On Education* (1762) and *Julie, or the New Héloïse* (1761), along with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1758) and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753).⁶ Very little attention has been paid to women's writings on this subject before Mary Wollstonecraft. A shift in our gaze to early-modern Spain and the writings of María de Zayas (ca. 1590–ca. 1661) brings into focus another important discourse, the rhetoric of courtly love, which, like sentimentality, served to obfuscate women's subordination, inviting their complicity under the guise of chivalric reverence. Positioned at the tail end of medieval honor codes and in the midst of the Spanish Golden Age, Zayas's writing reflects elements of both. In exposing and confronting the discourses of courtly love and honor, and showing their sometimes violent underpinnings, Zayas also disrupts assumptions about the progression of the European family form from hierarchical and authoritarian to egalitarian and affective. Her characterization of familial relations, especially those between husbands, wives, and lovers, resists easy categorization within the typology of family forms and reveals the coexistence and compatibility of passionate love with authoritarian violence.

⁴ That Mary Astell registers the discourse of familial and marital sentimentality confirms Toni Bowers's thesis that this discourse was at work in England *before* it took on such prominence in mid-eighteenth century France. See Toni Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15.

⁵ See Hilda Smith's introduction to *Women's Political Writings, 1610–1725*, vol. 4, ed. Hilda Smith, Mihoko Suzuki, and Susan Wiseman (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), vii.

⁶ See Jeremy W. Webster, "Sentimentalizing Patriarchy: Patriarchal Anxiety and Filial Obligation in *Sir Charles Grandison*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17, no. 3 (2005), article 10.

Zayas's two collections of fiction, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (*Amorous and Exemplary Novels*)⁷ and *Disengaños amorosos* (*The Disenchantments of Love*),⁸ are filled with passionate tales of love and betrayal. *Disenchantments of Love*, which comprises ten novellas and forms my focus here, portrays husbands who jealously guard the honor of their wives against the advances of suitors, and women who are torn between love and the fear of losing their honor, many of whom choose to sacrifice their family's reputation but are betrayed in the end by the one who seduced them. Maternal devotion to children is bizarrely absent in these tales—indeed, children themselves are absent altogether. Zayas's male characters are driven by uncontrollable passion toward their lovers, seemingly, but in the end, what they love more than anything is their own power and reputation, and it is this that most frequently causes their downfall. For Zayas, this is exactly the point, as the female-only-narrated novellas are encompassed by a frame story in which the newly engaged Lisis will hear ten tales, or “disenchantments,” in the lead-up to her wedding. The disenchanting effect of these tales is cumulative, as is the moral lesson woven throughout that women have much to fear in their relations with men and that even the most “innocent” of women can be defeated in a culture that pretends to hold them in the highest esteem.

Zayas's writing merits careful reading, along and against the grain. Her stories register and detail the complex and often violent workings of the Spanish honor code that formed the backdrop of social relations in the Golden Age. Because of this, interpreters have sometimes misunderstood her as a writer who upheld and reinforced the traditional honor code.⁹ Like some of her seventeenth-century Spanish contemporaries, Zayas depicts characters who are driven to madness by the desire to protect their own honor, with bloodshed being the only solution to the grievous wrongs committed. Some of Zayas's novellas mirror the Calderonian wife-murder plays in which women characters are treated cruelly and put to death to save face for the male family member. Yet her stories are also both didactic and humorous; in the midst of these complicated narratives of devotion and betrayal, the narrator frequently interjects to remind her readers of the lessons to women of living in a patriarchal world, sometimes taking the story to a level of absurdity that can only have the effect of undermining, not reinforcing, the emphasis on honor.¹⁰ Reading Zayas against the grain involves unpacking the overall effect of her dramatizations, noting that for characters who pursue their own reputations at the expense of all else, chaos and their own downfall are the usual results.

Building on recent feminist interpretations, I read Zayas as socially and politically significant in the history of ideas on the family and the private sphere. Zayas's writing maps the contours of the honor culture while it also exposes the power relations that underlie its proper

⁷ Translated by H. Patsy Boyer in *The Enchantments of Love: “Amorous and Exemplary Novels”* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

⁸ Translated by H. Patsy Boyer in *The Disenchantments of Love, a Translation of the “Disengaños amorosos”* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

⁹ Paul Julian Smith, “Writing Women in the Golden Age of Spain,” *MLN* 102, no. 2, Hispanic Issue (March 1987): 220–40.

¹⁰ Amy R. Williamsen, “Challenging the Code: Honor in María de Zayas,” in *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*, ed. Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 148. See also Terence O'Reilly, “Golden Age Studies: Spain and Spanish America in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The Companion to Hispanic Studies*, ed. Catherine Davies (London: Arnold, 2002), 50–67. O'Reilly suggests that even Calderón's plays are intended, not to support an artificial and violent conception of honor, but rather to demonstrate that “when honour is separated from right judgement and love it becomes a savage force” (55).

functioning. In these disenchanting tales she unearths the complicated and gendered divisions that run along yet cross over lines between public and private, revealing the barbarism of following the code to its logical limits. Although Anglo-American historiography has questioned the use and utility of the terms "public" and "private," especially as a means to discuss women's position, for interpreters of Zayas, women's relationship to the private remains an important subject for analysis precisely because it was invested with such (gendered) meaning for Zayas herself. Zayas's understanding of the private is rather different from ours, but it remains for her modern interpreters to discern those differences as well as to identify important points of connection.

In fact, one of the aspects of Spanish life that most concerns Zayas in her fiction is the idea of *encierro*, or the enclosure of women. Owing a debt to ancient Greek and Christian ideals about the appropriate behavior and location of virtuous women, the Spanish honor code held women's proper place to be the private realm. Here we might recall Pericles's famous dictate, repeated by Aristotle in his *Politics*: "A modest silence is a woman's crown." By this statement, a woman's virtue is contingent on her public invisibility. The accepted biblical message was, in effect, the same: women should be quiet and chaste, should understand their place in originating the sin of the world, and should learn in silence with full submission.¹¹ Of course, this does not mean that women remained, in ancient Greece any more than in early-modern Spain, solely in the domestic environment, for we are speaking here of an ideal rather than a social practice.¹² Nevertheless, the belief that a woman's virtue is fraught, and that it needs careful management, impacts all aspects of material life and acts as a justification for women's absence in public affairs of state.

Zayas's female characters negotiate the Spanish "obsession with domestic privacy"¹³ carefully, and always with some degree of agency. Her female characters all cross the domestic threshold, with women of a higher status accompanied by men or servants of their household, a practice that maintains a woman's modesty in public and limits access for male suitors (such as don Diego, who, in "Innocence Punished," must sit behind doña Inés in church to whisper privately to her). Women even have to be mindful of their visibility within their domestic setting. In "Most Infamous Revenge," Octavia talks to her suitor, Carlos, through the window grating after her parents have gone to bed at night, but when he chastises her for her inaccessibility, she responds that "the favors you now enjoy" are a "risk to my decorum and my nobility" (91).¹⁴ Because she was happily married, doña Inés, from "Innocence Punished," often went out of her house accompanied and freely appeared on her own balcony: "She was seen by everyone" (176). If she had known, however, that she was the target of don Diego's love serenade on the street below, "she would never have allowed herself to be seen" (177). Indeed, Zayas's female characters are as careful about the perceived need to conform to this ideological code as men are in imposing it on their sisters, wives, and lovers.

¹¹ These passages are summarized from Timothy 2:9–15.

¹² Tempting though it might be to categorize such thinking as antiquated and premodern, a case unfolded in the Canadian courts in 2012 surrounding a quadruple murder of a first wife and three girl children by a husband/father and sons in Kingston, Ontario. The issue at stake is the honor of one of the girls. Judith Timson, "Honour' Violence: A Crime against Humanity," *Globe and Mail*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/relationships/honour-violence-a-crime-against-humanity/article4403670/>.

¹³ Smith, "Writing Women in the Golden Age of Spain," 221.

¹⁴ All quotations from *Desengaños amorosos* are from Boyer, *The Disenchantments of Love, a Translation of the "Disengaños amorosos,"* and the page numbers will be given parenthetically in the text.

“Most Infamous Revenge” is a tale containing many suggestive references to the (sometimes permeable) border between public and private. After his parents’ death, don Juan is anxious to spend the family fortune on himself and thus kept his sister, Octavia, “totally shut in and deprived of everything” (93). Although she wishes to preserve her own honor, Octavia is pursued by a lover, Carlos, whom she can resist only for so long. The narrator laments her weakness, “Octavia surrendered. How frail is woman! She opened her door to Carlos. What madness!” (92). The architectural metaphor used to portray Octavia’s loss of honor suggests that the openness of her house is a symbol of her disempowerment; Zayas takes this one step further in explaining that “don Juan’s absence [temporarily, in a monastery] left Carlos master of Octavia’s house. He came and went without the least precaution” (95). Her brother and lover take turns controlling Octavia’s fate and mastering the domestic space to which she alone is confined, her brother directing its affairs in absentia and her lover freely enjoying his sexual access to her.

If men and women both execute this first layer of *encierro* by maintaining the physical enclosure of women’s bodies, it is men who enforce a second layer of enclosure by enwalling women within their domestic setting.¹⁵ In *Disenchantments* we are confronted with double clausturation: the virtue of some women has been so compromised that they must be contained physically in a separate space *within the household* as punishment for their alleged wrongdoing. Here the border around the private is strictly enforced and anything but permeable. In “Innocence Punished,” Zayas outlines the restriction of bodies taken to an extreme, with doña Inés walled up in her own attic with plaster and wood in a space no bigger than her own body; in “Too Late Undeceived,” Elena is confined in a cave within a wall where she must lie with the skull of her alleged lover. Doña Inés is so restricted in her movements that she cannot fully extend her limbs and is forced to stand in her own bodily waste, while Elena is permitted release from her prison cave only during mealtimes, when she lies chained like an animal under the dining table and suffers the humiliation of watching her former maid take her place at the table to eat with Elena’s own husband, the perpetrator of her imprisonment. In the latter case, the maid-turned-mistress’s deathbed confession concerning Elena’s innocence comes too late, for Elena is found dead in her cave, still holding the skull of the cousin with whom she was falsely accused of carrying on a romantic affair.

These examples of double enclosure are reminiscent of imprisonment and torture, with physical confinement of the body and control of its movements and functions as a way of enacting dominance.¹⁶ Indeed, the brutalization of bodies represented in these stories may reflect, not only Zayas’s profeminist analysis and a critique of changing aristocratic values, but also her political concerns with the Catholic church’s treatment of the victims of the Spanish Inquisition, just as it also registers other significant political events, including the Spanish expulsion of the Moors and the effects of colonization in the Americas.¹⁷ These women are physically privatized and also endure privation, having little sustenance, light, and air. It is evident that Zayas under-

¹⁵ Significantly, Anne J. Cruz finds evidence of women actually being walled in, some as a form of punishment and others voluntarily choosing it as a form of religious devotion. See her “The Walled-In Woman in Medieval and Early Modern Spain,” in *Gender Matters: Discourses of Gender and Violence in Early Modern Literature and Culture*, ed. Mara Wade (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, forthcoming).

¹⁶ Yet what is premodern also surfaces in modernity: consider the British news story involving a man who buried his fiancé alive in a cardboard box, in a shallow grave. He covered the box with earth, leaves, and a forty-kilogram tree branch; she escaped using her engagement ring to tear at her bindings and the box. Russell Jenkins, “Young Mother Was Boxed and Buried Alive by ‘Bored’ Fiancé,” *London Times*, December 20, 2011, 3.

¹⁷ See Lisa Vollendorf, “Fleshing Out Feminism in Early Modern Spain: María de Zayas’s Corporeal Politics,” *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos* 22, no. 1 (1997): 87–108; as well as her “Reading the Body Imperiled,”

stands these private spaces to be marked by complex power relations. On the one hand, she points to men as entitled to enjoy the freedom to move from public to private without difficulty; their entitlement to respect in the public sphere is fundamentally related to the power they exercise freely in the private. Their private power over women can range from seemingly benign to abusively tyrannical, often appearing to be the former only to mutate into the latter. Such is the case in the first novella, "Slave to Her Own Lover," wherein don Manuel, getting no response to his wooing gestures toward doña Isabel, takes more drastic action: "he was already holding my hand and, seeing me hesitate, he pulled me in such a way that I couldn't resist and he jerked me inside and locked the door with the key. I don't know what he did to me; my fright brought on a mortal swoon that deprived me of my senses" (52). In all these examples of women's privation, we get a strong sense of what Sandra Gilbert has called the "architecture of patriarchy," with the space of the house and the rooms within it serving as both the physical aspect of enclosure as well as a metaphorical sign of women's disempowerment.¹⁸ Particularly striking is the fact that Zayas calls attention to domestic tyranny, and to physical and sexual violence, centuries before domestic abuse is considered a political issue.¹⁹

On the other hand, she also portrays power flowing in the other direction, whereby the husband's public reputation is a product of his private life: he is well regarded in public only if he keeps his house in order. Even the slightest doubt about his capacity to control his private affairs can destroy his honor, which will be salvageable only with the blood of the wrongdoer. In this way, the private is vested with a great deal of power and, by extension, so are the women within it—their actions can make or break a man's reputation. In a strange turn of events in "Most Infamous Revenge," when Carlos's father finds out about his affair with Octavia, he instructs his son to take care of matters swiftly by offering Octavia a dowry either to marry another or to enter the convent. If Carlos failed to do this, "then with all his power as judge the senator (father) would punish Octavia in exemplary fashion by publically accusing her of *disturbing his domestic peace* and having her exiled from Milan" (97, emphasis added). A testament to the fact that power is being exercised in multiple ways, Carlos's father's threat disempowers both Carlos and Octavia: Carlos is not managing his own affairs properly and must be disciplined; Octavia is given no choice about her life course. Yet Carlos's father has also given Octavia a symbolic power since he considers her a risk to domestic peace, referring to both the order of his household and, given the threat of exile, the order of the nation.

Furthermore, women are never totally powerless, for they find ways to injure the men who torture them. Octavia gets her revenge in the end by unleashing her brother on Carlos for betraying her (her brother defiles Carlos's wife).²⁰ Following her rape in "Slave to Her Own Lover," doña Isabel "is filled with a "demonic fury" rather than despair: "I disentangled myself from the infamous prison of his arms," she relays, grabbing don Manuel's sword and trying to kill him.

274–77. See also William H. Clamurro, "Ideological Contradiction and Imperial Decline: Toward a Reading of Zayas's *Disengaños amorosos*," *South Central Review* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 43–50.

¹⁸ Sandra Gilbert quoted in Williamsen, "Challenging the Code," 143. See also Yolanda Gamboa, "Architectural Cartography: Social and Gender Mapping in María de Zayas's Seventeenth-Century Spain," *Hispanic Review* 71, no. 2 (2003): 189–203.

¹⁹ See Vollendorf, "Reading the Body Imperiled," 277; and H. Patsy Boyer, introduction to *Disenchantments*, 9.

²⁰ Even here, an innocent woman, Carlos's wife, Camilla, pays the greatest price, as women are the tools in this masculine game of revenge. After she is tricked and raped by don Juan, she is rejected by her husband; she retreats temporarily to a convent only to return to Carlos and die a miserable death.

That doña Isabel is unsuccessful adds weight to one of the central claims in *Disenchantments*, that women have their natural strength drained from them by their feminine education, are made cowards “by teaching them how to do hemstitching rather than how to use weapons!” (52). Throughout the novellas, Zayas interjects the argument that women ought to be educated and taught to defend themselves, for if they did “they would never suffer affront from any man” (140). In a tone remarkably similar to both Mary Astell and Wollstonecraft, Zayas’s narrator accuses men of constraining and demeaning women and limiting them “to do only household tasks” because they are afraid of women rising against them and of losing their power (140).

In Zayas’s framing, women are agents, not merely victims. Zayas resists placing women within a moral hierarchy where they are either completely virtuous or sinners, for not even the virtuous are spared; she acknowledges that women frequently make bad choices within the social constraints of their society and that they can also destroy each other. Women harming other women arises as a theme in several of Zayas’s stories, from the “evil woman” living across the street to doña Inés, who seeks to profit from a scheme that will dishonor her more privileged neighbor, to the women who conspire with male family members to punish the alleged wrongdoings of the protagonists. While women can use the rhetoric of honor to humiliate and punish other women, just as men do, in Zayas’s telling, women bear the brunt of the suffering and dishonor in this system.²¹ In Spanish society, she suggests, it is women who are blamed, whether they are innocent or guilty. This is the point of the disenchantments, to ensure that women are informed of the risks of love and marriage before they enter into these relationships.

In addition to the two layers of *encierro*, the privatization of women in the home and their double privation and torture, there is also their metaphorical enclosure within the discourse of courtly love and the honor system. What Zayas shows in *Disenchantments* is the treachery of excessively passionate relations between lovers and their falseness as a representation of human relations. Evident throughout the novel, the problem of excess passion is demonstrated nicely in the aptly titled “Love for the Sake of Conquest,” in which don Estaban is so in love with Laurela that he disguises himself as a woman, Estefanía, in order to serve as her maid. Unable to keep his secret at the news of her engagement to another, don Estaban reveals his identity to Laurela, sending her into a “mortal swoon” (226). Don Estaban’s confession is suffused with excess sentiment: his “only hope . . . is to die” now that she is betrothed; if she rejects him, he will kill himself. Yet these professions of love, like those of many others in the novel, are tinged with anger, hatred, and threats: “As soon as they find me lifeless and learn of my violent suicide, they’ll see that I’m not a woman all the while they thought I was . . . Then they’ll know how true my love was and they certainly won’t believe that you were ignorant of the situation. Instead, they’ll think it was your will that I transform myself to be with you” (227). Like the architecture of the house, this dramatic, aggressive expression of devotion becomes another layer of enclosure, as these female protagonists cannot escape their fate once they become the object of another’s passions. If

²¹ See Scott K. Taylor, *Honor and Violence in Golden Age Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), who argues, “For women, the rhetoric of honor was an instrument of their own devising, not a structure that kept them entrapped in enclosure and submission” (190). Still, this rhetoric at women’s disposal was premised on their own inferiority and resonated with patriarchal beliefs deeply embedded in Catholic church practice and Spanish society. Taylor suggests that we should be “suspicious of elite writings that portrayed” the rhetoric of honor as “an inflexible code” (189), for there is always a gap between rhetoric and practice. Such cautions can be kept in mind, while we also take seriously what Zayas and other women writers have to say about honor and marriage in their own social contexts. Zayas makes it quite clear that women are never simply victims and that they are quite capable of revenge seeking and making poor choices.

Laurela resists his love and chooses instead to protect her own honor; she will suffer nevertheless after his identity is revealed; if she accepts his love, she will also lose her honor by terminating her original engagement. Here, too, we see the arbitrariness, cruelty, and barbarity of the code; for no rhyme or reason, male suitors fall into passionate love with women only to turn against them and pursue another object, which is exactly what don Estaban does the moment he has succeeded in attaining Laurela.

Women are the losers in this game of overly passionate love and honor precisely because the game is predicated on deception and falsity. Laurela's downfall, Zayas's narrator remarks, is that she "was a child unread in the book of deception" (229) and found herself returning don Estaban's affections. Although she may genuinely care for him, his version of hypersentimental love cannot be real. He is driven less by affection for Laurela than by a desire for reputation, power, and control (a fact most of these women find out too late). Having fallen prey to his advances, Laurela loses the respect of her family and seeks refuge in her uncle's home. Rather than reaching out to help her in this dire situation, her father conspires with her aunt and uncle to punish her for her sins. In the end, they bring down a wall upon her, killing her while she sits for her tea. Her sisters, upon hearing about these events from a maid who witnessed everything, choose to join the convent, as does her mother once she is widowed, hoping that this story "might serve as a disenchantment for women, so women won't trust the clever deceptions of the crafty lover whose passion lasts only until he conquers" (237). The narrator concludes by asking her listeners to consider the situation of men and women dispassionately, for "it benefits men more than women. . . . If many women suffer with cause, there are many more who suffer without cause, and even when there is cause, it starts from their being deceived" (240).

Thus, Zayas shows the violent effects of *encierro*, not just on the body but on the mind as well. Each of the stories begins with a passionate proclamation of love, followed by love's diminution, and then, frequently, a betrayal. Zayas, again, offers both the dramatic romantic proclamation and her skepticism of courtly love wrapped into one, such as when Carlos first saw Octavia: "The moment he saw her he fell head over heels in love, or at least he appeared to. I think the thing that most bothers me about men is that they exaggerate and say more than they feel" (86). Passion deceives and mystifies; what seems to be love turns quickly to accusations, blame, and contempt, such as expressed in Carlos's letter to Octavia lamenting her refusal to accept his affections:

Heavenly Octavia, I do not know what pleasure you receive from being so cruel or how my loving bondage can give offense to you that you refuse to reward me by listening to my words nor do your beautiful eyes deign to grant me the favor of calling myself their slave. Be assured that you will cease being beautiful before I ever abandon my love for you. And since giving up my love is the more impossible of these two impossibilities, grant me the favor of hearing me and this will suffice for me to be yours as I shall be yours so long as I live. (88)

The problem is not that love turns sour but that its overstated, passionate expression masks its falsity in the first place. For the truth is that Carlos had never intended to marry Octavia. The truth, as Zayas reveals it, is that men enjoy considerable freedom and entitlement, for the honor code allows them to behave unjustly toward women and other men and serves as a means to augment their own power and reputation, often at the cost of women's reputations, sanity, and lives. It is hardly surprising that the end result of the ten "disenchantments" told in the lead-up to the wedding is that Lisis, the bride-to-be, chooses to enter the convent rather than marry. The separate

and feminine space of the convent, we learn again and again, is the only safe one for women in the face of “masculine brutality.”²²

If sentimentality in eighteenth-century political thought represents, in theory, the softening of reason to make room for affect and, consequently, a softening of the hard edges of masculine power and authority in the household, in Zayas’s *Disenchantments* passionate devotion between lovers coexists easily with arbitrary and authoritarian masculine power, and even violence. Zayas insistently demystifies the soft discourse of devotion and love, exposing the hard edges of masculine power. A careful reading of *Disenchantments* suggests that, long before sentimentality was “invented” and popularized in England and France, Zayas had already drawn attention to the dangers of such mystifying discourses for any notion of women’s independence, freedom, or equality.

MOVING FROM FICTION TO FACT: MAZARIN’S MEMOIRES AND ASELL’S REFLECTIONS

The marriage of Hortense Mancini (1646–1699) to Armand-Charles de La Porte de La Meilleraye provides a concrete seventeenth-century example of the kind of sordid relations about which Zayas only writes. The ill-fated marriage, the drama of which would become very public, with legal and political ramifications, forms the impetus for Mary Astell’s *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700). While Astell’s text is increasingly read as a political tract in which the proper obedience of wives to husbands is discussed in terms neatly parallel to public, political debate about subjects’ obedience to the Crown, there has been little attempt to situate Astell’s response in regard to the text that partially inspired it, the duchess’s own *Memoires of the Dutchess Mazarine, With the Reasons of Her coming into England* (1675; translated into English, 1699), and neither of these texts has been considered in light of the emerging discourse of sentimentality.

I suggest that the duchess’s memoir bears reading for its description of her marriage to the duke, a marriage that contains many of the elements of domestic tyranny and psychological abuse highlighted in Zayas’s *Disenchantments*. Significantly, the duchess begins her tale with an apology for writing a memoir,²³ which she thinks is a generally inappropriate undertaking for a woman, and acknowledges “how hard it is to speak discreetly of ones self.” Confirming the ongoing, trans-European relevance of the ideal of women’s public invisibility, she writes: “I know the chief Glory of a Woman ought to consist in not making her self to be publicly talked of. And those that know me, know like-wise, that I never took much pleasure in things that make too much Noise. But it is not always in our choise to live our own way.”²⁴ As in the Spanish Golden Age, so, too, in early-modern France, the virtue of women lies in their drawing as little attention to themselves as possible, an ideal belied by the publication of a memoir, which is thought to be the first of its kind by a French woman, and by the duchess’s otherwise very public life and affairs.²⁵ Justifying her choice to write a memoir, she explains, “it is very natural to defend oneself from Calumny” (1).²⁶

²² Boyer, introduction to *Disenchantments*, 1.

²³ Not dissimilar to the tone taken by Margaret Cavendish, who frequently apologizes for her own writing.

²⁴ All quotations are from Duchess of Mazarin, *The Memoires of the Dutchess Mazarine, With the Reasons of Her coming into England* (Covent Garden, 1675), and the page numbers will be given parenthetically in the text.

²⁵ After leaving her husband, the duchess is reputed to have had several affairs, and it is known that she became the mistress of Charles II.

²⁶ See also “The Memoirs of Hortense and Marie Mancini,” in Hortense Mancini and Marie Mancini, *Memoirs*, ed. and trans. Sarah Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2.

By most accounts, Armand-Charles de La Porte de La Meilleraye, who became Duke Mazarin upon his marriage to Hortense, was an unbalanced character. Before their marriage, when Cardinal Mazarin was considering suitable matches for his niece, Hortense, and her sisters, Armand-Charles pursued Hortense with fervor, sending her letters and gifts to the consternation of her governess. The governess reported to the cardinal, "I have never seen a man more assiduous in attentions, and I am often worried as to how I should receive them."²⁷ It was after their marriage that his personal eccentricities turned pathological. The potent combination of his adherence to religious ideals about women's propriety and his highly paranoid personality led him to make some unusual efforts to control the behavior of the women surrounding him. Rumors that he found the milking of cows overly sexual and that he personally disfigured antique nude statues at the Palais Mazarin, if true, would confirm that the duke took his religious morality to an extreme.²⁸ He also took some unusual measures to control his new wife, including hiring a servant to spy on her and report her every movement to him. For her part, the duchess appears to have adopted a policy of appeasement, observing the need to "shew submissions beyond my natural inclination" (34). Just as for Zayas's female characters, the duchess implies the artificiality of an excessive display of submission (or femininity): she recognizes that it is not natural to women but is nevertheless socially necessary to maintain the peace.²⁹

In her *Memoires* the duchess reveals that the duke's exercise of domestic tyranny centered on a combination of psychological manipulation and physical control. The theme of enclosure arises frequently, as both space and geography are imbued with power. The duke was intensely jealous of all who associated with Hortense, and he attempted to restrict her interactions with others as well as her movements. He carted her from village to village (even when she was very pregnant); he would not allow her to ride in her coach alone and, on at least one occasion, refused to provide her with a coach to leave her home; if he learned of developing friendships between the duchess and other women, he would remove her; he forced her to go to Paris three weeks after she was brought to bed with child.³⁰ From the outset of the text, the duchess writes frankly of his "violent passion for her," such that he claimed that if "he could but have the happiness to be married to me, it would not grieve him to dye three months after" (3). In spite of this professed love, the duke's "malicious tricks" against her once they were married were too many for her to list; he sought to wear her down and oppose even her "most innocent desires" (28).

So began the process of the duchess's separation from her husband, which was to take place in stages. When she resolved to leave him for a second time and remove to her brother's house, she was confronted with his insistence "that I should not go out when I pleased, meaning to make me a prisoner in my own house"; when she attempted to flee, he pushed her, threw himself in her way, and "called out to the servants to close doors" (35). His decision to "wall up a door" through which she had previously escaped signaled that "he never intended me any better usage for the future" (35). She was able to overpower him in the end only because, she writes, "my grief and vexation supplied me with more than my usual strength" (35). Although she returned to the duke on more than one occasion after fleeing, when she considered undertaking another move with

²⁷ Cyril Hughes Hartmann, *The Vagabond Duchess: The Life of Hortense Mancini Duchesse Mazarin* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1926), 50.

²⁸ Other rumors abound, but his transformation of the palace art is declared "absolutely authentic" by the duchess's biographer (*ibid.*, 78).

²⁹ See Boyer, *Disenchantments*, 140.

³⁰ Hartmann, *Vagabond Duchess*, 73.

him, this time to Alsace, her friends reminded her of “the little security I must hope for, from a man of that Caprice, in a place so Remote, and where his power was so absolute” (37). The duke was an unquestionably domineering and wealthy man whose public and domestic power came together to create the image of a mini-Leviathan, exercising authority as unchecked as it was arbitrary. In reference to his capriciousness, his psychological manipulations, his “absolute tyranny” in her household, the Duchess of Mazarin describes her husband as a “By-got Cabal,” a fanatical adherent to a conspiracy or religious faction (29).

Although she sees his madness plainly, in an era before legalized divorce she had no respectable way to terminate the marriage. In her *Memoires* she documents the travails of an elite woman seeking both to recuperate her own reputation and to obtain permission to live separately from her abusive husband. If her leaving was to become an issue of public interest, then so should his behavior within their marriage. Leaving her children behind, she traveled about Europe, resisting his pleas for her to return, and ultimately secured for herself a refuge in London with a pension from the court of Charles II. In the tradition of the *femme forte*, the duchess constructs for herself an independent life, although she is never free of scandal.³¹ In this sense, both her life and her memoir are exceptional, for few women, married or otherwise, possessed the kind of status that allowed them to cross borders so freely, or to publish a defense of their choice to do so. As a form of life writing, Mazarin’s *Memoires* do not extend to consider the situation of women more generally, nor does she challenge or question marriage as an institution.³² Rather, the duchess’s account is significant as a public testimonial to the potential abuses of masculine power in the domestic sphere, exposing for public view the duke’s malicious power and her fortitude in resisting it. Although marital discord and violence often expanded into the public domain as neighbors, friends, and the law intervened to sort the matter out, Mazarin’s *Memoires* constitute a rare and detailed account of a woman’s experience in her own voice.³³

One of the most important interventions in the conversation surrounding the legal dispute between the duke and duchess comes in the form of Mary Astell’s *Reflections*, written after the duchess’s death. Having read first the legal material surrounding their separation and then the *Memoires*, Astell responds with an analysis on the nature of marital power relations, which she sees as vitally connected to the relations between men and women in society. Thus, we move from the fictional writing of Zayas, to the life writing of the Duchess of Mazarin, to the incisive political commentary and theory of Astell. While Mazarin could not see past the particularities of her own situation to consider the condition of women on a larger scale, Astell moves easily from the particular to the general, offering a critique of gendered power relations that shares much with Zayas. Both Astell and Zayas are concerned about the lack of educational opportunities for women and its effects on women’s status in marriage and in society. And both are concerned, not just with the hard power husbands can exercise over their wives, but with the soft power of passion and sentiment and its capacity to disguise the true nature of men’s private power and, for Zayas particularly, its mystification of violence against women.

Although Astell makes clear her disapproval of the Duchess of Mazarin’s choices, she nonetheless identifies a central problem in the duchess’s marriage to the duke: the ill effects of absolute

³¹ Nelson, “Memoirs of Hortense and Marie Mancini,” 17.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ See Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.

authority. Astell does not endorse absolutism in any location (nor, to be fair, does she completely reject it), although she is more critical of its private than its public manifestations. She wonders why her contemporaries resist the exercise of tyranny in the public realm but tolerate it in the domestic. Far from devaluing marriage as an institution, which in its ideal form she thinks "provides the best that can be for Domestic Quiet and Content, and for the Education of Children" (37), Astell nevertheless takes up the duchess's claim about her lack of security, asserting that a man of a certain temper should be considered "not fit for a Husband, scarce fit for Society, but ought be turn'd out of the Herd to live by himself" (37). Significantly, we can detect here allusions to Thomas Hobbes in that marriage is described as a state that is as insecure in terms of personal safety for women as the state of nature is for Hobbes's presocial inhabitants.³⁴ In Hobbesian terms Astell describes how the social position of the contractors in marriage is not on par; the husband-to-be can readily agree to terms before marriage that he has not fully considered, "for he performs no more afterwards than he thinks fit" (51). The woman, by contrast, "has in truth no security but the Man's Honour and Good-nature, a Security that in this present Age no wise Person would venture much upon" (51). Even in the best of circumstances, marriage is so clearly the worse deal for women, and wives endure so much more than do men, that the least men can do is soften the edges of their authority to create a more satisfying union for both partners. This may sound at first like an appeal for sentimental marriage, when what Astell wishes for is a genuine enhancement of, and an extension of reason into, the relationship between "monarch" and "subject" allowing the two to coexist in a relation of mutual respect, even if not equality.

Another central theme running through Astell's *Reflections* is that passion can misguide women, that women's apprehension of events can be clouded by sentiment as mystification. This is particularly so for the woman "who has been taught to think Marriage her only Preferment, the Sum-total of her Endeavours, the completion of all her hopes, that which must settle and make her happy in this world" (60). Those who have been misled or misguided by the "Glitter and Pomp of a Wedding" and "whose Expectation has been rais'd by Court-ship, by all the fine things that her Lover, her Governess, and Domestic Flatterers say, will find a terrible disappointment when the hurry is over, and when she comes calmly to consider her Condition, and views it no more under a false Appearance, but as it truly is" (60). Here we find Astell remarking on a sentimental, domestic ideal that obscures the true nature of the marital power structure. Women are at fault, too, for failing to apprehend what lies beneath the veneer and for misleading each other. What some men really seek, Astell claims, the "sum of [their] violent love and courtship," is an "upper servant," one whom she describes in the most Rousseauian language:

One who may breed his children, taking all the care and trouble of their Education. . . . One whose Beauty, Wit, or good Humour and agreeable Conversation, will entertain him at Home when he has been contradicted and disappointed abroad; who will do him that Justice the ill-natur'd World denies him, that is, in any one's Language but his own, sooth his Pride and Flatter his Vanity . . . to conclude him in the right, when others are so Ignorant, or so rude as to deny it. (50–51)

³⁴ Penny A. Weiss, *Canon Fodder: Historical Women Political Thinkers* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 151. This provocative question of post-social contract security risks for women was taken up later in the eighteenth century by Catharine Macaulay. See Wendy Gunther-Canada, "Catharine Macaulay's 'Loose Remarks' on Hobbesian Politics," in *Feminist Interpretations of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Nancy J. Hirschmann and Joanne H. Wright (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

In these passages, Astell both registers and debunks the language of sentimental and companionate marriage and familial relations. Let women not be deceived by the false language and deceiving practices of courtship, she advises, especially since marriage requires obedience of women, even in the most desperate of circumstances. Women should not mistake men's power, nor their folly: "Have not all the great Actions that have been perform'd in the World been done by Men? Have not they founded Empires and overturned them? . . . What is it they cannot do? They make Worlds and ruine them. . . . All that the wise Man pronounces is an Oracle" (61). Making a vital link between men's power in the public, political world and the entitlements they enjoy in marriage, she points out that "when a Wife's Temper does not please, if she makes her Husband uneasie, he can find entertainments abroad, he has a hundred ways of relieving himself, but neither Prudence nor Duty will allow a Woman to fly out, her Business and Entertainment are at home, and 'tho he makes it ever so uneasie to her she must be content and make her best on't" (48). It is a woman's job to prop up, affirm, and admire in her "proper sphere of action," especially when men fail to appreciate one another (61–62). By keeping women ignorant and uneducated, men betray "their true interest" (62), which is to continue to benefit from the domestic power they enjoy, while women, seduced by the ideal of a sentimental union, enlist in their own servitude.

The question of how well Astell addresses the duchess's specific situation is a separate matter, since her remarks about marriage do not always apply in the duchess's case. She withholds support for the duchess's choice to separate from her husband (pondering whether the replacement of one's servant warrants such drastic action; 35) and implies that a woman ought to consider her choice in marriage carefully since she elects a "monarch for life . . . giving an authority she cannot recall" (48)—note a Hobbesian tone once again.³⁵ In particular, a woman ought to select one who has "government over his own passions," implying that women ought to possess this knowledge before marriage. Still, in placing the onus on women to take proper care in their choice of partner, Astell sidesteps the fact that, for someone of the duchess's rank, marriage is less a personal choice and more a political and economic arrangement (recalling her potent phrase "it is not always in our choise to live our own way"). Indeed, while Cardinal Mazarin considered many potential husbands for Hortense, including Charles II before the Restoration, she was most likely not consulted at all. Furthermore, Astell blames the victim and argues that a husband may test his wife's "patience and fortitude to the utmost . . . but that's all he can do: 'tis herself only can accomplish her ruin" (35). Given Astell's deep sense of religious duty and asceticism, her inability to endorse Mazarin's apparently reckless life comes as no surprise.

Yet her critique of marital tyranny certainly does apply to the case of the Duke and Duchess of Mazarin. Astell's *Reflections* exposes aspects of contemporary practice unfavorable to women while also demonstrating quite clearly that what happens within the confines of private marriage is a matter of public concern. Both the duchess and Astell take women's personal experiences within marriage and cross them over into the public domain: the duchess's *Memoires* are a self-exculpatory public exercise, while Astell is interested in marriage as a political issue.

Equally important to the critique of marital tyranny that Astell offers is her antisentimental commentary on marriage and the family. While Maria de Zayas is concerned with the artificiality

³⁵ The issue of passive obedience and proper hierarchy in marriage is a fraught topic in feminist interpretation of Astell. See Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), chap. 6; Bridget Hill, *The First English Feminist: Reflections upon Marriage and Other Writings by Mary Astell* (Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1986); Patricia Springborg, introduction to Mary Astell, *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

and obfuscation associated with men's courtship and with the ways in which artificial sentiments enclose women physically and psychologically, Astell's *Reflections* marks one of the first acknowledgments of the rise of sentimental rhetoric surrounding the family. She very clearly notes the vulnerability of women in their circumscribed, domestic lives when men's power is unchecked and encourages a move toward greater sensitivity shown by men toward their wives. Her solutions, to be armed with knowledge and foresight and to practice passive obedience, on the one hand, or to choose an entirely different path and abstain from marriage altogether, on the other, may not satisfy modern sensibilities, but even within these constraints, she presents a powerful argument against the falsity and folly of sentimentality.

THINKING THROUGH THE HISTORICITY OF SENTIMENTAL RHETORIC

In surveying women's, rather than men's, texts and giving weight to both conventional and more marginal sources, we find that the sentimental familial ideal has a complicated history and that there is a continuity between women's critiques of excess passion between lovers, on the one hand, and their critiques of sentimental familial relations, on the other. Before sentimentalism takes hold within political thought and literature in the mid-eighteenth century, women writers take up issues of familial power relations, the problems with masculine tyranny, and the obfuscations associated with passionate discourses of all kinds. Quite apart from social practice and material circumstances, the power of the ideas associated with women's virtue and propriety, the investment in the idea of women as objects of male affection and as the repository of love in the family, both robs them of an independent subject position and disempowers them in their capacity to fit into the ideal of active citizen. While the feminine-domestic ideal did not confine women absolutely, as these writers clearly demonstrate (and, indeed, they confined women of lower social status much less so), the association of women with the domestic sphere and the role that sentimental language played in securing that association were significant issues for Zayas and Astell. Thus, to claim, as many social and gender historians have done, that the language of public and private is no longer relevant because it is not descriptive, or because the private meant something different to inhabitants of other historical periods than it does to us, will have the unintended effect of marginalizing an issue of vital concern to the seventeenth-century women writers in question.³⁶

I suggest that the historicity of normative ideals about the family and our tendency to guide current practice by holding up historical examples and/or fictions indicate the ongoing importance of analyzing the history of the family in political thought. It is historically important for us to know, not just the social practices of family life in the seventeenth century, but also how women thought and wrote about love, marriage, and the family in the seventeenth century. It is significant to know, for example, that long before Virginia Woolf famously lectured about the dangers of the "Angel in the House," the ultimate symbol of the sentimental family form that must be destroyed before women can write, Astell had written about the mystifications of the

³⁶ For example, Erica Longfellow notes that it is now commonplace to point out the challenges of separating public from private in the early-modern period, and she tests for herself how meaningful these terms might be for the seventeenth century. She concludes that "private" is a term that must be used with caution, primarily because its meaning does not adhere to our present understandings (i.e., as something to which individuals claim a right). See Erica Longfellow, "Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (April 2006): 313–34.

self-abnegating and nurturing feminine beacon of the home. And before Woolf asserted presciently and provocatively that the sentimental relationship in marriage took hold because, for a variety of reasons having to do “with the British Empire, our colonies, Queen Victoria, Lord Tennyson, the growth of the middle class and so on ... *<a real relationship> between men and women was then unattainable,*”³⁷ María de Zayas had illuminated the ways that, far from constituting veracious accounts of marital affect, hyperbolic proclamations of love by men reflected more of an interest in the protection of their property and honor. As Okin has argued convincingly, sentimental familial ideals are not benign but rather have served a vital political purpose in liberal political thought by masking what came to be women’s hopes for political equality behind a normative devotion to private responsibilities. Although Zayas and Astell might not have proposed any sort of radical solution, their writings indicate that some women thinkers were not so easily deceived. A

³⁷ Virginia Woolf, speech before the London/National Society for Women’s Service, January 21, 1931, reprinted in Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel Essay Portion of “The Years”* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), xxx (emphasis added). The angle brackets enclose Woolf’s own later insertions to the speech.