

# Negotiating (Re-)marriage and Female Agency in the Golden Age Novella

*The Widow as Head of the Household and the Economy of Space and Desire in María de Zayas and Mariana de Carvajal*

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## 1. Introduction

While many negotiations on the marriage market might focus on young lovers and first vows, the perspective shifts when it comes to actors within the marriage market who are not newcomers to it, but re-enter it after the death of their spouse: Widows and widowers can participate in negotiating marriage as matchmakers for their children as well as negotiate their own remarriage.

Cultural studies emphasize on the different perception and representation of male and female widowhood throughout the centuries. In early modernity, female widowhood was perceived as a fragile and potentially dangerous status. In the introduction to the collection of essays *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (1999), Cavallo and Warner distinguish between three key stereotypes of the widow: “the good or ideal widow, the merry widow and the poor widow”.<sup>1</sup> While men would be considered and evaluated according to various social, economic and cultural factors (thus making their widowhood only one element amongst others), women were valued according to their marital status.<sup>2</sup> It is thus no surprise that one of the most influential treatises of the sixteenth century, a manual on the education of a Christian woman, *Institutio*

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1 Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner: *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*: “Introduction”, in: *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by id., London: Longman, 1999, pp. 3–23, here p. 6. See also Janina Lanza: *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, and Stephanie Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain. Protectors, Proprietors and Patrons*, Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2010; Allison Levy (ed.): *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003; Nausia Pimoulier: “Las viudas y las segundas nupcias en la Europa moderna”, in: *Memoria y Civilización* 9 (2006), pp. 233–260; Gesa Ingendahl: *Witwen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Eine kulturhistorische Studie*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2006, as well as a very recent collection of essays edited by Paloma Bravo and Donatella Gagliardi (eds.): *Viudas. Roles y Representaciones en la España de la Primera Edad Moderna*, Lausanne et al.: Peter Lang, 2025.

2 Cavallo and Warner: *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, p. 3.

*feminae christianae* (1524) by Juan Luis Vives, is divided in three main chapters which correspond to three stages of the female existence as maids, wives, and widows.

While as maids or wives, women are under the guardianship of a male head of family, who is in charge of their moral, physical and social integrity, as widows they seem to enter a gray area. Depending on her economic and social position, the widow faces the challenge to provide for herself and her children. In some cases, this leads her to turn to her husband's or her own family, or in the lack of their support, to the charity of the church, the crown or local authorities and institutions. In other cases, depending on the country's legislation, she becomes the head of the household. As Stephanie Fink de Backer points out, widows in early modern Spain enjoyed relative freedom and legal and financial sovereignty. Based on historical documents from Early Modern Toledo ranging from judicial proceedings to account books she concludes, that "widows appear to have been doing just about everything a man could do, save for holding ecclesiastical, military, or political office".<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, there were important differences between aristocratic, rich widows and poor widows, whose cases would rather be found in records from charitable institutions or the inquisition.<sup>4</sup> In early modern Spain, wars and the appeal of the recently colonized Americas and Caribbean left many wives without their husbands. Widows became a social group that had to be integrated into the country's economy and the social structures of the marriage market and reproduction: they were responsible for marrying off their children and ventured onto the marriage market themselves. While historical documents point to the economic and social agency of widows, contemporary treatises shape an ideal of 'retirement', the so-called "recogimiento" as the main virtue of female widowhood.<sup>5</sup> This rule, as we shall see, is an attempt to control the female libidinal economy, which literature caricatures in the stereotype of the "merry widow". The sexual experience that the widow most obviously has, combined with her new freedom, turns her into a dangerous element for the social order, which the religious and moral writers try to control and create rules for: The most important rule being the withdrawal from the world.

3 Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 6.

4 Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 7.

5 Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, pp. 17–40; Bravo and Gagliardi: *Viudas*; cf. also Jenny Haase and Sophie Houdard et al. (eds.): *Rückzug. En retrait/e. Produktivität des Solitären in Kunst, Religion, Geschlechtergeschichte / La solitude créative au prisme du genre dans les arts et les religions*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2025.

Literary texts address this gap between everyday practices, supported by contracts and negotiations, and behavioral ideals as found in treatises and manuals.<sup>6</sup> It is fiction, and very prominently the novella, which becomes a space for the negotiation of gender roles and concepts of female agency.<sup>7</sup> As a character steeped in stereotypes and moral and erotic expectations, the widow reveals new ways of bargaining on the marriage market.

This article aims to examine the literary representation of the ambivalent position of widows on the marriage market in the work of the Golden Age authors María de Zayas y Sotomayor and Mariana de Carvajal y Saavedra, who choose the genre of the novella for playfully negotiating both authorship and gender roles in a new urban setting.<sup>8</sup> Against the background of the stereotypical depiction of the widow between victim (the poor widow), example of virtuous withdrawal and self-control (the ideal widow) and a grotesque and distorted image of lustful sexuality (merry widow), Zayas and Carvajal play with stereotypes and emphasize the ambivalence of the widow's ambiguous position. The two authors use the restrictions imposed on women in their status as widows in a subversive way, doing so with regard to 1. economic, 2. spatial-theoretical, and 3. gender-related constellations.

After her husband's death, the widow is expected to 'return' to her innocence and take Christ as her spouse.<sup>9</sup> But is this sexually experienced woman to be trusted? Concerned about the knowledge and experience gained in marriage, theological treatises suggest that a widow's attempt to remarry is usually caused by her sexual desire and thus is proof of a vicious female appetite. The demands placed on the widow are ambivalent, as she must simultaneously withdraw from social life and care for the household and children as a mother, filling the void left by her deceased husband and taking his place as head of the household. Her life is thus caught in the tension of a space that she must both control and hide in. In his treatise *Tratado del gobierno de la familia*, Gaspar

6 Cf. Antonio Gargano, "Imágenes de la viuda, entre lascivia y castidad: modelos clásicos y figuras cervantinas", in: Bravo and Gagliardi: *Viudas*, pp. 19–44.

7 Cf. María Isabel Barbeito Carneiro (ed.): *Mujeres y literatura del Siglo de Oro: espacios profanos y espacios conventuales*, Madrid: Ediciones del Orto, 2007; Monika Bosse and Barbara Potthast et al. (eds.): *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico. María de Zayas – Isabel Rebeca Correa – Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1999; Isabel Colón Calderón: *La novela corta en el siglo XVII*, Madrid: Ediciones del Laberinto, 2001; Nieves Baranda and Anne J. Cruz (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Early Modern Spanish Women Writers*, New York / London: Routledge, 2018.

8 Nieves Romero-Díaz: *Nueva nobleza, nueva novela: reescribiendo la cultura urbana del barroco*, Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2002.

9 Bravo and Gagliardi: *Viudas*.

Astete writes: “La continencia viudal es un estado medio entre la virginidad y el matrimonio y así participa de los dos estados: en la continencia participa del estado de la virginidad y en el cuidado de gobernar su familia y sus hijos del estado del matrimonio.”<sup>10</sup>

The difficulty of the widow to fulfil these conflicting expectations has already been noted by another contemporary writer who was more concerned with rules of sociability. In his *Reloj de príncipes* Antonio de Guevara ironically pities the widow:

¡O, cuán triste!, ¡o, cuán enojoso!, ¡o, cuán peligroso es el estado de las viudas!: en que si una viuda sale de su casa, la juzgan por deshonesta; si no quiere salir de casa, piérdesele su hacienda; si se ríe un poco, nótanla de liviana; si nunca ríe, dicen que es hipócrita; si va a la iglesia, nótanla de andariega; si no va a la iglesia, dicen que es a su marido ingrata; si anda mal vestida, nótanla de extremada; si tiene la ropa limpia, dicen que se cansa ya de ser viuda; si es esquiva, nótanla de presuntuosa; si es conversable, luego es a sospechosa [...]”<sup>11</sup>

The confusion about the widow’s role in society even leads to the idea of a masculine widow, who shall act as a man and as a woman at the same time. On this topos, Renoux-Caron quotes Juan de la Cerda, who writes “la varonil y buena viuda ha de tener les veces de padre y madre”<sup>12</sup> and Gaspar Astete,

10 “Widow’s continence is a state between virginity and marriage and thus participates in both states: in continence it participates in the state of virginity and in the care of governing one’s family and children in the state of marriage”. My translation from Gaspar Astete: *Quarta parte de las obras del Padre G. Astete de la Compañía de Jesús. Tratado del gobierno de la familia, y estado de las viudas y doncellas*, Burgos, en la imprenta de Philippe de Iunta, por Iuan Baptista Varesio, 1597, p. 20, quoted after: Pauline Renoux-Caron: “Las cartas de San Jerónimo a las viudas en la España del siglo XVI”, in: Bravo and Gagliardi: *Viudas*, pp. 45–66, here p. 57.

11 “Oh, how sad, oh, how annoying, oh, how dangerous is the state of widows! If a widow leaves her house, she is judged dishonest; if she does not want to leave her house, she loses her property; if she laughs a little, she is considered frivolous; if she never laughs, they say she is a hypocrite; if she goes to church, they label her busy; if she does not go to church, they say she is ungrateful to her husband; if she is poorly dressed, they label her excessive; if her clothes are clean, they say she is tired of being a widow; if she is aloof, they label her presumptuous; if she is talkative, she is immediately suspicious [...]” My translation from Antonio de Guevara: *Libro llamado Reloj de Príncipes en el cual va incorporado el muy famoso libro de Marco Aurelio*, Valladolid: Nicolás Tierra, 1529, fol. 276, quoted after: Pauline Renoux-Caron: “Las cartas de San Jerónimo a las viudas en la España del siglo XVI”, p. 61.

12 Juan de la Cerda: *Libro intitulado Vida política de todos los estados de mugeres i en el qual se dan muy provechosos y christianos documentos y auisos, para criarse y conseruarse deuidamente las mugeres en sus estados. Divídese este libro en cinco tratados. El primero es el estado de las Donzellas. El segundo, de las Monjas. El tercero de las Casadas. El quarto, de*

who insists: “Las viudas han de ser padre y madre para sus hijos, señor para sus criados, porque muchas dellas quedan con tan amplia y numerosa familia que han de menester gran valor para gobernarla.”<sup>13</sup>

In the novellas by Zayas and Carvajal, these conflicting demands on the widow open up a rich scale of creative possibilities, and the widow emerges as a dazzling figure of liminality who is capable of transcending gender boundaries. In contrast to the precept of “recogimiento”, female novella authors reveal a new spatial order of female friendship and networking, agency, and hidden spaces of desire. As head of their economic and libidinous household, the fictional widows introduce a new social economy. In the novellas by Zayas and Carvajal, we encounter complex spaces and narrative structures for love and friendship that promise female agency on the marriage market. Furthermore, in the case of Mariana de Carvajal, the author’s social status as a widow is used as a selling point at the moment of negotiating authorship and is thus positioned within a specific economy of attention.

## 2. The Perks and Perils of Early Modern Widows

It is no news that early modern theologians are very busy telling women what to do and what not to do, filling many pages of complicated treatises with regulations and warnings. Among those, the status of the widow holds an important place.<sup>14</sup> The chapter on widows in Juan Luis Vives’ *Institutio feminae christianae* (1524)<sup>15</sup> is divided in seven subchapters addressing the process of mourning (a widow shall not cry too much nor too little), the funeral, the memory of the deceased husband, the abstinence and morality of the widow, a set of rules for how she shall behave inside and outside the house and a last

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*las Biudas. El quinto, contiene diuersos capítulos de mugeres en general*, Alcalá de Henares: Juan Gracián, 1599, p. 443–444, quoted after Pauline Renoux-Caron: “Las cartas de San Jerónimo a las viudas en la España del siglo XVI”, p. 63.

13 “Widows must be fathers and mothers to their children, masters to their servants, because many of them are left with such large and numerous families that they need great courage to govern them.” My translation from Astete: *Quarta parte de las obras del Padre G. Astete de la Compañía de Jesús*, p. 3.

14 Fink de Backer quotes among others Francisco de Osuna: *Norte de los estados* (Sevilla, 1531, chapter De la viudez); Francisco Ortiz Lucio: *Lugares comunes* (Alcalá, 1592); Gaspar Astete: *Tratado del gobierno de la familia y estado de las viudas y doncellas* (Burgos, 1597); Juan de Espinosa, *Diálogo en laude de las mujeres* (Granada, 1580); Fray Luís de León: *La perfecta casada* (Zaragoza, 1584); Juan de Soto: *Obligaciones de todos los estados y oficios* (Alcalá, 1619).

15 Cf. Gagliardi: “Viudas ejemplares: notes sobre la *Institutio feminae christianae* de Vives”.

chapter about remarriage, “las segundas nupcias”.<sup>16</sup> The major rule concerns the aforementioned withdrawal from society: “La viuda nada debe hacer en la plaza, en las reuniones de hombres, entre la muchedumbre; en estos lugares existe un grave riesgo para esas virtudes que más se recomiendan a la viuda, a saber, el pudor, la castidad, el buen nombre y la santidad.”<sup>17</sup>

Vives goes on to give detailed examples of how to dress and speak modestly. In order to guard her reputation, the widow is supposed to live in a very secluded manner and she shall only leave the house at the utmost necessity. She can only truly excel in keeping her good reputation by staying inside and making sure that the men in her house, family members and servants, have limited access to her. Vives advises the widow to have no direct contact to male servants, but rather choose an older male or female governor to take on this task. The closed off house will become a major topic of the novellas, all the while being turned upside down. The ‘new’ perfect widow uses her skills in self-control and reclusion, as we will see in Carvajal and Zayas, not to comply with the male ideal, but to her advantage as it will allow her to create a private space under her own direction.

After losing her husband, Vives insists, the widow should turn her love to God, who would become her only husband: “En la viudez, Cristo, su Esposo, se presentará con facilidad ante la que quiera vivir virtuosamente [...]”.<sup>18</sup> Like most authors, he is very sceptical of remarriage:

Lo que dijimos de las doncellas se acomoda a lo que estamos tratando ahora. Porque es mucho menos conveniente que se embellezca la viuda, la cual no sólo no debe buscar por sí misma un nuevo matrimonio, sino ni tan siquiera admitirlo o aceptarlo si la ocasión se presenta. De mala gana, oponiendo resistencia e inducida por una necesidad inevitable, se dirige a las segundas nupcias la mujer honrada.<sup>19</sup>

16 Cf. Pimoulier: “Las viudas y las segundas nupcias en la Europa moderna: últimas aportaciones”.

17 “A widow should do nothing in the marketplace, in gatherings of men, or among crowds; in these places there is a serious risk to those virtues that are most recommended to widows, namely modesty, chastity, good reputation, and holiness.” My translation from the online-version of Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, published by the Biblioteca Valenciana Digital, and follow the pagination indicated, chapter IV: “Como debe comportarse fuera de la casa”, p. 383, <https://bivaldi.gva.es/es/corpus/unidad.do?posicion=1&idCorpus=1&idUnidad=10066>.

18 Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, chapter IV: “La continencia y la honestidad de la viuda”, p. 373.

19 “What we said about maidens applies to what we are discussing now. For it is much less desirable for a widow to make herself pretty, since she should not only refrain from seeking a new marriage herself, and should not even admit or accept it if the opportunity

Vives suspects the main reason for remarriage to be the female sexual appetite, especially in young widows: “Confiesa tu torpeza. Realmente no hay ninguna mujer que se case para no acostarse con su marido.”<sup>20</sup> Remarriage is only admitted as a means to avoid any temptation for dishonour and bad reputation and the second wedding shall take place discreetly and without any ostentation. Reading his disapproving words in the chapter on second marriages, Vives approves of them only insofar as they do not give weak women the opportunity to enjoy freedom and use it for vice:

En una palabra, quiero que las más jóvenes se casen, engendren hijos, administren la casa y no den ocasión alguna de murmurar al enemigo; [...] otras no quieren casarse, porque prefieren la libertad. [...] Pero si te quedas soltera para hacer lo que te venga en gana sin nadie que te reprenda o te aconseje, entonces se trata de la libertad de la carne, y una ocasión no para la libertad sino para la muerte.<sup>21</sup>

In the chapter about memory, Vives recommends the widow to act as if her husband was not deceased, but just absent. The wife is thus to take care of all matters of the family according to how her spouse would act if he were present:

Trate así a su familia, administre así su casa, eduque así a sus hijos, de manera que el esposo se alegre y sea consciente de que ha obrado bien al dejar tras sí una esposa con ese temple, y no se comporte de manera que sus airados manes se venguen de su mujer disoluta y malvada.<sup>22</sup>

Vives also assigns her responsibilities within the governance of the household and thereby implicates the necessity of agency. Nevertheless, it is a very

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arises. Reluctantly, resisting, and driven by an unavoidable necessity, the honourable woman enters into a second marriage.” My translation from Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, chapter VII: “Las segundas nupcias”, p. 389.

20 “Admit your foolishness. There really is no woman out there who does not get married so she can sleep with her husband.” My translation from Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, chapter VII: “Las segundas nupcias”, p. 389.

21 “In a word, I want the younger women to marry, bear children, manage the household, and give no offense to the enemy [...]; others do not want to marry because they prefer freedom. [...] But if you remain single to do whatever you want without anyone to rebuke or advise you, then it is a matter of freedom of the flesh, and an occasion not for freedom but for death.” My translation from Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, chapter VII: “Las segundas nupcias”, p. 389.

22 “Treat your family, manage your household, educate your children in such a way, so that your husband will be happy and aware that he has done well in leaving behind a wife of such character, and will not behave in such a way that his angry ancestors will take revenge on his dissolute and wicked wife.” My translation from Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, chapter III: “La memoria del marido”, p. 369.

restrictive and mimetic agency as the wife shall only carry out things the way her husband would. The widow is under special scrutiny as her appearance and her words will be carefully watched: “En estado de viudez conviene que la mujer actúe con mayor circunspección, dado que todos los vicios se le imputan a ella igual que el elogio por las virtudes se centra sólo en ella, siendo así que, mientras vivía el marido, de una gran parte de ambos se le responsabilizaba a él.”<sup>23</sup>

Even the theologian Francisco Ortiz Lucio, who insists on the widows “recogimiento” and calls the life of the woman without her husband “monstrosity and bad business” (“Y es mal negocio y monstruosidad, andar el cuerpo sin la cabeça, y la muger sin su marido”), reluctantly admits in his treatise *Lugares comunes*, “Y esta tal es, la que en defecto y falta de su marido, puede regir y gobernar.”<sup>24</sup> In addition to the administration of property and inheritance, *governar*, the governing and administration of the house, also includes family policy, that is, the upbringing and marriage of children.

While the treatises certainly differ, they do have one thing in common: they do not wish to see the widow as an active part of the marriage market and warn her against remarriage, especially if she already has children. Interestingly, Gaspar Astete<sup>25</sup> explains this scepticism about remarriage from a nearly ‘feminist’ perspective, albeit involuntarily. In his *Tratado del gobierno de la familia* he writes:

Acuerdese que assi como aquellos que han escapado de una grave tormenta, y se veen ya libres, salvos, y seguros en el puerto, no desean otra vez entrar en los peligros de que se escaparon, assi ella [la viuda, AK] pues Dios la libro de los grandes peligros del matrimonio, la puso en el puerto mas seguro del estado de la viudez, no quiera bolver al peligro en que antes estava.<sup>26</sup>

23 “In widowhood, it is fitting for women to act with greater circumspection, given that all vices are attributed to them, just as praise for virtues is focused solely on them, whereas during their husbands’ lifetime, much of the responsibility for both was attributed to him.” My translation from Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer christiana*, chapter IV: “La continencia y la honestidad de la vuida”, p. 373.

24 Francisco Ortiz Lucio: *Lugares communes*, Folio 72r, quoted after Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 33.

25 Michelle Guillemont: “La viuda christiana según el jesuita Gaspar Astete”, in: Bravo and Gagliardi: *Viudas*, pp. 85–104.

26 “God has liberated [the widow] from the great dangers of matrimony, and has placed her in a more secure port, the status of widowhood. She should not want to return to the risks to which she was previously exposed.” Astete: *Tratado del gobierno de la familia*, p. 58, quoted after Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 35.

This quotation is particularly interesting because, at a time when marriage was the unchanging ideal, Astete admits that marriage constitutes a strong restriction of freedom for women. With remarriage the widow might fear to lose the control over her own property and over the property and heritage of the children from her first marriage. By arguing against remarriage, Astete acknowledges the widow as a genuinely autonomous economic subject. She might have lost her husband, but she just gained the rule over her house: “En este numero entran las viudas, que tambien tienen familias que gobernar [...] porque muchas dellas quedan con tan amplia y numerosa familia que han menester gran valor para gobernarla.”<sup>27</sup> He concludes by placing the widow at the centre of the household and sole governor over her assets: “De donde se sigue, que pues ella queda sola, a ella sola pertenece el gobierno de toda su casa.”<sup>28</sup>

Remarriage, and this seems to be especially relevant for our interest in emotions and calculations on the marriage market, is rejected for genuinely oiko-nomic reasons. Renouncing to love goes hand in hand with economic autonomy. To replace the *pater familias* at the head of the household the woman must forgo active participation in the negotiations of the marriage market and instead worry about marrying off her own children.

Stephanie Fink de Backer shows that widows in Early Modern Spain actually enjoyed a special right: In the event of their husband's death, they were legally entitled first to recover their dowry and the *arras* that the husband had paid her, as well as fifty percent of the property jointly earned during the marriage. De Backer uses historical case studies from archives to show that widows in Spain thus had a financially independent status: they did not have to return to their father's home, but could preside over their own house.<sup>29</sup> It is this historical circumstance that forces the male authors of moral treatises to consider women as governors and teach them how they should budget and govern their household and wealth. Interestingly, Astete simply tells female readers to consult the same chapters on household economy as male readers.

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27 “In this number enter the widows, who also have families to govern [...] because many of them are left with such a large and numerous family that they have to have great courage to govern it.” Astete: *Tratado del gobierno de la familia*, p. 2–3, quoted after Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 35.

28 “Because she remains alone, to her alone pertains the governance of all her house.” Astete: *Tratado del gobierno de la familia*, p. 4, quoted after Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 35.

29 Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 111–134.

He succinctly states: “por abreviar siga el orden que hemos dicho en la tercera parte que deven tener los señores en sus familias.”<sup>30</sup>

The widow thus has to find a balance between complying with the ideal of a virtuous widow, turning her back on the world and living according to “recogimiento” and the ideal of a prudent governor. While the male authors strongly advise her to live up to this challenge by forgoing the sexual economy and concentrating on the household, we will now examine two ways in which women writers tell stories of fictional widows who find a way to have it both.

### 3. Widows as Match-Makers and Heart-Breakers in María de Zayas’ *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*

After examining the male treatises on widowhood, we now turn to female voices known for their ironic subversion of male discourse on women: the two Golden Age authors María de Zayas y Sotomayor and Mariana de Carvajal y Saavedra. Both authors venture into the terrain of the novella and use the established patterns of male-written depictions of love affairs to transform them from a female perspective. In doing so, they demonstrate knowledge and expertise in the genre while surpassing the standards set by male authors.<sup>31</sup>

Mariana de Carvajal’s writing is often compared to María de Zayas’ transgressive narrative style and subversion of gender roles, and her novellas are attributed a more normative, less violent image of female behavior.<sup>32</sup> When

30 “For the sake of brevity follow the order that we have said in the third part that the noblemen must have in their families.” Astete: *Tratado del gobierno de la familia*, p. 57, quoted after Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 33.

31 Cf. Monika Bosse: “El *sarao* de María de Zayas y Sotomayor: Una razón (femenina) de contar el amor”, in: *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico. María de Zayas – Isabel Rebeca Correa – Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, ed. by id. and Barbara Potthast, Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1999, pp. 239–300; Ursula Jung: *Autorinnen des Barock. Weibliche Autorschaft in weltlichen und religiösen Kontexten*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2010; Irene Albers and Uta Felten (eds.): *Escenas de transgresión. María de Zayas en su contexto literario-cultural*, Frankfurt am Main and Madrid: Vervuert and Iberoamericana, 2009, here especially Claudia Gronemann: “Liminalidad y transgresión: una reflexión sobre el concepto de autoría en María de Zayas y Sotomayor”, pp. 97–108 and Stephan Leopold: “El aplazamiento de la mujer: la escritura femenina de María de Zayas”, pp. 137–158.

32 Cf. Lisa Vollendorf: “The Value of female friendship in Seventeenth-Century Spain”, in: *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47.4 (2005), pp. 425–445, here p. 427; as well as Noelia S. Cirnigliaro: “Megalografía y rhopografía: Lecciones de cultura visual en María de Zayas and Mariana de Carvajal”, in: *Letras femeninas XXXVIII.2* (2012), pp. 45–68; Rosa Navarro: “El marco de las novelas de Mariana de Carvajal”, in: *Salina. Revista de Lletres* 11 (1997), pp. 39–46; Eavan O’Brien: “Verbalizing the Visual: María de Zayas, Mariana

it comes to the role and portrayal of widows, our perspective must be more nuanced. Zayas and Carvajal both integrate widows into the narrative of love affairs on the marriage market, and in doing so they play with stereotypes of widowhood by rewriting the topoi of the poor widow, the lascivious widow, and the virtuous widow in different ways. Their novellas subvert the ideal of “recogimiento” by introducing social settings that allow the widows to uphold this golden rule all the while creating alternative spaces. Carvajal and Zayas place their fictional widows within a network of mutual female support and friendship and deal creatively with the question of how spatial “recogimiento” can be used in favor of the widow’s agency.

The comparison between the two authors is inevitable as both embed their collections of novellas in a complex frame narrative and set them in the milieu of aristocratic noblewomen in Madrid during the pre-Christmas period. Both novella collections, María de Zayas’ *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637) and Mariana de Carvajal’s *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas* (1663), are thus part of the transformation of urban sociability in Golden Age Madrid.

The female characters take advantage of the new possibilities of the “casa barroca”<sup>33</sup> and reshape their widowhood according to the measures and possibilities of the new urban life. According to Nieves Romero-Díaz, Golden Age novellas establish a strong connection between *nueva nobleza* and *novela urbana*:

Más allá de ser un simple localizador o marco ambiental, el espacio urbano participa en el debate ideológico que caracteriza este género. Es decir [...] defino la novela corta del seiscientos como una práctica cultural que discute el proceso de adaptación de los principios que tradicionalmente caracterizan a la nobleza española en su paso a una nobleza propiamente urbana. El conflicto ideológico representado en las novelas ayuda en la definición de esta nueva nobleza urbana. El simbolismo de las ciudades y de los espacios asociados a las mismas (villas, quintas, prados ...) se relaciona intrínsecamente con los discursos ideológicos de estas novelas.<sup>34</sup>

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de Carvajal, and the Frame-Narrative Device”, in: *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12.3 (2012), pp. 117–142.

33 Noelia S. Ciriigliaro: *Domus. Ficción y mundo doméstico en el Barroco español*, Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2015.

34 “Beyond being a simple locator or environmental setting, urban space participates in the ideological debate that characterizes this genre. That is to say [...] I define the seventeenth-century short novel as a cultural practice that discusses the process of adaptation of the principles that traditionally characterize the Spanish nobility in its transition to a truly urban nobility. The ideological conflict represented in the *novellas* helps to define this new urban nobility. The symbolism of cities and the spaces associated with them (villages, country estates, meadows ...) is intrinsically linked to the ideological

María de Zayas' *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637) are a collection of ten novellas told by a group of young noblewomen and -men at the royal court of Madrid during five days of Christmas festivities. The protagonists take turns in narrating two novellas per day, a social practice of entertainment embedded in dances, songs (*romances*) and poems.<sup>35</sup> The frame narrative revolves around five young ladies of the court, who form a tight network of female sociability: "pues el vivir todas juntas en una casa, aunque en distintos cuartos, cosa con- stumbrada en la Corte les facilitaba el verse a todas horas."<sup>36</sup>

The spatial constellation allows for practices of female friendship,<sup>37</sup> while suggesting a constant access and thus few possibilities for privacy. Their house

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discourses of these novellas." My translation from Nieves Romero-Díaz: "De la quinta a la ciudad: Carvajal reflexiona sobre la posición de la mujer en el dinamismo social del seiscientos", in: *Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Internacional del Siglo de Oro (AISO)*, II, ed. by Francisco Domínguez Matito and María Luisa Lobato, Madrid and Frankfurt a.M.: Iberoamericana and Vervuert, 2004, p. 1535–1543, here p. 1535. Cf. also Nieves Romero-Díaz: "Del sarao zayesco a la carta agrediana. La sociabilidad cortesana femenina en la España de Felipe IV", in: *Sociabilidad y literatura en el Siglo de Oro*, ed. by Mechthild Albert, Madrid and Frankfurt a.M.: Iberoamericana and Vervuert, 2013, pp. 255–276. For literature on Early Modern poetics and semantics of space cf. Esther Schomacher: "Haus-Ordnung. Der häusliche Raum in der Ökonomik und in der Komödie des 16. Jahrhunderts", in: *Horizonte. Italianistische Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft und Gegenwartsliteratur* 10 (2007), pp. 165–191, as well as Christina Schaefer and Simon Zeisberg (eds.): *Das Haus schreiben. Bewegungen ökonomischen Wissens in der Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018.

35 Among the very extensive research on the novellas by María de Zayas cf. Albers and Felten: *Escenas de transgresión*; Bosse and Potthast: *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico*; Jung: *Autorinnen des Barock*; Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack (eds.): *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*, Madison and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995; Javier Espejo Surós and Carlos Mata Induráin (eds.): *Trazas, ingenio y gracia. Estudios sobre María de Zayas y sus "Novelas amorosas y ejemplares"*, Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2021; Donatella Gagliardi (ed.): "La voz femenina en la obra de María de Zayas", in: Special Edition of *eHumanistas* 55 (2023); Ruth El Saffar: "Ana/Lisis and Zayas: Reflections of Courtship and Literary Women in María de Zayas' *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*", in: *María de Zayas: The Dynamics of Discourse*, ed. by Amy R. Williamsen and Judith A. Whitenack, Madison and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995, pp. 192–216.

36 "For living all together in one house, albeit in different rooms, which was customary at court, made it easy for them to see each other at all hours". My translation from María de Zayas y Sotomayor: *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, ed. by Julián Olivares, Madrid: Cátedra, 2010, p. 167. In the following I will quote this text as NA with reference to the corresponding page in the main text.

37 Cf. for the importance of female friendship in the Golden Age sociability Vollendorf: "The Value of female friendship in Seventeenth-Century Spain"; Penelope Anderson: "The Absent Female Friend: Recent Studies in Early Modern Women's Friendship", in: *Literature Compass* 7.4 (2010), pp. 243–253; Claudia Gronemann and Agnieszka Komorowska (eds.):

is by no means a place of female seclusion; rather, the young women are connected to five young noblemen who court them. However, this apparent symmetry, which suggests a potentially successful romantic courtship, is disrupted by the fact that one of the noblemen, Juan, is well-liked by two women: Lisis, who wants him as her husband, and Lisandra, who is preferred by Juan.

The love carousel begins to turn when the young society decides to honor Lisis with a five-day celebration, with the five potential couples corresponding to five days of festivities. Lisis, however, feels heartbroken by Juan's rejection and wants to escape the attention by asking her mother to orchestrate the *sarao*, as the celebration is called,<sup>38</sup> in her place. At this point, we learn that the mother is a widow who is happy to fulfill the young people's desire for entertainment. In a second step, the five *damas* and five *galanes* are paired with respectively five experienced women and men: these are the parents of the young people, who are characterized by the fact that they are perfectly symmetrically widowed: "[...] convidiaron a los padres de los caballeros y las madres de las damas, por ser todas ellas sin padres y ellos sin madres, que la muerte no deja a los mortales los gustos cumplidos." (NA 169)<sup>39</sup>

Thus, from the very outset of her frame narrative,<sup>40</sup> Zayas constructs a symmetry between young lovers and older widows and widowers, implicating different generations and marital status' in this network of love negotiations. At the level of the frame narrative, the widowed protagonists are seen as

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*Fe/Male friends. Staging Gender and Friendship in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Spanish Literature*, Frankfurt a.M. and Madrid: Vervuert and Iberoamericana, 2023; here especially Agnieszka Komorowska: "Mi casa es su casa. The Gender Politics of Hospitality and Friendship in the Spanish comedia of the Seventeenth Century", pp. 61–88; Agnieszka Komorowska (forthcoming): *Arte nuevo de hacer amigos en este tiempo: Transformationen des Freundschaftsdiskurses im spanischen Theater des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Habilitation Thesis, submitted at the University of Mannheim in 2021; Eavan O'Brien: "Female Friendship extolled: Exploring the enduring appeal of María de Zayas's Novellas", in: *Romance Studies* 26.1 (2008), pp. 43–59.

38 Cf. for discussion of the notion of *sarao* Bosse: "El *sarao* de María de Zayas y Sotomayor: Una razón (femenina) de contar el amor" and Rafael Bonilla Cerezo: "Engaños y desengaños del prólogo 'Al que leyere' del *Honesto y entretenido sarao* de María de Zayas", in: *Revista de Filología Española* CIII.2 (2023), pp. 285–311; Emre Özmen: "El *sarao* de María de Zayas: estrategias y sociabilidad", in: *Studi Ispanici* 43 (2018), pp. 201–221.

39 "[...] they invited the fathers of the *caballeros* and the mothers of the *damas*, since all of them were without fathers and they were without mothers, for death leaves mortals without fulfilling their desires."

40 Concerning the frame narrative cf. Nina Cox Davis: "Re-Framing Discourse: Women before their public in María de Zayas", in: *Hispanic Review* 71.3, (2003), pp. 325–344; Marcos A. Romero Asencio: "María de Zayas' Broken Frame: A Brief Study of the History and Evolution of Frame Narratives", in: *Neophilologus* 102 (2018), pp. 369–386.

supporters and advisors in the matchmaking of their children. They all belong to a community of courtly sociability, and their interactions take place within the confines of a supposedly private space, which is in fact a semi-public arena arranged like a stage in which the heartbroken and love-sick Lisis is seated in the middle like on a throne.<sup>41</sup>

However, the widowed protagonists from the frame narrative play but little roles in the rest of the text. On a metanarrative level, we can understand this as a reflection on the circumstance that widows tend to act 'in the background', creating the conditions for further progress of events, but not necessarily appearing visibly as actors on the scene. We only learn at one point that Juan's father is friendly toward Lisis, whom his son has rejected, and thus moves Juan to compassion. Lisis' mother can be considered a successful matchmaker insofar as she negotiates the marriage between her daughter and her new suitor Diego during the five-day festivities and she also gets to have the last word by telling the final novella. Thanks to the wise arrangements of mother and daughter, which include an effective emotional management by Lisis who successfully overcomes her unrequited feelings for Juan, the wedding of Lisis and Diego is supposed to take place the very day after the festivities.

On the level of the novellas, we find less successful matchmakers among widowed parents: In the first novella, *Aventurarse perdiendo*, the beautiful Jacinta blames the early death of her mother for the seduction she falls prey to: "Faltó mi madre al mayor tiempo, que no fue pequeña falta, pues su compañía, gobierno y vigilancia fuera más importante a mi honestidad que no los descuidos de mi padre, que le tuvo en mirar por mí y darme estado [...]." (NA 179)<sup>42</sup>

The motive of a widowed parent who fails to properly protect and guide the children appears frequently. In *La fuerza del amor*, the mother of Laura dies in childbirth and her father cannot fully compensate for the "discreción" a mother would provide in their children's upbringing. His lack of knowledge in female emotions is thus partly to blame for his daughter Laura being seduced: "Murío su madre del parto de Laura, quedando su padre por gobierno y amparo de los tres gallardos hijos, que si bien sin madre, la discreción del

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41 "Coronaba la sala un rico estado, con almohadas de terciopelo verde, a quien las borlas y guarniciones de plata hermoseaban sobremanera, haciendo competencia a una vistosa camilla, que al lado del vario estrado había de ser trono, asiento y resguardo de la bella Lisis [...]." (NA 169) "The room was crowned with rich decoration, with green velvet pillows, greatly embellished with silver tassels and trimmings, rivaling a colorful bed, which, next to the various platforms, was to be the throne, seat, and refuge of the beautiful Lysis."

42 "My mother disappeared at the worst moment, which was no small loss, for her company, guidance, and vigilance were more important to my honesty than my father's lack of care, who was responsible for looking after me and providing for me [...]."

padre suplió medianamente esta falta.” (NA 345)<sup>43</sup> And in the novella *El desengañado amado y premio de la virtud*, Fernando’s mother is, after the death of her husband, unable to prevent her son from becoming a dissolute seducer and gambler:

más que al mayor tiempo le faltó su padre, siendo el descuido de su madre en esta ocasión mayor que debiera, o por no poder sujetarle o por no tener otro, y parecerle que si le faltaba no tendría su pérdida más consuelo. Tuvo con esto lugar don Fernando de darse más sin rienda a sus vicios y travesuras, pependencias, juegos y damas [...]. (NA 374)<sup>44</sup>

Although these references to the role of widowed parents are usually brief and not elaborated on, they often appear at the beginning of a story in which the absence of the deceased parent causes an imbalance in the household, making the half-orphaned children vulnerable to seduction and vice. This implicitly addresses the danger widows face when raising their children alone, as emphasized by Juan Vives and other authors. Vives writes:

Muchas veces vemos que los hijos educados por viudas las obedecen menos de lo conveniente, echados a perder por la excesiva permisividad de ellas, hasta el punto que ha dado lugar entre muchos pueblos, y principalmente en el mío, a la expresión “hijo de viuda”, referido a los jóvenes con una educación deficiente, a los adolescentes corruptos, insolentes y con principios de vida depravados.<sup>45</sup>

Significantly, however, in Zayas’ novellas, this danger also applies to widowers and thus to both sexes.

The first novella *Aventurarse perdiendo*, shows Jacinta not only as a victim of her father’s widowhood, but the daughter herself will become a tragic widow. *Aventurarse perdiendo* is a novella about female desire and its ultimate

43 “Laura’s mother died in childbirth, leaving her father to care for and protect his three beautiful children. As they were left without a mother, their father’s discretion only partially made up for this loss.”

44 “The loss of his father was of major impact, and his mother’s negligence on this occasion was greater than it should have been, either because she was unable to restrain him or because she had no other, and she felt that if he was missing, she would have no consolation for her loss. This gave don Fernando free rein to indulge in his vices and mischief, quarrels, games, and ladies [...].”

45 “We often see that children raised by widows obey them less than they should, spoiled by their excessive permissiveness, to the point that in many towns, and especially in mine, the expression ‘widow’s son’ has come to refer to young people with a poor education, corrupt teenagers who are insolent and have depraved principles.” My translation from Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, p. 379, chapter V: “Cómo debe comportarse en casa”, p. 379.

punishment. Jacinta is characterized as a woman who will experience desire before she will get to know love. One night, the sixteen-year-old Jacinta dreams of an attractive man whom she desires so much that once awake she falls ill with longing for this imaginary lover. Time passes and one day, sitting at her balcony, Jacinta lays eyes on the attractive Félix, who resembles the man from her dream. A passionate love story ensues, with many misunderstandings, jealousy, and intrigue standing in the way of the two lovers. Ultimately, however, Jacinta and Félix manage to get married to each other, which suggests a happy ending. But the novella does not finish there. After the marriage, Félix dies in battle and Jacinta is left a widow. This is where the second love story begins, as another man, Celio, succeeds in winning Jacinta's heart. Unlike her first love with Félix, which eventually led to marriage and was based on true love, Celio has feigned his feelings for Jacinta and abandons her, leaving her to flee and enter a convent. The story is told from the perspective of Jacinta, who disguises herself as a shepherd, confides the story of her life to a passing nobleman, and elicits his pity. This results in an ambivalent characterization of the widow. From the beginning of the novella, Jacinta is characterized by her desire, as she dreams of an imaginary lover long before any man has tried to seduce her. She then consumes her passion with Félix before marriage. By falling in love again after her husband's death and giving herself to another man, she contradicts the ideal of the everlasting wife that Juan Luis Vives demands of widows. She appears instead as a sexually active woman who falls prey to her desire, so that the failure of her second love is a logical consequence of her misconduct and violation of gender expectations. Even though Jacinta's transgressive behaviour as a newly enamoured widow will be punished, her fate nevertheless inspires pity in the nobleman who listens to her story.

Yet, another sexually active widow gets away with her appetite without any further punishment, albeit the (male) judgement on her is much stricter. The fourth novella narrated on the second day, *El prevenido engañado*, tells us about a young nobleman from Granada, don Fadrique, who sets out to find the perfect wife. After finding out that his first love interest, Serafina, has tricked him by pretending to be a coy mistress and deferring the marriage, while she was pregnant with another man's child, Fadrique swears that he will keep away from intelligent women as they are vicious and deceptive. The second woman he will court is a young widow from Sevilla, who unfortunately will turn out to be just as vicious as Serafina. Fadrique falls in love at first sight with Beatriz, "la bellissima viuda" (NA 301). Ironically, she not only captures his attention through her beauty but incites his love through her fame to respect the rules of "recogimiento":

en este tiempo no ha merecido ninguno sus deseos, doncella ni su vista, casada, ni su voluntad, viuda, con haber más que cabellos tiene en su cabeza, pretendientes de este bien. [...] mas que elle había propuesto el día que enterró a su dueño no casarse hasta que pasasen tres años, por guardar más el decoro que debía a su amor, que por esta causa despedía cuantos le trataban de esto con alguna aspereza, por no dar a todos cuenta de sus designios [...]. (NA 301–303)<sup>46</sup>

By refusing all men who proposed to her since her husband's death, Beatriz seems to embody the ideal of the "recogimiento". Nevertheless, she decides to give Fadrique a chance and lets him know that if he agrees to wait one more year until her three-year mourning is over, she will marry him. Fadrique accepts to wait for marriage a second time and once again he will have to learn about female subversion and appropriation of the rule of "recogimiento".

One night, he manages to sneak into Beatriz's house and watches his lady talking to her maids. At first, this female space seems pleasant to Fadrique and appropriate for the dignity of his beloved. Once the lady and her entourage retire for the night, Fadrique becomes witness as Beatriz breaks her night's rest and, dressed in beautiful clothes and equipped with fine food and drink, secretly visits the riding stable. He follows her and observes a scene that prompts him to flee: Beatriz is courting one of her slaves, whom she has turned into her lover. The slave, however, clearly exhausted by his mistress's sexual appetite, is on his deathbed and accusingly refuses her advances, begging her to leave him alone. Beatriz' sexual appetite appears excessive and grotesque, as she seems to be sucking the life out of the suffering slave, whom Fadrique portrays as monstrous and ugly, thereby pandering to racist prejudices. Nevertheless, although Beatriz's physical beauty is described in stark contrast to her lover, ("pareciéndole en la hermosura ella un ángel y él un fiero demonio", NA 309), due to her outrageous behavior it is her who seems to be the true monster.

By shocking and amusing her readership with this extravagant widow, María de Zayas seems to play with male anxiety about female control of the household. She thereby echoes the fear underlying the famous treatises of her time. In establishing rules of "recogimiento" for widows, Juan Luis Vives quotes San Geronimo:<sup>47</sup>

46 "In this time, no one has deserved her desires, when she was maid, or her gaze, once she was married, or her will, now a widow, having even more suitors than hair on her head. [...] But she had resolved on the day she buried her master not to marry until three years had passed, in order to preserve the decorum, she owed to his love, and for this reason she dismissed with some harshness all those who spoke to her about it, so as not to give everyone an account of her intentions [...]."

47 Cf. Renoux-Caron: "Las cartas de san Jerónimo a las viudas en la España del siglo xvi".

Sé de muchas mujeres que, a pesar de estar cerradas al público las puertas de su casa, no se libraron de la infamia provocaba por sus criados, a quienes hacía sospechosos su desmesurado acicalamiento, o bien la hermosura de un cuerpo perfectamente alimentado, o bien su edad apta para el placer, o bien la evidente perturbación de su alma, producto del remordimiento de ese amor oculto que, a pesar de estar enmascarado, con frecuencia trasciende a la gente y menosprecia a sus compañeros como si fueran sus esclavos.<sup>48</sup>

At this point, Beatriz's behavior seems to confirm San Geronimo's and Vives' worst fears, even to the point where the widow is being portrayed as a tyrannical mistress who turns her fellow human beings into slaves, which is what the merry widow in Zayas' novella takes literally.

When her slave dies the next day, the noblewoman can hide her pain about the loss of her secret lover within the walls of her "recogimiento". Soon enough Beatriz, whom Fadrique at this point ironically describes as "la virtuosa viuda" (NA 311), reestablishes her health and above all her sexual appetite and sends her maid to Fadrique, demanding that he now fulfills his promise of marriage. Fadrique answers this request with a letter in which he confronts the noble lady with his knowledge about her secret affair by referring to her recent widowhood as she now has to mourn her deceased slave-turned-lover: "I, my lady, am a scrupulous man," Fadrique writes ironically, "and will not take it upon my conscience that you, a widow (since the day before yesterday, marry today." ("Yo, señora mía, soy algo escrupuloso y haré cargo de conciencia en que vuestra merced, viuda de anteayer, se case hoy." NA 312) As a double widow of both her husband and her lover, Beatriz remains rather unaffected by the losses. After a brief hesitation and moment of fear that her actions might be made public by Fadrique, she quickly comes to her senses when she realizes that the nobleman has left town without revealing her secret. Unimpressed, she marries another caballero in order to be able to satisfy her sexual appetite quickly and replace her deceased lover by a new man: "Pensó doña Beatriz perder con este papel su juicio, mas viendo que ya don Fadrique era ido, dio el sí a un caballero que

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48 "I know of many women who, despite keeping their doors closed to the public, were not spared the infamy caused by their servants, who were made suspicious by their excessive grooming, or by the beauty of a perfectly nourished body, or by their age suitable for pleasure, or by the obvious disturbance of their souls, the result of remorse for that hidden love which, despite being masked, often transcends people and makes them despise their companions as if they were their slaves." My translation from Juan Luis Vives: *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, chapter V: "Cómo debe comportarse en casa", p. 397.

le habían propuesto, remediando con el marido la falta del muerto amante.” (NA 312)<sup>49</sup>

The novella *El Prevenido engañado* establishes a narrative economy of constant postponement and disappointment according to the Golden Age logic of *engaño* and *desengaño*. Like Fadrique's first deceitful lover, doña Serafina, Beatriz has also postponed the consummation of love and, through her restraint, has given the impression of being a particularly virtuous woman. In Beatriz's case, she complies with the ideal of “recogimiento” required of widows and thus uses this ideal in her favour. However, Fadrique must discover once again that the postponement only serves to delay the satisfaction of male desire and thus increases it because a virtuous woman is considered more worthy. In reality, however, the woman is only postponing marriage but not sexual pleasure, as under the guise of “recogimiento” she indulges her own desires according to her own rules. Beatriz remains an ambivalent character: she is a protagonist who, as a lascivious and ingenious widow, can be considered transgressive on the one hand, but on the other hand fulfills the stereotype of the “merry widow” with an excessive and violent sexual appetite.

Just as widowhood is portrayed as one of three possible states of being for women, María de Zayas presents widows among a larger panorama of female characters, including virgins and married women. Yet it is the widow who appears particularly grotesque, being first idealized as an angel of “recogimiento” and quickly demonized for her free sexuality. Thus, the novellas undermine both ideals, the ‘whole house’ and the ‘ideal widow’, by inviting the readers to peak over the walls of Beatriz' house, a place where the efficient management of affective economy is based on using and replacing men as objects of desire.

#### 4. Negotiations of Authorship and Prudent Widowhood in Mariana de Carvajal's *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas*

Widowhood is an essential part of the *self-fashioning* of Mariana de Carvajal as an author of novellas about love and loss. While little is known about the noblewoman from Andalusia, who is most famous for her collection of novellas *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas* (1663), it is assumed that she was

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49 “When she received this letter, doña Beatriz thought she had lost her mind, but seeing that don Fadrique was already gone, she said yes to a gentleman who had been proposed to her, making up for the loss of her dead lover with her husband.”

left with nine children after the death of her husband.<sup>50</sup> That she took her economic responsibility for her family as *mater familias* seriously is evidenced by a letter she wrote to the king, whom she asked for the payment of her deceased husband's pension.<sup>51</sup> In order to understand the importance of widowhood for her literary writing, we shall take a closer look at the preface to the collection of novellas. Like her famous contemporaries Miguel de Cervantes and María de Zayas y Sotomayor before her, Mariana de Carvajal prefaces her collection of novellas with a foreword to the reader. Rather short in comparison to the lengthy explanation of Cervantes' "prólogo al lector" in his *Novelas ejemplares* (1612) and Zayas' two-fold "Al que leyere" and "Prólogo de un desapasionado" to her *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637), it nevertheless echoes their preoccupations with authorial *self-fashioning*:

Atento y curioso lector, aunque no me será posible el conseguir lucidos desempeños en el arresto de tan conocido atrevimiento, no por eso dejaré de servirte con los sucesos que en este pequeño libro te ofrezco, aborto inútil de mi corto ingenio. Y pues se dirigen a solicitar, cuidadosa, gustosos y honestos entretenimientos en que diviertas las perezosas noches del erizado invierno, te suplico admitas mi voluntad, perdonando los defectos de una tan mal cortada pluma, en la cual hallarás mayores deseos de servirte con un libro de doce comedias, en que conozcas lo afectuoso de mi deseo.<sup>52</sup>

50 For an introduction in the literature on Carvajal cf. Vollendorf: "The Value of female friendship in Seventeenth-Century Spain"; Shifra Armon: "The Romance of Courtesy: Mariana de Carvajal's *Navidades y Noches entretenidas*", in: *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* XIX.2 (1995), pp. 241–261; Mechthild Albert: "Modelos de masculinidad en *Las Navidades de Madrid* (1663) de Mariana de Carvajal", in: *Nuevos enfoques sobre la novela corta barroca*, ed. by id. and Ulrike Becker, Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2016, pp. 203–214; Pilar Beltrán: "Problema de edición en las *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas* de Mariana de Carvajal", in: *Edición y anotación de textos. Actas del I Congreso de Jóvenes Filólogos*, ed. by Antonio Chas Aguión and Mercedes Pampín Barral, A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, Servicio de Publicaciones, 1998, pp. 103–112; Romero-Díaz: "De la quinta a la ciudad: Carvajal reflexiona sobre la posición de la mujer en el dinamismo social del seiscientos".

51 Vollendorf: "The Value of female friendship in Seventeenth-Century Spain".

52 "Attentive and curious reader, although I will not be able to achieve brilliant results in arresting such well-known audacity, I will not fail to serve you with the events that I offer you in this little book, a useless failure of my limited ingenuity. And since you are seeking careful, pleasant, and honest entertainment with which to amuse the lazy nights of the bristling winter, I beg you to accept my will, forgiving the defects of such a poorly cut pen, in which you will find my greatest desire to serve you with a book of twelve comedies, in which you will know the affection of my plea." My translation from Mariana de Carvajal y Saavedra: *Navidades de Madrid y Noches entretenidas, en ocho novelas*, ed. by Catherine Soriano, Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1993, p. 5. Quotes from the novellas will appear in the main text with the reference NM and the page number.

In keeping with genre expectations, Carvajal begins with a *captatio benevolentiae*, presenting her collection of eight novellas and twelve comedias (promised in the volume but not preserved) as a 'little book', the result of her modest ingenuity and her 'poorly cut pen'. Readers of the Golden Age know this to be ironic modesty. In the prologue for his *Novelas ejemplares*, Cervantes claims his novellas have neither head nor tail ("porque no tienen pies, ni cabeza, ni entrañas, ni cosa que les parezca"<sup>53</sup>). And María de Zayas calls her novellas "borrones" in her own preface (NA 159).<sup>54</sup> Like Cervantes and Zayas, Carvajal uses the term "ingenio" to ironically downplay the originality of her writing by speaking of her "corto ingenio", but does so to in fact place her authorship in the tradition of creativity and intellectual power.<sup>55</sup> This becomes evident in the function that she assigns to her literary works, which, in the best tradition since Boccaccio's *Decameron*, are intended to provide pleasant and honest entertainment ("gustosos y honestos entretenimientos") during a special period of time (in this case the winter holiday season) through remarkable and extraordinary stories and events (sucesos).<sup>56</sup> Through her careful choice of concepts and the structure of the novellas, Carvajal proves that she has

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- 53 Miguel de Cervantes: *Novelas ejemplares*, ed. by Harry Sieber, Madrid: Cátedra, 2010, p. 51.
- 54 For a detailed analysis of the questions of authorship in the prefaces cf. Gronemann: "Liminalidad y transgresión"; Emre Özmen and Pedro Ruiz Pérez: "Deseo y autoridad: la tensión de la autoría en María de Zayas", in: *Criticón* 128 (2016), pp. 37–51; Rafael Bonilla Cerezo: "Engaños y desengaños del prólogo 'Al que leyere' del *Honesto y entretenido sarao* de María de Zayas", in: *Revista de Filología Española* CIII.2 (2023), pp. 285–311.
- 55 For a study on female ingenio cf. René Aldo Vijarra: "Ingenio y mujer en el discurso hegemónico y heterónimo de la temprana modernidad española", in: *Esféricas Literarias* 1 (2018), pp. 75–86; Robert Folger: "Die Natur der Frau im Siglo de Oro: Juan Huarte de San Juan und María de Zayas", in: *Begriff und Darstellung der Natur in der spanischen Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Wolfgang Matzat and Gerhard Poppenberg, München: Wilhelm Fink, 2012, pp. 183–203; Julia B. Köhne and Barbara Ventarola (eds.): *Weibliche Gegenentwürfe. Eine alternative Geschichte des schöpferischen Subjekts*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2022, especially Annika Nickenig: "Qué vale el precio del libro." Der Wert des weiblichen Ingeniums in María de Zayas *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*", pp. 109–130.
- 56 For a discussion of the genre cf. Mechthild Albert: "Las Noches": un subgénero novelístico en perspectiva comparada", in: *Edad de Oro* XXXIII (2014), pp. 356–381; for a comparison with Boccaccio see Emanuela Mini: "Notas sobre el *Decamerón* de Boccaccio y las novelas de Mariana de Carvajal y Saavedra", in: *Desde Andalucía. Mujeres del Mediterráneo*, ed. by Mercedes Arriaga Flórez and Jesús Angel Baca Martín, Sevilla: Arcibel, 2006, pp. 305–315; Alberto Rodríguez: "Chi di così cantar le fosse stato cagione": María de Zayas ante el *Decamerón*. Organización y función en la poesía en las *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*", in: *Los viajes de Pampinea: "novella" y novela española en los siglos de oro*, ed. by Isabel Colón Calderón and David Caro Bragado, Madrid: Sial, 2013, pp. 151–163.

mastered the conventions of the genre perfectly and has a rightful place among the renowned novella writers of her time.

The second part of the preface refers directly to the status of the widow:

Por primer suceso de este breve discurso te presento una viuda y un huérfano: obligación precisa es de un pecho noble el suavizar tan penoso desconsuelo, pues el mayor atributo de que goza la nobleza es preciarse de consolar al triste, amparar al pobre y darse por bien servido del siervo humilde que, deseoso de lograr sus mayores aciertos, sirve con amorosa lealtad a su estimado dueño, apadrinada de tan conocidas verdades. Ni me desvanecerán los aplausos de tu bizzaría, ni me daré por ofendida de tu censura, pues mi mayor vencimiento será el estar a tus plantas siempre, atenta a tan prudente corrección. Vale. (NM 5)<sup>57</sup>

The widow and the orphan referred to by the author are the main characters in the frame narrative of the collection of novellas. She presents them to the reader as worthy of pity and sympathy, since, having lost their husband and father, they are now dependent on the emotional and economic support of noble hearts and benefactors. In doing so, she takes up the *topos* of the poor widow and appeals to the reader to take her and her children under their wing. This reference constitutes a major difference from the prefaces of her contemporaries. Cervantes presents himself to his readers as the author of famous and successful novels such as *La Galatea* and *Don Quixote*, and also as a soldier who survived the Battle of Levante.<sup>58</sup>

Zayas, about whose marital status little is known though some speculate she remained single,<sup>59</sup> inscribes herself in a genealogy of other famous female *ingenios*, thus asserting her place as a female author.<sup>60</sup>

Carvajal, however, places her authorship in the realm of compassion. While the reader is initially meant to feel empathy for the protagonists of her novellas, the informed audience knows that Carvajal herself is a widow and has to care for her children. The connection she establishes is therefore one of emotional communication in particular. However, this also gives her room for maneuver.

57 "For the first event of this brief discourse, I present to you a widow and an orphan: it is the duty of a noble heart to ease such painful grief, for the greatest attribute of nobility is to take pride in comforting the sad, protecting the poor, and considering oneself well served by the humble servant who, eager to achieve his greatest successes, serves his esteemed master with loving loyalty, inspired by such well-known truths. I will not be swayed by the applause of your bravery, nor will I take offense at your criticism, for my greatest reward will be to remain at your feet, attentive to such prudent correction. Vale."

58 Cervantes: *Novelas ejemplares*, p. 51.

59 Zayas y Sotomayor: *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, p. 16.

60 Cf. Gronemann: "Liminalidad y transgresión"; Folger: "Die Natur der Frau im Siglo de Oro"; Nickenig: "Qué vale el precio del libro."

She evokes the *topos* of a poor widow, but at the same time offers the reader entertainment in the form of the collection of novellas, a gift that has real value. She thus becomes an active and virtuous widow who knows how to run her household, who is able to use her own experiences as a widow as a *mise en abyme* for her protagonists and transform them into literature. Hence, she has a double expertise: As a noble widow, she knows what she is writing about. And as a skilled and talented author, she knows how to write perfectly structured and entertaining novellas to capture the attention of her readers. She can pour her experience into literature and thus contribute economically to a better position as a widow and to her children's future. By reading the novellas, readers can practice their compassion for the fictional widows in the stories and thus prove their noble hearts. By purchasing the novellas, readers can also show their generosity toward the author. In this way, Carvajal serves a dual affective economy that differs from other novellas.<sup>61</sup> While Miguel Cervantes claims his credit from his reputation and creativity without any direct reference to economic values, María de Zayas introduces a fictive reader in her "prólogo de un desapasionado" who becomes more explicit about the material conditions of book sales and advises readers not to simply skim through the collection of novellas in a bookstore, thereby diminishing their reading pleasure through stinginess, but to purchase it and thus become better readers. The "desapasionado's" argument is that reading the novellas carefully is worthwhile because of the author's talent and ingenuity.<sup>62</sup> This clearly combines emotion and economy, because no reader wants to be called stingy or diminish their enjoyment. Mariana de Carvajal's argument is different: She woos the readers by reminding them of the noble duty of almsgiving without explicitly reminding them of the author's financial necessity, who is in a similar situation to her protagonists. By making this connection themselves, readers can enjoy a greater sense of satisfaction from their empathy, quite secretly, and thus also experience their own *discreción*. In doing so, Carvajal herself fulfills a requirement for widows emphasized by Juan Vives, namely the ability to control their words and gestures and use them in a discrete way in order to provide for their household.

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61 Cf. for a discussion of affect and economy Susanne Schlünder and Andrea Stahl (eds.): *Affektökonomien. Konzepte und Kodierungen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2018; Gesine Hindemith and Dagmar Stöferle (eds.): *Der Affekt der Ökonomie. Spekulatives Erzählen in der Moderne*. Boston: De Gruyter, 2018.

62 Cf. for a detailed discussion Nickenig: "Qué vale el precio del libro."

Just like María de Zayas before her, Mariana de Carvajal chooses a detailed framework in which to embed her novellas.<sup>63</sup> Similarly to Zayas' frame narrative, Carvajal's novellas are also set in Madrid during the Christmas season and are told by a group of noblewomen and -men during a five-day celebration. They also tell love stories of young couples, but the framework is more closely linked to a different, urban household community. In *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas*, a widow directs the action and hopes to use the practices of sociability to arrange a marriage for her child, thus echoing the frame narrative of Zayas' *Novelas amorosas*. Nevertheless, in *Navidades* the widow's efforts exceed the frame of festivities as she becomes the head of a complex household, which she has to manage carefully.

The novella's plot begins at the Real Corte de Madrid, where, among many beautiful ladies of the court, doña Lucrecia de Haro stands out. She is married to an old and sick nobleman, don Antonio da Silva, with whom she has a son, don Antonio, who delights at court with his grace just as much as his mother does. The events are carefully placed in the realm of urban sociability. We learn that, among the many houses her family owns, Lucrecia particularly likes to live in a house near the Prado because it allows her special recreation ("por ser de mucho recreo"). The detailed description of the house at the beginning of the novella deserves our attention. The house is called a "casa a la malicia", denoting a specific Golden Age architecture:

Aunque doña Lucrecia tenía muchas casas, respeto de los achaques de su esposo, gustaba de vivir en una labrada a la malicia, cerca de El Prado, por ser de mucho recreo. Tenía cinco cuartos principales y un hermoso y dilatado jardín, poblado de árboles frutales, hermosos naranjos, nevada tapicería de sus paredes, cuadros de cortadas multas, adornados de enrejados de menudas cañas entretejidas de cándidos jazmines, hermosas matas de claveles, espesos y encarnados rosales, fecundas vides que servían de hermoso dosel al sitio ameno, guardando su olorosa fragancia de los ardientes rayos del dorado Febo. (NM 13–14)<sup>64</sup>

63 Mariano Olmedo: "Las novelas enmarcadas como reflejo de la estructura amorosa en *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas* (1663)", in: *Novela corta y teatro en el Barroco español 1613–1675. Studia in honorem prof. Antony Close*, ed. by Rafael Bonilla Cerezo and José Ramón Trujillo, Madrid: Sial, 2012, pp. 107–120; Navarro: "El marco de las novelas de Mariana de Carvajal"; Rosa Navarro: "La 'rara belleza' de las damas en las novelas de María de Zayas y de Mariana de Carvajal", in: *Belleza escrita en femenino*, ed. by Angels Carabí and Marta Segarra Montaner, Barcelona: Centre Dona i Literatura, Universitat de Barcelona, 1998, pp. 79–86; Cirmigliaro: "Megalografía y rhopografía: Lecciones de cultura visual en María de Zayas and Mariana de Carvajal"; O'Brien: "Verbalizing the Visual: María de Zayas, Mariana de Carvajal, and the Frame-Narrative Device".

64 "Although doña Lucrecia had many houses, respecting the ailments of her husband, she liked to live in one designed "a la malicia", near El Prado, for being of much recreation.

In her study on the house in baroque literature, *Domus. Ficción y mundo doméstico en el barroco español* (2015) Noelia S. Ciringliaro describes the contemporary practice of the “casa a la malicia” as an architecture of deception that goes back to a contemporary policy of the household. It is set in the context of a royal decree that private houses should potentially be opened to state officials so that when they came to court on business, they could live there rent-free. To ward off this intrusion in the private home, many homeowners ‘hid’ the size of their living space by closing off rooms, creating secret spaces that could be used by residents as hiding places. This technique creates a new ultra-private space, and it allows the women and men in this novella to move freely outside of the public eye and to establish a different kind of *oikos*.<sup>65</sup>

The novella describes in rich detail the living situation of the noble tenants, which, apart from the noble landlady Lucrecia, consists of two unmarried ladies, two unmarried gentlemen, and a widow with a young daughter:

Vivía doña Lucrecia en el cuarto de adentro, por dar los que caían a la calle a sus nobles moradores. En los dos alinde al suyo vivían dos hermosas y principales damas, la una llamada doña Lupercia y la otra doña Gertrudis. En los del patio, en el uno habitaban dos caballeros vizcaínos, residentes en la Corte a pleitos y pretensiones, el uno llamado don Vicente, el otro don Enrique. Al cuarto frontero se mudó una viuda principal, mujer que lo fue de un Maestre de Campo, llamada doña Juana de Ayala. Tenía una hija de diecisiete años, tan hermosa como honesta, pues doña Leonor gozaba aquella fama tanto por su rara belleza como por sus conocidas virtudes. (NM 14–15)<sup>66</sup>

Let us recall the symmetrical arrangement of the couples in *Zayas*’ frame narrative and the disorder that Juan, who was loved by two women, brought to this symmetry. In Carvajal’s frame narrative, in addition to three young men

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It had five main rooms and a beautiful and extensive garden, populated with fruit trees, beautiful orange trees, snowy tapestry of its walls with the finest cut, adorned with trellises of small reeds interwoven with candid jasmines, beautiful carnation bushes, thick and red roses, fertile vines that served as a beautiful canopy to the pleasant place, keeping its aromatic fragrance from the burning rays of the golden Phoebus.”

65 Cf. Ciringliaro: *Domus*.

66 “Doña Lucrecia lived in the inner room, for giving the ones that fell to the street to its noble tenants. In the two adjoining rooms lived two beautiful and principal ladies, one called doña Lupercia and the other doña Gertrudis. In those of the courtyard, in the one room lived two gentlemen from Biscay, residents in the Court to lawsuits and pretensions, the one called don Vicente, the other don Enrique. To the adjacent room moved a principal widow, a woman who was the wife of a Maestre de Campo, called doña Juana de Ayala. She had a seventeen-year-old daughter, who was as beautiful as she was honest, for doña Leonor enjoyed that reputation as much for her rare beauty as for her well-known virtues.”

and three young women, two single widows will reside, who are not assigned any suitable gentlemen. Instead, they devote themselves entirely to their role as matchmakers for their children.

The architecture of the house and the living situation generate special conditions for the female and male residents to create their own space. Above all, bonds of friendship and love are forged between the neighbors. When new residents move in, the neighbors pay them a visit:

A quince días de mudada, le pareció a doña Lucrecia y a sus vecinas bajar a visitarla y darle la bienvenida; fue don Antonio escudereando a su madre. Fueron bien recibidos de la prudente viuda. Estando de visita, entraron los vizcaínos y, pareciéndoles buena ocasión de verlas y cumplir su obligación [...] (NM 15)<sup>67</sup>

It is during these private visits among neighbors and not in a festive court setting that love relationships are formed. During this visit, don Vicente falls in love with doña Gertrudis and courts her. Don Enrique, on the other hand, falls in love with doña Juana's daughter Leonor. A week after the visit, he asks for her hand in marriage and is rejected by the mother, who indeed proves to be a 'viuda prudente' because she prefers to act thoughtfully and improve her social position before deciding on a suitable husband for her daughter: "Respondió doña Juana que no trataba de casarla hasta concluir con un pleito que tenía, y esperaba la merced de un hábito; y aparte de estas cosas, no la casaría con forastero, por que no se la quitara de los ojos al mejor tiempo." (NM 15)<sup>68</sup>

Juana's hesitant attitude pays off and she is able to prove that her considerations are evidence of her reason and prudence. In fact, a better suitable and richer marriage opportunity presents itself for her daughter, because Antonio, the son of the noble landlady also falls in love with Leonor. To protect her daughter's honor, Juana keeps her secluded and thus shields her from the amorous advances of the two gallants. They rarely get to see Leonor, and when they do, it is always in the presence of her mother and other neighbors, making the neighborhood a safe haven for virtuous courtship:

67 "Fifteen days after she moved in, it seemed suitable to doña Lucrecia and her neighbors to come down to visit her and welcome her; don Antonio came along, escorting his mother. They were well received by the prudent widow. While they were visiting, the Biscayans came in, thinking that it was a good opportunity to see them and fulfill their obligation [...]."

68 "Doña Juana replied that she did not intend to marry her until she had concluded a lawsuit and was waiting for the mercy of a title; and apart from these things, she would not marry her to a stranger, so that he would not take her out of her eyes at the best time."

No le pesó a don Antonio de que se despidiera el casamiento, por quedar rendido a su hermosura y honestidad, aunque no se atrevía a decir su cuidado, temiendo la severa condición de su madre y porque doña Juana encerró a su hija, temerosa de los fracasos que suceden a las madres descuidadas. (NM 15)<sup>69</sup>

In the course of the plot, Juana and Lucrecia, both mothers and eventually both widows, appear as wise leaders of their families and households. Living under the same roof, they will build a friendship and negotiate the marriage of their children, so that neighborliness and friendship ultimately turn into family alliances. In doing so, they contradict the negative image of female friendship found, for example, in Fray Luis de León's influential treatise *La perfecta casada* (1583). The theologian suggests that female friendships can be harmful and that female neighbours can inspire vanity, vice and envy. He therefore advises prudent husbands not to allow their wives to receive visits from female friends.<sup>70</sup>

At the plot level of the novellas, we find a number of parallels with regard to the frame narrative, a mirror structure typical for Mariana de Carvajal's writing. When it comes to the friendship between the two widows Juana and Lucrecia, the third novella *El amante venturoso* can be read as an analogy: It tells us the story of a successful union between two families and two rich noblemen, who are dear and virtuous friends. Not only do they live in the same street, but both happen to be widowers, and they manage to arrange for their children to marry each other, thus binding the families together for the long term. The story ends happily and without any deception or intrigue. This is a parallel to the relationship between the two widows of the frame narrative and shows that this male model of friendship can also be applied to women.

When doña Lucrecia's husband dies two years later, he leaves her not only his fortune but also the duty and responsibility of taking his place as the governor of their household and heritage, a role that he trusted she would fulfil to his satisfaction: "Cumplió el Cristiano caballero con su obligación, dejando a su hijo por heredero de treinta mil ducados y a su esposa por albacea y tutora, seguro de su amor y prudente gobierno". (NM 16)<sup>71</sup> As a widow, Lucrecia is

69 "Don Antonio did not mind that the wedding was not concluded, as he was captivated by her beauty and honesty, although he did not dare to reveal his feelings, fearing her mother's strictness and because doña Juana locked her daughter away, fearful of the failures that befall careless mothers."

70 Fray Luis de León: *A Bilingual Edition of Fray Luis de León's La perfecta casada*, ed. and transl. by John A. Jones and Javier San José Lera, Lewinston et.al.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999.

71 "The Christian nobleman fulfilled his obligation, leaving his son as heir to thirty thousand ducats and his wife as executor and guardian, sure of her love and prudent government."

now solely responsible for keeping order in the house between the tenants. She must also manage her own interests, as after the death of her husband she has to manage not only the family's possessions but also its reputation and future endeavors.

In this situation, the household community proves to be a special place of support. It allows the new widow to find a space where she can fulfill the official requirements of widowhood while still being able to break with certain role expectations. This becomes evident in the different reactions to her new status as a widow by members of the court society and the household community:

A los últimos de octubre asistieron las amigas y nobles vecinas a la desconsolada viuda, para acompañarla al recibimiento de las muchas visitas; y los vizcaínos y otros amigos al huérfano, para acompañar y recibir a los caballeros que venían a dar los pésames, porque doña Lucrecia y su esposo se correspondían con la nobleza de la Corte. (NM 16–17)<sup>72</sup>

These official visits are described as “el impetuoso torbellino de las repetidas penas y renovados llantos” (NM 17),<sup>73</sup> whereas the noble community is considered to be a special place of trust: “Dos años vivieron todos con tan honradas correspondencias, que más parecía parentesco que vecindad.” (NM 16)<sup>74</sup>

Once those official visits that perpetuate the idea of mourning are over, the inhabitants of the house turn to different practices that transgress the ideal of “recogimiento”. In order to show her commitment to doña Lucrecia who just lost her husband, and to support the marriage negotiations between her daughter and don Antonio, doña Juana proposes that the house community spend the Christmas days together with dining, story-telling and poem-recitals. Each of the residents is to host a dinner for the widow over the five days, with dancing and music to sweeten the festivities, and in addition, each host is required to tell an entertaining story.

Aware of the slightly transgressive nature of their community, doña Juana emphasizes that their living situation allows them to establish the festivities away from the prying eyes of the Court and Madrid's nobility: “Y pues estamos libres de la murmuración de los vecinos y este cuarto está retirado de la

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72 “At the end of October, the friends and noble neighbours attended the disconsolate widow to accompany her in receiving the many visitors; and the Biscayans and other friends attended the orphan to accompany and receive the gentlemen who came to offer their condolences, because doña Lucrecia and her husband corresponded with the nobility of the Court.”

73 “[...] the impetuous whirlwind of repeated sorrows and renewed tears”.

74 “For two years they all lived with such honest correspondence, that it seemed more like kinship than neighborhood.”

calle, tendremos un poco de música y otro poco de baile.” (NM 17)<sup>75</sup> Thus, the house community benefits from the structure of the “casa a la malicia”, which precisely escapes the gaze of the neighbors. This is important as the festivities offend the decorum of mourning that the recent widowhood would demand of Lucrecia. The noblewoman understands this playful and festive transgression as a means to celebrate her new position as head of a rich and luxurious household:

No quiso doña Lucrecia darles con visos de luto, y mandó que aderezaran una sala que caía al jardín, adornándola de turquesadas alfombras, almohadas y sillas bordadas, ricas y costosas láminas, varias pinturas, lustrosos y grandes escritorios; dos braseros de plata colmados de menudo y bien encendido errax, cercados de olorosos y ambarinos pomos; prevenidas luces, que a sus encendidos visos arrojaban las ricas alhajas cambiantes resplandores. (NM 18)<sup>76</sup>

The domestic community circumvents this through the new urban sociability, which they create according to their own rules. In the frame narrative, the dishes, the decorations and the joyful pageantry are described in detail.<sup>77</sup> Lucrecia’s desire for festivities and ostentation distinguishes her as part of an aristocratic urban elite, and it stands in stark contrast to the rules that the moral treatises of the ideal widow have established. Astete’s *Tratado del gobierno de la familia* orders the widow to withdraw from festivities:

Y entienda que el habito negro y triste le ha de servir para que sepa refrenarse de las vanas conversaciones, y visitas de gente moça y muy regocijada. [...] No puede parecer cosa decente en la viuda el manto y veste negra y el mucho conversar entre la gente libiana, moça, libre y que se alegra.<sup>78</sup>

75 “And since we are free from the murmuring of the neighbors and this room is set back from the street, we will have a little music and a little dancing.”

76 “Doña Lucrecia did not want to give it a mournful look and ordered to decorate a room that fell into the garden, adorning it with turquoise carpets, embroidered pillows and chairs, rich and costly sheets, several paintings, shiny and large desks, two silver braziers filled with small and well lit errax, surrounded by fragrant and amber knobs, and lights, which shed changing gleams on the rich jewels with their lighted glimpses.”

77 On material culture and the urban nobility in Carvajal cf. Pilar Alcalde: “Mariana de Carvajal y la representación de la ostentación”, in: *Crítica hispánica*, 32.1 (2010), pp. 7–21; Robin Rice: “El materialismo en *Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas* (1663) de Mariana de Carvajal y Saavedra: clase social y otras obsesiones”, in: *Compostela Aurea. Actas de la Asociación Internacional del Siglo de Oro (AISO)*, ed. by Antonio Azaustre Galiana and Santiago Fernández Mosquera, Santiago de Compostela, Servizo de Publicacións e Intercambio Científico, 2011, pp. 435–444; Romero-Díaz: “De la quinta a la ciudad”.

78 “And understand that the black and sad habit will serve to restrain you from vain conversations and visits from young and very cheerful people. It cannot appear to be a decent

While the noble widow does not correspond to the decorum, which the church fathers demand of her, she acts however in the sense of the “nueva nobleza” which includes rich widows and their luxurious estates. Writing about the material situation of widowhood, Fink de Backer interprets the display of the widow’s wealth and luxury as part of her positioning in a social hierarchy, in which she represents her household and family to the outside world and hopes to enhance its reputation and thus the social success of her and her children by means of their economic capital:

[...] a consideration of the goods and services tied to the exercise of her purchasing power provides insight not only into the meaning and expression of wealth in Castilian society, but also the manner in which this wealth stimulated and supported commercial enterprise. Consumption and display thus tied the elite household to the economic life of the urban community.<sup>79</sup>

Lucrecia juggles two sets of values: her reputation as a virtuous widow, by keeping a low profile outside of her community, and her reputation as the head of an entertaining and luxurious noble household, worth living in and being associated to. The support she finds within the exclusive society of her noble neighbors proves that her *self-fashioning* is successful.

Lucrecia and Juana negotiate the marriage between their children and in this way manage to turn friendship and neighborhood into an actual family connection. They also act as advisors in the marriages of the two young noblemen Vicente and Enrique with the two single *damas* living in the house. At this, they prove experts in emotional and financial economy: “venido a casa de doña Lucrecia, acompañado de un oficial suficiente para las cartas de dote y capitulaciones.” (NM 284)<sup>80</sup>

Eventually, the festivities have led to successful matchmaking and result in marriages. Thus, after telling each other a variety of novellas, after lavish parties and gifts, the little community has consolidated the “vecindad” to the point that it now actually allows family ties.

While the widows of the frame narrative in María de Zayas’ *Novelas amorosas ejemplares* are less prominent than those in the novellas (Jacinta in *Aventurarse perdiendo* and Beatriz in *El prevenido engañado*), Mariana de

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thing/ that a widow in black cloak and attire/ converses freely and is happy/ with light-hearted, young, free-spirited people.” Astete: *Tratado del gobierno de la familia*, p. 61, quoted after Fink de Backer, *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 21.

79 Fink de Backer: *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain*, p. 143.

80 “[...] come to doña Lucrecia’s house, accompanied by an officer suitable for the letters of dowry and capitulations”.

Carvajal places them in the center of the frame narrative to her *Navidades*. They subvert the courtly frame of action, and create a private space in which the details of housekeeping are revealed and the widows take center stage as governors of their rich household. The widows in Carvajal's *Navidades* are part of a new urbanity, they are neither the reclusive nor the lascivious widow but the one who can enjoy the courtesies and festivities if their goal is to ensure the continuation of family wealth.

The portrayal of widows in the novellas by Zayas and Carvajal reveals the ambivalent position of widows in society at that time. It evokes the topoi of the virtuous, poor and deserving, and the lustful widow, transforming them into role expectations that the widow can strategically navigate and manipulate. This is where the subversive potential of the novellas lies, because they transform widowhood into a privileged status of agency and power.

Freed from the regulated institution of marriage, the widows act autonomously and present themselves as particularly good managers of their emotional households: The lascivious widow Beatriz in Zayas' novella knows how to increase her value on the marriage market through skillful play with "recogimiento", while at the same time satisfying her libidinous household. And the widow Lucrecia from Carvajal's novellas can enjoy the fun of urban sociability and successfully negotiate the marriage of her son at the same time.

In this sense, the widows of the two female authors can indeed have it both: control and prestige, economic success and enjoyment. In the context of our questions on emotion and calculation, they are experts in household management, and not simply passive sufferers of patriarchal defined gender roles (or "trophies" on the marriage market), but rather endowed with agency, both in economic and affective terms.

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