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S/Z in the Hispanic Context: Castration and Otherness in the Female Characters of Miguel de Cervantes and María de Zayas

En S/Z *(1970), un ambicioso estudio semiótico sobre "Sarrasine" de Honoré de Balzac, Roland Barthes analiza las oposiciones ideológicas que subyacen a esta diferenciación gráfica a partir del desvío de la norma en el nombre del protagonista masculino. Este artículo revela que su análisis es aplicable a las novelas de Cervantes y Zayas, en las que abundan personajes femeninos moros cuyos nombres comienzan con Z. La presencia de esta Z no se explica en términos fonológicos, sino por el entramado cultural de la España del s. XVII, que elige la Z como un sello que delata inequívocamente la otredad y castración social de estos personajes femeninos.*

Palabras clave: *María de Zayas, Miguel de Cervantes,* S/Z *de Roland Barthes, personajes femeninos moros y otredad*

In S/Z *(1970), an ambitious semiotic study of Honoré de Balzac's "Sarrasine," Roland Barthes analyzes the ideological oppositions behind this graphic differentiation based on observing an unexpected deviation from the norm in the male protagonist's name. This article reveals that Barthes's analysis is applicable to Cervantes's and Zayas's novellas, abounding as they are in female Moorish characters whose names begin with the letter Z. The presence of this Z is best understood, not in phonological terms, but from the perspective of the cultural fabric of seventeenth-century Spain, where the Z becomes the stamp that unequivocally denounces the otherness and social castration of the female characters.*

Keywords: *María de Zayas, Miguel de Cervantes, Roland Barthes's* S/Z*, female Moorish characters and otherness*

Doña Maria de Zayas
viu ab cara varonil.
que a bé que "sayas" tenia
bigotes tilava altius.
—Francesc Fontanella
[I saw Doña Mary of the Skirts
with a manly face,
who although she has "skirts,"
twirls a haughty mustache.]
(Greer, *Baroque Tales* 30)

In 1970, Roland Barthes published an ambitious study of Honoré de Balzac's short story "Sarrasine" that would soon become a classic of semiotic criticism. In his book, entitled simply *S/Z*, Barthes suggested that the name of Balzac's masculine protagonist presented an enigma, for the letter *e* placed at the end of the name is generally a mark of the feminine, and the customary French spelling of the name uses a *z* rather than an *s* [i.e., *Sarrazin*] (Barthes 17). According to Barthes, the distinction between S and Z reveals a desire to establish ideological oppositions on the basis of a graphic differentiation: "the same letter seen from the other side of the mirror; in Zambinella, Sarrasine contemplates his own castration" (107). Barthes argued that the gender of the protagonist's body does not necessarily determine that character's function or symbolic role in Balzac's story and concluded that the symbolic realm of the main characters "is not that of the biological sexes; it is that of castration: of castrating/castrated, active/passive" (36). In his reading of the story, the character of Sarrasine, the French sculptor who becomes Zambinella's lover unaware that Zambinella is a *castrato*, occupies a feminine, and therefore passive, space. Barthes refers to this method of evaluating the gender of characters as "the axis of castration."[1] His analysis of the opposition between the S and the Z is based on observing an unexpected deviation from the norm:

> *SarraSine*: customary French onomastics would lead us to expect *SarraZine*: on its way to the subject's patronymic, the Z has encountered some pitfall. Z is the letter of mutilation: phonetically, Z stings like a chastising lash, an avenging insect; graphically, cast slantwise by the hand across the blank regularity of the page, amid the curves of the alphabet, like an oblique and illicit blade, it cuts, slashes, or, as we say in French, zebras; from a Balzacian viewpoint, this Z (which appears in Balzac's name) is the letter of deviation (see the story Z. Marcas); finally, here, Z is the first letter of La Zambinella, the initial of castration, so that by this orthographical error committed in the middle of his name, in the center of his body, Sarrasine receives the Zambinellian Z in its true sense – the wound of deficiency. Further, S and Z are in a

relation of graphological inversion; the same letter seen from the other side of the mirror: Sarrasine contemplates in La Zambinella his own castration. Hence the slash (/) confronting the S of Sarrasine and the Z of Zambinella has a panic function; it is the slash of censure, the surface of the mirror, the wall of hallucination, the verge of antithesis, the abstraction of limit, the obliquity of the signifier, the index of paradigm, hence of meaning. (Barthes 106-07)

There is no way of knowing if Balzac, in first conceiving the idea of the "Sarrasine" story, was imagining an Arab cultural universe, though the main character's name clearly evokes one (Sarrasine means "Saracen" in French). Perhaps he meant the name to suggest that the character's alien-ness – in terms of all that made him strange and an outsider – was the product of a signifier determined by the very fantasies grafted onto the Arab world by nineteenth-century Europeans.[2] Although Barthes scarcely alludes to this aspect of the story, there are nonetheless revealing (and at once disturbing) ways in which his analysis can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to seventeenth-century Spanish literature featuring female Moorish characters, some of whose names almost invariably begin with the letter Z: Zoraida in the captive's tale from the first part of *Don Quixote*, Zahara in Cervantes's theater play *The Bagnios of Algiers*, Zaide in María de Zayas's "Slave to Her Own Lover." There is also Isabel Fajardo, the noble protagonist of "Slave to Her Own Lover," who takes the name Zelima in order to seal her identity as a Moorish slave and go off in search of her lover Don Manuel. The use of the Z as a mark of castration on a female character can also appear in ways that are even more veiled, as it does on the parchment paper that establishes the true identity of Costanza in Cervantes's "The Illustrious Kitchen Maid." In the case of all these characters, the Z (absent in the name Sarrasine, but present in its Zambinella mirror) is at once a revealing mark of castration and an enigmatic signifier; for even though Barthes distinguishes the "anecdotal condition" of "being castrated" (*castrature*) from "castration" as a "symbolic structure" (163),[3] in some cases the two can overlap. In the abovementioned works of Cervantes and María de Zayas, "castration" should be understood as social erasure, something women suffered when they were deemed incapable of participating in the rigid system of matrimonial exchange (among Christians, of course), whether because they belonged to a different culture or because they were victims of rape. This symbolic castration, which homogenizes the Moorish woman (or the woman in Moorish dress) with the violated woman (in which *being castrated* coincides with *castration*), emerges from a shared perspective, one whose variants depend on the drama in which the women are inscribed.[4]

If, as Barthes's analysis suggests, the symbolic castration of a man equals his feminization, what does the S/Z opposition signal when used in representations of seventeenth-century Spanish women? How does this sign of gender opposition superimpose itself on the cultural opposition between the Christian and the Moor? In the relevant female characters created by Cervantes and Zayas, the letter Z would seem to indicate a capacity to move across social boundaries and take control of one's own destiny. For the most part, however, these female characters remain inscribed within a worldview that considers passivity and matrimony to be the ideal state of femaleness.

To begin with, it is important to recognize a difference that Barthes establishes between S and Z, one that appears to be based on a graphic rather than a phonological plane. As any beginning French language textbook explains, the S is pronounced like a Z when in an intervocalic position or when followed by the vowel *e*. In French therefore – just as in Arabic – there is no exact correspondence between phonemes and their respective graphemes. In terms of peninsular Castilian, especially in the region of Castile, the phonological difference between S and Z is so marked that the letters always appear in their distinct graphemes. The explanation for the fact that Moorish female characters have names spelled with a Z (as opposed to an S) should not then be sought in phonology (especially given the arbitrary way words deriving from languages with different alphabets can be pronounced and transcribed). Rather, one needs to examine the cultural fabric of seventeenth-century Spain, where the Z becomes the stamp with which to unequivocally denounce the otherness of the female characters. While modernized Arabic standards differentiate S and Z as two phonemes (one voiceless, the other voiced), this difference is not necessarily expressed in graphic terms. The point is not simply to acknowledge the significance of Arabic having a different script from Spanish or the impossibility of reproducing the various Arabic dialects that would have surrounded Spanish writers in the seventeenth century. What matters more is that the texts being examined here are transcriptions made by native Spanish speakers in social contact with Arabic. Cervantes's novels and plays reflect the influence of his long captivity in Algiers in that they frequently include Arabic words and specifically reference the language that Christians and Moors used in that frontier zone to communicate with each other. According to the description of the captive in the first part of *Don Quixote,* this was a "language that's spoken between captives and Moors all over Barbary and even in Constantinople, and that's neither Arabic nor Castilian nor the tongue of any other country but a mixture of them all" (Cervantes, *Don Quixote* 379). As for María de Zayas, it is impossible to pinpoint the source of her Arabic references given the lack of information

on her life. However, it should be noted that several of the protagonists in her novels have contact with Arab and *morisco* slave women.

Perhaps the best example to illustrate the opposition between S and Z is found in Isabel, the protagonist of "Slave to Her Own Lover," the first novella in María de Zayas's *The Disenchantments of Love*. The narrator of this opening "disenchantment" is a slave named Zelima who surprises her audience by beginning her story as follows: "My name is Doña Isabel Fajardo and not, as you have thought, Zelima, nor am I Moorish, but Christian, the daughter of Catholic parents who belong to one of the most prominent families in the city of Murcia" (Zayas 43). Through her narration, we find out she is in a terrible predicament, having lost her honor to the "treacherous and false" Don Manuel (70). The son of a family who hosted her and her parents in Zaragoza, this young nobleman stole her virginity while she was unconscious. Although he first promises matrimony to Isabel, he later breaks his word and abandons her, at which point she decides to dress as a Moorish slave and adopt the name Zelima. In order to make her identity more believable, Isabel engraves the letter S onto her cheek alongside a drawing of a nail (*clavo*, in Spanish). The riddle is obviously an over-signification of how she wants to be recognized (S+*clava* = *esclava*, or slave). Moreover, the name Zelima itself is an imperfect anagram (or mirror) of Isabel. With its curvy, soft and undulating form, the S is a physical reminder of the original Christian signifier (the letter needed to restore her lost honor) while, on the other hand, the Z of the new name "stings like a chastising lash" and is the letter of the mutilation Isabel has suffered. It is this very mutilation, however, that provides Zelima with the opportunity to freely follow Don Manuel, first to Zaragoza and then to Sicily, determined as she is to convince him to marry her, for "even though Don Manuel is treacherous and false, my life depends on his" (70). While in Sicily, they are apprehended by pirates and taken to Algiers as prisoners.

In addition to gaining freedom of movement, Isabel's transformation into Zelima allows her to acquire agency over her own destiny and become a stronger, more independent person. After having her honor stolen, she is the one who decides to break free from the restrictions her social position has imposed upon her, arranging for a former servant to sell her as a slave. While in captivity in Algiers, it is Zelima, not Don Manuel, who initiates negotiations with the pirates, for she alone is in the position of being able to use her own money and jewelry to pay her ransom and that of her fellow prisoners. Another consequence of the conversion (and the change from the voiceless S to the voiced Z in her name) is that Isabel/Zelima gets the chance to become the author of her own narrative, as she is the first to narrate her story to the other characters within the framework of *The Disenchantments of Love*. Contrary to what one might expect, the loss of virginity and the

creation of Zelima, a "figure of alterity," results in the empowerment of Isabel who, as Deborah Compte has noted, now has the opportunity to "travel spatially" (54), to "mov[e] from girlhood to adulthood" (54) and "produce an affirming narrative of autonomy, authority and liberation" (53).

It is the protagonist's ability to comfortably traverse the borders between the Christian and Moorish worlds that inspire Compte to compare "Slave to Her Own Lover" to the genre of *passing narratives* that were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In these narratives, a person (or group) claimed a racial or ethnic identity that they did not possess, thereby *passing* "from a subordinate state to a dominant one to participate in the privileges of the latter" (Compte 56). There are certainly similarities between this type of narrative and that of Isabel, who creates Zelima in order to accomplish the goal of recovering her honor. What differentiates Isabel/Zelima from the protagonists of the *passing narratives* is that the identity change does not occur from the minority group to the dominant group, but in the opposite direction: Isabel, a young woman of noble Spanish blood, transforms herself into Zelima, a Moorish slave. Not only is this an inversion of the usual trajectory; there is also the irony that only through becoming a slave does Isabel acquire the freedom and agency necessary to carry out her plan and resolve the predicament in which she finds herself.

The independence achieved by the slave in "Slave to Her Own Lover" lends further credence to Barthes's argument that biological gender is not always determinant of a character's symbolic field. Isabel's transformation from passive character to protagonist of the story's principal events is initiated by a violation. And while her first reaction to Don Manuel may be a "mortal swoon" (Zayas 52), after waking up a half hour later and finding her virginity lost, she reacts with a violence that she herself recognizes as unusual in the feminine sex:

> That affront filled me with *mortal rage*; *what might have caused tears and despair in another woman* filled me with a demonic fury. I disentangled myself from the infamous prison of his arms and grabbed his sword which was lying beside the bed. I took it from its sheath in order to sheathe it in his body. (53; emphasis added)

It is the rape that changes Isabel's role from completely passive to intensely active. In an act metaphorically inverse to that of her rapist, Isabel takes the sword from the side of the bed and attempts to sheathe it into the body of Don Manuel. And even though Isabel's diabolic furor and abhorrence are temporarily calmed by her assailant's promise of matrimony, she soon finds herself in need of creating Zelima in order to pursue him, determined as she is to make him keep his word. Once the two are back in Zaragoza, after the

experiences of Sicily and the captivity in Algiers, Don Manuel tells Isabel/Zelima that he will not fulfill his matrimonial promise, that he has chosen to marry Zaida instead, for "it would be impossible for [him] to trust a woman who knows how to use so many subterfuges" (Zayas 77). Once Don Manuel is killed at the hands of Don Felipe, Isabel loses any chance of recovering her honor and so decides "to remain a branded slave, for that's how I [feel] in my soul" (79). In this enslaved condition, then, Zelima enters the household of Lisis, who only then begins to recover from a long illness, thanks to the extraordinary ability of this new slave to sing, play instruments, and compose verse. During the soiree organized to celebrate Lisis's recovery – the event which provides the backdrop for all the episodes of the *Disenchantments* – Zelima reveals her true name and Christian origin.

Within the context of this disenchantment, the function of the Z is to mark the violence suffered by the violated woman and the marginalized space she occupies in the seventeenth century. In the story of Isabel/Zelima, that marginalized space is equated with that of the Moorish woman, whose agency and determination put her on a par with the masculine protagonists of traditional narratives and turned her into a cultural opponent, or to quote Edward Said, into one of the "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1).[5] The relationship between this representation of otherness and the image of the traditional Spanish noblewoman exactly parallels the relationship between the S and the Z as established by Barthes, that is, "the same letter seen from the other side of the mirror" (107). The slave Zelima, polar opposite of the noble Isabel in terms of independence and resourcefulness, is, moreover, master of her own history.[6] This transformation is only a temporary one in the broader story of the *Disenchantments*, for in the end Isabel decides to enter a convent with Lisis and Estefanía, and eventually with the mothers of Isabel and Lisis. Isabel's decision to enter the convent should not be seen as a retreat to her previous self, but rather as a new point in her development as an individual. As Deborah Compte has noted, Isabel's "developmental journey" allows her to achieve "selfhood by crafting this alternate identity through which she is now able to supersede social expectations, confront Manuel and claim revenge" (62). As such, her resolution should be seen as her way to "free herself from the entrapment of her codified world" (62).

In contrast to Isabel, who adopts an Arab name in order to pursue the man who stole her honor, Zaide (from "Slave to her Own Lover"), Zahara (from *The Bagnios of Algiers*), and Zoraida (from the captive's tale in the first part of *Don Quixote*) are all Moorish women who seek to abandon their names and religious affiliation in order to marry Christian men. For these women, the name change signifies shedding the Z that has marked them as

"other," thereby enabling them to participate in the dominant culture's system of matrimonial exchange.

Most critics agree that the story of Zahara is a reformulation of Zoraida's, and that both characterizations were based on the real-life figure of the daughter of Agí Morato or Hajid Murad.[7] Here the focus will be on the character of Zoraida; for she most clearly illustrates the existence of the S/Z opposition.[8] Unlike Zaide, Zoraida is a young Moorish woman who converts to Christianity by choice and then seeks a Christian man who will take her to Spanish territory and marry her. The story begins in Chapter 37 of the first part of *Don Quixote,* when a character "whose dress indicated that he was a Christian recently returned from the lands of the Moors" arrives at the inn (Cervantes, *Don Quixote* 351). The man is accompanied by a woman mounted on a donkey and "dressed in the Moorish style: a veil over her face, a brocaded cap on her head and a cloak from her shoulders to her feet" (351). When the man addresses the woman as Lela Zoraida, she immediately replies: "No, Zoraida no: María, María!" (353). The Marian characteristics of her representation (arrival on a donkey, clad in a body-length cloak, married to an older man but with no conjugal relations) coincide with popular images of dark-skinned Virgins in seventeenth-century Spain.[9] The coincidence seems to suggest that, were it not for the Moorish garments of the beautiful, young woman, the people at the inn might have thought they were witnessing a miraculous apparition. It is only through the tale told by the man, whose name is Ruy Pérez de Viedma, that the people at the inn (and with them, the readers of *Don Quixote)* learn more about this couple: the man's childhood in León, his decision to become a soldier, the misfortunes he suffered during his captivity in Algiers, and his miraculous rescue by Lela Zoraida. Zoraida, he explains, is a noble Algerian woman who converted to Christianity through the efforts of her personal slave, who after dying, twice appeared to the noble woman, advising her "to go to the land of the Christians to see Lela Marien, who loved [her] very much]" (373).[10] In recounting his story, Ruy takes care to praise Zoraida's initiative and seductive powers: while captive in the Algerian prison, he saw coming out of one of the little windows of a neighboring cell "a long stick … and tied to the end of it was a handkerchief" (370). The stick was being waved back and forth, as if inviting someone to grab it. Two prisoners tried in vain to grab hold of the end of the stick, but only after Ruy grabbed it did the stick stop moving, thereby giving the impression – by the stick's manipulator – that Ruy was the intended man. The handkerchief contained money and a letter written in Arabic, in which a young woman who described herself as Christian and very beautiful asked him to plan a rescue for the two of them. After several repeats of this ingenious system, Ruy was able to amass enough money to escape the prison and take the mysterious lady with him.

The fact that the Zoraida of this story is "narrated" by the captive is highly significant, for she becomes the subject of the discourse of someone who has, in the first place, been the object of her seduction. This makes Zoraida radically different from Zelima, who, in appointing herself narrator, becomes both the subject and object of her own story.[11]

The transformation of the active Zoraida, capable of "fishing" the correct nobleman out of the prison and financing her own rescue, into the submissive and silent María who appears at the inn, is expressed symbolically by the name change that accompanies the change of religion. Zoraida renounces the Z that marked her as an active and entrepreneurial "other" in order to assume the Marian model. The question is: does the signifier *María* not also eradicate the dangerous resourcefulness of a woman who has decided by herself to assume the place that Christian society had assigned for her? If so, then the name marks a different, even more dangerous kind of castration: one that demands submission, passivity, and silence as the "natural" and most desirable condition of femininity.

The appearance of the Z as a mark of castration can also occur in more indirect ways, as happens in Cervantes's "The Illustrious Kitchen Maid." Although this exemplary novella includes neither Moorish women seeking to convert to Christianity nor young Christian women disguised as Moors, the Z does appear as a symbol of the rupture in the social order caused by a rape. The story begins with Don Diego de Carriazo and his friend Don Tomás de Avendaño, two young noblemen whose desire to experience the picaresque life has them setting off on a journey to Zahara de los Atunes. As Ruth El Saffar has correctly pointed out, just as the two friends have deviated from the life trajectory envisioned by their parents, a diversion caused by Carriazo's obsession with the picaresque life, so too does the journey to the coastal fisheries of Zahara get detoured, this time by Avendaño's falling in love with Costanza, "the illustrious kitchen maid" of the Sevillian Inn located in the city of Toledo (El Saffar, *Novel to Romance* 93).

The geographical displacements of the protagonists as they follow a sequence of hypothetical detours before arriving in Toledo are later mirrored in the part of the novella that begins at the Sevillian Inn,[12] when the narrative zigzags between the love story of Avendaño and the picaresque adventures of Carriazo. The mysterious oxymoron of the title (which has earned the story's female character wide renown for her antonymic description as being both "illustrious" and "a kitchen maid") is resolved when Don Diego and Don Juan, the fathers of Carriazo and Avendaño, suddenly appear at the inn in search of Don Diego's long lost daughter.

Constanza's mysterious origins are revealed when Don Diego confesses to being her father and, with regard to her mother, reveals: "it is enough for you to know that she was of such prestigious rank that I could be her servant" (Cervantes, *Exemplary* 232). As for the circumstances of her birth, Don Diego has no problem admitting that "the silence, the solitude, and the opportunity aroused in me a desire more daring than it was decent" (232). And completely unabashed, he finally confesses: "In short, I took her by force and against her will, and she, exhausted, overpowered, and distressed, either could not or did not want to say a word" (232). The silence necessary to conceal the violent circumstances of her engendering seems to mark the life of Costanza, for her character engages in almost no dialogue in the novella. When her mother appeared at that inn – "fifteen years, one month, and four days ago" (224) – to give birth in secret, she did so in "a wonderful calm and silence, which befitted the secrecy of such an extraordinary event" (226). It seems that Costanza, born amid such absolute silence that she did not even cry out at birth, "wears her piety like a second skin" (230).[13] Ruth El Saffar maintains that "Costanza is the result of a competing or alternating series of evil and generous acts" (104). Specifically, the father's evil and the greed of the administrator, who waited fifteen years to tell Don Diego of the existence of the child in order to benefit from a dowry, run counter to the mother's nobility and to the generosity of the innkeeper. In spite of this generosity, the traumatic circumstances of Costanza's conception and her secret birth seem to condemn Costanza's existence in the inn to silence. It is no accident that when the local magistrate hands Costanza over to Don Diego as his daughter, she cries out as if to signal her birth into a new life that corresponds to her new self: she kisses the hands of her father, "bath[ing] them with the many tears that flowed from her very beautiful eyes" (Cervantes, *Exemplary* 235).

The alternation or zigzagging – between the various possible destinies of the protagonists, the love episodes and picaresque adventures of the young men, and the evil and generous acts of key characters – seems encoded in the very document that confirms Constanza's noble origins. Upon entrusting the child to the care of the innkeeper, Costanza's mother leaves the child a golden necklace missing six gold links and half a white parchment paper torn "in a zigzag pattern, in the same way and for the same purpose that you put your hands together and write something on your fingers which can be read while the fingers are interlaced, but after the hands are separated the logic is broken because the letters become disconnected" (Cervantes, *Exemplary* 227). When the two pieces of the parchment paper, the one entrusted to the boarder ("T I I T E R E I N") and the one possessed by the senior don Diego de Carriazo ("H S S H T U S G"), are put together, they read: "THIS IS THE TRUE SIGN" (231).

In the image of the torn parchment paper, it is not at all difficult to discern the zigzag pattern, a graphic repetition of the Z. In the context of this exemplary novel, then, the Z clearly functions, just as Barthes observed, as "the letter of mutilation" that "stings like a chastising lash" (107). While the mutilation Barthes refers to in the context of Sarrasine is the castration of the masculine character, the mutilation represented by the Z of "The Illustrious Kitchen Maid" is the castration of the female body: the rupture of the metaphorical hymen that represents female purity and chastity, and therefore, women's place within patriarchal society. Marked from birth by the violation of her mother, Costanza seems destined to remain in an alienated and incomplete state.[14] That changes with the arrival of the person who possesses the six missing links of the golden chain and the other half of the parchment. Her identity remains a mystery, displaced and silent, until her father, a masculine savior figure, reveals her true origins and re-establishes her place within the patriarchal world of matrimonial exchange among noble families. The novel ends with three marriages, symmetrically interlaced: Don Tomás de Avendaño marries Costanza, Don Diego de Carriazo the younger marries the daughter of the local magistrate (a cousin of Don Juan de Avendaño), and Don Pedro, the local magistrate's son, marries the daughter of Don Juan de Avendaño.

What the stories of all these female characters from seventeenth-century Spanish literature clearly have in common is the presence of the Z, or the S/Z opposition, as a symptom of what Barthes called "the wound of deficiency" (107). In writings by Zayas and Cervantes, this omission is related to the otherness of the Moorish world and/or to the social castration that results from being a victim of rape. The origin of Zelima in María de Zayas's novel can be found in the need of a Christian woman named Isabel to create "a figure of alterity," a socially castrated personage with the necessary freedom and agency to be able to recover her (Isabel's) honor. In the stories of Zoraida and Zahara by Cervantes, the Z appears as a mark of otherness and deviation, a mark the female characters must discard to signify their conversion to Christianity and determination to place themselves within the Christian matrimonial system. The Z in "The Illustrious Kitchen Maid" is symptomatic of the master text. It is the wound of omission on the mutilated female body; a wound that must be sutured in order to secure the redemption of the elder and younger Don Diegos and to restore Costanza to her rightful place in the social order, correcting the deviation brought about by the violent circumstances of her conception.

According to Barthes, the Z as a mark of otherness (and fatality) can also be found in other writings by Balzac, including in *Z. Marcas*, one of the novels of *La Comédie humaine*. In this story, the tormented life of Zéphirin, the protagonist, is determined by the "thwarted stride in the shape of that 'Z'"

(Balzac, *Comedy* 199),[15] leading Barthes to conclude that "from a Balzacian viewpoint, this Z (which appears in Balzac's name) is the letter of deviation" (107).[16] Of course, it is impossible not to notice that "this Z" is also the first letter of the name Zayas, a clear sign of the "deviation" from seventeenth-century literary conventions that María de Zayas's narrative and theatrical works represented.

As a writer, María de Zayas constituted a "deviation" from the social expectations assigned to her gender: by dedicating herself to a masculine activity, she ran the risk of being equated with a man. The likeness is made explicit by one of Zayas's contemporaries, the Catalan priest and writer Francesc Fontanella, who, in his famous *Vexamen* (an academic satire written in 1643), dedicated these verses to Zayas:[17]

Doña Maria de Sayas
viu ab cara varonil.
que a bé que "sayas" tenia
bigotes tilava altius.
Semblava a algun cavaller.
mes jas' vindrá a descubrir
que una espata mal se amaga
baix las "sayas" femenils.
En la decima tercera
fou glosadora infeliz,
que mala tercera té
quant lo pris vol adquirir.
O! Senyora Dona Saÿa [sic],
per premiar sos bons desitgs
del sèrcol de un guardainfant
tindrà corona gentil! (Brown 231)

[I saw Doña Mary of the Skirts with a manly face, who although she has "skirts," twirls a haughty mustache. She looked like a gentleman, but it will be discovered that a sword can hardly be hidden under feminine skirts. In the third décima, she was unfortunate at glossing and she has a poor procuress if she wants to win a prize. Oh, Lady Dame Skirt, to reward your good desires, you will have a charming crown [made of] the hoop of your farthingale. (Greer, *Baroque Tales* 30)]

As Margaret Greer has noted, making fun of poets' physical characteristics was a common element in satires of the period, but María de Zayas is the only writer in Fontanella's *Vexamen* who gets criticized as much for her verses ("glosadora infeliz" ["unfortunate commentator]") as for her physical appearance (Greer, *Baroque Tales* 29-33). That said, Fontanella's critique

does not single out Zayas's writing as being unworthy. As a burlesque poem criticizing the shortcomings of all the competing poets, the *Vexamen* was actually intended to cement a camaraderie among the poets. Fontanella's critique of Zayas belittled her for having masculine attributes and devoting herself to activities proper to men. One could engage in a lengthy analysis of the sexism implicit in verses like his that are intended to be witty and ingenious (moustaches with flattened tips; the missing sword under the female skirts).[18] What is most important for purposes of this analysis, however, is to note the pre-Barthesian premonition in Fontanella's verses. Perhaps without even meaning to, Fontanella constructs an ideological opposition on the basis of a graphic differentiation: like *Balzac*, the name *Zayas* contains "the letter of deviation" (*Zayas* can be *Sayas*); and this deviation involved the "moustache" and the "sword," masculine attributes that are incongruent with female skirts, therefore converting Zayas into the "other," that is, into the "Saracen."

Like this rendering of María de Zayas, the stories of Isabel/Zelima and Zoraida/María, as written by their authors, stage challenges to prevailing gender norms: Zayas makes her heroine a Christian woman capable of cross-dressing as a Moorish slave in order to travel more freely through the world and recover her honor, while Cervantes makes his heroine a Moorish woman capable of changing her religion and marrying a Christian man who expects to find in her a model of Marian virtue. What is unsettling about the inversion in both stories is not just the inversion itself (an act constitutive of many stories, and of many Golden Age dramas), but rather the unexplained paradox that accompanies the change of name: even as the adopted names continue to connote femaleness, the engendering is called into question once inscribed within a cognitive universe in which Z marks a variety of deviations, regarding gender and religion, as well as the social and the sexual. Furthermore, these stories play upon the social fantasies that weigh on Moorish women, and likewise on the cultural universe in which they are inscribed. Such fantasies – privileging exoticism, sensuality, and guiltless pleasure – are undoubtedly symptoms of seventeenth-century Christian Spain in which Arab otherness is approached with both fascination and repulsion. Perhaps this explains the paradox that lies at the core of the argument presented here: if the Z – the letter of castration, as has been shown – allows women to move through the world with greater liberty and take personal initiatives, it is because the women need that liberty and those initiatives to incorporate (or re-incorporate) themselves into Christian society and be able to participate in its rigid system of matrimonial exchange. Once incorporated, however, it becomes necessary for them to erase all traces of the Z, just as Zoraida does when she adopts her new name

and Marian persona and as Zelima does when she recovers Isabel, her original name.

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NOTES

1 Deborah Lambert points out the limitations of Barthes's argument. She claims that Barthes simply displaces the content of the "biological axis of the sexes" with a "symbolic axis of castration," "without recognizing that this inverted axis only replicates and intensifies an ideology of sexuality" (164). From Lambert's perspective, Barthes's analysis reflects and reinforces the same interpretative limitations that Balzac's narrator has in the story of Sarrasine (162).

2 Because of the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula these fantasies are transferred onto Spain, as a kind of Near East. Mary Gossy notes that "[t]he romantic idea of Spain is founded on Orientalism. The knowledge that the Iberian Peninsula was settled and civilized for 800 years by Muslims, and had a thriving Jewish population (until after 1492) … makes Spain conveniently Oriental and exotic to a romantic European imagination" (62). The recurring presence of Spain and the Spanish in the novel *Sarrasine* is a symptom of what Gossy calls an "empire on the verge of a Spanish breakdown," within which "gender and historical anxiety hysterically affect textuality" (10). For example, the unclassifiable nature of the Lanty family and the strange circumstances surrounding the encounters between Sarrasine and Zambinella are always related to something Spanish. The Lanty family spoke "Italian, French, *Spanish*, English, and German perfectly" (Barthes, S/Z 223; emphasis added). Count Lanty was "dark as a *Spaniard*, dull as a banker" (224; emphasis added). The theater where Zambinella works is called *Teatro Argentina* (237), and the place where Sarrasine needs to go for his first meeting with her is on "the Via del Corso, in front of the Hotel di *Spagna*" (241; emphasis added). At the party when Sarrasine speaks for the first time to Zambinella, the songs being sung were "ravishing duets, songs from Calabria, *Spanish* seguidillas, Neapolitan canzonettas" (244; emphasis added).

3 Barthes claims that having the scar of castration coincide with castration "is the task successfully carried out by the performer (Balzac), since the former does not necessarily entail the latter … This success hinges on a structural artifice: identifying the symbolic and the hermeneutic, making the search for the truth (hermeneutic structure) into the search for castration (symbolic structure), making the truth be *anecdotally* (and no longer symbolically) the absent phallus" (164).

4 Margaret Greer utilizes the term "castration" in a different sense. According to her, "the almost simultaneous publication" of Germaine Greer's book "The Female Eunuch" (1971) and Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (1970) shows "a contrapuntal articulation of masculine and feminine sexual disempowerment, organized around the fantasized image of castration" (Greer, "Female Eunuch" 41). Inspired by both texts, Greer analyzes "the creation of a female eunuch, and a gender-polarized debate on sexual fantasies or phobias centered on castration" in the life and work of María de Zayas (41). According to Greer, this happens in two instances: in Fontanella's famous *Vexamen*, an academic satire that "paint[s] [Zayas] as a female eunuch to belittle her literary talents," and in Zayas's introduction to the fourth story of the *Disenchantments*, in which the narrator, Filis, "equates depriving women of books and arms with literal castration of men" (Greer, "Female Eunuch" 42, 47).

5 Although not referring specifically to the Spanish context or to the status of seventeenth-century women, Said's reflections on Europe's relationship with the East offer relevant insight into representations of Muslim women in the works of Cervantes and Zayas.

6 After comparing 400 Balzac characters with images from the broader French media of the period, Pierre Guiraud found a higher percentage of blondes and black-haired people in Balzac's stories and a higher percentage (57%) of brown-haired images in other media of the time. The greater polarization in Balzac's imagery, moreover, followed gender lines: women tended to be blonde and men tended to be black-haired. According to Guiraud: "Balzac sacrificed reality (the reality of French society) in favor of portraying a universe of greater contrasts and, therefore, of broader, more profound signification" (223; my translation). One can easily discern an analogous polarization operating within Zayas's work.

7 The similarities between the stories of Zahara and Zelima are evident. Critics such as Casalduero and Canavaggio, and, more recently, Fuchs and Garcés have pointed out the parallels between the two narratives.

8 María Antonia Garcés notes that Hajid Murad's daughter first married Abd-al-Malik, aspirant to the Moroccan throne who had been exiled to Algiers around 1570. Garcés also speculates that Cervantes could have met Hajid Murad's daughter around 1576, which is when Abd-al-Malik ascended to the Moroccan throne, leaving his wife and son in Algiers as hostages of the Turks. After the sultan was killed in the Battle of Alcazarquivir in 1578, Hajid Murad's daughter married Hasan Pasha, who became Cervantes's master in 1579 (Garcés 210-11).

9 Murillo (112), Forcione (348), Gerli (42) and Garcés (215) associate Zoraida with the Virgin Mary. According to them, the arrival of Ruy Pérez and Zoraida to Juan Palomeque's inn recalls the return of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Regarding the popularity of dark-skinned Virgins in Spain, the second part of *El donado hablador Alonso, mozo de muchos amos* (1626), by Jerónimo Alcalá

Yáñez, mentions several famous ones: "la imagen de Atocha de Madrid, de Guadalupe, de Montserrate y otras semejantes" (Alcalá Yáñez 1317). Alonso's long answer to the question posed by the priest of San Zoles – "¿Qué dice hermano? ¿Luego nuestra Señora no fue morena? ¿No ve que esta es común opinión de todos?" (1317) – attempts to clear up the "misconception" that the Virgin Mary had dark skin. In his opinion, the reason why these popular images have dark skin is "el tiempo y la humedad de la tierra donde los católicos las enterraron por miedo de que las sacrílegas manos de los moros no las maltratasen" (1317).

10 In *The Bagnios of Algiers,* "Zoraida's double, Zahara" (Garcés 209), offers more details: the slave not only suckled her mistress, but also taught her "the four prayers, and how to read and write" (Garcés 36).

11 As Deborah Compte has observed: "In the same way that Isabel/Zelima crosses cultural and caste boundaries … she also bridges narrative spaces functioning as author, narrator and protagonist" (57).

12 Carriazo and Avendaño set off from Burgos under the "pretense" of going to study in Salamanca. While on the road, they send a letter to their parents claiming to be headed to Flanders, but actually they are going to the fisheries of Zahara. The route between these destinations follows a zigzag pattern.

13 The text in Spanish claims that she wears "un silencio pegado a las carnes" (Cervantes, *Ejemplares* 112).

14 Christina H. Lee rightly observes that Costanza "is exceptionally uninvolved in the development of the plot" (45). According to her, "Costanza is a symbolic image, serving as the metonymic extension for the true heroine of this tale and the character that actively moves the primary plot of the story – Costanza's mother" (48).

15 At the beginning of the novel, after positing "a certain harmony between the person and his name" (Balzac, *Comedy* 199), the narrator claims that the Z preceding Marcas, as "the last letter of the alphabet, brought to mind some sense of fatality" (199).

16 It is important to note that the introduction of the letter Z had the opposite effect in Balzac's literary career. Although it was in fact his father who changed the family name from the Occitan Balssa to the French Balzac, the author's later addition of the aristocratic "de" contributed to his canonization as a writer. According to Michael D. Garval, Balzac's "elaboration of a vast fictional world peopled by thousands of invented characters" and "fabrication of his identity as the Noble Author 'Honoré de Balzac'" show that "the creation of fictions of identity [happened] at every level of Balzac's life, work and literary afterlife" (Garval, "Balzac's Comedy" 7). In a missed opportunity, Barthes does not mention how the introduction of this "letter of deviation" and the subsequent change from Honoré Balssa to Honoré de Balzac affected the writer's career. For Michael D. Garval, who analyzed the autobiographical

circumstances of the name changes, "the whole S/Z problematic is already contained in the juxtaposition of the writer's real and assumed family names" (*Dream* 81).

17 According to Kenneth Brown, Fontanella, "as secretary of the literary and semi-religious Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas and through the publication of his *Vexamen*, put an end to a poetic competition" in the city of Barcelona (176).

18 Margaret Greer offers two possibilities for a critical reading of Fontanella. The first assumes the text to be a confirmation of Zayas's condition as a butch, both in physical appearance and in terms of sexual orientation. The second reading finds the text to be a veiled compliment, inasmuch as Zayas's masculinization functions as a sign of her "effective intrusion in the realm of literary discourse generally considered a masculine preserve" (*Baroque Tales* 33).

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