(Mis)Representations of Female Slaves in Golden Age Spain: Mariana de Carvajal’s Recovery of the Black Female Slave in *La industria vence desdenes*

*Carmen King de Ramírez*


*Hispania* Open Access files are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
(Mis)Representations of Female Slaves in Golden Age Spain: Mariana de Carvajal’s Recovery of the Black Female Slave in La industria vence desdenes

Carmen King de Ramírez
Arizona State University

Abstract: Despite the number of recent Golden Age studies that examine feminine figures, the majority of research has been dedicated to analyzing the bourgeois woman and her function as a counterpart to the male figure. However, the lavish lifestyle characteristic of this time period is not sustained through the efforts of bourgeois characters, but rather, through the labor and collaboration of ancillary characters, such as female slaves, that tend to go unperceived by critics. The present article explores the inadequacies existent in Spanish Golden Age representations of black female slaves illustrated by several male authors, and proposes that works written by female authors of the same time period provide a more complete vision of the domestic and social importance of slave women. In order to investigate this proposal more fully, this article explores Mariana de Carvajal’s novella La industria vence desdenes (1637), and suggests that Carvajal’s detailed representations of the black female slave’s contributions to domestic affairs distinguish her work from other novelas of the same time period. In this text, the female slave’s multifaceted role unfolds as she acts as a caregiver, domestic servant, cultural ambassador, and intermediary between bourgeois figures. In order to form a base from which readers can fully appreciate Carvajal’s contributions to the representations of the domestic slave, the first part of this study provides preliminary information concerning the historical and literary presence of the black female slave in Golden Age Spain as well as illustrations of this figure in works written by Carvajal’s contemporaries.

Keywords: Golden Age/Siglo de Oro, Mariana de Carvajal, slaves/esclavas, Spain/España, women/mujeres

Female Slaves in Golden Age Spain

The booming urban culture in Granada and Seville sets the background for the development of bourgeois figures, which depend on servants and slaves to help them navigate the social boundaries imposed by urban society. Slaves become so important during the Baroque period that it is estimated that every social class owned at least one slave and there are several reported cases of Spaniards, such as doña Catalina de Ribera, who had more than seventy slaves serving her (Maravall 278). This historical example brings to light the culture of excess sustained in the Peninsula:

Ostentation was the law of the large city in a society whose order was based on privilege. There one could find the luxury and riches of modes of dress, the great number and opulence of banquets and dinners, the tremendous and magnificent buildings, the multitude of servants, and the riches of domestic furnishings. (Maravall 117)

The widespread domestic dependence on servants of almost all social classes, from nobles to ecclesiastics and tertian sectors, enhances the relevance of slave figures in seventeenth century Spain.

New literary characters born from the growing urban sectors of Golden Age Spain include women who become servants or slaves in order to satisfy the punishment for committing a crime
were sold as servants to pay a family debt, or wish to earn money for a dowry (Bensch 74). In this division of labor, prostitutes, servants and daughters of slaves work in the public sector in taverns, vineyards, and artisans while slaves work beside domestic servants and the household mistress.

**The Underdeveloped Character of the Female Slave**

Despite the indispensable role of female slaves during the XVI and XVII centuries, the importance of this figure is historically understated by Golden Age authors and modern scholars. More specifically, the role of black Golden Age slaves has been ignored as efforts to rescue literary voices/representations of indigenous populations gain more attention in Latin American studies (Aguirre Beltrán 153). While there are many factors that may have contributed to the underdevelopment of this character, understanding the subalternity of the female service figure is of utmost importance since her role in literature is manipulated to exploit and repress her character in accordance with the desires of the dominant ideology. In this way, the female slave satisfies Gayatri Spivak's criteria for identifying a subaltern figure. According to Spivak, the subaltern character is one for whom we are unable to find an authentic voice in literature, given that her existence depends as much on power, desire and subjectivity as the reproduction of labor and submission to the dominating social class (273).

The fact that the slave figure cannot represent herself, but is represented in a power relationship (male/female, master/servant), complicates the study of this figure even more, since it denies her, both in literature and history, a feeling of community, national ties, and political organizations. Ultimately, the twin barriers this character confronts, in her spatial exclusion to the domestic sphere and the discrimination she suffers as a member of an underprivileged social class, greatly limit contemporary scholars’ access to accurate representations of this figure.

By understanding the subaltern role of the slave figure, one can appreciate the patriarchal simplification of this character in Golden Age literature. The origins of said simplification, according to María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, are related to how honor and status are accorded historically only to those figures of higher social classes (73). The preoccupation with honor not only is reflected in the conduct of Golden Age bourgeois characters, but is also noted in literature through the increased emphasis on racial and religious themes.

In literature of the period, which establishes a clear marriage between honor and Christians, sociocultural minorities are often illustrated as lacking honor and, in turn, are portrayed as exhibiting carnivalesque characteristics in their speech and conduct. This phenomenon can be observed in the illustration of black slaves as comedic service figures that use altered forms of standard language and demonstrate a predisposition for music and dance. Female slaves represented in Spanish Golden Age literature fall victim to this exploitation as their literary representations are simplified so that they oscillate between humoristic helpers and instigators of malignant activities. Through an analysis of Golden Age literary works, one can conceive of how honor affects the relationship between slave and master and ultimately determines how the slave woman is portrayed in literature of the time period. The La estrella de Sevilla (1513) is an exemplary novel that portrays the topic of honor and its relationship to females and the patriarchal code. In this novel, Busto Tavera beheads the slave, Natilde, for allowing the King access to Busto’s sister, Estrella. Though the King ultimately did not obtain his goal, the slave Natilde’s head is placed in the main plaza as a warning to the King and any other who dares to offend the honor of his household.

The representation of the female slave character is not only subject to the way in which this character safeguards the honor attributed to their bourgeois masters but is also subject to the hierarchies that exist among ancillary figures of the same domestic spaces. Lope de Rueda illustrates the social position of the black servant woman in his play “De los engañados” (1567) as he dedicates the better part of an entire act to a quarrel between Julieta (servant) and Guiomar
(black slave). When the mistress asks the slave Guiomar to call for Julieta the rivialry and discord between servant and slave is brought to light.

Guiomar: ¡Chuchuleta, machacha! -Sinora, no responder; piensa que se muerta!
Julieta: ¡Ay, amarga de mí, y qué diablo me quiere allá fuera la cara de carbón de brezo! (67)

This dialogue continues as the author highlights complications born from social and racial differences of women who are forced to collaborate in domestic realms. The slave Guiomar is not only distinguished for her unassimilated use of Spanish but also for her skin color as her mistress refers to her as “la cara de carbón de brezo.”

The racial and social differences between slave women and other feminine figures in the domestic sphere are echoed throughout Golden Age literature of male authorship that commonly simplifies the complex lives of female slaves by reducing her importance in the work to the comic relief she provides through her carnivalesque characteristics. This phenomenon can be observed in Cervantes’ exemplary novel El celoso extremeño (1613) where the author underlines the unassimilated “no muy ladina” condition of the black slave Guiomar. The author’s obsession with this servant manifests itself in the linguistic peculiarities that characterize Guiomar throughout the novel. These speech variances can be observed in the following passage in which the slave and her white Spanish contemporaries curse the old governess Marialonso:

Entroyeron las mozas los requiebros de la vieja, y cada una le dijo el nombre de las Pascuas; ninguna la llamó vieja que no fuese con su epíteto y adjetivo de hechicera y de barbuda, de antojadiza y de otros que por buen respecto se callan; pero lo que más causara a quien entonces las oyera, eran las razones de Guiomar la negra, que, por ser portuguesa y no muy ladina, era extraña la gracia con que la vituperaba. (Cervantes 128)

Aside from the peculiarities that differentiate Guiomar’s speech from the Spanish servants of the same household, other racial stereotypes, such as the dark skin and skittish nature of the African servant woman, are noted throughout the text.

In the case of black characters in Golden Age literature, there is not only an obsession for skin color but also for their speech. Baltazar Fra Molinero notes this in his study of the representation of blacks in Golden Age theater: “Un negro es un negro siempre, y su presencia tiene que ir anunciada por algo: una lengua, unas situaciones específicas (cómicas), una referencia constante a su situación social de esclavo” (20). The exaggerated characteristics employed to mark the presence of black slaves in Golden Age works, denotes an underlying racism existent in this time period that insists on marking self and other.

This obsession with using racial stereotypes to identify others is a mechanism used to classify people within society and assign “appropriate” social roles (Bhabha 9). According to Frantz Fanon, racial stereotyping and the subsequent role assignments of minority figures is a colonial phenomenon that extends to any time period and social context in which there is social antagonism associated with a relationship of power (Bhabha 42–43). In Golden Age Spain, the colonialization of the black slave woman derives from the fact that she is always subject to the requests and whims of her master. Consequently, the female slave is conceived as an appendage to the authority figure and thus illustrated as such in literature.

In a master/slave relationship, an accurate representation of the black slave woman is difficult to achieve given that the colonial image of the slave always serves the purposes of the patriarchy who assigns carnivalesque characteristics to identify him/her as belonging to an inferior class/race. In turn, these assigned racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics become a “cultural mummification” in the colonizer’s avowed ambition to civilize or modernize” (Bhabha 43). The mummification of racial and ethnic characteristics assigned to the black female slave in Golden Age Spain discourages the exploration of alternative representations of this figure.
The largely unchallenged representations of black female slaves in Golden Age Spanish literature call attention to the importance of works such as Carvajal’s as spaces from which alternative aspects of the black slave figure and her experiences in Spanish society can be recovered.

**Servant Figures in the Works of María de Zayas**

Although Golden Age prose written by female authors is not void of sociocultural stereotypes, there is a marked difference in the approach that women writers take toward female servant and slave characters. Historically, male authors have marginalized urban ancillary figures by reducing female slaves and servants to traitors or simple comedic relief. In contrast, novels written by female authors, such as Carvajal and María de Zayas, portray the ancillary figure as a confidant and accomplice to the bourgeois protagonist. In this manner, slaves and servants illustrated by female authors do not display the same binary properties as those portrayed by their male counterparts but are characters whose roles in domestic spaces are more fully developed.

Maria de Zayas’ works are most recognized for her attention to the complexities of female relationships in the domestic spheres as well as women’s roles in society at large. “La traición en la Amistad” (1618) centers on the relationship between four bourgeois women who fall in love with the same man. This work not only stands out for the manner in which Zayas illustrates interactions between women of the time period, but also for the important relationship it reveals between the servant, Lucia, and the protagonist, Fenisa. When a fierce competition with her female contemporaries leaves her without any other confidants, Fenisa confides her secrets to her servant Lucia who helps her resolve the romantic problem. Zayas’s works support a feminist ideology through a bipartite structure that illustrates feminine solidarity when faced with false and unjust males (Spieker 156). In a society where men frequently wrong women, female servant and slave figures often surpass social limits to come to the aid of their vulnerable and lonely mistress.

**An Introduction to the Work of Mariana de Carvajal**

The more developed image of the female slave as illustrated by Golden Age women writers may signal the author’s vested interest in this domestic figure. This would seem to be the case of Mariana de Carvajal, who, given her upper class social status paired with the time period and region in which she lived, inevitably maintained domestic relationships with female servants. This supposition is not only supported by the ostentatious character of the bourgeois class to which the author belonged, but also a number of historical records. It was not uncommon during this time period for widows to petition for, and in many cases be granted, funds to support their servants and slaves.4

Although there are several studies dedicated to Carvajal’s works,5 these studies fail to recognize how the author’s stylistic tendencies make La industria vence desdenes an ideal work from which to study the image of the domestic servant. While historically the author has received little praise for what critics such as Agustín González Amezúa judge as “insipid . . . dull and prosaic” writing (3), the present investigation aligns with views of scholars, such as Caroline Bourland, who recognize the value of the accounts of seventeenth century upper-class domestic life that the author provides.6 The domestic intricacies of Carvajal’s courtly novella uncover the image of the female servant through rich descriptions of household interactions, popular attire, and interior designs that allow the contemporary reader to recreate the forgotten domestic spheres of the seventeenth century.

The restricted spaces of the feminine realm on which Carvajal bases her stories reflect her own reality as a widow left to care for three sons and six daughters. Although little is known about the author’s life, historic records indicate that Carvajal requested financial support from
the Spanish Crown after the death of her husband, Licenciado Don Baltasar Velázquez, who worked for the royal treasury (Serrano y Sanz 241–43). It has been proposed that the same simple language and “casera” topics employed by Carvajal are consequences of the responsibilities she undertook after her husband’s death (Valis 253).

Other stylistic distinctions of Carvajal’s writing that are particularly important in the investigation of the female servant is what Elizabeth Ordóñez identifies as the ability of female writers to create a relationship between the narrator and the reader (5–8). In her collection of novellas “Navidades de Madrid y noches entretenidas,” Carvajal achieves a connection between the reader and the text by creating a context in which the storyteller directly addresses the reader. Noël Valis argues that this technique that “invites” readers into the intimate spaces of the storyteller’s home is patterned after the use of fiction as gossip (257). This use of prose as gossip is structured on social behaviors that are characteristically female, especially when manifested through friendship or collaborative bonding (Abel 257). It is imperative that critics recognize the literary approaches employed by female authors when analyzing the development of the domestic slave whose figure has historically been underdeveloped in Spanish literature.

The author’s firsthand knowledge of slaves in the domestic sphere is brought to light not only in La industria vence desdenes, the principal work to be examined in this study, but also in a novella such as Quien obra bien, siempre acierta. Whereas La industria vence desdenes provides superfluous descriptions of the slaves’ domestic chores and her role in resolving familial discord, Quien obra bien, siempre acierta calls attention to an amorous relationship between a slave woman and her master. Although during the development of the narrative there are no meaningful exchanges between bourgeois characters and the slave Juliana, at the end of the novel Carvajal details the fate of don Leonardo’s slave mother who during the length of the narration plays no principal role in the plot.

While the story could have easily concluded without further mention of the slave Juliana, this character grows in significance when her master, and the father of her illegitimate son, directs a private and somewhat melancholic monologue to the slave woman:

> Ya, Juliana, se cumplió vuestro deseo que tantas veces me habéis pedido: que os de libertad. El Corregidor me ha notificado que os venda fuera de Córdoba. Ya sabéis el amor que os he tenido, y sentiré mucho que estando fuera de mi poder viváis desenfrenadamente. Yo he de buscar un mozo que sea hombre de bien, con quien casaros. Mañana os daré la libertad, y demás de lo que habéis adquirido en mi casa, os daré quinientos ducados. Prevenido todo lo que fuere vuestro, mientras me buscan cosa o propósito, porque no tengo más de quince días de plazo, y que os debéis salir de Córdoba. (117)

Although it is difficult to determine the nature of the sexual relationship between don Álvaro and Juliana, the dowry that he provides, as well as his arrangement for her to enter into a respectable marriage with a free man, provide some evidence of don Álvaro’s affectionate sentiments for the slave. The details provided by Carvajal pertaining to the juxtaposition of slave and bourgeois cultures are particularly interesting when one considers the overt prejudices of the time period, when social classes are strictly divided and extramarital relationships with a servant were carefully concealed from the public.

Carvajal’s narration of a sexual relationship between master/servant is not only unique in literature of the time period, but also sheds light upon taboos in Golden Age Spanish society. Despite efforts to conceal sexual exchanges between master and servant, these relationships were rampant. In fact, such relationships were so common that a man who was guilty of impregnating his slave was obligated by law to recognize the freeborn status of the child and grant freedom to the child’s mother (Blumenthal 174). When taking this law into account, the reader can appreciate Carvajal’s reprimand of don Álvaro as twofold: not only did he deny Juliana’s freedom by concealing her identity as the mother of his son, but he also brought shame upon his household by becoming sexually involved with a woman outside of his social class.
The author’s inclusion of these details alludes to her sensitivity regarding sexual relationships that blur the social boundaries between master and slave. This attention Carvajal pays to the often ignored sexual plight of female slaves could be considered an example of seventeenth-century female writers’ efforts to establish more complete images of the social and domestic conditions in which the female slave works and lives.

Although Carvajal’s work has always been considered inferior to that of her contemporary María de Zayas, her work has begun to gain recognition among scholars. Valis notes that while there has historically been a binary opposition between the two writers, Carvajal has much to offer given that the “plainness of her voice and narrative scheme is precisely the sort of reading experience which make us see things most clearly by suggesting that we judge actions as they are being performed” (252). Carvajal’s literary recreations of the servant woman’s role in domestic settings prove to be invaluable in works such as La industria vence desdenes.

Functions of the Female Slave in La industria vence desdenes

This novel casts female figures as instrumental characters in the development of the plot and offers insights into relationships established between the service sector and the bourgeois class. The beginning of La industria vence desdenes presents don Pedro, a bachelor, who after his parents’ deaths renounces the family fortune so that his sister, Jacinta, may leave her life at the convent and marry. Soon after, don Pedro moves to Rome where he works for a cardinal and eventually earns his own fortune through selling his paintings. During his seventeen-year absence, don Pedro’s sister gives birth to a son, Jacinto, who becomes a primary character in the plot of the story.

Don Pedro’s background serves as an introduction to the events that unfold after he returns to Spain. Don Pedro initiates a friendship with doña Guiomar and her daughter, doña Beatriz, who convince him to buy a home with which he receives two slaves. This domestic space becomes the backdrop of the main plot in which the slaves play a crucial role. Carvajal’s illustration of these slave women provide cultural images and resolve tangled bourgeois love affairs.

What underpins Carvajal’s work regarding the female slave figure is how the author illustrates the constant presence of this ancillary figure throughout the story. In a description of daily interactions between master and slave, Carvajal depicts a scene in which the slave Antonia bathes don Jacinto, who has just arrived to his uncle’s home.

Teníale prevenido un baño en una tina . . . Estaba cubierta de un pabellón, y Antionia le dijo:
—Entre vuestra merced en el baño y sientese para que le bene el medio cuerpo. Hízolo así, y como vivía contenta con la buena condición de su dueño, luego que le empezó a bañar, le dijo:
—¡Ay, hijo de puta! ¿Qué blanco es el mocico! Parece la mano de la negra mosca en la leche!
Con esto empezó don Jacinto a decir tantos donaires, y la negra a responderle, que no se podían tener todos de risa. (143)

As where most Golden Age literature only introduces the slave character to resolve or complicate the master’s plight, as in La estrella de Sevilla, this passage illustrates the importance of the slave in the most mundane chores, offering a unique view of genuine daily interactions between master and slave. The liberties that Carvajal gives the black slave who freely engages in dialogue with her master also prove significant.

According to Norman Fairclough, one can evaluate the distribution of power in a relationship according to the usage of speech that an individual is permitted in linguistic exchanges:

Power in discourse has to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants. It is useful to distinguish broadly between three types of such constraint: content (what is said or done), relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse), and subjects (the subject positions people can occupy). (38–39)
While it would be erroneous to believe that Carvajal is indicating a relationship in which master and slave access an equal amount of power, their dynamic interactions indicate an atypical scene in which the slave woman is allotted verbal interjections that showcase her personality.

Carvajal’s passage appears distinctive when compared to other Golden Age novellas in which slave images are shaped by their domestic chores. In such works, ancillary figures do not tend to initiate or lead conversations with bourgeois figures thus signaling the distribution of power between master and servant. To this effect, social mechanisms used by powerful participants (masters) control and manipulate the contributions of non-powerful participants (slaves) by limiting what they can do and say.

Carvajal’s Accounts of Servants’ Roles in Spanish Bourgeois Culture

In *La industria vence desdenes* the servants’ ability to promote the social reputation of their master is observed and emphasized in scenes such as the preparation of don Jacinto’s Sunday attire: “Y llamando al lacayuelo, le mandó llamase al sastre para ajustarlo, sacando un ferreruelo de dos felpas, un sombrero de castor y un cintillo de diamantes. Mandó a la negra le cosiera en él, cogiendo la falda con una brocha de lo mismo” (145). Many scholars have noted Carvajal’s elaborate descriptions of domestic decor and the protagonists’ dress differentiates her text from other novels of the same time period, as well as highlights the historical bases of the luxuries. However, such investigations do not credit the author’s emphasis on the role of the domestic slave in the bourgeois lifestyle. By detailing the female slaves’ daily routines such as sewing, attending to guests, preparing baths, cooking, and adorning the home, Carvajal draws attention to the indispensable role of these characters in ways that other Golden Age authors ignore. Despite modern scholars’ disregard for the domestic insights that Carvajal’s work offers, the importance of Carvajal’s domestic accounts are seconded by historic records which demonstrate the need to keep up appearances as alluded to in the novella (Maravall 117). *La industria vence desdenes* recreates the excessive ostentation of the bourgeois class of this time period through the extravagant parties hosted by don Pedro.

Don Pedro’s gatherings not only exemplify the importance of the home as a space in which to showcase personal possessions and social power, but also emphasize the relevance of the slave in maintaining the social protocol of the era. Given that Carvajal’s text offers various detailed descriptions of the labors realized by the slaves who prepare the home to receive their master’s guests, the author uses her work to expose female slaves’ indispensable role in the Spanish household:

Tenía la morena debajo de una enramada que cubría una fuente que estaba en el jardín, cercada de macetas, puestas unas alfombras con almohadas y taburetes en que descansaran y en una sala de tres que había por estar cerca de la fuente, sobre unas tarimas puso en que sestearan las damas. En la otra frontera hizo lo mismo para los hombres. (154)

Although the majority of scenes in the novel indicate a merely service relationship between master and slave, the slave woman’s importance is not reduced to the chores she performs, but extends to her daily interaction with the family (Anderson 65). This can be observed in the second part of the aforementioned passage as the master don Pedro rewards the slave Antonia for her labors:

Tan bien dispuesto todo, así en la comida como en lo demás que Don Pedro le estimó el cuidado y, abrazándola, como se preciara de la chanza, le dijo: Paréçeme que la negra quiere estrenar el día de mi santo chinelitas de gatatumba, coralitos y toquita de puntas. En yendo a casa daré para todo. (154)
This scene contradicts the overt racism of the public realm by illustrating the familiarity with which the master treats the slave woman, Antonia, in the domestic sphere. Don Pedro not only promises Antonia a pair of elaborate slippers but also embraces her challenging the manifest segregation between white and black characters of the time period.  

Cultural Exchanges Illustrated by Carvajal

Upon considering the interdependence between master/servant in Golden Age culture, the exchanges between characters such as don Pedro and his servants can be interpreted as evidence of familiar ties created by people of differing socioeconomic backgrounds. By forming a relationship with a slave, the master accesses and adapts conduct that contradicts his social status. Carvajal calls attention to this point when her master’s nephew, don Jacinto, accompanies the slave Antonia in an African dance with his bourgeois contemporaries present:

don Jacinto: No tenga vuestra merced pena que yo traeré el Sol de Guinea para que nos alumbre.

Y, llamando a Antonia, le mandó tráxese su adufe diciéndole:

don Jacinto: Señora morena, los dos haremos de bailar un baile mandingo a lo negro con todas sus circunstancias. Respondiéle la despejada negra.

Antonia: No quedará por mí, si vuestra merced la sabe bailar. Y traído el adufe lo bailaron con tantos gestos y ademanes que hizo el mancebo remedando a su negra que ya les dolían los cuerpos de risa. (158)

Antonia’s presence gives don Jacinto license to enjoy an activity reserved for an inferior social classes displaying in this manner the rarely explored theme of bicultural exchange between the bourgeois figure and the domestic servant.

This cultural transposition, illustrated in Carvajal’s work by don Jacinto’s participation in an exotic dance, is more commonly noted in situations in which servant figures appropriate styles, garments, and social attitudes from the higher class and in this way “challenge the perceived structure of society” (Mihaly 723). However, Carvajal demonstrates an inversion of cultural norms passed from upper to lower classes by highlighting behaviors that originate from the minority class and penetrate the upper class sector.

In Golden Age Spain, the opportunities for black cultural practices to infiltrate dominant white culture were frequent given that blacks, both free and slave, were publically permitted to play their native music and dance. In Seville, the neighborhood Santa María la Blanca was famous for large parties hosted by blacks during which they incorporated their native dances and instruments (Méndez Rodríguez 398). This freedom granted to blacks to publically preserve part of their cultural heritage is in direct contrast with the Moorish communities who were not allowed the same freedoms (Martín-Casares 423). As a result of the African traditions practiced publically and privately in Golden Age Spain, popular dances such as the guineo and the zarambeque became famous and commonplace in Spanish society. The guineo, described as “a dance of quick and prompt movements” (Covarrubias), mirrors Carvajal’s description of the dance in which Antonia and don Jacinto participate.

The scenes in which the master of the home, not the mistress, is the instigator of amicable interchanges with the female servant character make Carvajal’s work distinctive. However, while the domestic details offered in the novel provide a platform from which to rescue unique peculiarities of the master/servant relationship, the contemporary reader must beg the question of the slave’s autonomy and willingness to participate in exchanges such as the ethnic dance used as means of entertaining her master’s bourgeois friends.

Whereas this question is difficult to explore given the absence of the servant’s voice in the narrative, the reader may conclude that while the slave may not have voluntarily participated
in this exchange, don Jacinto’s participation in a dance form that is not of his social class would surely be scoffed by his bourgeois contemporaries. In this way, it could be argued that the master validates the cultural heritage of his slave by demonstrating his knowledge of her ethnic customs.

This blurring of social boundaries and cultural behaviors is also noted in the power allotted to slave women as intermediaries between bourgeois figures. Aside from the dance shared between don Jacinto and the slave Antonia, the author uses music to bring the slave figure into the main action of the novel.

**The Importance of the Missive in the Relationship between Master and Slave**

While Carvajal’s dedication to preserving what some may consider the mundane and unimportant details, the domestic realms provide unique insights to the daily interactions between black female slaves and their masters. The end of *La industria vence desdenes* highlights the importance of the black female servant in facilitating social interactions among the bourgeois.

Although music is typically employed as a means of seduction between bourgeois lovers, Carvajal uses music as a “catalyst of illness” (García Santo-Tomás 154), thus worsening don Jacinto’s lovesick state. This is illustrated by a series of infirmities that afflict the young master after he hears a song that foretells the rejection of a man who shares his same name: “De los desdenes de Celia llorando estaba Jacinto el verse tan despreciado, mirándose tan rendido” (159). Since don Jacinto considers the song to be a parallel to his own hopeless situation, his desperation leads him to suffer an illness characterized by insomnia and an accelerated pulse. The bourgeois figure’s weakened strength allows the slave to come to the forefront as a caregiver and thus form an essential part in resolving the plot.

As an intermediary between her ill master and other key characters, the female servant attends to those who visit don Jacinto and assumes an invaluable role as an intermediary who communicates the sick master’s health status to other characters. The inversion of power roles is apparent at this juncture when don Pedro relies on the care of the servant to insure the health of his adored nephew: “su tío, hallándole con tanto crecimiento, preguntando si había comido algo que le hiciera mal, le respondió Antonia como había salido y que el aire lo había causado” (168). Aside from underlining the importance of the ancillary figure as a caregiver, the previous passage also highlights the omnipresence of the ancillary character.

While the exits and entrances of bourgeois characters are clearly noted during don Jacinto’s ailment, the author’s omission of the slaves’ entrances and exits invites the reader to perceive an ever present ancillary figure. The continued presence of the slave at the side of her afflicted master converts her into an important source of information due to the fact that she observes conversations and actions realized in the most intimate spaces of the home. At this point, the slave woman’s omniscience becomes a characteristic that encourages an alliance between her and other bourgeois characters.

While don Jacinto is bedridden with illness, the bewitched doña Beatriz uses the window to notate who crosses the bachelor’s threshold. It is during her vigilance that this bourgeois character sees two women who have come to visit don Jacinto. At this juncture, she calls upon a slave woman to intervene in her concerns and spy on the female intruders. This passage clearly notes the advantage of the alliance between mistress and slave when considering the confinement of the female bourgeois figure. The mistress’s spatial limitations prompt her to use alternative spaces, such as the window, as the realm from which she may observe interactions between other characters. In contrast to doña Beatriz, the female slave is free to participate in both private and public scenes.

The accomplice relationship between doña Beatriz and her servant, motivated by the mistress’s spatial restrictions, is a phenomenon observed throughout Medieval and Golden Age Spanish literature. In the celebrated fifteenth-century work *La Celestina*, the physical descriptions in the narrative center on observations made by the servants. It is through these figures that the
reader becomes familiar with the urban landscape in which the story takes place given that the servants function as the eyes of their masters who are confined to domesticity.

Due to the realms to which different characters are bound, the manipulation of urban spaces by servant and slave characters is described by Halina Czarnocka as the opposition between the closed and open dichotomy of the house and the street: “The house makes up a closed space protected from the hostile world by gates and walls. The street is what threatens that house, that which surrounds it and tries to penetrate it” (65). So that the public affairs that take place on the street may be present in the home, the protagonist depends on the help of street-wise domestic servants. Despite the chronological gap between the work of Rojas and the novel of Carvajal, the spatial manipulation of spaces by ancillary figures remains a motivating factor for the relationships formed between master/servant/slaves in the Golden Age.

The multiple social spaces that servants and slaves are able to access in Golden Age literature can best be understood by considering the phenomenon of heterotopias, which is defined by Henri Lefebvre as “space with in a space” (33). The importance of said heterotopias in the relationship between slave and master is a concept that Michel Foucault identifies as the interrelationship or coexistence of living spaces: “We do not live inside a void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We live inside a set of relations that delineates sides which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposed on one another” (23). Through heterotopias, the concept of social hierarchy is annulled since the relationships that a character develops with others permit him/her to occupy various social spaces at the same time.

The spatial interaction between protagonists and slave brings to light the importance of interpersonal relationships in order to achieve the social desires. Paul D. McLean underscores this phenomenon by suggesting that, through the master/servant relationship, ancillary characters establish alliances that magnify their sense of individualism and better their social influences and possibilities to climb the social ladder.11

In the case of the female slave, establishing relationships with other figures in her social environment allows her to perform a variety of simultaneous roles. While she seems to be fulfilling domestic duties according to the conduct that the patriarchy expects of her, the ancillary figure lives in the margins of society by functioning as an intermediary for bourgeois figures. The black slave’s mobility is particularly useful in the exchange of clandestine letters in La industria vence desdenes as she is one of the few figures that can aide in the transmission of written correspondence between bourgeois lovers and thus evades social norms that prohibit uncensored communication between figures of the opposite sex.

It is through her female slave that doña Beatriz clandestinely exchanges letters with her suitor, don Jacinto:

Aquella noche, después de acostada su madre, [doña Beatriz] escribió un papel, y otro día por la mañana, dándoselo a la criada, la dijo: Vete a casa de Don Pedro, sin que nadie te vea. Dale este papel a su sobrino y dí que Doña Leonor me dejó para que se lo enviara encargándome le ganara la respuesta.

[Don Jacinto] Cerró el papel y dándoselo a la criada la dijo: Di a mi señora Doña Beatriz que le estimo mucho el cuidado y que me sea buena intercesora pues Doña Leonor, como amiga, le ha fiado este secreto. (169–70)

The exchange of letters in this scene continues until the end of the text, and identifies the slave as her mistress’s ally and a key character in the conclusion of the work.

The alliance between the slave and her mistress is not reduced to an innocent exchange of love letters but is an example of the bourgeois woman’s effort to establish a secure future. While men use written correspondence to create relationships with prominent figures in the community, women, such as doña Beatriz, use the missive within the domestic realm to take advantage of opportunities that may better their future. As illustrated in the close of the novel, the clandestine exchanges aided by the female slave ultimately procure doña Beatriz’s marriage to
don Jacinto. The romantic union that occurs as a consequence of the slave Antonia’s intervention is the culminating expression of the importance of the ancillary character in social and domestic matters of utmost importance.

In conclusion, Carvajal’s *La industria vence desdenes* provides unique perspectives regarding contributions of black slave women in Golden Age Spanish society. Unlike her male contemporaries’ tendency to create highly stereotyped, one-dimensional images of the black female slave, Carvajal creates a context in which the woman slave can be liberated from the simplification of the subaltern figure. From the unique detailed descriptions of informal domestic exchanges between slave and master to the more common representations of the female slave as an intermediary between bourgeois figures, *La industria vence desdenes* offers a rich framework from which contemporary scholars can procure new avenues for exploring the black female slave and her essential role in Golden Age Spanish society.

NOTES

1. Most studies regarding women in Golden Age Spain center on women and religion, women who assume masculine roles, and women as the object of patriarchal oppression and desire. Some examples of such studies include *La mujer en hábito de varón: Transgresiones de género en la España del Siglo de Oro*; *La prostituta y la prostitución en Don Quijote: Modelos de ‘mujeres libres’; La pecadora penitente en la comedia del Siglo de Oro*.

2. Although a clear legal distinction exists between the status of servant and slave, both women are treated as secondary citizens who must collaborate in the domestic space to appease the bourgeois figure. Furthermore, for the purpose of this study the term ‘black’ is used to refer to sub-Saharan Africans or individuals of sub-Saharan ancestry. While most twenty-first-century scholars would agree that the use of the term ‘black’ is reductionist in nature and fails to recognize the linguistic and cultural differences among Sub-Saharan groups (Patterson 22), Golden Age Spanish literature commonly employs the term ‘negros’ without detailing the nuances of the characters’ unique origins.

3. Spivak argues that the development of class “consciousness” is connected to one’s ability to identify with a specific community that meets the political and social needs of the individual (277).

4. In her book *Enemies and Familiares: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth Century Valencia*, Blumenthal cites several cases in which widows solicited loans in order to cover the costs of supporting their domestic servants, both slaves and free. A widow named Johana is mentioned who in 1478 requested funds to cover the expenses of supporting her female servant and the servant’s two sons among (124–25).

5. The number of studies dedicated to Carvajal and her works are significantly less than those regarding her male contemporaries and the celebrated female author María de Zayas. Of the studies based on Carvajal’s work, none treat the figure of the female servant or slave. For example, Fernández-Loza, García Santo-Tomás, O’Brien, and Rice.

6. In her article “Aspectos de la vida del hogar del siglo XVII en el siglo XVII según las novelas de Mariana de Carbajal y Saavedra,” Bourland argues that the naïvetés that Carvajal demonstrates as an author make her writings more authentic representations of domestic life in the seventeenth century when compared to writers such as María de Zayas whose feminism often interrupts and taints the narration.

7. Carvajal is careful to note the ethnic heritage of the slaves; one is Ethiopian and the other Berberisca, a term used to denominate someone from the North African regions of Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia: “la una etíope, que por haberse criado en un convento era ladina y de muchas habilidades; la otra, berberisca” (140).

8. The argument stated here is based on Fairclough’s communication theory as stated in the book *Language and Power* (48).

9. While scholars such as García Santo-Tomás note that Carvajal’s elaboration of domestic decor and the male protagonists’ dress differentiates her text from other novels of the same time period (154); O’Brien emphasizes the historical bases of the luxuries described in Carvajal’s works (1).

10. This affectionate exchange between don Pedro and the slave Antonia, as well as the illegitimate child that is born from the relationship between a slave woman and her master in “Quien obra bien, siempre acierta,” demonstrate Carvajal’s special interest in the ambiguities of biracial/bicultural relationships that form in the domestic sphere. These relationships are in clear contrast to dominant ideologies of the time period that promote discrimination and in many cases fear of racial intermingling. While one cannot deduce that Carvajal is a proponent for racial equality or biracial relationships, she clearly makes it a point...
to underscore representations of black female servants that extend past the limited functions that these figures serve in literature written by her male contemporaries.

This point is argued by Fairclough who debates that “by communicating with each other in the public sphere of the world of letters, (servant and master) confirmed each other’s subjectivity as it emerged from their spheres of intimacy” (194).

WORKS CITED


