



# Picking Wedlock: Women and the Courtship Novel in Spain

*Shifra Armon*

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## **Picking Wedlock: Women and the Courtship Novel in Spain** Shifra Armon

In eras when women's roles were heavily circumscribed, fictions about courtship and wedlock granted women writers an unassailable framework through which they contested orthodox beliefs about their place in society. In *Picking Wedlock*, Shifra Armon illuminates the remarkable convergence of three women novelists of Spain's Golden Age: Maria de Zayas, Mariana de Carvahal, and Leonor de Meneses. Armon considers these extraordinary writers together for the first time, appraising them in relationship to the historical and literary nexus that gave impetus to the publication of their work. Neither silent nor powerless nor choiceless, these women asserted their alternative story of female subjectivity via a cast of characters whose narrative adventures belied the prevalent ideal of the *perfecta casada*, or 'perfect wife.' Moreover, the stock courtship plot offered an ideal allegorical screen for critiquing the diplomatic courtship scenarios upon which Spain depended for dynastic renewal. In the parallel universe of their fictions, Zayas, Carvahal, and Meneses projected their preferred solutions to the succession crisis that threatened to unseat the Spanish Hapsburgs from 1644 to 1700. Concerned more with theorizing patterns of commonality among texts written by women more than with recuperating the individual texts, *Picking Wedlock* is fascinating literary history on the cutting edge of contemporary feminist literary scholarship.

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