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CONFRONTING MORAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES IN “LA FUERZA DE LA
SANGRE”

by

JOSÉ NAYAR RIVERA MÉNDEZ

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2015



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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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Abstract

CONFRONTING MORAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES IN “LA FUERZA DE LA SANGRE”

by

José Nayar Rivera Méndez

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The aim of this thesis is to argue that Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra used literary and artistic models to create the hybrid novella “La fuerza de la sangre” (The force of blood) in order to deal with moral and legal issues related to the representation of rape and subsequent marriage of the victim to the rapist. An explicit aim of Cervantes’ *Novelas Ejemplares* is to mix the useful to the entertaining, and he intended to elaborate forms of fiction that could transcend moral dilemmas. The legal and moral implications of marriage as the best restitution after a rape, and the possibility of the rapist being mentally impaired at the moment of the crime, present a complex image of what Cervantes might have intended to achieve beyond the exploitation of the female hero. Cervantes confronted the subject of sexual violence head-on, he was aware of the legal and emotional implications of rape and its consequences to the all people involved. But since the only possible way to reconstitute the social value of Leocadia —the victim— was marriage, Cervantes used several rhetorical and literary resources to that end; he situated the story before the Council of Trent, when sexual union was enough to legalize marriage; he integrated the realistic representation of rape with the rhythm and symmetry of folktales, idealized models of pictorial beauty and the conventional plot of the Hellenistic Greek novel, where lost lovers are reunited in the end. With all those elements, Cervantes intended to provoke the reader and create a feeling of urgency and a sense of the ineluctability of marriage as a logical denouement to the story.

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Confronting Moral and Literary Perspectives in “La fuerza de la sangre”

José Nayar Rivera Méndez

Almost at the beginning of Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1966 film *Blow-Up*, the main character –a young, handsome, and rich photographer– is shooting a fashion spread with a model, Veruschka. She wears a luxurious cocktail dress that suggests her naked body underneath, and the session quickly becomes a sort of sexualized choreography that culminates with the photographer kneeled over the model, taking pictures of her face with closed eyes, obedient to the lighting, the camera and the point of view of the photographer. But her passivity is deceitful; she is the one that captures the imagination of the viewer. Immediately afterwards the photographer shoots another fashion spread with a group of models. These models are covered in pearls, big hairdos and peacock feathers, and they pose against a neutral background that enhances their faces and attire. At one point, the photographer whistles at them, imprecating them to “wake up” and “smile”. The models become afraid of him and decide that they cannot pose any longer. The photographer then tells the girls “close your eyes” and exits the studio, leaving them standing as living statues. He goes to a park where he takes some pictures of a couple, and eventually discovers that he has not only invaded their privacy, but also photographed a killer and a body hidden among the trees.

Antonioni’s film is a commentary on the photographer’s different roles. He exerts violence on his subjects, but he is also a voyeur, and the involuntary witness and documenter of facts he did not plan and cannot control. The movie reflects on the role of the artist as someone who chooses a subject and a point of view and then creates a narrative out of those materials, and

on the role of the audience, who create their own reading of the story and the images presented to them.

Three and a half centuries before *Blow-Up*, Miguel de Cervantes published a story that also delved on similar themes. “La fuerza de la sangre”¹, one of Cervantes’ *Novelas ejemplares*², presents to the reader the story of a crime that soon becomes a comedy of errors and finally a love story. The story still generates strong reactions on in its readers because Cervantes, as I intend to explore in this paper, wrote an experimental form of fiction that integrates a realistic representation of sexual violence with idealized models of pictorial beauty and the conventional plot of what is called in early modern Spain a *novela bizantina* that imitates the model or the Hellenistic Greek novel. Moreover, the main feminine character Cervantes created was probably too lively for the passive role she adopted at the end of the story, thus highlighting the conflict between the power the author has over her and how a contemporary audience perceives the character. In order to complete the story, Cervantes seems to force the main character Leocadia to behave in a way opposed to her nature, making her silent for the pleasure of others, even if the final outcome of the *novella* means to extract a sense of happiness out of the restitution of her social role.

Leocadia as a character

The story of the abduction and rape of a girl who conceives a son and seven years later falls in love with her rapist seems difficult to accept for a twenty-first century reader. In his book *Love and the Law in Cervantes*, Roberto González Echevarría considers that “The Force of

¹ It has been translated as “The Force of Blood” or “The Call of Blood”, two translations that actually indicate two different interpretations of the text.

² Translated as *Exemplary Novels of Cervantes* or *Exemplary Stories*.

Blood” is Cervantes’ most severely criticized of the *Novelas ejemplares*, quoting some examples to prove his point. For Avallé-Arce the story is “a bold novelistic experiment and a failure at the same time”. For Manuel Durán it is an “Italianate Absurd Melodrama”. But for González Echevarría and other scholars, including Jean Pierre Florian, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, Luis Astrana Marín, and Joaquín Casaldueiro, “The Force of Blood” is among the best, if not the best, of the *Novelas* (González Echevarría, 178).

The subject of “The Force of Blood” was already problematic in Cervantes’ times. Leocadia –the protagonist– has a complex and somehow ambiguous role in the text. Peter Burke affirms that in early modern European popular culture “[m]ost popular heroines were objects, admired not so much for what they did as for what they suffered” (164). In Protestant countries, the story of Griselda, the suffering heroin of the last *novella* in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, was “celebrated in German plays, in Swedish ballads, in Danish chap-books” (164); in contrast, the resourceful Judith who slayed Holofernes “seems to have been an exception among heroines” (164). Leocadia is not an avenger, like Judith, but neither is she a Griselda. She is an active woman, when in popular imagination active women were considered deceitful.

At the beginning of the story, Leocadia is just a girl walking “to take the air by the river’s side”³ (FB) with her parents. When Rodolfo abducts her, she faints: “far from being able to defend herself or cry out, she had not even sense or sight left to see her ravisher, or know whither he was carrying her”⁴ (FB). Rodolfo and his friends are presented as criminals: “with their faces muffled in their cloaks, [they] stared rudely and insolently at the mother, the daughter, and the

³ [volvían de recrearse del río.]

⁴ [la cual no tuvo fuerzas para defenderse, y el sobresalto le quitó la voz para quejarse, y aun la luz de los ojos, pues, desmayada y sin sentido, ni vio quién la llevaba, ni adónde la llevaban.]

servant-maid”⁵. After the rape, he only wants to get rid of his victim, since “Apathy and disgust commonly follow satiated lust”⁶ (Cervantes FB).

Cervantes calls Rodolfo a “wolf”, a beast who can only follow his instincts, in stark contrast with Leocadia’s and her parents’ rational attitude. However, in her essay about shame in this story, Elena Carrera argues that Leocadia’s parents “might be to blame for having failed to protect her when they walked with her on the night when she was assaulted” (28). Carrera also argues that the rape is “not presented in the narrative as a crime, but as the effect of his [Rodolfo’s] temporary mental impairment” (Carrera 27). Carrera does not offer an explanation of this mental impairment, but one could argue that melancholy as a cause for transitory mental disorders such as those which took over Rodolfo was a common explanation during the Renaissance. In her book about madness in Tuscany, Elizabeth W. Mellyn affirms that “It is not surprising then that melancholics, but especially maniacs, were likened to animals” (151). In that sense, the fact that Cervantes calls the character a wolf might be more than a metaphor:

Borrowing from Galen via Avicenna, physicians identified two forms of mania: a mild jovial kind called doglike mania (*mania canina*)⁷ and a violent kind called wolflike mania (*mania lupina*).[...] Giovanni Arcolani (ca. 1390–1458), professor of medicine at Bologna and Padua, maintained that those afflicted with “wolfiness” (*lupinositas*) often lashed out at those around them. They acted as if they “were not men but demons and wolves” (151).

⁵ [*cubiertos los rostros, miraron los de la madre, y de la hija y de la criada.*]

⁶ [*como los pecados de la sensualidad por la mayor parte no tiran más allá la barra del término del cumplimiento dellos.*]

⁷ Also known as *insania lupina*

In contrast, Mercedes Alcalá believes that this story not only considers rape as a crime but also identifies the narrator with the victim, exploring her desolation, immense fear, shame and guilt, and therefore assuming her innocence. (31) The contrast between Alcalá's and Carrera's readings emphasizes again the paradox of the situation: only if Rodolfo is a criminal is Leocadia absolutely innocent, but only if his crime has some apparent mitigating circumstances can the marriage be accepted.

When Leocadia wakes up in Rodolfo's room, she talks to Rodolfo in a manner that shows her suffering but also her intelligence and her eloquence:

Where am I? Woe is me! What darkness is this? Am I in the limbo of my innocence, or the hell of my sins? Who touches me? Am I in bed? Mother! dear father! do you hear me? Alas, too well I perceive that you cannot hear me, and that I am in the hands of enemies. Well would it be for me if this darkness were to last for ever, and my eyes were never more to see the light! Whoever thou art," She exclaimed, suddenly seizing Rodolfo's hand, "if thy soul is capable of pity, grant me one prayer: having deprived me of honour, now deprive me of life. Let me not survive my disgrace! In mercy kill me this moment! It is the only amend I ask of you for the wrong you have done me. (FB)⁸

⁸ [-¿Adónde estoy, desdichada? ¿Qué escuridad es ésta, qué tinieblas me rodean? ¿Estoy en el limbo de mi inocencia o en el infierno de mis culpas? ¡Jesús!, ¿quién me toca? ¿Yo en cama, yo lastimada? ¿Escú-chasme, madre y señora mía? ¿Óyesme, querido padre? ¡Ay sin ventura de mí!, que bien advierto que mis padres no me escuchan y que mis enemigos me tocan; venturosa sería yo si esta escuridad durase para siempre, sin que mis ojos volviesen a ver la luz del mundo, y que este lugar donde ahora estoy, cualquiera que él se fuese, sirviese de sepultura a mi honra, pues es mejor la deshonra que se ignora que la honra que está puesta en opinión de las gentes. Ya me acuerdo (¡que nunca yo me acordara!) que ha poco que venía en la compañía de mis padres; ya me acuerdo que me saltearon, ya me imagino y veo que no es bien que me vean las gentes. ¡Oh tú, cualquiera que seas, que aquí estás conmigo (y en esto tenía asido de las manos a Rodolfo), si es que tu alma admite género de ruego alguno, te ruego que, ya que has triunfado de mi fama, triunfes también de mi vida! ¡Quítamela al

This first reaction shows that Leocadia realizes that, since the social worth of a woman is tied to her virginity, she is now sullied and worthless. Rodolfo does not respond to her cries, so she tries to persuade him that she will not act in any way against him:

"Inhuman youth!" she continued, "for your deeds assure me that your years are few, I will forgive the outrage you have done me, on the sole condition that you promise and vow to conceal your crime in perpetual silence, as profound as this darkness in which you have perpetrated it. This is but a small recompense for so grievous a wrong; but it is the greatest which I can ask, or you can grant me. I have never seen your face, nor ever desire to see it. It is enough for me to remember the injury I have sustained, without having before my mind's eye the image of my ravisher. My complaints shall be addressed only to Heaven: I would not have them heard by the world, which judges not according to the circumstances of each case, but according to its own preconceived notions. You may wonder to hear me speak thus, being so young. I am surprised at it myself; and I perceive that if great sorrows are sometimes dumb, they are sometimes eloquent. Be this as it may, grant me the favour I implore: it will cost you little. Put me at once into the street, or at least near the great church; for I shall know my way thence to the house of my parents. But you must also swear not to follow me, or make any attempts to ascertain my name or that of my family, who if they were as wealthy as they are noble, would not have to bear patiently such insult in my person. Answer me, and if you are afraid of being known by your voice, know, that except my father and my confessor, I have never spoken with any

momento, que no es bien que la tenga la que no tiene honra!]

man in my life, and that I should never be able to tell who you were, though you were to speak ever so long." (FB)⁹

Rodolfo responds only trying to rape her again. She defends herself with such vigor that he abandons his efforts and leaves her in his bedroom. Leocadia then tries to escape, and when she realizes she cannot, she examines the room very carefully:

[T]he moonlight shone in so brightly, that she could distinguish the colour of some damask hangings in the room. She saw that the bed was gilded, and so rich, that it seemed that of a prince rather than of a private gentleman. She counted the chairs and the cabinets, observed the position of the door, and also perceived some pictures hanging on

⁹ [-Atrevido mancebo, que de poca edad hacen tus hechos que te juzgue, yo te perdono la ofensa que me has hecho con sólo que me prometas y jures que, como la has cubierto con esta escuridad, la cubrirás con perpetuo silencio sin decirla a nadie. Poca recompensa te pido de tan grande agravio, pero para mí será la mayor que yo sabré pedirte ni tú querrás darme. Advierte en que yo nunca he visto tu rostro, ni quiero vértelo; porque, ya que se me acuerde de mi ofensa, no quiero acordarme de mi ofensor ni guardar en la memoria la imagen del autor de mi daño. Entre mí y el cielo pasarán mis quejas, sin querer que las oiga el mundo, el cual no juzga por los sucesos las cosas, sino conforme a él se le asienta en la estimación. No sé cómo te digo estas verdades, que se suelen fundar en la experiencia de muchos casos y en el discurso de muchos años, no llegando los míos a diez y siete; por do me doy a entender que el dolor de una misma manera ata y desata la lengua del afligido: unas veces exagerando su mal, para que se le crean, otras veces no diciéndole, porque no se le remedien. De cualquiera manera, que yo calle o hable, creo que he de moverte a que me creas o que me remedies, pues el no creerme será ignorancia, y el [no] remediarme, imposible de tener algún alivio. No quiero desesperarme, porque te costará poco el dármele; y es éste: mira, no aguardes ni confíes que el discurso del tiempo temple la justa saña que contra ti tengo, ni quieras amontonar los agravios: mientras menos me gozares, y habiéndome ya gozado, menos se encenderán tus malos deseos. Haz cuenta que me ofendiste por accidente, sin dar lugar a ningún buen discurso; yo la haré de que no nací en el mundo, o que si nací, fue para ser desdichada. Ponme luego en la calle, o a lo menos junto a la iglesia mayor, porque desde allí bien sabré volverme a mi casa; pero también has de jurar de no seguirme, ni saberla, ni preguntarme el nombre de mis padres, ni el mío, ni de mis parientes, que, a ser tan ricos como nobles, no fueran en mí tan desdichados. Respóndeme a esto; y si temes que te pueda conocer en la habla, hágote saber que, fuera de mi padre y de mi confesor, no he hablado con hombre alguno en mi vida, y a pocos he oído hablar con tanta comunicación que pueda distinguirles por el sonido de la habla.]

the walls, but was not able to distinguish the subjects. The window was large, and protected by a stout iron grating: it looked out on a garden, surrounded by high walls, so that escape in that direction was as impossible as by the door. (FB)¹⁰

Leocadia then takes a crucifix “not out of devotion, nor yet with a felonious intention, but with a very proper and judicious design”¹¹. (FB) This action, as she will later tell her parents, is meant (?) to “discover their enemy in the person of the owner of the crucifix”¹² (FB). This means that Leocadia was lying to Rodolfo when she said she will not proceed against him and shows her character even in the midst of the worst possible scenario.

When Rodolfo returns, he takes her out of the house. She has the wherewithal of counting the number of steps leading from the bedroom to the street. He leaves her at the Plaza del Ayuntamiento and soon she finds her way home, but even then her reaction is above all rational:

[S]uspecting that she might be followed at a distance, she stopped every now and then on her way home, which was not far, and looked behind her. To baffle any spies that might perchance be watching her, she entered a house which she found open; and by and by she went from it to her own.¹³ (FB)

¹⁰ *[por donde entró el resplandor de la luna, tan claro, que pudo distinguir Leocadia las colores de unos damascos que el aposento adornaban. Vio que era dorada la cama, y tan ricamente compuesta que más parecía lecho de príncipe que de algún particular caballero. Contó las sillas y los escritorios; notó la parte donde la puerta estaba, y, aunque vio pendientes de las paredes algunas tablas, no pudo alcanzar a ver las pinturas que contenían. La ventana era grande, guarnecida y guardada de una gruesa reja; la vista caía a un jardín que también se cerraba con paredes altas; dificultades que se opusieron a la intención que de arrojarse a la calle tenía.]*

¹¹ *[no por devoción ni por hurto, sino llevada de un discreto designio suyo.]*

¹² *[ansí, sabiendo el dueño de la imagen, se sabría la casa y aun la persona de su enemigo.]*

¹³ *[Miró a todas partes, no vio a persona; pero, sospechosa que desde lejos la siguiesen, a cada paso se*

When she arrives home, she describes to her parents every detail of the room and shows the crucifix she has stolen, and at that point they “imprecated Heaven's vengeance on the insolent ravisher, and prayed that he might be miraculously punished”¹⁴. Leocadia’s father’s reaction when he welcomes her back is to accept her back. Instead of punishing her daughter for the rape (as Virginius in Chaucer’s “Physician’s Tale” or as Titus Andronicus in Shakespeare’s play), he acknowledges her innocence and grants her protection:

[“]Real dishonour consists in sin, and real honour in virtue. There are three ways of offending God; by thought, word, and deed; but since neither in thought, nor in word, nor in deed have you offended, look upon yourself as a person of unsullied honour, as I shall always do, who will never cease to regard you with the affection of a father.”¹⁵ (FB)

Leocadia’s father will not even try to find the man who attacked her. Instead, he welcomes her at home, and provides refuge to her and the child that she will bear, the fruit of the rape. Leocadia will live safely with her family, but unmarriageable and ostracized from society for seven long years, until an accident that befalls her son brings her to the same room where she had been ravished. When this happens, Leocadia does not react by trying to exact revenge, as the reader could predict based upon her initial reaction to the rape, but instead she tells about her discovery to her mother. When Leocadia finally speaks to Rodolfo’s mother, Estefanía, “in the manner

detenía, dándolos hacia su casa, que no muy lejos de allí estaba. Y, por desmentir las espías, si acaso la seguían, se entró en una casa que halló abierta, y de allí a poco se fue a la suya]

¹⁴ *[se hicieron deprecaciones, se pidieron venganzas y desearon milagrosos castigos.]*

¹⁵ *[la verdadera deshonra está en el pecado, y la verdadera honra en la virtud; con el dicho, con el deseo y con la obra se ofende a Dios; y, pues tú, ni en dicho, ni en pensamiento, ni en hecho le has ofendido, tente por honrada, que yo por tal te tendré, sin que jamás te mire sino como verdadero padre tuyo.]*

previously concerted between herself and her parents”¹⁶ (FB), she declares that she was happy that a second tragedy, Luisico’s accident, may restore her to a rightful place in society:

[“]It was by the merciful providence of Heaven that he was run over, in order that being taken to your house, I should find him in it, as I hope to find there, if not the remedy most appropriate to my misfortune, at least the means of alleviating it.”¹⁷ (Cervantes FB)

At this moment, Cervantes transforms Leocadia. Instead of the girl that persuades a rapist to let her go, who analyses critical situations and decides the best way to act, she becomes, after telling her story, just a girl that faints. Maybe Cervantes silences her because he considers her beauty and virtue more important for the traditional family role she will have by the end of the story than her intelligence or will power, or maybe he hides her main qualities under her beauty. From this point on, Leocadia is no longer the energetic and eloquent character she has been throughout the story. As William Clamurro notes in his essay about the *Novelas ejemplares*, women are there objectified, the aim of their existence is to be the object of men desires, even though Cervantes conferred on them certain freedoms and free will necessary to the denouement of the stories. The trigger of the *Novelas*’ plots is typically the loss of women’s identity and status, and when these are restored, their relative freedom is no longer necessary¹⁸.

¹⁶ [*Destas razones tomó ocasión de decirle una vez, que se halló sola con ella, las que con acuerdo de sus padres había determinado de decille, que fueron éstas o otras semejantes*]

¹⁷ [*Permisión fue del cielo el haberle atropellado, para que, trayéndole a vuestra casa, hallase yo en ella, como espero que he de hallar, si no el remedio que mejor convenga, y cuando no con mi desventura, a lo menos el medio con que pueda sobrellevalla*]

¹⁸ Cervantes les permite a las mujeres una libertad y voluntad que sirven a las exigencias del argumento novelesco y que posibilitan la feliz resolución, pero que se rinden en el momento final cuando otra ley más allá de la de una voluntad individual se impone. Lo notable de las cuatro novelas comentadas arriba es la centralización de material y posesión, de la exigencia de un regreso a la identidad y el «status» social de la mujer perdida, robada o engendrada ilícitamente, y (sobre todo) las funciones de las protagonistas como objetos de deseo, de enfoque temático, de mediación material y social (Clamurro 367).

Luckily for her, Rodolfo's parents believe Leocadia's story, and she moves to their house with Luisico, where she remains silent and passive. Estefanía makes her son come back from Italy, where he had been living, and when he arrives, Leocadia sees him "filled with indescribable emotions, as she beheld him, herself unseen, from a secret place in which she had been stationed by Doña Estefanía's contrivance"¹⁹. These emotions, we will come to know later, are not of hatred. When she finally is introduced to the man who raped her and that she will eventually marry, she is filled with love and desire:

Leocadia, she, on the other hand, finding herself so near to him who was dearer to her than the light of those eyes with which she furtively glanced at him from time to time, began to revolve in her mind what had passed between her and Rodolfo.²⁰ (FB)

González Echevarría writes that "The Force of Blood" does not try to conceal the crime, "does not neutralize the positive power of evil, incarnated in sexual desire and the acts that it induces" (192). According to this reading, the point of the story would be transgression rather than redemption. The power of the story lies precisely in its clear and open account of the consequences of the violence of rape. Perhaps that is why the scholar considers that the text "reads like something drawn from a record of court proceedings" (202), criminal acts having "a facticity that stands before the language of the law, constituting a proto-language of their own inscribed in bodies, objects and things that are both suggestive and suggest meaning" (192).

¹⁹ [*Suspendióse Leocadia, que de parte escondida le miraba, por no salir de la traza y orden que doña Estefanía le había dado.*]

²⁰ [*Leocadia, la cual, en tanto que la cena venía, viendo también tan cerca de sí al que ya quería más que a la luz de los ojos, con que alguna vez a hurto le miraba, comenzó a revolver en su imaginación lo que con Rodolfo había pasado.*]

The general thesis of González Echevarría analysis is that the novel is a genre linked to the modern state and the law. But for Gonzalez Echevarria, the genre of the *Novelas Ejemplares*, linked to Italian *novella*, shares its "genre identity" with *Don Quijote*. For González Echevarría, both the novel and the *novella* emerge at a time when the modern idea of state and the rule of law are taking root in Europe, a time of social leveling that would continue until the eighteenth century. He writes about "stories" and "novellas" as part of the changing order: "The law and the transformations it brings about in life and literature are the mold, the style, the rhetoric of an emergent order" (34). He considers the novel a reflection "of the notarial arts and record keeping". The prevailing state of mind of the European population is that the law can somehow protect the weak against the powerful, but it can also transform them in potential criminals, as done in picaresque novel. The idea of the law is complementary to the idea of crime; therefore, novels always narrate stories of conflicts of love and crimes of sexual nature. Gonzalez Echevarría also notes in connection to this element the mysterious sexual attraction that Leocadia feels for Rodolfo, and he places "The Force of Blood" in the same list as *The Scarlet Letter* and *Lolita*. However, for many readers the idea that Leocadia is sexually aroused by the sight of the man who raped her is implausible. Another explanation that resolves partially the paradox of the crime that becomes marriage in the story is that marriage is the only outcome that offers justice to a very unjust situation in that given historical context.

From a literary perspective, Cervantes wants to combine different models of fiction; for instance, marriage is the necessary outcome in a Greek novel where lovers have grown apart by unlucky circumstances and they have to be reunited. Cervantes builds a literary engine with elements of realism, idealism, folktale, and literary representation that mimic pictorial representation. This construction supports reconciliation in a situation that might have easily

ended in tragedy. “The Force of Blood” is at the crossroads between realistic accounts of a crime, such as “The deceitful marriage”, and another *novella* like “The Spanish-English Lady”, where the lovers are indeed both innocent victims of the circumstances.

It might be pointless to argue whether Cervantes was a feminist *avant la lettre* or just the opposite. It is clear that he sees Leocadia as an innocent victim, and he intends to reconstitute her to a good place in society. But at the same time, he exploits the effect of her beauty and her suffering to engage the reader in the story. The second part of the *novella* consists in a complicated scheme by Rodolfo’s mother. By then the *novella* has left behind the horror of the crime and delves in a theatrical representation of the beauty of the protagonists, and the doubts that they must overcome to consummate their love story.

The alternative to this development of the story might have been a tragedy. Other Spanish writers contemporary to Cervantes portray rape with contrasting results. In Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna*, the people of the town kill the rapist Comendador, and in Calderón’s *The Physician of His Honour* and *The Painter of His Own Dishonor* the husbands prefer to murder their innocent wives rather than bearing the mere suspicion of their infidelity.

Honra, rape and marriage

The most salient aspect of the rape in “The Force of Blood” is the theft of Leocadia’s “*honra*”, which was the property of the victim’s father. *Honra* is usually translated as honor, but the word also means self-esteem and respect; good reputation acquired by virtue and merit; public display of appreciation for the aforementioned virtue and merit, and finally, shyness, modesty, honesty, decency. These are qualities that are both individual and social. Leocadia and her family are painfully aware that even though she is innocent, she will be blamed if her rape is

publically acknowledged. Her father reminds her that “an ounce of public dishonor outweighs a quintal of secret infamy”²¹. (FB)

As the owner of her *honra*, Leocadia’s father rejects her idea of prosecuting the rapist. González Echevarría points out that in Spain at that time, rape was legally punished with monetary retribution, flogging, or exile; in practice however the preferred solution was typically to marry the victim to her rapist.

The outcome of an accusation of rape could have been forced marriage or the punishment of the rapist, but in many cases the victim was reprimanded by the judge and even had to pay for the costs of the legal process.

Leocadia’s situation is worsened because pregnancy was considered the explicit proof of consent in a sexual relationship, making impossible to prove that there was indeed abuse and violence involved: “Early modern Europeans believed that female eggs were released only if the woman had an orgasm, and for the male jurists of the period orgasm signified the woman’s enjoyment of the sexual act” (Ruff, 145). This is probably one of the reasons why Cervantes makes her faint during the sexual act. If she were awake, she would immediately be suspect of enjoying sexual intercourse, therefore it would not be rape. For Alcalá, the fact that Cervantes makes Leocadia a mother shows that the author is radical in his defense of the victim’s innocence, in the sense that he assumes that a victim of rape can become pregnant without enjoying the rape (Alcalá 33).

But not only Leocadia and her father suffer the consequences of her rape. She bears a son, Luisico, who cannot be recognized as such, and has to pass as her cousin. He is raised in a

²¹ [*más lastima una onza de deshonra pública que una arroba de infamia secreta.*]

village until he is four years old, when he arrives to live with Leocadia and her parents. In this case, again, the only solution to avoid social ostracism is to disguise the truth. Luisico is a “hijo natural”, a natural son without the legal right that legitimate sons bear. Only “if the parents of *hijos naturales* subsequently married, then those children were automatically legitimated” (Romaniello 65).

Because she has to live in seclusion, denying fundamental truths about who she is, Iife and Darby identify Leocadia as a captive, a woman exiled from her identity; Leocadia’s family pray for a divine punishment of the ravisher, but indeed the only constructive outcome has to be that she regains her place in society; and this can only be done if she marries the agent of her displacement. What is important is what the alternatives are; only then can we understand that she seems so happy marrying the man who abused her. If she marries him, she comes back from social exile, and her *honra*, her identity, and her son’s identity are restored. It is noteworthy that Cervantes is very much aware of the legal implications of the rape and places the story in the past, in a time when Leocadia’s restoration by marriage is more easily achieved:

Doña Estefanía having no further need of stratagem, requested the priest to marry her son to Leocadia on the spot. This was done; for *the event took place at a time when the consent of the parties was sufficient for the celebration of a marriage, without any of the preliminary formalities which are now so properly required.* (Cervantes FB, the italics are mine)

This type of marriage, *consensus facit nupcias*, was made possible by Pope Nicolas I, and recognized in Castile before the Council of Trent. After the end of the council, in 1563, marriage is only recognized when the groom is acknowledged to be single, and the marriage is publically announced and celebrated before a priest, in the presence of two witnesses. (Alcalá 23)

For Alban Forcione, the story is a sort of secular miracle, because it resolves the apparent contradictions of the story. Social harmony is disrupted by a crime, and at the end of the story that harmony is restored. The gruesome, terrible story of the beginning needs an equally bold outcome just to balance the equation. It can be argued that instead of a secular miracle, it is the only possible solution that would be just for Leocadia.²²

²² Alcalá narrates a legal case very similar to Leocadia's; in that case, even though the man was accused, judged and found guilty, the woman did barely have any restitution:

En 1633 don Diego de Irusta, un caballero muy principal de Bilbao de 32 años, diputado general del Señorío —uno de los puestos más importantes de la región— y tan rico que según su declaración posterior afirmó que “teniendo de mi patrimonio además de las propiedades raíces, más de mil ducados de renta en censos”, fue acusado de estupro. En efecto, una muchacha humilde, Mari Sanz, lo acusó ante la justicia de secuestrarla, robarle su virginidad, y mantenerla encerrada durante varios días en su habitación durante los cuales siguió abusando de ella: “el dicho acusado me hubo buscado... me hubo llevado a la casa de su possada... y me hubo desflorado y privado de mi birginidad, y en muchas noches hubo dormido conmigo, y muchos días me tubo encerrada en un aposento, y me solía tener en su cama.” Don Diego no negó los cargos de estupro ni los detalles del mismo, aunque sí el que en momento alguno hubiera prometido matrimonio a Mari Sanz. También, como parte de su defensa, declaró estar prometido a una dama rica y de su posición Doña Ángela de Aldape, y sobre todo insistía, con desdén, en la pobreza de la denunciante, dato fundamental que se tomaba en cuenta a la hora de juzgar con benevolencia estos casos: era competente y bastante Dote para ella cinquenta Ducados, y que esta cantidad es la que se acostumbra dar en la d[ic]ha billa de Bilbao y señorío de Bizcaya a las mugeres estupadas [sic] que son del porte, caudal y posibilidad de la d[ic]ha María Sanz sin embargo que sean de buena opinion, hijasdalgo, y bizcainas originarias, por las personnas que las han esturpado [sic]. Pero Mari Sanz intentó impedir este matrimonio irrumpiendo en la iglesia durante la boda de Don Diego, siendo brutalmente agredidos ella y sus acompañantes por los poderosos partidarios de Don Diego que “con lanças, palos y espadas, sacaron por fuerça de la yglessia y maltrataron y herieron a las personas que fueron con la susod[ic]ha, diciendo q[ue] había de ahorcar de los arboles a la susod[ic]ha y a todos q[ue] le acompañaban.” Más adelante, uno de los amigos de don Diego la convenció de “que hera disparate pretender palabra de matrimonio jente de su calidad con la de don Diego”. Después de una larga batalla legal lo único que consiguió Mari Sanz fue una indemnización ridícula, una décima parte del dinero que solicitó en un principio. Debo toda la información sobre este caso al importante estudio histórico de Renato Barahona sobre delitos sexuales en la Edad Moderna. (Alcalá, 19)

Cervantes and painting

Cervantes' vision of rape as a crime that merits restitution was not common at his time. Sexual violence was seen as natural, essential, and irrepressible; the depiction and sublimation of sexual violence in baroque art is harmonic with the themes ethos and pathos of high culture. (Alcalá, 12-16). A typical example of this attitude are the paintings of Rubens, such as *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, an abduction adorned with an amoretto, painted to commemorate the double marriage of the heirs of the royal houses of France and Spain to each other's sisters²³. Sexual violence was a natural part of the world, and Ovid's *Metamorphosis* provided a classical lineage that was reincarnated in the works of painters and sculptors such as Bernini (*Apollo and Daphne*) or Tintoretto (*Tarquin and Lucretia*). Frederick de Armas has tried to prove that Cervantes might have been influenced by Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican when he was writing his play *La Numancia*, and that he used his recollection of the art he had seen in Rome in his youth as the engines of literary fictions: "[t]hrough the prism of art and experience these places of memory would be transformed into other places, other rooms". (Armas 22). As Fernando Cervantes noted, even though the influence of Raphael's art on Cervantes is difficult to prove, the idea is suggestive, since Cervantes attaches great importance to the relationship between painting and literature²⁴.

²³ Rubens, como la mayoría de los pintores de su época, es el autor de muchas imágenes, casi siempre encargadas por poderosos clientes, que recogen distintas escenas de violencia sexual muy al gusto del momento. Por ejemplo, no faltan entre sus obras representaciones altamente erotizadas de ninfas a punto de ser asaltadas por sátiros como en "Diana y sus ninfas sorprendidas por sátiros", o "Pan y Syrinx", o una escena de voyeurismo altamente inquietante, pues precede a un intento de violación, como en "Angélica y el ermitaño". (Alcalá, 12)

²⁴ Cervantes himself attached enormous importance to painting as a mode of expression that should not be separated from literature. "History, poetry, and painting," he wrote, "are in fact so similar and use so many symbols in common that, when one writes history one paints; and when

It is noteworthy that Cervantes omits the description of the rape, and instead he chooses to showcase Leocadia's beauty and moral virtues. Her beauty is emphasized by the surrounding darkness, creating a tragic aura that corresponds, more than with the art of Raphael, to the mannerist style. The first lines of the *novella* create a moral landscape that will prevail throughout the story. We find the contrast between the surrounding darkness with a source of light and the solitude of the characters:

One night, after a sultry summer's day, an old hidalgo of Toledo walked out to take the air by the river's side, along with his wife, his little boy, his daughter aged sixteen, and a female servant. Eleven o'clock had struck: it was a fine clear night: they were the only persons on the road; and they sauntered leisurely along, to avoid paying the price of fatigue for the recreation provided for the Toledans in their valley or on the banks of their river. (FB)

The image is similar in intention to the *View of Toledo* by El Greco, who lived in Toledo and was active at the same time that Cervantes was writing (Figure 1), and even might have used the writer as the model for his *Portrait of an unknown gentleman*. In that scene Rodolfo sees Leocadia, for the first time, and he is struck by her great beauty. Cervantes reproduces variations of that sight (Leocadia's beauty surrounded by darkness) several times in the *novella*; it is the power of that image what seduces Rodolfo by the end of the story.

one paints one composes." (*Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, 371). (Fernando Cervantes 344)



Figure 1. El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos). *View of Toledo*.

The only time when the reader encounters an actual painting in the text is right before Rodolfo sees Leocadia for the first time since he raped her. Estefanía shows Rodolfo the portrait of a plain woman with the explicit intention of deceiving him: “Here is something to give you an

appetite for your supper, Rodolfo; this is the portrait of your bride; but I must tell you that what she wants in beauty is more than made up for in virtue[²⁵].

When Rodolfo sees the portrait, he utters what could have been Cervantes's own reflection on the matter of representation of reality:

"Well," said Rodolfo, staring at the portrait, "if the painter of this portrait has flattered the original as much as painters usually do, then beyond all doubt the lady must be the very incarnation of ugliness."²⁶

The portrait tells a story, a deception that conceals the truth about the marriage, but also reveals what might be a *mise en abîme*. Like Rodolfo, Cervantes recognizes that art is deceptive; it gives new form and a sense of transcendence to the ugly truths of life, like the rape of a girl that becomes a love story.

Rodolfo, as his mother expects, after seeing the portrait that is the false likeness of her bride to be, as a platonic shadow, ponders what he really wants in a wife:

Some look for noble blood in a wife, some for understanding, others for money, and others again for beauty, and of the latter class I am one. As for high birth, thank Heaven and my ancestors I am well enough off in that respect; as for understanding, provided a woman is neither a dolt nor a simpleton, there is no need of her having a very subtle wit; in point of wealth, I am amply provided by my parents; but beauty is what I covet, with

²⁵ [-Yo quiero, Rodolfo hijo, darte una gustosa cena con mostrarte a tu esposa: éste es su verdadero retrato, pero quiérote advertir que lo que le falta de belleza le sobra de virtud; es noble y discreta y medianamente rica, y, pues tu padre y yo te la hemos escogido, asegúrate que es la que te conviene.]

²⁶ [-Si los pintores, que ordinariamente suelen ser pródigos de la hermosura con los rostros que retratan, lo han sido también con éste, sin duda creo que el original debe de ser la misma fealdad.]

no other addition than virtue and good breeding. If my wife brings me this, I will thank Heaven for the gift, and make my parents happy in their old age.²⁷ (FB)

Leocadia, as Rodolfo asserts, is neither rich nor of high birth, but very beautiful, therefore she seems Rodolfo's ideal wife. Although Cervantes seems to discard at this point her other qualities, like her eloquence, intelligence and sense of moral values, these qualities seem to be the medicine that Cervantes prescribes the melancholic Rodolfo under the coating of Leocadia's beauty. Beauty and spirit are then the cause of the secular miracle that is the marriage between Leocadia and Rodolfo, difficult as it is to imagine that possibility at the beginning of the story. Leocadia's beauty brought her disgrace, and Leocadia's beauty, along with her intelligence and moral purpose, bring about the denouement.

When Rodolfo actually meets Leocadia for the first time as his betrothed, he is completely dumbfounded. As Leocadia enters the room, Cervantes describes almost pictorially the contrast of her black dress adorned with diamonds, as a starred night, and her beauty shining brighter than ever:

The lady soon appeared, presenting a most charming spectacle of perfect beauty, set off by the most appropriate adornments. The season being winter, she was dressed in a robe and train of black velvet, with gold and pearl buttons; her girdle and necklace were of diamonds; her head was uncovered, and the shining braids and ringlets of her thick chestnut hair, spangled with diamonds, dazzled the eyes of the beholders. Her bearing

²⁷ [*Porque la nobleza, gracias al cielo y a mis pasados y a mis padres, que me la dejaron por herencia; discreción, como una mujer no sea necia, tonta o boba, bástale que ni por aguda despunte ni por boba no aproveche; de las riquezas, también las de mis padres me hacen no estar temeroso de venir a ser pobre. La hermosura busco, la belleza quiero, no con otra dote que con la de la honestidad y buenas costumbres; que si esto trae mi esposa, yo serviré a Dios con gusto y daré buena vejez a mis padres.*]

was graceful and animated; she led her son by the hand, and before her walked two maids with wax-lights and silver candlesticks. (FB)

This effect is *tenebrista*, or chiaroscuro. The contrast between the candle light and her face is similar to what we see in *The Penitent Magdalene* by Georges de La Tour (Figure 2),



Figure 2. Georges de La Tour. *The Penitent Magdalene*.

but the effect of the jewelry over the velvet brings to mind the idealized posthumous portrait of Isabella of Portugal painted by Titian (Figure 3). Her grace and animation also reflect Castiglione's ideal of *sprezzatura* popularized in Spain by Boscán.



Figure 3. Tiziano, Vecellio di Gregorio. *The Empress Isabella of Portugal*.

For Carrera “Her [Leocadia’s] purity and her honourable status are accentuated by the candles, symbolically held by two maids” (Carrera, 29), which in a way makes her a secular apparition emulating a Madonna. Cervantes did not write a moral for this story, but he wrote one for “The Spanish-English Lady” that seems to be valid also in “The Force of Blood”: “This tale may teach us what virtue and what beauty can effect, since they are sufficient together, or either singly, to win the love even of enemies; and how Heaven is able to bring forth our greatest happiness even out of our heaviest misfortunes”²⁸. (The Spanish-English Lady).

“The Force of Blood” as a laboratory of fiction

As mentioned earlier, there are several contradictory literary models combined in “The Force of Blood”. For Alban Forcione, the implausibility of the story would be resolved by the intervention of the Divine Providence. It would be Providence what makes Luisico a model of beauty and good breeding, what guides the circumstances of his accident and rescue by his grandparents, and what allows Leocadia to endure her social exile. But above all, Providence brings about the love and marriage of Leocadia and Rodolfo. Gonzalez Echeverría rejects this reading of the story and considers that what is original and disturbing in our story is precisely “how the questions of crime, punishment and restitution escape this kind of reading”. For Alcalá, the story is a stark representation of the sufferings involved in sexual violence. This scholar even questions whether the ending is a happy one. For her, it is instead an admirable “exercise of polysemy” (34). She considers that the symmetry of the appearance of the same elements from the moment of rape –such as the same room, a parallel scene when Leocadia faints and wakes up

²⁸ *[Esta novela nos podría enseñar cuánto puede la virtud, y cuánto la hermosura, pues son bastantes juntas, y cada una de por sí, a enamorar aun hasta los mismos enemigos; y de cómo sabe el cielo sacar, de las mayores adversidades nuestras, nuestros mayores provechos.]*

in the arms of her attacker— might indicate that Leocadia will pass the rest of her life reenacting the same ordeal. Pierre Darnis notes yet another possible reading, also based on a popular genre, the folktale. “The Force of Blood” has a structure very similar to the folktale type 425 from the Aarne-Thompson tale type index, the “Search for the Lost Husband”. The most popular version of this tale is the story of Cupid and Psyche that is included in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, written in the 2nd century AD. If we read “The Force of Blood” with this folktale in mind, we might recognize its five essential moments: 1. a young woman is possessed by a monstrous lover. 2. She loses him. 3. She looks for him. 4. She finds him. 5. He loses his monstrous appearance. The problem with this rapid superposition of the structure of the folktale over our *novella* is that we might not even notice one key element: Psyche *loses* him whereas Leocadia does not. Psyche has an active role in the tale, and Cupid goes away because of a violation of trust. As Peter Burke notes, “[t]here is no difficulty in identifying a folktale motif in a story by Cervantes” (147) (he mentions several examples), as “in popular culture the repertoire of elements from which an individual can draw is relatively limited” (147). There are some interpretative clues that might define Cervantes’ repertoire in the prologue to the reader of the *Novelas Ejemplares*. There we read that Cervantes found pride in his originality:

I consider (and with truth) that I am the first who has written novels in the Spanish language, though many have hitherto appeared among us, all of them translated from foreign authors. But these are my own, neither imitated nor stolen from anyone; my genius has engendered them, my pen has brought them forth, and they are growing up in the arms of the press. (Prologue)²⁹

²⁹ [*que yo soy el primero que he novelado en lengua castellana, que las muchas novelas que en ella andan impresas todas son traducidas de lenguas extranjeras, y éstas son mías propias, no*

Frederick A. De Armas and other scholars have stressed the intertextual relationship of the *Novelas* with the Greek novel, especially Heliodorus of Emesa's *Aethiopica*, which is mentioned in the lines that follow: "After them, should my life be spared, I will present to you the Adventures of Persiles, a book which ventures to compete with Heliodorus. (Prologue)"³⁰.

The plot of the Greek novel usually includes a couple of young lovers who find a myriad of obstacles only to be reunited in the end. There is always a young couple that wants to marry, but they find many obstacles in their way, such as dangerous trips, accidents, captivity, and forced separation. In the end, they overcome all difficulties and they find that their love has endured all their suffering and is stronger than ever. "La española inglesa", for example, contains abduction, poisoning, and chattel slavery, among other obstacles. The stories usually *begin in media res* and praise chastity, fidelity and strong moral values. At the same time, the characters and their actions are supposed to be realistic.

If Cervantes had this genre in mind when he wrote "The Force of Blood", this would explain the love between Leocadia and Rodolfo and their marriage at the end of the story. The main problem with this reading is that the original difficulty is a crime committed by one lover against the other. "The Force of Blood" stretches the moral and literary limits expressed by Cervantes in the Prologue: "the amorous intrigues you will find in some of them, are so decorous, so measured, and so conformable to reason and Christian propriety, that they are

imitadas ni hurtadas: mi ingenio las engendró, y las parió mi pluma, y van creciendo en los brazos de la estampa.]

³⁰ [*Tras ellas, si la vida no me deja, te ofrezco los Trabajos de Persiles, libro que se atreve a competir con Heliodoro*].

incapable of exciting any impure thoughts in him who reads them with or without caution.”³¹. Did Cervantes consider that rape could be in the category of amorous intrigue, since Rodolfo and Leocadia seem to be destined to be with each other, and their love is based on physical attraction? Or did he think that the sexual violence in this story could be obliterated by the redemption of love?

The answer is probably positive to both questions. As mentioned before, artistic depictions of rape and abduction were common at the time, and many times they were destined to arouse their audiences. Since Leocadia was unconscious when she was raped, and since she bore a beautiful and noble son from that act, the rape might have seemed less heinous to Cervantes than it is to us. This seems obvious for Cervantes, since he makes Leocadia change her mind and think about the rape in positive terms, as mentioned above in the scene when she sees him before the marriage. Moreover, the sexual act constituted a *de facto* marriage, and the consecration by the church was only needed to reestablish social order and allow the lovers to live together. Cervantes might even have thought that he was setting a good example by giving Rodolfo the chance to redeem himself, and by establishing that rape should eventually result in marriage. Cervantes might also have thought that the subject was challenging and he approached it as literary problem where he could combine different techniques. This would be consistent with the intention he expressed in the Prologue:

³¹ [*los requiebros amorosos que en algunas hallarás, son tan honestos, y tan medidos con la razón y discurso cristiano, que no podrán mover a mal pensamiento al descuidado o cuidadoso que las leyere.*]

My intention has been to set up, in the midst of our community, a billiard-table, at which every one may amuse himself without hurt to body and soul; for innocent recreations do good rather than harm³².

If Cervantes intends to entertain the reader, it makes sense that he tries to transform a story of crime and violence into a Greek novel, where the reader expects the protagonists to be married at the end. Cervantes's preference for a sensible resolution to the problems arising from rape is also consistent with the virtue of "*eutrapelia*", one of the forgotten virtues of moderation³³. "*Eutrapelia*" is the golden mean in any activities related with jokes and games. (Wardropper 154). As Wardropper and González Echevarría affirm, Cervantes considers that the *Novelas* respect this virtue, which makes them "*ejemplares*".

In Spanish, "*ejemplar*" used as adjective has two meanings: the first is "typical example" and the second is "excellent model". For Ife and Darby the conventional 'exemplarity' of the *Novelas* is hardly ever manifested in the use of positive models to be imitated. (Ife 173) González Echevarría writes that "'Ejemplar' may be an adaptation of the medieval term *exemplum*, in Spanish *esemplo*" which was a tale with a moral, yet another literary genre to consider. But if one could find a moral only if one were told how it is because exemplariness in moral terms is not central to the book" (González Echevarría 177). Thus, for González Echevarría, the exemplariness is just part of a playful adaptation. The book might be seen as a

³² [Mi intento ha sido poner en la plaza de nuestra república una mesa de trucos, donde cada uno pueda llegar a entretenerse, sin daño de barras: digo, sin daño del alma ni del cuerpo, porque los ejercicios honestos y agradables antes aprovechan que dañan.]

³³ Desde el siglo XIII la *eutrapelia* aparece en los tratados y en los manuales de la teología moral como una sola de las virtudes de la moderación, las que moderan las pasiones del alma. Para dar una idea del terreno moral en que se localiza la *eutrapelia*, voy a enumerar las demás virtudes de la modestia. Son: la templanza, la liberalidad, la filotimia (o sea, el amor al honor), la veracidad, la amistad, la fortaleza, la magnificencia, la magnanimidad y la mansedumbre. (Wardropper, 156)

'*muestrario*', a collection of literary samples, "stories with varying themes and techniques", a sort of laboratory of fiction. (González 177)

Conclusion

From the variety and richness of interpretations it is plausible to conclude that "The Force of Blood" was conceived as a bold literary experiment. Cervantes was probably aware that this *novella* would generate strong reactions. He wrote the story with the rhythm and symmetry of popular narratives that arouse in the reader a feeling of urgency and a sense of the ineluctability of marriage as a logical denouement. He chose very carefully the scenes he wants to foreground and crafts the descriptions of those scenes like paintings. While not explicitly describing the rape, Cervantes confronts the subject of sexual violence head-on, showing the pain it inflicts to the victim and noting its consequences to the people involved. He engages the reader with the beauty and nobility of the characters. However, Leocadia being intelligent and eloquent escapes somehow this tight structure. When Cervantes chooses, in the second part of the story, to make her silent, a beautiful object of desire like the silenced models from *Blow-Up*, the reader flinches, and in that sense, in the lack of unity and plausibility, the ending feels forced, and that might be the real flaw of the *novella*. But it is also possible that Cervantes, following Horace, conceived that true beauty was such only when accompanied by the useful. The explanation of the legal and moral implications of marriage as the best restitution after a rape and the possibility of Rodolfo being mentally impaired at the moment of the crime present us a complex image of what Cervantes might have intended to achieve beyond the exploitation of the female hero.

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