

## Remorse, Retribution and Redemption in *La fuerza de la sangre*: Spanish and English Perspectives

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In the Prologue to the *Novelas ejemplares*, Cervantes famously offered an astonishing guarantee of the high moral tone of the collection: he would rather cut off the one remaining hand with which he wrote them than publish stories which could drive a reader to evil thoughts or desires.<sup>1</sup> Despite these protestations, Cervantes makes frequent use of plots which have their origin in acts of rape or abduction, and the *Novelas ejemplares* are notable for the amount of sexual violence they contain. Even so, *La fuerza de la sangre* (The Power of Blood) is exceptional in several ways: the opening rape scene is startlingly graphic; the rapist is shockingly brutal, callous and lacking in remorse; and the extraordinary *dénouement* poses some of the greatest interpretative challenges of any story in the collection.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> '[. . .] que si por algún modo alcanzara que la lección destas novelas pudiera inducir a quien las leyera a algún mal deseo o pensamiento, antes me cortara la mano con que las escribí que sacarlas en público' ('[. . .] if by any chance it should happen that the reading of these novels might lead my readers into evil thoughts or desires, I would rather cut off the hand with which I wrote them than have them published'). Quotations from the text are from Miguel de Cervantes, *Exemplary Novels / Novelas ejemplares*, ed. B. W. Ife, 4 vols (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1992), I, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> The earlier critical history of *La fuerza de la sangre* is conveniently summarized in Ruth S. El Saffar, *Novel to Romance: A Study of Cervantes's 'Novelas ejemplares'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 128. R. P. Calcraft builds on El Saffar's approach, which sees the *novela* as an 'abstract combination of forces whose initial oppositions finally dissolve within a greater unity', in 'Structure, Symbol and Meaning in Cervantes's *La fuerza de la sangre*', *BHS*, 58 (1981), 197–204. Alban K. Forcione, in *Cervantes and the Humanist Vision* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982) develops an approach first used by J. J. Allen, 'El Cristo de la Vega and *La fuerza de la sangre*', *MLN*, 83 (1968), 271–75, which emphasizes the parallels with the miracle narrative in general, and the life of St Leocadia, patron saint of Toledo, in particular. Both critics, however, lay stress on the way in which Cervantes, while using the forms and structures of the miracle narrative, 'secularizes' the miracle of *La fuerza de la sangre* by underlining the important role played by Leocadia's prudence and discretion. Paul Lewis-Smith, in 'Fictionalizing God: Providence, Nature, and the Significance of Rape in *La fuerza de la sangre*', *MLR*, 91 (1996), 886–97, builds further

In fact, there is nothing inherently contradictory in writing a story about a sex crime and using it to deliver a moral message. The conventional 'exemplarity' of the *novelas* is hardly ever manifested in the use of positive models to be imitated, and is more often found in negative examples to be avoided. But Cervantes's brand of exemplarity goes well beyond the conventional, and is most often realized through the way he presents examples, or 'working models', of human behaviour which raise issues that are rarely cut and dried and require the reader's active engagement to make sense of them. Rather than using fiction to teach, still less to preach, Cervantes's aim is to provoke. Readers of *La fuerza de la sangre* will find much to admire in its subtle artifice and invention, but their reading will not be complete unless they also find themselves mystified and outraged by what is going on in the story.

### *Cervantes*

The clue to what makes Cervantes's fiction mysterious and provocative can be found in the gaps between what is conventional in his work and what is not. Some features of his work are so characteristic that they appear to be non-negotiable: that a suppressed truth must inevitably come to light, for example, or that a state of order, once disturbed, must be restored. But the pursuit of the 'happy ending' can be misleading if we are not responsive to the ways in which the plot architecture can be contradicted by narrative details which jag and jar. A conventional reading of *La gitanilla* (The Little Gypsy Girl), for example, will foreground the apparent inevitability in the chain of events at the end of the story:

Juana Carducha's revenge against Andrés for spurning her offer of marriage leads to his arrest; in response to an insult he reverts to his social type, kills the insolent soldier and is brought before the *Corregidor* (chief magistrate); the *Corregidor's* wife recognizes Preciosa as her long-lost stolen daughter, and Preciosa's gipsy *abuela* (grandmother) confirms the fact; Preciosa is revealed to be Constanza de Azevedo y de Meneses and is now free to marry Andrés, otherwise known as don Juan de Cárcamo.

But there is an alternative reading that is much more problematic:

Andrés kills the insolent soldier and is brought before the *Corregidor*; the *Corregidor's* wife fails to recognize Preciosa as her long-lost stolen daughter until the *abuela* puts two lots of evidence before her; the *Corregidor* leaves Andrés rotting in a dungeon long after he knows the true identity of the lovers,

on this work by showing how the *novela* illustrates the working out of divine providence through nature rather than through miracles. Adriana Slaniceanu, 'The Calculating Woman in Cervantes's *La fuerza de la sangre*', *BHS*, 64 (1987), 101–10 and Marcia L. Welles, 'Violence Disguised: Representation of Rape in Cervantes' *La fuerza de la sangre*', *Journal of Hispanic Philology*, 13 (1989), 240–52 change the balance of emphasis away from the figural to the literal, focusing on the role of Leocadia and giving more direct attention to the implications of the violence done to her. The present essay continues this trend.

tortures him by pretending that he is going to hang him once the two of them are married, and sends for a priest who refuses to marry them because the banns have not been read and there is no licence. Only then does the *Corregidor* let on that he knows who Preciosa and Andrés really are, and the marriage does not take place until several weeks later.

The fact that don Juan has absconded from home, and killed a soldier, is swept aside, as are the false witness of Juana Carducha and the old gipsy's thieving that started it all. Both readings are 'correct', that is, they are both consistent with the text. One foregrounds the plot structure; the other pays more attention to the detailed texture of the narrative. One results in a conventional happy ending; the other gets there eventually, but feels more like a chapter of accidents.<sup>3</sup>

Like *La gitaniella* and like many other *novelas* in the collection, *La fuerza de la sangre* also describes, at its simplest, a perfect arc:

Leocadia, daughter of a poor *hidalgo* (noble) family from Toledo, is abducted by Rodolfo, son of an aristocrat. He rapes her and dumps her in the street. She gives birth to a son, Luisico, who is brought up as her cousin. Luisico is knocked down in the street by a horse, and taken into a nearby house for treatment. Leocadia recognizes the room as the one in which she was raped. Rodolfo's parents summon him back from Italy, he falls in love with Leocadia when he sees her again, and marries her.

In many ways this is the quintessence of the Cervantine plot, beginning with the violent disruption of a stable harmony, and speeding like an arrow towards the restoration of that harmony. The incidentals of the plot simply postpone the inevitable as much as they help to bring it about. The fact that *La fuerza de la sangre* is written with great economy of means, and has no sub-plot which might intrude on the inevitability of this process, merely serves to speed the arrow on its way and sharpen its impact when it hits the target.

There are also some very nice narrative devices which strengthen the symmetrical structure: the crucifix which Leocadia removes from the scene of the crime, and which symbolizes the redemptive power of Christ's blood as well as bearing witness to the veracity of her story; the return to the scene of the crime brought about by Luisico's accident in which, again, blood is a significant narrative detail as well as a potent symbol of redemption; the family resemblance between Luisico and his father, which catches the attention of Rodolfo's father and ushers in the *dénouement*; and the fainting fits to which Leocadia is victim during her rape and again when she is confronted by Rodolfo for the second time.

We need to be on guard, though, against too reductive a reading of the story driven by its admittedly strong underlying structural symmetry. For this happy ending is not reached without a degree of anguish which is almost without equal

<sup>3</sup> See B. W. Ife, 'Miguel and the Detectives: Crimes and their Detection in the *Novelas ejemplares*', *Journal of Hispanic Research*, 2 (1993-94), 355-68.

in the *Novelas ejemplares*. The violence of Leocadia's rape, and the apparent lack of remorse on the part of the rapist, are startling by any standards. Even Diego Carriazo senior's cynical violation of Costanza's mother in *La ilustrada fregona* (The Illustrious Kitchen Maid) offers no comparison with the opening pages of *La fuerza de la sangre*. Cervantes sets the scene with compelling details: a family group is returning home after a nice day out by the river; five young louts, rich and idle, 'todos alegres y todos insolentes' (II, p. 102) ('uncaring and [. . .] insolent' [II, p. 103]), come marauding down the street;<sup>4</sup> they ogle disrespectfully at the three women in the family group; Leocadia's elderly father upbraids them for their insolence only for them to turn round and connive at Rodolfo's sudden urge to abduct her. And later, when Leocadia regains consciousness to find that she has been raped, Rodolfo responds to her entreaties by trying to rape her again. Few readers could remain unmoved by an episode which is all too credible: decent people's happiness and peace of mind is trampled by mindless arrogance; a young woman is brutally raped and dumped in the street, the flower of her youth and beauty destroyed, her family distraught, all decency put to shame. The episode is, and is clearly meant to be, sickening.

The reader's outrage will be compounded by the ending of the story. Rodolfo clears off to Italy and leaves Leocadia and her family to pick up the pieces of their lives. The truth comes to light through Luisico's accident, and Rodolfo is summoned back by his family not, as we might have expected, to get the rough edge of his father's tongue and to be made to face up to his responsibilities and make amends. No, he returns home to take part in one of the most bizarre charades it would be possible to imagine. First, his mother plays a childish trick on him by showing him a portrait of a plain Jane they have arranged for him to marry; and then when he objects, she produces Leocadia from behind an arras at dinner, so that she can blind him, for the second time in his life, with her beauty. He is not required to show any remorse for the crime he committed against Leocadia, nor does he volunteer any. When he marries her, he does so from choice, almost as if he were being rewarded rather than punished; indeed, no punishment is expected or extracted. An indignant reader might argue that he not only gets away with the crime – he gets a beautiful wife into the bargain.

On the question of Rodolfo's apparent lack of remorse, Paul Lewis-Smith has written that

For some critics, Rodolfo remains a distasteful figure to the end. These are critics who fail to see that the mature Rodolfo loves Leocadia or who overlook the

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Howe, 'The Power of Blood in Cervantes' *La fuerza de la sangre*', *FMLS*, 30 (1994), 64–76, points out in passing that Rodolfo and his friends are riding horses (p. 67). While this is not explicit in the text, it is strongly implied by the use of the word 'caballero' in its sense of rider rather than 'gentleman': it becomes clearer later in the story that Rodolfo's social rank is higher than that of a mere gentleman. A mounted Rodolfo makes the swift abduction more plausible, and also sets up a parallel between Leocadia's abduction, perpetrated by a rider against a pedestrian, and Luisico's accident, in which he is run down by a horse as he is crossing the street to get a better view of the race.

distinction that Cervantes draws between erotic love and lust [. . .] or who find it hard to forgive Rodolfo for failing to show remorse. To expect Rodolfo to show remorse when he is blissfully happy is to expect more than God expects and is morally unrealistic. We do not morally condemn Leocadia for failing to reprehend her husband and it behoves us not to condemn Rodolfo for failing to wear sackcloth and ashes. (p. 893, n. 8)

Nevertheless, if read at a purely literal level, *La fuerza de la sangre* provokes such strong feelings of injustice that only by suppressing wholly or in part the literal sense in favour of some form of metaphorical or symbolic reading can the opposing forces be reconciled. Even a reading as persuasive as Forcione's entails some 'explaining away': 'That Leocadia could love such an archetypal villain is quite implausible; it is in fact miraculous' (p. 363). Many readers may find that figural or symbolic interpretations, or recourse to miracles, whether secularized or not, do not allow them to keep faith with the outrage they experience when they read the story, or to see where their outrage leads them as critics or interpreters of the text. For the sense of outrage is real, and is caused by something that Cervantes put there in the text, and put there for a purpose. To recognize this is not to deny that God might use evil to achieve good;<sup>5</sup> it is simply to admit that that knowledge might not give a reader any consolation, or might not stop them from wanting revenge, from wanting Rodolfo to suffer as he made Leocadia suffer, from wanting him to shed bitter tears of remorse, or at least to say he is sorry.

#### *Middleton and Rowley*

A fascinating contemporary perspective on Rodolfo's lack of remorse comes from an English source, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's play *The Spanish Gipsy*. Middleton and Rowley were two of a group of five Jacobean playwrights whom we can identify as having an interest in Spanish literature. The others are John Fletcher, Francis Beaumont and Philip Massinger.<sup>6</sup> Their interest may originally have been scholarly – certainly they were all well educated and interested in language – but it was enhanced by the events going on in London at the time they were writing. Their careers happened to coincide with a *rapprochement* between England and Spain, which began with the Treaty of London in 1604 and which James I hoped to consolidate in the early 1620s by marrying his son and heir, Charles, to the Spanish Infanta. Since England was a Protestant country, this was a controversial policy which was much discussed and commented on, and was one of the main topics for debate in the Parliaments of 1621 to 1624. *The Spanish Gipsy* was performed at

<sup>5</sup> 'Cervantes places special emphasis on the marvellous and paradoxical truth that Providence works through evil.' Lewis-Smith, p. 886.

<sup>6</sup> Trudi Laura Darby, 'Cervantes in England: the Influence of Golden-Age Prose Fiction on Jacobean Drama', *BHS*, 84 (1997), 425–41.

court in Charles's presence on 5 November 1623, one month to the day after his return from an unsuccessful attempt to marry into the Spanish royal house.

*The Spanish Gipsy* weaves together the plots of two of the *Novelas ejemplares*, *La gitanilla*, from which it gets its title, and *La fuerza de la sangre*.<sup>7</sup> Middleton and Rowley faced two types of problem in adapting Cervantes's prose fiction to verse drama for the Jacobean stage, and the changes they made were both logistical and ideological. As regards the plot of *La fuerza de la sangre*, there were three principal changes. First, they cut two characters, Estefanía (Rodolfo's mother) and Luisico (Leocadia's son). The loss of Estefanía was almost certainly governed by practical considerations: heroes and heroines are often motherless in Jacobean plays, because all the parts were played by men. Women were played by boy apprentices, but few companies would have enough boys to allow a playwright completely free rein in the gender-mix when putting together his cast. *The Spanish Gipsy* already has six female roles, which would stretch the company's resources to its limits. So Estefanía has to go, but Rodolfo (now called Roderigo) acquires in exchange a powerful father, Fernando, the *Corregidor* of Madrid, who will turn out to be a key player in the shift of emphasis within the English play.

The loss of Luisico is more interesting. Again, there will have been logistical reasons. Drama, unlike prose fiction, is not good at handling long time-spans and the playwrights would have wanted to avoid having to cover the gap between the rape, the pregnancy and birth, and Luisico's accident at the age of seven. But losing the small boy also, of course, cut down on the number of roles requiring boy actors: the play has to be more compact than the *novela*, covering a shorter time span and with fewer characters. But no boy means no blood, no recognition device and, potentially, no *dénouement*. Middleton and Rowley handle the need for a recognition device simply by having Leocadia (now called Clara) rather than Luisico knocked down by a horse, and having her recover in the very room in which she was raped.

But the child's blood, which is central to the symbolism of Cervantes's original text is completely missing from the English version, and this omission is clearly ideological. To the extent that there is a blood motif in *The Spanish Gipsy*, the emphasis is very different. Clara, the wronged woman, tells Fernando, the rapist's father, that 'Sinners are heard farthest, when they cry in blood' (3.3.65),<sup>8</sup> but the image here is not one of Christ's redemptive blood streaming in the firmament, as it did forty years earlier for Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, but of the medieval proverb that 'murder will out', particularly when a murderer stands near the body of his victim and the body bleeds. The moral system underlying the statement is not one of redemption, but of retribution.

<sup>7</sup> A list of characters and a summary of the plot are given in the Appendix (pp. 187–89).

<sup>8</sup> Quotations are taken from Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Spanish Gipsie and All's Lost by Lust*, ed. Edgar C. Morris (Boston, USA: D. C. Heath, 1908).



The second main change concerns the episode with the portrait of the ugly woman, which Middleton and Rowley handle as a play-within-a-play, written by Fernando, with Roderigo playing the lead role. The pseudo-play helps the playwrights to negotiate an episode which they clearly felt was rather awkward in Cervantes's original, allows the episode to be played for comic effect, but also taps into the tradition in which the play-within-a-play is used as a device to prick a conscience. *Hamlet* is an obvious example.

And conscience provides a link with the playwrights' third main change, which bears heavily on the central issue of remorse. For Roderigo is, from the outset, a very different character from his Spanish counterpart, begging forgiveness of his victim as soon as she remonstrates with him:

[. . .] and since I find  
Such goodness in an unknown frame of virtue,  
Forgive my foul attempt, which I shall grieve for  
So hartily, that could you be your self  
Eye-witness to my constant vow'd repentance,  
Trust me, you'd pittie me. (1.3.75–80)

Roderigo's strong sense of guilt is reinforced by his father's reaction when he hears later what his son has done. Fernando, who has a double role as father and judge, throws himself on his knees before Clara, sheds 'tears of rage' and disowns his son:

I do not plead for pittie to a villain;  
Oh, let him dye as he hath liv'd, dishonourably,  
Basely and cursedly! I plead for pittie  
To my till now untainted blood and honour;  
Teach me how I may now be just and cruell,  
For henceforth I am childlesse. (3.3.84–9)

Fernando's gesture of chilling self-abnegation is, significantly, not matched anywhere in *La fuerza de la sangre*. Here we begin to appreciate the shortened time-frame created by the omission of Luisico. Fernando is reacting to an act of violence committed within the past few days and with no redeeming feature; Estefanía is responding to an event which by the time she hears of it must have happened some eight years before, and which is mitigated, in part, by the fact that she now has a beautiful grandson. Nevertheless, the difference in intensity between Estefanía's reaction and Fernando's is striking.

Fernando's anger and Roderigo's guilty conscience intersect in the play-within-a-play. Fernando tells his son that the play was not entirely make-believe: he has lost his fortune and Roderigo must marry the rich but ugly woman whose portrait he was shown in the drama. Roderigo protests that he would rather marry a beautiful woman whom he saw watching the play, a woman he does not recognize as Clara, his victim. Fernando agrees, if Roderigo can persuade her. After the marriage, Fernando has one more surprise for Roderigo, when he tells

him 'Thy wife's a wanton' and accuses him of having committed some terrible sin to deserve this. Under the onslaught of Fernando's cross-examination, Roderigo breaks down and confesses:

[. . .] Turn from me then,  
And as my guilt sighes out this monster, rape,  
Oh, do not lend an ear! (5.1.23–5)

Like a skilful psychotherapist, Fernando has got the subject to confront his guilt, and further, brings him to acknowledge what remedy he should have made: 'Oh! had I married her, | I had been then the happiest man alive!' he exclaims; at which point, 'Enter Clara, Maria and Pedro, from behind the arras' (5.1.37), as the stage direction puts it, and Clara's identity as his victim is discovered by production of the crucifix. That Roderigo's cure is complete is testified to by his reply: 'How can I turn mine eyes and not behold | On every side my shame?' (5.1.49–50) Cervantes, by contrast leaves us with no indication that Rodolfo ever acknowledges anything wrong with his actions.<sup>9</sup>

Middleton and Rowley have substantially rewritten Cervantes's text to make it say many of the things we might want it to say, but which it pointedly does not say. At the same time, they have stripped the *novela* of much of its core symbolism. This is hardly surprising, since they were writing for a particular audience within a Protestant context. Prince Charles was a follower of William Laud and the new 'High Church', Arminian theology; in this theology, images and ceremony were acceptable to enhance the dignity of the communion service. The crucifix which Clara takes from Roderigo's bedroom would not have been problematic. But a preference for decoration in churches should not be mistaken for a rejection of Protestant doctrine: the Church of England was still a Church which attached paramount importance to the Word rather than to images, and which put responsibility for its salvation on the individual soul rather than on any intercessory. An important text was St Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, which is particularly strong on repentance and says in the second chapter:

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart [thou] treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds:  
To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:  
But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,  
Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil. (5–9)

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted, however, that after the rape Rodolfo goes to seek advice from his companions about what he should do next, perhaps indicating that he at least realizes he is in some trouble.



This, surely, was a strong encouragement to penitence, and one with which any English Protestant would have been familiar. The cultural framework in which Middleton and Rowley were writing required self-knowledge as a way to repentance and was keen on retribution and punishment: this was a society in which the sermon, the homily and biblical exposition were woven into the fabric of life, and collections of sermons were best-sellers. As Patrick Collinson notes

[. . .] since for Protestants religion was not one compartment of a segmented life but all-enveloping, this must also mean that the Bible only is the *culture* of Protestants. [. . .] The Bible was not a straitjacket but a rich and infinitely varied source of imaginative and formal inspiration.<sup>10</sup>

In this society, Roderigo *has* to take responsibility for his actions: it is part of the confessional culture in which he is created. Cervantes, however, is writing for a different culture, one in which intercession is still possible and blood representing Christ's sacrifice can in itself be redemptive. For Cervantes, then, it is sufficient to rely on the pattern of events to bring about a satisfactory ending to his story, which one might view as a hagiography of Leocadia rather than a study of Rodolfo's conscience, of justice achieved through the patterning of events rather than the development of character. It is notable that, in bringing about the remorse and confession in Roderigo which we *think* we want from Cervantes, Middleton and Rowley move the focus of the play from the wronged woman to the man who wronged her. For the English playwrights the man is at the centre of our vision and it is a story of a troubled conscience. For Cervantes, however, it is the woman who is in focus and the story is of her courage and virtue.<sup>11</sup>

### *Spanish and English Versions*

A comparison between Cervantes's *La fuerza de la sangre* and Middleton and Rowley's *The Spanish Gypsy* shows two things: first, that it is not at all anachronistic for a modern reader to respond indignantly to Rodolfo's behaviour and attitudes, because some of Cervantes's contemporaries clearly did the same to the extent that they felt the need to 'correct' the lack of remorse shown by Rodolfo by creating their own character, Roderigo, who does demonstrate that remorse; and second, Cervantes's provocative lack of interest in the question of Rodolfo's conscience shows that, for him, Leocadia is at the centre of his

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England. Religion and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> The French dramatist Alexandre Hardy also wrote a version in 1626 which depicted Rodolfo passing through stages of remorse and repentance. See Esther J. Crooks, *The Influence of Cervantes in France in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore, 1931), p. 140, cited in Forcione, p. 361.

interest, not Rodolfo. What is challenging about *La fuerza de la sangre* is that it presents its readers with a series of deafening silences and asks them to interpret those silences in terms of what else is said. The absences from the story throw into relief what is there but which could easily be overlooked.

It is intriguing to note, for example, how Cervantes frames the story of *La fuerza de la sangre* with multiple references to the family. The story opens with Leocadia's family returning to Toledo from the riverside on a warm summer night. There are five of them in the group: 'un anciano hidalgo con su mujer, un niño pequeño, una hija de edad de diez y seis años y una criada' (II, p. 102) ('an old gentleman, with his wife, a small boy, a daughter of sixteen and a maid-servant' [II, p. 103]). If we leave aside the maid, this appears to be a family of four. The sixteen-year-old girl is Leocadia, but who is the little boy? Is he her brother? And why does Cervantes emphasize the father's age? This is a family which is particularized with great care: the father is quite old, the eldest child appears to be the girl, and there appears to be a son who is quite a bit younger, and who never appears in the story again. Why is he there, and why that age gap? Were there other children who did not survive? Is he an afterthought?

It is tempting to see the little boy as a harbinger of the nephew Luis who is yet to be born, and who will spend the first seven years of his life cast in the role of nephew/cousin rather than son. Cervantes appears to underline the link by using the diminutive ending '-ico' for Leocadia's brother and son.<sup>12</sup> But if we assume, as it seems we must, that he is Leocadia's brother, his presence on the first page of the novel, and his absence from the rest, might be much more significant. For, as Adriana Slaniceanu reminds us (p. 107), revenge in matters of honour is traditionally the role of the brother.<sup>13</sup> Leocadia has a brother, but he is conspicuously absent, by virtue of his age if nothing else, from the stage on which this drama will be acted out. This is clearly a story, Cervantes seems to be saying, in which the wronged woman will have to fend for herself.

If Leocadia is to bring about her own retribution, she makes a very promising start. What several critics have noted about the rape scene is Leocadia's extreme rationality once she has regained consciousness, and her exceptional presence of mind in observing the details of the room, and her foresight in removing the silver crucifix 'no por devoción ni por hurto, sino llevada de un discreto designio suyo' (II, p. 108) ('not for devotion, or as a theft, but inspired by a clever plan she had' [II, p. 109]). Both the reasoned arguments with which she meets and fends off Rodolfo's attempts to repeat his assault, and the 'discreet design' with which she removes the crucifix, point in one direction: honour and vengeance. At the very moment in which she is raped she appears to understand that the only way she is going to be able to right the wrong done to her is to take deep cover within

<sup>12</sup> After Leocadia is abducted Cervantes writes 'lloró su hermanico' (II, p. 102) ('her little brother wept' [II, p. 105]) and her son is referred to as 'Luisico' throughout.

<sup>13</sup> It is surprising that neither she nor Welles, who repeats the point (p. 247), noticed the disappearing brother, because it would have strengthened both their arguments.

the patriarchal social system, and bide her time. Don't get mad, she seems to say to herself; get even.<sup>14</sup>

This also appears to be the message she receives from her father when she is reunited with her family. Critics have often commented on the enlightened reception she is given. Far from disowning her, or throwing her out, which might have been the expected responses, her loving father teaches her two lessons, one soft and one hard. On the one hand he tells her quite rightly that she has committed no sin 'ni en dicho, ni en pensamiento, ni en hecho' (II, p. 110) ('neither in thought, word or deed' [II, p. 111]) and so has lost no private honour. But on the other hand he counsels against using the theft of the crucifix to trap her assailant, on the grounds that it can only work against her: 'más lastima una onza de deshonor pública que una arroba de infamia secreta' (II, p. 110) ('an ounce of public dishonour hurts more than a hundredweight of secret shame' [II, p. 111]). It is difficult to know whether this is wisdom, complacency or a world-weary acceptance that people of their social rank could not expect justice in these circumstances,<sup>15</sup> but either way, it is a salutary lesson in the way of the world. Leocadia now knows what Preciosa knew that fateful day she met don Juan de Cárcamo on the road into Madrid, that virginity has a cash value, is a tradable commodity in the sexual economy of the age: 'una sola joya tengo [. . .] que es la de mi entereza y virginidad y no la tengo de vender a precio de promesas ni dádivas, porque en fin será vendida' (I, p. 38) ('I have one jewel only [. . .] and I am not selling it for gifts and promises, because that would be, at the last, merely selling it' [I, p. 39]).

We have constantly to remind ourselves that words like 'honra' (honour) which are apparently so glibly bandied about in the literature of the time are merely euphemistic shorthand for this socio-economic fact of life. This was a society which was obsessed by the transmission of property through legitimate patrilineal descent, a society defined by *mayorazgo* (primogeniture). And the high value placed on legitimacy placed an equally high value on the virginity of an unmarried woman. In *La fuerza de la sangre*, Cervantes graphically reveals the sordid reality of honour and its loss. Robbed of her virginity, Leocadia is literally worthless within the patriarchal system. And her attendant loss of identity is intensified when she gives birth, and her son is sent away to be fostered until he can be passed off as a nephew. Leocadia cannot be identified as a mother, nor Luis as her son. It is easy for the reader, who is present at both the conception and the birth, to overlook this fact.

In some ways, then, there were two crimes committed by Rodolfo when he raped Leocadia: he not only took away her personal, physical integrity but also her sense of self in a social context. She ceased to be the person she once was. In

<sup>14</sup> Both Howe and Welles show how this *novela* is a very atypical example of the honour/vengeance theme in Spanish literature, and one in which the women break the cycle of violence endemic to honour/vengeance plots.

<sup>15</sup> Slaniceanu, p. 103: 'He seeks no aid from the forces of law and order, for *hidalgos pobres* (poor gentlemen) have no recourse to official justice.'

this respect, Leocadia is like a number of Cervantine women who are the victims of a crime which takes away their identity.<sup>16</sup> Three obvious examples come to mind from within the *Novelas ejemplares*: *La gitanilla*, *La española inglesa*, and *La ilustre fregona*. These are all reworkings of a very common narrative structure in Cervantes, the narrative of captivity and redemption, in which a character is abducted, stolen or otherwise misplaced geographically, culturally or socially, lives as another person, and is eventually 'redeemed' or repatriated to their proper place. Examples can be found throughout Cervantes's work: in *Persiles y Sigismunda* (the three 'mediterranean' narratives in Book I), and in *Don Quijote*, where the Captive's tale (I, 39–41) is the most obvious but by no means the only example.

The importance of the captivity narrative in early modern culture has been underlined by the English historian Linda Colley.<sup>17</sup> Colley has examined over one hundred English narratives of this type, both printed and manuscript, from 1600 to the middle of the nineteenth century, and although she does not mention captivity narratives in other languages, she does point out that she wrote the book to show that such narratives, which have usually been studied in the American context, are not unique to that context. The prevalence of this narrative type is undoubtedly a function of the high probability that early modern Europeans would find themselves captive at some time in their lives. Colley estimates that some 20,000 British and Irish captives were held in North Africa between the beginning of the seventeenth century and the mid eighteenth century (p. 56), and that at least 15,000 Spanish men and women had to be redeemed from North African captivity in the seventeenth century alone (p. 45). Cervantes's experience as a prisoner in Algiers (1575–80) was by no means exceptional.

What is striking about this phenomenon is not the number of people taken captive, but the number who wrote about the experience, which was clearly a formative one for many of them. Colley defines the captivity narrative as a mode of writing rather than a genre:

[. . .] captivity narratives commonly describe how a single individual or a group was seized, how the victim/s coped (or not) with the challenges and sufferings that ensued, and how they contrived in the end to escape or were ransomed or released [. . .] (p. 13)

The examples were not always heroic: many individuals who underwent the experience

[. . .] remained bitterly resentful throughout at being forced to cross into trauma and difference. Some captives, however, chose or were compelled

<sup>16</sup> Forcione, p. 357: 'The first half of the tale is marked by the loneliness of the heroine and her alienation from a society that deprives her of her very being'.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002).

to adjust to their new settings, while others learnt from their experiences to question the very validity of divides between peoples, and the meaning of what they had once regarded as home. Virtually all British captives though were compelled by the nature of their predicament to re-examine – and often question for the first time – conventional wisdoms about nationality, race, religion, allegiance, appropriate modes of behaviour, and the location of power. (p. 16)

Two things are helpful from this account: first, the importance given to the process of redemption itself – how the captives came to be restored to their rightful place in the scheme of things, which is why the form would appeal to writers of fiction<sup>18</sup> – and second, the lessons to be learned from contrasting two modes of being. If we put these observations into the context of the *Novelas ejemplares* we find a striking pattern emerges which may help to resolve some of the problems surrounding *La fuerza de la sangre* in particular.

Figure 1 summarizes the main structural features of four of the *novelas*, including *La fuerza de la sangre*. They can all be analysed into a number of basic elements: an initial crime results in some form of displacement, captivity or exile; an agent appears who brings about the redemption of the heroine, that is her restitution to her ‘real’ self and her proper place in society.

Figure 1: Captivity and redemption structures in four *Novelas ejemplares*

	<i>La gitana</i>	<i>La española inglesa</i>	<i>La ilustre fregona</i>	<i>La fuerza de la sangre</i>
Heroine	Preciosa	Isabel	Costanza	Leocadia
Crime	Theft	Theft	Rape	Rape
Criminal	<i>abuela</i>	Clotaldo	Diego Carriazo snr	Rodolfo
Displacement	Social/ethnic (gipsies)	Geographical/religious (Spain and England)	Social	Social
Agent	Don Juan/Andrés	Ricaredo, son of Clotaldo	Tomás de Avendaño, friend of Diego Carriazo jnr	Rodolfo <sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> A good contemporary example from England is that of Robert Greene’s short novel *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, first published in 1588 and best known today as the source of Shakespeare’s play *The Winter’s Tale*. See Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> It might be argued that Luisico could be the agent, but the paradigm favours Rodolfo because in each case it is the heroine’s own qualities of integrity and fortitude, represented by her physical beauty, which attract the attention of the man who will rescue her. Moreover, Luisico does not have the power to reinstate her to her rightful place in society; only Rodolfo can do that.

In every case, the agent of redemption is a man who is attracted by the displaced girl, her physical beauty, and her character, integrity, and resistance to her alien environment. In every case, the first cause of the narrative is a crime which causes the suppression of a truth, and the narrative is concerned with the ways in which that truth will out, for out it must.<sup>20</sup>

Although less obvious than in the other examples, this pattern is also present in *La fuerza de la sangre*: the initial crime (Rodolfo's rape) leads to social displacement (Leocadia is robbed of her honour and her place in the marriage market and is forced to deny her role as mother); the agent is, and in this case can only be, the man who committed the original crime; and the outcome is that Leocadia regains her place in society, underlined by the further children she and Rodolfo give birth to.

In *La fuerza de la sangre*, the suppressed truth is Leocadia's role as mother and Luis's role as son, and the moment of revelation comes with the accident, and the intersection of these two family narratives in the bloodstained body of a beautiful little boy. After seven years of internal exile, Leocadia senses that the moment has come, and takes what is really a very brave step in revealing the truth to Rodolfo's family: 'this boy is your grandson' (II, p. 116; II, p. 117). It hardly bears thinking about how badly that moment could have gone: would they deny it and have her thrown out; would they try and pay her off to protect themselves and their son against social blackmail?<sup>21</sup> But Leocadia plays it to perfection, bringing the biological and the social realms into phase and creating a perfect alignment of three generations of patrilineal descent. All they need to do is supply the missing third term, and it is significant that from now on Leocadia and her parents-in-law will act in concert to ensure that Rodolfo plays his part.

Once the truth has been revealed and Leocadia's story has been verified, Cervantes moves quickly to get Rodolfo back from Italy and all other matters resolved. But there remains the oddity of the episode with the portrait. Several critics follow Ray Calcraft in arguing that Rodolfo's response to the picture of the plain lady is evidence of maturity gained from his years in Italy. It is true that his reply to his mother's suggestion that he should marry the plain but virtuous wife they have selected for him is extremely polite. But many readers will prefer to read Rodolfo's response as a spoiled brat's plea not to make him marry an ugly woman.<sup>22</sup> If he ever does become a changed man, the moment is not yet.

<sup>20</sup> The sole exception to this rule appears to be the episode in *Persiles y Sigismunda* (II, 7) where Auristela decides not to reveal the contents of the offensive note she has received from Clodio.

<sup>21</sup> This thought is voiced, quietly, at several points in the text. The exceptional wealth of Rodolfo's family is clear from the furnishings in his bedroom, and his mother is careful to verify Leocadia's story, just in case she is a gold-digger.

<sup>22</sup> He describes himself, somewhat disingenuously, with the words 'mozo soy' (II, p. 120) ('I am a young man' [II, p. 121]) (he is twenty-nine by this stage), and his mother entices him back from Italy with 'la golosina de gozar tan hermosa mujer' (II, p.118) ('the appetite to enjoy such a beautiful woman' [II, p. 119]); she clearly knows what kind of child she is dealing with.



It is difficult to fathom why Cervantes has Estefanía play this trick on him, and it may be necessary to conclude that it is simply a manoeuvre, another kind of 'discreet design'; its function is to prepare the ground for the replay of the first encounter between Leocadia and Rodolfo, a return match from which she intends this time to get a result that suits her. Like some stallion who has to be made ready to cover a prize mare, Rodolfo has to be softened up for the great revelation at dinner, the moment when Leocadia and her son will be revealed in all their miraculous glory and the male gaze will finally come into focus.

It is clear from the final pages of the story, however, that Rodolfo and the state of his conscience are not as significant for Cervantes's purpose as Leocadia is. For Cervantes, and for Leocadia, Rodolfo is simply a means to an end, a cipher, an agent. He has performed a biological function and he is now required to perform a matching social function, to marry her and give her back what he stole from her. This story is entirely about Leocadia, about how she is the victim of a vicious crime, about how she is robbed of meaning and value within the society in which she lives; about how she bides her time and when the chance presents itself, how she engineers her own release and that of her son from social exile into the social mainstream, as measured by 'la ilustre descendencia que en Toledo dejaron [. . .] que muchos y felices años gozaron de sí mismos, de sus hijos y de sus nietos' (II, p. 126) ('the noble descendants [. . .], which [they] left in Toledo; and they enjoyed many happy years together, with their children and grandchildren' [II, p. 127]).

Our response to Rodolfo and how he behaves is, then, simply a by-product of Cervantes's concern to show the brutal reality behind the word 'deshonra' (dishonour) and the mere functionality of his male character; it has no real bearing on the story itself. Rodolfo's role is simply to redeem both Leocadia and her son, to rescue them from the social exclusion to which his action has banished them. This might have been brought about by his father getting the shotgun out, but as the comparison with other *novelas* shows, that is not what seems to interest Cervantes. What he seems interested in is how all of these women – Preciosa, Isabel, Costanza and Leocadia – bring about their own redemption, how their qualities, their integrity and fortitude, symbolized by their physical beauty, motivate and inspire the men who will rescue them. Those qualities are rewarded by their ultimate redemption from captivity or repatriation from exile. Like Ricaredo, Avendaño and don Juan de Cárcamo, Rodolfo is inspired by a well-managed, hieratic *coup de foudre*, rescues Leocadia from social exclusion and restores her to marriage, domesticity and fecundity. Unlike them, he was also the cause of her initial captivity. In this respect, perhaps *La fuerza de la sangre* represents the most perfect expression of Cervantes's narrative structure of captivity and redemption.

At the end of *La gitanilla*, Cervantes introduces a note of irony at the moment when Preciosa is restored to her proper place in the social order. As a gypsy she is bright and self-motivated; as the Corregidor's daughter she is dutiful and submissive. There is a similar irony in this story, perhaps an inescapable one; for all of Cervantes's female leads illustrate the virtual impossibility of defining a role

for themselves in other than patriarchal terms. However much they shine in their various struggles, they are all ultimately ingested into the status quo. Fulfilment entails submission, loss of individuality, absorption, invisibility. Perhaps Leocadia stands out in this context, because, although she too takes her place in the reproductive cycle, she does not simply slot into her place, she sets out to achieve marriage as a form of revenge. And since her family is clearly poorer and socially inferior to Rodolfo's she achieves more than restoration, she manages to achieve betterment. And in a world where we do well to come out even, we can only admire a woman who comes out ahead.

### *Appendix*

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623)

#### *List of characters*

Don Fernando, *corregidor* of Madrid  
 Don Pedro de Cortes  
 Don Francisco de Carcomo  
 Roderigo, son to don Fernando  
 Lewys, son to de Castro, slain by Alvarez  
 Diego, friend to don Lewys  
 Don John, son to Francisco de Carcomo and a lover of Constanza  
 Sancho, a foolish gentleman and ward to don Pedro  
 Soto, a merry fellow, his man  
 Alvarez, and old lord disguised like the father of the gipsies  
 Claro and Antonio, two gentlemen disguised like gipsies  
 Maria, wife to don Pedro  
 Clara, their daughter  
 Guyamara, wife to Count Alvarez, and sister to Fernando, disguised like the mother of the gipsies, and called by the name of Eugenia  
 Constanza, daughter to Fernando, disguised like a young Spanish gipsy and called by the name of Pretiosa  
 Christiana, a gentlewoman, disguised like a gipsy  
 Cardochia, a young hostess to the gipsies  
 Servants

### *Synopsis*

#### *Act 1*

Night time. Roderigo and his friends Lewys and Diego are on the outskirts of Madrid. Roderigo has seen a woman (Clara) with whom he is 'bewitched' and who is approaching them with her parents (Maria and Pedro). He persuades Lewys and Diego to help him abduct her and this they do. In the course of the

abduction, Pedro calls out who he is – don Pedro de Cortes – and Lewys is horrified, because he realizes that the woman he has helped to kidnap is the woman whom he has been courting. Meanwhile, Roderigo has taken Clara to a house and raped her. He leaves her locked in a room, the features of which she memorizes and she also takes a crucifix which she finds there. Roderigo returns and Clara makes him repent of his actions. He swears never to reveal his crime, and to take her back to the place whence he abducted her. Lewys and Diego search for Roderigo. Diego follows don John, thinking him to be Roderigo, and realizes that he is in love with a gipsy girl. Lewys finds Roderigo and explains that they have abused the woman he hopes to marry; Roderigo praises the woman's virtue and asks Lewys never to reveal her identity to him. He will leave Madrid, to avoid her, and go to study in Salamanca. Diego meets them and tells them of don John's infatuation.

### *Act 2*

The gipsies are lodging at the house, near Madrid, of Juanna Cardochia, where they are visited by Sancho, don Pedro's foolish ward, and his servant Soto; Sancho has brought verses for the famous gipsy girl, Pretiosa, and gives her money, as well as his cloak, hat, scarf and ruff. As he leaves, don John arrives: he wishes to marry Pretiosa, and she says that if he will serve for two years as a gipsy, then she will marry him.

Clara has told Maria and Pedro what has happened to her, and they advise discretion. Lewys continues his suit to Clara, but she is not interested. Lewys remains in conversation with Pedro, and discusses the fate of Alvarez, who had killed Lewys's father and had been in exile ever since. Don Fernando, Corregidor of Madrid, and Alvarez's brother-in-law, has been encouraging Lewys to have Alvarez brought back to Spain – if he is still alive.

Sancho and Soto return home, and are scolded by don Pedro for having lost Sancho's clothes. Outraged, they decide to turn gipsy.

### *Act 3*

Roderigo is now disguised as an Italian and overcome with remorse. He meets Sancho and Soto, and goes with them to join the gipsies. They go with the troop to perform at the house of don Francisco de Carcomo (don John's father), where don Fernando, don Pedro, Maria, Lewys and Diego are also present, and tell fortunes. Don Francisco recognizes his son in disguise, but keeps quiet.

News comes that Clara has been injured in an accident, outside don Fernando's house, and he instructs that she should be cared for in his home: he will follow Pedro, Maria and Lewys to see her. Clara recognizes the room in which she is being nursed as the same as the room in which she was raped, and when her parents and don Fernando arrive, she asks him if he is married. Yes, he was, and he has a son Roderigo still alive; but his wife died in childbirth and the daughter to whom she gave birth was lost at sea with his sister. Clara gives don Fernando a note describing her rape. He is horrified, and vows revenge on his son.

*Act 4*

Don John goes through a betrothal ceremony with Pretiosa and adopts the gipsy-name of Andrew. But Juanna Cardochia also asks him to marry her, an offer which he refuses. She asks him to wear a token jewel of hers, which she gives him.

Don Fernando has had Alvarez's banishment repealed: don Francisco is lamenting the loss of his son don John who has left a letter saying he has gone to the wars. The gipsy troop arrives at don Fernando's house, and he commissions them to act a play which he has drafted, in which he wants their Italian poet to play the role of a son asked to marry a rich but ugly heiress, to restore the family's fortunes. The play proceeds, but is interrupted with the news that Diego has been wounded by the gipsy Andrew, whom he saw wearing a jewel belonging to his own mistress, Juanna Cardochia, and which Cardochia says was stolen. Andrew is arrested for theft and for assault. Don Fernando tells Roderigo that he has seen through his disguise, but that the play was in earnest and he must marry the ugly heiress. Roderigo pleads instead to be allowed to marry the beautiful woman who sat with his father during the play (i.e. Clara). His father agrees, as long as the woman is willing.

*Act 5*

Roderigo has married Clara, and don Fernando now tells him that his new wife is a wanton. Roderigo must, he says, have committed a dreadful sin in order to deserve such a punishment, and questions him until Roderigo finally breaks his vow and admits the rape. He wishes he had married the woman whom he violated. At this point, Clara, Maria and don Pedro emerge from behind an arras and all is explained.

Preciosa pleads for the release of her gipsy husband, Andrew, who is to be hanged. The mother of the gipsies reveals in private to don Fernando that Andrew is don John de Carcomo, and further that she herself is don Fernando's own sister and Alvarez's wife, whom he had believed drowned; Pretiosa is his daughter Constanza, and Alvarez is the leader of the gipsy troop. Alvarez offers Lewys the opportunity to kill him and expresses his remorse at the death of Lewys's father. Lewys finds himself unable to take revenge and they are reconciled. Don John and Constanza (Pretiosa) are to be married and Sancho and Soto see the error of their ways.

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