

# THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SHAME IN CERVANTES'S *LA FUERZA DE LA SANGRE*

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## LA DIMENSIÓN SOCIAL DE LA VERGÜENZA EN *LA FUERZA DE LA SANGRE* DE CERVANTES

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### RESUMEN

Este artículo se apoya en Aristóteles, Castiglione, Vives y Huarte para examinar la representación de la vergüenza anticipatoria y retrospectiva en *La fuerza de la sangre* de Cervantes (1613), en relación con los conceptos imperantes de honra y honestidad, basados en preconcepciones profundamente arraigadas en el vínculo entre sangre y linaje, y riqueza y reputación. Al analizar las dimensiones sociales y de género de los conceptos renacentistas de vergüenza, el artículo intenta arrojar nueva luz sobre los polémicos temas de la verosimilitud y la ejemplaridad de esta novela.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cervantes, *La fuerza de la sangre*, violación, vergüenza, honra.

### ABSTRACT

This article draws on Aristotle, Castiglione, Vives and Huarte to examine the representation of anticipatory and retrospective shame in Cervantes's *La fuerza de la sangre* (1613) in relation to prevailing notions of *honra* and *honestidad*, which were underpinned by deep-rooted preconceptions linking virtue to blood and lineage, and reputation to wealth. In analyzing the social and gender dimensions of early modern approaches to shame, the article seeks to shed new light on the existing critical debates on the verisimilitude and the exemplarity of this tale.

KEY WORDS: Cervantes, *La fuerza de la sangre*, rape, shame, honra.

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Cervantes's exemplary novel *La fuerza de la sangre* begins with the rape of an *hidalga* girl by a wealthy young nobleman, and ends with the happy marriage of rapist and victim more than seven years later. The fact that the rape is readily forgiven by the victim and goes unpunished has been interpreted as rather puzzling (El Saffar, Welles), contradictory (Pecoraro), shocking (Kartchner) or seemingly difficult to reconcile with the idea of exemplarity (Lappin). While some critics have tended to focus on formal aspects, such as structural symmetry (Piluso, Calcraft, Selig, Levisi, Gitlitz), the tale has also been criticized for its lack of verisimilitude (Avalle-Arce, Clamurro). The unlikely succession of events that leads to the marriage of victim and rapist has been explained in allegorical terms as the rapist's redemption (Casalduero, Piluso) and compared to miracle narratives (Allen, Forcione) or tales of spiritual transformation (Braun). In accounting for Cervantes's choice of title, Calcraft, Gitlitz and Welles have made an explicit connection between the bloodshed of the girl in the initial episode and the equally innocent bloodshed, seven years later, of the son conceived during the rape. Nonetheless, the notion of blood that gives this tale its title is not necessarily restricted to the embodied experience of being assaulted or injured.

This article argues that the title *La fuerza de la sangre* evokes two key aspects of the early modern notion of blood, which are crucial to the understanding of the verisimilitude of the tale. On the one hand, it evokes early modern conceptions of virtue (and *honra*, reputation) that, according to the dominant Aristotelian-Galenic discourses, were dependent on the quality of a person's blood (lineage). On the other hand, it serves to explain the unexpected long-term relationship created in the tale's *dénouement* between two noble social groups usually kept apart by their differences in wealth, status and moral standards. If the blood shed during the rape marks the unequal social relation between the two groups, the blood of the boy thereby conceived creates an affective bond between them. This bond, in turn, questions the excessive emphasis placed in early modern Spanish society on the link between *honra*, social status and wealth.

## THE SOCIAL AND GENDER DIMENSIONS OF *HONRA* AND SHAME

In the opening scene of *La fuerza de la sangre*, an old *hidalgo*, his wife, their sixteen-year-old daughter, their young son and their maid are strolling up the hill towards the city centre of Toledo, late at night, having spent the hot summer evening relaxing by the river. Pre-empting the reader's conjectures about why they are walking (i.e., whether they are too impoverished to travel by carriage), the narrator emphasizes their respectability ("honrada familia"), their trust in the city's extensive judicial system

and in the good inclinations of its people, and their carefree state of mind (“lejos de pensar en desastre que sucederles pudiese”), immediately contrasting these with the “desdicha” that they are about to encounter, which will make them cry for years (Cervantes 147). Having thus built up our suspense, the narrator goes on to refer to a group of insolent young men: a twenty-two-year-old nobleman (introduced under the pseudonym of Rodolfo) and four of his friends, who look at the women’s faces with blatant lustfulness (“deshonesta desenvoltura”) and laugh shamelessly when the old man tells them off.

We thus see how the main axis on which the tale’s plot is built from this opening scene is the confrontation of two groups: one characterized by their *honra*, the other by their *deshonestidad*. Their differing values, goals, and social norms of behaviour are accentuated by the fact that they belong to two separate social spheres within a hierarchical structure determined by rank and wealth. Thus, the identity of the young nobleman is defined in terms of the reputation he has among his peers (“renombre de atrevido”, 147), though his recklessness appears to be inconsistent with his noble blood (“atrevimientos que desdecían de su calidad”) and is explained by the narrator as the result of his wealth, his high social rank, his depraved disposition, his excessive freedom, and his rude friends: “... la riqueza, la sangre ilustre, la inclinación torcida, la libertad demasiada y las compañías libres” (147)<sup>1</sup>. While Rodolfo focuses on pursuing pleasure, with the help of his friends (“por dar[le] gusto”, 148), the family of “hidalgos pobres” (149) are bound by a sense of duty and the need to prove their moral virtue in order to maintain their social respectability, their *honra*<sup>2</sup>. Even though the rich young men and the impoverished family belong to two social groups who do not normally interact with each other, when they do, their differing moral codes and values can lead to conflict and injustice. In this story, the wealthy young noblemen’s attack on the *hidalgos* is not only unjust, but also shameful.

The early modern notion of shame included the seemingly opposed meanings of *pundonor* and *deshonra*, both of which were already contained in the Ancient Greek word for shame, *aiskhunê* (Konstan 94-95). In sixteenth-century Spain, the

1. In interpreting “calidad” as an “ambiguous” term referring to Rodolfo’s “split between his image and his self”, Slaniceanu (110) overlooks the fact that this term was a common way of referring to noble status in early modern Spain.
2. As McKendrick notes, in seventeenth-century Spanish society, wealth was used for “promotion to and within the ranks of the nobility” (321) and thus acted as a main source of *honra*. Therefore, while the wealthy nobles were able to preserve their reputation through an ostentatious lifestyle (grand houses, expensive fashionable clothing, servants, coaches and horses), which granted them a considerable degree of immunity against social criticism, the *hidalgos* were moved by the desire for social betterment to adhere to a strict code of honour regulated by social opinion.

term *vergüenza* denoted both anticipatory shame, protective of one's good reputation (*pundonor*), and the retrospective shame for a misdeed one had (or was thought to have) committed. We can see this, for instance, in Pedro Simón Abril's translation of Aristotle's *Ética*, in which *vergüenza* is both the long-term attitude that helps to attain *honra*, and the emotional state of being ashamed as the result of an affront: "... procede de virtud; pues procede de vergüenza y de apetito o deseo de la honra, que es uno de los bienes, y del aborrecimiento de la afrenta, que es cosa vergonzosa" (1116a 27-29). The anticipatory dimension of the long-term attitude of shame was often emphasized by using the term *vergüenza* together with other related terms, as Huarte does in the *Examen de ingenios*: "... la vergüenza y honestidad dice Aristóteles que es propia pasión del entendimiento" (311). While in modern Spanish the terms *honestidad* and *honestar* refer primarily to the moral rectitude of a person's behaviour, in early modern Spanish they also had a wider social dimension related to exemplarity and reputation<sup>3</sup>.

The "deshonesta desenvoltura" shown by the wealthy young noblemen in *La fuerza de la sangre* can be interpreted as a form of shamelessness. It is precisely because young people were generally thought to be guided by their passions that Aristotle recommends in the *Ética* that they ought to cultivate the attitude of shame as a bridle that would prevent them from doing the wrong thing: "... porque como se dejan regir por sus afectos, hierran muchas cosas, y la vergüenza esles como un freno" (1128b 18-19). In *De anima et vita* (457), Vives endorses the Aristotelian idea that the restraining effect of shame helps to counteract people's tendency to act in erratic and thoughtless ways. He also argues, more specifically, that the shame related to the concern to maintain honour could also be beneficial in preventing men from doing things that may not only be wrong, but also harmful to others.

Rather than thinking of shame as a generally applicable restraint mechanism, it is useful to consider how its distinct meaning might depend on social context. Thus, for instance, noting how the display of attitudes such as shame and shamelessness would not only depend on actual social inequalities, but also on perceived differences, Vives explains that there are people who behave in a shameless way because they believe they are superior to everybody else, and consequently seek to display their audacity in situations in which they would be expected to feel shame (454). This account of shamelessness is well illustrated by the contrast between the audacious behaviour displayed by

3. As we see in Covarrubias's definition, *honestar* had the meaning of enhancing a person's reputation, just as *denostar* meant to harm it: "Honestar, hacer una cosa honesta o alguna persona, honrándola; como, por el contrario, denostar, afrentarla; denuesto, afrenta" (1066).

Rodolfo at the beginning of *La fuerza de la sangre*, when he and his young friends meet the lower-status family of *hidalgos*, and the submissiveness he shows at the end of the story, when, after seven years, he re-encounters his victim, dressed up and introduced as a grand lady, in his parents' presence.

In considering the social dimension of shame, Vives also observes that we tend to feel more embarrassed in the presence of people whose disapproval we fear will bring us greater dishonour and in the presence of people we respect, while we are less embarrassed when we do something shameful in the presence of people who would act like us (455). This point is illustrated by the emphasis placed by the narrator of *La fuerza de la sangre* on the impact of Rodolfo's friends in validating his intentions: "... que siempre los ricos que dan en liberales hallan quien canonicen sus desafueros y califique por buenos sus malos gustos. Y así, el nacer el mal propósito, el comunicarle y el aprobarle y el determinarse de robar a Leocadia y el robarla, casi todo fue en un punto" (Cervantes 148). While Rodolfo's friends seem to provide a micro social context in which shame plays no role, the narrator's use of terms such as "mal propósito" and "desafueros", also suggests that, outside the parameters of the group of young noblemen, Rodolfo's intentions are contrary not only to reason but also to social justice.

Despite Clamurro's and Avallé-Arce's view that *La fuerza de la sangre* lacks verisimilitude, the story can be said to ring true because it follows the logic of common mechanisms of deception and self-delusion. For instance, Vives's observations that having one's face covered to prevent recognition usually reduces shame substantially and that darkness usually eliminates any sense of shame or embarrassment (256) are echoed in Cervantes's tale by the precautions taken by Rodolfo and his friend in covering their faces with scarves before kidnapping Leocadia, which not only prevent them from being identified, but also pre-empt any sense of shame. After raping her, Rodolfo circumvents any feelings of retrospective shame or guilt by lying to his friends ("se resolvió en decirles que, arrepentido del mal hecho y movido de sus lágrimas, la había dejado en la mitad del camino", 154) and by choosing to forget it all: "... con tan poca memoria de lo que con Leocadia le había sucedido, como si nunca hubiera pasado" (157).

While Rodolfo's reputation is unaffected because he was able to take advantage of the darkness of the night to carry the unconscious blindfolded Leocadia to his lodgings "sin ser visto de nadie" (Cervantes 148), the reputation of her family is also ironically protected by the fact that their efforts to call for help to stop the kidnapping are completely ineffective. The secrecy of the kidnapping and the rape would have proved crucial in a society like seventeenth-century Spain, in which the rich were largely able to protect their reputation through their display of wealth, while the impoverished

*hidalgos* were under pressure to maintain their *honra*, both by acting in morally acceptable ways and by preventing the detrimental effects of gossip.

This explains why, when Leocadia regains consciousness, and finds that she has been dishonoured by Rodolfo, she emphasizes the personal humiliation to which she has been subjected (“desmayada me pisaste y aniquilaste”, 152), though she is primarily concerned with covering up the crime, because she knows that it would be easier to live with her dishonour and humiliation in secret than to have to deal with the consequences of gossip: “... que es mejor la deshonra que se ignora que la honra que está puesta en opinión de las gentes” (150). She further argues that social opinion tends to be based on arbitrary assessments, rather than on facts: “... el mundo, el cual no juzga por los sucesos las cosas, sino conforme a él se le asienta en la estimación” (151). Such arguments echo Aristotle’s claim in the *Ética* that the great importance that people of high social rank attach to honour is questionable because it depends on other people’s perceptions, rather than personal merit, and thus can easily be taken away:

Pero los ilustres y para el tratar las cosas aptos, la honra tienen por su felicidad; porque éste casi es el fin de la vida del gobierno de república. Pero parece que este fin más sumario es que no aquel que inquirimos, porque más parece que está en mano de los que hacen la honra, que no en la del que la recibe, y el sumo bien paréceme que ha de ser propio y que no pueda así quitarse fácilmente. (1095b 22-27)

Aristotle’s view is that honour should be based on virtue (“la honra premio es de la virtud, y a los buenos se les debe de derecho”; 1124a 1-2), and that virtue should therefore be a more important goal than *honra*: “... conforme, pues, al parecer éstos, se colige ser la virtud más digna de ser tenida en precio que la honra, por donde alguno por ventura juzgará ser ésta con razón el fin de la vida civil” (1095b 30-32). As Aristotle further argues, honour should not be based on wealth or on blood ties (lineage): “... porque los que son de ilustre sangre, y los que están puestos en señorío, y los que viven abundantes de riquezas, son al parecer tenidos por dignos de que se les haga honra, .... Aunque en realidad de verdad sólo el bueno merece ser honrado” (1124a 23-29).

The Aristotelian distinction between *honra* as social reputation (i.e., dependent on other people’s opinions) and a more truthful notion of *honra* as moral integrity (i.e., based on virtue) was still a controversial one in Cervantes’s time. This distinction provides the basis for the claim made by Leocadia’s father that “la verdadera deshonra está en el pecado y la verdadera honra en la virtud” and his suggestion that, since she has committed no sin, she should perceive herself as possessing moral integrity: “... tente por honrada, que yo por tal te tendré” (156). However, even though he encourages

her not to see the rape as a dishonour, because she is not blameworthy, he still differentiates between the public and private spheres, warning her that private virtue is not sufficient, and that she also needs to protect her public reputation: "... más lastima una onza de deshonor pública que una arroba de infamia secreta..., no te pene de estar deshonrada contigo en secreto" (156).

To understand why it is crucial for Leocadia and her family not to draw public attention to her disgrace, even if she is an innocent victim, we may consider the widespread early modern view, outlined by the character Julián in Castiglione's *El cortesano*, that the dividing line between blamelessness and blameworthiness could be easily blurred by gossip: "... debe ser más recelosa que no el hombre en lo que toca a su honra, y tener mayor cautela en no dar ocasión que se pueda decir mal della, y regirse de tal manera que no solamente sea libre de culpa, mas aún de sospecha; porque la mujer no tiene tantas armas para defenderse de lo que le levantan como el hombre" (124). This passage suggests that well-to-do early modern women were expected to cultivate anticipatory shame as their main means of maintaining their reputation. It also shows that there were clear gender differences in how people were expected to react to affronts.

When Leocadia finds out that she has been raped, her first reaction would fit traditional gender expectations in that she does not seek revenge, but asks her offender to kill her as a way of putting an end to her dishonour: "¡... te ruego que, ya que has triunfado de mi fama, triunfes también de mi vida! ¡Quítamela al momento, que no es bien que la tenga la que no tiene honra!" (Cervantes 150). The idea that a woman with no *honra* does not deserve to live ("no es bien que la tenga") would, in principle, seem comparable to the claim, often found in Golden Age drama, that life with no honour is not worth living (e.g., "Qué importará, si está muerto / mi honor, el quedar yo vivo!" *El alcalde de Zalamea* II: 840-41). The main difference, however, lies in the ways in which male and female characters were shown dealing with their retrospective shame. Thus, while in plays written and performed in Spain between 1575 and 1675 male characters might be shown defending their reputation by killing (or being killed by) their opponents in duels and *ad hoc* fights, or even killing their wives if suspected of adultery (Stroud 19), female characters were not shown killing others to defend their honour, but, rather, attempting to kill themselves out of despair (as Tisbea tries to do in *El burlador de Sevilla*) or embracing death (as Mencía seems to do in *El médico de su honra*) as a way of demonstrating virtue.

Even though suicide was condemned by the Church and by secular legal codes, a number of influential literary texts presented it as the most heroic and honourable course of action women could choose when seeking to defend their sexual purity and

honour<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in Castiglione's *El cortesano* we find a series of accounts of women's suicides intended to illustrate the view that: "... el verdadero freno generalmente para las mujeres es la virtud y deseo de honra, de la cual, muchas que yo en mis días he conocido, hacen más caso que a la vida propia" (175). In this text, suicide is presented not only as a praiseworthy way of preventing rape (as in the story of a young Capuan noblewoman who threw herself into a river after being kidnapped by Gascoignes), but also as a laudable logical reaction to it (as in the story of the farming girl near Mantua who, having been sexually assaulted, chose not to confide in her sister but to jump into a river, 184). Women's suicides are then interpreted as heroic deeds, motivated by three possible factors: noble blood, fear of infamy and the grief produced by the loss of virginity (185).

Leocadia's experience of rape contrasts with Castiglione's examples in that she relies on her family's support in dealing with her disgrace. It also departs from well-known classical models, such as Lucretia's (widely known in early modern culture as an *exemplum* of Roman chastity), in that she is able to maintain her anonymity and keep her rape secret by using her intelligence and eloquence to persuade her offender not to follow her or find out her parents' names<sup>5</sup>. The main difference, however, is that whereas in the story of Lucretia and in the anecdotes recounted by Castiglione the emphasis is on the social dimension of shame, in Cervantes's tale, Leocadia's feelings of shame are put into perspective through the acknowledgement of God's role as the omnipresent witness of her true actions and motivations<sup>6</sup>. This is made explicit by her father's suggestion that the crucifix she took from the room where she was raped could be used to invoke God's crucial role as the only witness who could ensure that justice is ultimately restored: "... lo que has de hacer, hija, es guardarla y encomendarte a ella; que, pues ella fue testigo de tu desgracia, permitirá que haya juez que vuelva por tu justicia" (Cervantes 155). Thus, in contrast to Lucretia's inability to bear infamy (emphasized in Augustine's

4. See, for instance, the woman in the *Cantigas de Santa María* whose husband had told her he was seeing another woman (Cantiga 84).

5. Referring to recent scholarship on Christian and pagan interpretations of Lucretia's story in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and quoting Augustine's analysis of her reasons to kill herself, Lappin (155-58) argues that Cervantes is offering here a Christian version of the story, in which the heroine is unconscious when raped and thus, unlike Lucretia, can be seen to be completely innocent. Cervantes, nonetheless, also places his heroine in social circumstances that are markedly different from those of the classical story. As a married woman who was assaulted in her own home, Lucretia agreed to be raped as a way of preventing a worse infamy, whereas Leocadia is able to use her intelligence to avoid being identified and thus protect her family's honour.

6. While it is relevant to consider here Fernie's argument that "an early modern person is always, even in his or her most private moments, exposed to God" and that, therefore, "shame as disgrace does not, in this epoch, define shame as merely social" (47), Castiglione's examples show no evidence of any religious framework of that kind.



*City of God* 31), Leocadia is able to endure her pain with the support of her family and of her faith in God. Her behaviour can thus be seen as much more exemplary than that of Lucretia and that of the women who choose to kill themselves in Castiglione's *El cortesano*. Instead of killing herself out of grief, out of despair or out of fear of infamy, she exercises the three theological virtues promoted by Christianity: faith, hope and charity. She shows hope in invoking God's help and faith in adhering to the Christian belief in divine Providence: "... cuando Dios da la llaga, da la medicina" (Cervantes 161)<sup>7</sup>. She also shows charity in forgiving her rapist, though her forgiveness, as we shall now see, is also based on cultural preconceptions regarding differences between the sexes.

## THE FORCE OF BLOOD

According to Huarte's Aristotelian and Galenic views on the impact of the innate qualities of people's blood on intelligence, physique, character and moral behaviour, women were generally assumed to be moister than men, and thus more able to maintain an attitude of shame than men. Likewise, moist and warm men with abundant blood would be more inclined to be shy and chaste, than choleric (hot and dry) men:

las costumbres ordinarias de los hombres calientes y secos en el tercer grado son ánimo, soberbia, liberalidad, desvergüenza, y hollarse con muy buena gracia y donaire; y en caso de mujeres, no tienen rienda ni moderación. Los calientes y húmidos son alegres, risueños, amigos de pasatiempos; son sencillos de condición y muy afables; son vergonzosos y no mucho dados a mujeres. (325)

Such preconceptions about the influence of physiology on behaviour reinforce the verisimilitude of Leocadia's readiness to forgive Rodolfo.

Rodolfo's act of raping Leocadia is not presented in the narrative as a crime, but as the effect of his temporary mental impairment: "... ciego de la luz del entendimiento, a oscuras robó la mejor prenda de Leocadia" (149). The narrator further suggests that Rodolfo's mental blindness is caused by the kind of excessive sexual desire which might be felt by young people: "... los ímpetus no castos de la mocedad" (149); "la insolencia que con Leocadia había usado no tuvo otro principio que de un ímpetu lascivo" (152). The young man's impetuous sexual desire is also explained as the direct effect of Leocadia's beauty, which had made such a strong impression on him that he had no control over his own will: "... la mucha hermosura del rostro ... comenzó de tal manera a

7. For a perceptive analysis of the *novela* as a depiction of how Providence works through natural mechanisms, see Lewis-Smith.

imprimírsele en la memoria, que le llevó tras sí la voluntad y despertó en él un deseo de gozarla, a pesar de todos los inconvenientes que sucederle pudiesen” (148).

The narrator’s arguments are echoed by Leocadia’s attitude towards Rodolfo. She is prepared to forgive him (as long as he promises to keep the rape secret) because she is able to attribute his actions to his youth and lack of experience: “... atrevido mancebo, que de poca edad hacen tus hechos que te juzgue, yo te perdono la ofensa que me has hecho”; “haz cuenta que me ofendiste por accidente” (152)<sup>8</sup>. What modern readers might see as shameless sexual assault seems to be partially explained in Cervantes’s tale as the effect of Rodolfo’s uncontrollable desire, caused by seeing Leocadia’s beautiful face and, ultimately, by the *fuerza de la sangre*, that, as an over-indulged young man, he has not learnt to control.

Such views about the effect that a young woman’s beauty could have on men who could not control their impulses explains the advice often given in early modern conduct books that parents should protect the chastity and reputation of their unmarried daughters by ensuring that they stay at home and have no opportunity to be seen until they leave home to marry or enter a convent<sup>9</sup>. In the light of such suggestions, it would seem as if 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, and are now responsible for preventing any future outings. From now on, Leocadia is forced to learn to live with the sense of shame, by exercising virtues such as patience and modesty, and adopting the kind of lifestyle that moralists at the time prescribed for unmarried young women. She begins to lead a life of enclosure in her parents’ home, wearing simple clothes that hide her youth and her beauty: “... se redujo a cubrir la cabeza, como dicen, y a vivir recogidamente debajo del amparo de sus padres, con vestido tan honesto como pobre” (Cervantes 156). This is the only way she can expect to be able to protect her physical and moral integrity, while also sheltering her reputation and that of her family from the effects of gossip.

Although the narrative does not make it explicit, most early-modern and modern readers would be able to represent to themselves the plight of a woman like Leocadia in conventional terms: “... once deflowered out of wedlock, a woman was dishonoured for life unless she could get her assailant to marry her” (Mujica 44). Even though in early modern Spain the honour code was not applied to all women, the social conventions

8. Taking into account Covarrubias’s definition of “accidental” as “todo lo que no es esencial o natural en la cosa” and “accidente” as “toda la calidad que se quita y se pone en el sujeto sin corrupción suya” (3), it can be argued that Leocadia does not perceive Rodolfo’s recklessness as a permanent character trait, but, rather, as the effect of a transient temperament (the heat of male youth).

9. See, for instance the early seventeenth-century treatise by the Jesuit Gaspar Astete (157-59, 186-92).

applicable to the upwardly-mobile *hidalgos* dictated that a victim of rape should either enter a convent or marry the man who had assaulted her sexually<sup>10</sup>. Leocadia, however, does not know the identity of her assaulter, and cannot marry another man because she is no longer a virgin, and lacks the wealth that might make her attractive to a prospective husband: "... mis padres..., que a ser tan ricos como nobles, no fueran en mí tan desdichados" (Cervantes 152). Her only option, therefore, is to lead a secluded life: "... yo haré que no nací en el mundo" (152). Her isolation is not simply a way of preventing potential suitors from becoming interested in her, but is also marked by fear: "... pasaba la vida en casa de sus padres con el recogimiento posible, sin dejar verse de persona alguna, temerosa que su desgracia se la habían de leer en la frente" (157). The idea that she thinks that, unless she hides, people will find out about her secret is an indicator of the degree of retrospective shame that might be experienced by victims who conceal the crimes perpetrated against them<sup>11</sup>.

Leocadia's secluded life soon becomes necessary as a way of hiding her pregnancy (157). The birth is kept secret by not even calling a midwife, and the child is hidden away in the country until the age of four, when he is brought back as a nephew. In remaining enclosed in her parents' home, pretending to be her son's cousin, she maintains her social worth. While she has to deal with the feelings of retrospective shame resulting from being sexually abused, she also has to cultivate the kind of anticipatory shame that was expected of *hidalgo* women in early modern society.

Rather than seeing shame as an emotion, in modern terms, we should consider the early modern view that *vergüenza* is the most important virtue in a woman because it guarantees her sexual purity (see, for instance Guevara 22, Taylor 1084). In understanding why early modern discourses stressed the importance of a woman's sexual purity as a public measure of her worth, we need to take into account that, at the time, noblewomen's most widely appreciated contribution to society was their ability to guarantee the continuity of the male blood line. As Castiglione points out, a man whose wife was not sexually restrained could not be certain that his children carried his blood:

De la incontinencia de las mujeres nacen infinitos males, que no nacen de la de los hombres; y por eso ... sabiamente ordenaron ellos que a ellas les

10. See Poska's illuminating study, which shows that the honour code we associate with early modern Spain hardly applied to impoverished men and women in sixteenth—and seventeenth— century rural Galicia, where marriage prospects for women were generally low.

11. As social psychologists have argued, "even though shame does not need to occur in a truly public situation, shame does bring with it a feeling of exposure" (Lickel, Schmader, and Barquissau 41).

fuese lícito sin infamia poder errar en todas las otras cosas, a fin que pudiesen poner todas sus fuerzas en mantener esta sola virtud de la castidad, sin la cual los hijos serían inciertos, y aquel ñudo que tiene al mundo atado con el deudo de la sangre, y con amar naturalmente aquello que ha producido, quedaría suelto. (Castiglione 169)

The importance that early modern discourses, such as Castiglione's, attributed to blood ties in reinforcing love can be seen to justify the seemingly unlikely turning point in the plot of *La fuerza de la sangre*, which is summarized at the end of the tale: "... permitido todo por el cielo y por *la fuerza de la sangre*, que vio derramada en el suelo el valeroso, ilustre y cristiano abuelo de Luisico" (Cervantes 171). When Rodolfo's father sees Leocadia's seven-year old son covered in blood, having been trampled by an uncontrollable horse ridden by a nobleman, he takes him into his home, partly as a charitable act, partly because the boy's face reminds him of his own son. The *fuerza de la sangre* that causes this physical resemblance also helps to create an affective bond between the boy and the old man, who readily accepts him and Leocadia as part of his family.

In contrast to the immediate effect that the spilt blood and the newly-found blood ties have on the old man, his wife, Doña Estefanía, is moved to accept Leocadia because she is impressed by her intelligence in recounting the story of her dishonour and in stressing the honourable status of her family: "... soy noble porque mis padres lo son y lo han sido todos mis antepasados, que con una medianía de los bienes de fortuna han sustentado su honra felizmente dondequiera que han vivido" (Cervantes 161)<sup>12</sup>. Summoning her son Rodolfo from Italy with the news that they have found him a most beautiful wife, Doña Estefanía orchestrates a meeting in which he will be able to appreciate Leocadia's beauty.

In a private conversation, she tricks him by showing him the picture of an ugly woman, and is reassured to hear his view that for a marriage to work there should be mutual pleasure ("el justo deleite que los casados gozan", 165), and that he would only find this possible if his wife were beautiful, able to gladden his eyes. Aware that he is inheriting his parents' nobility and wealth, he argues that, besides beauty, his wife only needs the attributes of modesty and decency: "... la hermosura busco, la belleza quiero, no con otra dote que con la de la honestidad y buenas costumbres" (165). When Leocadia is later introduced to Rodolfo, his mother stresses her "mucha honestidad" (anticipatory shame), while magnifying her social status: "... sin entrar

12. Doña Estefanía's compassion and appreciation of Leocadia's intelligence are not taken into account by Howe when she argues that in agreeing to the marriage, the noblewoman is guided by factors such as external beauty or the boy's physical resemblance to her son, rather than justice and virtue (72).

en cuentas con su mucha honestidad, nos venga a honrar esta mesa, que los que a ella están todos son mis hijos y sus servidores” (166). Her *honra* is beyond doubt, given her display of wealth.

Meeting Leocadia face to face, seven years after the rape, Rodolfo cannot recognize her. She is no longer identifiable as an impoverished young *hidalga*, but appears instead to be a wealthy lady, carefully dressed in a black velvet attire, adorned with gold, pearls and diamonds, displaying her beauty, her fine figure and her gracefulness (“gentil disposición y brio”, 166). Instead of wearing the headscarf that had marked her feelings of shame and fear for over seven years, her hair is now down, and is made to look beautiful with curls and diamonds. In contrast to her seven-year experience of avoiding being seen, for fear that people might read her (retrospective) shame on her forehead, Leocadia is now fully exposed by the light of two candles in silver candle holders, and she dazzles everyone with the gold and diamonds she is wearing on her head. Her purity and her honourable status are accentuated by the candles, symbolically held by two maids<sup>13</sup>. Rodolfo, who sees beauty as the key to happiness, wishes that the woman his mother has chosen for him were half as beautiful: “... tuviérame yo por el más dichoso hombre del mundo” (167).

Critics have emphasized Rodolfo's lack of remorse (Ife and Darby) and his lack of repentance (Boyd), seeing it as morally objectionable (Gitlitz) or as an example of bad taste (Hainsworth). Nonetheless, when Leocadia faints and is thought to be dead, Rodolfo shows greater sorrow than anyone: “... el que dio más muestras de sentirlo fue Rodolfo, pues por llegar presto a ella tropezó y cayó dos veces” (Cervantes 167). He also faints, falls over her with his face pressing against her chest, and feels ashamed when he comes round: “... corrido de que le hubiesen visto hacer tan estremados estremos” (168). In contrast to his earlier shameless behaviour under cover, encouraged by his friends, he is now embarrassed to be acting impulsively in front of older, wiser people whose opinions he respects. His mother argues that there is no reason to feel ashamed of this (“no te corras, hijo, de los extremos que has hecho”, 168), and that he might demonstrate even greater sorrow when he finds out that this (seemingly dead) beautiful woman was the wife his parents had chosen for him. When he hears this, his

13. Calcraft (202-3) has noted the visual similarities between this scene and traditional images of the Virgin Mary between candles. Parker Aronson has taken this idea a step further, boldly suggesting that Leocadia is taking the role of the Virgin Mary: “adopta el papel de la Virgen María, mediante una combinación del artificio con lo natural para cumplir con las expectativas de Rodolfo” (85). While the textual evidence does not support her claim about Rodolfo's expectations, Boyd (36) has pointed out that Calcraft's reading is consistent with the text's description of the characters' reactions: “levantáronse todos a hacerle reverencia, como si fuera alguna cosa del cielo que allí milagrosamente se había aparecido” (Cervantes 166).

laments are so shrill that they pierce the heavens (“penetraban los cielos”, 169). What we find here is not a predictable scene of *anagnorisis* or catharsis, but rather a highly effective display of sorrow. Its extreme loudness not only serves to prove that Rodolfo has feelings for Leocadia and is affected by her apparent death, but also makes her regain her consciousness.

At this point Rodolfo marries Leocadia in an improvised ceremony, performed by a priest who has witnessed the scene, and is then told in front of everyone that she is the young woman he had raped. Readers familiar with other *novelas ejemplares* might find it surprising that he does not act like the young nobleman Marco Antonio in *Las dos doncellas*, who recognizes that he is blameworthy. The main difference, however, is that Marco Antonio had dishonoured a woman who was his social equal, and was known to him, whereas Rodolfo and Leocadia belong to two distinct, and usually separate, social groups. Instead of asking for forgiveness, he asks for proof. Showing the cross as evidence that she is not lying, Leocadia tacitly forgives him (“lo doy por bien empleado”, 170), claiming that, though he had dishonoured her, she now feels honoured to be his wife. No one blames him for the errors of his youth because everyone is happy to see their current mutual demonstrations of love.

At the beginning of the tale the younger Rodolfo was portrayed as a shameless wealthy young man asserting the superiority of his social rank by taking advantage of Leocadia, a beautiful powerless young woman. At the end, the older Rodolfo is shown succumbing to her beauty (enhanced by the jewels his parents have made available to her), and impatient to be alone with her. Thompson has explained Rodolfo’s ability to wait as an indication that he now experiences love rather than lust: “... whereas his lust at the start led to abduction and rape, his love must now wait, at least for a while” (272). Nonetheless, rather than contrasting lust and love as if they were incompatible, it is possible to argue that Rodolfo still feels lust (or sexual attraction), though he is acting cautiously. This might be partly due to the fact that he is older (and thus perhaps less hot-blooded and impetuous), though it is also largely the effect of social context: he is now forced to refrain from behaving recklessly in order to maintain his reputation in front of his parents.

At first sight, it seems that the tale’s exemplarity lies primarily in its depiction of Leocadia’s behaviour. By displaying intelligence in defending herself, patience in hoping for justice, and kindness in forgiving, Leocadia is not only able to overcome the shame and fear provoked by Rodolfo’s shameless behaviour, but also succeeds in breaking social barriers and proclaiming the superiority of virtue over wealth or rank. This can, indeed, be seen as an example of how virtue can be maintained and

cultivated at crucial points when an individual's social reputation is challenged by circumstances beyond his or her control. Nonetheless, the tale also suggests that moral superiority is more effective in manifesting as *honra* when it is not simply based on virtue, but is also accompanied by beauty, and supported by wealth and lineage, i.e., by the power of noble blood.

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