

Leocadia's Paradox: Moral and Ethical Demands in *La fuerza de la sangre*

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Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares* present twelve exemplary stories where their protagonists live outside the margin of society.¹ For the most part, their true identity is hidden under a disguise, a deceit or a false persona, in some instances, they are not even aware of their own true identity until it is revealed to them by chance. Their trials and adventures, structured within different plots and subplots, are thematically linked and lead the protagonists, and the reader, into a labyrinthine world of self-discovery.² In these fictional worlds, the heroes and heroines travel through different spaces, where they mediate their present circumstances in relation to their past in a continuous reshaping of their identity. Their past experiences define their present states, and, in essence, conditions their future. Their aim is to regain their place within the fabric of society, but in order to achieve this goal they must reconcile the haunted past within their present state. In these stories, the heroes and heroines embark in a process of redefinition and re-contextualization of their past within a new meaningful narrative in the present, which involves redefining their place within the social group. The narrative framework of the *novellas* allows for such a reflection, where in the form of a summary the characters reveal their past in a manner of a testimonial and rationalize the why, the how and the when their life trajectories changed. Their current state is determined by a past event that created a casuistic chain of actions that lead them to be expelled against their own will from the social group, thus are forced to live within its margins. This incident defines the rupture between the individual and the community, and by default distorts their identity. It is the temporal marker that delineates the present state from the past, and conditions the future.

The aim in this article is to bring into the discussion the ethical and moral responsibility of society and the individual towards its victims and marginal members. An argument will be made on how Cervantes implies that the individual and society are accountable towards its victims and marginalized members, who must accept and confront their past, since it defines the narratives that allow for their reinsertion into society in the present; how moral and ethical implications for acceptance of the individual and society's mistakes condition the sequence of events, as to move onto the future in a transformational process: a form of working through the past. These points will be discussed in reference to the novella *La fuerza de la sangre*, illustrating, how Leocadia claims justice in order to restore the broken connections that disrupted her life trajectory, in essence, forcing a shift in her moral and ethical relationship with the other; how Cervantes postulates that there is an individual and collective responsibility that implicates a confronting and mediating of the protagonist's present state with their past in order to regain their place in the fabric of society. Finally, it will be argued how the process of forgiving creates a point of inflexion that leads to the forging of new lines of trust, which redefines the victims and victimizers moral and ethical paradigm of conduct. It is an imperative that the protagonists come to terms with their

¹ See Mark Mascia's "Cervantes and the Reinvention of the Picaresque Narrative in *Novelas Ejemplares*."

² See Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Talens' *Through the Shattering Glass: Cervantes and the Self-made World*.

past as to reconnect with the mainstream of society. In essence, they must rewrite their own narrative, a form of moral and ethical repair, which attempts to restore a broken trust.³

La fuerza de la sangre starts with a bucolic scene where a young girl is out for a stroll with her parents and they are enjoying the last minutes of daylight. The family is unaware of the danger lurking as dusk sets. It is an uneventful and ordinary day in their lives. The trusting family is oblivious to the danger and the events that will change the course of their lives. They take pleasure in the remains of the day as a band of hooligans erupts into this pastoral and idyllic scene. The gang falls upon them as they would unto a prey without remorse. The leader sets his eyes on the innocent young daughter – unaware, she becomes the object of desire – kidnaps her and leaves behind a distraught father, who must accept his failure and shame in silence. The band of hooligans rides away as the leader holds on to his prey. He takes her back to his bedroom and forces himself upon her. He rapes her while she is unconscious. Violence turned her innocence into misery. As the rapist paces the room, she wakes up and realizes that she was raped while unconscious, and faces the rapist with nowhere to escape, who tries once more to rape her. At a moment's whim brutality erupted twice in her life and threw her into a world of despair and darkness. She becomes a silenced victim who cannot claim justice.

But, the events of this day will not fade into oblivion, they date a before and an after in the victim's life, they are indented not only on her memory, but with the birth of a child-of-rape who bears resemblance to the rapist, his father, a constant reminder of a violent day. The girl claims justice, yet the victim's pleas are silenced as the identity of her future child, who she must deny as her own. These are the chain of events that frame the first part of *La fuerza de la sangre* where there is a clear line that divides the victim's life trajectory, which in different degrees of trauma must face life with the veil of a broken trust. The eruption of violence disrupts their relationship with the other, society as a whole; since it is a nobleman who breaks the trust and transgresses the moral and ethical demands set upon him by his social status. *La fuerza de la sangre*, David Castillo points out, "offers a tragic view of the inside of the aristocratic vault where women are silently victimized" (113).

In Luis A. Murillo's reading, Leocadia is still muted. He argues that the resolution is not necessarily to bring justice, but to restore Luisito's rightful place in society: "the honor and legitimacy [of] the child through the restoration of her virtue and honor in marriage to the child's father" (245). His discussion, paradoxically, is limited to the restoration of the child's honor, a male, Luisito who will then carry on the lineage and the family's name. Since Leocadia, the victim is not able to restore her family's honor by herself. She is silenced until a male agent facilitates her reestablishment to the main fray of society. The treatment given to Luisito, even if he did not know who his parents were, is different, he still lives within the family circle; however the truth is hidden from him until the incident that leads to the discovery of his real identity. Despite the happy ending, one has to note the crudeness of female alienation in a society that relegates Leocadia to seclusion, and renders her unable to claim her place or honor without male agency. Murillo argues: "Restoration of his legitimacy is a way of restoring the mother's honor, and to bring this about the operations of divine will are enlisted" (245). However, there is no mention anywhere of the agent's culpability, that is, Rodolfo who does not take neither individual nor social accountability, and

³ See Charles L. Griswold's *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*.

believes to be above the honor codes imposed by a society who see women as the culprits, not as victims. The idea of a divine intervention in the ending is not totally convincing, since the sole responsibility lies within female agency, and it is Leocadia, with the assistance of doña Estefanía, who must take action in order to restore her honor.

Michèle Guillemont's highlights female verbal violence, and establishes a relationship with the myth of Eve: women as sorceress and agents for the fall of man. A facet implicitly referred to in *La fuerza de la sangre* where at the beginning of the novel, Rodolfo succumbs to Leocadia whose beauty awakens his lustful desire that leads him to act irrationally as being possessed. It implies the culpability of the victim, Leocadia, as a female agent who causes man to surrender to her radiant beauty, thus losing control of his "*entendimiento*." She is portrayed not as victim, but as a seductive agent, and cause of Rodolfo's moral debasement and weakness. Anthony Lappin's study on rape, and its effects, exposes the social reality of the victim and their precarious situation that they faced in a society that negates them, dismisses them as culprits, and considers that the actions of rapists are momentary lapses of reasoning. He summarizes the legal statures on what was considered to be, in all its purposes, a "legal rape."

Women were considered to be guilty and socially responsible without any considerations to the circumstances of the rape. The only occasion they were protected was when there was no consent in any form, passive action was deemed as permissive. It was up to the victim to prove their innocence in a biased society. Cervantes captures this reality in his novel, as Lappin summarizes:

The first half of the story features the actions and decisions of men (Rodolfo's rape of Leocadia, her father's decision that she cannot pursue her plan to track down the rapist, Rodolfo's father's decision to take Luis home). The second half of the story involves the decision of women. Social form is preserved or (re)established by women who manipulate appearances, who create fictions which manipulate, which seduce, and, with Leocadia, who also seduce. (163)

Nonetheless, the act of manipulation, once again, reinforces the discourse of women as deceivers, emphasizing the myth of Eve. According to Lappin "Rodolfo's punishment would serve nothing, and would be highly detrimental to Leocadia" (164). Given the precarious situation of women, perhaps there is some truth to this, but it still does not resolve the unfair recrimination of women.

La fuerza de la sangre exposes this cruel reality where silenced women live in a society dominated by a misguided sense of honor, unfair and unbalanced, therefore forces the reader to reflect on this unjust social reality that women had to face in everyday life. As Salvador Fajardo summarizes:

The expectation of a minimum of security necessary for the survival of a civil society and maintained by *justicia* is another implicit component of the wider peninsular space that enters into play. Such *justicia* is necessary so that the transactions required by the patriarchy may be carried out in a legitimate and predictable manner. The novella illustrates an occasion when these expectations first break down and then reappear to be reaffirmed: space is first made chaotic and then reordered. (104)

Marcia Welles states that Cervantes “has subverted not only the conventions of ‘romance’ (as Edward Friedman has perceptively shown in a recent study) but also, and more specifically, those of the typical rape narrative: he has transformed what is usually a men’s story into a woman’s story” (241). Welles points to the fact that Leocadia’s family, as the father had said at the beginning of the story, could not publicly expose this dishonorable act, since it is the word of a woman against a nobleman. It is not until the end when the truth is revealed:

In ‘La fuerza de la sangre’ violence threatens to explode, for once the family has identified Rodolfo as the rapist, closure is required: marriage or death. Because both parties are still single and both give their consent, marriage occurs instead of conflict, the bedroom replaces the dueling ground, and healing takes place for Leocadia and the body politic. A potential dangerous social impasse – a confrontation between two families of unequal power and wealth – provoked by Rodolfo’s abusive transgressions sanctioned by male society, have been averted. (249)

At no time does Rodolfo feel any remorse or guilt, he is moved by lustful desire, not to set or restore social order. He has not being tried publicly for his action. On the contrary it has been suppressed in order to preserve his honor and that of his son, who has to be legitimized through marriage.

The idea that the change is wrought by the agency of women is an issue that Welles presents in her study. Nonetheless, it is a factor that lies outside the agency to which society accepts the verdict, or the testimony of the woman, who is credible only by an object, the crucifix, the essential proof that verifies Leocadia’s story. It is the Church who absolves the guilt and society who restores the social order through a public marriage. But, it must be taken into account that it is the agency of his son Louis who brings closure, not the agency of women. Fajardo states that “Rodolfo’s rape of Leocadia is both physical and a socio-cultural aggression” (99); and as Elizabeth Teresa Howe adds: “in virtually all of the interpretations of honour, however, the focus is universally masculine. A man’s decision to cleanse the stain to the family’s good name by shedding the blood of the reprobate or, conversely, to hide the truth drives those works in which honour is a theme” (65).

William Clamurro discussion brings into play the ambiguity of the main characters’ identities, pointing to the lack of a deeper characterization. He highlights not only the brief description of their physical features, but the intentional denial of Leocadia identity as a result of rape by Rodolfo within the social group. For him: “The resolution of the problem and crime that begin the tale include the ability for a tarnished and suppressed identity to emerge into the public sphere with honor restored. Leocadia’s recovery of her honor and the restoration of her identity – which in, turn effects, or coincides with, the redemption of Rodolfo – comes, however, at a steep price” (152). Indeed, the price paid is to accept the marriage with her rapist, the agent that caused her shame and consequent loss of individual identity within the social group. But it is by no means an act of remorse, or accountability of any moral responsibility for his actions.

Rodolfo’s actions are moved by carnal desire, to own the object that he devours without remorse. There is no such redemption, but the affirmation of a social system that tramples and

ignores their own moral and ethical standards that they supposedly have to defend and emulate with exemplary fashion. The social system is against the silenced victim who is forced to hide herself from the public as well as her pregnancy; and to deny the child's identity because of the false sense of honor, and the unfair defense of one's actions within a social group that violates social harmony. As Edward H. Friedma points out:

The closing passage of *La fuerza de la sangre* seems to exonerate [Rodolfo] and to end Leocadia's victimization, yet there is no eradication of the indisputable fact that the women must concede to social pressure (and must enter into the sacrament of holy matrimony) in order to regain her honor; she must be accepted-redeemed-by the man who has wronged her. He, in turn, receives what he most desires: an exceptional beautiful woman. (133)

Rodolfo as a member of a patriarchy represents and acts with impunity. He is not held responsible for his act; on the contrary he is rewarded for such violent actions. As far as Leocadia, there is no justice, she loses and has to swallow the bitter pill at the end of the novel, because if she does not accept the resolution, she will be again be dishonored, jeopardizing the future of your child: "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" (Ife and Darby 175). Herein lies Leocadia's paradox: to continue to live in seclusion, denying herself her rightful place in society, and that of her son; or forcing a narrative that will mediate the violent act into one of misguided judgment by a predator, thus forgiving and forgetting the action of the rapist altogether.⁴

La fuerza de la sangre presents how moral and ethical implications restructure the paradigm that would allow for the victim's reinsertion in the main fray of society. And, as Castillo summarizes [it] "explores one of the theoretical (re)solutions of the conflict of honour caused by rape, that ultimate breach of the walls. The infamy of dishonor is kept secret to avoid public exposure" (113). The narrative of the *novella*, as seen before, centers around Leocadia, who has been raped by Rodolfo, and, as a result, under the critical eyes of the society, loses her honor and is forced to deny and hide the incident and the fact that she had a son, Luis. Leocadia silences her violation and lives with the fact that she cannot recognize her own son as hers. Luis is a product of a rape, and as such he is a constant reminder of the tragic event that shattered her life trajectory. Not only is Leocadia a victim of an individual's brutality, but, also, a strict moral code.

Even though she suffered a hideous crime, society relegates in Rodolfo the responsibility of taking the first step towards restoring her place within the social group. Rodolfo has to accept his own responsibility, admit his brutal crime before the victim and society, and make reparations to Leocadia in the form of marriage. The strict codes of Spain's counterreform society impose that the only viable way for Leocadia's restoration is, ironically, in the hands of Rodolfo, since: "la deshonra secreta puede ser mitigada por la honra pública, es decir, la pérdida de la virginidad de Leocadia puede ser restaurada sólo por el que la robó y por medio del matrimonio público trecentino" (Harry Sieber 14). Leocadia does not have much of a choice; in fact, she has none. She

⁴ See Sylvia M. Vollmer's article "The Position of Women in Spain;" Eric Kratchner's *Unhappily Ever After: Deceptive Idealism in Cervantes's Marriage Tales*.

must find the strength to live in silence, which she does in a stoic Christian manner, until her honor is restored through reparation, that is, she has to find the strength to forgive her victimizer. The bedroom becomes a *locus* of memory and oblivion. Leocadia consciously looks around the room and memorizes the objects that witnessed her attack while Rodolfo steps outside. These stilled objects will be crucial to redeem her honor, since they will confirm her story. But, one in particular, the crucifix, will be decisive for her redemption.

Leocadia faces up to her past as she relives the traumatic experience when she finds herself, again, in the bedroom where she was victimized. The action that places her again in the bedroom occurs when a carriage runs over her son Luis, who is now seven years old; unknown to the driver and the victim, they are related by blood; the driver is his paternal grandfather and the victim is the grandson, Rodolfo's son. Leocadia goes to the house where her son is being kept and once there, recognizes the room where she was raped by identifying the objects in the bedroom, which she memorized. These bring back to her memory the aggression perpetrated against her honor, and, in consequence, forced her to live in hiding. This incident will change the family's life trajectory, once more, and opens the path for Leocadia and Luis's reinsertion in the social group.

As she confronts her past, she decides to take action, breaks her silence and decides to confront her past, and regains control of her life trajectory, and denounces Rodolfo's crime to his parents. Now, it is up to society and the victimizer to acknowledge their own moral responsibility, and recognize the grievance caused to Leocadia and his family. Rodolfo's parents need to investigate Leocadia's claims and determine the veracity of the event. Again, female agency is questioned, it is the male agents who must verify the truth behind her story. Her words are, essentially, futile until they question their son's accomplices, who verify the story as true. The traces of the past come together, and the event silenced in oblivion, in memory, becomes central for the outcome of the story. Rodolfo's parents make the decision to place their son in a trial, thus forcing him to accept his moral responsibility, as it is required by the social group to which he belongs. The rapist, who has escaped to Italy after the aggression, returns at the request of the parents, because they have selected his future bride. In the presence of Leocadia, who he does not recognize, he is confronted by his own mother, and through deceit, he must accept and admit his moral responsibility to Leocadia and society, ultimately, to act according to the moral ideas that govern the social group. Leocadia's honor is restored by an act of forgiveness by her, since the aggressor neither recognizes the error nor repents, and the victim concedes to their marriage. The novel ends restoring Leocadia's life trajectory and her family's to the main fabric of society. But it is a bitter solution that women faced in a society where they had no legal recourse to the violence suffered at the hands of men. Violence in essence was sanctioned by the power structures.

Leocadia constructs and reconstitutes her own past in relation to her present state and assumes her own ethical and moral responsibility not to society, but to her own son – as difficult as it might seem to the modern reader – since she had no choice but to be silenced as her father advised. She must redefine her role in a society as a silenced victim of rape. Society is accountable and has to collectively assume the moral commitment towards her. It has to create the path for the victim's readmission into the social group, to acknowledge its errors that precipitated the rupture with the victim, to recognize the errors and injustices perpetrated towards the victim and make reparations. In essence, the victimizer and society have to make amends and repair the broken moral and ethical trust through the sacrament of marriage.

Leocadia mediates her past as it relates to her present state. The circular trajectory of her tragic life begins and ends in the same space where she was violated. The *novella* presents part of a journey, an act of self-discovery, where life's trials will define her true moral and ethical character, which is paramount to her reinsertion in the main fabric of society, even if she is the victim. Leocadia presents to Rodolfo's mother her testimony, reformulates her narrative in order to regain her new identity, a step that will enable her to re-establish the broken trust within the social group. This self-examination is an aspect that Jeffrey Blustein raises in his study on the moral responsibility of the individual, explaining that: "By critically examining the past in the light of current needs, interests, beliefs, and values (and from what other standpoint could one conduct the examination), the past can become a force for personal growth and political and sound betterment" (13).

Leocadia reexamines her past within the present needs, since these comprise her personal identity, which are linked to the moral demands imposed by the individual herself, as a member who responds to the moral demands imposed by the social group. Society must rectify the mistakes made in the past, so as to restore the broken connection between her and the social group. There must be a reformulating of the narrative that allows for the victim's full reintegration as a functional member in society. A public recognition – a confession – by the victimizer is crucial for it to be a genuine reintegration of the victim in the community. As Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones points out: "esta historia parece describir un movimiento desde la estabilidad a la entropía, y desde esta última a un modelo organizativo que contiene y armoniza los elementos anteriormente perturbados" (202).

In order to move on, to work through the past, the victim's testimony is crucial to gain a deeper insight into the characters' present state. In *La fuerza de la sangre*, it comes in the form of a summary where Leocadia narrates the sequence of events that led to her exclusion from society to the perpetrators mother, doña Estefanía. Once this testimony is out in the open, it becomes part of the collective shared memory, public opinion. The reinsertion in the social fabric depends on how the victim's testimony establishes the breaking point that initiated the chain of events and forced her to live within the marginal spaces of society. Leocadia's breaks her secret to Rodolfo's mother, and narrates the traumatic event that broke her moral and ethical trust with the social group. One that must be repaired, so that Leocadia can reconstruct a working relation, which can only be done by re-shifting the moral and ethical demands imposed upon her by the collective group.

Leocadia comprehends her present state by reflecting on the casuistic chain of events that led to the exclusion from the fabric of society. In itself, the testimony is the narrative that determines the correlation that is formed by memory and forgetfulness, which also establishes their identity. In order to comprehend the past, she must make memory as to renegotiate the moral and ethical connections with the social group. She must forget the errors committed against her in the past, and make amends to become fully participant of the social group once more. She must find a way to forgive, since the act of memory is, as Blustein states, "critically important for personal identity thus understood: it preserves and makes available for us the past experience, actions and relationships, and so forth that furnish our sense of self" (43); that is, a reworking of the event in the present context becomes a key element for the understanding of the lived experience. The tragic event keeps the subject in a trance, acting out the past and it does not allow for the new life. The victim is forced to re-examine critically her own moral responsibility, which has been broken by

a violent crime, and redefine how to regain a working moral and ethical trust with the community. Leocadia is haunted by the past.⁵ In Leocadia's case, she needs to rebuild a narrative that will mediate between the past and present, one that gives meaning to her current status, but at the same time explains the reasons that her life trajectory has been involuntarily disrupted.

This brings into question the role of memory which is crucial for there to be a process for/of reintegration, because it "is the medium through which a certain kind of moral progress is possible, and how one remembers and one's memories are shaped reveals a great deal about what sort of moral agent is one" (Blustein 41). The victim's testimony reconnects the past with the present, and through remembrance constructs a new narrative that allows for the victim's reinsertion into the social group. Even though, this process of reconciliation is difficult, since the victim must face the agent who is responsible for the rupture with the social group in the first place, since "[our] current experiences condition how we remember and what we remember of the past, and the meaning the past experiences have for us at one age will be probably be very different from those they have many years later" (Blustein 43). For this reason, the victim must formulate a narrative of forgiveness and must confront the agent that violated her person so as to regain control of her destiny. This places on trial the moral implications on the event that in some way or another has disrupted the development of her personal identity in connection with the social collective.

It is through testimony and remembrance of the event that the subject mediates the traumatic experience, which affected her future identity. It examines from a critical point her present state, which determines the steps to take in order to restore the broken trust between the victim and the society. A social group that has failed to respond bluntly to the offender's disregard of the moral codes that governs individual and social behavior. As a victim, Leocadia seeks justice and through her testimony, she seeks to redefine the moral responsibilities that govern her and the members of the social group. For this reason, she must conform to a personal and collective obligation that will, once more, enable her to be a functional member.

But, there must be a total commitment which conditions the reinsertion into the fabric of society: the agent of moral transgression has to first accept his moral responsibility and act as to assume the trauma that triggered the break between the victim and the social group. As asserted by Avishai Margalit: "By expressing remorse the offender presents himself in a new light to light that can be proclaiming into the past. This ability to feel remorse attests that he is not evil, even if the act that basically I performed was abominable" (195). It is a crucial step towards closure: one that has conditioned the victim, yet there must be proof that the executioner of the crime has processed and assumed responsibility for the crime, and fully comprehends and accepts his moral and ethical responsibility towards the victim. In addition, he must express his guilt to the social group as well and assume his responsibility in the process for the victims' restitution to the life cycle of the social group. As a matter of fact: "the antithesis is that forgiveness is not a policy or decision but a change in the mental state of the one who was wronged ("a change of mind"). Forgetting the injury is part of what is required for this change of heart and for successful forgiveness" (Margalit 203).

In Leocadia's case, as Ruth El Saffar stated, for the modern reader: "it is almost impossible to understand how a girl could fall in love with and marry the same man who raped her seven years

⁵ See Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*.

earlier” (128). The possible answer lies in the framework of the *Novelas ejemplares* where the protagonists began a journey into a world that tests their moral and ethical character.⁶ It is a world where choice is a determining factor as to whether they will regain their rightful place or not in the community. For this reason, they must confront their past by facing the event that diverted their life path, as to rewrite their personal narratives, which is crucial for it to be a genuine reinsertion.⁷ As Griswold concludes:

Forgiveness is a model virtue for the project of reconciliation with moral-wrong doing – one salient and ongoing feature of the human world’s imperfection. Like political apology (the analogue to forgiveness in political context), forgiveness does not reiterate the past but instead promise renewal without forgetfulness, excuse, or condonation of past wrongs. (211)

In these novellas, Cervantes brings forth the past through an act of memory and remembrance, where the protagonists look back and rationalize how they arrived at their present situation. This is a crucial moment in their life trajectory, since it creates a new turning point that allows them to retake control of their lives. However, to reach this stage, they must accept their past in order to move forth and reconstitute their identity. Indeed, they must redefine their moral responsibility to society and confront a past that defines their identity and through cogitation construct a narrative that enables them to regain their place within their communities.

In *La fuerza de la sangre*, the past is a determinate force in the resolution of the story narrated and explores how the act of memory and forgetting is crucial for there to be an act of forgiveness. For the most part, it explains how an isolated event caused a break between the individual victim and the social group. The structural axis of the exemplary novel unfolds around an incident that triggered a chain of events, throwing the characters into a voyage of self-discovery. The victims in the *novelas* face an injustice and a situation of hopelessness that causes a loss of trust, ripping apart the referential points that individuals use to respond to moral and ethical responsibilities imposed upon them by the social group. It examines the transgressor’s responsibility, at the same time, determines how the victim relates himself or herself to the social group.

La fuerza de la sangre analyses how the characters’ lived experiences are a determining factor in the formation of their personal identities and how personal testimonies exteriorize the traumatic memory of an event that caused the initial fracture, leading to their exclusion from society. At the same time, the act of remembrance assists them to reflect on their life path, in consequence, it gives meaning to their present state by looking back into the past. For these

⁶ See Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones’ “Los secretos de la Ley: Justicia, melancolía y excepción en *La fuerza de la Sangre*.”

⁷ Darcy Donahue makes an interesting observation of Leocadia’s clothing as symbolic to her reinsertion in society: “The social difference between Leocadia, the daughter of poor but honorable *hidalgos*, and Rodolfo, the scion of powerful and wealthy nobles, is erased as Leocadia becomes and embodiment of aristocratic beauty and style with the help of his mother” (111); and adds: “The situation is certainly ceremonial, and constitutes Leocadia’s induction as a member of the aristocracy, a membership which will be re-confirmed in her marriage to Rodolfo” (111).

reasons, the personal narratives in the form of testimonies – summaries – publicly denounce an injustice. It forces the victim to redefine the meta-narratives that permit him or her to understand their own moral and ethical responsibility within the paradigms of social norms, which failed to protect them in the first place. The victims demand that their aggressors be held accountable for their actions, at the same time, they question the moral and ethical demands imposed upon them which govern the relationship between its individuals and society as a whole. The victims in the *novela* demand justice, and that their legitimate place within the social group is restored, that the agents of aggression assume their moral responsibility, thus taking the first step for reconciliation between the victim and the agent that triggered the rupture of their life trajectory. It is the only way to become functional once more and to redefine the traumatic event with a new narrative, one that allows the subject to retake control of his or her life.

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