Teodosia's Dark Shadow? A Study of Women's Roles in Cervantes's *Las dos doncellas*

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The numerous women that pass through the works of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra vary in type, size and temperament, and present a panoramic view of women as the author saw them in his era, as well as a view of how he perhaps fantasized them. The women in his *novela* "Las dos doncellas" are two examples of his interpretation of the roles women can play in society and in determining their own destiny. The assertiveness that borders on aggressiveness shown by both Teodosia and Leocadia in the *novela* is unusual in an age dominated by men and "pundonor." This article examines closely the roles of the two women in order to determine their significance, and investigates the possibility that, as indicated by Ruth El Saffar in her study of the *novelas ejemplares*, Teodosia and Leocadia together form one entity.

1 See the study by Sadie Edith Trachman, *Cervantes's Women of Literary Tradition* (New York: Instituto de las Españas, 1932).

To briefly summarize the intricate and somewhat unbelievable plot, Teodosia and Leocadia, unknown to each other, have each been dishonored, to different degrees, by the same man, Marco Antonio. Each has separately disguised herself as a man to go out searching for the man she loves. Each tells her sad story to a person she believes to be a stranger (but turns out not to be), and each develops a bitter jealousy of the other, whom she perceives to be her rival. All these similarities have led some critics to refer to the protagonists as one woman with two different aspects. That question will be discussed in depth later in this study. It is necessary to note that, indeed, there are important differences emphasized by Cervantes between the two women. It is essential for the dénouement of the story that Teodosia was pursued by Marco Antonio, while when Leocadia saw Marco, she was the one determined to have him as her husband. The case is not, as indicated by Thomas Pabon in an article dealing with marriage as a panacea in Cervantes, that "Teodosia and Leocadia are both the victims of having recognized that they were desired —that is, they fall in love with Marco Antonio’s love of them." In fact, in the case of Leocadia, quite the opposite is true. She relates the beginning of their relationship: "Habiendo mirado más de aquello [Marco Antonio] que fuera lícito a una recatada doncella, la gentileza y discreción de Marco Antonio y considerado la calidad de su linaje y la mucha cantidad de los bienes que llaman de fortuna que su padre tenía, me pareció que si le alcanzaba por esposo era toda la felicidad que podía caber en mi deseo." It is Marco Antonio who is pulled egotistically into the trap of feeling desired: "El vino a caer en que yo le miraba" (217).

Another important difference in the stories of the two women is that while Marco Antonio indeed seduced Teodosia, and physically dishonored her, he did not appear for his appointed rendezvous with Leocadia and left her, as it were, waiting at the bedroom door. Beyond that, the purposes of the two, although primarily to find Marco Antonio, also differ. While Teodosia is concerned only with restoring her honor by either marrying or killing her man ("haré que me cumpla la palabra y fe prometida, o le quitaré la vida") (208), Leocadia is determined to take revenge on Teodosia, whom she wrongly assumes to have run away with Marco: "No piense aquella enemiga de mi descanso gozar tan a poca costa de to que es mío; yo la buscaré, yo la hallaré, y yo la quitaré la vida, si puedo" (219).

The aggressive behavior of women, although unusual, was not unheard of prior to Cervantes. There still continues to be some debate regarding that question. Angel Valbuena Prat is of the opinion that "Las dos doncellas" is an Italianate work, referring specifically to the motif of a woman, disguised as a man, searching for her lover. Cervantes himself points to the characters in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* as models for his (224). Pabon also refers to the novel as an "idealized Italianate" work.

Sadie Edith Trachman, in classifying both Leocadia and Teodosia as "chivalresque" types of women, attributes these traits to the influence of the Italian chivalresque, as in *Orlando furioso*. They are, according to Trachman, "types
Another trait of Teodosia’s personality is the fear and timidity she demonstrates at several points in the novel. This novel begins in mediis res, a trait more characteristic of the Byzantine works such as Teagenes y Cariclea, so popular in the Golden Age in Spain, than of the aforementioned Italian novelli. In addition, it is true that Italian heroines at times did disguise themselves as men, the practice was known long before that, as evidenced by Cariclea herself in the novel by Heliodorus: “Cariclea y Calasiris se disfrazaron en hábito de mendigos, vistiéndose de paños muy viles y groseros que para ello tenían aparejados.”

George Hainsworth, in his study of Cervantes’s short novels and their influence on French literature, points to the Greek romances as the origin of “Las dos doncellas” and several other novelas. (In fact, the intricacies of the plot seem to have confused Hainsworth himself to the point that he cannot keep the characters straight and eventually has Teodosia marrying her brother.) The elaborate intricacies of the plot, with its many adventures, also point to a Byzantine origin for this novela. It is evident that Cervantes was influenced by both sources, and that he did not imitate one to the exclusion of the other.

Both Pabon and Harry Sieber, in referring to the elaborate plot detailed by Cervantes, note that while he deliberately tries to mislead the reader by making the stories of the two women as similar as possible, even to the point of having them say the same things at the same time, the author never goes beyond a point after which the confusion cannot be resolved. As Sieber explains it, any other plot twists, such as having Marco Antonio physically dishonor both women, would not have fit into the Cervantian world of the early seventeenth century. He refers specifically to “este mundo cervantino en que el sacramento del matrimonio se usa para terminar una obra de ficción” (25). Pabon tells us that the end-all, solve-all marriages at the end of many fictional works of the age reveal “the necessity for marriage in order to restore the lost honor of the women,” a necessity which “lies in the age itself, in the physical desires which bring human nature into conflict with social mores.”

Not only does Cervantes reunite Teodosia and Marco Antonio; he also makes Rafael, Teodosia’s brother, a central figure so that in the end he can marry Leocadia and restore her lost pride, and thus tie up all loose ends. In this way, the question of which of the two women is the valid wife of Marco Antonio “is resolved by Cervantes in accordance with the decrees of the Council of Trent.”

To return to the development of character in the novela, the subtle differences between Teodosia and Leocadia actually have a great effect on the sympathies of the reader. As Jennifer Thompson states in her article on the structure of the novela, “it is dangerous to assume with a writer of Cervantes’s calibre that he did not know what he was doing.” Leocadia is pictured as bolder than Teodosia. The former was the aggressor in her relationship with Marco Antonio; Teodosia, the object pursued in hers. And, once Leocadia makes her appearance, Teodosia stays in the background of the action. We are allowed to follow her thoughts as jealousy rages, but it is Leocadia who first approaches Marco Antonio with her plea to him to comply with his promise and marry her, while Teodosia waits with bated breath to see what her lover’s decision will be.

From the start, Teodosia is pictured sympathetically. She is tender-hearted, as revealed by the attention she pays to her horse: “sólo a suspiros parecía despedirlese el alma” (204). She speaks in a “voz debilitada y flaca” (204). We are told how, through much persuasion, Teodosia ceded to the will of Marco Antonio: “Cada palabra era un tiro de artillería que derribaba parte de la fortaleza de mi honra; cada lágrima era un fuego en que se abrasaba mi honestidad; cada suspiro, un furioso viento que el incendio aumentaba de tal suerte que acabó de consumir la virtud que hasta entonces aún no había sido tocada y, finalmente, con la promesa de ser mi esposo, a pesar de sus padres, que para otra le guardaban, di con todo mi reconocimiento” (207). This last phrase reveals an aspect of Marco to which neither Leocadia nor Teodosia give much emphasis; that Marco was intended for another by his parents. The intentional ignorance of this fact by both women is yet another indicator of their assertiveness.

Another trait of Teodosia’s personality is the fear and timidity she demonstrates at several points in the novela: “el temor que tengo..."
charge, and she "no tenía más voluntad que la suya [Rafael's]" (212).

However, Cervantes continues to present Teodosia as a very sympathetic figure, especially as she listens impatiently to Leocadia's story. When Leocadia says "me ofrecí a que hiciese de mi todo lo que quisiese" (217), we follow Teodosia's agony as she waits to find out whether indeed Marco Antonio has been unfaithful to his promise to her. She interrupts Leocadia's narration: "¿qué hizo? ¿Entró por dicha? ¿Gozáesteis?" (218) and breathes a nearly audible sigh of relief as the story continues: "No le gocé, ni me gozó, ni vino al concierto señalado" (218).

Rafael becomes a more important character at this point in the novela, as he has been overcome by the beauty and plight of Leocadia: "porque así como oyó decir quién era Leocadia, así se le abrasó el corazón en sus amores" (221). Cervantes develops a continuous line of the contrasting feelings of Teodosia and Rafael regarding Leocadia, as for example in the following passages: "En aquel mismo traje suspendió los sentidos de Don Rafael, y doblió los celos de Teodosia" (222); "los dos iban mirando a Leocadia, deseándola Teodosia la muerte, y don Rafael la vida" (222). Because of this, it is no surprise to the reader when Rafael declares his love for Leocadia and she agrees to marry him, but this does not take place until the many possibilities for an "unhappy" ending are exhausted. Marco Antonio makes the decision he must, according to the expectations of the epoch, and marries Teodosia as he had promised, while Leocadia also has the opportunity for happiness in her marriage to don Rafael. Even in this solution, however, Leocadia is still not presented as favorably as is Teodosia. While the latter behaves decorously as befits a woman of her status, Leocadia is shown to be mercenary and perhaps unworthy of Rafael's affections; as she puts it: "Pues así lo ha ordenado el cielo, y no es en mi mano ni en la de viviente alguno oponerse a lo que El determinado tiene . . . En fin el nombre de ser mujer legítima de don Rafael de Villavicencio no se podía perder, y con este título sólo viviré contenta" (232).

What remains of the novela is strictly anticlimactic. The happy couples go off to Santiago on a pilgrimage, and return to their homes in the nick of time to prevent their respective fathers from fighting over the honor of the women; after which all live "luengos y felices años" (236).

Regarding the question of whether Leocadia and Teodosia are a single character split into two aspects, one must take note of what Cervantes himself says about his story: "la hermosura y los sucesos de las dos tan atrevidas cuanto honestas doncellas, sujeto principal deste extraño suceso" (237). The two women, for him, are one subject, which does not mean that they are just one character, but that their stories are inextricably linked to each other. The similarities between Leocadia and Teodosia are numerous and pronounced. Jennifer Thompson is of the opinion that the similarities serve to emphasize the importance of the fine differences between the two cases. In referring to what she calls the "center of the whole work," the question of who has the greater claim to Marco Antonio, Leocadia or Teodosia, she states that its central importance is underlined by the deliberate similarities introduced by Cervantes. When Ruth El Saffar states that Leocadia functions "as an exaggeration of repressed aspects of Teodosia" and that "Leocadia is Teodosia's dark shadow," and "Teodosia is the image of Teodosia's self-doubts, having no real claim to a separate identity," I believe she is mistaken. Leocadia and Teodosia, while they have similar stories, retain their separate identities. El Saffar says that Teodosia needs Leocadia to mediate between her and Marco Antonio, but the actual plot of the novela does not indicate this. Teodosia has left home to find her man on her own, and seems capable, in spite of her fears, of accomplishing her goal. Rather than see Teodosia's alter-ego, Leocadia is present in part as a contrast to the other woman, but also to serve as a diversionary ruse; an attempt by Cervantes to mislead the reader. His plot complications do not make "Las dos doncellas" a great novela. They do, however, provide a certain suspense which would otherwise be lacking. As Sieber states: "Lo que importa . . . es la posibilidad de haberla gozado" (25), the possibilities which are only present because of the existence of Leocadia in the novela.

Leocadia, and Teodosia to a lesser extent, are presented as aggressive, determined women with a definite purpose in life. They are surprisingly "liberated" or "atrevidas," according to Cervantes) for their epoch, willing to leave home and security in order to achieve their goals. This similarity between them is praised by Cervantes in his depiction of the two. As noted by Otilía López Fanego, "insiste Cervantes en el derecho de la mujer a dar satisfacción a sus deseos amorosos, tan naturales y exigentes como los del hombre." It is the


13 Thompson, 146.

14 El Saffar, 111.

15 El Saffar, 114.

very assertiveness of both women that allows them to accomplish their aims; Teodosia, to marry Marco Antonio; Leocadia, to marry well and regain a good name. Leocadia and Teodosia are perhaps the forerunners of the more liberated women of their future; Cervantes has shown that women can exert some control over their destiny.

It should be finally noted that, by emphasizing the differences between Leocadia and Teodosia, Cervantes presents one woman more sympathetically than the other. It is Teodosia who, though aggressive enough to pursue regaining her honor, behaves in a manner appropriate for her situation. It is also she who, in the end, accomplishes her goal of marrying Marco Antonio, while Leocadia must settle for her second choice, Rafael. The end results demonstrate the obvious preference indicated by Cervantes for Teodosia, who represents his ideal heroine.

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