

Realism, Idealism, and the Transformation of Romance in “La ilustre fregona”

PAUL LEWIS-SMITH

“LA ILUSTRE FREGONA” IS a strikingly hybrid composition when it is judged by contemporary standards of generic consistency. Building upon the well-worn literary and dramatic themes of long-lost daughters and rebellious sons, and explicitly basing its secondary hero on a real-life Spanish social type, that of the runaway son of nobles who happily settles in the depraved, semi-criminal world of the Andalusian *almadrabas*, it amalgamates and, on the level of moral characterisation, literally blends the heroic, sentimental, idealist genre that we now call “romance” with picaresque and the *entremés* tradition.¹ Its crucial source of inspiration as a synthesis of contrasting genres is likely to be the anti-Classical *comedia*. The latter’s influence is clearly detectable in the more polarised forms of romance/comedy hybridism and particularly in the *gracioso*-like role of Carriazo *hijo*, the lover of the *almadrabas* and friend and semi-comic foil of the enamoured Avendaño.²

1 On the social type who lies behind the young Carriazo, see the interesting article by Contreras. Cervantes informs his readers that many “padres principales” have errant sons whom they discover in the *almadrabas* and that “[los hijos] tanto sienten sacarlos de aquella vida como si los llevaran a dar la muerte.” *Novelas ejemplares*, ed. Harry Sieber, 22nd ed., II, 14r. All quotation from “La ilustre fregona” is from this critical edition.

2 Whilst no one has discovered a *comedia* to which the *novela* is closely related on the level of plot, *El mesón de la corte* (1588-95) and *La noche toledana* (1605) have long been recognised as possible dramatic influences. There are definite links between the *novela* and the later *comedia* *La ilustre fregona y amante al uso*. The latter is a dramatic spin-off that was published under Lope’s name in 1641. Morley and Bruerton regarded its attribution to Lope as false. In his recent study of “La tradición textual de ‘La ilustre fregona’ atribuida a Lope de Vega,” Presotto inclines to the contrary conclusion. More attention needs to be given to the *novela*’s relationship with Classical Roman comedy. Its principal characters

One of the things that seem to me to distance the *novela* from the typical anti-Classical *comedia* is its narrowing of the traditional sensibility gap between representations of secular life (*obras humanas*) and their biblical and hagiological counterparts (*obras divinas*). Although it is not stridently so, when judged by the ideological standards of narrative and dramatic treatments of aristocratic adventure and love, “La ilustre fregona” is unusually theological in conception. It is basically a work that brings together idealism in a romance mode that has been modified by asceticism with the kind of realist outlook on life that informs Alemán’s *Guzmán*. It superimposes a Christian perspective on ideal love and matrimony that transcends the idealistic range of both Spanish drama and the romance tradition on a human realism that is anchored ideologically in the doctrine of Original Sin, therefore stressing the negative meaning of moral *humanitas*. This it does in a self-consistent, logically reserved way that subordinates the idealistic to a realist sense of verisimilitude and does not gamble on a readership that identifies unanimously with the author’s conception of what constitutes the ideal. The amatory ideal is gently debunked, the corresponding matrimonial ideal is presented very coyly, and both are distanced from the certain facts of the tale. The *novela*’s internal harmony—its structural “decorum,” in neo-Classical language—is Christian and basically realist. The continuity that the *novela* lacks when viewed from the perspective of Classical decorum and native traditions may be found in the thematic focus on sin, the conceptual association of sin with the realm of the Flesh (materialism, whose lower forms are sensual), the idealisation of spiritual values, and the subordination of literary idealism to realistic constraints.

The fundamental thematic importance of the doctrine of Original Sin in “La ilustre fregona” is increasingly detectable in critical studies that have appeared in the last twenty years. Whilst Kartchner is more strongly inclined than other critics to regard the *novela* as a tragic tale, it is, now, widely agreed that “La ilustre fregona” modifies romance traditions in characterisation and does not produce a happy ending that fully conforms to conventional idealistic standards of literary decorum. The rebellious ingredients are normally regarded as forms of social criticism. Whilst not dwelling on the socio-critical vein to be found in previous interpretations, Boyd reflects the broad consensus when he describes the *novela* as a tale

are descendants of the rebelliously enamoured sons, long-lost daughters, clever slaves, and conservative fathers of the Classical dramatic genre. The clever slave is the oldest dramatic ancestor of Carriazo *hija*.

of loss and providential restoration in whose ending there are "troubling shadows." He briefly identifies most of the things that have repeatedly troubled critics. Carriazo *padre* expresses no contrition for committing rape. Carriazo *hijo* is not contrite for deceiving his parents, and is not taken to task for almost beating a boy to death in Toledo. Constanza's "wrench with her previous existence, and especially the pain of her departure from the innkeeper's wife, is movingly emphasized," and it is a safe assumption that the foster-parents "will rarely, if ever again, see the girl they brought up as their daughter."³

My general purpose in the following pages is to stress the importance of Christianity as a formative influence on "La ilustre fregona," the discreet fusion of both realism and idealism with inexplicit satire, and the use of a multiple ending: one that is open to a range of interpretations. I wish initially to focus upon the realist content and to offer some new or closer perspectives on the realist forms of satire. I shall then move on to expound my rather more radical views on the *novela's* idealism and the fluidity of the ending.

Approaching the work as a contribution to satirical fiction, I assume that we can all agree that "La ilustre fregona" is less waspish towards the

3 Boyd (ed.) 38-39. Boyd calls the rape Carriazo *padre's* "original sin," alluding to the symbolic value that the rape can acquire from its position in the chain of causality. Kartchner takes a gloomy view of both the heroine's repossession by her natural father and her marriage to Avendaño. Expressing an opinion that I regard as too simple, but with which I can certainly empathise, he suggests that the tale is circular. The heroine's "options and reactions" when her father intervenes in her life "are very similar to those of her mother years before when her mother was confronted with the choice of being raped in silence or of shouting for help and announcing her shame. Constanza has no real control over her situation [...] First she is shamelessly displayed to the Corregidor for his approval. He examines her body from top to bottom and finds it very attractive. Next, despite the fact that it was the innkeeper who raised her [...], the *corregidor* [...] is the one who presents Constanza to her birth father, Carriazo [...] Unable to talk, she can only sob. Although perhaps her tears signify happiness at meeting her father, the text might suggest otherwise, that she is sad at being torn away from her 'real' parents, the innkeepers. Constanza cried so hard when she was asked to leave her 'mother' and to follow her birth father that the *corregidor* asked the innkeeper's wife to accompany Constanza for a few days with her new family. Finally, Constanza was promised in marriage to Avendaño without her consent or knowledge." Bearing in mind that in other works Cervantes highlights "a woman's right to choose her partner and parents' responsibility to consult their children regarding marriage plans, [...] Constanza's tears and silence seem all the more telling" (94). More moderate views of the subversion of romance conventions, none of which regards the work as rebellious to the point of ending in a tragic mode, will be found in the studies by Herrero, Checa, Fallows, Clamurro, and Williamson.

female sex than it is towards the male sex and that it chiefly attacks the male aristocrat. If this is not a correct assumption, my nearest ally is probably Williamson. Williamson points out that the idealisation of patriarchy that is characteristic of old romance is inverted in the *novela's* ending by the revelation that Coſtanza's father had raped her mother and by the behaviour of the Corregidor, a judge who turns a blind eye to the guilt of Carriazo *padre* and to the crime of grievous bodily harm that Carriazo *hijo* has just committed against an insolent boy. If we view the ending from this perspective, so he contends, the social order that Cervantes evokes "appears to be based on wealth and power rather than on virtue and honour." Further, "it is exposed by the rape as resting on—or at least facilitating—the 'pura fuerza' of the privileged male" (671). The rape committed by the aristocrat is therefore emblematic, so Williamson implies.⁴ This strikes me as true. As I perceive it, the realist treatment of romance material is chiefly concerned with sexual and family life, emphasises the corruption of men, and treats the wealthy nobility as the social class in which men are at their worst. Possibly conceived in some degree as a realist response to the glorification of womanhood in the courtly love tradition, its most prominent feature is a waspish comparison of male sentimental attitudes towards women with male friendship and patriarchal attitudes to sons, especially those of wealthy aristocratic men towards male heirs.

Carriazo *hijo*, so we are told, made many friendships, and very good ones, in his time at the *almadrabas*, where he was presumably bonding with members of his own sex.⁵ He and Avendaño *hijo* are good friends to each other and so are Avendaño *padre*, Carriazo *padre*, and his cousin, the Corregidor (though the Corregidor is superior to the other two, as he graciously accepts Carriazo's choice of Avendaño's son over his own

4 Carriazo *padre* uses the phrase "pura fuerza" when he speaks of it: "La gocé contra su voluntad y a pura fuerza mía" (II, 194).

5 "Despidióse de sus amigos, que los tenía muchos y muy buenos" (II, 142). In referring to friendship, I use the term "good" in the sense of truly affectionate and loyal. This is what "friendship" means today, but it is only part of what "friendship" meant for Cervantes. None of the examples of male friendship in "La ilustre fregona" is truly "good" when friendship is judged from the demanding Aristotelian perspective that prevailed in seventeenth-century moral philosophy. In accordance with Aristotelian theory (*Ethics*, Bks 8-9), goodness in friendship was associated with virtuous living. The description of Carriazo's friends as "very good" is an ironic one to the extent that the kind of friendship in question is far from being an *amicitia honesta*. The only truly "good" friendship in "La ilustre fregona" is that of Coſtanza and the innkeeper's wife, if friendship is judged from an Aristotelian perspective.

to be Coſtanza's husband). On the other hand, neither of the two sons is sentimentally attached to his father or his mother. Both, in fact, are happily cruel to their parents. Further, if we set aside the idealistic portrait of Coſtanza's husband that I detect between the lines of the ending, none of the men in Cervantes's tale is a truly good friend of the heroine. None of them is sacrificially kind to her, spontaneously and selflessly interested in knowing her feelings and thoughts, or charitable without some prompting. Her suitor is deceitful. In one of the *novela's* various travesties of conventional romance motifs, he endeavours to ingratiate himself by casting himself as an amorous pilgrim who has left his home and forsaken his true identity under the inspiration of Coſtanza's reputed beauty: "A la fama de vuestra hermosura, que por muchas leguas se extiende, dejé mi patria, mudé vestido, y en el traje que me veis vine a servir a vuestro dueño" (II, 178).⁶ What is worse, he is happy to accept Coſtanza as his future wife regardless of what her feelings towards him may be, and on terms that require her to live far away from the one person, her foster-mother, whom she clearly loved at the time of her betrothal.

It is likely that the heroine's father repossesses his daughter only because she is beautiful and chaste. Her mother's majordomo has probably given him a full report of Coſtanza's reputation. He has certainly been informed of her beauty, as he recognises her on first sight (II, 191), and he seems to check up on a favourable report of her *honestidad* by pumping La Gallega, having just tricked the wench into confirming his assumption that Coſtanza is the girl whom he has come to find. To verify his daughter's chastity, he seizes upon a jealous comment on her sexual attractiveness: "Luego esta niña, a esa cuenta—replicó el caballero—debe de dejarse manosear y requebrar de los huéspedes" (II, 192).

None of the three male parties who have a direct interest in Coſtanza (Avendaño *hijo* and *padre*, and Carriazo *padre*) or their male friends (Carriazo *hijo* and the Corregidor) cares to hear either her instant or her considered wishes for her own future. The patriarchs handle her repossession like bulls in a china shop until they observe that she and her foster-mother are deeply distressed by the prospect of being parted, at which point the Corregidor, usurping the role of Coſtanza's father, instigates the small mercy of allowing the pair to remain together until Coſtanza leaves Toledo for Burgos (II, 197). Given that he does not require him to set up

6 Clamurro (204) and Zimic (268) both observe this lie.

home in Toledo, it is a reasonable assumption that her father's choice of Avendaño as his son-in-law in preference to the son of the Corregidor is a selfish convenience. Rather than give his daughter a matrimonial home that would be close to the home of her foster-mother, Carriazo *padre* chooses to please the old friend who lives in his own city and to ensure that his daughter ornaments his own life, along with her future offspring. This treatment of the heroine strikes a hugely ironic contrast with the fathers' indulgent treatment of their rediscovered sons, both of whom have manifestly disobeyed them, stolen from them, and lied to them, despite the relevant Commandment: "Honour your father and mother." When the narrator refers to the parable of the Prodigal Son on the occasion of the male reunion, he must be a medium of satire, for he is committing a theological *disparate*. Unless he is viewed as an additional character (a perspective, I think, that would be too modern), the narrator is the real author engaging in irony. The male reunion is a travesty of the parable. The miscreant sons whom the fathers tearfully welcome back, with no criticism from the Corregidor, are patently contrite only because they have been caught (II, 195-96). This, moreover, is history repeating itself, for, when Carriazo *hijo* had returned from his three-year period of absence without parental leave, he was treated with the same indulgence. It is strongly hinted that both fathers, having failed to train their sons to fear paternal castigation, reap what they have sown.⁷ In this respect, they contribute to the same line of authorial thought as the fictionalised praise of the Conde de Puñonrostro, the stern Asistente of Seville (II, 147). Cervantes implies that fear is the only effective weapon against delinquency.⁸

7 According to the Tridentine Catechism, to honour parents is to love, respect, and fear them. Filial duties include obedience as long as the parental wishes and instructions do not conflict with God's moral laws. According to catechismal teaching, the word "father" is to be understood as meaning not simply one's natural father but other men who are regarded as fathers in Scripture. The latter include "guardians," "trustees," "instructors," and "teachers" and would therefore include the *ayo* whom Carriazo and Avendaño deceive. For their part, it is the duty of parents "to imbue their children with most holy discipline and morality, and to give them the best precepts for the regulation of their lives," avoiding both excessive severity and the opposite, for "children are often spoiled by the too great lenity and facility of their parents." See *Catechism of the Council of Trent* 352-53 and 356 (Pt III, Chap. 5, Qs 5-8 and 13). The betrayed fathers in "La ilustre fregona" fail as disciplinarians rather than as moral instructors. Witness the set of written instructions on wise self-governance that they give their sons when they send them to university (II, 144).

8 The Conde de Puñonrostro is the only good lawman to enter Cervantes's fiction. The historical allusion is to Francisco Arias de Bobadilla (d. 1610), who was Asistente of

The seemingly unconditional nature of the love that the fathers bear for their sons is attributable to the fact that the latter are *hijos únicos*. As such they are dynastic successors and patriarchal second selves. The fathers' moral carelessness originates in the patriarchal custom of according privileged rights of inheritance to the eldest or only son, a practice that was most deeply entrenched and most consequential in the life of the rich nobility. More extreme in the Carriazo *padre/hijo* relationship, it is a further reflection of the aristocratic dynastic mentality to which reference is first made at the tale's beginning when the narrator says, with no evident malice, that Don Diego named his son after himself—an observation that flags him up as an extreme representative of the mentality in question.

Giving the fathers a broader relevance as portraits of their social class is their sense of identity. They both implicitly vest their identities first and foremost in their distinguished socio-economic standing and that of their male kith and kin and least of all in their relationships with women. This is shown most forcefully when Carriazo *padre* reveals himself to Avendaño *padre* and the Corregidor as a man who raped a noble widow in a calculated act of lust, shows that he has never been racked by conscience, is not upbraided, and does not ask his friends to treat what he has revealed to them as confidential information.

While the wealthy aristocratic class bears the brunt of Cervantes's satire, his discrediting of the male sex is basically generic. It is extended down the social ladder by the avaricious treachery of Costanza's mother's major-domo and by the characterisation of her plebeian foster-parents. In them we see a further example of patriarchal distance from the opposite sex, and, at one remove from parenthood in the normal, biological sense, the greater depth of parental affection that a daughter can expect from a mother. Whilst the foster-mother is deeply distressed by the heroine's repossession, and whilst her husband is one of the male observers who are moved to compassion by the distressed affection that she and the heroine show for each other when they are required to part company (II, 197), the innkeeper is perfectly happy to deliver Costanza into the charge of her natural father in exchange for a thousand escudos (II, 192-93). This Judas-like feature suggests that he was somewhat hypocritical when, in the moment of accepting money from Costanza's mother, he asked her to perish the thought

Seville in the period 1597-99. According to the Tridentine Catechism, it is the attribute of the "carnal" Christian to abstain from sin "more through fear of punishment than love of virtue" (323: Pt II, Chap. 26).

that he and his wife were mercenary. Only the wife is clearly innocent of mercenary motivations. It was she who physically received the money from Coſtanza's diſtressed mother, but she did so in a completely absent-minded way that reflected her deep emotional involvement in the lady's narrative (II, 187-88). Her husband, to be sure, is loyal towards Coſtanza's mother and is anxious to protect his foster-daughter against sentimental involvement with a youth of unsuitable rank, but, in a work that registers human nature through the doctrine of Original Sin, the reader should suspect that the motivation of the husband's conscientious behaviour is his ignorance of the mother's death, his knowledge that she had been forestalling a scandal, and his fear of getting himself into trouble with the child's father or other interested parties. Three things seem perfectly clear about the innkeeper: he is less moved by the suffering of Coſtanza's mother than his wife is; he is not nearly as attached to Coſtanza as his wife is; and he does not care deeply about his wife's feelings.

In "La iluſtre fregona" Cervantes suggests that men normally look upon women only as the opposite sex. He further suggests that their interest in them tends to be selfish and their affection for them slight, unless it is either amorous or that of a proud father. In the latter case, so he implies through his portrayal of Coſtanza's father, the affection will depend on the daughter's lustre as a prospective or actual wife. The treatments of rape and inheritances suggest that the aristocracy is the social class where male attitudes towards women are most insalubrious.

As the satire of the male sex is predominantly inexplicit and most critical of the nobility, by implication it is largely addressed to a select public whose typical members would have been middle-class. However, one opinion of the male sex is clearly regarded as unanimous and universal, at least when people are honest: on the male side, there is no such thing as sexual love of a kind that is free from lust. This implicitly normal view is expressed by Carriazo *hijo* in the amused, *gracioso*-like comment that he passes on Avendaño's claim that he loves Coſtanza with feelings that are utterly chaste. Carriazo doubts its sobriety: "¡Oh felicísimos tiempos los nuestros, donde vemos que la belleza enamora sin malicia, la honestidad enciende sin que abrase, el donaire da gusto sin que incite [...]" (II, 165).

The ideal that informs the *novela's* ending depends upon a marvellous exception to the realist law that a young man's love is never free from lust. The heroine's marriage is a happy one on the idealist level of Cervantes's fiction precisely because, on that level, Avendaño is the kind of groom with

whom Coſtanza can form a loving relationship, which is one who does not need sex. The betrothal, however, is firmly anchored in the *novela's* realism. It is impossible to applaud the couple's engagement unless one identifies less with Coſtanza than with Avendaño and/or the noble patriarchs—men whose priorities lie in shackling their wilful sons to wives and homes, and in using their children's marriages to cement their own friendship. The behaviour of the three fathers should perhaps be viewed as a denunciation of moral failure on the part of the Tridentine Church. Although it had proclaimed "the liberty of marriage" in its reform programme for matrimony, the Church had not in fact prohibited arranged marriages. It had merely required the bride and groom to consent to marry in the presence of a priest and witnesses, subject to an exemption for the bride, whose consent could be proxied by parents.⁹

It is a safe bet that Coſtanza was betrothed to Avendaño against her private wishes. To be sure, there is evidence in the manner in which she discourages him from repeating his declaration of love that she does not dislike him and is cruel in order to be kind.¹⁰ On the other hand, she has no extended contact with Avendaño, any special fondness she may feel for him can be only embryonic, she has never shown any interest in marriage, and she clearly possesses a vocation for celibacy. The latter may be physiological, but, if it is, it is inextricable on a psychological level from an extraordinary religious piety that includes a special devotion to the Virgin.¹¹ We are prompted to wonder if Coſtanza's vocation lies in marriage in the

9 See *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* 196–97 and 203–04 (Twenty-fourth Session, Chaps. 1 and 9) and *Catechism of the Council of Trent* 292 (Pt II, Chap. 8, Q. 7): "Instead of words, however, a nod or other unequivocal sign of inward consent may be sufficient for marriage, and even silence also, when the result of female modesty, provided the parents speak for their daughter."

10 "Tomás, no me duele [el diente] nada; y así, ni tengo necesidad de tus palabras ni de tus oraciones: conténtate que no te acuso a la Inquisición, y no te canses; pero que estas razones las dijo sin mostrar ira en los ojos ni otro desabrimiento que pudiera dar inicio de reguridad alguna" (II, 183–84).

11 The innkeeper informs the Corregidor that Coſtanza is "devotísima de Nuestra Señora" and that she goes to communion and confession every month (II, 189). Members of the laity were required to take communion only at Easter, although they were encouraged to do so more frequently. See *Catechism of the Council of Trent* 217–18 (Pt II, Chap. 4, Qs 57–58). The testimony of the Corregidor is corroborated by La Gallega, speaking to Coſtanza's father. From her we learn that Coſtanza frequently prays: "Es una tragaavemarías; labrando está todo el día y rezando. Para el día que ha de hacer milagros quisiera yo tener un cuento de renta. Mi ama dice que trae un silencio pegado a las carnes" (II, 192).

temporal sense or in becoming a bride of Christ. Her beauty screams “marriage” in the temporal sense, whilst her piety, her special devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, her serene detachment from male admirers, and her lack of socially ambitious interest in the enamoured sons of the well-to-do, scream out “nunnery.”

The *novela* concludes in an ironic style that parodies romance escapism and extends the satire of males. The irony partly lies in a narrator who states that “all were happy” (II, 198: “contentos, alegres y satisfechos”), when Coſtanza, her foster-mother, and the son of the Corregidor could not have been in good spirits, and the betrothed females in distant Burgos had yet to be put in the picture. At this point, the narrator stands for two distinct things: the escapist streak in human nature as manifest in narrative and dramatic endings that create perfect temporal order (endings that are thoroughly happy, if only when judged by worldly standards); and patriarchal partiality as evidenced in myopic perceptions of where such order exists, whether the context be real life or fiction. There is further irony, now on the subject of male sensuality, in the genial reference to Toledan poets who extolled Coſtanza’s physical beauty whilst completely ignoring her soul: the piety, the chastity, and the sentient-intelligent being in general.

The ending is a morally testing one both for the characters and for Cervantes’s readership, particularly for its male contingent, and most of all for members of the wealthy nobility. The momentous importance of coincidence in the *novela*’s ending clearly implies that the characters’ lives are governed by divine providence and that the reunion that occurs at the inn is a product of God’s volition. It is only a morally bad reader who associates the entire ending with divine volition, however. The ending turns on a providential moral trial whose immediate outcome surely owes more to divine permission than to God’s moral will. The reunion that occurs at the inn is a divine trial of patriarchal justice. It is centrally a moral test of Carriazo *padre*. It is the latter’s chance to compensate for the sins of rape and irresponsible fatherhood by subordinating his own will to that of his daughter, discouraging her from making any hurried decisions concerning her future, encouraging her to seek the will of God, and punishing his son.¹² It seems clear that, in a suddenly perfected world, Coſtanza’s betrothal to Avendaño would not have occurred immediately, if indeed it occurred at all, that she would

¹² Avendaño *padre* should also have acted to castigate his son, but greater punishment should have been visited on the young Carriazo, given that the latter was a double offender and was responsible for corrupting Avendaño *hijo*.

not have been required as a married woman to move to Burgos, a long way away from her foster-mother, and that neither of the other marriages would have occurred until and unless the prospective spouses had wished them to, having assured themselves of their compatibility. Considering what actually happens, it is possible that the son of the Corregidor and the daughter of Don Juan de Avendaño had never even met each other at the time of their betrothal, and it is a safe assumption that all the children with the exception of Avendaño *hijo*, who marries for love, accept their allotted spouses in obedience to unsentimental social norms that they accept uncritically or are powerless to resist.¹³ It is possible that, in the realm of divine imagination (divine volition, unfulfilled), Coſtanza became a nun.

The *novela's* ending accommodates both realist and idealist conceptions of the married relationship of Coſtanza and Avendaño. One realist possibility is that the marriage was a truly happy one only for Avendaño and that Coſtanza was simply "constant" as a conscientious wife. Another realist possibility is that the marriage was a miserable one for both the wife and the husband. This alternative possibility arises when the narrative hints that they had no children or had none that survived into puberty. The medium for this suggestion is an arresting inconsistency of the kind that contains a deliberate omission, or "deliberate" oversight. While silent on the matter of offspring when he speaks of Avendaño's marriage, the narrator observes that Carriazo's marriage with the daughter of the Corregidor produced three healthy sons:

Dio ocasión la historia de *la fregona ilustre* a que los poetas del dorado Tajo ejercitasen sus plumas en solenizar y en alabar la sin par hermosura de Coſtanza, la cual aun vive en compañía de su buen mozo de mesón, y Carriazo ni más ni menos, con tres hijos, que

¹³ We are told that the Corregidor's son accompanied the Carriazos and Avendaños to Burgos, as he wished "to go and see" his bride: "Quiso ir a ver a su parienta y esposa" (II, 198). This wording accommodates the possibility that the couple have never met. The emphasis placed on the blood relationship between these spouses, which, in principle, is too close to permit them to marry each other, has critical implications. The ending contains an implicit attack on the clerical corruption that enabled socially powerful men—in this fictional case, the Corregidor of Toledo, headquarters of the Spanish Church—to secure dispensations from the law that prevented second cousins from marrying. According to the *Canons and Decrees* of the Council of Trent, exemption from the law that restricted marriages between blood relations should be granted only "rarely" and "for a cause" (199: Twenty-fourth Session, Chap. 5).

[...] están todos estudiando en Salamanca. (II, 198)

Three tragic possibilities arise out of this passage: (1) Avendaño and/or Coŝtanza were infertile; (2) their children died in infancy; (3) Coŝtanza was sexually incompetent: the heroine was either unable or unwilling to satisfy a spouse who had proved to be entirely normal once he had come into intimate contact with his bride.

The idealist perspective on the main marriage is a positive interpretation of the allusion to childlessness. In the idealist view, God allowed the young Avendaño to marry Coŝtanza in the knowledge that their arranged marriage would become a deeply spiritual one, loving but unsullied by carnal relations. The idealistic climax of "La iluŝtre fregona" is based on the idea that the heroine remained a virgin and that she and her husband therefore lived like the Virgin Mary and Joseph, who, according to the Catholic tradition, did not have sexual intercourse either before or after the birth of Jesus. The full idea is that Coŝtanza showed an aversion for sex, that Avendaño, in accordance with his pre-marital claim that his love was devoid of carnal desire, won Coŝtanza's chaste love by happily practising abstinence, and that both of them lived at the higher end of grace.

Whilst "La iluŝtre fregona" is a disordered work when it is judged by Classical standards of literary decorum, it is not disordered when it is judged from a sympathetic Christian point of view. From such a perspective, it is a harmonious fusion of realism and idealism that is oriented by basic Christian beliefs. The realism is theologically based on the doctrine of Original Sin and is a dystopian view of life and manners in the author's own land. Closely observed, it reveals a strong satirical bias against members of the male sex and is especially caustic as a depiction of the wealthy nobility. It is completed by a representation of postlapsarian providence that emphasises divine foresight (God's remote control of the world), moral trial, and the concept of divine permission: the *providentia concessionis* that confers power on the Devil. The idealist vein first produces a socio-literary joke: the absurd figure of the aristocratic "pícaro virtuoso" (II, 140). The latter is a satirical character whom Cervantes conceives as an ironic homage to a conventional form of literary-dramatic propriety: that of treating the wealthy Spanish nobility with respect.¹⁴ Moving into the realm of romance

¹⁴ The virtuous "pícaro" is a ludicrous creation. He is "virtuous" despite the fact that he has excelled as a *pícaro* in what, allegedly, is the sink of picaresque depravity. The only virtues that he is specifically given are *discreción* (here meaning something like modern

on terms that increasingly distance the ideal from the ascertainable truth of the tale, the fiction becomes an affirmation of the excellence of spiritual love, its climax being a youthful and yet celibate marriage that shadows that of the Immaculate Virgin, the bride's spiritual Mother.

The satirical spirit in which the idealist fiction began is perpetuated in the heroine. Costanza is a parodic version of an immaculate secular heroine. On a basic level, she is a satire of male sensuality as reflected in the physical beauty of a conventional secular heroine. In this regard, she is a combination of caricature and bathos. Sublimely endowed with physical beauty, but publicly known as a mere scullery-maid and living in a social goldfish bowl in which she is gaped at by men of varied social class, she is whimsically different from her counterparts in romance: those beacons of beauty who attract the competitive interest of knights in the books of chivalry. On what perhaps is a more obvious level of literary satire, she mocks the sociological conventions of secular works by appearing to come from an innkeeping family, being known at first as a scullery-maid, then being revealed as a silver-cleaner, and finally acquiring a tarnished form of the aristocratic social identity that befits a secular heroine. Finally, she is over-endowed with virtue. The qualities that make her a potential nun turn the conventional *honestidad* of the female hero of *obras humanas* into a liability, or what would have been a liability in a normal composition.

Closely examined, "La ilustre fregona" accommodates Avellaneda's claim that the *Novelas* are "más satíricas que ejemplares," assuming that he meant by this that they are devoted more to ridicule and escoriation than to moral charity—well-meaning illustration of moral wisdom and folly—and that he did not use the concept "satire" to mean only vocal satire. The satirical content of "La ilustre fregona" is largely inexplicit. In this respect, the author's malevolence partly lies in permitting his moral enemies to fail a literary moral trial, whilst enabling his moral friends to enjoy their superiority. Cervantes's hostility towards the morally inferior reader finally surfaces in a very restrained form when he glosses over the subject of Costanza's fertility. In doing so, he nags such a reader with unpalatable thoughts concerning the marriage and, perhaps, with the uncomfortable suspicion that the *novela* has gone over his head, whilst avoiding a moral collision. The absence of any specific allusion to a marriage of purely spiritual love ensures that this particular version of the childless marriage is

"shrewdness"), liberality, which might mean prodigality, and temperance in drinking wine (II, 139-41).

beyond the sensibility range of readers who would have had no patience with Cervantes's eccentricity.

If he had in fact been candid with this moral-intellectual *vulgo*, they might have attributed his idealist values to sexual senility. They might also have accused him of disrespecting the Faith, as, according to official religious doctrine, the divine end of matrimony was procreation, and the primary duty of a young wife was that of motherhood.¹⁵ A reader who attributed Cervantes's eccentricity to a declining libido might have been thinking along the right lines, as he may well have been in his sixties at the time of composing the work.¹⁶ However, one who accused him of impiety would have been simply biased. On the one hand, the celibate version of the Avendaño-Coſtanza marriage cannot represent the author's serious view of how spouses should ideally live while they are still young, for he cannot have believed that God had willed the extinction of the human race. On the other hand, it is eminently defensible as a spiritual fantasy.

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
P.Lewis-Smith@bristol.ac.uk

Works Cited

- Boyd, Stephen (ed.). *A Companion to Cervantes's Novelas ejemplares*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005.
- The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*. Ed. and trans. J. Waterworth. London: Dolman, 1848.
- Catechism of the Council of Trent*. Trans. Very Rev. J. Donovan. Dublin: James Duffy, 1908.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Novelas ejemplares*. Ed. Harry Sieber. 22nd ed. 2 vols. Madrid: Cátedra, 2003.
- Checa, Jorge. "El romance y su sombra: hibridación genérica en 'La ilustre fregona'." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 25.1 (1991): 29-48.
- Clamurro, William H. *Beneath the Fiction: The Contrary Worlds of Cervantes's Novelas ejemplares*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.
- Contreras, Vitelio. "El 'curioso pormenor de las almadrabas' en 'La ilustre fregona'." *Texto crítico. Nueva época*, 1.1 (1995): 93-100.
- Fallows, Noel. "Nobility of Soul": A Rhetorical Commonplace in Cervantes' 'La ilustre fregona'." *Romance Notes* 33.3 (1993): 305-12.

15 "The principal object which a female should have in getting married is to become a mother" (*Catechism of the Council of Trent* 290: Pt II, Chap. 8, Q. 2).

16 1604 is a cautious *terminus a quo*. I base it upon the early reference (II, 139) to the "famous" hero of *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Part I 1599; Marti's Part II 1602; Alemán's Part II 1604).

- Herrero, Javier. "Emerging Realism: Love and Cash in 'La ilustre fregona'." *From Dante to García Márquez*. Ed. Gene H. Bell-Villada, Antonio Giménez, and George Piñtorius. Williamstown: Williams College, 1987. 47-59.
- Kartchner, Eric J. *Unhappily Ever After: Deceptive Idealism in Cervantes's Marriage Tales*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2005.
- Morley, S. Griswold, and Courtney Bruerton. *Cronología de las comedias de Lope de Vega con un examen de las atribuciones dudosas, basado todo ello en un estudio de su versificación estrófica*. 2nd ed., rev. Madrid: Gredos, 1968.
- Presotto, Marco. "La tradición textual de 'La ilustre fregona' atribuida a Lope de Vega." *Criticón* 87-89 (2003): 697-708.
- Williamson, Edwin. "Challenging the Hierarchies: The Interplay of Romance and the Picaresque in 'La ilustre fregona'." *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 81.4-5 (2004): 655-74.
- Zimic, Stanislav. *Las Novelas ejemplares de Cervantes*. Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1996.