
La Señora Peregrina as Mediatrix in “La ilustre fregona”

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Readers of “La ilustre fregona” have often been perplexed by what they see as the excessive plasticity of the tale’s assumed heroine, Costanza. She is one of the several female noble characters of the *Novelas ejemplares* who is deprived of her rightful social situation and forced to be situated in a region of the lower world. But Costanza stands as a foil against her Cervantine peers, such as the curious and defiant Leonora (“El celoso extremeño”), the undomesticated Preciosa (“La gitanilla”), the adventurous Teodosia (“Las dos doncellas”), and the resolute Leocadia (“La fuerza de la sangre”) who, in varying degrees, resist becoming unjustifiably enclosed and subjugated. As William Clamurro points out, it is peculiar that unlike the heroines of “La española inglesa,” and “El amante liberal,” Costanza involves little interaction and no special challenges that the suitor must overcome (203). Indeed, Costanza is exceptionally uninvolved in the development of the plot; silent and stationary, she appears mostly unconcerned with the shaping of her destiny in any way. Instead she waits for “the timely intervention of a

deus ex machina" (Aylward 70). Until the recognition scene, she remains an aloof figure that evades interaction with both fellow characters, as well as with the reader. Ana María Barrenechea describes Costanza's image "en hueco," pointing to her lack of interiority (199–200). What little information we have about Costanza comes second-hand, from what other characters have to say about her. As Ruth El Saffar observes, there is no behind-the-scenes acquaintance with her "true personality" (103).

Critics in the past have often likened Costanza's exemplary behavior to that of the heroine of the romance genre, highlighting her ability to resist the immoral forces that pervade the Toledan inn.¹ Joaquín Casaldueiro remarks that "Costanza, que vive constantemente sometida al peligro, que está en relación con los hombres, sale victoriosa de todo ataque" (202). There is nothing in the text, however, that suggests that Costanza is exposed to real danger. In fact, even though she is famously known as a "fregona," she is described as never having washed a single dish.² And although the inn where she resides is filled with raging vio-

¹ Most studies of "La ilustre fregona" are focused on its structure; namely, the narrative's intertwining of the genres of the romance and the picaresque. Following Frye's archetypes, they appropriately associate Costanza's love story with romance, while Carriazo's adventures loosely suit characteristics expected of picaresque narrative. Thus, these two literary tendencies dialogue and merge with each other within the tale, echoing Cervantes' own preoccupation with the nature of fictional genres. While Robert Johnston focuses on the points of convergence of these two genres, William Clamurro emphasizes the dialogic aspects of the tale. Johnston, in line with Joaquín Casaldueiro, looks at the pastoral as the subgenre of romance that best fits "La ilustre fregona" and highlights its points of convergence with the picaresque, in the protagonists' disguises, changes of identity, and sojourn. Clamurro sees, in the story's plurality and coexistence of discourses, elements of Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia, emphasized in the juxtapositions of linguistic diversity, which underscores the complexity of individual identity and social order. In a different light, Laura Gorfkle and Amy R. Williamsen offer a psychoanalytical interpretation of Costanza's silence as Freudian narcissism (15–16).

² Monique Joly reminds us about the salaciousness of the word *fregar* and its derivatives: "según aclara Covarrubias en su *Tesoro*, *refregarse con las mujeres* es *allegarse mucho a ellas* y *que mujer de buen fregado* se dice *de la deshonesta que se refrega con todos*." Thus, as Joly points out, the notion that Costanza "no friega, no tiene la ingenuidad que modernamente parece" ("En torno" 12).

lence and lust, she does not experience any real danger of being killed or raped, as would the romance heroines of Northrop Frye (80). Costanza is described as spending her days praying, reading, and embroidering. Ironically, she appears to live the idealized life for maidens as constructed by humanists such as Luis Vives or Fray Luis de León. Thus, while Costanza is physically placed in the Toledan inn, she nevertheless lives a separate life away from the darkness and chaos associated with the underworld, inexplicably isolated and protected from her picaresque surroundings, as if by enchantment. Like the enchanted Dulcinea, she is also depicted as a "villana de Sayago" (148). It is only when all of the main characters assemble at *anagnorisis* that she uncovers her mysterious identity (Clamurro 203). It is during this scene that, through the confession of the father, Costanza is finally disenchanting.

Although Costanza does not actively shape the main elements of the story, her presence is central to the development of the main plot. She is an astral body, as described by Barrenechea, "un astro que arrastra hacia su órbita a los que se cruzan en su camino" (200). Costanza lives in a shrine-like place where all of the major elements of the tale are eventually resolved. It is as if Costanza herself is the end of a pilgrimage, where men from all classes, including her half-brother, her future husband, and her father, go to show their love and devotion. It is because of Costanza's presence at the inn that young Avendaño and Carriazo stay in Toledo, where they will subsequently be reunited with their fathers and be restored to society. In an ironic twist of events, the elder Carriazo also finds himself in a pilgrimage to Costanza's "shrine" where, through confession and repentance, he and his son will finally break against the picaresque forces that prevented them from living up to the "ilustre" code of behavior expected of their social standing. In Clamurro's words, Costanza represents "the unifying thread, linking the lust-inspired, illicit acts of the elder Carriazo with the virtuous love interest of young Avendaño" (203). She is the symbol of the transgressions of her father, but also of the hope for his redemption. As such, Costanza is not meant to exhibit "realistic" behavior; instead she is meant to symbolize certain moral principles: she represents Robert

Scholes' "illustrative character" (88). Her unsullied beauty illustrates redemptive forces at work in the midst of the most unsullied picaresque surroundings at the Posada del Sevillano. The narrator closely associates this illustrative or symbolic character to popular iconographic images of the Virgin Mary, and Costanza's dwelling is associated with a shrine of worship that allures the worship and devotion of all classes of men.³ Alban Forcione observes that "[t]he hyperbolic descriptions of Costanza's beauty emphasize light, heavenly bodies, flowers, silver, candles, and jewels, all standard features of the contemporary iconography of the Virgin" (389 n. 122). As discussed below, these descriptions evoke, among others, the images of the young Marys of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), figures untouched by evil and well protected by the miraculous forces governing hagiographical narratives. Given the palpable parallels between Costanza's image and Marian iconography, it has been standard, starting with Casaldüero's heartfelt study on the subject, to conceive Costanza's character as that of the *mediatrix*—the active intercessor between God and humanity (Apostolos-Cappadona 248). According to Casaldüero, "la falta paterna no ha dado lugar a otra falta, sino al ejemplo de virtud (paradigma: la Virgen)" (199).

But idle Costanza, as discussed above, is neither heroic agent nor *mediatrix* of this paradigmatic parable of fall and restoration. Costanza is a symbolic image, serving as the metonymic extension for the true heroine of this tale and the character that actively moves the primary plot of the story—Costanza's mother, also known as *La Señora Peregrina*. It is *La Señora Peregrina* who after her death exerts great influence on the significant events that lead to the deliverance and restoration of all the Carriazos (Costanza, Diego the father, and Diego the son). It is *La Señora Peregrina* who, as would Frye's heroic agent, endures persecution, journeys to the underworld, and through her efforts finally finds liberation (Frye 65–93). Ultimately, *La Señora Peregrina* is the agent that works as the mediator between her rapist, Carriazo,

³ William Christian, Jr., in his extensive study of religion in the sixteenth century, explains that shrines, as opposed to common chapels, are dedicated to a higher, more permanent level of advocacy (70–125).

and his god. As Hippolyte Delehayé points out in his analysis of hagiographical narratives of saints, a distinctive feature of the saintly hero (or heroine) is that both the formation of a cult and occurrence of the miracles often take place after his/her death (99). I propose we re-center the story around *La Señora Peregrina*, so far disregarded by critics, as a means of unveiling a reading of the text as one that inserts itself in the tradition of the hagiographical romance, but that within its parameters, challenges its idealized and unfeasible discourse.

La Señora Peregrina embodies the heroine of the hagiographical narrative of saints, a subspecies of the romance genre. As such, she demonstrates unwavering faith and active devotion to Catholic tenets, even when faced with the most severe hardships and tribulations. In line with the typical narrative of saints, she proves to be an exemplary woman even before her defining period of sainthood, which begins the moment Carriazo penetrates her home and violates her, as he says, "contra su voluntad y a pura fuerza mía" (194). In his subsequent confession, Carriazo narrates a synopsis of her life prior to the rape. He says: "basta saber que fue tan principal que pudiera yo ser su criado...siendo viuda de un gran caballero, se retiró a vivir a una aldea suya; y allí, con recato y con honestidad grandísima, pasaba con sus criados y vasallos una vida sosegada y quieta.... Era por extremo hermosa" (194).⁴ She shares many of the invariable features of widow saints, namely her noble birth, her physical beauty, and her personal choice to remain unmarried and lead, instead, a life of chastity and spiritual devotion (Levy 22). She fits the pattern of the "ideal widow" laid out by moralists such as Vives, who counseled widows not to remarry, if possible, and suggested they spend the rest of their days retreated from the world, living chastely and honoring their deceased husbands.⁵ Since early centuries of Christianity, widows that pledged a vow of celibacy were cele-

⁴ In Castile of the sixteenth century, widows had more legal freedom than married women. A widow had control of her dowry and the rights to half of the couple's property, earned over the course of the marriage (De Backer 179–80). It could be assumed that a wealthy widow from an aristocratic social class, like Costanza's mother, would have had numerous suitors for a second husband.

⁵ For Vives' treatment of widows, see Book Three (299–326).

brated, in sermons and hagiographical texts, for their “return to chastity” (Katz 84).⁶ Hagiographical texts and sermons focused on this legacy, and bestowed much prestige to widows who did not remarry, for these women proved to have the willpower to overcome fleshly weaknesses that they have already tasted (Bilinkoff 189). The notion was rooted in the belief that the virtue of physical chastity conferred an extraordinary spiritual strength and autonomy to the subject. A woman’s chastity could not be separated from her physical body; wholeness in the flesh represented wholeness in spirit.

The main feature that distinguishes widow/virgin saints from their male counterparts is a preoccupation with their sexuality. Almost all of these legends dramatize some threat to the saints’ chastity/virginity, but by miraculous forces they narrowly escape. Most often, the heroine endures torture and a gruesome death at the hand of her persecutor. According to Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, for instance, Saint Euphemia is beheaded, Saint Appollonia has her teeth pulled out, Saint Anastasia is starved and burned alive, Saint Juliana is slowly broken on wheels, and Saint Agatha has her breasts cut off and is rolled over hot coals. The stories have rather uncomplicated plots and a punctual denouements. Life after death is the reward in the virgin/widow martyr narrative and so the death of the saint in question marks the formal resolution to the plot. Behavior manuals encouraged women to include these types of hagiographies in their restricted reading list. They were expected to defend their chastity with the

⁶ The “Litany of the Saints,” for instance, places virgin and widow saints in the same category (“All you holy Virgins and Widows, pray for us”). In early Christian literature, hagiographers emphasized chastity rather than virginity, a tendency that better fit the values and practices of Christian communities in late antiquity in which celibate widows were active and influential in promoting and forming the church during its first two centuries. By the sixth century, the figure of the female saint had been reshaped into a virgin. Winstead sees it as a consequence of the interest of the early medieval Church in promoting virginity and of the fact that monasteries were becoming principal centers of cultural production. An example is the legend of Apollonia, the patron saint of toothache sufferers, who went from being “the wonderful old lady Apollonia” in a vita from the third century to a beautiful and virgin princess in a version from the fifteenth century (Winstead 9–10).

determination of these martyrs. The protection of a woman's chaste body was worth an excruciating death. Winstead draws attention to the fact that these legends bring forth the paradoxical views towards sexual violence, which still prevail in many societies.

Threatened with rape, the saint serenely expresses the common piety that she will remain chaste in the eyes of God, regardless of what happens to her body; yet she never is raped. Her inevitable miraculous escape contains a powerful implication: although being raped would not, in theory, tarnish a virtuous woman, in practice virtuous women are not raped. (13)

Costanza's mother fits the archetypal characteristics of the widow/virgin saint and the structure of her biography also follows the pattern of a hagiographical story. But there is a variance in the story that was never posited by writers of vitae and moralists. She is raped and not only does she survive the rape, she becomes impregnated with a child as a result.⁷ Thus, her story is not simply another recreation of the self-sacrificing saint, it is a secularized narrative of the virgin/widow saint.⁸ In this secularized hagiography, the heroine takes active charge of her situation and personally designs a resolution for her crisis. One of the most innovative aspects of this re-writing, is that the heroine's sense of self and willpower ("voluntad") is not obliterated by the rape, even after Carriazo attempts to do so. If we go back to the moments when Carriazo is violating Costanza's mother, we might observe how he believes that he can silence his transgression by exploiting the "honor code." He warns her that "las voces que diere serán pregoneras de su deshonra," as he brutalizes her "contra su voluntad," and "pura fuerza" (194). Carriazo attempts

⁷ Very few Saints are actually raped. An example is Saint Theodora, who after the rape, abandons her husband, disguises herself as a man, and joins a monastery (see Jacobus de Voragine 229).

⁸ I was inspired to use this term by Forcione's interpretation of "La fuerza de la sangre" as a "secularized miracle."

to take her “voluntad” by force, but her “voluntad” remains untouched. On the contrary, she refuses to let the violation be muted. In her carefully planned finale, the silence is broken by the confession of her transgressor. What is brought to the forefront in this narrative is that the strength that is believed to come with physical chastity is not as powerful as the empowerment and the autonomy that comes with the wholeness of moral and spiritual chastity. The heroine’s flesh may have been ruptured but not her “voluntad.”

What is striking about Costanza’s mother’s behavior is how self-consciously she fashions herself after the ultimate female exemplar of Christian virtue, the Virgin Mary. Having been dehumanized by Carriazo’s violation, she abandons her pre-rape identity in order to take on the persona of *La Señora Peregrina*. She requests to be only known by this name, “traían orden de no llamarla sino la señora peregrina” (187).⁹ Like many other of Cervantes’ characters that experience a rite of passage by changing their names, Costanza’s mother undergoes her rite of passage, and signals a transformation “an act of symbolic assimilation of the ideal represented by the name” (Dunn 120). Just as in the hagiographical legends, or in particular, the narrative of Marian apocrypha, *La Señora Peregrina* overcomes unjustified suffering with endurance and unending patience (Foskett 1–22). She adopts a name that is evocative of the Spanish iconographic representation of the Virgin Mary as *La divina peregrina* (also known as *Nuestra Señora del Refugio*), the central figure of the narrative of the Virgin’s escape to Egypt with the Christ child, and their miraculous deliverance from the forces of evil (Trens 348, 446–48).

Upon learning that she has conceived the child of her rapist, *La Señora Peregrina* makes a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe to find refuge and guidance (“Por huir de los maliciosos ojos de mi tierra, y porque esta hora no me tomase en ella, hice voto de ir a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe” [195]). On this pilgrimage she feels pains of labor, and taking them to be the providential sign of the Virgin of Guadalupe, she must stop at

⁹ This name should not be confused with *Nuestra señora Peregrina de Pontevedra*, an icon established in the 1800s.

the Toledan inn. She tells the innkeeper that "debe de haber sido servida [Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe] que en esta vuestra casa me tome el parto" (187). The birth of Costanza is described as an extraordinarily one. It is characterized by the peace and quiet that pervades throughout the event. The mother gives birth without a midwife, makes no complaint, and the child does not cry, all of which evoke the Virgin's painless delivery in popular Marian narratives. Saint Augustine said that Mary "conceived without pleasure and therefore gave birth without pain" (Katz 49). Saint Jerome also maintained that the Virgin birth was so serene and so painless that a midwife would not have been needed (Warner 33).¹⁰ Just as Mary's painless delivery is cited as proof of her virginity, the peaceful birth suggests that despite Carriazo's violent corruption of her physical body, she has been able to retain her chastity and integrity. It suggests that *La Señora Peregrina* is empowered by supernatural forces and, thus, cannot be subjugated or possessed (Frye 80, Warner 48). It also challenges the discourse of moralists that located chastity in the physical body of the woman. Here chastity is conveyed not as being located in the body but in one's soul.

La Señora Peregrina works as the architect that methodically lays the ground for the elder Carriazo to find and restore his daughter to society. Once her child is born, she christens her with a name that echoes her own behavior, Costanza, and requests that the innkeeper raise her child according to her directions.¹¹ She also arranges for the financing of her upbringing, plans a kind of insurance system for her daughter (in case she dies before

¹⁰ The story of "*La Señora Peregrina*" resembles the Virgin's narrative of the *Qur'an*, which includes Mary among the perfect women of Islam. Although Mary's narratives of the *Qur'an* share elements of the Gospels and Christian apocrypha, in the Islamic text Mary is described as taking on a more active role of leadership at the time she gives birth. According to the *Qur'an* Mary "left her people and betook herself to a solitary place in the East" (quoted in Katz 23). Mary gives birth in isolation, removed from the world. The character of Joseph is absent in the *Qur'an*. She has no husband and is only armed with God's support.

¹¹ Constancy, a virtue symbolic of loyalty and steadfastness was an attribute of the Virgin Mary. It was often represented by the image of the moon, as it was considered nature's best measurer of time and it had hegemony over all waters (Warner 259–63).

she can be reunited with her) and even sets up a dowry fund for her marriage. Most importantly, she provides the inn keeper with a chain with some missing links and a parchment paper cut in a zigzag pattern that contains a cryptic message that could only be read with the other half. She tells the innkeeper that the missing links of the chain and the other half of the paper would be brought by the person who would come for the child. The whole message of the paper reads “Ésta es la señal verdadera” (193). The innkeeper explains how this special paper was cut:

a vueltas y a ondas, a la traza y manera como cuando se enclavijan las manos y en los dedos se escribiese alguna cosa, que estando enclavijados los dedos se puede leer, y después de apartadas las manos queda dividida la razón, porque se dividen las letras; que, en volviendo a enclavijar los dedos, se juntan y corresponden de manera que se pueden leer continuamente: digo que el un pergamino sirve de alma del otro, y encajados se leerán, y divididos no es posible, si no es adivinando la mitad del pergamino... (188–89)

Thus, the process that reveals the identity of Costanza mimics the specific way in which the fingers have to be interlaced as in a prayer of confession, and it is such a confession that redeems the elder Carriazo and his offspring. As Carriazo—the father—interlaces the two parts of the parchment paper, the narrator describes: “se hicieron una, y a las letras del que tenía el huésped...E T E L S N V D D R, respondían en el otro pergamino éstas: S A S A E A L E R A E A, que todas juntas decían: ESTA ES LA SEÑAL VERDADERA” (193). The two parts that come together are also symbolic of the union of Costanza’s mother and father. One half symbolizes the hand of the mother, the synecdoche that stands for the raped body, and the other, the hand of the father, the corrupt flesh that raped the mother. In the fashion of the selfless hagiographical hero, she has moved beyond herself to hold hands with her rapist. The message could not be more powerful: the raped woman has prepared her rapist’s path of forgiveness. Just as the *mediatrix* champions all sinners before the judg-

ment, Costanza's mother has laid out the plan for the deliverance of the entire Carriazo family.¹²

While *La Señora Peregrina* has deliberately fashioned herself in the saintly image of an active Mary, she has also carefully designed her daughter's role to be the iconic representation of her own self. The innkeeper explains that Costanza's mother requested that her daughter be raised and dressed like a peasant ("en hábito de labradora, como su madre me lo dejó mandado" [189]). Through the disparity between her humble costume and startling beauty, Costanza exudes, through her flawless image, her mother's humility, chastity, wisdom, and benevolence. Until the moment of her father's confession, Costanza functions as a figurative altarpiece behind which lies the figure of her mother who at the same time is transfigured in the archetype of the Virgin Mary.

As Marina Warner explains in her study of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, the crucial function of a religious image was to transmit the benevolent forces of a revered agent to their subjects.

[a] sacred image was not an illusion but the possessor of reality itself, and the beneficent forces that flow through icons and relics of a holy personage like the Virgin bring them to life... icons and relics did not just stir the soul to the contemplation of higher things, they also physically communicated the properties of their subject or owner. Images were alive, and so they could breathe life into the dying. (293)

Costanza represents a sacred image. Accordingly, she "breathes life," at least momentarily, into the roguish individuals that stop at the inn. As an iconic representation of her mother, who inspires all of those who meet her to ultimately behave morally, she compels them, at least momentarily, to want to reach a higher

¹² But as noted by Clamurro, it is also through this conservative resolution of Carriazo's violent act that the issue of social inequality is brought to the forefront; forgiveness and restoration are seen as being more readily available to the aristocratic male characters (208).

state of being. Through the image of Costanza, *La Señora Peregrina* tames the brute instincts of men, lower in social class than the younger and the elder Carriazo, but no different in their moral make-up. For example, an Andalusian mule driver, the prime example a depraved person at the time, is so stupefied by Costanza's supernatural beauty that he attempts to describe her to his friend in poetic terms."

Es dura como un mármol, y zahareña como villana de Sayago, y áspera como una ortiga; pero tiene una cara de pascua y un rostro de buen año: en una mejilla tiene el sol y en la otra la luna; la una es hecha de rosas y la otra de claveles, y en entrambas hay también azucenas y jazmines. (148)

In his description of Costanza, the mule driver attempts to produce a more graceful description of the kitchen maid than would be expected of this type of character within the mode of the picaresque. It is as if the mystical experience of seeing Costanza forces him to search for a higher form of language that is unavailable to him. The mule driver's use of metaphors and similes are markedly redundant and disparate, very much like Sancho's poetic attempts to describe Dulcinea to Don Quixote. But ironically, it is because the mule driver fails as a poet that the readers better grasp the excessive artificiality with which Costanza has been shaped. His strained linguistic efforts manage to associate Costanza with the iconography of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. The elements mentioned by the mule driver are all symbols of the *Tota Pulchra*, as often seen in images of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was then common to overload these images of the Virgin with hieroglyphic symbols that had been drawn from the Marian litanies, not necessarily directly connected with the concept of the Immaculate Conception. Costanza, like the *Tota Pulchra*, is identified with the symbols of the sun (*Electa ut sol*), the moon (*Pulchra ut luna*), the rose (*Plantatio rosae*), and the lily (*Sicut lilium inter spinas*) (Trens 153–54).

Costanza's presence inspires such wholesome commitment from her admirers that their devotion is analogous to Marian



Figure 1. Anonymous, *Queen of All Saints* (1500s). Book of Hours, Monastery of Guadalupe (Trens 388, figure 260).

tributes. Her most eligible admirer, the son of the *Corregidor*, serenades Costanza with a song honoring her beauty and virtue that could be easily mistaken as a Marian hymn. The song proclaims: “deja el servir, pues debes ser servida / de cuantos ven sus manos y sus sienas / resplandecer por cetos y coronas” (154). It is not surprising, then, that Avendaño awakens from his sleep, believing the music is sung for the shrine of Our Lady del Carmen, and he surmises that “es ya de día y que debe de hacerse alguna fiesta en un monasterio de Nuestra Señora del Carmen que está aquí cerca, y por eso tocan estas chirimías” (153). The musician pronounces Costanza to be in the highest regal position, above all nobility—both worldly and heavenly. Such a description is reminiscent of Gothic artistic representations of the *Regina sanctorum omnium*. An example can be seen in an anonymous work from the end of the fifteenth century entitled *Madonna of the Catholic*

Sovereign, in the collection of Museo del Prado. In this panel, the sovereign Ferdinand and Isabella with their children are kneeling in prayer before the enthroned Madonna and child. A more powerful image of the exalted Virgin Mary is shown in a Book of Hours (*Queen of All Saints*, 1500s), which resides in the Monastery of Guadalupe (Figure 1). This depiction conveys the Virgin's special status as queen, above all "cetros y coronas," with more force because she is presented alone, without the Christ Child, in the highest position above all Saints and nobility.

Another anonymous picaresque character is so inspired by his devotion to Costanza that, like the mule driver but more successfully, he is able to briefly take part of the world of romance. He sings:

¿Dónde estás, que no pareces,
esfera de la hermosura,
belleza a la vida humana
de divina compostura? (171)

He describes Costanza as humanized element of the divine, as a special instrument of mediation between heaven and earth for she resolves the tension brought by the forces of the picaresque that govern the Carriazos' transgressions and those of the forces of hagiographical romance that govern the saintly behavior of the mother.

When Avendaño looks at her for the first time, he reacts as if he had seen an apparition.

[Carriazo] vio salir una moza, al parecer de quince años, poco más o menos, vestida como labradora, con una vela encendida en un candelero. No puso Avendaño los ojos en el vestido y traje de la moza, sino en su rostro, que le parecía ver en él los que suelen pintar de los ángeles. Quedó suspenso y atónito de su hermosura, y no acertó a preguntarle nada: tal era su suspensión y embelesamiento. (149)

He avoids looking at her body, and instead, he is left stupefied as he marvels at the wondrous image of Costanza's countenance, which is lighted by the candle she is holding in her hand. The image of Costanza holding the candle is reminiscent of her mother making a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in hopes of finding the "light" that will guide her out of her purgatorial journey. *La Señora Peregrina* tells the innkeeper that she will instruct him what to do with Costanza after she comes back from Guadalupe: "De lo que después se hubiere de hacer, siendo Dios servido de alumbrarme y de llevarme a cumplir mi voto, cuando de Guadalupe vuelva lo sabréis, porque el tiempo me habrá dado lugar de que piense y escoja lo mejor que me convenga" (188). It is only after Costanza's mother becomes "alumbrada" by the Virgin that she devises a plan of unification and deliverance. This plan, however, is only fulfilled when the Carriazos, father and son, go through their own procession of repentance at Costanza's figurative shrine at the inn. Although their redemption is to be mediated by *La Señora Peregrina*, the Carriazos themselves are required to make the expiatory pilgrimage to the underworld. The narrator illustrates the theme of expiation when he says that Carriazo, the son, passes through the archway named the "Sangre de Cristo" (the blood of Christ) that leads to Costanza's dwelling. This image is a foreshadowing of the final confession of Carriazo where he appears with his face and teeth covered with blood, symbolizing the end of his old self and beginning of a new identity that will be cleansed of his father's transgressions. The deliverance of the Carriazo family becomes clear when in the last moments of the narrative we are told that Carriazo married and had three sons, and that none of them take after their father, "que sin tomar el estilo del padre ni acordarse si hay almadrabas en el mundo, hoy están estudiando en Salamanca" (198).

While Avendaño sees divinity in the image of Costanza, Carriazo only sees the facade of her body. Casaldüero points out that Costanza's attire is not described until Carriazo meets her for the first time: "El traje no será descrito hasta que la vea Carriazo, el cual no puede pasar de los límites terrenales y físicos" (194).

Her physical description follows growing naturalistic tendencies of visual artists of the time, to depict the Virgin as a young girl often dressed as an earthly peasant but exuding great dignity (Katz 77).¹³

Su vestido era una saya y corpiños de paño verde, con unos ribetes del mismo paño. Los corpiños eran bajos, pero la camisa alta, plegado el cuello, con un cabezón labrado de seda negra, puesta una gargantilla de estrellas de azabache sobre un pedazo de una colona de alabastro, que no era menos blanca su garganta; ceñida con un cordón de San Francisco, y de una cinta pendiente, al lado derecho, un gran manajo de llaves. No traía chinelas, sino zapatos de dos suelas, colorados, con unas calzas que no se le parecían sino cuanto por un perfil mostraban también ser coloradas. Traía tranzados los cabellos con unas cintas blancas de hiladillo; pero tan largo el tranzado, que por las espaldas le pasaba de la cintura; el color salía de castaño y tocaba en rubio; pero, al parecer, tan limpio, tan igual y tan peinado, que ninguno, aunque fuera de hebras de oro, se le pudiera comparar. Pendíanle de las orejas dos calabacillas de vidrio que parecían perlas; los mismos cabellos le servían de garbín y de tocas. (155–56)

Every element used to describe Costanza's appearance compares her to the archetype of the perfect woman, as epitomized by artistic images of the Virgin Mary. The emphasis on her humble but unsullied, green attire represents hope for the regeneration of the soul; and her fair skin and her extremely long and light hair symbolize her incorruptible virginity, chastity, and youth (Apostolos-Cappadona 158). Moreover, "the set of keys that Costanza has attached to her body are a reminder of her mother and her role as *mediatrix*. Just as Mary is the Queen of Heaven in the book of Revelation, she "holds the key to eternal

¹³ Joly ("Para una reinterpretación" 115) observes that Costanza does not resemble the expected image of a kitchen maid, for she is never seen wearing an apron and instead of the usual *chinelas*, she wears double-soled shoes (*zapatos de dos suelas*).

life and can fling open the gates of paradise” (Warner 289). Finally, the cord of Saint Francis, which she wears around her waist, alludes to her temperance, and self restraint (Ferguson 283). It also reminds us of the Marian devotion to *La divina peregrina* established by the order of Saint Francis.



Figure 2. Zurbarán, *Young Virgin* (c. 1632–33). Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The portrait of Costanza as a chaste, beautiful, modest, and most importantly, physically enclosed young woman closely corresponds to the conventions of visual representations of Marian apocrypha—in particular from the *Protoevangelium Jacobi* (200s A.D.).¹⁴ Francisco Pacheco writes specific guidelines in *El arte de la*

¹⁴ The apocryphal writings on the Virgin’s early years were the result of the lack of biographical information on the Virgin in the scriptures and the longing for specific information of her childhood and education despite the continuous censure of theologians (Foskett 1–22).

pintura for the ideal depiction of the Virgin Mary: “Hase de pintar, pues, en este aseadísimo misterio esta Señora en la flor de su edad, de doce a trece años, hermosísima niña, lindos y graves ojos, nariz y boca perfectísima y rosadas maxillas, los bellísimos cabellos tendidos, de color de oro” (210). Zurbarán illustrates these widely accepted principles in his *Young Virgin* (Figure 2). Drawing inspiration from these non-canonical but influential legends, artists in from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries were particularly interested in depicting the Virgin as an adolescent girl, sometimes accompanied by angels, usually either reading, praying, spinning or embroidering—activities that visually transmitted the key elements of Mary’s character: youth and purity (see Katz 43).

In *Young Virgin*, one sees a Costanza-like young woman seated on the floor, in a moment of prayer as she rests from her needle work. Her eyes roll upwards as if she were gazing upon the mysteries of heaven, her mouth sealed in submission, calmly waiting for her destiny. The lilies and roses, once again, emphasize her unmatched purity and virginity. There is a book on her right, which suggests that when not praying or embroidering, the young Virgin will engage with a meditation on the scriptures.¹⁵

Jonathan Brown points out that Zurbarán converted an otherwise pictorial narrative of the childhood of the Virgin into a devotional picture with marked theatrical overtones:

The pink curtains that hang in the corners are obvious clues to the alteration in intent. Somewhat less conspicuous is the ledge that is formed by the dark area running along the lower edge of the canvas. Although it may at first appear to be a shadow, there is no object in the picture that could produce one of such a width and length. Hence it must be interpreted as a forestage. The introduction of these two elements changes the picture from an illustration into a theatrical tab-

¹⁵ It was widely believed that the Virgin knew how to read, and scenes of the Annunciation often showed Mary with a book, either reading it or in deep meditation upon her reading, to indicate the fulfillment of sacred prophecies as it could be observed in another of Zurbarán’s Marys, “The Virgin as a Child, Sleeping” (ca. 1625–1630).

leau, and this helps to explain the studied appearance of the still-life objects to a high degree of finish [sic], and placed them with a deliberateness that appears to elevate them from the mundane to the divine." (Brown 76)

Just as the detailing and positioning of the objects in Zurbarán cannot hide their theatricality, it is Costanza's extraordinary physical appearance and demeanor, in contrast to her prosaic surroundings, that reveals her symbolic nature. As in the depiction of Zurbarán's Virgin, Costanza spends most of her time making lace or praying ("no hay mayor ramera en Toledo" [189]; "es una tragaavemarias; labrando está todo el día y rezando" [192]). The Innkeeper also underscores Costanza's ability not only to read, but also to write. We might wonder how Costanza learned these skills, since it appears unlikely that she would have any opportunity to become literate. However, in the context of Costanza's iconographic role, which demands an added suspension of disbelief from readers, the question is rendered irrelevant. Analogous to Zurbarán's need for placing a book near his young Mary, the construction of Costanza's image could not be complete without the inclusion of a sacred book on her side, which she would read when not praying or doing needlework.¹⁶

Costanza's iconographic descriptions are a reminder of Zurbarán's representations of Mary as a passive, silent, and enclosed Virgin. Behavior book writers, such as Luis Vives and Fray Luis de León, suggested that an honorable woman learn from these iconic representations of the Virgin. If she followed the

¹⁶ This depiction is representative of humanist beliefs that growing women had to avoid idleness in order to prevent their weak minds from evil by engaging themselves in two main domestic activities in order to be: reading (although limited to "safe" genres, such as hagiography, book of hours, and the like) and needlework. Vives declares about the education of the Christian woman: "she will learn, together with reading, how to work with wool and flax, two arts passed on to posterity from that former age of innocence, of great usefulness in domestic affairs and contributing to frugality, which should be a matter of prime concern for women" (58) "Reading is the best occupation and I counsel it first of all, but when she is tired of reading, I cannot bear seeing her idle" (59). Vives is particularly weary of idleness, for he believes that it puts the young woman in danger of evil doing.

models of the Mary and other virgin/widow saints, she was invariably going to live a moral and untroubled life.¹⁷ Ironically, in “La ilustre fregona,” it is the disclosure of the identity of the supposed “the perfect maiden”—Costanza—through the narrative of her mother *La Señora Peregrina*—“the perfect widow”—that exposes the deficiencies of such models. Despite her mother’s virtuous living, despite the fact that she removes herself from the world to live in isolation as it was socially expected of widows, she is raped and left with a child. What models should she follow? There are rare cases in hagiographies in which saints are raped, and there is not a single case in which they have to deal with pregnancy. The silence about cases of rape in sermons and stories approved by the Church suggests that rape is a shameful subject that is better ignored. It reinforces the idea that chastity in a woman is inextricably located in her physical body. What *Cer ilustre fregona*,” is to appropriate the hagiographical genre and secularize it in a way that it includes a new saintly model, one that is closer to the experiences of real women. In this secularized hagiography, the heroine is empowered by her chastity, like her sisters in the traditional form, but hers not a chastity that can be physically infiltrated; hers is a chastity of spirit and of mind. Instead of waiting silently and passively for a miracle, she uses her faith and also her intellect as a means to find a resolution to what it would look like an impossible conundrum to solve. *La Señora Peregrina* is, without doubt, one of the *Novelas ejemplares*’ most powerful and innovative heroines.

The character of Costanza has been often singled out for differing from other heroines of the *Novelas ejemplares*. Passive and excessively conformist in her portrayal, she has been perceived in recent studies, as one of the most simple and uninteresting Cervantine characters. Nonetheless, careful examination of her visual representation and role in the *novela*, reveals that she is not

¹⁷ Fray Luis’s “perfecta casada” has nothing to fear, “porque sabida es que, cuando la mujer asiste a su oficio...en su casa reina y respandece, y convierte a sí juntamente los ojos y los corazones de todos. El descanso y la seguridad la acompaña adondequiera que endereza sus pasos, y a cualquiera parte que mira encuentra con la alegría y con el gozo” (16). For Vives’ treatment of chaste martyrs and saints, see the tenth chapter of Book One (120–24).

its heroine. Instead, she embodies the symbolic figure of the “real” heroine of the story, *La Señora Peregrina*. If the story is re-centered around *La Señora Peregrina* as its heroine, it becomes apparent that Costanza’s inactivity coincides with her metonymic role.

When visualizing the image of Costanza as a beautiful altarpiece that enfoldes the hagiographical narrative of her mother, one may be reminded of the images of the *Virgenes abrideras* (opening Madonnas) of Gothic pre-modern style. These rare examples of ivory are very much like many other statuettes of the Madonna, but are special in that they can be opened, like the



Figure 3. *Virxe Abrideira* of Allariz (closed).



Figure 4. *Virxe Abrideira* of Allariz (open).

wings of a triptych, to reveal a miniature retablo inside. According to Manuel Trens, the best-preserved statuette of this sort is *The Virxe of Allariz* (Galicia), shown above (502).¹⁸ When the statuette is closed, the hinged sculpture represents the Virgin holding the Christ Child. If we look towards her feet, we notice that she is stepping on the infernal dragon, the Christian symbol of evil. The Virgin, as a second Eve, triumphs over the forces that caused the original fall of men. The image also illustrates the power inherent

¹⁸ The images are taken from a postcard purchased at the Museo de Arte Sacra in the Monasterio de Santa Clara (Allariz, Ourense).

in the fertile physical body of the *Theotokos* and the heterodox view that without the paramount role of the Virgin, the mysteries of Christian salvation could not have taken place (see Warner, Illustration 6). Once the wings unfold, the story of the life of the Virgin is revealed (“seven joys of the Our Lady”).

Likewise, before the mystery of her origin is disclosed, the character of Costanza represents a kind of “closed” altarpiece, a purely symbolic figure in a state of enchantment. At the time of *anagnorisis*, however, the altarpiece is finally “opened” and Costanza is revealed, disenchanting, and humanized. It is at this time that, through the secularized hagiographical narrative of *La Señora Peregrina*, this tale of fall, repentance, and restitution comes to completion.

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