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Rewriting Womanhood

LaGreca, Nancy

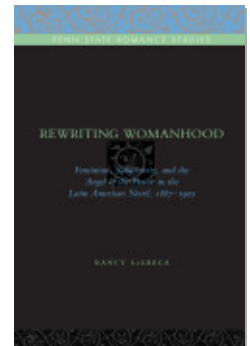
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NEW MODELS FOR NEW WOMEN:
 RETHINKING CINDERELLA'S VIRTUES AND HUMANIZING
 THE STEPMOTHER IN MERCEDES CABELLO DE
 CARBONERA'S *BLANCA SOL*

Del infantil grupo se levanta leve
 Argentada y pura una vocecilla
 que comienza: "Entonces se fueron al baile
 y dejaron sola a Cenicientilla.

Se quedó la pobre triste en la cocina,
 de llanto, de penas nublados los ojos,
 mirando los juegos extraños que hacían
 en las sombras negras los carbones rojos.

Pero vino el hada, que era su madrina,
 le trajo un vestido de encaje y crespones,
 le hizo un coche de oro de una calabaza,
 convirtió en caballos unos seis ratones,

.
 ¡Cuentos que nacisteis en ignotos tiempos
 y que vais volando por entre lo oscuro,
 desde los potentes arios primitivos,
 hasta las enclenques razas del futuro!

[From the group of children softly rises
 the clear and pure voice
 that begins: "Then they went to the ball
 and they left Cinderella alone

the poor thing was left behind in the kitchen,
 her eyes, clouded with tears and sorrow,
 gazed upon the strange play
 of the red coals in the dark shadows

But then came the fairy, her godmother,
 who brought her a dress of lace and crepe,
 she made her a coach of gold from a pumpkin,
 she turned six mice into horses,

.
 Oh, Stories, born in times past
 and carried through the dark of ages

from the powerful and primitive Aryans
to the debilitated races of the future!]

—José Asunción Silva, “Crepúsculo”

The epigraph is a fragment of a poem from 1895 by the well-known Colombian *modernista* writer José Asunción Silva (1865–1896) that depicts a group of fascinated children listening to a musical voice telling the time-honored tale of the unfortunate Cinderella, whose unparalleled self-sacrifice and virtue attract the love of a prince who transforms her existence from a dreary inferno into dreamy happiness.¹ At the turn of the century, when psychoanalysis opened up the subconscious mind to intellectuals and artists, writers such as Silva—and Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera—became aware of the profound influence of fairy tales. Foreshadowing twentieth-century studies on the psychological and social impact of fairy tales, Silva explains in “Crepúsculo” that these fanciful legends are “más durables que las convicciones [*sic*] de graves filósofos y sabias escuelas” (40) [longer lasting than the convictions of serious philosophers and wise schools of thought]. Rich in imagery, these magical stories delve deeply into the human psyche and therefore provide ideal material for rewriting social fictions of female subjectivity.

The Cinderella fairy tale embedded in *Blanca Sol*, the story of the courtship and marriage of two secondary characters, is a patch of the symbolic social fabric that Cabello reconfigures, but which has been overlooked by critics to date.² Cabello rewrites womanhood by taking pieces of social signifiers, such as gender stereotypes, and recoding them in ways that critique and undermine tenets of the Angel of the House.

Cultural Myths and Social Critique

Possibly a reaction against women’s auxiliary roles in the struggle for independence, representations of bourgeois women in the early republic placed them

1. *Modernismo*, a nascent literary movement in the 1880s, was known for its sensual and piquant subject matter and its exquisitely wrought language. Silva’s interest in the Cinderella fairy tale fits the basic ideas associated with Latin American *modernismo* because it provides a perfect opportunity to indulge a love of escapist and fantastical settings.

2. *Blanca Sol* has received more critical attention in the past twenty years than have the novels of Barragán and Roqué. Many scholars debate Cabello’s use of Naturalism (see the overview of criticism on Cabello’s Naturalism in Chapter 3), while others consider the role of gossip, Cabello’s early feminism, and the role of beneficent activities in the novel. In addition to the critical works in Chapter 3 and in note 12 of that chapter, one can find articles on Cabello’s essays and other novels

squarely back in the home and couched narratives about women in terms of how serviceable they could be to the men and children in their lives. Although small groups of pioneering women worked toward reforms, women's education was viewed as impractical, and single women's professional options were few and their work poorly remunerated. In short, Cinderella provided a tempting fantasy for women in desolate conditions who were encouraged to believe that, if they were sufficiently virtuous and dutiful, their fortune might change through an introduction to a man who would save them.³

Cabello, like other well-educated women of her day, was a firm advocate for improvements in women's academic formation. She passionately lobbied for women to be educated beyond the basic reading and writing skills and cursory knowledge in the humanities, as evidenced by her use of Positivist discourse to support women's access to higher education in her 1874 essay "Influencia de la mujer en la civilización," as I discuss in Chapter 3. In *Blanca Sol* we find that her interest in reforming notions of womanhood includes expanding restrictive definitions of femininity to accommodate a more human and less ethereal standard for her sex. This broadening of the definition of womanhood acknowledges women's desires and needs and portrays those needs as human, healthy impulses, rather than as evidence of an egotism that endangered the sanctity of domestic life.

Perhaps Cabello learned from history how preexisting images in the myths and symbolic beliefs of a culture or nation can be manipulated by a dominant class to achieve some social, political, or religious goal within that culture. For instance, the Spaniards colonizing the New World in the sixteenth century took advantage of the presence of cults of female deities, such as the Andean fertility goddess Pachamama, and replaced them

as well as on her participation in the *veladas literarias* of Gorriti (see the Introduction in this study for more information). John Miller's 1977 article is an early attempt to place two Peruvian women writers into their national literary history. Miller reads the novels of Matto and Cabello as literary discourses in dialogue with the social problems of corruption, clerical abuse, racism, and poor education after the War of the Pacific. Masiello's 1996 study of turn-of-the-century melodrama includes a short analysis of *Blanca Sol* in the critic's discussion of gossip and the press. Masiello observes how Cabello links gossip with the deformation of reality to question the process of the cataloging of knowledge (277). Ana Peluffo's studies from the early 2000s add new angles to the body of criticism on Cabello. In "Bajo las alas del ángel" (2004) she examines women characters' beneficent activities as a means to take on a position of power outside the home in a society that otherwise did not allow its women to lead public lives. Peluffo points out that the opportunities for participation in public life that charitable activities offered are exploited and satirized in *Blanca Sol*.

3. The Cinderella fantasy persists today, not only in new animated versions of the tale, but also in the form of soap operas such as the internationally popular 1986 Venezuelan telenovela *Cristal* and its 1998 Mexican remake, *El privilegio de amar*.

with a cult of the Virgin Mary, thus facilitating the spread of Christianity. Sometimes this displacement occurred unwittingly, as when the Aztecs associated the arrival of Hernán Cortés from the West with the return of the bearded Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl. As another particularly relevant example, the biblical story of Eve the temptress (a female figure analogous to the chaos-inducing Pandora of Greek mythology), has been read as a justification for confining women to domestic spaces and keeping them out of positions of power.⁴ In each of these examples the power of widely consumed and accepted stories facilitated the imposition of a new cultural order.⁵ In *Blanca Sol*, Cabello takes advantage of the power of the Cinderella fairy tale to blur the neatly constructed lines between “virtue” and “evil,” thereby rewriting the standards of morality and legitimacy for women of her era.

The most famous version of Cinderella, the one reflected in Cabello’s *Blanca Sol*, was published by the French writer Charles Perrault (1628–1703) in 1697 and was extremely popular in Spain by 1810. (This is the story of Cinderella “much concerned with social detail” that Walt Disney has made famous worldwide [Tosi 2001, 94].) A Spanish translation of the opera *Cendrillon* (*La Cenicienta* [Cinderella]) by the French composer Nicholas Isouard (1774–1818) and the dramatist Charles-Guillaume Étienne (1778–1845) was staged fifty times in Madrid between 1810 and 1818, making the production one of the two most frequently performed musicals of this eight-year period of the nineteenth century (Lorenz 1941, 380). Folklore specialists have found early Spanish versions of the Cinderella story in Spain, Chile, the Philippines (Gardner and Newell 1906, 273), and Puerto Rico (Boggs 1929; Espinosa and Mason 1925), while the existence of Silva’s “Crepúsculo” indicates that it was known in turn-of-the-century Colombia. Cabello was probably familiar with these versions. Her principal biographer, Ismael Pinto Vargas, confirms that children of prominent families from Cabello’s hometown of Moquegua, including several of the writer’s relatives (2003, 64–74), often traveled to Europe to be educated. Cabello herself spent formative years of her life in the bustling cosmopolitan city of Lima. There can be little doubt that well-to-do Peruvians such as Cabello, with their exposure to European literature, were familiar with Perrault’s version of Cinderella.

4. See the feminist studies on the biblical myth of Eve by Elizabeth Menon (2006) and Manelon Sprengnether (1989).

5. Many prominent scholars of fairy tales, including Jack Zipes (1987), Bruce Bettelheim (1976), and Maria Tatar (1987), have convincingly shown that fairy tales are cultural myths that ensure that certain values are ingrained in the social consciousness.

In Cabello's own version, rather than eliding the circumstances under which the "evil" and "virtuous" characters came to be immoral (in the case of the stepmother character) or poverty stricken (in the case of the Cinderella character), Cabello consciously traces these outcomes to specific causes in the social structure and through the character development of the social-climbing protagonist Blanca and her alter ego, the humble seamstress Josefina (two superficially opposite, yet inextricably linked, characters), Cabello critiques the harmful fantasies instilled in young girls that derail their transition to self-reliant adulthood. She places blame squarely on the social and political systems of mid-1800s Lima for providing a paltry education and few economic options for single women and widows. Unlike the Cinderella fairy tale, the narrative Cabello offers emphasizes the limited educational infrastructure of nineteenth-century Lima that produces girl-women who are forced to rely on a paternal figure and their attractiveness to the opposite sex for survival. Cabello dismantles the tenets of the Angel of the House, a model mirrored in the virtues of the humble, self-sacrificing Cinderella, to write female characters who have agency and voice, but who run into the aforementioned roadblocks to self-realization because of their environments.⁶

Elements of the Cinderella Fairy Tale in *Blanca Sol*

Blanca Sol was one of the first best sellers of the nineteenth century in Peru, given its three editions in the short span of 1889, 1890, and 1894 (Peluffo 2002, 39).⁷ In keeping with the author's opening statement about her philosophy of narrative (that it should include a mixture of Romanticism, Realism, and Naturalism), the story opens with a discussion of the protagonist and title character's childhood to give the reader an idea of her upbringing and environment. The narrator makes it clear that Blanca Sol is a young woman who is naturally gifted in intelligence and charisma, but whose faulty upbringing leads her astray. Blanca's mother is a society

6. Marcia Lieberman has noted that tales such as Cinderella present a picture of sexual roles, behavior, and psychology, in such a way that good temperament, meekness, and beauty are rewarded, while ill temper and ugliness are punished. Intelligence for women simply does not play a part in the Cinderella economy (Lieberman 1987, 187–89).

7. Peluffo notes the competitiveness that Cabello's sales figures likely inspired on the part of her male contemporaries in Peru such as Ricardo Palma and Manuel González Prada, as well as Pedro Paz Soldán (penname Juan de Arona), who mocked Cabello and Clorinda Matto de Turner with scatological and dehumanizing nicknames (Peluffo 2002, 39).

woman who has lost her fortune but is skilled at using credit and her good taste to present the appearance of opulence. Although naturally bright, Blanca attends a school where such superficial qualities as wealth, beauty, and social status are valued and cultivated, while intelligence and diligence go unrewarded. She falls in love with an attractive and well-born young man but she does not marry him, because he lacks an adequate fortune. Instead, Blanca's mother and others of her social class convince her to marry the unattractive and dull—but fabulously wealthy—Don Serafín Rubio. The optimistic Blanca compares her Serafín to a shrimp: he is pink and ugly but *rico* (which in Spanish means both “wealthy” and “tasty”).

Blanca marries Serafín (who pays off her mother's exorbitant debts) and the young woman becomes a high-society personage. She is content to be admired and envied by women and pursued by men of elevated social positions, whom she universally disdains. She endures the duties of married life and produces several children over the course of her marriage.

Although society has taught Blanca to be selfish and materialistic, her underlying compassionate nature shines through at times. One day, her heart is softened at the sight of a poor orphaned seamstress named Josefina who is struggling to support her grandmother and siblings. Blanca takes Josefina under her protection and provides for the orphaned young woman's siblings and grandmother in exchange for the flowers the seamstress sews for Blanca's social and beneficent events. When Blanca's attractive and successful suitor Alcides Lescanti (with whom she has an extramarital flirtation but nothing more) falls in love with the humble and virtuous Josefina, Blanca suddenly becomes aware of her feelings for him. This epiphany comes too late. Scorned once too often by the capricious Blanca, Alcides rejects the coquette in favor of the simple seamstress. Blanca is devastated by Alcides's rejection. Moreover, she discovers that her extravagant whims have consumed Don Serafín's fortune and they are financially ruined.⁸ To make matters worse, Alcides purchases all of Blanca's debts so that she is not only

8. The commonplace of the vain lover or wife who financially ruins the man in her life because of her expensive tastes in clothing and other luxuries is prevalent in novels of the era. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857)—with which *Blanca Sol* has been compared—Zola's *Nana* (1880), and the Spanish writer Benito Pérez Galdós's *La de Bringas* (1884) are three examples featuring this sort of woman. A lesser-known example of this story line is revealed through the protagonist Rosario in the Puerto Rican writer Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo's novel *La muñeca* (1895). As the analysis in this chapter demonstrates, Cabello's early feminist novel is far more sympathetic toward the lead character than the three novels noted above, as Blanca's faults are clearly linked to the poor examples and weak education provided by Lima society.

rejected by her beloved, but also financially indebted to him. Don Serafin loses his mind and is committed to an asylum. Bitter and enraged at her poverty and left to support her six children alone, Blanca turns her home into a brothel for the wealthy men of Lima as her last means of survival. Her voice echoes in the last lines of the text, swearing to corrupt in turn the society responsible for her misery. Blanca's tremendous potential is short-changed by her upbringing, and when her own socially scripted fairy tale dissolves into the grim social realities of patriarchal Peruvian society, the greatness of her being is reduced to her sexual allure.

Blanca's fate highlights society's moral double standards and hypocrisy, while Josefina is similarly shown to be a normal woman (morally flawed, and not always angelic) who seeks survival, as her lack of education and vocational skills impede full self-sufficiency. The Josefina subplot is a tricky, subtle one to read, as Cabello simultaneously presents Josefina's good fortune as an unrealistic tale (Peluffo [2002] points out the noticeable Romantic tone used in the narration of the subplot, whereas Naturalism and Realism prevail in the sections focusing on Blanca), and also slips in hints that *no one* is *completely* virtuous . . . not even Josefina. Josefina's superficial virtue represents the mainstream ideal of domestic perfection, that is, that of the Angel of the House—one that Cabello masterfully and subtly disassembles.

The embedded Cinderella subplot, therefore, is that of the rise of Josefina from a poverty-stricken waif to one of the wealthiest women in Lima through her marriage to the Italian magnate Alcides.⁹ While critics have not explored the Cinderella allusions, the scholar of nineteenth-century women's writing Ana Peluffo hints at the parallel when she describes Josefina's social ascent as one in which the destitute young woman "emerge de la cenizas," (2002, 45) [rises from the ashes], while the critic Lucía Guerra compares Josefina to Cinderella in passing (1987a, 38). The general reading of the Josefina-Alcides subplot is that it offers up to the reader, in didactic fashion, an example of woman's ideal virtue. I propose that there is significant early feminist depth to this subplot: Cabello employs allusions to the Cinderella tale in order to deconstruct the ideal of the Angel of the House.

9. The fictional character of Lescanti represents a real wave of immigration of Italians to Lima in the 1840s. Giovanni Bonfiglio (1994) has studied Italian immigration in Lima in depth, finding that it was spontaneous and that many Italians came from the city of Liguria and were merchants and sailors. They came during the Guano Age in the mid-1800s to amass fortunes and return home to Italy, but many remained to make up an influential economic and cultural segment of Lima society.

The parallels between the Alcides-Josefina story and Cinderella are fairly clear: the indigent and modest Josefina is Cinderella; Blanca embodies the would-be villain from the privileged class, a stepmother figure; and Alcides is the handsome Prince Charming who saves Josefina-Cinderella through marriage and permits an unrealistically steep ascension up the social ladder for the beautiful and “morally perfect” girl.

Apart from this central structure, there are several details that provide clues to decipher the allusion. Cinderella and Josefina are both fallen aristocrats; because of unfortunate circumstances, they must work for others for meager compensation. In both stories the Cinderella figure runs away from the prince, and he must undertake a tedious search for her (in Alcides’ case, he does not know Josefina’s new address when she flees from Blanca’s home). In Cabello’s novel, Alcides himself searches for his love, but he also hires spies to help him (136), just as the prince has his footmen help in the search for Cinderella.¹⁰ In both the fairy tale and the novel, the Cinderella character is destined to prevail because of her virtue. The narrator specifies the expectation that the Romanticized ideal of virtue win when she reveals Josefina’s grandmother’s thoughts on Josefina’s union with Alcides: “No le causaba á ella novedad, pues bien segura estaba de que, la virtud de su nieta, había de recibir el justo premio, que Dios depara á los buenos” (147) [“It was not a surprise to her, because she was sure that her granddaughter’s virtue had to receive the just reward that God provides to good people”]. Complementing the importance of moral decency is the insignificance of luxurious attire to winning the prince: Blanca, like the Cinderella stepmother and the stepsisters, is finely dressed, while both Josefina and Cinderella are in ragged garb when finally rescued and embraced by their princes. Both Alcides and Prince Charming recognize their brides-to-be by an unparalleled extremity: for Cinderella it is the tiny foot that fits the slipper among a slew of large-footed hopefuls, and for Josefina it is the delicate white hand that clearly stands out in a racially mixed crowd (136–38).¹¹ Last, the ornate carriage from the Cinderella tale in which the royal couple departs is present in Cabello’s novel, carrying Alcides and his new bride in elegance (176). The overall structure and the supporting

10. All quotes are from the 1889 edition of *Blanca Sol*.

11. The significance of the white hand is an interesting topic whose analysis does not fit into this study. However, an in-depth look at the lower class’s comments about Josefina and Alcides is worthwhile for their equalizing value: the crowd’s message seems to be that white people are guilty of the same moral lapses of which they accuse other races.

details of the stories make the similarities strong enough to render the allusion recognizable.

A New Moral Code for a Progressive Era:
Debunking Ideal Virtue

In Cabello's literary-theoretical essay "La novela moderna" (1892), she passes judgment about traditional notions of morality:

En el orden moral, las ideas muertas pasan a servir de base a otras escuelas y a otros principios. . . . Los que se llaman conservadores no son más que insensatos que pretenden hacer vivir cadáveres. (63)

[In the category of morality, dead ideas pass on to serve as the basis for other schools and other principles. . . . Those who call themselves conservatives are nothing more than fools who attempt to revive cadavers.]

Although Cabello does not explicitly mention it, among the "dead ideas" in the category of morality she likely includes the suffocating moral standard of the Angel of the House. Enveloping her ideas in the progressive Positivist discourse of the new republic, she rhetorically equates restrictive moral policy with "dead ideas"—to be read as backward-looking ideas from the colonial era under imperial Spain.

We find a similar disdain for close-minded morality as it regards the idealized notions of women's virtue in Cabello's rewriting of the Cinderella story. While the fairy tale centers on Cinderella, Cabello is far more interested in the stepmother figure, Blanca Sol. Josefina is not the protagonist but rather a secondary character who is not fully developed, an alter ego of Blanca herself:

Blanca halló en Josefina un nuevo motivo de simpatía: pareciale estar mirando en un espejo tal era el parecido que notó entre ella y la joven florista, pero enflaquecida, pálida y casi demacrada, Josefina era la representación de las privaciones y la pobreza, Blanca la de la fortuna y la vida regalada. (89)

[Blanca found in Josefina a new motive for her affection: it seemed as if she were looking into a mirror, such was the similarity in appearance that she noted between her and the young florist. But Josefina, scrawny, pale, almost emaciated, was the representation of deprivation and poverty, while Blanca was that of fortune and the easy life.]

For Cabello, this subplot is a case study in patriarchal oppression, particularly concerning women's poor education and lack of preparation or opportunity in the workforce:

Josefina . . . pertenecía al número de esas desgraciadas familias [aristocráticas], que con harta frecuencia, vemos víctimas del cruel destino. . . . Entre los muchos adornos con que sus orgullosos padres, quisieron embellecer su educación, la enseñaron á trabajar flores de papel y de trapo, y á esta habilidad, poco productiva . . . recurrió Josefina en su pobreza. (88)

[Josefina . . . belonged to the number of unfortunate [aristocratic] families, that so often we see become victims of a cruel destiny. . . . Among the many adornments with which her proud parents tried to embellish her education, they taught her to make flowers out of paper and cloth, and it was on this ability, so poorly remunerated . . . that Josefina had to rely in her poverty.]

Josefina's paltry earnings must support herself, her grandmother Alva, and her two younger siblings. She exhibits "la virtud y trabajo de la mujer" (89) [virtue and work of woman], yet even the best Angel of the House cannot better her conditions without a living wage, to use a fitting anachronism.

Cabello's rewriting shifts the focus onto the "villainous" Blanca Sol by granting her the dominant voice in the narrative. Blanca Sol speaks approximately 257 times in the text—almost two and a half times more than any other single character.¹² She speaks more than seven times more than Josefina, the Romantically idealized woman. The narrative ascribes actions to Blanca as a subject who claims actions as systematic parts of her identity, as conscious desires leading to identified social agency. Despite the fact that Cabello is

12. I have counted both characters' thoughts and dialogue as speech.

careful to preserve proprieties by following up Blanca's overtly transgressive acts with punishments for her and others, these destructive outcomes can be explained by revisiting the primary Naturalist goal of the novel: to show how an insufficient education for naturally intelligent women ultimately leads to further corruption of the system and the people in it. Rather than judge Blanca to be an immoral person, the narrator blames her poor education and society's materialistic examples of womanhood. The skill that Blanca demonstrates in gaining power, albeit deleterious, is worth attention.

The protagonist's acquisition of the post of minister for her husband, a dull man with no experience, is arguably the most profound public gesture the character enacts. Blanca wishes to rid herself of something that irritates her substantially: "la pequeñez de su esposo" (35) [her husband's insignificance]. As the literary scholar Lucía Fox-Lockert and others have pointed out, Blanca and Don Serafín represent two social classes of the time: Blanca is part of the fallen aristocracy and Don Serafín is emblematic of the new bourgeoisie.¹³ Since Blanca holds an established family name and Don Serafín does not, she wishes to procure a title for both of them, so that her husband will not be a "*don nadie*" (35) [*Mr. Nobody*].

Blanca's desire for a title points to an insecurity inherent in the condition of being part of the newly wealthy class as defined at the time. Serafín's father was a lowly soldier who made his fortune as a merchant. Blanca wants some official designation in order to claim a place as near to the established elite class as possible. To achieve this goal, she uses her powerful influence as a well-connected socialite to cause several figures of the existing political structure to fall in order to procure the post of minister for Serafín. Blanca's resolve in this matter is unstoppable: "Blanca sin desistir un momento de su idea, prometióse á sí misma, que su esposo sería Ministro . . . con, ó sin su gusto (36) [Blanca, without abandoning her project for a moment, promised herself that her husband would be minister . . . whether he liked it or not]. Cabello's representation of Peru's political structure as a corrupt, fragile one is a theme that she repeats in *El conspirador*, as the literary critic Cristina Mathews points out (2005, 468). On a subversive level, this act of political manipulation proffers Blanca Sol as a female agent who would have great

13. Fox-Lockert cites an uneasiness and discontent with the economic situation in late nineteenth-century Lima. She explains these socioeconomic circumstances as follows: "While this [uneasiness] is only an opinion, it is confirmed by economical data of the period wherein land-owners lost out to foreign investments, business came to depend almost entirely on *guano* and social upheaval was caused by complicated governmental and political systems which sought to control dwindling urban resources" (1979, 149–50).

public potential if her desires were well guided. Since her actions reflect the public role models of Lima, she manages, instead, to indulge her desire for status and put an unintelligent, unprepared, and uninterested man in a position of power.

We can take two things from Blanca's social agency. The first is that women's mental and social aptitude and agency are not to be underestimated (indeed, one may argue that Blanca would make a far better public official than Serafin) and the second is that how women are educated not only is important on a domestic level, but also will affect the fortitude of the social system. Using a covert strategy to express her views by putting them into the words of a friend of Alcides', a representative for the upper-class male citizenry of Lima, Cabello intimates to the reader that "las mujeres pueden mucho cuando quieren" (59) [women are able to accomplish a great deal when they so wish]. His words, in the context of the story, sound like they could be an admonition of doom or a promise of hope—the interpretation seems to depend on what steps society takes to empower women with the education and opportunities to realize their potential.

Returning to the Cinderella fairy tale allusion, we see that Cabello deconstructs hegemonically prescribed ideals of virtue, as Blanca displays a much more intricate morality than that of the original stepmother.¹⁴ In her article on *Blanca Sol* Guerra explores the "desvíos no-disyuntivos de la virtud" (the nondisjunctive detours of virtue). She reads the complex representation of morality in the novel as a sign of disconnect between Romantic ideals of virtue and the difficulty of fulfilling them in a corrupt, materialistic society. In this complex system, Blanca Sol is "un signo oximorónico en el cual la confluencia simultánea de dos significados primarios pone en evidencia una tensión no resuelta" (an oxymoron-like sign in which the simultaneous confluence of two primary meanings points to an unresolved tension" 1987a, 41). While for Guerra this "unresolved tension" means that the coincidence of good and bad in Blanca does not have a specific purpose, but rather is a sign of "las contradicciones ideológicas de la autora" (41) [the ideological contradictions of the author]—possibly referring to Cabello's adherence to both Catholicism and Positivism—I read it as a conscious effort to muddy the waters of established gender-biased categories of morality.

14. Arambel-Aguiñazú (2004) points out the moral complexity of Blanca Sol's character, while other critics have portrayed this figure as a villain. Several critics read the lack of moral clarity of Blanca Sol's character as a manifestation of Cabello's ideological confusion or ambiguity (Guerra 1987a; Nagy-Zekmi 1999).

The Cinderella allusion in the novel helps to clarify how Cabello complicates traditional dichotomous categories of virtue and vice. While indisputably vain and superficial, Blanca never indulges in the harsh punishments that the stepmother administers to Cinderella. In fact, when Blanca sees the desperation of Josefina's living conditions, she employs her, lodges her, dresses her, and arranges accommodations for her grandmother and siblings:

Con su natural sensibilidad, Blanca habíase compadecido de Josefina y la dió su decidida protección.—Desde hoy—hábiale dicho—no trabajará U. sino para mí sola, y la abuela de U. recibirá una mesada con la cual podrá llenar las necesidades de los dos hermanos de U. (91)

[With her natural sensitivity, Blanca pitied Josefina and she gave her her resolute protection. "From today forward," she had told her, "you will only work for me, and your grandmother will receive a monthly allowance with which to support your two siblings."]

The narrator further specifies that Josefina regains her health and beauty, as she thrives under Blanca's protective care (91). Cabello's rewriting places Blanca on a much higher moral ground than that of the stepmother, and yet the protagonist is punished far more ruthlessly than the evil women in the fairy tale. While, in the most famous version of the tale, the stepmother is invited to the court of the newly married Cinderella, Blanca is humiliated and soiled by a cloud of dust from Alcides' and Josefina's stately carriage as she walks on the side of the road, descending later to a life of degradation (176).

Similarly, the rescripted Cinderella story offers a humanized Josefina in place of the idealized model as a means of diluting the long-suffering standard to one in which the Cinderella character is treated humanely, rather than abusively, by the stepmother; Josefina does not have to prove that she has suffered sufficiently in order to be rescued by the prince. Josefina, unlike Cinderella, is not materially disinterested; rather she is shrewd in recognizing that she must focus on making a favorable marriage to elevate her position. Before the Cinderella allusion is introduced, we have a subtle passage, cleverly slipped into a dialogue between anonymous characters, that voices the criticism of the angelic standard for contradictorily demanding that women be self-sacrificing and virtuous, while also putting disproportionate emphasis on social status and beauty for the establishment of their identity.

In the scene in question, two men are speculating over the immoral means by which a woman may have obtained her elegant gown: “Amigo mío, nosotros rendimos homenaje más que á las virtudes, al lujo de las mujeres, y luego queremos que no sacrifiquen la virtud para alcanzar el lujo” (48) [My friend, we praise women’s luxurious attire more than their virtue, and then we expect them not to sacrifice their virtue for luxury].¹⁵ It is an announcement of upcoming messages in the text that invite the reader to reevaluate the ideals of virtue in light of the social realities of 1870s Lima as they concern Blanca and Josefina.

Josefina’s perfectly human, yet imperfectly angelic, nature is apparent in certain moments when we glimpse the seamstress’s competitive side: “Josefina se sonrió pensando cuan súbitamente podría ese pobre y raído vestido, trocarse por el elegante y lujoso que llevaría, si por acaso llegaba el día, que ella fuera una gran señora, la señora de Lescanti” (148) [Josefina smiled thinking how soon she could exchange that poor, threadbare dress for the elegant and luxurious one she would wear, if by chance the day came, when she would be a great lady, the wife of Lescanti]. Her words show that she is thinking of her intended’s fortune and the prizes it will bring, voicing it in the same terms as Blanca had before marriage, with dreams of being a “gran señora.” Josefina even takes great pleasure in having won her mistress’s lover: “Nunca se había atrevido á considerarse superior á una gran señora, á la señora de Rubio; pero hoy sí, hoy que era amada y respetada imaginaba estar á incomensurable altura, más arriba aún que la señora de Rubio” (144) [Never had she dared consider herself superior to a great lady, to Señora de Rubio, but today she did, today, as she was loved and respected, she was imagining being at an unreachable

15. This quotation brings to mind famous *redondillas*, cited in Chapter 2 of this study, of the baroque poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Mexico 1648?–1695). In her verses that begin with “Hombres necios” (Foolish men) the poetic voice accuses men of placing blame on women for lapses that the men themselves provoke, from the patriarchal ideal of chastity:

Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,
sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis
(Cruz 2005, 109)

[Foolish men who accuse
women unjustly
not seeing that you are the reason
behind the sins for which you blame them]

height, even higher than Señora de Rubio]. Josefina is relatively virtuous because she works long hours to support her grandmother and siblings. However, the interested, envious emotions that the seamstress experiences offer a Naturalist–Realist view of human nature rather than the stepmother and Cinderella roles in which simplified images of good and evil are pitted against one another.

Cabello was aware of the concept and dangers of stereotyping, as she uses this exact term as a verb, *esteriotipar* in the novel (128). The narrator employs the term in defense of Don Serafín, whom Blanca seems to be stereotyping as the apathetic and weak husband.¹⁶ The term appears italicized to draw attention to it, probably because it was still new at the end of the nineteenth century. This use of *esteriotipar* draws attention to the negative consequences of making quick and superficial judgments and implies a reproach of society; the author stimulates new awareness of the concept that leads the reader to recognize that stereotyping women or men is oppressive.¹⁷ For example, when the narrator criticizes society's harsh judgments of men such as Don Serafín who do not prevent their wives from flirting, the narrator is quick to point out that women frequently suffer from this type of gender prejudice: "La sociedad que con tanta frecuencia es injusta para juzgar á la mujer, lo es también en un sólo caso para juzgar al hombre" (99) [Society, that is so frequently unjust when judging women, is also unjust in only one case when judging men]. Critiquing stereotyping is one way the author encourages society to broaden its definition of gender roles and to rewrite its symbolic order in new ways to accommodate a new republic striving toward modernity. Repeatedly, we

16. The exact phrase in the novel is "tiene el alma atravezada," which does not translate in current Spanish usage, but it appears to imply that Don Serafín was apathetic or did not care about Blanca (128). Regarding the term *stereotype*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), it was first used in 1804 to describe the means of reproducing a print.

17. Cabello had her own personal experience with being stereotyped because of her intelligence. Her unusual knowledge earned her praise as well as gender-biased scorn for being a writer and an intellectual. Such scorn was not uncommon:

La figura de la marisabidilla o "mujer que escribe" se convirtió en "diabólica" y también en sinónimo de "masculinización". La asociación que siempre se ha hecho entre "mujer fea" y "escritora", o "mujer masculina" y "escritora", la encontramos presente en todo momento. (Portugal 1987, 8)

[The figure of the (female) know-it-all or "woman who writes" turned into the "diabolical woman" and also into a synonym of "masculinization." The association that has been made between an "ugly woman" and a "woman author," or "masculine woman" and "woman writer," was prevalent at that time.]

see the narrator defending Blanca Sol and critiquing the social factors that affect her life:

A no haber poseído esa fuerza poderosa que da la hermosura, el donaire y la inteligencia, fuerzas suficientes para luchar con la saña envidiosa y la maledicencia cobarde, que de continuo la herian; Blanca hubiera caído desquiciada como una estatua para pasar oscurecida y triste al número de las que, con mano severa, la sociedad aleja de su seno. (8)

[Without having possessed that powerful strength that beauty, elegance, and intelligence provide to battle invidious rage and the cowardly slander that continually hurt her, Blanca would have fallen like a statue, to pass into the dark and sad number of those who, with a cruel hand, society banishes from its bosom.]

Knowing that Cabello was the object of name-calling for being a successful woman intellectual allows us to better appreciate the narrator's pronouncement of society's denigration of Blanca Sol.¹⁸ The author was addressing a contemporary problem for women in Peru (as well as in other Spanish American countries and beyond), one that she herself experienced: society's persecution of "powerful strength" in women. The characterization of Blanca Sol ought to be read as a biting criticism of bourgeois Lima—not

Cabello's biographer, Tamayo Vargas, gives further evidence of an ostracizing attitude toward the author when he writes that there was something masculine in her temperament, although she was considered physically attractive by her peers: "Presentaba en los momentos, que podríamos llamar de prueba, una actitud hostil, una altanera energía que respondía a cierta masculinidad de su temperamento, en contraste marcado con su afán de agradar y su apariencia femeninamente afable" (16) [She presented at times what we might call a hostile attitude, a lofty energy that responded to a certain masculinity in her temperament, in marked contrast with her desire to please and her femininely pleasant appearance]. This is a case when the symbolic order comes into conflict with itself; "masculine" is positive for a writer, unless that writer is female. Although it is true that a woman could sometimes be praised by saying that she thought like a man, a woman who took a step beyond this and published her work, it seems, could be deemed a bit too manly for a society in which women's primary role was domestic. The description of the author as having a "lofty energy" necessarily brings to mind the descriptions in the novel of Blanca Sol, who is called energetic, haughty, and proud throughout the work.

18. For an analysis of the persecution Cabello endured for being an early feminist intellectual and student of Positivism, see Arango-Ramos 1994, which also offers a feminist reading of Cabello's novel *El conspirador*.

only condemning women's poor and frivolous education, but also expressing discontent with the limited definition of the feminine to which women were expected to conform.

The narrator's final defense of Blanca Sol is an essential element of the early feminist strategy of the author. The idea that Blanca is undeserving of blame, and that society is at fault, is repeated five times in an emotional apology. I include it here so that the reader might get a sense of its full rhetorical effect:

¿Qué culpa tenía ella, si desde la infancia, desde el colegio enseñáronla á amar el dinero y á considerar el brillo del oro como el brillo máspreciado de su posición social? . . .

¿Qué culpa tenía de haberse casado con el hombre ridículo; pero codiciado por sus amigas, y llamado á salvar la angustiosa situación de su familia?

¿Qué culpa tenía si, siendo una joven casi pobre, la habían educado creándole necesidades, que la vanidad aguijoneada de continuo por el estímulo, consideraba como necesidades ineludibles, á las que era forzoso sacrificar, afectos y sentimientos generosos?

¿Qué culpa tenía, si en vez de enseñarla, la moral religiosa que corrige el carácter y modera las pasiones, sólo la enseñaron la oración inconsciente, el rezo automático y las prácticas externas de vanidosas, é impías manifestaciones?

¡La sociedad! Qué consideraciones merecía una sociedad, que ayer no más, cuando ella se presentaba como una gran cortesana . . . la adulaba . . . (181)

[How was she to blame, if from infancy, since grade school, they taught her to love money and to consider the brilliance of gold the brilliance most prized in her social position? . . .

How was she to blame, for having married a ridiculous man, but one coveted by her friends, and having been called upon to save her family's distressed situation?

How was she to blame, if, being an almost poverty-stricken young woman, they had educated her creating needs that her vanity, constantly incited by stimuli, considered unavoidable needs, and to fulfill them it was necessary to sacrifice affection and generous sentiments?

How was she to blame, if instead of teaching her religious morality that corrects the character and moderates passions, they only taught her to pray unaware of the meaning: prayer by rote and the superficial practices of vain and impious manifestations of religion?

How was she to blame if the life lesson learned in school was to view domestic virtues with scorn, and to view the extravagances of vanity with admiration and covetousness?

Society! What consideration did a society deserve that, only yesterday, when she was a great socialite, . . . adored her.]

The criticism of society here is a vindication of Blanca Sol, going a long way toward redeeming her in the eyes of the reader (a benefit that the stepmother in “Cinderella” never enjoys). However, it is worth noting that, despite the intensity achieved through reiteration, the narrator still cautiously works within the boundaries of what could be acceptably criticized by women so overtly; the passage blames society for faults in Blanca’s religious, domestic, and sentimental education. All three were areas in which women were generally considered to have more experience than men and were expected to take a moral high ground to defend the standards of preparation for young women. So, the use of rhetoric here allows the author to affix a traditional filter to the narrator’s words in order to avert negative criticism and, thus, enabling her to reprimand so harshly the patriarchal society that is the butt of her attack.¹⁹

19. Villavivencio points out Cabello’s and other women authors’ strategy of criticizing within accepted boundaries of domestic topics:

El discurso femenino fue tibio y se cuidó de no alterar lo que consideraba el fundamento biológico y social de la mujer. De allí que constantemente las escritoras, para defender su oficio, señalaran que sus actividades no se contradecían con sus responsabilidades de madres, hijas o esposas, las cuales reconocían como principales. (1992, 59)

[The feminine discourse was mild and it took care not to alter what was considered the biological and social foundation of woman. It was from this premise that women writers constantly pointed out, in order to defend their work, that their activities did not contradict their responsibilities as mothers, daughters, or wives, roles they recognized as fundamental.]

It should be noted, however, that despite Cabello’s effort to situate her commentary within the domestic and spiritual safe zones, she nonetheless suffered harsh personal insults as a result of speaking out.

Consequences: A Valorization of and Return to the (Step)Mother

Whereas the crux of the Cinderella fairy tale depends on a stark contrast and animosity between Stepmother-Stepsisters (physically ugly, morally evil and hurtful, materialistic and wealthy) and Cinderella (physically beautiful, benevolent, spiritual and poor), Cabello consistently tempts the reader to imagine an alliance between Josefina and Blanca Sol that suggests the makings of female solidarity—one, of course, that she does not fully deliver. First there is the strong resemblance between Blanca and Josefina, which hints not only at the similarity of their natures, but also at some sort of a symbolic blood bond between them.²⁰ Then, we witness Blanca's affection for and protection of Josefina, which is broken when she learns of Josefina's courtship with Alcides. Finally, a betrothed Josefina, after envying Blanca, discovers Blanca's faithfulness to her dull husband and appreciates her lofty and honorable character. When Josefina learns that high-society gossip has condemned Blanca as an immoral adulteress, when this was never the case, she sympathizes with her former protector: "Cómo es posible que sucedan tales absurdos y tan estupendas injusticias" (176) [How is it possible that such absurd and such stupendous injustices are allowed to happen]. Josefina's words recognize that Blanca was never at fault; she is, as her name in Spanish indicates, "white," connoting purity of body and soul. In this case, the woman in the role of the stepmother is actually not so evil after all, a radically different take on the traditional model of blaming or killing off the mother in fairy tales, an idea that is fleshed out in contemporary studies of children's fairy tales.²¹ Cabello, in the 1880s, a century before

20. Cabello's parallels between Josefina and Blanca could be read as a reconnection between mother and daughter figures. The scholar of fairy tales Maria Tatar has found that the Cinderella story and its many variants respond to the Electra fantasies of female children, in which the little girl's desires are projected onto the father, while her vilified mother is the rival for the father's affection (Tatar 1987, 150–53). In the traditional model the male-identified woman rejects the mother to align herself with the father—a gesture that twentieth-century women intellectuals, such as Kristeva and Irigaray, might read as a tremendous obstacle to women's ability to stake a claim for equality; for Kristeva it means a denial of *jouissance* (1974a, 156), while for Irigaray it marks the cyclical reproduction of patriarchy (1985, 41). Cabello's Cinderella subplot centralizes and vindicates the mother figure to create a symbolic bond of sympathy that radiates from Josefina toward Blanca. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Cabello's version readjusts the focus to the pre-Oedipal maternal body and its impulses, as the novel ends with the story of the fallen stepmother.

21. In her feminist analysis of fairy tales and pornography *Hating Women*, Andrea Dworkin notes that benevolent fairytale mothers are "soon dead. . . . When she is bad she lives, or when she lives she is bad. She has one real function, motherhood. . . . For a woman to be good, she must be dead [or asleep, as in the case of Sleeping Beauty and Snow White when the prince finds her in the glass

feminist critiques of *Cinderella*, was reevaluating the agency and power of the self-serving “witch,” and the unfairness with which she is treated—while inviting her reader to rethink for herself the motives and consequences of acting selfishly in a society that necessitates such action. Blanca is the nether-space fairy-tale woman. She is neither good nor evil, and she is certainly not dead, asleep, or passive (metaphorically or literally), as the feminist writer Andrea Dworkin finds in the case of traditional fairy-tale women. In regard to motherhood, ironically, the reader sees Blanca become a better mother to her children the further she falls into moral decline in the eyes of society. Blanca is never in any moment primarily mother, or wife, or daughter, but rather a human individual grappling with social forces, and she herself is a force that society must reckon with, as she embodies an unapologetic critique of Lima society’s superficiality and hypocrisy. While the traditional fairy-tale wicked woman is repulsive because she attempts to control others and get her way without exhibiting redeeming qualities, Blanca Sol is humanized and defended in her efforts to achieve material comforts and the power of her own volition in a world where these privileges are both highly valued and reserved for men. Like the twentieth- and twenty-first-century revisionist fairy tales written by Gregory Maguire, Jill McCorkle, and Robert Munsch, Cabello’s novel presents the reader with alternative myths of feminine being.²² It is a step toward a renewed valorization of a new type of fairy tale woman and mother, one who dominates the textual space with her words and actions, one who is permitted to have human flaws—and flaws that were learned from patriarchal society.

Conclusions

In *Blanca Sol* we are presented with an image of what a woman is capable of accomplishing through her mental aptitude and social skills. The novel

coffin], or as close to it as possible. Catatonia is the good woman’s most winning quality (Dworkin quoted in Bennett 2002, 7; comments in brackets are Bennett’s). Bennet discusses further the black-and-white nature of women’s moral categories as they are presented in fairy tales: “Unless women want to be the dead mother, only two options offer themselves: beautiful but passive princess or evil step-mother/witch. Good and bad, beautiful and ugly, loved and unloved. . . . Perhaps it would be best to evaluate the witch and see . . . that being a witch isn’t so bad. After all, she has the magic . . . and she has power” (11).

22. Indeed, the Cinderella myth is an obstacle to women’s psychological development of self and independence in our own era, as journalist and researcher Collette Dowling roundly proves in her 1981 study *The Cinderella Complex*.

presents a strong defense of a female protagonist who is brash and intelligent, and who independently steers her life and her affairs, as far as she is allowed within a symbolic system that confines women to playing the roles of dependent and subservient children when they are married, and underpaid social servants (such as primary schoolteachers or uneducated laborers) when they are single. By reminding readers of the moral complexity of the protagonist and even of Josefina, I hope to have disproved the notion that Cabello's characters in *Blanca Sol* are "feminine stereotypes," as some critics have claimed (Mazquiarán de Rodríguez 1990, 95), that they lack psychological complexity (Torres-Pou 1998, 248), or that "the whole novel is constructed upon essentialist categories (vanity/modesty, passions/moral nobility, materialism/religiosity, etc.);" (Voyses 1998, 199). The text invites the reader to consider the unjust punishment that befalls the woman who pushes the status quo set for her sex and who tries to surge beyond the unrealistic standard of the Angel of the House in order to forge her own unique identity.

Cabello's changes to the Cinderella fairy tale serve as a way of questioning what abnegation and selfishness, spirituality and worldliness, and reward and punishment mean as far as her female characters are concerned. Cabello's rewriting of the Cinderella story challenges the reader to question the legitimacy and viability of the image of the Angel of the House as a realistic ideal for women, through the portrayal not only of Blanca, but also of Josefina. The author is working to counteract the social myth that even a poverty-stricken (connoting disinterest in material things) woman can win all the socially prescribed prizes if she is an Angel of the House.

Cabello, of course, is not interested in purely virtuous and passive women, as her society defines them. She is interested in proactive, intelligent women. *Blanca Sol* revives the image of an active female agent who has power in the symbolic order, recalling the politically engaged women of the independence era six decades earlier. Cabello writes the novel at a time when women are just beginning to rediscover their voices after years of using their agency, only to serve others during the early postcolonial period, and she seems to be encouraging them to be brave enough to break free from the most limiting gender roles for women, so that they may use their potential to become a positive force in a society ready for progress.

The novel is effective as an argument for providing women with a solid education because it plays on a principal fear of the ruling class, the

argument being that Peru might decline to barbarism rather than rise toward civilization and progress.²³ The message from the novel is that educating the mothers of future leaders and citizens will prevent society from falling into the “barbaric” degradation that befell Blanca Sol. We are further invited to recognize that the hegemonic power structure will crush women’s potential, as well as its own, by neglecting to cultivate its precious resource.

The veiled early feminist message in the text is an appeal for the ruling class to broaden its definition of the feminine and give women opportunities for education and personal growth. It also communicates a threat and an exploitation of hegemonic fears in its suggestion that society as a whole can be negatively affected by encouraging superficial and material desires in women. Cabello formulates and packages her views on a new, revolutionary female subject as the key to entering the twentieth century in a state of preparedness to face the challenges of new nationhood. However, these are changes that would also improve the lives of women as individuals by allowing them to focus on cultivating their intelligence and pursuing their desires, rather than focusing on others (as the self-sacrificing Angel of the House) or expending energy to live up to superficial social norms.

23. The opposition of civilization and barbarism was wrought into Latin American bourgeois consciousness with the publication in 1845 of Sarmiento’s *Civilización i barbarie: La vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* (*Civilization and Barbarism: The Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga*) in 1845. Although this message is implied in the novel, Cabello expresses it clearly in her essay “Influencia de la mujer en la civilización” (Woman’s Influence in Civilization [1874]).