

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE *SERRANAS* IN THE *LIBRO DE BUEN AMOR*

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This autobiographic stance on the part of the narrator must, of course, be clarified since, as Peter Dunn reminds us, we are dealing here with a fiction and not autobiography in the true sense of the word.¹ Gonzalo Sobejano goes so far as to state that he does not see any psychological coherence in the autobiographic form of the work but rather that “se limita a servir de sostén a las funciones morales del sujeto: el hombre pecador” (“Consecuencia y diversidad”, 17). Carmelo Gariano classifies the *Libro* as an “autobiografía poética” but is very quick to point out that “la autobiografía poética no es menos real que la autobiografía concreta [...]; la presencia del yo se afirma como síntesis entre el dato externo y la intuición íntima” (“Autobiografía real o literaria”, 466). More recently John Dagenais expands on this concept distinguishing Juan Ruiz from his pseudo-autobiographical protagonist in terms of the medieval

view of the *auctor*. Dagenais reminds us that “textualization of the author in which we would stress an «authorial persona» or «lyric I» was viewed in quite a distinct manner by medieval readers” (*The Ethics of Reading*, 176). Laurence De Looze directly confronts the issue of Juan Ruiz’s text as pseudo-autobiography in his 1997 study, *Pseudo-Autobiography in the Fourteenth Century...* De Looze asserts that “The *Libro de buen amor* exploits many elements of the medieval pseudo-autobiography. It puts itself forward self-consciously as book of the self, capitalizing on the Augustinian tradition. The multiplicity of the author-narrator’s supposed experiences becomes a multiplicity of texts inserted into the work; the author’s erotic impulses become the pre-text for the inserted poems and for the construction of the work as a whole” (45).

The author-narrator of the *Libro* repeats the motif of the need to “test” all things in order to discern good and evil before he sets out for a series of misadventures in the mountains: “Provar todas las cosas, el Apóstol lo manda: / fui a porvar la sierra e fiz loca demanda” (vv. 950ab). Burke points out that the Biblical injunction to try all things is found in

¹ “The «personal fallacy» which for so long enveloped the *Libro de buen amor* like a fog, flattening the perspectives and creating strange shadows has, fortunately, dissipated itself. The autobiography of the Archpriest is seen for the fiction that it is, not as a scandalous exhibition by a wolf in priest’s cloth” (“De las figuras del arcipreste”, 79).

I Thessalonians 5.21 (“Omnia autem probate: quod bonus est tenete”).² While at first, it appears that the Archpriest emphasizes the first part of the verse while ignoring the injunction to choose on the good from one’s experience, Burke argues that the Biblical mandates reflects

the essential medieval conception of the world—a realm divided into orders of law and desire with the individual expected to be fully aware of and ready to experience both [...]. This biblical phrase, “omnia autem probate”, urges a kind of *mise-en-action* in regard to the relationship that the Middle Ages understood as existing between contraries [...]. Knowledge of the contrary would finally enhance one’s understanding of the other pole (*Desire Against the Law* 185-186).

Since, as we shall see, the narrator’s adventures in the *sierra* prove to be unpleasant, it follows that they illustrate the opposite of the type of experience to which the Christian should cling. In fact, Dagenais sees the grotesque descriptions of the girls the narrator encounters in the mountains and his erotic experiences with them as a kind of poetic foil which served to dissuade his audience “from a careless, enslaving and destructive earthly love” (“*Cantigas d’escarnho and serranillas*”, 259). Lawrence posits the Archpriest’s call to experience all things—**good and bad—within the scholastic framework with which both the author and his audience would have been familiar**: “Medieval logicians distinguished three types of argument: by authority, by reasoning, and by experience” (“The Audience”, 234). Lawrence asserts that the archpriest uses the word “provar” as stipulated by the Aristotelian axiom to “prove by experience”; “the experience [...] is advanced as a technical step in argument, not as a rhetorical simile or parodic smokescreen” (“The Audience”, 235). Thus, as part of the archpriest’s journey through the en-

tangled concepts of *buen amor* and *loco amor*, his encounters with the mountain girls will contribute to the “understanding” promised in his prologue.

In addition, the archpriest’s encounters with the *serranas*, or mountain girls, are among the most entertaining examples of our archpriest testing and trying all things in order to distinguish the good from the bad. These sections of the book are blatant and unabashed parodies of the *pastourelles* which presented fanciful visions of idyllic encounters with peasant girls. The satiric nature of these scenes has occasioned considerable critical attention and, while these studies are valuable, I, in part, agree with Steven Kirby, who observes that such studies “do not go very far toward answering [...] the relationship of this bizarre sequence to the *Libro de buen amor* as a whole” (“Juan Ruiz’s *Serranas*”, 151). While his use of the term “bizarre” certainly interjects a value judgment on these sections of the *Libro*, it does aptly reflect the struggles critics have had with relating them to the book as a whole.³ I will here briefly summarize major critical perspectives on the *serrana* narratives as well offer some ideas about what purposes the *serrana* narratives serve in the *Libro de buen amor* and how we can understand them as part of the book’s overall structure.⁴

³ Lawrence De Looze mentions the *serrana* episodes as on the gaps, in the Iserian sense, in the text (see “Text, Author, Reader, Reception”).

⁴ The cycle of sin and repentance in the *Libro de buen amor* was identified from the earliest critical analyses of the book. In his classic study over 40 years ago, “Medieval Laughter: The *Book of GoodLove*”, Otis Green masterfully traced the archpriest’s vacillation between sin and repentance as a structural component of the *Libro* in which bawdy tales of seduction are followed by serious and sincere religious verse and invocation to God and the Virgin. Green asserts that the Archpriest realizes that, in his book, he is encouraging, and indeed instructing, others in the ways of *loco amor* but, in the way of all repentant sinners and good Catholics, he knows that he will find his way back to God. I quote Green paraphrasing the words of the archpriest: “I do this in full awareness that I am engaging, and inviting you to

² “Experience everything: hold to that which is good”.

The four encounters with the mountain girls, or *serranas*, are, in fact four variations on a theme with each episode recounted in two distinct verse forms and meters.⁵ These episodes make up a rather extensive section of the book, comprising some 91 strophes (vv. 950-1041). Each meeting with a *serrana* is first narrated in four line strophes of 14 syllable monorhyming verses (the classic *cuaderna vía* of the *mester de clerecía*), and then in a song, each in a unique variation on the *zéjel*⁶ verse form.⁷ The

engage in a truancy. But by and by we shall return, and in all seriousness" (53). What I find particularly intriguing about the *serrana* episodes is that their "truancy" actually forms part of a journey of repentance.

⁵ De Looze points out that critics have traditionally tried to reconcile the two versions of the events—one narrative and one lyric—by claiming that the two versions pit realistic against courtly treatments. He feels however, that "this distinction fails to acknowledge that realism be understood to be certain literary procedures that stand in opposition to other conventions and/or to previous treatments, but are in and of themselves not necessarily any more real than other literary codes [...]. Juan Ruiz seems abundantly aware that realistic narrative and courtly lyric are conventional discourses that exaggerate in different directions" (*Pseudo-Autobiography*, 58).

⁶ Maxim Newmark defines the *zéjel* as "An Arabic-Spanish popular song verse from in which a theme verse (*matla*) or theme stanza is repeated and developed in subsequent stanzas. The *zéjel* ends with a repetition of the rhyme of the *matla*. The *zéjel* differs from the *muwassaha* in that the former is in popular whereas the latter is in classical Arabic. The *zéjel* is the prototype of the *villancico*, cultivated by Spanish court poets at the end of the Middle Ages" (*Dictionary*, 351). J. A. Cuddon adds that the *zéjel* "At its simplest form is four verses rhyming aab, ccbb. The b rhyme runs throughout" (*A Dictionary*, 1051).

⁷ For two conflicting interpretations of the relationship between the *cuaderna vía* and the song portions of the *serrana* episodes, see those of Ramón Menéndez Pidal and María Rosa Lida de Malkiel (quoted by R. B. Tate in "Adventures in the *Sierra*", 219): "La parte en cuaderna vía refiere con colores realistas y caricaturescos el encuentro de la serrana, y a continuación se repite al mismo encuentro en forma de canción, de tonos idealistas, en fuerte oposición con el relato precedente" (Menéndez Pidal), and "No veo [...] contraste entre el tono caricaturesco de la versión en cuaderna vía y el supuesto tono idealista de la versión zejelesca" (Lida de Malkiel).

first song consists of eight syllable lines in seven-line strophes with consonant rhyme ababccb; the second, in eight syllable verses arranged in strophes of nine lines, with consonant rhyme ababababc; the third song repeats the pattern of the first with a slight variation in the consonant rhyme which here is abababb; and the fourth consists of six syllable lines in strophes of five verses with consonant rhyme in aabbc. Recounting each episode twice in different poetic meters displays not only the author's talent as an accomplished poet but also conforms to one of the purposes for writing his book which he enumerated in the prologue; there Juan Ruiz states that his book can be used as a manual for learning to compose verses: "conpose lo [...] a dar a algunos lección e muestra de metrificar e rrimar e de trobar. Ca trobas e notas e rrimas e ditados e versos que fiz conplidamente, segund que esta çiençia rrequiere" (prologue, 110-111). Moreover, since each encounter with a mountain girl differs not only in meter but also in plot details, Juan Ruiz exhibits his ability to write not one, but four, distinct parodies on the women of the *pastourelle*.⁸ Deyermond identifies five distinct ways in which the *serrana* narratives parody the *pastourelle* in his article, "Some Aspects of Parody in the *Libro de buen amor*" (64-66). These are 1) the setting in the *Libro* is in winter not the spring months associated with the *pastourelle*; 2) woman is the pursuer, not the pursued; 3) especially in the case of the last of the *serranas*, Alda, the description offered by Juan Ruiz is a point-by-point antithesis of the portrait of the ideal lady (more on this point later in my discussion of Alda), 4) the traveler in the

⁸ The bibliography on the parodic and allegorical in the *serranas* episodes is vast. Kirby gives a summary of criticism in his footnote 1 (through 1986) to his article "Juan Ruiz's *Serranas*" (163-164). See especially for the parodic, Marino, *La serranilla española*. For more current critical trends on the *Libro*, see a summary in Dagenais's footnote 6 of *The Ethics of Reading* (220). Uriarte Rebaudi also gives a summary of research in her article "Andanzas por la Sierra".

Libro is more interested in food than sex; and 5) in the case of the second *serrana*, flattery has the opposite effect on her as that intended in the pastourelle (in fact, she reacts violently to the flattering and deals the protagonist a sound blow). Deyermond concludes that “With the Archpriest’s *serranas*, the reversal of roles is total, and extends even to the violence which Andreas Capellanus advises the nobleman to use should he unfortunately desire a peasant woman, and which is here used against the narrator by the *serrana* (64). De Looze further develops the parodic nature of the *serrana* episodes which is built on a myth “propagated during the preceding centuries; it follows a particular paradigm (encounter, love request, departure) and contains its own syntagmas [...]. Juan Ruiz demystifies the myth by showing how far the courtly register is from what supposed real life provides [...]. Juan Ruiz gets to be both bawdy and courtly (*Pseudo-Autobiography*, 59-60).”

Our narrator encounters the first *serrana* (who is also called a *vaqueriza* or cow-girl), when he becomes lost in the mountains during a terrible snow storm. She identifies herself as La Chata (or Pug-Nosed)⁹ and tells him that she guards this pass in the mountains and that he must pay her a toll in order to proceed. He promises her jewels (which he does not possess) if she will give him shelter. La Chata agrees to give him food and shelter in exchange for

⁹ Concerning the translation of La Chata’s name, Louise Vasvári contends that both the Chata and the name of the second *serrana*, Gadea, are related to the Santa Ágata who is the patron of fertility and lactation who, in turn, is a Christianization of *Lou Gat* (Santo Gato). Vasvári points out that during the festivals of Ágata in Spain women have license to attack men, strip them of their clothing, touch their sexual organs, and even throw honey on them (“Peregrinaciones por topografías pornográficas”, 1564). Burke also relates La Chata to the Feast of Santa Ágata and points out that “In Zamarramala, a village on a ridge overlooking Segovia, this feast is particularly significant since it is marked by a series of events in which roles are reversed and women «águas» take power for a period of week” (*Desire Against the Law*, 194).

the promised jewels and trinkets but threatens him with her staff if he should not do her bidding.¹⁰ She then hoists the exhausted traveler onto her shoulders and carries him off to her hut. In fact, she feeds him quite well (with rabbit, partridge, bread, wine, cheese, and milk) but then insists that “faremos la lucha” (v. 969g). Now warm and with his belly full, the archpriest finds himself inclined to cooperate and, even though she does physically overpower him, he takes pride in the fact that “fiz buen barato” (v. 971g). The poetic structure of the poem cleverly reinforces its content: in eight four line strophes of 14 syllables, the narrator, who La Chata identifies as an *escudero*, recounts how he becomes lost and his initial meeting with La Chata at the mountain pass she guards; then he slips easily into a song in shorter eight syllable lines in which he expands on his conversation with the cow-girl, gives a detailed description of her hut, its warm fire and the lavish meal to which he is treated, and finally his sexual romp with his “captor”. In the song, too, La Chata actually throws her shepherd’s crook as well as her sling. These objects serve to reinforce the role reversal here between the male “victim” and female aggressor since it is she who wields objects which clearly connote the male phallus and testicles.¹¹ Even though this *serrana* is certainly not physically attractive (the archpriest initially describes her as “gaha roín, heda” (v. 961b) nor dainty in size, she does save our weary traveler who apparently goes on his way with a full tummy and a warm glow. In analyzing this first of the four encounters with women in the mountains, R. B. Tate concludes that “The burlesque of the pas-

¹⁰ To comment on the phallic nature of the *serrana*’s staff hardly seems necessary. However, note that the narrator in his encounter with the second mountain woman, Gadea, is not only threatened by actually struck a might blow by the shepherdess’ staff.

¹¹ Burke points out that the *serrana* episodes are offer numerous allusions to piercing (penetrations) as well as castration. (*Desire Against the Law*, 183-184).

toral meeting is not exceptional, with its anima view of sexuality, but the specific point of the lyric is that despite inconvenience and forced submission, the protagonist gains at least as much as he loses in self respect" ("Adventures in the *Sierra*", 221). Estelle Irizarry goes so far as to say that "the Chata does seem acceptable enough for him [the narrator] to consider that the experience was worthwhile after all" ("Echoes of the Amazon Myth", 62). The plot of this narrative, as well as the four that of the four other encounters with mountain girls, are related, as Vasvári has shown, to the folklore tradition of the *cantares de caminantes* whose protagonist is the "peregrino errado asaltado por una pastora, serrana, u otra mujer agreste con características dominantes, y a menudo asociada con el agua fría o con el tiempo frío" ("Peregrinaciones por topografías", 1564).¹² While Vasvári elaborates on the erotic implications of the archpriest's description of his encounter with La Chata, Uriarte Rebaudi also relates the *serrana* episodes to the *canciones de caminantes* but limits her discussion to an identification of motives á la Stith Thompson to what she calls the "leyes folklóricas" which govern the narratives. Specifically she speaks of following: 1) "la elección de un camino peligroso para probar las propias fuerzas [...], 2) pasos en la montaña cerrados por arte de magia, 3) la mujer que toma al viandante por enamorado [...], [and] 4) el viajero que encuentra un espectro" ("Andanzas por la Sierra", 46-47). Kirby elaborates this last folkloric motif in his analysis of the *serranas* as examples of the wild man or women figure in medieval literature.¹³ He notes that "wild men and wild women

were enemies of polite, courtly society because of their inability to control their appetites, especially those relating to sex [...] [and] they possessed precisely those characteristics that were the opposite of those which the ideal man or ideal woman exhibited according to the conventions of medieval rhetorical portraiture" (157).

In the second encounter with a mountain girl, Juan Ruiz alludes to his previous adventure with La Chata. In this episode the archpriest begins his journey in Segovia but assures us that he has not gone there to buy the promised jewels for La Chata—a vow he never intended to keep. In keeping with the extended metaphor of these journeys in the mountains as part of pilgrimage, Burke analyzes both the archpriest destination, i.e. Segovia, which he sees a "not a proper object of true pilgrimage" as well as the time of year (March 3) on which he sets off on his journey. Since March 3 could fall within either Carnival or Lent, Burke sees the trip to Segovia as part of the archpriest's "attempt to achieve a private carnival for himself [...], another aspect of this enduring demand for personal license" (*Desire Against the Law*, 190-191).¹⁴ On his way home from Segovia, the archpriest tells us that he decides to take a

¹² Vasvári gives numerous examples of *cantares de caminante* in which the sex act is invariably part of the bargain.

¹³ In his analysis, however, Kirby points out the difficulty in folkloric analyses in general: "When dealing with folkloric elements in literature, it is essential to rely on careful extrapolations from known facts as well as on composite findings because of the inherently sketchy nature of the evidence available" ("Juan Ruiz's *Serranas*", 156).

¹⁴ However, Kirby in his article "Juan Ruiz's *Serranas*" argues very convincingly that episodes in the *Libro* form part of a pilgrimage narrative, most probably a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. His conclusions are based on the internal evidence of sequencing in the *Libro*. The *serrana* narratives immediately follow the incident with doña Endrina when our protagonist, now thinly disguised as don Melon de la Huerta, experienced one of his few successful seductions. If the adventures in the mountains are indeed part of the experience of pilgrimage, we can assume that the pilgrimage is undertaken as penance for, yet again, falling victim to *loco amor*. Also, following the *serrana* episodes, there is a long, allegorical struggle between the forces Lady Lent and Lord Flesh, which ultimately ends in the triumph of the latter, thus affirming that, despite the protagonist's efforts of sincere repentance, he will always be pulled back to the world of lust, greed, and deceit which is so masterfully captured in the tales about the *serranas*.

different route through the mountains precisely in order to avoid running into the first *serrana*, La Chata, again. By trying to take an alternate route through the mountains, the archpriest again becomes lost and, upon encountering another mountain girl, Gadea, who is guarding the path, he defaults to the strategy that had won him shelter and directions from La Chata. He boldly announces to Gadea: “morar me he con vusco o mostrad me la carrera” (v. 975d). Gadea’s reaction is brusque and she warns him not to so boldly invite himself to her hospitality and help:

“Semejas me, diz, “sandío, que ansí te conbidas:
non te *llegues* a mí, ante te lo comidas;
si non, yo te faré que mi cayada midas:
si en lleno te cojo, bien tarde la olvidas”

(vv. 976a-d)

Just as she had threatened, Gadea smacks him roundly with her herding staff and hauls him off to her cabin where she demands sex from him. Again the staff, or *cayada*, carries the same erotic-phallic symbolism as it had in his encounter with La Chata. Gadea also insults him, calling him *cornejo* which Vasvári identifies as a word play on *cornudo*, and thus by extension, “coward and impotent” and also *envernizo* which implies weakness and without sexual warmth (“Peregrinaciones por topografías”, 1570). Cold and hunger as he is, he tells her that he can not perform well on an empty stomach (“que ayuno e arreçido, non podría solazar; / si ante non comiese, non podría bien luchar”; v. 982bc). He nonetheless manages to pay for what he calls a “small snack” but he certainly doesn’t enjoy it: (“Escoté la merienda e partí me dalgueva” (v. 983c). Gadea asks him to stay longer now that her passions are fully aroused but he refuses and she finally shows him the path to the next village. As with the encounter with La Chata, the archpriest divides his account between a narrative summary in 14 syllable verses and a song in which

there is a rapid exchange of dialogue between the traveler and the *serrana*. In the fast-paced song, the archpriest initially addresses her with excessive flattery but she reacts by laughing at him, hitting him soundly with her staff, and then insulting him for not performing as she had hoped. The short song sequence ends with Gadea threatening to literally skin him alive (“Yot mostraré, si non ablandas, / cómmo se pella el erizo, / sin agua e sin rroçío; vv. 992g-i). In Vasvári’s opinion in the phrase “como se pella el erizo”, *erizo* has the same sexual connotation as *nueces* and thus her threat is actually to “skin his nuts alive”, i.e. roast his nuts over an open fire (“Peregrinaciones por topografías”, 1570).¹⁵ While again sex has been the toll demanded by the *serrana*, this second encounter has been totally unpleasant and the archpriest escapes from Gadea literally the worse for wear.¹⁶

We arrive now at the encounter with a third mountain girl who the archpriest describes as “lerda” or slow-witted. He comes across this *serrana* as she is cutting down a tree — a **thinly veiled allusion** to the fact that he is about to play the castrated male to a more aggressive female partner (see Burke, *Desire Against the Law*, 184). She immediately proposes marriage to our traveler whom she believes to be a “pastor”.¹⁷ The name of this *serrana* is Menga

¹⁵ Gybbon-Monypenny, in his edition, cites Corominas who interprets these lines as “como se apelo-tona el erizo (a sentirse amenazado)” and Morreale who, like Vasvári interprets *erizo* as “erizo de la castaña”, understands these lines as “que el erizo [de la castaña] se pela aun «sin agua y sin rocío» [...] a fuerza de pisotones y palos” (317).

¹⁶ Kirby summarizes this second encounter as follows: “Unlike the previous encounter, when the traveler saw himself as gaining something by submitting to the *serrana* (958bc and 971g), he submits here through fear alone and perceives no benefit to himself (983c, 984d, and 992b)” (“Juan Ruiz’s *Serranas*”, 158).

¹⁷ Steven Kirby calls identification of the traveler as a pastor as “a deliciously ambiguous misunderstanding” (159) since the word can quite literally mean shepherd or can convey the ecclesiastical meaning of pastor or priest. For more on the anti-clerical criticism in the *LBA* see Otis Green’s “Medieval Laughter”.

Lloriente, which roughly translates as dull-witted and weepy. After a very short introduction (four strophes) again in 14 syllable verses, the archpriest switches to the eight-syllable song stanzas in which he enumerates a long litany of his skills as a mountain man when Menga asks him about his qualifications to become her husband. De Lope, Dagenais, and Vasvári are among the critics who have pointed out the obscene *double entendres* present the *serrana* episodes and a stunning example appears in the “pastor’s” enumeration of his skills:

“Sé muy bien tornear vacas,
e domar bravo novillo;
sé maçar e fazer natas,
e fazer el odrezillo;
bien sé guitar las abarcas,
e tañer el caramillo,
e cavalgar bravo portillo”

(vv. 1000a-g)

The references to riding and dominating animals, of course, connote the sexual act while the “natas” reference coupled to the verb “amasar” imply both thrusting and ejaculation. The reference to the “odresillo” (small wineskin) is directly related to the scrotum whereas playing the “caramillo” implies the penis.¹⁸ Of course, after the last two episodes in which he was certainly not the sexual aggressor, this boasting takes on a particularly ludicrous tone. And,

¹⁸ The Archpriest alludes to playing musical instruments a number of times throughout the *Libro*. Perhaps the most noteworthy is found at the end of the dispute between the Greeks and the Romans: “De todos instrumentos yo, libro, só pariente: / bien o mal, qual puntares, tal te dirá ciertamente. / Qual tú dezir quisieres, y faz punto, y, ten te; / si me punter sopieres, sienpre me avrás en miente” (vv.70a-d). As Burke points out, “the implication is that one is free to create on this musical instrument (i.e., the book) whatever tune he may wish. The reader may «play» with the material recorded in the book, to understand the poet’s experiences as an example for either good or bad” (*Desire Against the Law*, 175).

on a more literal level, this braggadocio on the part of the hapless narrator who had who twice before found himself lost and exposed in the mountains without any necessary survival skills, is doubly pretentious. In the song Menga, in turn, catalogues an extensive list clothing, jewelry and trinkets she will require as marriage gifts. This meeting with the third *serrana*, however, does not lead to a sexual encounter but rather to lengthy, colorful monologues by both the archpriest and Menga. These serve to further demonstrate the author’s skill as a poet as well as his command of local and specialized vocabularies.

The preceding three episodes lead up to the longest and most elaborate account of the archpriest’s meeting with the fourth *serrana* known as Alda. Once again, as in his first adventure in the mountains, the traveler finds himself lost in a cold and icy storm. The woman he now encounters in his wanderings is nothing less than a hideous beast, a monster or “vestiglo” (v. 1008b). The poet gives full rein to his poetic powers of description giving us all the gruesome details of her appearance: she is huge and hairy with ears like a donkey, a mouth like a big, ferocious dog, ankles the size of year-old cow, with a hoarse and unpleasant voice, and breasts so large and pendulous that she can sling them over her shoulder.¹⁹ After 44 14-syllable lines of detailed description of this *serrana*, the archpriest promises no less than three songs to relate his adventures with her. However, only one of the songs survives and, in it, the archpriest initially addresses the monstrous Alda calling her “fermosa, loçana / e bien colorada” (vv. 1024cd). For Kirby the apparent contraction in calling this beastly woman “fermosa” is actually a ploy to score points for humor with the audience as well as to try to win favor from this large and imposing adversary (“Juan Ruiz’s *Serranas*”, 160). For Dagenais,

¹⁹ Tate sees the description of Alda “as a photographic negative of the ideal woman described at 431-435, 443-445, 448 of Don Amor’s address” (“Adventures in the *Sierra*”, 224).

the contrasting descriptions hold a more subtle subplot. Rather than the ironic interpretation posited by Kirby and others, Dagenais develops de Lope's idea that the archpriest's descriptions of Alda is a "reflection of folklore themes of the *serranas* as capable of disguising themselves as beautiful young women".²⁰ He relates the archpriest's dual description of Alda—hideous/beautiful—to a number of examples, including Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's* tale and Dante's *femmina balba* scene from *Purgatorio* 19, of "graphic descriptions of the grotesque hidden nature of the love object" (*Cantigas d'escarnho* and *serranillas*", 258). And he goes on to ask "Is [...] Juan Ruiz suggesting in his double, contradictory portrayal of the *serrana* as grotesque and «fermosa» the same sort of contrast between the lover's imagination and reality [...]? Is he suggesting, after the manner of the moralists, that the *serrana* is the grotesque reality which lurks behind «el loco amor del mundo»?" (*Cantigas d'escarnho* and *serranillas*, 258). Dagenais's evidence leads him to answer both queries in the affirmative.

Alda tells the narrator, who she addresses as "fidalgó", to be on his way but the traveler insists and she promises him shelter for a *soldada*, i.e. monetary payment (v. 1027e). He promises her money and in return he receives coarse bread, bad wine, and salted meat—a sharp contrast to the succulent repast he had enjoyed with the first *serrana*. Alda tells him that if he wishes a good dinner and soft bed he must first bring her gifts and her inventory of desired objects is not unlike that demanded by Menga Llorente as part of her dowry. In fact, if the archpriest can deliver what she asks she even offers to marry him²¹ and he

solemnly promises to bring her what she demands. But Alda is no dull-witted Menga and the archpriest will get nothing more from her until she sees the merchandise: "Do non ay moneda / non ay merchandía, / [...] / e yo non me pago / del que *nom* da algo, / nin le do la posada" (vv. 1040bc and vv. 1041c-e). This last of the *serrana* songs ends on a cynical note placed in the mouth of this monstrous *serrana*: "Nunca de omenaje / pagan ostalaje; / por dineros faze / omne quanto plaze, / cosa es provada" (vv. 1042 c-e). Rosalie Gimeno sees covetousness at the root of characterizations of all the *serranas* and it is certainly true for Alda ("Women in the *Book of Good Love*", 94).

What has the archpriest accomplished with the *serrana* episodes? First, he has given us a lesson in the writing of poetry—he establishes model patterns for variation on a theme in which he contrasts long verses of narration with short, fast-paced songs that bring the episodes to vivid life. Tate argues that there is more resemblance between the four narratives than between the four lyrics and that the lyrics probably pre-exist the narrative ("Adventures in the *Sierra*", 225). While I do not dispute this opinion, I find that his statement that "we cannot wholly deny to Juan Ruiz some degree of poetic sophistication" (226) with regard to these sections of the *Libro* to be an understatement. Even though each of the mountain girls is a unique individual and each encounter plays itself out somewhat differently, the episodes are interrelated by the repetition of similar motifs and poetic structures. De Looze sees in these sections, a poet who is "straining against the code of the pastoral genre as he writes. The shepherdess *must* be comely, she *must* be addressed as a beautiful young maiden, and there *must* be at least the rudiments of a witty verbal battle embroidered around what in the last analysis is rape, prostitution, or refusal. But being slung over a serrana's shoulder is not easy to work into the proper register" (*Pseudo-Autobiography*, 62). Secondly, the *serrana* poems contribute to the overall organization of the book. They appear between the

²⁰ "What is being illustrated here, according to De Lope, in the puzzling contradiction between *cuaderna vía* and lyric sections, is the dual nature of this folkloric character ("*Cantigas d'escarnho* and *serranillas*", 257).

²¹ This episode is clearly a message against marriage since, in the midst of the detailed description of the hideous Alda, the narrator inserts the line: "los que quieren casar se aquí non sea sordos" (v. 1014d).

affair of the archpriest's alter-ego don Melón with doña Endrina and a long allegorical battle between don Carnal and doña Cuaresma. In the guise of don Melón, the protagonist had just won the sexual favor of his lady²² but, as the season of Lent draws near, he begins to repent of his lustful ways. Thus, just before the epic battle that occurs each year during the Lenten season between the forces of repentance, restraint and self-denial and those of earthly delight, passion, and revelry, the archpriest goes off into the mountains and encounters the *serranas*. In a transparent parody of Christ's struggles with temptation in the wilderness, the archpriest, too, must come to grips with demons before he is able to return to the good love of God. In fact, immediately following the *serrana* poems and before the allegorical battle between Lady Lent and Lord Flesh, the archpriest includes a prayer to the Virgin in which he thanks her for saving him from the mountain girls. He then includes two versions of the Passion of Christ as indicators that he has returned his attention to the love of God and the promise of salvation through Christ. The mountain girls' demands for sex or material goods are manifestations of the *loco amor* of the world and the archpriest's encounters with them lead him to repent of his worldly ways as the season of Lent arrives.

But beyond the tales of the *serranas* as examples for poetic composition or as a structural element which leads our protagonist away from worldly love and back to the divine, these episodes are designed to make us laugh, and, more particularly, to make us laugh at folly and sin.²³ Using the age-old comic

techniques of exaggeration and gratuitous repetition coupled with vocabulary full of double entendre and salacious connotation, the archpriest creates one of the most amusing interludes in the entire book. These intriguing sections of the book dovetail nicely with its self-proclaimed mission to instruct others in the art of writing poetry as well as its thematic sequences of examples of sin and repentance. And they contribute to the moral ambiguity of the work which we identified at the beginning of this paper for, as the archpriest reminds in an aside during his adventure with the second *serrana*: “fasta que el libro entiendas, dél bien non digas nin mal, / ca tú entenderás uno e el libro dize ál” (vv. 986cd).

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²² For a discussion of how the don Melón and doña Endrina episode relates to the *serrana* sections see De Looze, *Pseudo-Autobiography* (especially 46-48).

²³ De Looze speaks of the comic nature of the *serrana* episodes in terms of readers' reaction to “the poet-narrator laboring to make events conform to a courtly paradigm, and we laugh when they so clearly fall short” (*Pseudo-Autobiography*, 58).

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