



«Fui a provar la sierra e fiz loca demanda»: Wilderness in the *Libro de buen amor*

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RESUMEN:

Este artículo propone que los detalles descriptivos de los espacios naturales y los lugares donde el arcipreste/narrador del *Libro de buen amor* se encuentra con las cuatro serranas son esenciales para la creación artística. Se puede leer la representación de las montañas y del yermo, además de las fechas indicadas, de manera tan realista como alegórica a pesar del hecho de que la mayoría de los críticos han enfatizado una lectura alegórica. El narrador del *LBA* incluye detalles topográficos de Guadarrama, cerca de Segovia, que pudieron ser conocidos por el lector. Para proporcionar al oyente/lector información detallada de los escenarios naturales, se modifica el registro retórico de la parodia hacia una risa compartida entre aquellos que eran conocedores de los lugares citados. Una lectura eco-crítica de los espacios naturales, el clima y espacios identificables donde el narrador encuentra a las serranas añade otro horizonte interpretativo a esta sección del *LBA*.

ABSTRACT:

This article proposes that details about the natural spaces and locales where the archpriest/narrator of the *Libro de buen amor* encounters the four *serranas* are essential to the author's artistic creation. The mountains and the wilderness locations, as well as the temporal settings, can be read in both realistic and allegorical ways, although most critics have privileged the latter interpretation. The narrator of the *LBA* includes details about the typography of the region of the Guadarrama around Segovia that may have been familiar to his original audience. By giving his audience detailed information about the natural surroundings, he changes the register from the purely literary game of parody to one of group laughter shared by a community of listeners who knew the locales mentioned. An eco-critical reading of the natural settings, climate, and identifiable locales where the narrator meets the mountain girls adds another level of interpretation to this section of the *LBA*.

Albrecht Classen, in a volume on rural space, points out that the courtly hero «requires the exposure to the natural world in order to find himself, to grow into a mature adult, and then to face the challenges of this world most constructively and efficiently» (147). While the protagonist/archpriest of the *Libro de buen amor* can, in no way, be con-

sidered a courtly hero, or any other kind of hero for that matter, I contend that he, too, must confront the harshness of the natural world. His encounters with the four *serranas* take place in the wilderness and, more precisely, in the Sierra de Guadarrama, just north of Madrid and east of Segovia. In this article I want to show that this particular wilderness setting is just as important an element for the reading of these scenes as the characters and their interactions.

Steve Kirby, in a well-known article about the episodes in the *sierra*, proposes that the archpriest/narrator finds himself in this setting because he is on pilgrimage, probably as an act of penance after the supposed seduction of Doña Endrina or for having offended his female readers (152).¹ He sees the encounters as a kind of Lenten penance, observing that both the quality of food and drink he receives from the mountain girls as well as that of the sexual encounters diminishes with each encounter. This would seem to indicate an increasing degree of self-denial as Lent progresses (160-61). The motive of penitential pilgrimage, combined with the narrator's innate curiosity, explains the archpriest's choice to enter the mountain wilderness according to Kirby. He also states that «The exotic, hostile, frightful, and forbidding qualities of the mountains are what provided simultaneous stimulus and apprehension to the traveler» (153) and stresses the poet's «meticulous yet unusual attention to chronological and geographic detail» (155). I would like to propose that the poet's attention to detail is essential for the *serrana* encounters; his descriptions of natural spaces and locales are not mere backdrop for the meetings with the mountain girls but play a key role in the author's creation. In my reading of this section, I hope to counter Zaharea's and Pereira's contention that the geographic details provided by the narrator do not have any intrinsic value because they only duplicate well-known motifs in *serranilla* lyrics such as the cold, harsh conditions experienced by one lost in the mountains.

Carrie Ruiz, in an insightful article published in 2008, argues for the *sierra* as liminal space, calling it «un espacio abierto y salvaje que no se rige por las mismas normas, está lejos de la ciudad no sólo geográfica y culturalmente, sino también temporalmente» (236-37). She contends that the space of the wilderness actually constitutes another dimension where the hegemonic order can be inverted, i.e. where male and female roles can be reversed. This analysis is apt since, as we know, in at least two of these episodes, the *serranas* take on the role of sexual aggressor usually assigned to males when they encounter the archpriest in the mountains (237). Carrie Ruiz describes the mountains, and especially the mountain passes that figure in this section of the *Libro* in Bakhtinian terms, specifically relating them to the chronotope of the threshold. She sees these mountain passes as neither inside nor outside but rather as representing a break where the protagonist must undergo some change or crisis. Wendi Casillas, along with other critics, identifies the carnivalesque qualities of the archpriest's encounters with the *serranas* and also associates them with the quest-myth as postulated by Northrop Frye. From this starting point she investigates the archpriest's journey in terms of a labyrinth where the narrator finds himself lost on the paths of «loco amor.» She also proposes that the *Libro* itself can be interpreted as the life-line for negotiating through this labyrinth of sinful love to the center which represents the intercession of the Virgin Mary and, ultimately, the saving

1.- Kirby has identified the carnivalesque elements in the *serrana* episodes, associating the initiation of the archpriest's escapades in the mountains on the day of Saint Emeterius, March 3, with the Lenten season (160-61).

Grace of Christ. Both Ruiz's and Casillas's theses are intriguing and I have no issue with them as a means of reading this section of the *Libro de buen amor*.² However, I would like to propose a more eco-centric reading of these passages that bring to the foreground the natural settings where these encounters occur and try to determine the role these natural details play in the narration.

According to the narrator, his decision to go into the mountains is in keeping with the teachings of none other than St. Paul who in First Thessalonians 5:21 encourages the faithful to «Put all things to the test.» In this spirit he declares: «Provar todas las cosas, el Apóstol lo manda: / fui a probar la sierra e fiz loca demanda» (950ab).³ James Burke contends that the narrator's use of the phrase «provar la sierra» indicates that «he will not only receive an impression of what these mountains signify in and of themselves but also project meaning upon the mountains...» (183). This observation is central to my thesis since I argue that the mountains themselves play an intrinsic role in this section of the *LBA*.⁴ The temporal setting is also significant; as numerous critics have pointed out, the archpriest begins his journey in early March, a time when wintry weather would still be the norm in the mountains. In a masterful article, Ryan Giles investigates possible reasons why the narrator specifies that he begins his journey on March 3, the day of Saint Emeterius. Emeterius and his brother Celedonius were soldiers in the Roman Seventh Legion and, according to Spanish versions of their legend, they traveled on foot from León to Calahorra where they converted to Christianity and were subsequently martyred for their newfound faith (Giles 166-67). According to Giles, among the many popular beliefs associated with this saint was that of perambulation and wearing out one's shoes in wanderings, and thus it is a fitting date for our narrator to strike off on his adventures. Wearing out shoes was also related to excessive roaming about, usually in search of sexual adventures (Giles 172). It would seem that the *Libro's* original audience would have harbored a wealth of symbolic association with the festivities of Saint Emeterius that would make his feast day an apt temporal marker for the onset of the adventures in the mountains.⁵

As luck would have it, no sooner does our narrator enter the wilderness area of the mountains than he loses his mule. He takes a path leading out of Loçoya (present day, Lozoya)⁶ in the foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama, about 27 km east of Segovia. This city is in a valley surrounded by the Montes Carpetanos to the north, and the Sierra de Canencia to the south. While Lozoya itself is only at an altitude of 1116 meters, it is surrounded by high peaks, including the Pico de Nevero at 2209 meters, one of the highest in the Sierra de Guadarrama.⁷ Thus, our narrator is about to enter an area of high peaks

2.- Hereafter *LBA*.

3.- All quotes from the *LBA* are from the edition of G.B. Gybbon-Monypenny in the Clásicos Castalia edition.

4.- Carrie Ruiz reminds us that both St. Paul and St. Augustine in speaking about experiencing all things actually are referring to all manner of suffering, but the verb «provar» also had gastronomical associations, and food will play some part in each of the archpriest's four encounters (237-38). And Kirby speaks of the abruptness of the narrator's decision to go into the mountains (152).

5.- Giles also points out that two of the *serranas* demand shoes as a part of their price to help the archpriest (1004d, 1037c) and that shoes were especially associated with lechery (170-71).

6.- There are a number of other towns in the area that also use Lozoya in their name, such as Gargantilla de Lozoya, Villavieja de Lozoya, and Lozoyuela.

7.- The highest is Peñalara at 2428 meters.

where, in early March, one could certainly expect the «nieve y granizo» of which he speaks in verse 951c.

His encounter with La Chata, the first of the four *serranas*, occurs at a mountain pass that she is guarding. He tells us twice that the road is narrow as if to emphasize that he is hemmed in and has no other alternative than the route blocked by La Chata: «Detovo me el camino, como era estrecho: / una vereda angosta, vaqueros la avían fecho» (954ab). Louise Vasvári has pointed out the sexual, even pornographic, connotations for the «narrow path» in relation to female anatomy and her reading of this whole section as innuendo and word play is a convincing one.⁸ However, she dismisses altogether any other possible readings for the details about the natural world included in this portion of the *LBA*.⁹ Leaving aside, for our purposes here, the ins and outs of the «negotiations» between La Chata and the narrator (no Vasvarian pun intended), suffice it to say that after he promises her jewelry in return for shelter; she throws him onto her back and crosses «los arroyos e las cuestras» (958c) to her hut. Barely eight strophes into the 92-strophe section dealing with the *serranas*, our poet has mentioned, in sequence: *la sierra*, *la nieve* (2 times), *el granizo*, *el puerto* in the sense of «mountain pass,» *el camino estrecho*, *la vereda angosta*, *el frío* (2 times), *los arroyos* and *las cuestras*. Here I am forced to disagree with Kirby who states that «In no way is this fictive journey intended to be seen in ‘realistic’ terms ...» (156). Realism in the portrayal of the natural setting seems on vivid display here. The author has named his point of departure, in a high valley, at the foot of the Sierra de Guadarrama, specified the date for his journey, and described the climatic conditions as well as geographic details such as the narrow mountain pass, streams, and peaks. Despite all the possible, and probable, symbolic or allegorical readings inherent in these episodes, the narrator clearly brings the natural world into his verses, mentioning places that may have been familiar to the audience of the *LBA* and setting up a very real tableau for the appearance of these women.

Each of the four encounters with the mountain women is conveyed, albeit with different details, first in a narrative structure of *cuaderna vía* stanzas, followed by shorter-line lyric verses. A number of critics have commented on this dual structure including Louise Haywood who proposes that «The counterpoint between narrative and lyric meters offers Ruiz as poet the opportunity to work through various configurations of the encounter between the itinerant male character and a female peasant whilst pointing to external mediation of the literary codes between the Archpriest and the mountain women» (114). In the retelling of the encounter with La Chata in the lyric stanzas, the narrator names the mountain pass she is guarding as Malangosto, another reference to the narrowness of the pass.¹⁰ The archpriest tells La Chata that he is on his way to Sotos Alvos¹¹ which is, indeed,

8.– Burke also interprets the «puerto de Malangosto,» or the «pass of narrow passage» as a foreshadowing of the sexual situations that are about to transpire (183).

9.– «La toponimia de esta tierra maravillosa carece totalmente de significación geográfica, vaciándose de función denotativa para convertirse en una toponimia iconográfica que sirve para estructurar la narrativa y para caracterizar a los personajes» (1565).

10.– Even today there is a popular hike called the «Puerto de Malangosto,» sponsored by the Segovia Sur, Asociación por el Desarrollo Rural, that includes the supposed pass guarded by La Chata at a spring which is the source of the Cambrones River. See: <<http://www.segoviasur.com/index.php/rutas/sierra-y-sus-puertos/puerto-de-malangosto.html>>.

11.– Present-day Sotosalbos.

on the opposite side of the Guadarrama, approximately 18 kms north of Segovia. I am not here suggesting that we all pull on our hiking boots and head out into the mountains near Segovia, but I want to establish that the poet is meticulous in crafting this geography, a meticulousness that would not be required if our only reading of these passages was intended to be allegorical. James Stamm states that the short-line lyrics, or *cánticas*, are «more intimate, familiar, and colloquial» than the narrations in *cuaderna vía* (196). The inclusion in the lyric stanzas of these added details about the typography, probably known by the poem's original audience would tend to support Stamm's contention. Also, only in the lyrics do we see that the archpriest has warped into another of his alter-egos when La Chata calls him «escudero» in 961c. When our narrator/escudero tells La Chata that he has brought no gifts with him with which to pay the toll that she demands, she rebukes him, telling him to go back to Somosierra. Somosierra is 27 kms north of the narrator's jump-off point of Lozoya as named in the account related in *cauderna vía*, but, significantly, Somosierra is on the same, eastern side of the mountains and a trip to Somosierra would still strand our archpriest cum *escudero* on the far side of the Guadarrama, and put him no closer to Segovia. In the lyric verses, our protagonist again mentions the weather: «Fazía nieve e granizava» (964a). After he promises to give La Chata jewelry that he doesn't have, the *serrana* says that she will take him back to her hut and later put him on the right path. She tells him not to fear the «escacha» (966g), for «escarcha,» and promises him a hearty meal fit for mountain folk: «bien te daré que yantes, / commo es de la sierra uso» (967fg).¹² After their feast, she demands sex from the narrator and even though she does physically overpower him, he takes pride in holding up his part of the bargain: «creo que fiz buen barato» (971g). The allegory of the *pastorelle* is undeniable here, but the *LBA* poet brings in his own knowledge of the natural settings where this encounter is purported to occur. By giving his audience detailed information, he changes the register from the purely literary game of parody to one of group laughter, shared by a community of listeners who are also familiar with the world the poet paints in words.

Before the second encounter with a mountain girl we learn that our archpriest/*escudero* did indeed find the right path through the mountains and arrived safely to Segovia. Having exhausted all his money in the city, he again decides to leave the confines of urban life and set off into the wilderness. Two of the strangest and most-debated lines in this section of the *LBA* 972cd in which the narrator states that «fui ver una costilla de la serpiente groya / que mató al viejo Rando, segund dize en Moya.» According to Zahareas, Pereira, Kirby, and Corominas, the reference is obscure and may relate to some local legend while Calleja Guijarro proposes that the «serpiente» may be a reference to the aqueduct in Segovia,¹³ a piece of which could have fallen and caused the death of the old man, Rando,¹⁴ mentioned in these verses. As for Moya, the only city that critics cite with this name is in the province of Cuenca and, thus, unrelated geographically to the archpriest's

12.– The next mention of the natural surroundings comes in the description of the meal she feeds the lost «escudero.» Among the items is «gaçapo de soto,» young rabbit from the thicket.

13.– See his article in *El Adelantado*: <<http://www.eladelantado.com/opinionAmplia/5138/colaboracion>>. The aqueduct originally brought water to Segovia from the Fuenfría spring located in La Acebeda, some 17 kms. from the city.

14.– Corominas admits that Rando is a strange name and offers the following explanation for it: «refiriéndose a Castilla la Vieja no sorprendería una forma desaspirada *Errando por Ferrando*... y aun apocopada después» (380).

time in the Guadarrama. Corominas speculates that the reference to Moya may be to a small town near Segovia that has long since disappeared (380). This reference, although obscure for contemporary readers of the *LBA*, may have presented no problem for the work's original audiences and what is important for my argument here is that the poet takes pains to include this particular reference when giving the location of his narrator.

The archpriest/narrator states that he did not find either «pozo dulce nin fuente perenal» in Segovia. As Gybbon-Monypenny and others have pointed out this phrase is a Biblical allusion¹⁵ but it also vividly contrasts urban life with the countryside, as represented here by its reference to a free-flowing spring. And, in the following strophe, the poet makes a direct reference to the very spring that is the source of the water carried by Segovia's aqueduct —Fuenfría. As our narrator again enters the Guadarrama, he strays from the path that leads to Fuenfría and, once more, becomes lost. Now, away from the city, and back in the wilderness, the natural world encroaches and directly affects the protagonist. He heads down through a piney wood —«Por el pinar ayuso» (975a)— and finds himself face-to-face with a second mountain girl. Corominas mentions the pine forest of Valsaín, just south of La Granja, as a possible allusion in this verse (380). Moreover, Valsaín lies in the Pinar de la Acebeda where the Fuenfría spring is located.

The woman he encounters in the pine forest is a cowherd, grazing her cattle on a riverbank. Although the peasant women of the *pastorelle* are often identified as cowherds or shepherdesses, the inclusion of the riverbank setting takes on special significance if, indeed, the poet has the forest of Valsaín in mind when crafting these verses. Three rivers run through the valley where Valsaín is located —the Eresma, Acebeda, and Peces— and any one of these could have conjured up for the *Libro's* audience the setting where our narrator first spies the second *serrana*. Having learned what is probably expected of him from his previous encounter with La Chata, our archpriest invites himself to the cowherd's hut but she becomes angry at such insolence and throws her staff at him, catching him behind the ear and knocking him to the ground. Besides the obvious phallic association with the staff,¹⁶ Jesús Botella analyzes the blow behind the ear that Gadea gives the narrator according to medical knowledge of the time. It was believed that the semen circulated from the brain through small veins behind the ears and that a blow of this type could imply permanent impotence for our narrator (61). As our narrator lies helpless, and perhaps impotent, on the ground, he compares his plight to that of a young stork thrown from the nest. Cejador y Frauca attributes this reference to the fact that storks sacrifice their chicks by throwing them from their high nest if the number of offspring exceeds ten or, according to some sources, five. The poet seems to be saying that he has been attacked for trying to get into an already crowded nest, perhaps suggesting, as Cejador proposes, that many clerics passing through this area had also spent some time in the cowgirl's hut (II, 42). Another bird image follows when the cowherd calls him *cornejo*, an obvious word play on *corneja* (crow) and *cornudo* (cuckold).¹⁷ After paying for the *serrana's* hospitality, but not to her satisfaction, she takes him to a crossroads and he is again

15.— See, for example, St. John 4:14.

16.— See, for example, Vasvári and Scarborough.

17.— In the lyric version of the encounter with Gadea, she calls the archpriest *conejo* and alludes to the fact that she has him trussed up, like a dead animal after the hunt: «Así apiuelan el conejo» (991f). Beltrán speaks of the irony of calling the

on his way through the mountains, arriving early in the morning to Ferreros. This is present-day Otero de los Herreros, to the southwest of the Pinar de la Acebeda and about 15 kms south of Segovia (Corominas 384).

In the song that follows the narrative verses about the second *serrana*, we learn the name of the cowgirl —Gadea de Riofrío, an apt name for a woman of these parts since Riofrío is only 9 kms north of the narrator's final arrival point, Otero de los Herreros. The significance of Gadea's name also points directly to the poet's precision about localities. Gadea, and some would argue that also the name of the first *serrana*, La Chata (Vasvári 1564), are variations on Santa Ágata, the patron of fecundity and lactation. Around her feast day on February 5, throughout the northern part of Spain, the festivals of «Las Águedas» are celebrated. For a week, men's and women's roles are reversed and women may attack men, even being allowed to rip off the men's clothes and touch their genitalia (Vasvári 1564). Burke specifically cites the festivals of Saint Ágata that take place in Zamarramala, a village on a ridge that overlooks Segovia (194). Since the women in the *serrana* episodes are the aggressors, such naming is not only appropriate but reflects local custom as well. This attention, not only to local settings and landmarks, but even to local custom, achieves the purpose of keeping the reader fixed on a specific environment, rather than a merely representative and non-differentiated wilderness.¹⁸

At the beginning of the encounter with the third *serrana*, the narrator finds himself near Cornejo, another use of the play on the words *corneja* and *cornudo*.¹⁹ But, in this instance, besides the word play, the poet alludes to an actual locale, identified by Corominas as the Venta del Cornejo, located in the Garganta de Espinar, near Riofrío and the Puerto de Guardamar (388). Here he meets the *serrana lerda* as she is cutting down a pine tree. Apart from the obvious phallic reference of the tree and its cutting, implying castration, the pine tree hints at the fact that the narrator is still wandering through the same forest where he encountered Gadea. The third *serrana* takes him for a shepherd —«coidós que era pastor» (994a). Here, the protagonist/narrator takes on yet another guise which is ironic since, as Haywood points out, *pastor* can also be applied to members of the priesthood, thus further blurring the narrator's identity (116).

Although the narrator says that he is now traveling in the summer, the weather is far from pleasant: «Façía tienpo muy fuerte, pero era verano» (996c). The narrative account of this encounter is quite short —only four strophes— and the details of the meeting are only spelled out in the lyric verses. Here the woman is named Menga Lloriente and as Tate, Kirby, and others have noted, unlike the other *serranas*, she does not threaten the narrator or demand sex from him (Kirby 159, Tate 224). She proposes to marry him if he can prove he has the skills needed of a mountain man.²⁰ In order to prove his worth, he

narrator a crow, since this animal was a symbol of matrimonial harmony, especially since Gadea is making her husband a cuckold (cornudo) by having sex with the archpriest (266-67).

18.— In the lyric verses, the archpriest speaks of the *verdura*, i.e. the pasture where he comes upon Gadea as well as the riverbank.

19.— This reference to Cornejo also works on an ironic level since the crow was associated with matrimonial fidelity and this mountain girl does propose marriage to the narrator (Pérez-Rioja 140). However, see the following footnote for other possible implications of the verb «cassar.»

20.— However, Giles reminds us that «cassar» can also be a euphemism for soliciting sex (171).

describes his talents in verses 999c-1001, first emphasizing his domination and superiority over animals such as the mare, wolf, greyhound, cow, bull, and unbroken colt (Haywood 117). He also claims to be able to produce cream, wineskins, and sandals; moreover, he is a clever musician, dancer, and wrestler. There are obvious sexual innuendos here, especially with regard to churning cream, and the association with sexual intercourse and ejaculation as well as the wineskin as an allusion to the male scrotum.²¹ Ekman notes that Menga does not get these jokes, however, and takes the *pastor's* answers as true indicators that he will make an excellent husband.²² After learning that he possesses all the necessary skills, she enumerates a long list of wedding gifts she expects from the narrator and he departs, supposedly, to fetch them.

The fourth and last encounter is with the truly grotesque Alda. This huge and hairy woman is the negative opposite of descriptions of the ideal woman described in other parts of the *LBA* (Tate 224). As if echoing her negative attributes, the natural conditions the narrator describes when he meets Alda are, indeed, the harshest and most severe of all the four accounts. An entire strophe is devoted to the cold, ice, and freezing winds:

Siempre ha la mala manera la sierra e la altura:
si nieva o si yela, nunca da calentura.
Bien en çima del puerto fazía orrilla dura:
viento con grand elada, rrozío con grand friura. (1006abcd)

The narrator is running downhill in an effort to escape the cold —«corrí la cuesta ayuso» (1007b)— and again stresses the frightfully bitter temperatures —«Nunca desdeque nascí pasé tan grand peligro / de frío...» (1008ab). He encounters the hideous Alda and, in spite of his initial repulsion, he is so cold that he asks her for shelter. She takes him to La Tablada, identified by Gybbon-Monypenny as the present-day Puerto de Guadarrama. Corominas states that the place named as La Tablada no longer exists but evidence of it survives in its diminutive, La Tabladilla, on the road towards Collado de la Marichiva, not far from San Rafael and El Escorial (394). Later in the lyric, the narrator again mentions Ferreros, and Haywood identifies a possible link with the second *serrana* episode that also mentioned the locale of Ferreros (119). In the narrative portion of this encounter, there is a long and detailed description of the physical appearance of this *serrrana*. As Ekman observes, she is compared to various animals and even to sin itself (422).²³ The description itself is comical in its exaggeration but is not essential to what most concerns us here although the details are tantalizing.²⁴

In the lyric stanzas that follow the long, narrative description of Alda,²⁵ the narrator stresses once again his plight, alone at dawn in the frigid mountains:

En çima del puerto,
coidé me ser muerto

21.— See Haywood, 117 and Lida de Malkiel 41.

22.— Kirby states that «what undoes the *serrana* is her greed and gullibility» (159).

23.— Ekman states that «She is a figure of sin and animal desires far from the civilizing influence of town and church» (422).

24.— See Scarborough, especially pp. 573-75.

25.— Fourteen strophes in ms. S.

de nieve e de frío,
e dese rroçío,
e de grand elada. (1023)

Alda agrees to take him in, even though he has just told her that he is married, and she gives him «buena lunbre, / commo es de costunbre / de sierra nevada» (1029cde). The most pressing need expressed several times by our narrator is for heat, an escape from the harsh wintery conditions. The food that Alda serves him is of very bad quality, especially when contrasted with the sumptuous meal he had received from La Chata in the first encounter. Alda addresses our narrator as «fidalgo,» and tells him that he will have nothing more from her without payment upfront and not just the promise of gifts. As Ekman observes, «when she refuses to extend credit to the Archpriest, a willing though penniless client and partner in the blameworthy conduct condemned in the allegorical description of her...» she sends him packing. The list of presents that Alda demands as a prelude to any sort of sexual encounter is similar to the list requested by Menga Llorente but, unlike Menga, Alda does not believe that the «fidalgo» will deliver and she has the last words —«por dineros faze / omne quanto plaze, / cosa es provada» (1042cde) (Haywood 119; Ekman 424-25).

In conclusion, I do not propose that we all don our best archpriest disguise and take to the mountains near Segovia to follow the trail of his adventures.²⁶ Rather, I have tried to highlight a new way to read this intriguing section of the *LBA*, a reading that falls somewhere between the purely parodic and finite reality. While I have mentioned specific places and their geographic relationship to one another, we should note that our poet is not always a slave to geographic accuracy but does take pains to include spots of local interest.²⁷ A reading somewhere between parody and absolute realism draws into focus the poet's descriptions of the natural world, especially those associated with the wilderness, and all it connotes.²⁸ The narrator finds himself in wilderness locales that are carefully delineated and described; we, as readers, are invited, so to speak, to walk a few kilometers with him on these excursions and witness his adventures there.²⁹ Drawing our attention to the specifics of natural settings, climate, and identifiable locales where the adventures with the mountain girls occur does not deprive these scenes of any of their comedic or parodic potential; a more eco-centric reading of them simply allows us to appreciate them on yet another level inherent in their multi-faceted richness.

26.— This is precisely what Rubén Caba proposes in his *Por la ruta serrana del arcipreste*.

27.— One could argue that these place names serve only the ends of either rhyme scheme or meter, but this does not always appear to be the case.

28.— See, for example, chapter 3, «Wilds, wastes, and wilderness» in Gillian Rudd's excellent book, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*.

29.— According to Uriarte Rebaudi, our protagonist «eligió sí un camino peligroso y se extravió en la sierra, perdió sus pertenencias en algún caso, vio menoscabada su dignidad» (46).

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