

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE SPANISH SHAHRAZĀD AND HER
ENTOURAGE: THE POWERS OF STORYTELLING
WOMEN IN *LIBRO DE LOS ENGAÑOS DE LAS
MUJERES*

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The anonymous *Libro de los engaños e asayamientos de las mugeres (LEM)* is a collection of exempla consisting of a frame tale and twenty-three interpolated tales. It forms part of the *Seven Sages/Sindibād* cycle, shares source material with the Arabic *Alf layla wa layla (A Thousand and One Nights)*, and was ordered translated from Arabic into Romance by Prince Fadrique of Castile in 1253. In the text, females may be seen as presented according to the traditional archetypes of Eve and the Virgin Mary; however, the ambivalence of the work allows that it be interpreted as both misogynous and not, which complicates the straightforward designation of its female characters as “good” and bad.” Given this, the topos of Eva/Ave as it applies to this text is re-evaluated.

The reassessment is effected by exploring the theme of ambivalence and by considering the female characters as hybrids of both western and eastern tradition. The primary female character of the text, dubbed the “Spanish Shahrazād,” along with other storytelling women in the interpolated tales, are proven to transcend binary paradigms through their intellect, which cannot be said to be inherently either good or evil, and which is expressed through speech acts and performances.

Chapter I reviews the historical background of Alfonsine Spain and the social conditions of medieval women, and discusses the portrayal of females in literature, while Chapter II focuses on the history of the exempla, *LEM*, and critical approaches to the text, and then identifies Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and Judith Butler's speech act theory of injurious language as appropriate methodologies, explaining how both are nuanced by feminist perspectives. A close reading of the text demonstrates how it may be interpreted as a misogynous work. Chapter III applies the theoretical tools in order to problematise the misogynous reading of the text and to demonstrate the agency of its female speaker-performers; the analysis centres on the Spanish Shahrazād, who represents a female subjectivity that transcends binary depictions of women and represents a holistic ideal of existence that is reflected in the calculated, harmonized use of both her intellect and corporeality.

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THE POWERS OF STORYTELLING WOMEN IN
LIBRO DE LOS ENGAÑOS DE LAS MUJERES

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2004

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Dedication

In memory of my grandfather, Thomas Barnes, 1925-2001.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly thank the people that have supported me both professionally and personally in the writing of this dissertation and in the completion of other doctoral degree requirements over the past six-and-a-half years.

I thank my advisor, Dr. Carmen Benito-Vessels, for always being so encouraging and accessible, and for teaching me through challenge and example.

Thanks to all of my former professors and mentors at the University of Maryland at College Park, for having contributed to so many different areas of my training and professional development.

Wholehearted thanks to the Graduate School and to the St. Andrew's Society of Washington, D.C. for their generous funding.

I also wish to thank my department chair, Dr. Jeff Chamberlain, of George Mason University, for his unwavering support and good humour.

Finally, my greatest thanks go to my family and friends on both sides of the Atlantic, and in both hemispheres, as well as to an incredibly understanding, caring, and patient husband. Thank you all for believing in me.

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Chapter I: The Historical Context

Introduction

As is the case with so many fragments of our western literary tradition, the origins of the anonymous *Libro de los engaños e asayamientos de las mugeres* (*LEM*) lie in the East, where one of its ancient forefathers spoke Sanskrit and was clothed in a collection of words that bore the title *Panchatantra*. Under this name, those words journeyed from India to Persia, to become the *Tuti Nahmeh*, before leaving for the Arabian Peninsula, where they adopted other names, such as the Hebrew *Mishle Sendebat* and the Arabic *Alf layla wa layla*. They continued ever westward, borne by the hands and tongues of conquerors and wanderers, until they reached entirely different eyes and ears, in the world of medieval Europe. Thus Semitic peoples brought the words to the Iberian Peninsula, where, in an Arabic manuscript that is long lost to us, they arrived in thirteenth-century Castile and found an admiring patron who belonged to a royal family known for its love of literature and learning. Prince Fadrique, brother to Alfonso X of Castile, adopted the words and sponsored their translation into *romance*, the Spanish vernacular, in 1253.

LEM begins with a frame tale concerning the fulfillment of a prophecy, and an episode modelled after the story of “Potiphar’s Wife”: One of the king’s ninety concubines propositions her stepson, the prince, and when he rejects her, she claims that he tried to violate her. The prince cannot defend himself since his tutor, Çendubete, having foretold possible doom if the young man utters a word, has bound him to an oath of silence for seven days. These circumstances instigate an eight-day trial, which is narrated within the frame by way of interpolated stories told by the opposing parties; the

queen tells five tales and the king's counsellors, who step in to speak on the prince's behalf, tell thirteen. Presiding as judge, the king alternates between sentencing his only son to death and sparing him. On the eighth day, when he can finally talk, the prince relates five tales and manages to save himself. The text ends with the king's ruling that the stepmother be boiled alive in a dry cauldron.

The majority of the twenty-three intercalated tales in *LEM* are told by the male antagonists as they build their case in order to prove the stepmother's guilt; as the title of the text suggests, the deceitfulness of women is a dominant theme in most of them. The stories describing female fornication and deception reflect a concern of the historical context into which they were translated; according to official culture, medieval women who dared to defy norms regarding chaste behaviour—abstinence for virgins and moderation within marriage for wives—as well as those who contested subordination with guile, were a threat to social stability, and a nuisance to the male-imposed gender hierarchy. Prevailing thought concurred with Isidore of Seville (d.636), who had written that women were to be subject to men, whose every strength was greater. The literary women in *LEM* therefore provide excellent fodder for the slander and disdain directed at them for their perceived misbehaviour.

In their totality, the short narratives we find in this text tell of everything from straying wives and gleeful pranksters to morphing demons and anthropomorphized animals. They are bawdy and grotesque, fanciful and funny. They recall the humorous French *fabliaux*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, parables, fairy tales, Aesop's fables. They have much in common with all of these, yet they are known as "exempla." The exemplum is one of the prototypes for the medieval European short story, and it

comprises a short tale used for didactic purposes. Its form is designed to deliver an ethical or practical lesson; each tale would give an “example” of an error, redemption, a good deed, or some other matter, and end with a statement, either overt or implicit, about human conduct. The stories were often used as “mirrors for princes,” and served the purpose of instructing members of the nobility with regard to codes of comportment, and leadership ideals. Exempla have hybrid origins; on the Western side, many of their sources come from classical and patristic writers such as Ovid, Juvenal, Augustine, and Jerome, while their Eastern sources are culled from the Bible, the Qur’an, Buddhistic parables, and Middle Eastern folklore. Some exempla are more deeply anchored in oriental tradition than occidental, and vice versa.

No matter its lineage, the moralizing, instructional nature of the exemplum meant that it was met with a warm welcome in medieval European literature, which made of it an appropriate vessel for conveying Christian teachings. Along with religious content, these teachings also passed on a misogynistic tradition, enhanced by philosophy inherited from the Classical world. Christian doctrine deftly validated its anti-female stance with the biblical history of the Fall, faulting Eve—and by association, all women—for bringing sin and death into the world. Medieval calumny expressed towards women drew upon the biblical models of Eve and her ilk—Lot’s Wife, Potiphar’s Wife, and Delilah, among others—and echoed Saint Paul, who had meticulously outlined the subjugation of women in his Epistles.¹

¹ Eve’s legacy of wickedness was seen in the disobedience of Lot’s Wife; the lust of Potiphar’s Wife; and in Delilah’s betrayal of Samson. In the New Testament Saint Paul attempts to curb women’s influence and ensure that they understand their place in relation to men; Paul writes that “A woman must be a learner, listening quietly and with due submission. I do not permit woman to be a teacher, nor must woman domineer over

The obverse of Eve was recognized, however, in the redemptive Virgin Mary, who made motherhood and female chastity causes for praise. The example of the Holy Mother, along with tales of other esteemed biblical women such as Sara, Ruth, Rachel, and so on, revealed another type of female and made it possible to conceive of women in an alternative way. The sacred image of “Woman” had no place in the “case against women,” represented in diatribes against Eve and her likenesses; it therefore helped inspire the “case *for* women” expressed through veneration of Mary and in defence of females that emulated her.

Thus, throughout most of the Middle Ages, the two female models *par excellence* remained conjoined yet polarized as “Eva/Ave,” a palindrome employed by Alfonso X in his *Cantigas de Santa María*. Although the binary construct paradoxically conflates the female into a symbol of both salvation and damnation, it was one that the medieval mind accepted and frequently employed, and it was constantly repeated and re-elaborated throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. The classification of females into one of two varieties, both of which were legitimized by scriptural documentation, must have greatly appealed to the minds of an epoch that delighted in both cataloguing and categorizing, and in re-affirming the germaneness of its faith.

Medieval texts abound with this Manichean view of the female, and authors frequently drew upon the two archetypes to suit their needs, representing women as active or passive, uninhibited or repressed, demonic or saintly, and so forth. In Spanish literature, there are an abundance of women who represent one female exemplar or the

man; she should be quiet,” (Tim. 2:11-12) and he advises, “Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord; for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ is also the head of the church” (Eph. 5:23-24). He gives many other similar injunctions.

other. For example, *Los siete Infantes de Lara* and *El Conde Lucanor* present “La mala de doña Lambra” and the unruly “mujer brava” in exemplum XXXV, who stand in contrast to the redemptive mother Doña Sancha and the unquestioningly obedient Doña Vascañana of exemplum XXVII. Many other texts used the figures of the *alcahueta* and the adulteress to channel “Eva,” while other works depicted “good” women such as the submissive and dutiful Doña Ximena, wife of El Cid, or dedicated themselves wholly to revering the virgin, as did the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. Praise of women was of course brought to new heights, and became a separate topos of its own, in courtly literature.

When we examine *LEM*, as might be expected, it is not difficult to identify the use of the Eva/Ave motif. Since the book plays on elements of misogynous literature, it focuses more, as would be expected, on representations of Eve, licentious and uncontrollable, rather than those of Mary, chaste and gentle. In fact, considering the seductress-concubine, the *alcahuetas*, adulteresses, and other devious women in the text, we can identify a total of nineteen deceitful or “wicked” women fashioned after the model of “Eva” (we may increase the number to twenty-one if we count the two male demons that transform into females and persecute men). However, these “bad” women are not simply one-dimensional, malevolent characters; they are also very clever, and the didacticism of the stories they are found in relies on demonstrating this. Given that the tales belong to an age that valued wit, wisdom, common sense, and other types of intelligence as did the Middle Ages, and given that the very purpose and format of sapiential literature was geared towards the promotion and celebration of logic and learning, it is difficult to affirm that women’s wiles meet with nothing but disapproval in

the text. The tales about “wily women,” who outbest men even when openly challenged by them, appear to admit and even admire the females’ cerebral dexterity.

To support this, we may consider the three women in *LEM* that are presented in a positive light, in the mould of “Ave”: the prince’s mother in the frame story, and the wives in the two interpolated tales “Leo” and “Pallium.” Although these women may be identified as “good,” they are also shrewd, and each uses her cunning as a means to an end. This begs the question, if these “good” women are shown using their wiles to influence and control events without suffering the defamation that the “bad” women endure, then are the “*engaños e asayamientos*” of women really all that bad? With this in mind, we may postulate that the difference between the “good” and the “bad” women does not rest on contempt for their use of artifice after all. In fact, women’s wiles are perhaps even admirable. The problem of astuteness as an attribute shared by models of both *Eva and Ave* must be addressed, particularly in a text purportedly about the *engaños e asayamientos* of women, with a title that on the surface makes one term a corollary of the other, and is usually read as indicating that both are frowned upon. The identification of some women in *LEM* as incarnations of *Eva* and others as *Ave* is valid, but it does leave some questions unanswered. There is an ambivalence in “wiles” that seems to complicate the designations “bad” and “good.” Although we can claim that the women of *LEM* are disparaged for lying and adultery, we cannot fully assert that their *craftiness* is seen in a negative light.

A further complication is that, in a text that details the wickedness of women, one would expect to feel sorry for their victims. However, the cuckolded, duped, and ridiculed males in *LEM* evoke no pity in the reader; with few exceptions, they are shown

to be buffoons. The audience laughs at them, and in that amusement is encoded the implicit endorsement of the actions of the women responsible for outdoing the men. As entertained readers/listeners we are complicit with the females of *LEM*—we approve of what they do, and we are delighted when they succeed.

One could argue that the text *does* make an implicit value judgment about women—therefore denouncing their wiles—when the temptress-stepmother is finally sentenced to die. Yet this does not detract from the inherent sanctioning of women’s wiles throughout the stories of the text; taken in context, it seems a mere formality, a nod to the order of the establishment. Furthermore, it is not without its narrative complications, as we shall later see—after all, we do not actually witness the outcome of the verdict at the end of the story. Moreover, the logic of the structure has not supported the conclusion that women are wicked and that therefore the seductress deserves to die; close analysis of the tales told by the men reveals that the narratives do not really support their arguments. Although the purpose of the counsellors’ and the prince’s stories is to prove that women are deceitful, several tales have morals that do not fit their narrations or the professed theme, and the ethical value of the stories are thrown into doubt, as Rosa María Juarbe i Botella, among others, has shown.² Even at the semantic level, the text does not prove women’s deceitfulness. Once again, we must question the extent to which it maligns its females.

These are interesting conditions for a literary analysis that explores how the “bad” women in *LEM*, while they may fit within the dimensions of the Eva archetype, also prove resistant to it. We must re-evaluate the application of the topos to this text in order

² In “Framing Conflict and Opposition in the Medieval Spanish *Sendebär*.”

to find out why. To begin, let us first recall the medieval debates both “for” and “against” women. The case “for” women has been identified by Alcuin Blamires as “a mode of discourse which aims to build a positive representation of women in response to either specified or implicit accusations” (*Case for Women*, 9). If we invert this definition then we can deduce that we have a statement that describes the case “against” women; that is, “a mode of discourse that aims to build a *negative* representation of women in response to either specified or implicit accusations.” Yet as we have seen, negativity does not fully describe the misogynist discourse in *LEM*. We have seen how the text complicates and goes *beyond* the binarism in the paradigm of Eva/Ave. Although the work contains elements that reinforce those binaries—the Potiphar’s Wife motif is an obvious example—it also says something *else* about women, something that does not rely on the polarized attributes of either archetype, the positive or the negative. It depicts women as having attributes that cannot be neatly divided into the “good” and the “bad.”

Perhaps we can explain the situation we have encountered by scrutinizing and re-evaluating the use of a binary tied to occidental Christendom. We should remember that *LEM* started as a translation from an Arabic original—an oriental text with a lengthy ancestry and a complicated succession of supposed origins—that was later translated into a western, Catholic context. This may limit the adequacy of a patristic structure such as Eva/Ave to delineate the text’s characters, as they do not belong exclusively to just one socio-historical context but rather are hybrids of both western *and* eastern parentage. Let us then extrapolate from this by revisiting the depiction of women in *LEM* with a mind that is open to something other than reiterations of the Madonna/Whore duality. Is there

something in this text, something associated with women, that defines binary classification and that simply must be allowed to *be*? Neither good nor evil, just *existent*?

In search of an answer to this question, our attention is directed first to the principal female character since she, after all, is a creator of tales and the other females in the text occupy a less central position, in the background of the stories, appearing only as do the narratives that they inhabit. The seductress, however, remains as a protagonist throughout the work; she is a constant presence from beginning to end—on a par, in that respect, with the nine principal males. A king's cohort who must tell stories to prolong her life, this figure bears a strong resemblance to someone else: Shahrazād peers out at us from every page.³ This occidental avatar, the “Spanish Shahrazād,” transcends the boundaries of the Eva/Ave binary that so frequently shapes our understanding of women in medieval Spanish literature because she is something other than merely “good” or “evil”: she is intelligent. Although she may be interpreted as a sinister influence in the text, her demonstrated intellect forces us to pause and re-evaluate her portrayal in the work. A re-reading of the role of this woman yields her intellect as an attribute that problematises her designation according to a system of analysis based on “either/or.” The faculty of thinking, reasoning, and applying knowledge and logic is the most salient property of this character. An ingenious storytelling female protagonist, she demonstrates her narrative skill as her words influence the king's judgment from one day to the next. Aside from her verbal aptitude, she also displays a physical dexterity in *staging and performances* as she maintains the pretense of her innocence and attempts to cover up her attempted adultery, enhancing her assumed role of “victim” with

³ *Alf layla wa layla (A Thousand and One Arabian Nights)*, the text in which we meet this female narrator, is an oriental literary cycle with which *LEM* closely associated.

premeditated dramatics that successfully provoke the king's (com)passion, and fear for her life. She constantly re-shapes the possible outcome of the trial; whenever he decides not to execute his son, she causes him to recant.

If we now look for the same theme as it relates to the secondary female protagonists in the text, we find six additional examples of women whose talents lie in staging and performance: the five interpolated stories “Leo,” “Avis,” “Gladius,” “Ingenia,” and “Abbas” also feature the adultery theme (fulfilled or not), as well as wives that stage both their own performances and those of others’ in order to ensure that events accord with their agendas. In each case, their theatrics are successful. Thus, although misogynous thought would have it that these women are creatures enslaved by an inferior, deviant biology that limits and controls them, they are all shown as being able to exert control over their surroundings, orchestrate events to obtain their own fulfillment (political, sexual, and economic), and exercise an ability to manipulate people and situations to fall in line with their objectives.

The preponderance—and therefore importance—of intellectually resourceful women in the narrative, and the male characters who repeatedly bemoan their *engaños*, acknowledge that females inhabit a certain sphere of superiority in this text; the women of *LEM* have power by way of a type of intelligence that the men simply lack. Although the text tells of men that lie and deceive, it depicts no man with the ability to stage and perform; only the women have mastery over the art of masquerade. The variety of “wiles” the women use to achieve their wishes are performative and narrative strategies that define their agency; this is a manifestation of intelligence, which is an attribute that,

although it may be *used* in a positive or a negative manner, cannot be said to *embody* either one; it thus signals a departure from the binary Eva/Ave.

All of this in no way refutes that the values and voice of the State are clearly preserved in *LEM*; age-old paradigms and traditional power structures are still present, as we see in the divine response to the petition for an heir, in the king's privilege of having multiple wives and officiating as judge, and in the prince who successfully proves himself worthy of future rule. An omnipotent male god, the earthly supremacy of the sovereign, and primogeniture, triumph and are maintained. The existence of those structures supports that the text *does* re-affirm misogynous thought, and reinforces male authority and solidarity at the expense of women. Yet misogyny is not alone in the representation of the female characters in the text; also present are the lucid contours of a literary crossbreed, the "Spanish Shahrazād," who along with her entourage of female companions presents an aspect of the medieval Spanish conception of women that goes beyond the motif of Eva/Ave, complicating its binarism and demonstrating that females have a literary *gravitas* that may be perceived in the text's admission of their intelligence, which is attached to them as an ability to stage and perform.

Chapter One of this dissertation prepares the way by presenting an overview of the history of the Spanish Middle Ages up to the century of *LEM* production, reviewing the social conditions in which women found themselves during the medieval period, discussing the "Case for Women" in further detail, and problematising depictions of women in literature. Chapter Two focuses on the history of the exempla and the influence of eastern, didactic tradition on what we now recognize as our western "story." It also details the history of *LEM*, its place within the *Seven Sages/Sindibād* cycle, its

various critical editions, and the text's patron, Prince Fadrique. This is followed by a section on narratological approaches to the text, and the identification of a suitable methodology, which is found in a combination of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque as developed in *Rabelais and His World*, and Judith Butler's speech act theory of injurious language in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, both of which are nuanced by feminist perspectives. The chapter ends with a close reading that demonstrates how the text can be interpreted as a misogynous work; this underscores the inherent equivocal nature of the text, since it is followed by Chapter Three, which applies the theoretical tools and problematizes the misogynous reading of the text by giving a non-misogynous interpretation that interrogates the notion of the work as anti-female. This final chapter supports the hypothesis that in addition to a misogynous context tightly bound to the socio-historical circumstances of thirteenth-century Spain, *LEM* also offers us a view of storytelling, performing females who claim their place within this didactic text not only because they can be made into archetypal examples, but also because they take an active part in contributing to the delivery of the message of the tales, by virtue of which their intelligence, wit, and subjectivity is acknowledged. These women exemplify the ambivalent nature of much medieval literature; not only that, but they also offer us an alternate view of medieval female characters, one that does not confine them to a pejorative place but rather one that demands that we recognize them as creators of meaning, since they too are portrayed as contributing to acts of signification. They are involved in the design, development, and representation of a symbolic order.

Admittedly, we cannot uncover medieval social realities by studying an anonymous literary text; however, we can collate the views we find with those of our

own, constantly re-evaluating them and interrogating the nature of their interrelations. This exercise may lead us to re-discover and re-assess our views about the roles of women in medieval literature; yet the divide of the centuries often makes the task difficult at best, impossible at worst. It is particularly trying for scholars who are both medievalists and feminists. As they grapple to reconcile the two areas of interest, one of their objectives may be defined as to “search out the historical roots of feminist thought and emphasize women’s rich intellectual traditions,” as Lisa Vollendorf has put it in *Recovering Spain’s Feminist Tradition* (11).

Searching for feminist thought in medieval times is viewed by most as anachronistic, given the nonexistence of what may rightly (and even then only tentatively) be termed “feminist” literature until the eighteenth century; identifying parts of a tradition of female intellect—those faint fingerprints left by the many hands of history, historical literary evidence that women were regarded as thinking beings—may better lend itself to a medieval feminist inquiry. Such an undertaking would hope to align the two areas of investigation: Medieval Studies, which is sustained by centuries of academic research, as well as other critique, reflection, study, and re-expression; and Feminist Studies, which has a comparatively brief history and which seeks to examine and challenge ideas about sex, gender, class, and culture that at times cannot transcend the limits of history and place. Although seemingly incompatible, each discipline *can* inform the other, however, as Medieval Studies concedes that the questions that feminists raise may have not been fully considered, and Feminist Studies recognizes that medieval texts can contribute to a re-evaluation and re-casting of women’s roles and influence throughout the ages, and even help to re-configure the shape of women’s history.

Cognizant of the historical restrictions of Medieval Studies, and yet equipped with a feminist vision that values women in and of themselves and not just as extensions of men, we may therefore understand the “tradition of female intellect” in *LEM* through our perception of the medieval male’s suspicion that women were indeed intelligent; we are alerted to this notion whenever he presents the female as capable of strategizing, reasoning, and able to overcome him. This contrasts with the diatribes of much religious, medical, and social propaganda that refuted—or at least suppressed—the idea that a woman’s brain was in any way a match for a man’s. It also imparts some indication, albeit minute, of the existence of women as cogitative participants in history.

Yet if some Medievals imagined such a thing, they were restricted to expressing this view in a cryptic manner. An early manifestation of the recognition of female intellect may therefore have been disguised and encoded within a text such as *LEM* not as a concession, but as a condemnation. To that end, women’s intellect was better styled by male writers as *engaño*. Thus designated, intelligence dons a semantic disguise that, once removed, confronts us with its neutrality and confounds the imposition of binary constructions of right and wrong.

From the Muslim Invasion to Alfonso X and the Thirteenth Century

Before examining a medieval Spanish text, we must first take into account the context in which it was written and situate the text in time and space by considering the backdrop of the European Middle Ages. This was a time in which several future nation-states were in their early nascence and the continent was wracked and yet also enriched by political, cultural, linguistic, social, and religious issues of every kind. Unlike the

northern countries of England, France, and Germany, Spain played a rather different role in the formation of what was to become Europe. Its southernmost tip facilitated its contact with the cultures of the African continent and the “exotic” countries beyond it, whose influences it bore, and although various ethnic groups inhabited all the European territories, among them, Spain was a unique point of contact with other peoples.⁴

Of the five European territories mentioned above, Spain ranks only the fourth most eastern in terms of its global orientation; yet its medieval history was arguably just as influenced by the East as by the West, and therefore for many centuries most Europeans regarded Spain as part of the European hinterland.⁵ Indeed, it did stand apart by virtue of its ethnic makeup: throughout the entire Middle Ages, varying amounts of its territory was ruled by Muslims who, along with Jews, populated the land and considered Spain their home, as had other ethnic groups before them. Their *convivencia* with Christians was a testament to a medieval religious tolerance that, despite being coloured by underlying economic and political concerns, nevertheless did exist for quite

⁴ As it is used here, “Spain” refers to a variety of political and territorial entities that existed in the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Ages where Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, the Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica now exist. Referring to “Spain” during the Middle Ages (711-1492) is complicated; the distinct and fluctuating kingdoms and territories that were variably ruled by Christians and Muslims throughout the period meant that there was not just *one* Spain but rather *several* of them. The idea of a multiplicity of “Spains” is expounded in Bernard Reilly’s *The Medieval Spains*, 1993.

⁵ Adrian Shubert draws an interesting parallel between the attitude of many Europeans towards Spain and the sentiment expressed “...by W.H. Auden in his poem ‘Spain 1937’ as ‘that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot / Africa soldered so crudely to inventive Europe’” (Shubert 1). Although Schubert—and Auden—write about twentieth-century Spain, this encapsulates the idea that Spain is geographically separated from the central body of Europe both because it is a peninsula and by the Pyrenees—a fact that would have affected its relationship to the rest of Europe.

some time.⁶ The co-survival of Jews, Muslims, and Christians necessitated a variety of new names and categories—some used at the time and others coined later by modern historians—for those who crossed over the boundaries between the faiths and social groups: *conversos* were Jews who had converted to Christianity; *moriscos* and *tornadizos* were Muslim converts to Christianity; the *elches* were Christian converts to Islam; *mudéjares* were Muslims allowed to remain and practice their faith on reconquered soil; and so on. Spain was the only place in Europe that could boast of a social synergy of this kind. This positive element was unfortunately offset by the negative element of continual, protracted warfare since, in spite of *convivencia*, the Christians of the Iberian peninsula had been struggling to oust the Muslims ever since their arrival in 711 CE.

When Arabs from North Africa first arrived in Spain, led by Tarif ibn Malluq in his reconnaissance mission of the Spanish coast in 710, the area was under Visigothic rule and conditions were ripe for change; the Catholics and Jews had suffered as a result of the Ariansim of the Germanic inhabitants, who afforded them little religious tolerance. Jews in particular were persecuted; no wonder they welcomed their Semitic kin, who returned in 711 under the command of Tariq ibn Ziyad, who led an army of approximately 12,000 men.⁷ The outcome of their battle was determined by a variety of factors: disgruntled partisans, unrelenting conflict between Visigothic factions, the aid of

⁶ *Convivencia* is a term used first in a linguistic sense by Ramón Menéndez Pidal and later used in a sociological sense by Américo Castro. As now used in historical and literary commentaries on Spain, it may be said to denote “the coexistence of the three groups, but only as registered collectively and consciously in the culture of any one of them” (Glick 2).

⁷ Ibn Ziyad originally landed on the Rock of Gibraltar between 27-28 April 711 with about 7,000 men, then he went to Algeciras and waited for reinforcements.

Muslim-controlled Ceuta and Tangier, and a formidable religious devotion. Tariq's journey across the strait was a success, and it opened the West to oriental influences that would bring a steady stream of knowledge, an inundation of cultures and peoples, and a tidal wave of enmity that would forever ripple across the Iberian peninsula and provide a source of tension between East and West to the present day: al-Andalus came into being.

For several years after the Muslim invasion, a series of largely incompetent governors ruled the region, exercising power in the name of the caliph, an Umayyad whose family had ruled the Muslim world since 661 CE. In 750 CE, the Umayyad dynasty in Syria was defeated by the Abbasid line, and the capital was moved from Damascus to Baghdad; however, Abd al-Rahman, a grandson of the former Umayyad Caliph Hisham I, managed to escape to Morocco. He made his way to al-Andalus, gathered an army of those loyal to his lineage, and gave battle against governor Yusuf al-Fihri on 15 May 756. Al-Rahman successfully overcame the capital of Córdoba and was proclaimed amir; the region became the new home and haven for the exiled family.

From Córdoba, the Umayyad dynasty maintained ties with the successive Abbasid caliphs, acknowledging them as the true descendants of Muhammad for about two hundred years (until the 16th of January 929, when Abd al-Rahman III reasserted his birthright and also assumed the title of caliph and "commander of the faithful"). The "western caliphate," which emulated the eastern in its administrative organization, was the primary seat of power and cultural influence in the peninsula for several centuries (756-1031 CE). Through this portal, the Arabs introduced the western world to advancements in agriculture, architecture, mathematics, science, philosophy, and language, and either enhanced or brought various industries, such as glass-making;

metalwork; and silk, leather, and paper production. To the advantage of the west, the displaced rulers seem to have taken great pride in trying to better their eastern counterparts: among the members of Abd al-Rahman II's court was the Persian musician Ziryab, who had formerly held a high position at the Abbasid court in Baghdad; the caliph Al-Hakam II filled his court with philosophers, poets, grammarians, and artists, and his library with as many as 400,000 texts; apparently, the climate of learning and culture was so influential that "The Cordoban aristocracy imitated the caliph and vied with one another in acquiring books" (O'Callaghan, *A History...* 159). By all accounts, the Cordoban capital rivalled Baghdad as the cultural centre of the Muslim world in the mid-ninth century.

Meanwhile, the Christian states had been building and establishing disparate loci of power, their Reconquest unconsolidated yet steadily gaining momentum. Although culturally they presented little threat to their southern neighbours, and indeed at the beginning of the Muslim occupation, "in stark contrast with the Muslim world, no Christian prince could even read, so far as we can ascertain" (Reilly 126), the Christian states gradually increased their strength and political influence. When, due mostly to bad governance, the western caliphate disintegrated and was abolished in 1031 and the *taifas* (or petty kingdoms) subsequently were formed, the Christians began to exact tribute from the territories' Muslim rulers instead of paying tribute themselves to Córdoba.⁸ The current of conquest did a definitive about-face in favour of the Christians in 1085 CE, when Alfonso VI of Castilla reconquered Toledo, the ancient Visigothic capital. Alarmed, the

⁸ It is worth noting that the period of the *taifas* continued to be one of cultural accomplishment, and was in fact "the Golden Age of Hispano-Arabic and of Hispano-Jewish literature" (Armistead "Taifa kingdoms").

Andalusian Muslims invited the help of the Almoravids of North Africa in 1086. The Almoravids stayed, overpowering the weak *taifa* rulers and remaining undefeated until the next wave of Berber Muslims, the north African Almohads, arrived in al-Andalus with intentions of revising the Almoravids' unorthodox ways, as well as occupying their territory. The Almohads declared war against the Almoravids, establishing themselves in al-Andalus between 1147 and 1163.

The Spanish Christian kings, however, continued to be unrelentingly successful in their Reconquest, finding allies in mercenaries that came from other parts of Europe, and also receiving institutional support from the Church. They avidly accepted and advertised Rome's position on their struggle: "Alfonso I el Batallador, rey de Aragón (1104-1134), describió la idea española de cruzada como el camino hacia Jerusalén a través de Marruecos" (Hamilton 79). The idea gained attention and acceptance; in 1118 CE, Pope Callistus II announced that the Aragonese conquest of Zaragoza was part of the Christian Crusades, which had been set in motion in 1095 CE by Pope Urban II.⁹ With the impetus and politics of the Crusades as a bolster, the combined forces of Castilla, León, Navarra, and Aragón proved their might on 16 July 1212 in the great battle against the Almohads at Las Navas de Tolosa. A new era began.

The decisive battle at Las Navas de Tolosa made the thirteenth century the most significant in terms of the future outcome of the Reconquest; after this confrontation, the Christian kingdoms gradually reduced the Muslims' territories until their last outpost, Granada, fell in 1492. This was also an important period regarding the region's relationship with the rest of the continent: "Spain's gradual incorporation into the

⁹ Occupied by the Muslims since 714, Zaragoza fell to Alfonso I of Aragón on 18 December 1118 after a nine-month battle.

mainstream of western European life reached fruition in the late thirteenth century” (O’Callaghan, *A History...* 359). This was still only a partial inclusion, however, particularly since Spain’s existence as an early nation-state was so complicated by division among the Christian kingdoms. The paradoxical, opposing themes of fragmentation and unification were hard at work in medieval peninsular history.

Although the shared goal of the Christian kingdoms was to unite and reconquer, each kingdom had its own additional political objectives, and there were divisive tensions between the different royal houses as they struggled over issues such as boundaries, payment of tribute, and the unpredictability of alliances. The fragmentation seen physically and politically in the region was also evident in the administrative set-up of the various peninsular kingdoms; there was a vast amount of fertile and productive territory being reconquered, at a rapid rate, and there was a lack of Christians to repopulate them. Vast expanses of lands had to be re-inhabited, as well as defended. The nobility gained greater importance, for they were to help preside over the new lands. This both fortified and weakened the position of kings, who had many men under their rule, and therefore several strands of power to keep bound together. As their territory and the reach of their sovereignty increased exponentially, so did the burden of retaining power.

Yet a nationalizing impulse persisted in the region, no doubt drawing strength from the many successes of the Reconquest. Most historians would probably agree that during the critical thirteenth century, the zeitgeist is well represented by the Castilian-Leonese ruler, Alfonso X, “El Sabio” (1252-1284). Alfonso is remembered as a magnificent, if headstrong monarch—he both knighted and crowned himself (Burns

“Castle of Intellect...” 12). He is arguably the most significant monarch of the century, and he certainly is one of the most memorable in all of Spanish history. Moreover, an understanding of his reign is important because it provides insight into the political and social milieu of his time, which was the same period leading into and surrounding the production of *LEM*.

Alfonso X had hopes of gathering the disparate lands of Iberia into one magnificent empire, with him at its head. He was not the first of his lineage to have desired this; his father, Fernando III (1217-1252), had also had designs on an imperial title, but his wish had never been fulfilled. The hunger for empire had long been associated with the ruler of León; centuries before, Alfonso VI of León's (1065-1109) contention that he was emperor over all the other Christian monarchs had fallen on deaf ears, although later, Alfonso VII of León (1126-1157) made the same assertion and was indeed actually “Recognized as suzerain by the count of Barcelona, the king of Navarre, the count of Toulouse, and others” (O’Callaghan, *A History*.256). However, Alfonso X’s claim to regal supremacy was supported by an undeniably sound legitimacy; the title of Holy Roman Emperor was a birthright that had come down to him through his mother, Beatrice of Swabia, daughter of Emperor Philip of Swabia. This made Alfonso a member of the Hohenstaufen family and eligible for the imperial crown. His electors, acknowledging this, gave him the title *Rex Romanorum*, which was “used to designate a king of Germany before his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor” (MacDonald 157).

The Empire was a dream that Alfonso pursued throughout his reign, and it seems to have influenced many of his actions, overtly political or not.¹⁰ It was in fact a dream that almost came true: in the 1257 election for the position, he was doubly nominated, along with his rival, Richard of Cornwall. However, the pope recognized neither of them and the title was left unoccupied. Alfonso's hopes were resuscitated when Richard died in 1272, but in 1273 Pope Gregory X ignored the Spanish king and instead recognized Rudolf von Habsburg. However, although he was crowned king at Aachen, he was never crowned as emperor. With the title still officially vacant, Alfonso came remarkably close to his greatest aspiration; he travelled to southern France in 1275 and in June and July of that year he earnestly advocated his cause to the pope; however, his expectations were quashed when his claim was rejected.

While involved in advancing his efforts to secure the title of Holy Roman Emperor, Alfonso was unable to commit himself completely to the complications faced by his territories; thus, he pursued his hypothetical, imperial realm to the detriment of his actual holdings. The monarch had a vast amount of land within his sphere of influence; he ruled not only Castilla, but also the kingdoms of León, Galicia, Toledo, Murcia, Jaén, Córdoba, and Sevilla, among others, as well as *señoríos* such as the Algarve and Algeciras; these lands were also the most fertile and densely populated (Porrás Arboledas et al. 30). Such an extensive domain brought with it a great burden; Alfonso's kingdom was troubled by problems presented by the threat—and reality—of uprisings by the

¹⁰ James F. Burke mentions that the authors of the Alfonsine historical text the *Primera Crónica General* (1270-1280?) “were actively attempting to assimilate Alfonso and his surroundings to an imperial tradition divinely inspired” (469). This propagandistic move to paint Alfonso as the successor of Charlemagne and therefore further legitimate his claim to the title of Holy Roman Emperor was first noted by Charles Fraker, according to Burke (468).

mudéjares, the Muslims living in Christian territory, as well as the Muslims in the independent kingdom of Granada. It did not help that Alfonso provoked the Marinids of Northern Africa with the invasion and pillage of Salé. Clashes with the rulers of Portugal and Gascony over territory and sovereignty also beleaguered him, as did a sometimes tense relationship with Jamie I of Aragon, his father-in-law.¹¹

For a complex variety of reasons, Alfonso's reign ended in disaster. He suffered great resistance from his nobles, who accused him of bad leadership. One of their primary grievances was based on Alfonso attempting to create a uniform law code for his entire realm, a project actually begun by Fernando III. Confronting him at a *cortes* in Burgos in 1272, the nobles complained that the Roman law on which his *Siete Partidas* (1251-1265) was based favoured absolutism and took away many of their rights. They wanted to retain the individual town *fueros*, which were more specific, regional codes of law that carried the benefit of protecting the nobles' powers and traditions.¹² To his dismay, Alfonso's much-loved brother Felipe was among those that challenged him; his other brothers, Enrique and Fadrique, also rebelled against him, and while in exile went as far as becoming vassals to Muslims rulers. Alfonso eventually capitulated and reinstated the old laws in 1274. The following year, while Alfonso was in France, Infante Fernando de la Cerda became ill and died suddenly; he had been the next in line for the throne. Fernando's brother, Sancho, assumed command and claimed that he, not Fernando's sons, had the legitimate right to rule. Alfonso's monarchy ended without a

¹¹ Alfonso either had, or established during his reign, ties with France, Aragon, and Portugal through carefully planned royal marriages. This indicates his interest in extending his territories into these regions.

¹² In Reconquest society, *fueros* also functioned as settlement charters for the frontier towns.

clear solution to this dispute, and amid mounting unrest and divided and lost loyalties, the king was forced to retreat to Sevilla. When he died there in 1284, his second son seized power and became Sancho IV (1284-1295).

Alfonso's failure as a politician is often noted by historians, who attribute much of it to hubris. This was a king who did recognize the Pope as spiritual leader; "In temporal matters, however, pluralism replaced universal secular authority, papal or imperial; here the Castilian king acknowledged no superior" (MacDonald 155). Alfonso was a true believer in absolute rule, and he organized and presided over his realm in accordance with that philosophy. He was perhaps inspired and encouraged in pursuing his great geopolitical ambitions not only because of the possibilities offered by his vast holdings, heritage, and influence, but also because of the idea of the "monarch" during his time.

The territories controlled by the medieval kings were so huge that they precluded straightforward, simplistic identification with their rulers; the simple idea of a mere mortal man being king was expanded into the idea of the crown itself as a symbol of inherited might and earthly divine authority: "los antiguos reyes conservaron un cierto grado de personalidad institucional, si bien se hallaban unidos bajo la égida de un solo monarca. Hubo que inventar un nuevo concepto que reflejase la nueva realidad, para lo cual se echó mano de la corona, como unidad superior a los reinos" (Porrás Arboledas et al. 56). The idea of there being a "king of kings" and of the crown as an omnipotent abstraction superior to the earthly corporeality of a human king naturally segues into an association between the monarch and a higher spiritual order. This notion must have been supported by the many tangible victories of the Reconquest, which was the Spanish

kings' crusade in their own lands; material reality was fed by a religious ideology that was reflected in the organization of medieval society. Thus the Christian kings were indeed God's representatives on earth.

Although he had many shortcomings, Alfonso's flawed statesmanship was offset by the far reaching talents he demonstrated in other areas. The cultural advances Alfonso brought to his kingdom helped forge early Castilian identity. His great efforts to impose linguistic unity were to have a lasting effect on his territories and reverberate throughout world history; building upon the work of his father, who had "encouraged the official use of Castilian, rather than Latin, as the official language of government and administration" (O'Callaghan, *A History...* 354), Alfonso took the next step in attempting to unify all Spanish letters through Castilian, making it the preferred language of the state and prose texts.¹³ He commissioned the translation of literary, philosophical, legal, historical, and scientific texts into this vernacular, setting up translation centres to produce them. In these cultural centres—the most well-known is the Toledo school—representatives from all three of the major faiths are thought to have worked alongside each other.

The literary output achieved during Alfonso's reign was the most impressive among the Spanish Christian kings during the Middle Ages. This erudite and prolific king actually penned his own contribution to peninsular literature with his *Cantigas de Santa María*.¹⁴ John Keller notes that what we know about the life of the Wise King

¹³ The impulse of a growing regionalism also affected other Spanish societies, which were "experiencing a surge of pride and local consciousness one might term protonationalist" (Burns "Castle of Intellect..." 21). James I of Aragon, for example, wrote his autobiography in Catalan, not Latin.

¹⁴ The *Cantigas* were not written in Castilian, however, but rather in Galician-Portuguese, the language used by Spain's troubadours and therefore the most appropriate linguistic

communicates “an uncommon phenomenon of personal participation for medieval times” (qtd. in MacDonald 207). Indeed, aside from writing his own material, Alfonso is also said to have supervised and participated in the editing of almost all of the works he commissioned. Although we do not know the extent to which he personally revised the texts, “There can be very little doubt that Alfonso intervened editorially” (MacDonald 175).¹⁵

The long list of texts Alfonso sponsored is too lengthy to include here; however, there are some works on that list that must be mentioned, since they relate to *LEM*. The most relevant text is *Calila e Dimna* (1253) since, like *LEM* that work hails directly from Eastern tradition and shares parts of the same rich literary history. Also immediately important is the already-cited *Siete Partidas*; this law code, parts of which will be examined in more detail later, may be taken as reflecting attitudes towards human relations and societies in thirteenth-century Castilla.¹⁶ In turn, these views may also be

vehicle for poetry written in adoration of a “lady-love” (in this case, the Virgin Mary). The political nature of the *Cantigas* must be acknowledged to be no less than that seen in other Alfonsine works. Even in his troubadouresque poetry, the Wise King managed to paint a picture of himself “...dentro de una línea de tradición divina,” and *Cantigas* 209, 221, 235, and 254, in telling of miracles received by Alfonso and others of his line, underscore the relationship between the royal family and God (Benito-Vessels 23). In his *Cantiga* 209, for example, there is an anecdote about the king falling ill in Vitoria; when he asks for “her book” to be placed upon his chest (an earlier version of *his own* book), he is healed (Solomon 103). Alongside the theme that the Virgin healed Alfonso exists the implication that he heals himself (since he wrote the book), in addition to the idea that the book itself was ethereal and bore miraculous power. It seems that the king wasted no opportunity to exalt his own name as he sought recognition as emperor.

¹⁵ This is something that Antonio Solalinde further supports in his article “Intervención de Alfonso en la redacción de sus obras.”

¹⁶ The *Siete Partidas* postdates *LEM*; however, we can assume a general relationship between the two works predicated upon them both reflecting the psychology of the same

perceived in the literature produced there. Of particular interest to this dissertation are the opinions and beliefs regarding women in that society. These viewpoints came from a variety of interrelated, constantly dialoguing discourses, which mutually reinforced each other; the next section will give an overview of what they had to say.

Women in Medieval Society: Religious and Physiological Treatises, and Socio-Economic Practices

To understand the conditions under which medieval women lived, let us hark back to when the female became the supposed harbinger of the world's woes; this idea was first developed in the West during the Classical period, when Hesiod's genealogy of the gods, *Theogonis*, gave us the tale of Pandora's box.¹⁷ This myth provided an ideological gender legacy that was echoed by Judaism, which asserted that the first female, Eve, caused the Fall and was responsible for human suffering. Although they give slightly different accounts of what happened in Eden, the two creation stories in Genesis 3:11-13 both establish Woman's inferiority to Man. As Leonard Shlain points out, the importance of this concern is attested to by the fact that "Gender relations is the *first* issue raised *and settled* after the creation of the universe" (112).

When Christianity inherited the story of Eve, the New Testament patriarchs and commentators solidified the religious dogma that would later prevail in Christian Europe by delineating the day-to-day practices that females were to follow in order to submit to

monarch's reign. Also, the laws of the *Partidas* are based on older models of legality that Alfonso and those of his realm would have been familiar with in 1253.

¹⁷ In the Roman Republic, write McNamara and Wemple, the adult female was classed as *alieni juris*—a minor (83).

men and elaborating their exegesis of the story of Eden. Saint Paul, for example, spelled out women's required subordination and powerlessness in his Epistles, and Saint Augustine invented the idea of Original Sin, a concept that is not mentioned in the Bible. Contributors such as these helped confirm that the female was a lesser being, and that Eve had passed on a legacy of spiritual inferiority and uncontrollable lust to those who shared her sex.¹⁸ So it was that "female sexuality became the symbol of human weakness and the source of evil" (Lerner, *Creation* 201). These beliefs and guidelines regarding females, which were reiterated by the men responsible for disseminating scriptural traditions, provided the underpinnings for the medieval Judeo-Christian religious discourse. The story of Eve's Fall and all women's consequent inborn disgrace was a stock part of the medieval social imaginaries that spanned Christian Europe.

Considering the trinity of cultures that influenced medieval Spain, we should also take a moment to note the Islamic viewpoint regarding Eve. The Qur'an does not fault Eve exclusively for the Fall, but rather says that Adam and Eve dwelled happily in the garden, "But the Shaitan [Satan] made them both fall from it," (Surah II, 36). Muslims assign responsibility for the Fall to both *Adam and Eve*. This is not to say that Islam did not propound its own brand of misogyny—man is patently deemed superior to woman in the Qur'an, and the text brings many restrictions against women that men are not required to observe. However, the damning of Eve is not part of Islamic teleology in the same way that it is in Christianity or Judaism. Thus, of the three great religions of medieval Spain, only Christianity and Judaism ground their misogynous views towards women on

¹⁸ The inheritance that resulted from Eve's temptation of Adam and their subsequent banishment from paradise was even seen in the development of speech, medieval views asserted; when girls were born, they were thought to call out "Eee" for Eve, while boys cried "Aaa" for Adam.

the story of paradise lost. However, although Christianity had kept the story of Eve, it differed from its Jewish ancestor in that it had expanded the tradition; moreover, it necessarily added a complementary figure who became a second archetype representative of women: the Virgin also had a part to play in fashioning ideals regarding the female.

In complete contrast to Eve, Christ's mother, Mary, was thought to be free from Original Sin and untainted by evil. As the epitome of purity and goodness, she represented an unparalleled female holiness and was the ultimate role model for all Christian women. She was at a standard of perfection that ordinary humans could never reach; but by attempting to emulate her piety, chastity, and righteousness, women might have a chance to redeem themselves, despite the burden they carried by virtue of their sex.

Together, Eve and Mary comprised a binary construction that was known throughout the Middle Ages as the motif "Eva/Ave." This was a binary, as Concetto Del Popolo points out, that was used to create other, similar constructions: "Il parallelismo deve necessariamente essere costante: ad Eva si sostituisce Maria, Cristo soppianta Adamo" and likewise Gabriel, the angel associated with Mary, finds his opposite in Lucifer, the fallen angel associated with Eve ("Da 'Eva'..." 28). Yet the related tropes of opposing males associated with the binary of good/evil were not well known. It was only the female rendition, exploited as a motif that neatly explained "the nature of all women" that became popular—so popular, in fact, that it would have been widely recognized by the inhabitants of thirteenth-century Spain when King Alfonso X employed the palindrome in his *Cantiga No. 60*, and assured his readers that "Entre Av 'e Eva gran

departiment ‘a / Ca Eva nos tolleu / o Parays’ e Deus, / Ave nos y meteu; / Entre Av ‘e Eva gran departiment ‘a” (qtd. in Lacarra, “Algunos datos...” 350).

As the Church inculcated its members and reinforced the antipodal construction of Woman through the Bible and its commentaries, it found little resistance to the interpretations it offered. Most of its audience was illiterate; moreover, the educated clergy was the only segment of society permitted to elucidate scripture, so that elite group alone controlled what the sacred teachings meant. This helped ensure that ideas regarding females remained securely contained by the religious writings that referred to them. However, it was not just ecclesiastical pens, but also secular ones, that put Woman into text.

Medieval medical treatises on human physiology bolstered dominant ideas regarding the lesser status accorded to women by affirming that men were responsible for the continuance of the human race and that women were merely carriers and bearers of offspring. This concurred with the religious view that the pains of childbirth were punishment for Eve’s Fall and that, as Thomas Aquinas had taught, “God, by delegating the power of gestation to females, left man freer to pursue a higher aim, namely intellectual tasks” (Bullough “Medieval Medical...” 500). The work of the physician confirmed this, in part because he, like the ecclesiastic, had also been influenced by Hellenistic ideas; Greek culture relied heavily on Aristotle’s (384-322 BCE) writings on physiology, in which he had postulated that the male element denoted “soul” or “form” while the female element denoted “body” or “matter.” From this was born the idea that the male principle is “active” while the female principle is “passive” and, ultimately, that

the inert substance of the female is actually a defective version of the male entity.¹⁹ This understanding of the female as *masculus occasionatus* was later elaborated, so that “Male and female were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy, and order/disorder” (Caroline Bynum in Murray 2).

The temperament of the female organism was also theorized by Spain’s own Isidore of Seville (c.570-636) who asserted, in his *Etymologiae*, that the nature of females was a lustful one, as demonstrated by the Greek word “femina,” denoting “burning force” (Blamires, Marx, and Pratt 43). Connecting linguistic symbols with live beings, Isidore also reasoned that *mulier*, or woman, is named for *mollities*, or softness, whereas man, *vir*, is associated with *vis*, strength, and *virtus*, virtue. The corporeal differences between women and men were theorized by men of science across the centuries and used to forge a relationship between ancient physiology and philosophy and Christian ideology, both of which reinforced the idea that woman was lesser than man. This led to some rather inventive ideas being suggested by the medieval medical community as they struggled to understand and explain human biology.

One of those ideas was that male semen was the residue resulting from refined or “concocted” blood, which was believed to have originated from its storage space in the brain (Solomon 52). While men sometimes had to be purged when they suffered from an abundance of semen (this required the “use” of a woman), too frequent sex would

¹⁹ Aristotle’s view contrasts with that of Plato, who had believed that both males and females had the same, ungendered, eternal souls; however, this response to misogynous thought, which appears in the *Republic* and does not conform to the one that most Hellenistic writers espoused, was “practically unknown” in the Middle Ages (Blamires, Marx, and Pratt 223).

“literally drain away the vitality of a man’s blood, shrinking his brain perhaps” (Blamires, Marx, and Pratt 39).²⁰ The loss of too much semen was just as devastating as the loss of too much blood. How this idea corroborates man’s superiority to woman and relegates females to the status of “object” needs little explanation.

Although medieval physiology experienced changes, some concepts remained stable, such as the theory that the human body functioned in accordance with the four humours of blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. One’s state of health (physical or mental) depended on the favourable balance of these four substances. The theory included the thought that the female was a “cold” and “humid” life form whereas the male was “hot” and “dry.” The female could not produce semen because her body was too cold, so she was unable to refine blood into semen. Her blood therefore stayed in her body, accumulating and then having to be purged through menstruation. This blood was a toxic substance, by all accounts; from their contact with it (or merely its vapours), trees lost fruit, silkworms stopped producing silk, and metals corroded. The puissance of this toxin of course could be felt in the mere presence of a menstruating woman, whose body was so wracked by the effects of the poison that even the saliva she produced while menstruating could cause plants to wither and scorpions to drop dead.

The outlet for women’s menstrual flow, the vagina, was the focus of much medical conjecture. Since the vagina was another “mouth” that led to the open chamber of the uterus, a woman had “holes” at two extremes of her body; this allowed wind to pass more easily into her, from either end. The excessive wind that entered her made her talk too much, thus women’s well-known verbosity was a direct result of her biology;

²⁰ Too frequent sex could also lead to sexual infections, which of course were traced and attributed to the female body, thus women were conflated with disease.

men, on the other hand, were not prone to such “windiness” since the penis was a closed entity and acted as a “bolt” for the lower body (Solomon 79). All things considered, a woman’s body was a faulty one, given its stark departure from the workings of that of the male model; the principal idea of its humoural instability (proven by menses) became a touchstone that “was held to govern also specific domains such as that of intellect. A woman’s intellect allegedly could not focus in a sustained way on a proposition on account of the ‘fluxibility’ of her constitution” (Blamires, *The Case* 27).

In short, between them, religion and science asserted that women were lesser, lustier, colder, and damper. One offered spiritual evidence and the other pointed to physical confirmation. Neither could be proven wrong.

If the theological and physiological views regarding women sought to restrict them ideologically, society appeared to do so tangibly, on a daily basis.²¹ In the secular view of women that emerges from an examination of legal codes and social practices, it is clear that women were seen as commodities to be exchanged among men, who set up the terms and regulation of the transactions; women passed from fathers to husbands, according to the principle of *patria potestad*. As animate articles of trade, females were of great potential economic and political worth to their male merchandisers as the exchange of females between royal families shows. Alfonso V of León (999-1028), for instance, set up an alliance with the Muslim king of Sevilla by allowing him to marry his

²¹ It should be acknowledged that the legal discourse, although it might seem more reliable than the religious and medical discourses on women, may not always be so. Legislative ordinances, like the other writings, remained fictionalized to some extent since they often most likely reflected what men *wished* society to be—the rules that should be followed to ensure social order and sound economic habits—but not necessarily what society *was*. Nevertheless, laws and social practices do give us some idea as to the goals of particular societies and the mores they esteemed.

sister, Teresa, in exchange for his aid in battle against the ruler of Córdoba; and Alfonso X ended a dispute with Afonso III of Portugal and gained temporary usufruct of several territories by arranging for the (already wed) Portuguese ruler to marry his illegitimate daughter, Beatriz.²² Alfonso X would have made sure, no doubt, that any marriage was planned in accordance with his view on royal matrimony given in the *Siete Partidas*: “[D]eue el Rey catar que aquella con quien casasse aya en sí quatro cosas. La primera, que venga de buen linaje. La segunda, que sea hermosa. La tercera, que sea bien acostumbrada. La quarta, que sea rica...” (qtd. in González-Casanovas, “Gender Models...” 55). The preoccupation with lineage may of course be read as a reiteration of the priority expressed in the fourth reason; a woman with *buen linaje* was usually one from a well-to-do family and would have more of an inheritance to pass along.²³

Although these examples involving illustrious personages are rather extraordinary, the exchange of women, and the related acquisition of territory and power, occurred at all levels of society. Women were of economic value not only to royals and nobles, but also to common men. Not only was their “ownership” inseparable from issues of inheritance, but in the frontier towns, having a wife meant that a man could be eligible not only for acquisition of lands and legacies but also other gains, such as election to public office, since his marital status and establishment of a fixed family residence signalled a commitment to the community where he settled (Dillard 22).

²² As Natalie Zemon Davis points out, however, “In the tenth and early eleventh centuries, the marriages of warriors and kings were made by abduction as well as by arrangement” (viii).

²³ Although, to be fair, it must be duly noted that the Wise King ends the sentence with “...la hermosura e la riqueza pasan más de ligero” qtd. in González-Casanovas, “Gender Models...” 55). On the other hand, would it have been so wise of him to omit this detail, in a production destined for the legal and moral edification of the public?

Marriage was therefore encouraged all-around; the fourth *Partida* advocated the institution even for those who could not reproduce (Stone 41).²⁴

With marriage as the official central purpose of her life, medieval woman was referred to by a variety of names that would indicate her status and availability. The preponderance of names for different types of females—categories that fulfilled social organization and bequeathal purposes—show that their relationships to men were the essential markers of their existence: a woman could be called a *manceba en cabellos* if of marriageable age; a *novia* if betrothed; a *muger* if a wife; a *muger soltera* if unmarried; a *muger de toca* if married and mature, or perhaps widowed (in which case she might also be known as a *bibda*); a *muger escosa* if beyond child-bearing age; or a *barragana* if she were a domiciled mistress—these being the most commonly-used names, but certainly not all of them.²⁵ A man, on the other hand, was “usually called by a title showing status based on property, residence or profession” (Dillard 19).

²⁴ The Church saw celibacy as sacred, and virgins and widows (assumed celibate) were considered more saintly than wives (Haro 471). Saintliness, however, did not increase the population or improve anyone’s material wealth, therefore secular society valued married (and preferably procreating) citizens over celibate ones. This conflict between the interests of material society and the religious establishment sometimes causes contradictory images of medieval life to emerge.

²⁵ Concubinage, or *barraganía*, helps illustrate the two types of marriage that existed in the Middle Ages and is again an indicator of the aforementioned conflict between secular and religious views towards marriage. According to Georges Duby in “Marriage in Early Medieval Society,” medieval marriages were both sacred and profane, and a marriage accorded to either the lay model (which was tied to inheritance) or the ecclesiastical model (which was more concerned with spirituality). Since the lay model sought to protect heirs and the transfer of wealth from one generation to the next, it tolerated concubinage. That the Church was aware (and disapproved) of the various types of marriage other than those which it sanctioned is indicated by the words it used to describe carnal love outside of the bounds of wedlock: *Luxuria, concupiscentia, libido*. The Church eventually capitulated, however, and formally recognized concubinage as a valid form of marriage in the 1398 Council of Toledo (Duby, *The Knight...* 41). Furthermore,

Unmarried women were expected to maintain their chastity and virtue in order to preserve the family honour (i.e., the reputations of men), and would hopefully attract appropriate suitors and become betrothed at the appropriate time—which could be as early as age seven for both men and women—and then could be married at age twelve (Stone 36). Whom a woman would marry was largely determined by her social position, her parents, and by laws, such as those that allowed males and females who shared descendants to marry only if they were beyond the fourth degree of consanguinity.²⁶ Having hoped for the best, once married, a woman “...moved in two directions: laterally, when she went to her husband’s house, but also vertically, either upward into a family

it is noted that “prostitute” does not appear as a social status on this list; although they were of course part of medieval society, prostitutes were not recognized in the *fueros* and other legal writings, in that they had no rights. It is also noted that another important category for medieval women is that of *monja* or nun. There is less information available on nuns, in comparison with other women, but they of course still participated in the economy of inheritances as heiresses—or even as transmitters of inheritances, as did monks; the *Siete Partidas* mentions *forneçinos*, who were “children born of adultery with a relative or woman in a religious order,” (Stone 92) and it is documented that Alfonso X allowed the priests of the Diocese of Salamanca to legally pass on inheritances to their children and other descendents (Benito-Vessels, “Gonzalo...” 18). Peter Linehan gives additional evidence of the sometimes unexpectedly profane lives of nuns and monks in *The Ladies of Zamora*, in which he explains the amorous relationships between a group of thirteenth-century nuns and Dominican friars. Indeed, since they did not always dedicate themselves wholly to the ascetic life, *monjas* could be complicated characters. Convents sometimes served as sanctuaries for the wives of abusive husbands (Duby, *The Knight...* 89); one might therefore find *monjas* who were not much interested in celibacy, and who were accustomed to lifestyles outside of the cloister. Conversely, it was also possible that convents and monasteries be homes to spouses living apart from each other—sometimes accompanied by their families—in order to pursue an existence unavailable to them in secular society.

²⁶ Aside from *consanguinitas*, or blood relationships, adoption (*cognatio legalis*) and spiritual affinity (*cognatio affinitatis*), that is, relationships between godchildren and godparents, or the children of those godparents, were also conditions that precluded marriage. Incest was to be avoided at all costs, with efforts to do so having “inspired the drawing of diagrams, the inclusion of footnotes and the insertion of intertextual paragraphs of explanation” into law books (Stone 70).

situated higher on the social scale than her own, or downward” (Klapisch-Zuber 289). As a wife, she was expected to remain faithful, bear children, and serve her husband in all things, following the Pauline edict that *vir est caput mulieris*. The husband became the official guardian of whatever wealth the couple had gained together through their union, and he alone had official authority to liquidate their assets, which comprised the *arras* (premarital endowment) he had given her before they took their vows, the *dote* (dowry) or *ajuar* (trousseau) she had contributed from her family, the wedding gifts they had received, and the inheritances that either of them might receive up on the deaths of their parents (minus the expense of the *dote*, in the woman’s case) as well as any military booty the man might have acquired. All of this might amount to money, jewels, lands, livestock, servants, clothes, quilts, linens, utensils, or a number of other things.

In a warring society that often took husbands away from their wives, adultery was apparently a concern, and perhaps a common occurrence, given the incitements against it; Marilyn Stone notes, for example, that the fact that so many canon lawyers wrote “...attempting to create a moral climate which would encourage the value of marital fidelity” indicates that they perceived societal flaws in that regard (34). Regulations governing adultery also act as evidence of its frequency, and reveal that although both husbands and wives strayed from the bonds of marriage, punishments were by no means equitable. For the Church, adultery was punishable for both sexes; but if a wife uncovered her husband’s philandering in the thirteenth century she might have found that according to Alfonso X’s *Siete Partidas*, for example, “pues que los daños y las deshonras no son iguales, conveniente cosa es que el marido tenga esta mejoría, que pueda acusar a su mujer de adulterio si lo hiciere, y ella no a él...” (qtd. in Wirkala

115).²⁷ If *she* were found guilty of adultery, however, she suffered legal, social, and financial repercussions; her marriage could be dissolved and her dowry would thereafter belong to her husband (Stone 57). Or, depending on the local laws specified in her town's *fuero*, a wandering wife might undergo physical castigation, through flogging, or even be expelled from her community (Dillard 133).

These public punishments were of course additional to that privately meted out by her husband, if he got his hands on her, since rebellious wives were at their husband's mercy when it came to discipline. Such was a husband's authority over his chattel of a wife, furthermore, that if he did find her *in flagrante* with her lover and decided to avenge himself by killing both her and her paramour on the spot, he would not be charged with murder, as provided by the *Fuero Juzgo* (Dillard 203).²⁸ Even if a husband did not discover his wife's infidelity at its moment of consummation, some town *fueros* pardoned husbands for killing their unfaithful wives at a later date. In Alcalá de Henares, for instance, a husband could kill his adulterous wife at any time, even after her act of disloyalty, as long as three of her relatives agreed that she was culpable; and in Coria and Sepúlveda, "...a husband could expect his wife's kin to help him apprehend and kill her with her lover since they, too, took offence at the couple's treachery" (Dillard 205).

Beyond laws serving to reinforce that men were to be accorded official authority over

²⁷ This illustrates the great weight accorded to the concept of *honra*, which even when associated with women in the end reflects a male preoccupation with defining himself in relation to other men. For a woman to be branded as an adulteress "was a most serious accusation that transmitted dishonour from a wife to her husband" (Dillard 171).

²⁸ The *Fuero Juzgo* (c. 1240) was a Romance translation of the old *Visigothic Code*. Parts of the *Code* made their way into Alfonso X's *Fuero Real* (1256), as well as several town *fueros* across the peninsula.

women, they therefore sometimes even allowed that they take justice into their own hands.

With just a brief overview, we have seen that the religious, medical, and legal views regarding the status and treatment of women in medieval Spanish society all seemed to concur that women were unequal to men. However, the legal discourse differed from the other two in that it contained a component that the others—more theoretical and hypothetical—did not have; the relationship that the legal sphere had to sustain with social and economic matters was unavoidable. Legal attitudes towards women had a vested interest in controlling who and how they married in order to preserve the material gains that their men folk had made and to ensure the inheritance rights of any offspring they might have. Therefore, contrary to what we have just seen, this actually led to some *favourable* social circumstances for females. Let us look at some other policies and practices that concerned women in medieval Spanish societies, and consider how they may be interpreted as having granted women some types of agency, and even having complicated thereby the suppressive forces of misogyny.

Complicating Misogyny: Women Protected, Empowered, and Defended

Historians working with charters, deeds, bookkeeping accounts, wills, and other such records have been able to conjecture about, and in some cases ascertain, what several aspects of material life was like for women in the frontier towns of Spain. The general picture is not entirely a gloomy one. Economically-based measures taken to establish and sustain communities in war-threatened societies, as well as the complicated matrix of rituals and legal requirements to which men were subjected in order to effect

their marriages to women, resulted in females enjoying certain protections and sometimes making financial and social gains throughout their lives.

As the Christian medieval Spains expanded their borders into territory won from the Muslims, re-population efforts required large numbers of colonizers who were ready to risk retaliatory invasion, stand their ground, and develop new communities. To encourage their migration and settlement, people were offered incentives to set up homes and stay to populate and become permanent inhabitants of the new territories. *Women*, as well as men, therefore, were offered ownership of property and encouraged to colonize; language reflected this in the term *vecina*, which denoted a woman who owned her own house in a frontier town, and *morador* which referred to one who simply rented (Dillard 16). Women were able to lay claim to property, then, and had some land control inasmuch as they owned or occupied the spot where they lived.²⁹ On an interesting and related note, in the *Libros de repartimiento andaluces* there are a great number of women recorded as having received plots of land; this is significant because the responsibilities of the “...poblador eran la defensa con las armas y el trabajo de la tierra, tareas que no parecen muy propias de una mujer” (Segura Graiño 132). The marital status of these women goes unmentioned. If they were wives, surely their husbands’ names would have been listed along with, or instead of, theirs; therefore we may assume that they were single—perhaps widows, but not necessarily so.

Women’s importance in community matters regarding real property was increased if they could exchange their holdings, as did men. Indeed, it is documented that women in rural northern Castilla, circa 1300, apparently bought and sold land (Ruiz 110).

²⁹ This was in addition to women gaining property and lands from inheritances.

Moreover, in some cases, property-owning women were allowed to have a say in annual elections held in their towns: “A few tenth- and eleventh-century notices of women who took an active part in defending the privileges of their communities against outsiders have survived,” according to Heath Dillard (148). The opportunity to conduct their own personal economies through the acquisition of real estate could therefore lead to women’s participation in grander economies and related negotiations that concerned the well-being of their communities.

Although women did not need men to become property-holders, it was common that they came to acquire real estate and territory through marriage. As soon as a woman became betrothed—which was not to happen against her will, most laws stated—her financial situation changed in that she was linked to another family and stood to gain from that relationship.³⁰ The *arras* that her husband -to-be gave to her upon their engagement was usually a source of material wealth that would have required him to have exerted considerable effort to amass and present to her and her family, and which in part served as a protection in case he abandoned his future bride (deflowering and desertion cannot have been uncommon, especially as betrothed couples often had sexual relations).³¹ As long as the nuptials were not dissolved, the *arras* belonged to the wife,

³⁰ Although the *Fuero Real* stated that a woman’s relatives could not impose a husband upon her, other regional *fueros* might be different—such as that of Navarra, which allowed the woman to refuse the first two suitors her parents proposed but forced her to take the third (or risk disinheritance, a costly alternative) (Rodríguez Gil qtd. in Segura Graiño 125).

³¹ In many communities, a man who simply retracted a betrothal promise might be fined up to 100 *mrs*; however, if he had had intercourse with his bride-to-be, matters were different: “At Zorita de los Canes repudiation after *copula carnalis* to use the canonists’ term, quadrupled the town’s relatively low fine for simple repudiation, while at Teruel it soared to 200 *mrs*. Here, as at Cuenca and all the other towns which considered this

“and she could dispose of it freely until she had children” (Dillard 47). Even then, she was entitled to keep one-fourth of it.³²

Within her marriage, a woman found further financial advantages and protections. As a wife, she shared her wealth (the *dote* given to her by her family) with that of her husband’s, in addition to whatever they had gained from marriage gifts, equally. These belongings became their joint property in a fifty-fifty ownership. Although officially, as mentioned above, the husband had administrative power within a marriage, this did not mean that he could squander his wife’s inheritance, which was legally protected; for example, if a wife perceived that her husband was being wasteful with her dowry, laws provided that she could claim it during their marriage, or have a third party administer it instead of him (Stone 57). Moreover, there is evidence that wives actually did participate, albeit unofficially, in the control and management of their estates: “Every surviving medieval cartulary, with documents typically showing wives acting with their husbands to sell, mortgage, exchange or otherwise dispose of property...proves that joint action by both spouses was usual procedure in alienating any valuable goods, especially land that either of them owned” (Dillard 76-77). Women therefore not only stood to profit from entering into matrimony, they also had some say in the operation of their family economies.

Socially, too, women realised some influence because of their status as marital partners, particularly if they became mothers.³³ Women with female children had a say

disastrous sequence of events, the man was also banished as an outlaw” (Dillard 57). Betrothal was no trivial matter, therefore.

³² Regulations regarding dowries varied among the *fueros* used in different localities.

in whom their daughters married; *parental*, not just paternal consent, was required for daughters to wed, thus mothers had to be consulted about this family decision. In the uppermost echelons of society, mothers were afforded greater admission to power when they had male children. If their sons were under-age, women were able to act as regents in place of them; later, when the children became rulers, the mothers could continue to exert some leverage through their counsel.³⁴ Of course, we should keep in mind that mothers did not have to be wives. *Barraganas*, too, had their place in medieval societies (and they also found themselves protected to some extent, in that they might be provided for through cohabitation with their lovers, until such time as they were abandoned for suitable wives).³⁵ *Barraganas* might also hold sway over their more officially powerful children—who also had to be taken care of, as laws provided; the sons and daughters offspring of “common-law” marriages were called *fijos de ganancia*, and they could have honourable marriages arranged for them if they were female and could inherit from their fathers’ estates if they were male (Lacarra, “Representaciones” 32-34).

Aside from motherhood, a woman’s influence, although typically concentrated in the home, and usually consisting of household-related activities such as washing, fetching

³³ In this regard, David Herlihy has suggested that “One possible indication of the importance of the woman within the family is the use, by her children, of a matronymic rather than a patronymic...many persons in the charters are identified not by the name of a father but of a mother” (16).

³⁴ Some royal women were even able to rule in their own right—as did Queens Urraca and Berenguela—since the absence of a Salic Law allowed them to do so, if necessary. In fact, Urraca even took command of her father’s (Alfonso VI) troops “frente a su marido Alfonso I de Aragón para defender su derecho a gobernar el reino heredado de su padre” (Lacarra, M.E., “Los paradigmas...” 10).

³⁵ Dillard notes that priests’ *barraganas* need not have feared this (131-132). They therefore may have enjoyed any material benefits (gifts, for example) of their extra-marital relationships for longer periods than did other women.

water, cooking, and so on, could actually have a greater trajectory that might extend to the inn, the mill, or the market, among many other venues. Many aristocratic wives “acted as partners and surrogates for their husbands, and after marriage they often stepped into their roles” (McNamara 26). Of course, non-aristocratic widows could also adopt their husbands’ professions. In frontier societies, women had plenty of opportunities, welcomed or not, to replace their husbands when they were away at war. The common woman, having most likely helped her husband with his profession throughout his life, and having learned how to manage his business or practice his trade, might know how to fire up the huge communal ovens that baked the town’s bread, know where to purchase the lead-tin alloy used in the type metal of printing machines, or be able to efficiently run the local bathhouse. She may even find herself skilled in carpentry, woodcutting, or tanning, as “it would be unwise to suppose that women necessarily shied away from even the heaviest labours when necessary” (Dillard 161). Although a widow in particular might find herself in the powerful position of running a business, other women might also do so, having inherited shops from their families, or otherwise simply by being involved in the workforce; there is plenty of evidence that women laboured, for example, in the olive groves of Andalusia, which demanded an enormous amount of workers and where the term *cogederas* was specifically used to denote the women that did the oliveharvesting (Borrero Fernández 15). There is no reason to assume that women of every marital status were not participants in the most demanding of tasks and lifestyles.

If women *were* widows, however, they were guaranteed many protections. Law codes ensured that widows were well taken care of by providing them with legal counsel,

protecting them from accusations of adultery regarding their first marriage (if they remarried), and safeguarding their homes against foreclosure, among other considerations (Dyer 66-67). Furthermore, they alone may be left in charge of the accumulated wealth their husbands had left behind, and they might become the sole owners of considerable amounts of property and find themselves in comfortable economic situations, as long as their deceased husbands had not left them in debt. Widowed women were permitted to preside over their late husbands' estates as long as they did not remarry (otherwise they would have to relinquish authority to their new husbands). If they did remarry, they might even experience some small liberty in that regard since, whereas the *manceba en cabellos* risked disinheritance if she married without first obtaining her parents' consent, the widow was bound to no such restriction; "The widow of any age was considered an independent woman, and her freedom to remarry furnishes one example of her autonomy as a citizen with an established position as an adult" (Dillard 44).

The authority that could come to women through widowhood is supported by sources such as the fiscal censuses from Seville's rural economy in the late Middle Ages, which list women as the *heads* of family units (Borrero Fernández 13). These women were most likely widows presiding over their children—whose marriages they had the authority to approve and arrange—as well as their late husbands' estate holdings, perhaps servants, and even the family business. It is no surprise, then, that as Mercedes Vaquero notes, in spite of Dillard's suggestion that the Reconquest favoured widows remarrying, "we do not find many widows who have married a second time" in the Chartularies of Toledo from 1101-1291 (127). Although official practices would have favoured remarriage (particularly given the shortage of females in the Middle Ages), Vaquero's

findings imply that women were comfortably satisfied with their widowhood and did not see the need to legally formalize any relationships they may have had.

Unmarried women, wives, and widows all may have enjoyed some material and social benefits despite the oppressive misogynous discourses that surrounded them. The fact that women were seen as commodities had both negative and positive aspects; while on the one hand women were reduced to items of exchange, on the other hand, they had to be legally protected in order to preserve the material value they carried and transferred from one family to another, and this may have improved their living conditions.

As research shows, non-fiction documents—legal and economic records—concerning medieval Spain often show deviations from what the religious discourse wished reality to be, and they reveal practices that illustrate disjuncture between secular laws and religious laws, and between prescriptions and practices; these aberrances take the form of anything from the merely unexpected (widows hiring farm hands) to flagrant acts of insubordination (nuns having lovers). In practice, women had some influence on the development and operation of society, and actual daily life sometimes contradicted the dictates of dominant ideologies. Although men held most public power, women often exercised authority within their personal spheres of existence. Legal policies and social practices demonstrate that women could yield seigniorial and familial authority, own buy and sell property, gain and manage inheritances, and contribute meaningfully to the workforce. We can interpret this activity as “power” if we consider alternative definitions of the word. “Power” in the traditional historical sense includes the idea of having “public authority,” as discussed in Mary Eler and Maryanne Kowaleski’s *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*; yet our idea of power must shift somewhat when we

consider medieval women. There is power also in “the ability to act effectively, to influence people or decisions...” (Erler and Kowaleski, “Introduction” 2). Power therefore can include the informal influence exercised in private and public spheres; agency also is acquired through meaningful participation in social networks, and through family membership and community involvement, not just through official, state-imposed hierarchies that favour domination by a male elite.

The preceding pages show that there was obviously some disparity between the roles played out by ideological women and those of *real* women; reality often did not fully conform to misogynistic discourses. The active participation of females in various walks of medieval life seems to defy the neat, binary construction of Woman that antifeminist discourses proposed. The historical evidence about *real* women’s lives, their rights and protections, and their sometime exercise of non-publicly-granted but publicly-operational authority, raises questions regarding the acceptance of the archetypal ideals of Eva and Ave, as well as about the extent to which the control and suppression of women in medieval society was successful. Women fulfilled roles other than those which society usually prescribed for them, and sometimes they even engaged in activities that directly challenged official directives regarding their behaviour. In fact, the anti-feminist dialogues at work within medieval society had hushed but nevertheless extant corollary components that actually worked in women’s favour. Indeed, along with the myriad of discourses that presented the case *against* women, there also existed a case *for* them.

The anti feminist tendency so vigilantly expressed in many medieval writings—and which burgeoned particularly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—was steadily countered by those who wrote in defence of women. The “case for women,” as Alcuin

Blamires describes it, is “a mode of discourse which aims to build a positive representation of women in response to either specified or implicit accusations...It will characteristically take the form of direct oration, but forms such as debate, narrative, and even lyric can also accommodate it” (*The Casø*). Therefore, the “case for women” may be said to have been expressed through two different modes of communication: that which Linda Woodbridge has called the “formal controversy” (qtd. in Blamires, *The Case* 9), and that which Blamires calls the “incidental case” (Blamires, *The Casø*). The former may be applied to official disquisitions (this form of the defence really did not fully develop in Spanish literature until the mid-fifteenth century), while the latter is witnessed informally in attitudes expressed in texts that do not explicitly claim to be arguing a case for women—works such as biblical commentaries, medieval treatises on morality, hagiographies, and exemplary tales. Even legal writings may be interpreted as providing some part of the Case.

For example, as an informal contribution, we might briefly consider Alfonso’s *Siete Partidas* as regards matrimony. The text says that although Woman was made for Man by God, that He “...puso ley ordenadamente entre ellos, que assí como eran de cuerpos departidos según natura, que fvesen uno quanto en amor, de manera que non se pudiessen departir, guardando lealtad uno a otro...” and besides this, that “[L]a razón por que llaman Matrimonio al casamiento, e non Patrimonio, es ésta. Porque la madre sufre mayores trabajos con los fijos...E demás desto, porque los fijos, mientras son pequeños, mayor menester han de la ayuda de la madre, que del padre” (qtd. in González-Casnovas “Gender Models...” 54-55). This seems to advocate some measure of egalitarianism between women and men involved in the institution of marriage while the linguistically-

based line of reasoning—a technique that was memorably used against females by St. Isidore—recognizes that because of the work of women with children, females have a more significant role early on.

Yet the two categories of the Case for women, formal and informal (or incidental) pose problems for interpretation; as regards the formal mode, although the participants sometimes seem genuinely pro-feminine, their motives are often questionable, since at times their disputes seem nothing more than *topoi* that male writers use to squabble amongst themselves, or with small groups of privileged writing women—such as the 15th-century French female writer Christine de Pizan, author of *Cité des dames*—as they compete in demonstrating their flair for argumentation.³⁶ On the other hand, when it comes to the incidental case, much of the material concerns highly ambivalent sources that may be read as providing misogynous viewpoints which would be more in line with the case *against* women. With medieval literature in particular, this is often the situation. A well-known example is provided by courtly tradition, which, with its celebrations of adulterous love and depictions of women who enjoyed sexual liberation, and its admiration for the female's physical beauty and ennobling presence, “could be considered a major sector of vernacular literature relatively positive about women” (Blamires, Marx, and Pratt 148). Yet the courtly tradition may also be classified as misogynous, given that it objectifies the female, portrays her as a fickle item of exchange

³⁶ If the “formal case” can be interpreted, in part, as a frivolous game of rhetoric, this begs the question of whether or not its obverse, the “case against women,” or medieval misogyny, can also be considered as just another literary argument for arguments' sake. The Medievals *were* particularly fond of debates. Nevertheless, although literary inclinations played some part in the literature of misogyny, “there was surely too much at stake in this particular debate (apportioning of responsibility for the Fall, for one thing, and woman's continuing exclusion from public office for another) for us to dismiss it all as fundamentally unserious” (Blamires, Marx, and Pratt 13).

between men, and ultimately negates her subjectivity for, in the final analysis, “La imagen femenina se proyecta desde el punto de vista masculino y la mujer vuelve a ser lo que el poeta-protagonista quería hacer de ella: un motivo para su propio ‘ennoblecimiento’” (Wirkala 119). Thus the texts that we may want to use as examples that prove the incidental case for women may varyingly be called misogynous or not and may present themselves as continually shifting between one viewpoint or the other.

This polar variance, the fluctuation between for-and-against, correlates to the antithetical construction of Woman as Eva/Ave that was repeated and re-elaborated across the Middle Ages. We frequently see women in medieval texts alternately portrayed as incarnations of Eve and Mary. This tendency may be easily identified in a variety of Spanish literary works that may be understood as belonging to an incidental case for women—or not—since they most certainly do not *formally* champion females, and in some cases they portray women in a positive manner. A brief consideration of some key texts and genres will suffice to sketch a general picture of the situation: thus we recall that the *jarchas* (9th-10th century) record the laments of devoted women dutifully pining for their absent lovers; in *Calila e Dimna* (1253) the story “Del rey Çederano et del su alguazil Beled et de su muger Elbed” tells how Elbed saves her husband, and the story “El carpintero, el barbero y sus mujeres” relates a tale of female duplicity; the epic poems *Cantar de Mío Cid* (c. 1207), *Poema de Fernán González* (c. 1250), and *Mocedades de Rodrigo* (c. 1365) depict submissive, well-behaved women while the *Cantar de los infantes de Lara* (predates the 13th century) describes the libidinous Doña Lambra; the *Libro de Apolonio* (c. 1250) contrasts Luciana’s “pure” relationship with her father with another girl’s incest; the *Libro de buen amor* (c. 1340)

posits the innocence of the chaste Doña Endrina against the machinations of the wily Trotaconventos; *El Conde Lucanor* (1335) presents the deferential Doña Vascañana in Exemplo XXVII, “De lo que conteçio a un emperador et a don Aluar Hannez Minaya con sus mugeres,” and later mocks the disobedient wife of Exemplo XXXV, which tells us of “el mançebo que caso con una muger muy fuerte et muy brava”; and the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (13th century) venerates the Virgin, while the *Corbacho* (1438) inveighs brutally against women’s malfeasance.

To put it generally, we see a positive view of women where they are obedient, faithful, and chaste, and we are given a negative view where they are presented as lustful, deceitful, and disruptive. These are of course but a few examples that hint at the dimensions of an obviously complicated topic that would require much more space to explain than is available here. Yet even this partial list suffices to illustrate how medieval Castilian literature, from poetry to prose, early to late, presents a convoluted, highly ambivalent picture of women—re-elaborating that tradition across centuries and genres—in the types of texts we might turn to if we wanted to find fragments of the incidental case for women. The simultaneity of thought that is perceived here pays enduring obeisance, in the final analysis, to an ideology that suppressed and defined women by categorizing them into either one of two compartments in a diametrical duality. Therefore, we might conclude that despite “real” medieval women being depicted in a variety of ways that break with the typical images of the Virgin and the Whore, the polarized Eva/Ave motif is apparently well-accepted in Spanish literary texts, as we see in the reiterations of bad women/good women in the examples above.

If virtuous women are found along with wily ones—even in single texts associated with single authors—and if wily women outnumber the virtuous, as we find in most exempla collections, for example, then the exercise of identifying works that demonstrate the incidental case for women in medieval Spanish literature may seem self-defeating. However, rather than limiting us in identifying instances of the case “for” women, the phenomenon of some medieval texts’ unreliability in terms of presenting themselves as either pro- or anti-feminine actually increases our options for criticism by allowing the search for attitudes in favour of women to concern itself with a wider variety of works than we might have initially thought. Moreover, it destabilizes the monolith of medieval misogyny; for if a medieval text arguably can be both pro-feminine and anti-feminine, the system of absolutes (for and against, anti and pro) on which much interpretation and categorization is based becomes increasingly precarious. Within this system of absolutes, we will recall, we have seen the ever-repeated constructions of Eva/Ave. If the inherent ambivalence of medieval Spanish texts hinges upon the use of this motif, and the concept of medieval misogyny is unstable, then the motif in turn also becomes volatile.

The ambivalence of medieval texts towards women in the use of Eva/Ave and the instability of Eva/Ave is hinted at by a particular medieval female archetype. She not only epitomizes the ambivalence that is so often a *sine qua non* of medieval texts, but also helps us perceive the possibility of different female subjectivities that lie outside of the well-used duality. We will now foray deeper into the realm of ambivalence and see how the construct of Eva/Ave may be complicated, by contemplating that female archetype and what she yields to a critical analysis.

Mary Magdalene and Speaking Women

Although religious tradition offered two extreme models of women—a negative ideal, which women could not help but suffer from as a result of their God-given inferiority, and a positive ideal, which they were expected to emulate as far as possible—it also offered an additional female exemplar who was a combination of the two ideals and thus presented an alternative to the rigidity of Eva/Ave; her name was Mary Magdalene.

A prostitute-turned-penitent, Mary Magdalene was said to have witnessed Christ's crucifixion, to have been the first to receive the news of the resurrection, and to have conveyed that information to the incredulous disciples. The Medievals were fascinated with her persona, which came to symbolize a complex spiritual transformation and which prompted its own cult following. Mary Magdalene had admitted human flaws and foibles and carried with her the stigma of the "seven deadly sins" that Christ had cast out from her; thus ordinary women could perhaps relate better to her than they could to the ethereal Virgin. This, along with the important fact that she was repentant led to her being valued and cultivated as a role-model for Christian women, and thus it is no surprise that "She emerged into high popularity in the twelfth century...coinciding with the growth of dualistic concepts like those which had evolved in the early years of the Christian era" (Kane 678).

Mary Magdalene is emblematic of the built-in ambivalence and elusiveness that seems to typically render the analysis of medieval texts so problematic. Moreover, this figure complicates the binarism of Eva/Ave in that she represents a *crossing-over* from the sinfulness of one to the consecrated realm of the other. Unlike Eve and Mary, she

presents herself and may be conceptualized as *either/or*; both a paragon of holiness and a representative of the sinfulness of the material world, she is “Experienced alike in Eros and in Agape” (Kane 683). However, although she may complicate the binarism of Eva/Ave to some extent because she does not remain fixed as one or the other but is capable of being *both*, alternately and endlessly echoing the two choices of the good woman/bad woman stereotypes we find reiterated time and again in medieval discourses on the female, Mary Magdalene ultimately cannot escape the black-and-white parameters of the motif, which dictate that the female be defined by the categories of “good” and “evil.” Whether she is good or bad or both, Mary Magdalene is still part of the same equation as Eve and Mary, since she is nonetheless a “model woman” for either extreme of a constructed duodirectional continuum, and thus she too is trapped by the limiting dualism of the Manichean thought evident in Christian conceptions about women.

That said, Mary Magdalene does differ from the Virgin in a way that lets us see how she indicates the way forward for interpretations of medieval women to break with binary thinking. Firstly, we must note that Mary Magdalene stands alone as an image of the Good, praised and valued for her own self-existence. This is in contrast to the Virgin, for whom “conception was more a motive of glory for her offspring, Jesus, than for her and womankind” (Villalta 30). The Virgin proves nothing by virtue of simply being a woman and is not a self-sufficient image of positivity. On the other hand, appreciation of Mary Magdalene is unassociated with the holy product of a son of God, and she does not obtain distinction through an unavoidable relationship to Christ.

Yet even aside from this, Mary Magdalene is exceptional in an even more important way, since she is the first to tell of the resurrection. In other words, she is

empowered through her participation in an act of speech. Within this archetype we therefore perceive a trace of *authority* because Mary Magdalene is entrusted with, and successfully fulfils, a mission to convey the words that bear the message of the most significant event in Christian history.³⁷ This apostolic, speaking woman was therefore esteemed in a way that other women—even the Virgin—were not. Although other women exemplars, good or bad, may have *spoken*—including Eve and Mary—no others were chosen to speak on behalf of the deity at the time of his ascension. In being selected to yield the power of the holy word, “Mary Magdalene seemed conspicuously elevated to an evangelistic role when Christ asked her to inform the apostles of the Resurrection...” (Blamires, *The Case* 91). That is, this woman was selected to do what women were for the most part not permitted to do: to preach, to tell, to *instruct*.³⁸ This aspect of this archetype has naught to do with either extreme of the binary Eva/Ave, nor with the alternating movement between the two poles.

That a woman should be noted for *speaking* is remarkable because, as we have seen, above, men believed that women were lesser intellectually and in every other way. It was unthinkable, then, that females should be permitted to speak publicly; they were not suited for such an activity. This belief carried over into reality, insofar as women

³⁷ Accounts of the event vary, of course: In the Gospel of Matthew 28.10, Mary Magdalene is accompanied by “the other Mary” when Christ appears and instructs her to deliver his message, and in Luke 24.10, she is just one of a group of several women who give the news to the apostles. In Mark 16.9 and John 20.17-18, however, Christ appears only to her, and she alone conveys the news of his resurrection. The Medieval understanding of Mary Magdalene’s role as it developed into a literary motif granted her the honour of being the sole speaker, as in Mark and John.

³⁸ This is all the more surprising in light of the Pauline edict that, “As in all congregations of God’s people, women should not address the meeting. They have no licence to speak, but should keep their place...It is a shocking thing that a woman should address the congregation” (I Cor. 14:34-35).

were precluded from certain professions that would have required them to speak in public; the *ars praedicandi*, for example, or the practice of law.³⁹ In the latter case, the justification as to why not, aside from the age-old contention that female reason was inferior, was also that if the female preached, it would not matter how good or chaste she was, she would provoke immoral thoughts and arouse her male listeners, thereby posing a threat to the sanctity of their souls. This latent fear of the speaking woman is more candidly articulated by Jehan Le Fèvre who, writing in the 1370s, expressed that women were excluded from the legal profession because men feared their wits, knowledge, and subtlety (Blamires, Marx, and Pratt 6). Thus, whether he openly admitted it or not, medieval man saw the speaking woman as something to be avoided because he feared her. For that, Mary Magdalene's uniqueness was downplayed through the popular medieval belief that Christ appeared to her only because he knew he could rely on a woman to quickly spread the word of his resurrection because of the female's legendary garrulousness (woman's "windiness," as described in the misogynous biology above). This slight directed towards female orality again obviates that the desire to quash female orality or the glory thereof stems from the trepidation caused by the speaking woman—for the speaking woman is one with subjectivity, and the power to manipulate symbols

³⁹ Although some mendicant orders did allow women to become preachers, women were for the most part excluded from this profession. It is also noted here that these two professions were those that contained two of the main discourses—the religious and the legal—that men used to define women. To allow women to enter into these professions would have been to allow them to enter into those discourses as speaking subjects and to define *themselves*—surely a dangerous prospect.

and even make some of her own; she threatens male power.⁴⁰ Few women may have been educated and taught how to read and write, but articulation cannot be stifled through illiteracy; speech was accessible to any woman, young or old, poor or rich. Women who spoke in public influenced, and those who influenced had power. Speaking women such as Mary Magdalene lacked public power but could nevertheless wield a non-official brand of power. The *auctoritas* that comes from the power of speaking is a quality that exceeds binarism and can grant women agency.

It is unusual, then, to find speaking women, and even more so to find women that “instruct” by displaying their learning. However, within medieval Spanish literature there are some so-called *mujeres sabias* who do speak; they also possess astounding intellects and knowledge that seem to put them on a par with men. The most well-known *sabia* is Teodor, the principal character of the anonymous *Historia de la doncella Teodor* (dated to the mid-1200s).⁴¹ This speaking woman is an “instructor” inasmuch as she informally “teaches” the other characters of the text (her words also edify her extra-textual reading/listening audience). She proves that her wisdom and intellect is superior to that of anyone else, rising above the men of the text, even the *sabios* that come to challenge and test her.

If the convention of the *sabia* has something in common with misogynous tradition, says Rita Wirkala, “...es que ambos admiten en el sexo femenino una inteligencia innata, una astucia—ya sea para fines negativos o positivos—con la cual el

⁴⁰ The great power in articulation is of course also substantiated by Judaeo-Christian beliefs in the ability of God’s speech to vocalize the world into existence, “Let there be light.” Therefore the medieval esteem for speaking was rooted in theology.

⁴¹ This story is thought to come from a version of the *Alf layla wa layla*, or *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.

hombre no puede competir” (119). Aside from this, however, there is another obvious connection between the *sabia* and misogynous thought: in the case of the doncella Teodor, for example, if we examine the text, we find that this prescient woman is something of a “talking head” who simply regurgitates what male writers might usually say; let us consider, for example, the exchange between Teodor and one of the *sabios* that interrogates her:

El sabio le preguntó:

—¿Qué cosa es el hombre?

La donzella le respondió:

—Imagen de Nuestro Señor Dios.

El sabio le preguntó:

—Donzella, ¿qué cosa es la muger?

—Arca de mucho bien y de mucho mal, imagen del hombre, bestia que nunca se harta. (Baranda and Infantes 76)

The carefully planned organization of the dialogue makes an oppositional matrix out of man/woman by having the *sabio* ask Teodor to define “male” versus “female” in succession, thereby implicitly contrasting the two; moreover, the *sabio*’s second question, being preceded by the vocative “Donzella” serves to gratuitously remind Teodor and, more importantly, the audience of readers/listeners, that *she is* a woman and that her answer will glorify or damn all of her kind, in spite of herself—which it does.⁴² Thus,

⁴² The medieval audience might also have appreciated her response for its intertextuality with other definitions of “muger” delivered by male speakers; her reply is very similar to, only it is a slight improvement over, what Segundo says after having been instructed in the wickednesses of women in “La historia del filósofo Segundo” (thought to be of Greek origin, dating to the second or third centuries), which appears in Alfonso X’s *Estoria de*

although Teodor's knowledge is immense and her sex is not usually seen (or allowed) to astonish men with displays of intellect, her words do not particularly favour women. Aside from this, we might also question the presentation of Teodor as a *sabia*. In the medieval period the word *sabio* denotes, rather than "someone who is wise," something more along the lines of "...la expresión contemporánea *un intelectual*, del francés 'intellectuel'...El término sabio designa, así, a un grupo o clase de individuos que, conscientes de su *diferencia*, laboran con la palabra y la mente, en lugar de vivir de las rentas o trabajar con las manos" (Sánchez Martínez de Pinillos 17). If we recall, then, that Teodor works as the slave of a merchant—a domestic occupation of the most physical kind, one that certainly would have required her to do hard labour and one that goes against, therefore, the idea that this woman could *really* belong to the ranks of the *sabios*.

Aside from Teodor, other "wise women" are exemplified by Tarsiana in *Libro de Apolonio* (c. 1250), Grima in *Libro del caballero Zifar* (early fourteenth century), Isonberta in the story "El Caballero del Cisne" in *La Gran Conquista de Ultramar* (thirteenth century) and Liberia in Alfonso X's *Estoria de España*, as Wirkala points out (123-126). In addition, Marta Haro includes "las cuatro doncellas del rey Sorobabel" in *Libro de castigos e documentos* (thirteenth century), and she also relaxes the definition of *sabia* to include women that simply give good counsel, giving various examples of the related figure of the "mujer consejera" which she identifies in several works (465). Many

España; he tells us that woman is "Confondimiento del omne, bestia que nunca se farta, cuydado que non fuye, guerra que non queda, peligro del omne que non a en si mesura" (qtd. in Haro 458).

of these unofficial advisors are chaste and obedient wives who dutifully listen to and counsel their husbands, or they are other women that “come to the rescue” of men.

On the whole, the *sabias* and female counsellors are women who are presented as possessing profound perspicacity and insight, sometimes using their wisdom to overcome great adversity and perform heroic acts—or perhaps just delivering messages of sound common sense. Although their existence seems to favour women, as always, the interpretation of medieval texts is enslaved by an inherent ambivalence. For the most part, as Wirkala notes, “Los ejemplos de mujeres sabias y honradas en la cuentística, la poesía y la narrativa caballeresca no son despreciables, pero funcionan como representación de algo exquisito, una rareza difícil de hallar, y más bien se asemejan a una metáfora” (101). In other words, the *sabia* is not a “real” woman. The importance bestowed upon the woman as *sabia* or *consejera* is undeniable, and the positive view associated with such women because of their wisdom and influence is something that perhaps partly mitigates misogyny; it certainly allows the female to be something other than merely “good” or “bad. However, as Lacarra points out, “...los textos protagonizados por doncellas sabias, claramente antitéticas a las protagonistas de otras muchas historias, no se alejan tanto de la corriente misógina, de la que sólo son una variante singular” (Lacarra “El arquetipo...” 17).

From Eve and Mary to Mary Magdalene, the *mujer sabia*, and the *consejera*, we might see some progression in that while Eve and Mary are subjected to the binary constructions of bad / good the talking women seem less so. It is difficult to speak of medieval women other than those represented by archetypes, and we will always find them; even men in literature of the Middle Ages are “typed,” especially in exempla, as

we find the typical king, the typical prince, the typical wise man, the typical priest, and so on. These stock character types are reiterated over and over, and there is of course no possibility of finding the more original, independent individuals that we find in modern literature. Thus it is hard to escape talking about women in terms of their being one or another archetype—described by the *Oxford Dictionary* as “a typical specimen” and “a recurrent symbol or motif.” However, we might hope to find overlooked segments of the literary depiction of women—parts of women’s literary history, therefore—by looking within archetypes, dismantling them and scrutinizing their components in order to speak about women in a way other than that which is dependent on conceiving of them merely as interchangeable, predictable, archetypes. If we look at some of the women in *LEM* for example, we see speaking women who, although they easily may be called Eva/Ave, have powers of orality that go beyond those we have seen in the figure of Mary Magdalene and that of the *sabia* and *consejera*. They do not just speak, they also perform. In that regard, these women do not appear to emulate an archetype.

Beyond the Binary: Shahrazād and the Spanish Shahrazād

Given what we have seen above, we should not be surprised, when we turn to *LEM*, to still see binarism at work; the text has what we might call collections of “good” women and “bad” women, with many more of the latter. The principle female character of *LEM*, for example, who is the most mentioned woman and who is by far the most memorable, is a lustful, lying, wicked temptress that wreaks havoc on the society around her; as such, she is an avatar of Eve. At no point does she resemble the Virgin, and neither does she evoke Mary Magdalene since she is unrepentant, unredeemed, and

unholy. However, she does share one attribute with Mary Magdalene and other women just mentioned: the power to speak. In fact, she is primarily defined by this quality.

This speaking woman of *LEM* however, exceeds the boundaries of the Mary Magdalene model and differs significantly from the *sabia* and the related *consejera*. Unlike Mary Magdalene, she does not act as an envoy for any man; any message she delivers is her *own*. When she speaks, her words issue from her as original signs, not repeated ones spoken in the service of a man-deity, but rather as something of her own creation. Unlike the *sabia* she is not an idealized woman; she is unremarkable. Her medieval writers, in portraying her as deceitful, obviously wanted us to think of her as “typical”; due to her wiliness, she is not categorized as being of the same type as the metaphorical wise woman described above who, “Precisamente debido al bajo aprecio que se tenía por la mujer...fue la metáfora ideal, paralela a la ‘rareza’ de estas cualidades especiales en el ser humano” (Wirkala 120). Therefore, any intelligence we might find in her words might also be classified as “real,” as she builds a case against *men* in her efforts to show their deficiencies (never speaking out against women, as does Teodor). Neither is this woman completely like the *consejera*; she is not chaste or subservient, and she does not counsel the king for his sake but ultimately for her own (in order to save her life). Therefore, although she does bear similarity to all three of these characters—Mary Magdalene, the *sabia*, the *consejera*—she is something else. Her intelligence—unsweetened by the implicit commentary on the paucity of its occurrence in women, and unaccompanied by chastity or goodwill—seems more genuine.

We might, then, seek to think of this speaking woman in a different manner from those described in the previous pages. The way forward seems indicated by a feature that

attends her acts of speech throughout the text: *staged performances*. This female creates her own alternate realities through a combination of dialogue and acts—as would a lawyer trying to convince a jury, or a preacher trying to persuade non-believers. Her body serves not as an enclosure—as does the body of the courtly lady and so other women in medieval literature—but as a conduit of her own expressive power.

When the body speaks, says Ruth Salvaggio, it breaks with representation systems that imprison it (in Gabriele 163). When the lead female of *LEM* speaks, she distinctly shows herself to be beyond the simple designations of “good” and “bad.” She is something other than that as she shatters the conception of women as intellectually inferior by challenging and outwitting her male companions and relying on words and wisdom to postpone her fatal destiny. Yet she is not a Magdalene, a Teodor, or a conciliatory advisor; this female protagonist does, however, recall yet another medieval female archetype: the Arab Shahrazād, who also tells tales to postpone her death.⁴³

Shahrazād does not belong to the system of symbols used to propagate the paradigmatic women of Christendom. Shahrazād is not told how, what, or why to be, think, or act; rather, *she* does the telling and through her narration she creates her own world. Like her Arab counterpart, the “Spanish Shahrazād” of *LEM* a creator of situations and conversations. She is not passive and waiting, she is active and moving. She does not submit to being acted upon, but rather she is the one that will perform. She is not an item of exchange, in contrast to many other women of Castilian literature. She is, however, a subject that effects exchange; *she seeks to exchange herself*, as the wife of

⁴³ Wirkala likens Shahrazād to Teodor (121); however, although Teodor tells tales to “save her life” metaphorically, Shahrazād does so in the most literal sense—as does the principal female protagonist of *LEM*

one partner (the king) to become the wife of another (the prince). She thinks beyond merely attempting adultery; she wishes to kill the king, thereby ending the relationship she has with him, and join herself in a permanent relationship to his more virulent son. She therefore also seeks to exchange partners. Since all of this exchange is in relation to her, she is paradoxically both the agent and her own object in attempted the transaction. This is a female who uses her intelligence and creates her own agency in order to subvert the age-old paradigm of masculine-activity superiority/feminine-passivity-inferiority.

The Spanish Shahrazād goes even further beyond the archetype represented by the Arab Shahrazād, however. Whereas the Arab Shahrazād speaks to a king and indirectly influences him (she never asks him to spare her life), the Spanish Shahrazād speaks to a king and *directly* influences him . She uses her words to suggest that the king send his son to her (which he does) and after the failure of her attempted seduction she repeatedly tells him he *should not* pardon his son and *should not* listen to his counsellors. In addition to establishing herself as someone who gives directions, she uses her body (in kinetic expressions of meaning that we shall see later) to persuade him to save her life by killing his son.

She is not the only one in the text, however, to give instructions to a man and to use her body to impose her will. Adulteress women of the interpolated stories of *LEM* also do the same. On the whole, in fact, although the female body is traditionally cast as an object, a site of male pleasure, women in *LEM* may be understood as having their own bodies which they use to their own ends. Sometimes this means they use their bodies to obtain their own sexual satisfaction and at other it means they use their bodies to direct men through scenes which they have conceived. In a reversal of biological and social

norms regarding the sexes, *male* bodies are objects and female bodies are *subjects*. Notably, these adulteresses indulge in their illicit activities within the bounds of their own homes. The house, “Considered a metaphor for entrapment within which women have been historically defined—and historically have defined themselves—as objects of the dominant culture, the body,” (Gabriele 163) is here a space of female empowerment where women can control and coordinate the entrance and exit of lovers, husbands, and helpers that move through or within their quarters. Thus the women exert control within their own places of “confinement.” The *sabias*, *consejeras*, and Mary Magdalene may have voices, but they do not command, give instructions, or order men what to do; the speaking women of *LEM* do not just talk, they *tell* and *direct*. Along the way, they narrate their own realities to fit their agendas. They are speakers, directors, and performers. We could say that the females we shall see in the interpolated stories, in a thematic sense, form the Spanish Shahrazād’s literary entourage as they follow her example—speaking and acting for themselves—throughout the pages of the text.

In a marked divergence from the message sent by religious, medical, and social discourses that sought to limit, define, and control the female body by divulging its differences and dictating its meaning, the body is *not* the principal symbol by which women in *LEM* are identified; rather, the *word* is. Through words, the Spanish Shahrazād and her entourage spend time in the text *telling*; they tell stories, and they tell men what to do.

Chapter II: Criticism and Methodologies

Exempla and Traditions

We have seen that, despite the flow of undercurrents working against it, thirteenth century Europe was submersed under a wave of misogyny backed by institutional authorities. Aside from this sociological force, the thirteenth century also saw an increasing preoccupation with ethical conduct and the powers and duties of monarchs (Lacarra, “Introduction” 41). On the literary front, these circumstances converged with one another to give rise to the dissemination and popularity of didactic works that arrived from the East. Thus was induced the proliferation and influence of the genre known as “exempla.”

Exempla are didactic stories inextricably tied to the particular space and time of Europe during the Middle Ages. Although the term encompasses several kinds of short narratives that may be further catalogued as parables, hagiographies, wisdom literature, miracle stories, anecdotes, myths, fables, folktales, fantastic tales, and other types of stories, their commonality is that they all illustrate the wonders and challenges of the human condition while they address the defects of society and provide “examples” of how to live.⁴⁴

The medieval exempla collections reflect both Western and Eastern traditions. Those with classical precedents harken back to the stories of Roman antiquity, such as Aesop’s fables, and the exempla of Valerius Maximus. The classical exempla, which tell

⁴⁴ Some of these—such as “wisdom literature”—are considered genres within their own right; however, they are often mixed into collections of exempla, and used within didactic tales, and the boundaries between the types of narratives are often blurred. Lacarra notes that, “Dada esa confusa situación terminológica la crítica suele englobar el conjunto de relatos medievales bajo el nombre común de ‘cuentos,’” although the term was not used in medieval Spanish texts (Lacarra, “Panorama del cuento...” 27).

of heroic deeds undertaken in the name of the Roman Empire, had been endearingly popular enough to promote a civic sense of duty in the Roman populace; as Frederic Tubach notes, “The effectiveness of the classical exemplum rested upon the fact that it could draw its narrative material from the rich connotation of familiar surroundings and from the literary tradition in which the citizens of Rome saw an eloquent reflection of their own social and cultural heritage” (“Exempla” 409). Exempla served to encode and preserve societies’ most esteemed traditions and values; we may assume that medieval European exempla do the same. In that respect, the narratives offer a precious, ephemeral glimpse of audiences that once attentively listened and whose presence lingers somewhere beneath every word.

Many exempla came from Eastern tradition; the cross-cultural contact unwittingly fostered by the Crusades, as well as that that flourished in the Iberian Peninsula, took care of bringing oriental tales to Europe. Stories from the Arabs’ *Alf layla wa layla* (1001 *Arabian Nights*), Jewish Haggadah, Persian folklore, and Indian mythology, among others, not only introduced much novel content, but also innovative narrative models such as frame stories with interpolated tales, and “mirrors for princes,” which featured authority figures teaching audiences—a format used to convey comportment and leadership values expected of future rulers.⁴⁵ These exempla were transferred, translated, and transmogrified for Western consumption.

⁴⁵ Colbert Nepaulsingh signals the utility of “thread” rather than “frame” in some cases, pointing out that in the *Conde Lucanor*, for example, the narratives are better described as “strung or woven” and the “question-and-answer exchange between Lucanor and Patronio seems to run as a thread through the *exempla*, not as a frame around them” (220).

The simplicity and directness of exempla, combined with their didacticism, propelled them rapidly towards becoming a distinct literary genre during the Middle Ages; although they were often passed through oral tradition, they began to be written down, with sometimes vast collections being compiled for use in sermons. Exempla developed up until the twelfth century, propelled by the ecclesiastical reforms regarding moral education introduced by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215—which urged clergy to see to the instruction of the masses. They were most widely used and circulated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As it grew, this genre also changed; the exempla of the early Middle Ages were inseparable from a metaphysical, moral message that pitted good against evil and illustrated that men must always choose Christian righteousness; divine order, not order in society, was the key to well-being. The exempla altered somewhat at the beginning of the thirteenth century, as the new mendicant orders employed social awareness to communicate their religious beliefs. In the exempla of this period, although the struggle between good and evil may still be apparent, man is portrayed as a personality subject also to social, not just divine, forces. These exempla (the set to which *LEM* chronologically belongs) include classical and oriental tales, and are sometimes satirical.

Although many exempla are rather risqué and comic, their use in church sermons, where they might have been used to illustrate and warn against the wicked deeds of Fallen Woman, seems to have been rather common. As Harriet Goldberg points out, “...the inclusion of frivolous matter in sermons had been condemned for centuries until St. Thomas Aquinas praised a moderate use of the comic” (“Sexual Humor...” 71). Besides, Christ had often taught through parables, similar to the exempla. Thus the early

advocators of Christianity in Europe, realizing the magnitude and importance of their task—perhaps particularly in Spain, as the gears of the Reconquest machinery began to move—saw that they should not underestimate the power of a narrative tool that would allow them to congenially appeal to the common man. There is evidence that preachers frequently used exempla in their preaching, most likely hoping to pique and maintain the attention of their audience while imparting what they held to be valuable lessons that instilled Christian values. A variety of folktales and other short narratives appeared in many a sermon in the thirteenth century, and the Franciscans and Dominicans in particular made wide use of exempla in their preaching as part of their strategic discourse of indoctrination.

Aside from the use of exempla in church sermons, there is also evidence that coronation ceremonies in Spain were accompanied by sermons on how to be a good monarch.⁴⁶ Perhaps exempla were used during such events? The theme of “ideal governance” was an important one in medieval Spain, and the rules of conduct embedded within apologues were useful in educating leaders. Didactic tradition certainly made an impression on Alfonso X, whose sources for his second *Partida*—a treatise concerning the duties of those who govern—included the exempla collections *Disciplina Clericalis*, *Bocados de oro*, and *Poridad de poridades*.⁴⁷ The Wise King even made his own contribution to the genre; the *Setenario* (c.1250), produced during his reign, is an ethical guide for educating heirs to the throne.

⁴⁶ Walsh in Lacarra, *Cuentística medieval*... 37.

⁴⁷ Alfonso X's *Siete Partidas* (1256-1265) comprise an extensive juridical code which was pronounced operative as suppletory law in 1348.

That even the most secular of exempla were used to demonstrate good Christian ways and warn against deviation from such is attested to by their eventual prohibition.⁴⁸ Indeed, use of exempla in church sermons was forbidden by the *Concilio de Burgos* in 1624, apparently due in part to the excessive use of profane narratives (Lacarra, *Cuentística* 46). In fact, across the centuries, exempla had altered greatly. The late medieval exempla were no longer religiously inspired; rather, their purpose was pure entertainment, and religiosity and moral lessons were extraneous (Tubach, “Exempla” 410-416). This was something that the Church frowned upon, and Protestants in particular began movements to ban the use of exempla in sermons. It was considered blasphemous to combine laughter with religion. As Goldberg points out, “Most probably, the use of these tales was condemned because of their sexual content and not because they were comic” (“Sexual Humor...” 71).⁴⁹

In taking stock of the impact of exempla in medieval Spain, we must remember that what seem to us to be stories of debauchery versus chastity, good versus bad, strong versus weak, couched in doctrinal language and describing remote times and places—quaint tales illustrating general religious beliefs, some no longer held sacred or taboo—

⁴⁸ However, even after the decline of the exempla, many of their motifs persisted in literature, and indeed the narratives were still used as literary resources well after their “heyday” by authors such as Don Juan Manuel, Calderón de la Barca, Cervantes, and Zayas y Sotomayor, as well as the Italians Boccaccio and Bandello.

⁴⁹ In addition to this, it is noted that fifteenth-century *ejemplarios* show the increasing influence of the church, incorporating more references to psalms, God, the afterlife, chthonic beings, purgatory, crucifixes, praying, clergymen, and so on. This reflects the century’s growing preoccupation with asserting Christianity in a Spain that would still house the “infidel” until 1609. Obviously, tales from oriental tradition, many of which contained elements that stood outside of the Christian belief or value system, or else pointed to the existence of other religious observances and practices, were no longer seen as appropriate vessels for state-sanctioned teachings.

amounted to much more in times past. Beyond mere tales, exempla represented wisdom and knowledge, which carried special significance during an age in which both were deeply hallowed. Associated with the clergy and nobility—the members of society that most had access to learning—tales that could impart learning must have been held in a reverence with which we cannot today identify. The former esteem afforded the exempla is perhaps most of all corroborated by their numerous compilations.

As may be inferred from this survey of their history, exempla are of immense historico-literary importance, as they provide the first examples of European narrative prose. The exempla that most came to influence the literature of medieval Spain may be grouped as those belonging to Western tradition, those from Eastern tradition, and those of Peninsular origin (which were influenced by both Eastern and Western traditions). The texts that belong to these traditions represent a variety of physical compilations; they may be catalogued alphabetically, be presented as coherent narrative wholes, or both. Their narrative format often follows the so-called “Chinese box” or “Russian doll” arrangement that is a characteristic feature of oriental narrative; or stories may be strung together, often by means of two speakers engaged in an ongoing question-and-answer dialogue in which one asks the other for information (one of the two characters will usually be some kind of authority figure, and often there will be a student-teacher relationship, thereby contributing to and reinforcing the didacticism of the stories). Within and across their categories, there is a phenomenon of widespread source-sharing among the different traditions.

There are of course far too many exempla collections in each tradition to list here; but a few representative samples will be mentioned. On the Western side, for instance,

the most well-known exempla collection in Spanish literature is undoubtedly the *Libro de los exemplos por a,b,c (ABC)*. The text dates between 1400 and 1421 and was authored by Clemente Sánchez de Vercial, who served as Archdeacon at Valderas, in León. This collection perfectly reflects the medieval clerics' preoccupation with classificatory systems, as it lists its 547 exempla under 438 titles, from "Abbas" to "Ypocrita."⁵⁰ In the Eastern line, the most influential text by far is the *Disciplina Clericalis (DC)*, the first written record of European exempla.⁵¹ This collection of eastern didactic tales was compiled in Latin by a *converso* monk from Aragon known as Pedro Alfonso ("Petrus Alphonsus").⁵² Since Alfonso was born in 1062, it is assumed that *DC* was created shortly after the turn of the century, in the 1100s. The text contains a series of lessons delivered from father to son, providing an excellent example of how the narrative structure of the exempla could complement their instructional nature. An ample number of the *DC*'s exempla are cross-referenced with countless later exempla collections, including *LEM*.⁵³ Its influence on other collections is a testament to the diffuse distribution and popularity of the *DC*, of which Alfons Hilka and Werner Söderhjelm

⁵⁰ This is not the only text to feature this ordering, although it may be one of the most well known in Hispanic letters. The first preserved text that used alphabetical order is the *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicandum*, of 1275. The second is the *Tabula exemplorum secundum ordinem alphabeti*, of 1277. Both are attributed to English Franciscan monks.

⁵¹ Although exempla of course had been used in sermons before the appearance of the *DC*.

⁵² Formerly Rabbi Moses Sephardi, one of the many Jewish intellectuals of medieval Iberia.

⁵³ Since some of the stories in *DC* are also found in *LEM*, some of its tales were apparently known in medieval Europe prior to the appearance of *LEM* as a separate work, or in its entirety.

found and identified sixty-three different Latin manuscripts, dating from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, in libraries across Europe.⁵⁴

The final group of exempla combines both eastern and western traditions, and are those belonging to the category of original Peninsular invention. They draw on both occidental and oriental tradition while imparting a uniquely Spanish flavour in that they address concerns relating to the space-specific societies of their times: the anonymous *Libro de los doce sabios* (c.1237), for example, “puede ser considerado como el primer tratado de educación de príncipes en castellano” (Lacarra, “Cuentos” 58); likewise, the *Castigos e documentos del rey don Sancho* (c.1292-1293) was also a “mirror for princes,” said to be written by Sancho IV for his son Fernando; and the anonymous *Libro del caballero Zifar* (early fourteenth century), draws upon material from the *DC* and several other didactic texts but revamps the age-old stories innovatively enough to become Spain’s first original *novela de caballería*.

There are other Peninsular exempla, however, that distinguish themselves even further in that not only are they directed to an evermore “Spanish” audience, but they illustrate an evermore “Spanish” consciousness and self-awareness on the part of the author. These include texts such as the *Libro de los enxiemplos del Conde Lucanor et de Patronio* (*CL*) and the *Libro de buen amor* (*LBA*), whose authors not only recycled the old exempla material but also gave it their own creative signatures. Both texts follow in the footsteps of their predecessors: the *CL* (1335), for example, written by Don Juan Manuel, nephew of Alfonso X, employs the question-and-answer format seen in *CD* and

⁵⁴ In *Die Disciplina clericalis des Petrus Alfonsi (das älteste novellenbuch des Mittelalters) nach allen bekannten handschriften, hrsg. von Alfons Hilka und Werner Söderhjel.* Heidelberg, C.Winter: 1911.

LEM, among other texts, and it borrows stories from the *DC* and from other eastern and western sources, while the *LBA* (c. 1340), attributed to Juan Ruiz, Arcipreste de Hita, includes thirty-four stories from Eastern and Western storytelling tradition, the majority from Aesop, and others from *CD* and *Libro del caballero Zifar*.⁵⁵ Yet, although the confluence of oriental and occidental material is apparent in both of these works, tradition defers to the greater significance of the respective authors' artistic creativity, self-consciousness style, and ability to convey the social flavour of their times.

With this brief sketch of the families of exempla that circulated in medieval Spain, let us return to *LEM* to locate it within the vast catalogue of medieval Spanish exempla.

The *Siete Sabios/Sindibād* Cycle and *LEM*

LEM is a text burdened with a complicated and fragmented textual history about which, in the final analysis, few definitive details are known. The brevity of the text itself, which occupies little space in most modern editions, is thoroughly illusory, as it belies the work's intricacy. *LEM* is connected to and representative of a cycle of texts that are inextricably interrelated with it; the history and complexity of the larger entity, which complicates its membership of texts, is staggering.

The cycle to which *LEM* belongs is bifurcated into two distinct categories, West and East, with the respective titles of the *Seven Sages* tradition and the *Sindibād* tradition. Scholars have been left to hypothesize extensively about each text's origins, since neither

⁵⁵ Juan Ruiz's true identity, doubted for many decades, was verified by Francisco Hernández in 1984 (and further supported by his article of 1987-88). Questions still remain concerning the source of Ruiz's materials, as some scholars argue that they were purely Western, and others say that they came from both East and West.

of the two branches contain original source texts. Although each version in each branch has its own particular history, all texts contain the same skeleton frame story: the king's vizier(s) educate(s) the prince and foresee that an upcoming event will endanger his life; sure enough, shortly after the prince is schooled, his stepmother (concubine to the king), attempts to seduce him and, when her plan fails, cries rape.⁵⁶ With a seven-day oath of silence preventing the prince from speaking in the trial that ensues, the royal viziers step in on his behalf and take the offensive against the woman, with both parties telling stories (thus the interpolated tales begin) to exemplify their arguments: the woman tells tales warning of the dangers represented by both children and kings' counsellors, and the sages tell stories of deceitful women and actions taken impetuously. The king mediates, calling alternately for the execution or sparing of his son, depending on which party convinces him of the "truth" at the time. In the end, the seven days elapse, the prince tells his version of events, and the stepmother is punished.⁵⁷ Although the tales vary between the two branches, the versions do reiterate many of the same interpolated stories, and almost all of them have four tales in common.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lacarra does point out, however, that within the western branch, "uno de los procesos más curiosos sea el aplebeyamiento que va sufriendo la historia en su pervivencia moderna en pliegos de cordel. El rey pasa a ser un simple caballero rico, el castigo se limita a un encierro del hijo y la madrastra acaba congraciándose con él" ("Introduction" 23). However, the fundamental "problem" of the story—which motivates its telling—does not change.

⁵⁷ Although in *LEM* she is boiled alive in a cauldron, not all versions of the story end with her fatality; in the Greek version, her head is shaved and she is made to ride a donkey while criers announce her wickedness; in the Syrian version she is hung; and in the Hebrew she is pardoned (Lacarra, *Sendebār* 29).

⁵⁸ The only exception is the western *Dolopathos sive de rege et septum sapientibus*, the first Latin version of *LEM*, produced by the monk Juan de Alta Silva at the end of 12th century, which has only one story in common with all the others: "Canis" (tale 12 of

The most distinct way in which the western versions differ from the eastern is that the figure of Çendubete, the king’s wisest sage and the prince’s personal tutor in the oriental versions, is split into seven different people, each with their own different names—hence the “Seven Sages” of the tradition’s title.⁵⁹ In addition, the western branch versions feature longer narratives and replace many of the typically oriental stories with materials from European tradition. The founding member of the western branch appears to be the twelfth-century Latin *Liber de septem sapientibus* (Lacarra “Introduction” 13). The other versions of this branch are too numerous to list, as they total approximately 40 different texts in various European languages which appear in over 200 manuscripts and more than 250 editions. However, it is worth briefly noting that three Spanish versions are found on this side of the cycle: *Libro de los siete sabios de Roma* (1530); *Historia lastimosa del príncipe Erasto, hijo del imperador Diocleciano* (1577), and *Escala del cielo* (fifteenth century).⁶⁰ *LEM* does not figure among them since—unsurprisingly, given the historical context of medieval Spain—it belongs to the *eastern* branch of the cycle, where it is accompanied by seven other versions.

The eastern cycle, the oldest of the two, is known as the *Sindibād* cycle because in the versions belonging to this set, there is a principal character whose name is “Sindibād”

LEM—also known as “Llewellyn y su perro”/“The Faithful Dog.”). Aside from this, the other versions of both branches also share *LEM*’s tales number 2 (“Avis”), 9 (“Senescalcus”), and 11 (“Aper”).

⁵⁹ The sages’ names are also offered in just *one* Eastern version: *Mishle Sendebār* (Epstein 21).

⁶⁰ The anonymous *Libro de los siete sabios de Roma*, and the *Escala del cielo* by Diego de Cañizares are both taken from an earlier Latin text, *Scala Coeli*, by Juan Gobio; the *Historia lastimera del príncipe Erasto, hijo del imperador Diocleciano* is a translation from Italian made by Pedro Hurtado de la Vera.

(or a variant thereof).⁶¹ There are seven versions that belong to the oriental tradition of the cycle: the Syrian *Sindban* (tenth century), the Greek *Syntipas* (eleventh century), the Hebrew *Mishle Sendebbar* (twelfth or thirteenth century) the three Pahlevi (literary Persian) versions *Sindbād-Nāmeḥ*, *Sindibād-Nāmeḥ*, and the *Tuti-Nāmeḥ* (1160, 1375, and c. 1300), as well as the Spanish *Libro de los engaños* (1253). Some critics list up to *ten* oriental versions, including those that are Arabic, since the “Tale of The Seven Vizirs” that appears in some versions of *Alf layla wa layla* (nights 578-606) is analogous to the story of *Sindibād*; that tale appears, however, in the Cairo/Bulaq, Tunis, and Bengala versions, but not in the more critically-acclaimed and perhaps more authentically “Arab” Syrian version.⁶² None of the versions are originals, and all of the dates given here should be considered approximate, particularly as they are seen to fluctuate greatly in the scholarship.

Scholars have uncovered references to what may be the primordial book that eventually spawned the eastern and western versions: the historian al-Yaqubi, writing in 880, mentions a certain book of *Sindibād*, and in the tenth century, the historian Masudi refers to the *Kitab-as-Sindbād (book of Sindbād)* (Kantor 10).⁶³ Although it is widely assumed that this book gave way to the others in the tradition, and that the conserved

⁶¹ Not to be confused with the *Sindbād* often seen in some versions of the *Alf layla wa layla (1001 Arabian Nights)*, a spurious character most likely of European invention.

⁶² There are several editions of *Alf layla wa layla* that some Arabists regard as specious, due to their European origins or appropriation. Over the centuries of the cycle’s history, “cross-contamination” from European versions have greatly altered the panorama of Arabic versions of the tradition.

⁶³ Phonologically, there is a slight difference between the Arabic words *Sindibād* and *Sindbād*, but in medieval Arabic, which is written unvocalized, the “i” would not have been apparent.

representatives of the eastern branch came from an intermediate Arabic version, opinions differ.

The greater history, both chronological and literary, that is associated with *LEM* due to its membership in the *Sindibād* cycle throws into relief the intricate web of historical, cultural, and linguistic ties and interrelations that the text represents. Apparently minimal, the text actually lies in disguise, unsuspectingly containing an entire universe of its own. Critics, in their efforts to define *LEM* within the grander tradition of world literature, first started by situating the text within the Spanish literary tradition. This endeavour led to the logical pairing of *LEM* with *CD*, since the two are the most socio-historically related of all the oriental didactic texts that came into medieval Spanish literature; both are translations from Arabic and both were ordered to be rendered into Romance during the reign of Alfonso X. *CD*, appearing in 1251(?), precedes *LEM* just two years.⁶⁴

Brief contemplation of this partner text prompts us to recall that *CD* is a collection of mostly animal fables that, pointing to its oriental origins and didactic intent, features

⁶⁴ The date of *CD* is controversial, however, since the text itself states that it was translated at the mandate of *infante* Alfonso in 1299 of the Spanish Era, which would be 1261 of the Common Era, and by then Alfonso was regent (having reigned from 1252 to 1284). Most critics assume that the date should be 1251 of the Common Era, and cite the date as such, but the matter remains problematic. There are two complete codices of *CD* that are associated with the Alfonsine era, both considered translations from Arabic; they are designated *A* and *B*. Both are thought to date to the beginning or middle of the fifteenth century, but version *A* is illustrated whereas *B* is not. They are not copies of each other, although they do share very similar passages. Version *B* is slightly longer; aside from this, differences in spelling, syntax, and the lexicon used in the two versions abound, with José María Cacho Blecua and María Jesús Lacarra noting discrepancies such as that found “...por ejemplo, en el capítulo VIII, en el que el perro del manuscrito *A* corresponde a un gato en el manuscrito *B*” (*CD* 53). There is also a *P* codex, which represents a fragmentary version of *CD*, bound along with fragments of other didactic works. The *P* version is markedly different from the *A* and *B* versions and seems to be a draft, not a source.

an authority figure (the philosopher Bidpai) who instructs his audience (a king).⁶⁵ Like *LEM*, there is a frame tale that encloses a trial at the beginning of the work, as well as interpolated stories that may be understood as exemplifying a central moral. Michel García signals another similarity at the linguistic, structural level, pointing out that both *CD* and *LEM* use the refrain “Dixo el rey: ¿Cómomo fue eso?” to link stories to one another. “Les deux ouvrages emploient parfois la même tournure,” he notes, before going on to hypothesize, “...est imputable à un même groupe de traducteurs?” (García 106).⁶⁶

Critics suspect that *CD* was born in the form of an ancient Sanskrit original and agree that its narratives reflect the (Christianized) influence of tales of the life of the Buddha. Most scholars agree that *CD* was indeed created in India, before migrating ever westwards to Persia, then on to the Arabian Peninsula, then North Africa, and finally the Iberian Peninsula. Along the way, it would have been translated from the original Sanskrit into Pahlavi, then Arabic, then Romance, respectively. Support for this is found in the text itself, which gives its own testimony: its journey from East to West

...no solo está atestiguado por los textos conservados sino que ha dejado su huella literaturizada en la versión castellana. En el denominado

⁶⁵ The frame tale tells of two jackals, Calila and Dimna, who are jealous of the ox Cenceba, who is the lion’s (the king’s) favourite subject. Dimna convinces the king that Cenceba is a traitor, and the king orders his execution; however, he later regrets it, puts Dimna on trial, finds him guilty, and then condemns him to death by starvation.

⁶⁶ On the second point, Lacarra would disagree: “Es fácil suponer que el hermano de Alfonso X no contara con un equipo tan competente como el que después dio origen a la ‘escuela de traductores alfonsíes’” (“Algunos errores...” 56). On the other hand, however, Pedro Mora Piris mentions a school of Estudios Latinos y Arabes that was founded in Sevilla in 1254 (*El secreto...* 31). Perhaps the text was produced there, by competent translators, and yet was later done a disservice by negligent scribes?

capítulo I (<<Commo el rey Sirechuel enbió a Berzebuey a tierra de India>>) se cuenta novelizada la transmisión de la obra desde su tierra de origen, la India, hasta Persia. La siguiente etapa, de Persia al mundo árabe, tiene su reflejo en la <<Introducción de Ibn al-Muqaffa’>>.

(Lacarra, “Las primeras traducciones...” 8).

Lured by the text’s spacio-temporal and structural similarities to *LEM* some critics have insinuated possible shared sources for the two collections and have tried to use the story of *CD*’s journey westward to also retrace *LEM*’s birth and evolution. Most famously, in 1859, Theodor Benfey published a German translation of the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* (*Pantschatantra: fünf Bücher indischer Fabeln, Märchen, und Erzählungen*, Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus) in which he proposed that, Aesop’s fables aside, the roots of early European narrative may be traced to India.⁶⁷ Among the texts that find their ancestral roots in Indian myths were those belonging to the *Sindibād* tradition, Benfey affirmed. He argued that *LEM* and *CD*, hailed from an Arabic text that had previously been written in Pahlevi and first written in Sanskrit.

To lend credence to his theory, Benfey pointed out that the frame of *LEM* was similar to a story that appears in the *Panchatantra* in which a wise man promises to educate the king’s three sons in a period of six months. He also drew a parallel between the frame of *LEM* and another Indian tale about king Asoka, whose son Kunala is

⁶⁷ The *Panchatantra* the name of which means “five treatises” in Sanskrit, is a collection of five volumes of animal fables and apologues from Indian mythology thought to have been compiled between the third and fifth centuries; it is a didactic work meant to prepare princes for kingship. It seems to have been used for social purposes, similarly to the exempla of the Middle Ages, since its “origen parece estar en la utilización religiosa por parte de los predicadores budistas de parábolas, llamadas <<jatakas>>” (Lacarra, “Introduction” 15).

tempted by his stepmother and subjected to an oath of silence for seven days. Moreover, Benfey proposed that the name Alcos (the king in *LEM*) could have come from the Persian name “Kai-Kurush,” which he proposed as a translation from Sanskrit of the name “Kuru,” a name that appears in the Indian *Mahabarata* (Kantor 13). He also proposed that the name “Sindbād” is a form of the Sanskrit name “Siddhapati,” which denotes “sabio.”

Benfey’s etymology of the word inspired George Artola to build on his observation and postulate that a Persian form of the name indeed could have derived from “Siddhapati,” and furthermore that “It would not be amiss to assume that SIDDHA of the title SIDDHAPATI, misunderstood by the Pahlavi translator, was confused with Sindhu (the country around the Indus river which, to the Persians, was India) to give for SIDDHAPATI an alternate form *SINDUPATI” (Artola 41). This name would eventually yield “Çendubete” in Romance and give us the name of one of the principal characters of *LEM*. Even more convincingly in support of remote Indian origins for the Romance text, Auguste Loiseleur-Deslongchamps—predating Benfey, in 1838—found Sanskrit antecedents for eight of the stories contained in *LEM*, nearthing analogues in the *Panchatantra*s as well as other Indian mythological texts —the *Hitopadeza*, the *Sukasaptati*, and the *Brhatkatha* (included in the *Kathasaritsagara*), the *Vetalpanchavinsati*, and the *Bahar-i-Danish* (Lacarra, *Cuentística* 23).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The tales correspond to story numbers 5, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, and 19 in the Spanish version. (See Appendix A for a list of the story numbers and names used in reference to the exempla of *LEM*.) Loiseleur-Deslongchamps’ findings are found in *Essais sur les fables indiennes et sur leur introduction en Europe*, Paris, Techener Librairie, 1838, starting on p. 127 (qtd. in Lacarra, “Introduction” 15).

Most scholars have come to accept Benfey's hypothesis and agree that *LEM* was created during the evolution of Buddhist parables and was originally written in Sanskrit, then as it travelled westward was translated into Pahlavi and then Arabic, between the eighth and tenth centuries.⁶⁹ Although of course there is no trace left of these early translations of *LEM*, the argument for Indian origins is a persuasive one, and there does seem to be an accepted, solid relationship between the Buddhist storytelling tradition and *LEM*. Thus *CD* and *LEM* already so obviously interrelated, most likely share similar trajectories of migration that explain their eventual translation from East to West.⁷⁰

Not everyone holds this opinion, however. The main opponent to the theory regarding Indian origins is B.E. Perry, who proposes a *Persian* genesis for *LEM* in his article "The Origin of the Book of Sindibad." Perry finds antecedents for three of *LEM*'s stories (numbers 22, 19, and 21) in Greco-Roman literature—Aesop, Aelian, and Valerius Maximus, respectively, and views the technique of the interpolation of stories as

⁶⁹ Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín, José Amador de los Ríos, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, and John E. Keller, for example, agree on Sanskrit origins for both texts.

⁷⁰ Another Eastern-influenced text, the anonymous *Barlaam e Josaphat* (*BJ*), also was most likely first created in Sanskrit, and it is probable that "el texto indio tuvo una versión maniquea escrita en turco y fue traducido al árabe en Bagdad, por las mismas fechas en que lo eran el *Calila* y el *Sendebár*" (Lacarra, "Cuentos" 23). However, the Spanish version, appearing sometime in the thirteenth century, was made from a Latin version produced around 1048; that text, in turn, had come from a Greek version. Unlike *CD* and *LEM* therefore, the Spanish versions of *BJ* were not translated directly from Arabic. There are similarities in themes and the format, however; *BJ* is a collection of tales in which the elderly Barlaam explains the human condition to the young Josaphat. The text is a Christianized story of the life of the Buddha, whose beliefs were otherwise unknown in the medieval period (Keller and Linker, xxii). Once again, we see the narrative template typical to eastern-influenced exempla: an authority figure delivers lessons to a solitary listener or small audience by way of a frame tale and interpolated stories.

reminiscent of Greco-Roman style.⁷¹ He also contrasts “Sindbad” with “Sundbad,” which is an Iranian form of the name. Perry refutes all of his opponents’ points of evidence by insisting at every turn that the stories of the cycle travelled from Persia to other countries, and that the writer was a Persian who, “en los últimos años del imperio Sasánida, pudo componer el libro partiendo de numerosas fuentes” (Lacarra, “Introduction” 17), and that although the author may have used materials written in Sanskrit, such as *CD*, the work produced was original, and therefore of Persian beginnings.

Some have also argued that the Crusaders transmitted the cycle from East to West, but there is abundant evidence that the *Seven Sages/Sindibād* texts were known before the Crusades. Another theory, much more substantial, is that of Morris Epstein, who maintains that the primary text for the eastern branch translations was a Hebrew version that was translated into Latin and acted as intermediary between the Eastern and Western versions. “Absorbed into the Persian stream of literature,” Epstein says, “it appeared in the Pahlevi translation of the sixth or seventh century of our era” (35). Epstein supports this by drawing parallels between the content of *Mishle Sendebār* and the Old Testament stories about David and Absalom, as well as the Book of Esther, and aphorisms that may be identified in ancient Jewish literature (31-35). Lacarra notes that “Los paralelismos que se observan en la trama con el libro bíblico de Ester le llevan a presuponer que el *Sendebār* pudo pasar del hebreo al persa y no a la inversa, aunque en

⁷¹ Also Greco-Roman, some argue, is the motif of silence imposed upon the prince; however, “...no es seguro que la prueba de silencio sea de origen pitagórico, y no lo sea de carácter iniciático folklórico; la moral de los cuentos también coincide con la del mundo oriental” (Fradejas 12).

esta argumentación no va implícita una negación de la tesis indianista” (“Introduction” 17-18).

Notwithstanding this debate, and whether its primordial moments were indeed spent in India or Persia, it is generally accepted that when Ibn al-Muqaffa, the *CD*'s translator from Persian into Arabic, was alive in 724 CE, the anonymous Arabic translation of *LEM* probably also existed around the same time (Lacarra, *Cuentística* 13). That many of the narratives included in both *LEM* and *CD* are of eastern heritage is of no doubt; however, the issue of where and how the collections originated and came to be translated will most likely forever be hotly debated among scholars.⁷²

Whatever its original language, it is unquestionable that *LEM* is, to date, the earliest known translation of an eastern book in a western vernacular. Although parts of its remotest history, both contextual and structural, are left in the textual residue sprawled across its pages—the setting of India, the polygamist king, the Russian doll, its didacticism, a latent Arabic syntax still visible through the opaque veil of translation—these remnants are barely discernable and can be understood—and even then only partially—by examining the other eastern variants. This, among other points, has made *LEM* in and of itself a most enigmatic work. Its very title, in fact, is a most fitting rubric for a text that continually deceives its readers. “Libro de los engaños” is, one notes at once, a title very unlike the names given to all but one of the work's oriental cousin texts mentioned above. Although *LEM* belongs to the cycle of *Sindibād*, it does not make any

⁷² Hans R. Runte, J. Keith Wikeley, and Anthony J. Farrel actually mention a “Society of the Seven Sages” as collaborators in the production of their *Seven Sages/Sindibād* bibliography (1984). The list of participants, given at the end of their book, represent various countries. This is a testament to the popularity of the cycle and the effort of scholars in this area.

reference to Çendubete or to any other *sabios* in its title.⁷³ What we have is in fact a title that was given to the text long after it was written. We do not actually know by which title the Medievals referred to this Romance text. The title by which we know it does, in true medieval style, communicate a relationship between itself and the text, however; since the frame tale that initiates the trial, as well as many of the interpolated stories, concern the deceitful actions of women, the title indicates this situation. Yet, a Modern designated the work as *LEM*. In 1863, José Amador de los Ríos, who was the first to mention the work as a subject of literary criticism in *Historia crítica de la literatura española*, coined a title based on a sentence that appears at the end of the text's prologue, and the book came to be known as *Libro de los asayamientos et engaños de las mujeres*.⁷⁴ "Curiously enough," notes Artola, "Amador de los Ríos in his first reference to the work gave the title as *Libro de los asayamientos et engannos de las mugieres*...but later changed it to *Libro de los engannos et asayamientos de las mugiere*?" (40). Amador de los Ríos choice has inspired much debate.

The untitled manuscript that contains *LEM* most likely dates from the fifteenth century, according to Amador de los Ríos and other authorities, such as Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo. It contains not only a fifteenth-century hand, however, but also has

⁷³ *LEM*'s membership in the *Sindibād* cycle has inspired another popular title for the work; it is often referred to, and even published as, *Sendebār*. This title has purposely been avoided in this dissertation, as I do not believe it accurately reflects the content of the work or the focus of criticism regarding the text. Çendubete, although a principal character, appears only briefly in the work, in contrast to the several women—*engañosas* or otherwise—that populate its pages; besides which, scholars have been much more preoccupied with these females than with the sage Çendubete. For these reasons, it seems more appropriate to use a title that shifts the focus to them.

⁷⁴ Artola refers to pages 474 and 536 of Amador de los Ríos' *Historia crítica de la literatura española* in citing this difference.

around 271 emendations made by a sixteenth-century scribe who deleted, altered, or replaced words or entire passages—for example, the second scribe modernized the spelling of certain words, and replaced archaic expressions with more contemporary ones, changing, for example, “...*toller* por *quitar*, *guay* por *ay*; las formas en *-ades* de 2a persona del plural por formas en *-áis*; sustituye expresiones que juzga malsonantes por otras, por ejemplo: *holgar con muger* por *yazer*” (Lacarra, “Las primeras traducciones...” 9) and in other cases the editor corrected the text, perhaps with the aid of another version.⁷⁵ This makes the text extremely difficult to read.

John Keller was the first to suggest that, given the existence of the two different hands, the text be reconceived as containing two versions, *A* (the fifteenth century scribe) and *B* (the sixteenth-century corrections).⁷⁶ This proposal was accepted by other critics. In light of this, Amador de los Ríos’ title becomes a point of contention, since there is an emendation in the line upon which he based the title that corrects the word *engañados* to *engaños*. The *A* version of the text reads, therefore, that Prince Fadrique “Plogo e tovo por bien que aqueste libro [fuese trasladado] de aravigo en castellano para aperçebir a los engañados e los asayamientos de las mugeres” (*LEM* 3).

Keller leaves this line as it is in his edition of the text, paying homage to the first copyist and the older version (*A*). Amador de los Ríos, however, decided to rely on version *B* of this sentence in the manuscript, and thus the book’s title has survived as

⁷⁵ Keller suggests the scribe referred to another version, whereas González Palencia and Lacarra, among others, disagree with this.

⁷⁶ Keller discusses the differences between the two variants in his article “Some Stylistic and Conceptual Differences in Texts A and B of *El libro de los engaños*,” in which he additionally suggests that the dating of the text be changed to the fourteenth (version *A* of the manuscript) and fifteenth (version *B*) centuries, rather than the fifteenth and sixteenth.

Libro de los engaños instead of *Libro de los engañados*, as it might (more authentically?) have been. Although Amador de los Ríos, like Keller, acknowledged the superiority of the first copyist's work, he "either failed to note this scribal correction or preferred, in view of the frequent occurrence of the word *engaños* in the body of the work, to give it the title it bears today" (Keller, *LEM*). Preference seems more likely than failure; it seems doubtful that an exacting scholar would neglect to notice something as significant as a correction that altered the meaning of the sentence based on which he was to propose how posterity was to designate an untitled text.

Whether or not Amador de los Ríos let the frequency of words guide him as he took his preferred pick of emendations in order to compose a title, his choice had lasting literary consequences, and was one that carried the implicit decision *not* to partake in poking fun at the duped parties of the text—as do many of the exempla—who are mostly men. Keller points out that the title *Libro de los engañados* has "a more realistic and personal note, one calculated, perhaps, to evoke wry humor in those who were 'the deceived'" (*LEM*).⁷⁷

Keller also has another idea regarding the title: he hypothesizes that another copyist's error may exist in the line, and that "as there are many scribal errors in the text it is possible that *e* was meant to be written as *de*, or 'by,' in this particular instance"

⁷⁷ This title changes the interpretation of the purpose of the text, if we consider that although its audience, made up of both the deceived and the deceivers, may have been united by the common element of amusement, their laughter reacted to and immediately produced an inherent hierarchy; the deceivers (or those in the audience who related to them) could enjoy a sense of self-satisfaction for having the upper hand, and the deceived (again, those who identified with such), although part of that *actual* laughing audience, were also the book's *implied* audience (*los engañados*), and would feel shamed for having been bettered—and having everybody "know" it, as acknowledged by the communal laughter.

(Wiles footnote 37). Thus, instead of reading “para aperçebir a los engañados e los asayamientos de las mugeres” (Keller, *LEM*), we might read the line as “para aperçebir a los engañados *de* los asayamientos de las mugeres” (Keller, *LEM*). This means accepting the older “engañados” instead of the amendment of the word to “engaños,” then entertaining the scribal error in “[d]e.” This is a possibility. There is at least one other, however.

Even if we do leave “e” alone, it is not such a simple word. Artola accepts the version A “engañados” but keeps the “e” undisturbed, and generates another distinct reading of the line, one that posits yet another title. Citing the uncertainty surrounding the punctuation of medieval manuscripts, Artola proposes that the end of the prologue may be understood as reading, “para aperçebir a los engañados. *E los asayamientos de las mugeres*, este libro, fue trasladado en noventa e un años” (Artola 40). This title, he claims, “...shows clearly what the book had become in the hands of the Spanish translator, namely, a narrative revealing the evil machinations of women...” (Artola 40).

Of all these titles, taken from a sentence complicated by the vagaries of manuscript culture that can be read, to suit the reader, in a multitude of ways, none seems any more or any less legitimate than the others. The title is not the only part of the text’s fundamental identity that has been disputed, however. The date the self-same text proclaims has also raised objection.

The last line of the text’s prologue states, “Este libro fue trasladado en noventa e un años,” (Keller, *LEM*). That date must be lessened by thirty -eight years, to take into account the difference between the dating of the Spanish Era and that of the Common Era, therefore we arrive at the date of the original translation as having been effected in

1253. Most scholars agree on that date. Maurice Molho, however, does not; he recommends that the date of the book be taken forward to 1291 (of the Common Era). Molho bases this date on the linguistic evidence of “el uso exclusivo a lo largo del libro de la forma ‘AY’ frente a ‘HA’” (Lacarra *Cuentística*, 31).

Aside from these points of contention, the majority of critics concur that the text is composed of a frame story that contains twenty-three interpolated tales.⁷⁸ The woman and the prince each tell five tales, while the seven sages tell a total of thirteen. Each of the seven sages tells two stories, apart from the third sage, who tells only one; his second story is assumed to have been omitted by virtue of faulty transmission or translation.⁷⁹ Logically, then, there should be twenty-four interpolated stories besides the frame.

⁷⁸ The tales have not always been numbered as twenty-three, however; earlier critics did not always consider the frame tale (which may be broken down into two or three components) apart from the interpolated exempla, therefore their count of the tales varied between numbers over twenty-three. Critics still arrive at varying numbers: Cynthia Ho, for example, counts twenty-two tales (92). Furthermore, aside from the interpolated exempla, the tales regarding the *madrastra*'s attempts to save herself might also be considered separate tales—such as the “Enxenplo de commo vino la muger al seteno dia antel rrey, quexando, e dixo que se queria quemar; e el rrey mando matar su fijo apriesa antes quella se quemase,” a scene that falls between tales 16 and 17. However, no critic now considers them as such, since they are seen as part of the frame tale—although Lacarra and Blecua do observe of the scenes in which the *madrastra* appears that “...la última de ellas funcionará dentro del conjunto como si se tratara de un cuento más” (“El marco narrativo...” 227).

⁷⁹ Kantor notes that of the stories told by the sages, “la primera de ellas es siempre una historia que gira en torno al ‘error’ y la segunda en torno al ‘engaño’” (23). The third sage’s missing second story would, assumedly, tell of some instance of deceit (a misogynous story). The structure proposed by Kantor is questionable, however, as it may not always be watertight; for instance, Goldberg points out that tale 9, “Senescalco,” which under Kantor’s system should be a tale warning of haste, may also be construed as a tale of *engaño* since “...certainly the wife is really betraying her foolish husband” (“Sexual Humor...” 78). (In the tale, a bathkeeper “hastily” prostitutes his wife to a prince, then repents, but it is too late, as the contract between them is made and his wife refuses to break it and insists on sleeping with the prince for the entire evening.)

The Edition Used

The one extant manuscript of *LEM* formerly in the possession of one Count Puñonrostro and now housed in the archives of the Real Academia de la Lengua in Madrid, is bound under the title *El Conde Lucanor, Ms. Antigua* along with the *CL*, the *Lucidario*, the *Testamento del maestro Alfonso de Cuenca*, and a letter designated as one “from St. Bernard to Ramón, señor del castillo de Santo Ambrosio.”⁸⁰ Although the latter two works are considered minor, the former two are notable for their association with the same royal family. The *Lucidario* is an encyclopaedic work written in dialogue form (the conversation is between a master and his student, a hallmark of oriental literary tradition) and it aims to reconcile Aristotelian science with Christian dogma.⁸¹ It was commissioned around 1293 by Sancho IV, son of Alfonso X. The *CL*, as mentioned above, is also part of the literary production of Alfonso X’s lineage, having been written by his nephew Don Juan Manuel. The fact that such an eminent text accompanies *LEM* may be indicative of the esteem and circulation that *LEM* once enjoyed.

The first modern edition of *LEM* was produced by Domenico Comparetti in 1869, as an appendix to his book, *Researches Respecting the Book of Sindibad*, which was published in 1882. Comparetti did not directly consult the manuscript, however, but instead relied on a copy of the text given to him by Amador de los Ríos (based on the *A* version). “El resultado deja bastante que desear, bien sea por errores de lectura o por fallos en la impresión,” according to Lacarra (“Introduction” 52). Adolfo Bonilla y San

⁸⁰ The folios that contain *LEM* are 63r through 79v of 157.

⁸¹ The text “...accurately reflects the orthodox Christian views of the average Spaniard between the thirteenth century and the demise of Aristotelianism some four hundred years later” (Kinkade, “Lucidario”).

Martín was the next to publish a version using Amador de los Ríos' title, *Libro de los engaños y los asayamientos de las mugeres* (1904), yet using the corrected *B* version. Ángel González Palencia later published an expanded work, *Versiones castellanas del Sendebár* (1946), which included *LEM* (similar to Bonilla y San Martín's edition) plus the three western versions of the text.

John Keller was next, and he was the first to produce a recognized authoritative version based on the *A* text, which he logically assumed to be closer to the original Arabic translation—although it, too, was probably altered substantially by its copyist, and the extent to which it accurately represents its precedent is unknown.⁸² Keller's version is titled *Libro de los engaños* (1953, 1959), and there also exists an English version called *Book of the Wiles of Women* (1953).⁸³ The versions that have appeared in more recent decades are *Libro de los engannos y los asayamientos de las mugeres: con un appendice di brani da altre versioni del "Sendebár"* by Emilio Vuolo (1980), *Sendebár* by María Jesús Lacarra (1989), and *Sendebár o Libro de los engaños de las mujeres* by José Fradejas Lebrero (1990), the last being a modernized version.

The edition of the text used in this analysis is the revised edition of Keller's *Libro de los engaños*.⁸⁴ Although his is not the only version based exclusively on the older

⁸² Keller claims that he strived to remain as faithful as possible to the text of *A*, modifying only the punctuation and abbreviations (e.g., *omne* for *ome*), maintaining the original spellings, aside for cases in which there may have been confusion between the letters "i" and "j" and "u" and "v" (Keller, *LEM*viii).

⁸³ Despite Keller's reading of the text as *engañados* (version *A*), not *engaños* (version *B*), the title of his Spanish edition honours Amador de los Ríos, while his English title defers to Artola's reading of the prologue (with the title *Los asayamientos de las mugeres*).

⁸⁴ The revised edition, published in 1959 by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill.

scribe's text (Vuolo followed suit in that regard), Keller's edition is the most critically acclaimed to date.⁸⁵ This choice is not meant to discredit the other versions of the text, but since one is modernized and the others are all either somehow deficient, or based on the *B* version, or else incorporate various corrections from *B* without explanations regarding why and without stating the criteria used to choose between *A* and *B* (this point is supported by Juarbe i Botella 14), Keller's *LEM* seems the most suitable for the purposes of this dissertation. Aside from this, Keller's edition includes an appendix that specifies the changes between the *A* and *B* manuscripts.

Regarding the history of the critique of this work, particular attention has been paid to its origins, ties to oriental tradition, transmission, and of course to the theme of misogyny that, as its modern title indicates, is elaborated throughout the text. Yet thematic analysis of the work has always taken second place; Lacarra, for one, notes "la escasez de estudios que aborden los aspectos más literarios del mismo" (Lacarra, "Introduction" 51) and, in reference to the wider tradition of the *Seven Sages/Sindibād* cycle, Ho is astonished that "...remarkably little critical analysis exists on these fascinating texts which appear in almost every European language" (90). Critics have always viewed the text as lacking in both content and literary merit, particularly when compared to other Spanish exempla. Early on, a tradition of censure was started by

⁸⁵ Keller's edition is not without critique, of course. Artola maintains that since Keller used a photocopy of the manuscript to transcribe his edition, "Without direct reference to the manuscript it is not easy to test completely the accuracy of Keller's transcription... a comparison with the other printed texts reveals several disparities..." but he concedes that "Notwithstanding, its merits are many and it is a vast improvement over previous editions" (39). Kantor states that Keller's version has print errors and that "ofrece no pocos casos de lectura errónea del ms."; she also criticizes the version she relies on, however (Vuolo's), saying that "La transcripción gráfica de Vuolo no es siempre convincente" (30).

critics such as Menéndez y Pelayo, who opines that the tales of *LEM* Son, pues, extraordinariamente livianos en el fondo, ya que no en la forma, que es grave y doctrinal y nunca llega al cinismo grosero de los *Fabliaux* ni a la sugestiva y refinada lujuria de Boccaccio” (qtd. in González-Palencia xxix), and González-Palencia states that the manuscript was “bastante incorrecto” (xiii). Later, Fradejas notes that “El manuscrito es defectuosísimo, con frecuencia no hace sentido, y es obligado interpretarlo, a la buena de Dios, apoyándose, a veces, en las intercalaciones posteriores...” (“Introduction” 7), while Kantor asserts that “no parece ser muy innovador...Es, probablemente, la versión menos cuidada” (30) (in reference to *LEM* comparison with the other oriental versions) and Michel Garcia agrees that “Il est vrai que le texte de ce dernier présente des imperfections qui rendent parfois difficiles plusieurs passages...” (Michel 105). Even Lacarra notes “la pobreza expresiva del *Libro de los engaños*” (*Cuentos* 16) and that it is “un texto con una sintaxis pobre y vacilante, con pasajes oscuros, que llegan a afectar la lógica de algunos relatos” (“Introduction” 50).⁸⁶

Comments such as these have effectively contributed to the greater body of critical work related to the text, and have preserved general collective attitudes towards it. Across the centuries, critics, apparently frustrated by having to speculate so much about such a concise but complicated text, seem to have developed a tense, ambivalent

⁸⁶ Many mistakes are a result of the palimpsestic nature of the manuscript, with its *A* and *B* versions. Other mistakes are probably translation (the sometimes strange syntax) and transmission errors (the third sage’s missing story). Some most commonly noted mistakes are the changing number of sages (which increases from four to seven) and confusion over numbers in regard to how long Çendubete will teach the prince and the calculation of the prince’s actual age when his education is over. Some mistakes in the original have inevitably filtered down into the several editions, complicating matters even more.

relationship with their subject of study.⁸⁷ Their contributions have added several differing opinions, some at times even fanciful and somewhat arbitrary (as is, for example, Amador de los Ríos' selection of the work's title and his later transposition of two of its words, or the various ways that tales might be counted). Perhaps the most interesting consequence of this is that the criticism on the work has been evermore evocative and reflective of the ambiguity and complexity of the medieval work itself, as new theories have been formulated and different disputes have arisen that themselves have become part of its intricacy of relations.

The text abrogates the idea of linearity and resists monolithic authority, not only through its structural set up—the *mise-en-abîme*—but also through its influence and appeal. The nexus of its narratives, the complex network of its interdependent stories-within-stories, has prompted the creation of an active, documented network of textual lives *outside* of this text. This work has multiple, synchronic lives: it dialogues with others beyond itself, going backwards, spreading laterally, and reaching forwards in time, connecting not only with its assumed origins—the *Bible*, the *Panchatantra* the *Bhagavad*

⁸⁷ As a side note on this point, and on the concision and apparent simplicity of the text, we might consider what Eva Sallis has to say about Eastern storytelling techniques regarding characters in the *1,001 Arabian Nights*, since that text is closely related to *LEM*: “Character portrayal in the *Nights* differs in striking ways from the conventions of Western expectations. Western literature and film subsumes a notion of the ‘developed’ character, as distinct from a two-dimensional character which is not ‘developed’. These categories are of very little help in reading character in the *Nights*. The familiar two-dimensional character which is the stock, simple figure with structural importance to a tale, East or West, is not the problem...However, complex characters in the *Nights* are also two-dimensional, and this is where Western categories have to be discarded...Complexity of character is achieved through repetition, shadows, duplication, collage and indirect referral...” (96). This observation helps to underscore one of the undoubtedly many differences between perceptions of narrative from East to West. We might ask if Western critics have been overly harsh, and “overly occidental” in their approaches to, and appraisal of, *LEM*

Gita, Aesop's fables, classical tradition—but also with other exempla collections that existed contemporaneously with it (the *CD* and others containing its analogues), as well as with future incarnations of itself and with its modern criticism.⁸⁸ This intertextuality contributes unendingly to the ontology of the text.

As we saw above, the problem of the title (missing, in the Romance version) is just one aspect of the book that gives it its characteristic multivalence. The caprices of the text—what we may perceive as “deficiencies”—are even more complicated by a textual history that likely will never be fully recovered or understood. Although, given the earliest references to what we believe to be the book's ancient antecedent, it most likely was named *Sindibād* or some linguistic mutation thereof, it now exists within the Spanish literary tradition as a book of *engaños* and *engañados*—a title it certainly deserves, since its objects of deception reach well beyond its pages. The apparent external simplicity of the text is belied by a complex narrative structure that has resulted in the work having a life of its own. The choice of a particular version of the text being used for study over all others—a decision that was made above—now seems rather moot. The text as it was discovered for modern criticism in 1863 by Amador de los Ríos, was already two versions, a palimpsest. Now it is several, added to by its many editions. How, then, should one approach this problematic text in order to effect a literary analysis? Before a methodology is sought, let us first grasp at one more idea: although

⁸⁸ Those future incarnations would come to include not only modern editions, but also adaptations and reiterations of the characters, techniques and themes used in *LEM*, such as those seen in such works as Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares*, for example (for instance, the theme of cuckoldry in “El celoso extremeño,” or the framing method used to link “El casamiento engañoso” to “El coloquio de los perros.”)

the text is anonymous, it is associated with a patron. Could that shred of possible authorial influence reveal anything about the history or purpose of the work?

LEM, being part of a cycle that was immensely popular throughout the medieval world, would once have been hugely successful. That it was deemed important enough to be translated by Prince Fadrique—assumedly in accordance with the blessings of his sovereign brother—speaks of the past appreciation the book once enjoyed. In the absence of an author, let us consider the patron of the text, without whom this work may not have become part of Spanish literature.

The Patron of the Text: Prince Fadrique

Our text is associated with a person whose name appears just once on the manuscript; its patron “Fadrique” (1223-1277) is mentioned in the prologue to *LEM*, which identifies him as a son of Castilian royalty who “Plogo e tovo por bien que aqueste libro fuese trasladado de aravigo en castellano para aperçebir a los engañados e los asayamientos de las mugeres” (Keller, *LEM*). Overall, information on him remains scarce, and for the most part history has allowed him to serve as mere background material for the most illustrious of his brothers, Alfonso X, under whose entry his name appears in the *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*. Indeed, Fadrique is rarely mentioned if not in association with Alfonso. Yet we do know something about Fadrique’s life.

Born in 1223 to Fernando III and Beatriz of Swabia, Fadrique was apparently named after the Hohenstaufen Friedrich II, German Emperor and king of the two Sicilys and Jerusalem. Fadrique spent some time in Italy as an adolescent, when he went to the court of Friedrich II in 1239 or 1240. He returned between 1241 and 1245, and in 1248

he was at his father's side in the conquest of Sevilla, shortly after which, in 1253, he received lands in and around Sevilla, based on his father's behest. For some reason, Fadrique was exiled around 1259-1260; "En las Cortes de Toledo de 1259 ya no se cita su nombre" (Mora Piris, *El secreto...* 17). He appears to have gone to join his exiled brother, Enrique, who in 1255 had incited a rebellion against the crown but, realising a lack of support, had left Castile.⁸⁹ Whether or not Fadrique had participated in the earlier uprising is unclear; however, when it was his turn to be banished, he went to join Enrique and together they shared for some time "a life of bellicose adventure and long captivity abroad" (MacDonald 188). They were to be found in the service of the Sultan of Tunisia.

In 1268, Enrique summoned Fadrique to assist him in the capture of Sicily; in 1270, Enrique was captured and Fadrique managed to escape back to Tunisia. Then, in 1272, Alfonso X, perhaps in need of support to continue his hold on his reign, particularly since a group of rebellious nobles was headed by his other brother, Felipe, pardoned Fadrique, who landed at Murcia. Fadrique later appeared in Castile, providing counsel to the king during the nobles' conspiracy. However, his life ended a few years thereafter; an untimely death awaited him, in 1277. On this point, the chronicles tell us only that Alfonso and Sancho left from Segovia to Burgos and that "...porque el rey supo algunas cosas del infante Don Fadrique, su hermano e de don Ximón Ruiz de los Cameros, el rey mando al infante Don Sancho que fuese prender a don Ximón Ruiz de los Cameros, e que le fiziese luego matar...E Don Sancho fue a Treviño, e mandó quemar allí a don Ximón Ruiz; e el rey mandó ahogar a Don Fadrique" (qtd. in Mora

⁸⁹ The Galician-Portuguese troubadours sung of Enrique having had an affair with Fernando III's second wife, Juana. In the folklore of Sevilla, Enrique is sometimes confused with Fadrique due to the similarity of their names.

Piris, *El secreto...* 21-22). Thus, what little information we do have about the prince paints him as a controversial figure who was exiled and later murdered by Alfonso for unknown reasons. Both the fact of this, and the lack of information regarding the situation, are strange, considering the high rank in society that Fadrique held. His death has, of course, prompted countless theories.

A likely reason has to do with Fadrique's involvement in a conspiracy regarding royal succession. This concerned Alfonso, who was at odds with his wife, Queen Violante; the queen refused to acknowledge their second son, Sancho, as heir, after their eldest son, Fernando, had perished in battle. This topic was hotly debated by two noble factions: one was headed by Queen Violante and the deceased Fernando's widow, Doña Blanca, and favoured Fernando's son, Alfonso de la Cerda; the other faction was headed by Fadrique and other nobles and supported Sancho's claim, arguing that since Fernando had not been regent when he died, his son had no right to the throne (MacDonald 193).

This is complicated by discrepancies in the scholarship, however, concerning to which faction Fadrique belonged; Keller, for example, states that Fadrique took Violante's side, assisting her escape to Aragon, where she and her deceased son's children sought refuge at her brother's court. This allows Keller to claim that "It is almost certain that for his part in the flight of the queen, Fadrique was executed in 1277 by order of Alfonso" in Burgos (*Wiles* endnote 35). It is of course possible that Fadrique outwardly supported Sancho but also aided the queen in her flight, thereby incurring Alfonso's wrath. However, MacDonald states that Violante fled only *after* the Cortes of Segovia, which had solidified Sancho's claim to the throne (MacDonald 194). The Cortes was held in 1278, a date also supported by O'Callaghan ("Image" 27). That

would have been a year after Fadrique's death, so he could not have assisted the queen's escape. There is also a difference of opinion regarding the date of Fadrique's death; Keller and MacDonald, as well as Maurice Molho, confirm the year 1277 as the date of his demise, whereas Lacarra asserts that it is 1271 (*Cuentística* 31). Yet either way, Fadrique would have been dead before the Cortes of Segovia and the queen's defection, so he could not have assisted her.

A rather more lurid explanation for Fadrique's death is offered by some critics' reading of the chronicles, which suggests that "It is likely that charges of sodomy and treason were combined to justify the executions in 1277 of his [Alfonso's] own brother Fadrique by hanging and the noble Simón Ruiz de los Cameros by burning" (González-Casanovas, "Male Bonding..." 167). This theory is based on the oblique, above-cited "porque el rey supo algunas cosas del infante Don Fadrique, su hermano e de don Ximón Ruiz de los Cameros." The idea is that Fadrique and Ximón Ruiz de los Cameros, who was his son-in-law through marriage to Fadrique's daughter, Beatriz, were involved in some kind of illicit sexual relationship with one another, given the types of execution that were meted out to them.

Another account, put forward by Jerónimo Zurita, proposes that Fadrique was executed because Alfonso had learned from augury that a close relative would incite a rebellion against him (in Lacarra, "Las primeras traducciones..." 10). This may have been true, but that kinsman seems to have been his son, not his older brother. The Wise King did hold astrology in great esteem; however, a prophecy does not seem plausible enough a reason for a death sentence. Then again, perhaps Alfonso was not in complete command of his faculties at that time? Mora Piris cites Richard P. Kinkade's research

and analysis of the illness that afflicted Alfonso towards the end of his life, and that “cáncer maxilo-facial, debido a la virulencia de los dolores pueden llegar a tener reacciones desproporcionadas” (qtd. in Mora Piris *El secreto...* 23). Mora Piris notes that Alfonso was always an ambitious king but never homicidal, and that “contrasta la dureza empleada en esta ocasión con la tibieza mantenida por el monarca anteriormente con los nobles encabezados por su hermano Felipe” (*El secreto...* 21).⁹⁰

Critics have also searched for clues to Fadrique’s demise in the prologue to *LEM* to no avail. However, at least one critic sees something else in the prologue related to the death. Maurice Molho proposes that *LEM* was actually produced as an homage to Fadrique *after* Alfonso had had him executed. In reference to the dating of the text as 1253 (with which he disagrees for linguistic reasons, as stated above, and moves to 1291), he claims, “Mais il n’est pas sûr qu’il faille comprendre ainsi, car l’auteur anonyme de la traduction, en rendant hommage à l’Infant, fait allusion à sa mort” (80). He perceives this in the nautical metaphor seen in the prologue, which he interprets as an esoteric reference to the prince’s demise, since it says that he “...tomo una nave enderesçada por la mar en tal que non tomo peligro en pasar por la vida perdurable” (Keller, *LEM*).⁹¹

The idea of using a water metaphor for death (meaning also the eternal life, “la vida perdurable”) is admissible. Yet Lacarra thinks Molho is misguided, and points out that “en estas palabras se combina la idea del saber y la inmortalidad con el empleo de

⁹⁰ The author reiterated this point in a personal interview on 2 June 2004, in Sevilla, emphasizing that it was out of character for the king to have acted so violently.

⁹¹ We might also interpret this water journey in the context of Fadrique’s years spent in Italy, also *ultra mar*.

una metáfora náutica, lugar común de muchos proemios” (*Cuentística* 31). The reference is also easily innocent, then, and devoid of any nostalgia for an executed royal renegade. Besides which, Lacarra says in reference to the idea that the text was produced *after* Fadrique’s death, “Extraña pensar que en 1291, veinte años después de ser ejecutado, alguien pretendiera llevar a cabo la voluntad del malogrado don Fadrique, cuando ya se van apagando los ecos de la labor traductora alfonsí” (*Cuentística* 31), literary activity having been slowly extinguished after Alfonso’s death in 1284.

However, there *might* be something to Molho’s claim that the production of the text postdated its sponsor and that “...en 1291, le parrainage posthume de l’infortuné Infant, dont les partisans soutenaient Sanche le Brave dans sa guerre dynastique contre les Infants de la Cerda, ne pouvait manquer d’intéresser un écrivain attaché à la cause du roi” (80). Although Molho does not mention this, we might admit that Sancho or his court was sympathetic towards Fadrique if we consider that Mora Piris tells us that Sancho, who had somehow been involved in the executions (as stated in the chronicle), when he became king, “trató de reivindicar en cierta forma la memoria de su tío Fadrique,” stating that his grave had been moved to an honorable site, “al tiempo que acusaba a su padre de haber ordenado la muerte de su hermano Fadrique ‘sin causa’” (*El secreto...* 21). Given this, Molho’s idea that someone would try to honour Fadrique after his death does not seem so far-fetched. Was he in fact even honoured at Sancho’s mandate?

In the prologue, we will recall that Fadrique is referred to as the “fijo del muy noble aventurado e muy noble rrey, don Ferrnando, de la muy santa rreyna conplida de

todo bien, doña Beatriz, *por quanto nunca se perdiese el su buen nonbre.*” (*LEM*)
(emphasis added). How should we interpret this? Once again: in many possible ways.

This line of the prologue is noteworthy because it contains one of the most common features seen in Alfonsine literary prologues: the naming of the king’s parents, with “the most common formula being ‘son of the very noble king, Don Fernando and of the queen Doña Beatriz’” (Cárdenas 100). The reason for this naming of progenitors, according to Cárdenas, “may be that the prologues look toward the noble lineage from which Alfonso is descended, perhaps for added prestige, perhaps to honour them, or again, perhaps because they and in particular Fernando III initiated Alfonso into the world of knowledge” (100). This stock formula, used to emphasize Alfonso’s noble lineage in his sponsored texts, does seem to be the formula that is used in the prologue of *LEM*, which is attributed to Fadrique. Although the words may be seen as a vindication of Fadrique and a nod to the tragedy of fratricide associated with him, it is also possible to discard that idea and use the phrase to support the claim that Fadrique inserted himself into his sponsored text, having surely been raised with the same respect for literacy and education to which Alfonso had been exposed, and therefore conceivably also interested in making a contribution to the text he sponsored, following the tradition of his brother and intervening in the writing of the *LEM* prologue, using the same formula —a reference to his parents—that Alfonso frequently employed at the beginning of his works.

If that is so, perhaps Fadrique even understood the prologue as his opportunity to underscore that he too was descended from greatness even though he had not aspired to it to the extent that Alfonso had? Moreover, we might consider the apparently parallel themes between what we know about Fadrique’s story and the frame story of the text,

with their commonalities of a royal court, astrology, betrayal, and execution. Could there be a trace of the prince in the prologue, one that speaks not of his death but of his life, which was haunted by tensions between he and Alfonso, even before his exile? Could it be that his reference to his mother, “por quanto nunca se perdiere el su buen nonbre” (Keller *LEI*), is meant as an oblique gibe at Alfonso, who in 1246, when he was still a prince, had laid claim to territories that Fadrique felt should have gone to him? MacDonald postulates that “Fadrique's disenchantment with Alfonso may have been based on the king's unwillingness to see their mother's hereditary estates in Germany and the duchy of Swabia go to the second-born instead of to himself” (188). His prologue was his chance, perhaps, to remind his brother that he had certain claims through royal blood on the maternal side and that they had been unfairly denied him.

If Fadrique did use the prologue to make intimations regarding his contentious relationship with the regent, then the path is open for other analyses that follow that same route. Indeed, several critics have suggested other ways that Fadrique may have used his prologue to send a subtle message to his brother, or other readers.

The practice of adding prologues to texts in the Middle Ages was commonplace. Although the first item an audience sees, prologues are usually the last textual item the authorial hand produces, and they often foreshadow or reiterate themes and stylistics found in the text proper; they are the fanfare that sounds before the text makes its grand entrance. In that respect, prologues are microcosms of the literary works they introduce, and they are intimately tied to the ensuing narratives. In the spirit of didacticism, medieval authors were naturally concerned about making their audiences aware of the

purpose of their works.⁹² Don Juan Manuel, for example, clarifies the educational purpose of *CL* in the introduction to his *ejemplos* (although it is recognized that this goes hand-in-hand with the work's political agenda), while Juan Ruiz uses the preface to his *LBA* to express his hope that the book will bring his readers *solaz*, and Ibn al-Muqaffa' tells us in his prologue to *CD*, "al que este libro leyere es que se quiera guiar por sus antecesores, que son los filósofos et los sabios" (*CD* 89).⁹³ Likewise, the didactic intention of *LEM* is thought to be elucidated by its brief prologue.

If this is the case, then Fadrique's intimations about his relationship with Alfonso perhaps continues at the end of the prologue, which states that man learns, to the extent that he is able, "profeçia e fazer bien e merçed a los quel aman" (*LEM*). *Profeçia* denotes "learning," and is perhaps a subtle intimation to the king that he should be more lenient with those close to him (since by the text's production in 1253 there was most

⁹² In reference to the medieval period it is noted that we must make the term "author" flexible and plural, to include scribes, writers, editors, translators, compilers, and even illuminators and miniaturists, all of whom may have worked on a given text. This is aside from any "subject-area experts," comprising anything from astrologers to *juglares*, who may have been consulted regarding content. Not only that, but we must recall that medieval works have disparate origins and are usually composed piecemeal, in that they often feature sections that have been added or are missing or have become illegible—sometimes over centuries.

⁹³ This prologue only appears in some versions of *CD*, i.e., the so-called *B* and *P* versions, but not in *A*. It goes untitled, and therefore does not identify itself as a prologue, but clearly its purpose is to introduce the work. There is, moreover, another prologue affiliated with *CD*; that of al-Fārisī, which is included in many Arabic versions (but not all, which may explain its absence from the Spanish), and which features King Dabshelim and the philosopher Bidpai; these same characters do appear in the Spanish *CD*, at the beginning and end of each chapter (as in Arabic versions), but since the Spanish version's prologue is that of Ibn al-Muqaffa' it of course lacks the structural link with the text (Lacarra, *Cuentística* 21). On a related note of interest, this shows an association between prologues and their texts that predates the Middle Ages, since al-Fārisī was alive sometime between the fourth and eighth centuries.

likely already some friction between Alfonso and the rest of his brothers). As Alan Deyermund notes, “The *Libro de los engaños*, the story of a power struggle at court, the education of a prince, and the persuasion of a king by means of exempla, thus foreshadows much of the history and the literature of Alfonso’s reign” (“The *Libro de los engaños...*” 160).⁹⁴

Whether or not Fadrique did have some first-hand part in authoring the prologue, it must be accepted that he apparently did influence the production of the book in that he somehow motivated its existence. The text explicitly tells us that the book pleased the prince, who “tovo por bien que aqueste libro fuese trasladado de aravigo en castellano para aperçebir a los engañados e los asayamientos de las mugeres” (*LEM*).⁹⁵ The prince must have appreciated the book for its didactic content, which apparently dictated the purpose of the translation; whether or not its instructional intent has an element of genuine *gravitas*, we do not know; perhaps the prince merely found the stories amusing. This does bring us to one more question, however, about Fadrique: did he speak Arabic?

We might assume from the wording of the prologue that Fadrique did indeed speak and/or read Arabic. This is just one of many assumptions we have to make about

⁹⁴ Several other critics have pointed out the relationship between the text’s themes and Fadrique’s life: “En la obra se plantean los límites del poder real” (Lacarra “Las primeras traducciones...” 10); “Es posible que don Fadrique haya utilizado la traducción como medio para mostrar precisamente las injusticias que un rey puede provocar en contra de uno de los suyos, de su propia sangre, si no está debidamente aconsejado” says Wirkala (106); and García opines, “Cet ouvrage, qui relate la formation d’un personnage, un jeune prince qui, bien que près du trône, ne peut y accéder légitimement sans l’aval du souverain en titre, pourrait laisser percer certaine frustration de la part de son commanditaire. Et peut-être faut-il interpréter aussi comme un signe politique le fait que le *Sendebâr* n’ait pas eu, loin s’en faut, la fortune du *Calila*” (110).

⁹⁵ It should be noted here that Keller’s edition respects the older “engañados” of scribe A, as opposed to the B scribal emendation of the word to “engaños.”

this rather enigmatic figure. We might conjecture that, having lived in Sevilla shortly after its conquest, Fadrique did have cause and opportunities to learn Arabic (if paternal influence and an apparent genetic affinity for letters and learning were not enough—his father, Ferdinand III, encouraged language study and Alfonso was somewhat familiar with Arabic). Just five years after its siege, there must have been a strong Arab presence in the city and the Arabic language surely survived there, just as it has, in some quarters, up to the present day. Fadrique perhaps enjoyed the “período de paz cuando...se instala en esta ciudad ocupando los extensos dominios que le había donado su hermano Alfonso...La ciudad de Sevilla es además por estos años un centro cultural de singular importancia” (Lacarra, *Cuentística* 31), and it was perhaps there that he produced the text, since Sevilla was home to one of the translating centres set up by Alfonso.⁹⁶ In addition, if we take in to account that he and his brother Enrique were both “Mercenarios distinguidos al servicio del rey de Túnez, al que defenderían de los ataques de los pueblos vecinos” (Mora Piris *El atamor...* 71), then it would make sense that Fadrique would have known Arabic, even before his exile to Tunisia.

Whether or not this apparently erudite prince *did* read Arabic, “...podemos deducir que don Fadrique encargó la traducción guiado por un afán de inmortalidad. El saber y el bien obrar son una garantía para asegurarse la vida eterna” (Lacarra, “Introduction” 37), and this was surely one of medieval man’s greatest fixations. Indeed, Fadrique demonstrates his pursuit of knowledge not only through the production of a text for which he is most remembered, but also for another work of art with which he is associated: an architectural legacy in the shape of a tower.

⁹⁶ Aside from Seville, during Alfonso’s reign there were also translation centres in Murcia and Burgos (Stone 7).

“En todas las mitologías de fondo esotérico, el centro del mundo aparece representado como un lugar cerrado, cueva, habitación o palacio, que es a la vez símbolo de la cavidad del corazón,” says Lacarra (“Introduction” 34). The tangible centre of Fadrique’s world in Sevilla was perhaps the Torre de Don Fadrique, which still stands, although in dire neglect, on the grounds of the Convento Santa Clara in Sevilla.⁹⁷ Said to have been constructed in 1252, it displays a mixture of Roman-Gothic styles which contrasts with the *mudejar* architecture seen in buildings throughout other parts of Sevilla (Mora Piris 16). With its Romanic first-floor topped by two Gothic floors, Mora Piris conjectures in *El atañor del infante*, that the tower conveys an architectural message left by the prince: that during his time, he had seen and been capable of superseding the old and introducing the new, so he built this tower, an icon of prestige (and not meant for defensive purposes), as a testament to his might and—like the text—a remembrance of himself, his life, learning, and influence.

It does seem that the tower draws attention to itself in several ways: above its portico is a marble plaque, which appears to be from the fourteenth century, that states (in Latin): “Esta torre fue fábrica del magnífico Fadrique, podrá llamarse la mayor alabanza del arte y del artífice: a su Beatriz madre le fue grata esta prole del rey Fernando, experimentado y amigo de las leyes. Si deseas saber la era y los años, ahora mil doscientos y noventa años (1252) ya existía la torre serena y amena llena de riquezas” (Mora Piris, *El atañor...* 70). In the brief text’s awareness of the status of Fadrique, el “magnífico,” of its audience, “Si deseas saber...” and of its debt of gratitude to the royal

⁹⁷ Another tower attributed to Don Fadrique also stands in Albaida del Alzarafe, on the outskirts of Sevilla near Itálica, according to Joaquin Díaz (as related in a personal interview on 10 June 2004 in Sevilla).

parents, it seems to foreshadow the prologue to *LEM* (its assertion that Fadrique “nunca se perdiese el su buen nonbre,” that the text is written “para aperçebir” and its encomium of Fernando III and Beatriz of Swabia).

Fadrique’s tower seems to once have been a part of the *Palacio Bibarragel*, where he once assumedly lived when resident in Sevilla. In the context of his life, we might also call it a place that symbolizes his isolation. Furthermore, quite fascinatingly, this construction has, to the exterior eye, four floors clearly outlined in stone upon its outer walls; upon venturing inside, however, one will discover that it contains only three levels. Like the text it predates, the tower, too, deftly deceives its spectator. True to the idea that “En la Baja Edad Media, las torres representaban un símbolo de elevación espiritual, alusión al *axis mundi* la escala que permitía la comunicación entre el cielo y la tierra,” (Mora Piris *El secreto...* 32) and also to the association between towers and the might and privilege of the nobility, each floor literally elevates and enlightens the occupant further, the increasingly larger arched windows allowing more and more light to enter each ascending room. The uppermost floor contains a domed ceiling around which are arranged a series of seven figures, one of which is mounted slightly higher than the others—could it be Fadrique?

So far, although all of the details we have reviewed enrich the textual history of *LEM*, it may be said that in the final analysis, the exact details of Fadrique’s life matter little in terms of the text’s exegesis, although they do make for interesting conjectures about the relation of this royal personage to the history of the text ; the apparent facts that the ill-fated prince celebrated in the introduction to *LEM* had clashed with the regent and was eradicated under mysterious circumstances, his supposed insertion of himself into his

text, and his further self- commemoration in the building of a tower have been further reasons for scholars to enter deeper into the study of an enigma that has no end in sight, and each investigation adds further to the list of unanswered questions.

If the brief prologue of *LEM* is richer and more complex than it initially appears, we can image the rest of the text; in this respect, without a doubt, we can say that the prologue is indeed a preview of the work to follow. In the final analysis, however, we cannot be sure of Fadrique's relationship to his prologue, or to the work as a whole, which is in any case anonymous. Yet entertaining Fadrique as an authorial entity does serve to exemplify a problem inherent to texts so far removed from us chronologically: even if we had an author, could we rely on that person to help us determine the purpose of the text? It is doubtful. Medieval authorial agency is easily undone. Even when authors' names are known, problems that are unique to Medieval Studies arise; identities may not be verifiable.⁹⁸ Moreover, there are problems posed by the observance of literary conventions; as Barbara Weissberger points out, a female author, for example, may be "writing not as a woman writer but as she thought men of her class expected a woman to write" ("The Critics..." 39). These problems cross the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction as Weissberger has shown in her study of Queen Isabel's letters ("Me atrevo..."). Studies of medieval works that hope to relate textual significance to the texts' authors risk repeating constructions created merely because of literary norms.

⁹⁸ For example, there is the case of the fifteenth century "Florencia Pinar," for whom there is little biographical information; we assume that the writer is female, but we do not have categorical confirmation of her sex and "...Archival reconnoitring have not yet produced anything of value in elucidating for us the life of this unusual personality" says Joseph Snow ("The Spanish Love Poet..." 321). Specific authors associated with particular works do not necessarily yield definitive or completely useful contextual or historical information.

We cannot always rely on the identification of authors, therefore, nor accept that texts reflect their authors' true sentiments. We return to the issue, then, of how to study this text.

Critical Approaches to the Study of Exempla: Text Typologies and Narratology

Although before the late 1800s, relatively few scholars seemed interested in Spanish exempla (perhaps the bawdy nature of much of the material discouraged them from research), at the close of the nineteenth century works such as *CD*, *LBA*, *LEM* and others began to receive plentiful critical attention, particularly in reference to their lineage and the ways in which they repeated patterns of arrangement and shared common sources with commonalities in character types, plots, and thematics. This coincided with the rise of the structuralist movement inspired and informed by French semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, which insisted that the study of literature be effected through scientific and objective methodologies which could lead to ultimate, structural "truths." Early on, critics studying exempla primarily sought ways of organizing and further categorizing them—an activity that seems to poignantly echo the work of the Medievals. With an array of collections and an overwhelming amount of tales and sources to examine and cross-reference, the most popular technique employed in the literary study of exempla was the use of the "text typology," or the grouping of tale types according to predetermined rubrics.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ The methodologies used for folk and fairy tales also lend themselves to exempla, since all of these short narratives are usually considered of the same ilk and genre.

Typology is a tool traditionally associated with folklorists, who often have a wealth of tales to sort and who therefore seek systematic ways of organizing them. The most well-known initial endeavour of this kind to date is that of Antti Aarne, who in 1910 created an index of folk and fairy tales that was published in Helsinki under the title *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen mit Hilfe von Fachgenossen Ausgearbeitet*. The tales were organized according to their plot type: animal tales, regular tales, and humorous tales. In 1928, Aarne's work was translated and expanded by Stith Thompson in *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*.¹⁰⁰ His work is widely acclaimed and his tale categories are often used and cited in editions of *LEM*. However, although Thompson's work contains tales pertaining to Spanish literature, it does not focus exclusively on that tradition. The Spanish-specific typologies are Ralph Steele Boggs' *Index of Spanish Folktales* (1930), Aurelio Espinosa's *Cuentos españoles recogidos de la tradición oral de España* (1946), and Keller's *Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Exempla* (1949), and Goldberg's *Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Folk Narratives* (1998).¹⁰¹

Along with text typology, approaches to the exempla have typically included narratological methods. "Narratology" is a translation of *narratologie*, coined by the

¹⁰⁰ Other important works by Thompson are the 1946 *The Folktale*, a history of folktale classification spanning the years 1864 to 1910, and the 1966 *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (which cross-referenced several of the tales originally documented by Aarne).

¹⁰¹ Classification references are not noted in the ensuing analysis of *LEM*. Many editions of *LEM* and much of the research on the work includes classification of its tales mostly according to either Thompson or Keller, or both. These text typologies are not repeated in this dissertation, since that information is readily available in several other places.

Bulgarian Tzvetan Todorov in 1969.¹⁰² Todorov created this term to describe what he and other structuralist literary critics conceived of as a narrative “science”: its goal was the creation of a narrative structure or system that could apply itself indiscriminately to all narratives, thereby revealing their “essence” and yielding definitive conclusions about the nature of storytelling. The most influential narratologist to date is the widely recognized forerunner of structuralist folklore, Russian Vladimir Propp. Going beyond text typologies (which, although they classify, do not attempt any further literary analysis), Propp did much more than simply arrange tales into thematic, or motif-determined groups.¹⁰³ His seminal *Morphology of the Folktale (Morphology)*, translated into English in 1968, examines the plots of individual tales based on “narrative units,” which he calls “functions.”¹⁰⁴ His was the first significant attempt to go beyond merely categorizing tales, and provide a *model* that could be used to theorize folktale narratives.

A member of the Russian Formalist school that flourished in the 1920s, Propp was not interested in the content of tales, but rather the configurations that they yielded. Building upon Aarne’s and Thompson’s categorizing methods, he used classifications to identify repetitive arrangements that surfaced in his analysis of fantastic tales. He then based his typology of the Russian folk tale on the structure that he saw emerging—one that all of the tales had in common. Throughout the course of his investigation, Propp identified 31 functions, which were plot segments that moved the folktale forward to its conclusion. Not all of the functions he found were existent in every tale; but when they

¹⁰² In Todorov’s *Grammaire du Décaméron*.

¹⁰³ Propp is also known for his typological work, however.

¹⁰⁴ Although Propp’s work became widely known as a result of the translation of *Morphology*, his ideas existed in Russian forty years earlier, in 1928.

did appear, they always occurred in the same sequence. The only function that *always* had to occur was that which he named “lack”; Propp took this to mean that “lack” was inherent to any story’s existence. In addition to this, Propp suggested that each tale had seven “spheres of action,” or possible character types: Sought-for Person (or Victim), Villain, Donor, Magical helper, Dispatcher, Hero, and False Hero. Character attributes—physical or otherwise—play no part in this classification. Propp’s work may be productively applied to *LEM*, as Lacarra—among others—has noted: in the frame story of *LEM*, “Al igual que tantos cuentos maravillosos, la historia se inicia antes del nacimiento del héroe, lo que nos da ocasión para conocer los problemas planteados por su concepción y nacimiento. Este comienzo es similar al señalado por V. Propp en su *Morfología del cuento...*” (“Introduction” 31). Lacarra goes on to enumerate eight plot elements that correspond to some of the sequential components that appear in Propp’s introductory sequence to the folktale.

Propp’s work had a far-reaching influence on other structuralists, such as the Frenchman Algirdas Julius Greimas. A devoted student of Propp’s work, Greimas applied his reading of *Morphology* to the development of the “actantial system,” which he described in his 1966 work *Semantique Structurale*. According to this scheme, there is a set of functions or roles (as in Propp, they are not attached to specific characters) found in all narratives: the *Sujet* is the desirer; the *Objet* is the desired; the *Adjuvant* is the helper; the *Opposant* is the obstacle (person or thing); the *Destinateur* is the dispatcher (that is, the one that gives the subject a mission); and the *Destinataire* is the

beneficiary.¹⁰⁵ Greimas' actantial system is concerned above all with the desire of the subject in relation to the object desired. It assumes that everything happens depending on the *Sujet* at the centre of the text, and that the closure attained at the end of a tale equals the satisfaction of that subject's desire. As with Propp's system, we might also use that of Greimas to help elucidate the roles played by characters in medieval narrative. Evelyn Birge Vitz, for example, affirms that Greimas' actantial system is useful for pointing out the high status awarded to the *Adjuvant* as a particular feature of medieval narrative—with such a figure sometimes being God (6).

The number of narratological systems that we might introduce here is great; we shall restrict it to the two mentioned thus far, which appear due to their historical significance and the popularity of their use in the study of short narratives. We shall now consider the applicability of the two systems as regards medieval literature, since their closed paradigms suggest that they each offer definitive application to the study of short narratives such as exempla, and they demand our attention as to whether or not this is so.

The Suitability of Narratological Systems as Applied to Medieval Literature:

In Search of a Methodology

Although as a child of Structuralism, narratology boasts an interdisciplinary ancestry comprising linguistics, semiotics, folklore, and anthropology, its aspiration and claim to be a *sciences totales* for all narratives is self defeating. This owes in part to the issue of the somewhat arbitrary, subjective nature involved in typologies and the

¹⁰⁵ Greimas later revised the system and proposed the *Adjuvant* and the *Opposant* as “auxiliaries” instead of actors.

development of narratological systems—as evidenced by their proliferation of different methods of indexing and arranging. Harking back to Thompson’s apparently straightforward text typing, and taking it as representative of the problems posed by other text typologies also, we might question, for example, the categories he proposes.

Thompson’s choice, for example, to separate “animal tales” from “human tales” in his index could be said to have been guided by a personal preference, since the distinction between animals and humans is not based on any explained objective measure. In a similar vein, Propp’s methodology also may be construed as displaying limitations.

In Propp’s case, his methodology shifts the importance in his text typology to plot: actions and their outcomes take precedence over all other things. With his set of functions established, Propp separates them from all else and claims that it is not important *how* a function takes place, only that it actually happens. Yet that claim begs justification—which never comes.

Likewise, it does not matter to Propp *who* (or what) performs any given function. Actors are interchangeable and can be alive or dead, human or inanimate, male or female (or both—they can change sex), and so on, and their traits are irrelevant. Propp’s insistence on focus on form does not lend itself to social interpretation, since it ignores context.¹⁰⁶ Yet context and character seem inseparable from action and function; narrative units alone do not give us the complete meaning of a tale. To illustrate this, let us turn to an application of Propp’s findings to medieval Spanish exempla; Goldberg provides an example with her reading of *Morphology* in relation to *ABC*. In her article,

¹⁰⁶ Propp did, however, interpret the final function of “marriage” as a concern with the nuclear family and its formation. This indicates that he intended to draw social conclusions from his approach.

“Deception as a Narrative Function in the *Libro de los exenplos por a b c*,” Goldberg takes issue with Propp’s statement that characters’ attributes must be considered extraneous to narrative:

Without his injunction we might assume that some stories reveal in what regard some kinds of people were held. In several stories, told presumably to condemn feminine wiles, astute women deceive their complaisant husbands. Are women really being attacked? It is unclear in these tales [in *ABC*] who is the victor and who is the victim. (“Deception...” 33)

Goldberg’s critique here is twofold. Not only does Propp’s negation of the factor of personality preclude us from psychological, social, and historical analysis; additionally, the “spheres of action,” or character sets, that he proposes are not constant. If the *dramatis personae* are interchangeable to such an extreme that there may be confusion, for example, between victor and victim (as we see in the quote above—are women attacked or praised?), then the possibilities are great that a tale could take on multiple meanings, since its seven characters may all be confused with each other in a variety of ways. This was not part of Propp’s research considerations, and indeed it hints at the narrative concepts that were to be explored later by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and others; yet it is immediately important because it seems to complicate and contradict Propp’s claim to have found *one universal structure* for the folk tale.

Aside from encountering complications regarding the identification of a tale’s actors, Goldberg also finds that in the exempla in *ABC*, the distinction between good and evil is blurred, which means that “we can point to several tales in which a good person defeats the Devil, not through virtue or piety, but by means of a deceitful trick”

(“Deception...” 34). Propp’s answer to this would most likely be that it does not matter *how* the “defeat” happened, it merely matters that it *did* happen, since then the function occurs and the plot can move towards its end point. This line of reasoning seems to depend heavily on an either-or scheme of thinking—a binary mode.¹⁰⁷ Either the “defeat” takes place or it does not, but either way, something else will happen that will fit into the tale’s overall structure and move it along, regardless of all else.

The binary-type existence of Propp’s functions do not connect them to actors and do not therefore admit flexibility. They also do not provide us with any means of solving problems of ambiguity. Furthermore, as Goldberg demonstrates, the identification of *how* someone is—or what *something* is—contributes to the *meaning* of a tale, particularly in an exemplum, since such information determines the moral lesson conveyed, and is therefore crucial. Propp’s methodology, which will not allow us to consider the intrinsic links between actors and their actions, or those between the characters’ prescribed and ascribed roles, does not permit us to go beyond binaries. Although Propp’s text typology yields a structurally significant means of analyzing stories, some of the ideas he proposes restrict analyses that aim to consider context and history. The interchangeability of any and all characters seems unfeasible; it disallows culture-specific interpretation—what will differentiate Spanish from French or German medieval literature if all heroes, villains, and others are the “same”? The rules of his approach also assume a collapse of genders into one, since sex does not matter. The last point is particularly perplexing as it relates to the study of gender roles in literature.

¹⁰⁷ The insufficiency of this is demonstrated, for instance, by Lacarra and Cacho Blecua’s need to recognize “una división entre unos elementos estáticos, que no contribuyen a que la acción avance...y una secuencia que supone la resolución, de manera favorable o no, de un problema y que numeraremos...” (“El marco...” 228).

Let us now consider Greimas' actantial system, which used Propp's as its foundation. To do so, we might use the findings of another study: in *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire*, Evelyn Birge Vitz considers the application of modern theories of narratology to several examples of medieval literature.¹⁰⁸ She finds fault with narratological systems for various reasons, which may be summarized as the ahistorical outlook; the difficulty of identifying medieval subjects; and the fragmentary nature of medieval texts.

Vitz first proposes that narratology errs most greatly in its disregard for historicity. We have seen that Propp pays no attention to the *why* of a narrative, only to the *how*, and does not concern himself with temporal aspects; likewise, Greimas deemed the synchronic and the diachronic unnecessary to, and therefore excluded from, structural studies.¹⁰⁹ However, Vitz argues that unless we account for the time of a text, we cannot fully understand it. We must bear in mind that external systems of belief can inform a text's content and structure. In medieval texts, this is well demonstrated if we consider religious beliefs: the notion that God is the author of men's lives and of all of history; that God's plans are mysterious and unknowable; that an omnipotent God is the only constant, unchanging force. Other beliefs also are important, however, such as scientific ideas about the earth and the firmament, and beliefs regarding the biology of women, such as those we have seen. To ignore the ideologies that surround a medieval text is to view it as something other than medieval. There is thus a problem with narratology's aim

¹⁰⁸ Although Vitz focuses on medieval French literature, her considerations apply also to Spanish exempla.

¹⁰⁹ These dimensions were frequently used by Saussure, however.

to establish “universals” when these are seen to change historically, depending on the contexts in which they occur.

The identification of medieval subjects is also problematic, as Goldberg has shown. Keeping in mind that Greimas’s system is based on the desires of the primary subject, Vitz relies on a historical reality to introduce the complication that medieval writers did not distinguish between individuals, but rather relied on basic details in order to differentiate between characters. The medieval “self,” not conceived of as an independent whole, provokes further problems in the application of narratological systems. The structuralist concern with the departure and eventual return of the “hero,” Vitz argues, is historicized as correlating to ideas about the “ego” (81). This leads into the problem that Goldberg notes above—that it is difficult to determine just *one* subject in a medieval text, since in those works, “Often, there is no adequate, autonomous Subject” (Vitz 105). Medieval works often offer concurrent, multiple perspectives; who are the subjects of such narratives? According to what criteria should we choose them? *LEM*, for example, presents us with various viewpoints from which to choose points of subjectivity: that of the Prince, Çendubete, King Alcos, the *madrasta*, or even the seven sages.

All of this has ramifications for Greimas’ concept of closure: can closure still be “desire satisfied” (the desire of the main subject), if there are multiple subjects? Furthermore, we may not be able to see that desire fulfilled if the subject is unseen; God, ever on the periphery of a medieval work, may be one of the multiple subjects in any given text, since, in studying medieval literature, “...we often have to be willing to consider as Subject various figures that are not characters, or even ‘in’ the story, in the

obvious and traditional sense” (Vitz 145).¹¹⁰ Another problem arises from this: “when do we know God as an invisible actor and when do we take him as just a figure of speech when he is an omnipresent force?” (Vitz 148). Furthermore, aside from God, a medieval text may include several other unseen subjects; Vitz calls these “Transcendent Subjects” tied to medieval ideas about causality: Fortune, Satan, or Love are other examples (145).¹¹¹

Finally, yet another problem unique to structural analyses of medieval literature is that presented by the lack of plot coherence. Although repetition and binary contrasts may give some thematic unity to medieval texts, neither one of these yields overall narrative unity. The fragmentary nature of medieval texts, which can include multiple perspectives and countless authorial hands, may also be contradictory, and faulty, and even lead double, concurrent lives as palimpsests, as we have seen, do not seem to allow the “subject”—if we are able to isolate one—to occupy the centre space of the text. Thus Vitz seems to succeed in her project to prove the de-centring of the *Sujet* (particularly since Greimas never reflects on exactly what his system applies to, or specifically *how* the subject is determined). She ultimately proposes that medieval narratives have a centrifugal, as opposed to centripetal, quality, and that “The center (as represented in

¹¹⁰ Not only are there unseen subjects, as Vitz suggests, but there may also exist *events* that are external to those narrated; for instance, we are told during the narration of *LEM* about a king who longs for a son, and a *madrastra* that is finally sentenced to death—yet these real, narrated events are accompanied by the “unseen real”: the prince’s conception, the *madrastra*’s reaction when she learns her final fate. There are parts of the script that go unwritten, although we know that they happen; they therefore must somehow play a part in the meaning of a text.

¹¹¹ To these we might add the idea of the State, the Law, or the King (God’s representative on Earth) as additional Transcendent Subjects, since characters of a given work may be reacting to any one of these.

Greimasian terms by the Subject) does not hold—especially during and after the thirteenth century” (100).

In the final analysis, then, Propp’s and Greimas’ methods seem unsatisfactory for the study of medieval Spanish exempla. At every step, narratological theories paradoxically run the danger of always proving themselves correct. The narrative “truths” that structuralist systems of narratology uncover are suspect because they are self-manufactured; much of structuralism is actualised as a re-enactment, with structuralist critics *doing* what they study, their activity culminating as it began, their work consisting of “...organising the phenomena of organising the phenomena of...” (Boon 59). Structuralism is not as objective as it hopes to be, since its basic units aren't self-evident; any given story might be interpreted in an almost infinite number of ways, and the functions or *dramatis personae* chosen and the manner in which a tale is arranged might vary from one person to another.

Structural theories of narratology can be criticized for failing to account for literary tradition, historical changes and processes, or (sub)cultural variance. If narrative theories ignore historicity, then of course they ignore women’s history. The narrative elements of a story cannot be separated from the historical and cultural discourses that are situated outside of it. We cannot make sense of a narrative without knowing something about the context in which it is being told, and who tells it; simply knowing the nature in which it is told, i.e., *what happens*, is insufficient. Exempla, for instance, were told to inculcate value systems. Where is that accounted for in a structuralist analysis that simply examines plot and character functions? The content and context must be taken into account—these not being typically structuralist elements of consideration.

The many supposedly “universal” aspects of structuralist narrative theories cannot transcend history, as they might think; they simply ignore it. This discounts the reality that motifs, seemingly universal, can mean something in one genre, time, and place, and something different elsewhere. Adultery, for example, is not condemned in the *libros de caballerías* as it is in the exempla. Adultery committed by single men is not condemned in *LEM* as it is condemned if performed by women. Adultery as a construction of the “bad” is therefore relative and unreliable. Even within the same gender, in *LEM* we see adultery leading to different outcomes: the female characters of the interpolated tales get away with adultery, whereas the seductress queen of the frame tale, who does not actually commit adultery although she wants to, is awarded a severe punishment. In addition to this, character “types” also are necessarily culturally and chronologically dependent: a Catholic hero is fundamentally different from his or her Muslim counterpart. Cultural specificity and historical relativity conditions desires, actions, and audience perceptions, among other factors.

As Ruth House Webber has noted, a narrative system that does not allow us to consider temporal contexts, such as that of Propp’s or Greimas’, is “too reductive in that it eliminates information necessary for defining the Hispanic tradition” (qtd. in Goldberg, “Deception” 37). That tradition is the primary concern of this dissertation, as is the condition of women within it. For that reason, the specific context of *LEM* cannot be separated from the interpretation of the text, and although typology and consideration of form will be useful periphery tools in this analysis, neither can be the primary theoretical process used to explicate the text.

Both Goldberg and Vitz make convincing cases when they argue that narratological systems fail when applied to medieval texts because they rely on fixed ideas about the subject that are impossible to apply to the Middle Ages. If narratological systems are inadequate, which method(s) may effectively be used to interpret *LEM*? To answer that question, we might start by considering Goldberg's statement that it is not clear whether the women of *ABC* are victors or victims, since we can say the same of *LEM*. The women of *LEM*, like many of the females of *ABC*, are seen cuckolding their husbands or otherwise deceiving men, and while the king's sages and the prince speak against them and denounce their wives, we may also perceive an undercurrent of admiration for females in the text, given their constantly demonstrated superiority over males.

This topic leads us into a review of critics' opinions as to the nature of the text: if the text is misogynous, it is logical to assume that women are depicted as victims; otherwise, they are the triumphant victors. Yet there is doubt surrounding the central question of whether *LEM* is antifeminist or not. According to Menéndez y Pelayo, the text's stories "tienen por único objeto mostrar los engaños, astucias y perversidades de la mujer, tal como la habían hecho la servidumbre del harem y la degradación de las costumbres orientales" (qtd. in González-Palencia xxix). This author of *Orígenes de la novela* (1943) was one of the first critics, and a most esteemed one at that, to comment on the text. Many others followed suit in the assessment of the text, and agreed with this opinion, thus the general consensus for a long time was that the exempla of *LEM* served to "Demostrar la maldad y engaños de las mujeres," (Hernández Esteban 47) and that since it first appeared, audiences would have understood this text "Sin duda, literalmente: los

engaños de las mujeres representaría una amenaza a la armonía de la relación cortesana...” (Wirkala 106-107) and that “Como el título indica, su objeto es mostrar todas las picardías y engaños que usan las mujeres, y, en verdad, cumple su propósito” (Oñate 11). This is of course defines the text as misogynous. There are some critics, however, whose work suggests that the subject is not resolved so categorically.

Rosa María Juarbe i Botella believes that the entertaining stories of *LEM* go against any serious message, including its misogynistic ideology” (16). She demonstrates that many of the intercalated tales exhibit a disharmony between their supposed purpose (to illustrate the wickedness of women, for example) and the morals with which they end. This produces a “bipolarity” in many of *LEM*’s inserted tales, which actually may be told by either party, woman or sages. This interchangeability demonstrates their lack of closure and “boundlessness.” Moreover, Juarbe i Botella argues that only six of the interpolated tales are properly called “exempla” and that there are five “suspicious” exempla that contradict their own morals; the rest of the tales comprise two incomplete animal tales (with sexual connotations), and ten *fabliaux*—eight of them told by the sages, who, despite the fact that *fabliaux* are understood as comic, “...curiously want to convince the public of their serious purpose” (Juarbe i Botella 145).¹¹² Juarbe i Botella affirms that all of this allows us to read the text in a more flexible manner, and instead of seeing it as “fixed” in its misogyny,

...if the focus is placed on the inadequacy between tale and teller, on the interchangeability of tales, on the superimposed and unconvincing morals,

¹¹² Tales 3, 12, 15, 19, 20 and 21 are the true exempla, according to Juarbe i Botella, and tales 1, 4, 6, 7, and 22 are faulty exempla. She classifies tales 11 and 14 as animal tales, and tales 2,5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16, 17, 18, and 23 as *fabliaux*.

and on the use of the frame as a sign of the impossibility to contain *all* stories about the ruses of women, the text, which has always been understood as a *manifesto on feminine wickedness*, becomes an example of the failure to prove that women are evil. (45)

Likewise, Cynthia Ho points out that the tabs "...all undercut their introductory morals with some type of narrative or interpretative dislocation and subvert the effect of the dominant structure of the frame...the details and circumstances of the stories undercut the moral impact by cultivating strong compassion for the wrong characters" (100-101). *LEM* apparently does not have a coherent agenda of medieval misogyny; this throws into doubt its place within misogynistic tradition. This incoherence is also discerned by Lacarra and Blecua, who state: "Para nosotros, el contenido misógino de los relatos acaso haya sido lo de menos, aunque no sucede así en su contexto histórico" ("El marco narrativo..." 243). They implicitly admit some kind of disjuncture between the supposed misogynous content of the tales and the historical reality to which they belong.

The subject of whether or not exempla such as those we find in *LEM* fully are misogynous is a theme that Goldberg more fully explores in her article "Sexual Humor in Misogynist Medieval Exempla."¹¹³ Goldberg argues that in the types of tales included in many exempla collections in which women seem to be an object of contempt and yet are shown as being able to get the better of men, "Although it might be said that we disapprove of the wily woman, we reserve our derision for her credulous husband"

¹¹³ One of the first to discuss misogyny in Spanish literature was Jacob Ornstein in his 1941 article, "La misoginía y el profeminismo en la literatura castellana." However, Ornstein excludes oriental-influenced works and starts with the fifteenth century, arguing that work before that time was not really Spanish. This ignores the intended audience for which oriental didactic works were re-written.

(“Sexual Humor...” 70). Among these naïve husbands Goldberg would include *LEM* king Alcos, since, “In a sense, the king is as much a gullible credulous fool as any of the cuckolded husbands in the exempla since each tale apparently convinces him either to kill the youth [his son] or to spare his life” (“Sexual Humor...” 77). This directs the audience’s contempt towards the males of several of the stories—aside from the frame tale, this includes all of the tales in which women are seen to manage to deceive men. Goldberg asserts that although traditionally understood as misogynous, tales such as these are actually not antifeminist and that “...it is evident that the stories of the skilful adulteress, or the temptress...or the woman whose power causes even the wise and the mighty to be demeaned are in a different class” (“Sexual Humor...” 83).

Lacarra seems to agree with this when she says that in certain stories in *LEM*, such as those which feature cuckolded husbands outwitted by their wives, “El marido representa en todos estos relatos el papel del bobo que acepta contento todas las explicaciones; es inútil que tome precauciones...No hay en estos relatos una clara hostilidad hacia las mujeres, sino más bien un afán por ridiculizar a sus ingenuas víctimas” (“Introduction” 46-48). However, she ends by saying that despite how we might interpret these stories, the fact that the trial of the frame story pits men against women ultimately *does* give the collection a misogynous slant (Lacarra, “Introduction” 48). Of course, this is just another one of many highly debatable points regarding the work, with this one in particular seeming to depend upon the subjective issue of whether one sees the frame tale or the collection of interpolated stories as the larger, more important thematic entity in the text.

We might further complicate the designation of the text as misogynous by asking to which extent the misogynous treatment of women is a mere convention; or by pointing

out that the sages that tell their stories “against women” do so in part in order to save their own skins. After all, the counsellors realize that if they stand by and let the king kill his only son, they will surely suffer later: “E dixieron los unos a los otros: —Si a su fijo mata, mucho le pesara, e despues non se tornara sinon a nos todos, pues que tenemos alguna rrazon atal que este ynfante non muera” (Keller, *LEM2*). Given this, we might question whether or not the sages even really believe what they are saying when they insist that women are the most deceitful creatures in the world, or if it is instead the case that they simply are using every recourse available to them as they desperately attempt to protect themselves by defusing the king’s wrath. Could not a medieval audience also have had the same query? Finally, we must also be aware of the danger of calling a text misogynous; in doing so, are we perhaps being complicit with patriarchal ideas, since “...misogyny, enacted in the reading process, reinforces and stabilizes the ideology, assumptions and expectations of the patriarchal system of power” (Sandoval 65)? After all, the understanding of a text “...according to Augustine, is ultimately a function of the reader’s moral condition or predisposition, misogyny can only reside in the reader, not in the text or in its author” (Solomon 3).

Once again, above, we have seen that the work of the critics mirrors the text inasmuch as their opinions reflect its ambiguity, and that the stories of *LEM* offer us no clear-cut answers. In fact, most would surely agree that *LEM*...is not a ‘récit classique’ (Barthes) governed by the principle of non-contradiction; on the contrary, its main feature and ‘raison de ‘être’ seems to be just the opposite. Conflict and opposition are both at the center of the text” (Juarbe i Botella 182). Ambiguity is the only sure thing. It is in the spirit of this idea that we might try to meet ambivalence with ambivalence when

determining which theoretical approach to employ in analysing the work. This demands a much more flexible narratological paradigm than that afforded by the systems we have seen so far. It entails the identification of a mode of thought that allows textual interpretation while acknowledging and working in tandem with the “centripetal quality” (as Vitz has dubbed it) of medieval texts. It asks that we abandon attempts to impose any semblance of final authority in the text. To do this, we must return to further structuralist (and post-structuralist) contributions and briefly consider two more extensions of the work initiated by the pioneers of narratology.

Questioning Authority: Barthes, Genette, and Bakhtin

Aside from Greimas, another Frenchman who found himself inspired by Propp’s work was Roland Barthes, who started his line of critical inquiry and observation by setting about identifying sequences within narratives, as well as paired narrative units such as “injury-reparation,” emphasizing binary oppositions in the style of Claude Lévi-Strauss.¹¹⁴ However, having started out as a structuralist, Barthes, among others, evolved into a post-structuralist in the late 1960s.¹¹⁵ In his post-structuralist phase, Barthes went

¹¹⁴ A forerunner of structuralist narratology, and one of the scholars that introduced Propp’s ideas to the West, French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss conducted an analysis of myths which started from the premise that although myths may come from distinct global cultures, they are seen to have certain similarities. He determined that myths are sets of structural relations based on binary oppositions and that they contain narrative units that he called “mythemes,” or basic units of signification that allow them to translate with more or less no loss of fundamental meaning. Lévi-Strauss understood the myth as reflecting universal concerns common to all cultures; essentially making of it a “classification of man in nature” (Boon 28).

¹¹⁵ Post-structuralism may be defined, contrary to structuralism, as a movement that posited that meaning “...is always temporary and in a state of flux, never stabilized or rooted in any way...” (Webster 114).

beyond the insistence on the existence of a central subject in narrative, and on textual centrality, by proposing the “death” of the author. He challenged the idea that the writer has authority over his or her text and that he or she produces its ultimate significance. In his 1968 essay “La mort de l’Auteur,” translated as “The Death of the Author,” he argued that language, not the author, reveals meaning in a literary work, and he criticized the practice that “The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end...the voice of a single person...” (143). Barthes proposed that the range of meanings to be found in a text are independent of the author and that texts therefore have lives of their own.

Barthes’ idea of the irrelevance of the author, of the text’s independent life, seems particularly suited to study of the thematics of the exempla, which requires that we separate word from creator. As they have come down to us, medieval exempla distinguish themselves as having led an independent existence from creation, belonging to no one person or even one particular society, since they having passed through many redactions in many hands and have crossed continents. Instead of an author, or several authors, we may think of the production of *LEM* or example, as having gone through multiplicitous *processes of authoring*, which took place on several levels—cultural, moral, social, and psychological, and occurred by way of a variety of media that reflects the involvement of scribes, translators, patrons, and editors, and is inflected with the influence of oral tradition.

Finally, we might mention Frenchman Gérard Genette who, also inspired by post-structuralist methodologies, wrote *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997, originally published in 1979) in which he proposes a theory of “paratextuality.” Similar

to Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, Genette understands paratextuality as the phenomenon of various relations (overt or not) that exist between texts. He posits various types of paratextuality, with the most obviously important one here being that of "hypertextuality." This term designates the relationship between two texts associated through a relationship of derivation: text A, the "hypotext" will be related, within this system, to text B, the "hypertext." The latter text is posterior, thus text B derives from A, the hypertext from the hypotext. As an example, Genette gives Homer's *Odyssey* as the hypotext of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (5-6), and states that the process by which a hypertext is created is a mimetic gesture. The creation of hypertexts breeds an endless supply of others; "Hypertexts, as is well known, generate hypertexts," Genette points out (373). He also elaborates the autonomy of the hypertext, now freed from the hypotext; this feeds into the same current of thinking as that of Roland Barthes' with his idea of the death of the author.

More important to the study of exempla, however, is the idea of an actual palimpsest and how Genette's theory applies to a critical consideration of texts resulting from medieval manuscripts. As we have seen in the case of collections such as *CD* and *LEM*, the exempla texts not only have multiple shared sources (hypertexts whose hypotexts will never be found), but one physical work may represent two versions in one and therefore encapsulate and exemplify a hypotext and a hypertext: that we have versions *A* and *B* in the one existing manuscript of *LEM* an example of this, and thus illustrates that "...every successive state of a written text functions like a hypertext in relation to the state that precedes it and like a hypotext in relation to the one that follows. From the very first sketch to the final emendation, the genesis of a text remains a matter

of auto-hypertextuality” (395). The manuscript of *LEM* a palimpsest both literally and, within Genette’s system of theorizing, figuratively.

Genette says that the creation of hypertexts generates “more complex and more savory objects than those that are ‘made on purpose’; a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole” (398). Texts are enriched by successive others, leading to different nuances and increased significations, as we have seen in the case of the critics’ reading and partitioning of *LEM*. Even the misunderstandings that may result from reading or transmission practices result in other, new texts that underscore the palimpsestic process as the most original aspect of a text, one that is at once both anachronic and achronic.

Ideas such as this—again rooted in the structure of narrative—theorize form in the tradition of structuralism and yet go beyond it to allow multiple significations to coexist. This indicates how we might side-step certain predicaments inherent to medieval manuscripts, such as the problem of anonymity; both Barthes and Genette make the identification of a subject a moot point, in that they both “open up” the text and admit its multivalence. Single, centralized authority becomes an impossibility, and subjectivity may come from a variety of sources. Both Barthes and Greimas deny that texts can yield definitive meanings. The question of a text’s origins becomes less and less important, and the possibilities for its interpretation multiply into eternity.

Having seen how a text might become “freed” from narrative authorities such as authors and rigidly-defined subjects, we might now attempt to make a match between another anti-authoritarian theory and *LEM*. To do so, we shall turn to the Russian

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin.¹¹⁶ Bakhtin was called a formalist and was claimed as such by the Jakobsonians.¹¹⁷ He was not of their ranks, however, and he actually criticized the formalists for their disregard of sociological factors in their textual interpretation. Unlike them, he saw a need to account for socio-cultural, ideological forms of expression, and for how language is used in literature. Bakhtin first of all distinguished poetry from the novel, which over the course of his career in criticism became his chosen focus of study. He saw poetry as aesthetic, and associated the novel with a practical, didactic function; for him, this genre had a social purpose.

Bakhtin is perhaps most recognized for his writings on the “dialogism” of language, and the “polyphony” of words, or his theorizing on the multi-voicedness of the word and the multivalence of meanings contained therein. He was particularly interested in the interaction between literature, history, and society; he coined the term “chronotope,” for example, to designate the social and historical elements—the time and spatial dimensions—that shape every genre. Bakhtin’s early work rejected formalism and sought to take account of the impact of society on literature; one of the sociological manifestations of meaning that Bakhtin perceived in society and in literature is the tradition of the carnival.

Carnivals—celebrating the death of the old and the birth of the new, with subjects that range from new seasons to new rulers—have been a part of life in European societies for centuries. In the book *Rabelais and His World*, published in English in 1965, Bakhtin

¹¹⁶ There is unresolved ambiguity regarding the authorship of Bakhtin’s writings; his work is sometimes confused with that of his associate, V.N. Volosinov, under whose name some of Bakhtin’s work may have been published.

¹¹⁷ Disciples of Roman Jakobson, who was a co-founder of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915), which was part of the Russian Formalist movement.

discusses the concept of the carnival and theorizes it as a social expression of anti-authoritarianism.¹¹⁸ The carnivalesque is often seen in literary expressions of folk cultures, such as those produced in *fabliaux*, fairy tales, and exempla. The carnivalesque atmosphere also may be seen to exist as a major component of the female's struggle against authority in *LEM*.¹¹⁹ The world of carnival encompasses themes of violence, deception, death, revulsion, illness, desire, sex, gender instability, and so on. It is a breaking of established rules, a disorder; it destabilizes stipulated symbols and forms; it problematizes and ambiguates the stability of gender and power. As such, Bakhtin's theory of the role of carnival in literature—particularly folk literature—seems appropriate for a reading of a medieval text, as it allows us to explore and validate a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. The carnivalesque works *with* the ambivalence of the text, not against it.

¹¹⁸ The text was actually written decades earlier than its date of publication; it was based on notes Bakhtin had made in the late 1930s, which he later compiled and submitted as a dissertation to the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow in 1940.

¹¹⁹ Mary Russo points out that "...social historians have documented the insight of the anthropologist Victor Turner, that the marginal position of women and others in the 'indicative' world makes their presence in the 'subjunctive' or possible world of the topsy-turvy carnival 'quintessentially' dangerous; in fact, as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie shows in *Carnival at Romans*, Jews were stoned, and there is evidence that women were raped during carnival festivities" (60). However, females are not alone in the "subjunctive" world of the carnival in literature; they are joined by men. Furthermore, the documented rape of women during carnival festivities is unfortunately part of a greater world of harsh realities in which women were subjugated. I do not believe either observation precludes the use of Bakhtin's theory to bring to light the ambiguity of *LEM* and to elucidate a departure from binary thought.

A Medievalist-Feminist Perspective

Supported by the text's ambiguity, this dissertation is written from the standpoint that *LEM* neither fully misogynous nor fully pro-feminine, but somewhere unidentifiably in between. Like most other exempla collections, the text can be—and to date has primarily been—read as a work that denigrates women, because if it is read according to the traditional medieval constructions of Ave/Eva, it will be seen to depict females almost unilaterally as deceptive and licentious. However, as Goldberg—among others—has pointed out, we might read exempla in a different manner:

...these stories traditionally designated as antifeminist do not really reflect hostility toward women as much as a kind of amused disdain of their supposed victims...If we remember the psychologically based observation that humor can be an expression of aggressive feelings couched in a socially safe form, then we can assume that the storytellers were directing hostility toward the comic figures in their stories, none of whom was a woman. (“Sexual Humor...” 83)

Goldberg persuasively uses the theme of humour to illustrate a way in which exempla can be read as, for lack of a better term, “not misogynous.” *LEM* like many other exempla collections, may be interpreted in this way, as a “not-misogynous” work—although it can also be interpreted as a misogynous one as well. This is an important point, and it will be demonstrated in the pages that follow; however, it is not the central argument of this dissertation.

The greater issue here is how female subjectivity might be perceived through the work independent of either stipulation, “misogynous” or “not misogynous.” That is, does

the work allow female subjectivity to be expressed in terms other than “either/or,” and if so, do the narratives thereby represent some form of female agency? As the answer to this question is sought, Bakhtin’s ideas regarding the carnivalesque take the methodological lead in terms of how the text’s ambiguity may be interpreted; furthermore, for the reasons explained above, feminist perspectives naturally inform this dissertation since the reading focuses on the portrayal and position of women in the text. Such a stance immediately appears problematic since “feminism” is a modern term and does not apply to medieval societies.¹²⁰ Yet a feminist analysis may be employed to understand the female in medieval literature if we understand it as an approach that considers “...the image and roles assigned to female characters in relationship to the image and roles assigned to male ones, their possible interdependence and the impact and function of both females and males on the work as a whole” (Lacarra, “Notes on Feminist Analysis...” 14).¹²¹ This re-evaluates the role of women as literary characters, taking

¹²⁰ Feminism may be generally defined as an umbrella term for a number of ethical and political movements in favour of women’s equal status with men. These movements seek, to varying degrees, the dismantling of cultural structures that perpetuate patriarchy and misogyny. Feminism exists where there are organized collectives of women willing and able to advance their own cause for egalitarianism. Its true development is generally not recognized before the late 1700s. Although some feminist texts divide feminist theory into Anglo-American thought and French thought, this is increasingly a time “...when feminist criticism has expanded to include a myriad of ideologies, methodologies, and perspectives” (Felski 21). For example, other feminisms include Latina feminisms, black feminisms, Third-World feminisms, and—surprisingly, to Westerners—Islamic feminisms, among others.

¹²¹ The study of images assigned to women hopes to avoid the production of “images of women” in the sense that Toril Moi employs the phrase in *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Moi considers this type of analysis as a mode of production of *categories* of women, which is self-defeating for a feminist analysis. Here, “image” is used to describe the gendered portrayal of a subject. Furthermore, although terms such as wife, seductress, cohort, and so on are used in this dissertation, they are used in a descriptive, not an ascriptive, sense.

into account their presence and absence, their speech and their silence, as ideological indicators—even in texts in which feminist thought was in its earliest, evolutionary phases.¹²² That is, the way that women are written into literature may yield evidence regarding how societies perceive and feel about their place, and the extent and type of their influence, in the world; when women are given voices, we might learn something about their history, and about their representation and expected roles, from what they say, as well as how, when, and to whom, they speak. Likewise, their absences and silences might permit us to make inferences about how they might have been expected to act and react according to male-dictated social imaginaries.

By paying close attention to the description and elaboration of female images and male images, the mannerisms that are ascribed to them, the attributes they share and those they do not, how they communicate with one another, and how they separately and jointly become factors in how or why a story is told, we can learn about attitudes towards medieval women and arrive at an increased understanding of medieval teleologies regarding females. That, in turn, contributes to women's history, which is where Medieval Studies and Feminist Studies surely intersect. Given this, we may effect a feminist reading of a medieval text.

The stance of “medieval feminist” is a difficult one, however, and it can cause problems when feminist strategies and readings are applied to literally to medieval

¹²² In *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteenth-century*, historian Gerda Lerner discusses the development of what she calls “feminist oppositional thought,” or women's resistance to patriarchy, arguing that it evolved over a far longer period than is commonly believed, and may be traced back even as far as the Middle Ages. Perhaps we could understand “feminist consciousness,” in part, as a recognition of the fact that men and women were not equal in society; this does not strictly have to begin with female writing, but rather, it might also be sensed in anonymous, or male-authored texts.

literature; for example, the pitfalls of assigning feminist tendencies to medieval writers have been signalled by Barbara Weissberger, who warns against attributing a “post-Romantic sensibility and a postmodern feminist agenda” to Florencia Pinar (41).¹²³ By extension, we might also beware of assigning any feminist inclination to an anonymous medieval text. However, that is not the intent here, and many critics have been able to employ feminist perspectives and convincingly apply them to their readings without falling into the trap of anachronism.

This may be effected by first of all acknowledging that even the overt, “formal case” for women found in medieval literature “...satisfies few feminist criteria. It is a very indirect ancestor of modern feminism, precariously liable to collapse into what our culture [a Western context] would describe on the contrary as misogynous modes of thought” (Blamires, *The Case...* 11). Given this, instances of the *unofficial* case for women are even further removed in terms of the family line that reaches forward to the modern period, and they must be handled with the utmost apprehension. Yet, as Elaine Showalter points out, feminist criticism “...is not limited or even partial to a single national literature, genre, or century” (“Women’s Time...” 30). This does not involve temporal restrictions. Therefore, by looking at the ways in which women in medieval works subvert social codes of comportment, manipulate and control the outcome of the narratives, and answer back with words or silent protest, we might arrive at a “feminist” interpretation of a medieval text. Moreover, in their approach to literary analysis, “Feminist theories of difference have often emphasized the instability of texts and their readers...in their anonymous authorship and audiences, in their shifting content, and in

¹²³ In “The Critics and Florencia Pinar: The Problem with Assigning Feminism to a Medieval Court Poet.”

their uncertain transmission” (Bennett 28). In view of the fact that medieval texts are so unreliable—due to the erraticism of manuscripts and their transmission, disparity in modes of human thought across the millennia, and so on—many medieval writings seem to lend themselves particularly well to feminist enquiry.

With the “how?” of a medievalist-feminist viewpoint explained, the question “what for?” may also be briefly addressed here. As mentioned above, Lisa Vollendorf sees the feminist study of women’s writing as a “recovering” of female intellectual traditions. We might be particularly conscious of the multivalence of the word “recovering” in relation to a feminist project: it can denote the re-searching for materials that may have been overlooked, the detection of those lost, and even the improved “health” of those thought to be fully explored. As Alan Deyermond points out in “Spain’s First Women Writers,” women writers have long been neglected by critics and historians; although this situation has greatly improved since his article was published in 1983, there is still much to be done.

Of course, Vollendorf and Deyermond address the issue of writing *women*; but what about texts that were not written by females? I believe that we should express similar concern for writing that represents women as we do for writing *by* women; and that the two matters of interest are significantly related. It is admittedly a different task to draw conclusions about writing *not* by women, as opposed to making inferences about texts that we know females wrote. Yet both areas have something to contribute to our conceptions of women’s history and even to our understanding of the development of feminism. As Wendy Hennequin affirms, in her article “Managing Medieval Misogyny,” our understanding of the misogyny of medieval texts helps us understand the “why” of

current-day feminism. Therefore the question of why one would endeavour to elucidate a medieval text using feminist perspectives is answered with what any student of history soon realises: an appreciation for the present is only fully grasped through an appreciation of the past.

The feminist perspectives that have generally influenced the writing of this dissertation comprise too many to list and detail here; however, a guiding idea comes from Kristeva, for example, whose exhortation that definitions of “Woman” should always be challenged, and that in the final analysis, woman is indefinable, “something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies” (“Woman Can Never...” 137) has inspired the search for ways to elude binary constructions. In addition, this dissertation responds to Teresa De Lauretis’ contention that there is a relationship between, and parallel function shared by, theories of narration and the Oedipal Complex, and that because of this feminist critics should re-examine established ideas about narrative in order to elucidate fresh viewpoints that do not rely on patriarchal structures.

These basic precepts about women and narration from Kristeva and De Lauretis’, both of which may be understood as being concerned with the expression of female subjectivities, and which confront how texts attempt to represent them, underpin my approach to the theoretical analysis of *LEM*. To more specifically examine the text from a feminist stance, however, I use Judith Butler’s theory of performative oral communication in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (Excitable Speech...)* (1997). Although Butler is known as a feminist thinker, this work is not a feminist treatise, as is her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (written in

1989 and published in 1990 and 1999). However, in this (the latter) text, Butler provides the tools to more profoundly excavate the speech acts of the speaking women of *LEM* and to foreground the power of speech and performance.

In *Excitable Speech...*, Butler works from the premise that a speech act is simultaneously a performance—a theatrical deed that has an audience and is therefore open to interpretation—and a linguistic act that generates effects as a result of its ties to linguistic conventions. The relationship between acts of speech and their outcomes allows us to draw conclusions about the influence of their source, the speaker; in the case of *LEM*, we may use these ideas to interpret the tangible results obtained by female speakers through their acts of speech. Moreover, while the females of *LEM* most memorably, the *madrastra* of the frame tale—also employ physical performances that accompany their verbal expressions, these acts are always related to the words they articulate; this draws together the speech and the bodily act into a union that is difficult to partition. Indeed, although the content of speech is formulated in the mind, actual audibility is produced by the body, therefore the action of speaking is intimately related to a corporeal act that has linguistic consequences. Based on this, Butler asserts: “Thus speech belongs exclusively neither to corporeal presentation nor to language, and its status as word and deed is necessarily ambiguous” (*Gender Trouble...* xxv). Once again, the theme of ambivalence enters into the discussion.

Butler’s idea that speech is ambiguous connects with Bakhtin’s proposition that carnival ambiguate. While Bakhtin permits us to observe how *LEM* inverts power structures and generates insurrectionary medieval laughter that disallows stability and order, Butler helps us to perceive a connection between speech and the body that

questions the separation between verbalization and action and therefore obscures where the influence of one ends and the other begins. These ideas, applied to a text that tergiversates to its very end, will facilitate us in surpassing binary constructions in order to witness female subjectivity of a different kind.

First, however, let us revisit the notion that *LEM* can be read as a misogynous text; this is of course an integral part of the ambiguity that the work so well exemplifies. Therefore, before Bakhtin's and Butler's theories are applied, the following section serves to delineate just one of the ways in which we might think of *LEM*'s epitomizing medieval misogyny. In the close reading that ensues, the text is viewed as being emblematic of the medieval Castilian male's anxiety regarding the female's power to disrupt matrimony through infidelity. Adultery produced various ramifications in the life of a husband of medieval Castile; aside from the shame and other emotional upset it could cause, it also might obfuscate or wrongfully direct the transmission of inheritances, which could come to affect one family's hold on wealth, territory, and power, as compared to another's. For that reason, social bonds among males had to be shown as the pre-eminent form of human social union; after all, in feudal times, male-male relationships were much more important than male-female relationships in terms of protecting wider state cohesion and development. Let us return, then, to Alfonso's Spain, the historical context of *LEM*, and consider the portrayal of the wanton, adulterous women in the text as an anti-feminine statement that reinforces male hegemony.

The Voice of the State and Constructions of Love: Female Depravity and Male Solidarity

The Alfonsine context, Gonzalez-Casnovas affirms, exhibits a cross-cultural syncretism (“Male Bonding...” 160). Since *LEM* appears a year after El Sabio’s accession, an analysis of its content may benefit from a consideration of that political context, as well as of the status of Castile as the supreme leading force of the Reconquest.¹²⁴ The objective of this technique is not to confuse social or historical narratives with the independent reality of the text, but to set the stage for a comparison between the constructedness of socio-historical narratives and constructs in the text that may be seen as complicit with each other. This is not to say that a “master narrative” dictates the contents of the text, but it certainly acknowledges that there is an unavoidable relationship between the two.¹²⁵

Alfonso’s kingdom dominated the other two emerging nation-states of Aragon and Portugal, and as the Christian kingdoms gathered strength, “Insofar as Castile was the only Christian state whose borders touched upon Granada, she alone had any evident role to play in the reconquest in the future” (O’Callaghan, *A History*.334).¹²⁶ Add to

¹²⁴ Castile had been united with León since 1230, and the dual kingdom formed the largest territorial entity in Iberia until 1492. Besides Aragon and Portugal, the other Christian kingdom on the peninsula was Navarre, but it was under French control during the thirteenth century. Granada was the one remaining Muslim territory.

¹²⁵ The term “master narrative” is used here as meaning “the standard unfolding of political events as related in history textbooks” or “the patriarchal narrative that privileges the actions, opinions, and texts of men,” as used in Erler and Kowalski (7).

¹²⁶ Although some scholars deny the applicability of the term “state” before the 19th (or even the 16th) century, Porras Arboledas et al. presuppose the existence of a *medieval state*, “ya que, en dicha época, se cumplen en parte los tres elementos que

that fact Alfonso's claim to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire through his mother, Beatrice of Swabia, and the potential future of the realm appeared most formidable. His endeavours to retrieve territory and prove his lordship over both Muslims and fellow Christians met with many successes. Yet the fruition of Alfonso's ambitions required more than military might; as he reconquered territory, the king had to sustain control of it and keep internal affairs in order.

Alfonso was known as a munificent ruler; having acceded shortly after the conquest of Seville, he assumed responsibility for allocating the spoils of battle taken from the city and outlying areas, "distributing houses, lands, vineyards, olive groves, and the like to the settlers who came from Castile, Galicia, Navarre, Portugal, the Basque provinces, and even Catalonia," and making a point of liberally remunerating those who had fought in the service of the crown (O'Callaghan, *A History*.359).¹²⁷ Plying the opportunism of newcomers with an abundance of material possessions to induce their gratefulness and secure their allegiance would have been only part of his plan to keep a firm hold on newly reconquered territory, however. The king made sure that his generosity was well recorded; "The *Libro del Repartimiento* drawn up on his orders contains the lists of grantees and the estates given them" (O'Callaghan, *A History*... 359). This monarch recognized the use of the written word as an important political vehicle of

tradicionalmente se supone que conforman la existencia de lo que más tarde se denominará Estado moderno: la existencia de una burocracia organizada, el mantenimiento de un ejército permanente y la disponibilidad de recursos financieros para sostener las tareas del poder público" (45).

¹²⁷ Alfonso's generosity is well recorded; "The *Libro del Repartimiento* drawn up on his orders contains the lists of grantees and the estates given them" (O'Callaghan, *A History*... 359).

expression. In that regard, Alfonso's literary activity was, in part, a project that reinforced his agenda to sustain and improve on his status as the dominant Christian king in the peninsula. To that end, even a small book like *LEM* had a role to play in maintaining the polity.

As to be expected, the documents produced under Alfonso encoded the ethics of the state. When he took the throne in 1252, Alfonso decreed it official practice that the translators at the Toledo School were to use Romance, supplanting Latin, which the school had favoured since its establishment in 1126.¹²⁸ By ordering the production of translations in the common language of most of his subjects, Alfonso bolstered the linguistic unity of his territory. His plethora of sponsored works, which ran the gamut from *belles-lettres* to scientific treatises, displayed the strident spirit of the Reconquest in their appropriation of Arab sources (the intellectual waging of war) and a heartfelt Christian vision. They also displayed the spirit of a Court invested in promoting societal unification and *convivencia* as a method of holding territories gained. This Court was headed by an ambitious king who would have known that to ensure commitment to the hierarchy of a semi-feudal system, and to preserve the ongoing formation, expansion, and integrity of the State, solid male allegiances and appreciation for the culture of male bonding were crucial.

In frontier society, this of course had wider societal ramifications. As we have seen, men were encouraged to marry and settle in the new frontier towns; if a man married and kept his wife domiciled in a frontier town, it was "...the most secure pledge and measure of a man's allegiance to a particular community" (Dillard 22). To ensure

¹²⁸ We may assume the same went for other translation centres.

men's ongoing contributions to and participation in their larger communities, towns had annual residence requirements in place, which could range from six to nine months. Therefore, although men were allowed to spend some amount of time outside of their places of residence, that time was limited—and, in the case of *caballeros*, it was altogether preferred that they remain as full-time residents. Thus although the knight was allowed to wander, he was under certain legal restrictions in that regard, as "...it was important for him to be in town for major religious holidays and to take part in community affairs apart from his military obligations" (Dillard 23). Aside from promoting procreation and the development of new communities, frontier settlements helped preserve and uphold the cultures of communities of men. This is supported in legal practices; for example, although the best case scenario when the king was identifying those qualified for tax exemptions was that a man have a permanent, stable living situation involving a wife and children, "A bachelor's companions (*companneros*), literally those who shared his bread, were counted as acceptable substitutes for the domiciled family of a married man" (Dillard 23). Thus the fact that groups of men lived together, and were considered as collections of kin alternate to those of the "parents-and-children" kind, obviously met with societal approval.

One of the most important works providing insight into the hopes and concerns regarding the social condition during Alfonso's time is the *Siete Partidas* (*SP*), a legal treatise heavily inflected with Christian ontology. The production of *SP* is thought to have been initiated in 1256. The text is a series of law treatises arranged as the following: I, spiritual matters and religion; II, royalty and kingdoms; III, justice; IV, marriage, friendship, and family relations; V, contracts and business; VI, wills and

inheritance; and VII, crimes and punishments. There are many unanswered questions about the precise sources for the text; various scholars, as well as the text itself, indicate Visigothic, Classical, canonical, and unnamed folkloric sources, such as “los sabios antiguos,” among others. There are also uncertainties regarding the extent of the king’s role in writing and editing this work—as with other texts he commissioned—as well as the currency of the thought expressed in the *SP* in terms of its applicability within its own era. Regarding the king’s involvement, it has been ascertained that Alfonso X took an active part in composing, editing, and supervising the writing of several texts, although we will never know to what extent.¹²⁹ The issue of the validity of the work is also difficult to address, since it was long in the making, not actually promulgated until the following century, in 1358, and is considered by some scholars to be utopic.¹³⁰ However, there is sufficient evidence to prove that the contents of the *SP* were not only known, but also debated in universities and courts during its writing (Stone 9-10). This makes a good case for the relevancy of the *SP* in its own society; it also strengthens its ties to other texts produced during the Alfonsine era, in this case, *LEM*

For the current topic, the most relevant *Partida* is the fourth, which addresses familial and social relations; it is also useful for elucidating conceptions about the strength of ties between the individual, the community, and the State.¹³¹ González-

¹²⁹ In the particular case of the *SP*, Solalinde points out “Como detalle curioso...una observación hecha de antiguo: las iniciales de los prólogos de cada Partida forman el nombre de Alfonso” (*Antología...* 151).

¹³⁰ González-Casnovas attributes this idea to Francisco López-Estrada (165).

¹³¹ María Jesús Lacarra notes that friendship is one of the three main themes of *LEM* along with deception and destiny (*Cuentística...* 194).

Casanovas has suggested that the *Cuarta partida* shows how individual action extrapolates to the State; this is exemplified in one instance by an entry on sodomy, which is thought to bring disaster not only upon those who practice it, but the entire realm: “de tal pecado como este nascen muchos males a la tierra do se face” (qtd. in González-Casanovas, “Male Bonding...” 166). Likewise, behaviours seen as desirable are thought to affect the state in a positive way; marriage, for instance, which “Es mantenimiento del mundo” and friendship, which is “prouechosa a la vida de los omes” (qtd. in González-Casanovas, “Male Bonding...” 165-166).¹³² In each of these cases, “there is a chain of responsibility that connects individual and group, believer and church, subject and nation, so that whatever works for the good or evil of one party also affects the others” (González-Casanovas, “Male Bonding...” 166-167). The views expressed regarding marriage and friendship accord with the proposed utopic vision of the *SP*, which nevertheless may also apply to the reality of the values that Alfonso wished to uphold as he built his world and pursued his quest to become the mightiest of Spanish and European kings.

Yet what if some of these ideals—such as matrimony, the very foundation of Christian society according to both Church and State, chosen as part of the *Cuarta partida* so it would fall in the dead center of the text, underscoring its centrality to existence—sometimes went awry? To answer that question, let us turn for a moment to the misogynistic medieval conception of women, which allowed for the collective reputation of women being defined by men in terms that were often less than flattering.

¹³² The theme of friendship was of course one that figured often in the medieval mind; nuanced by Aristotelian and other Classical ideals, friendship is a recurrent theme in exempla collections such as the *DC* and the *CZ*, which both contain the popular story of “El medio amigo” in which true friendship is celebrated as an uncommon delight in life.

The trope of Eva/Ave, used to distinguish between the two female archetypes yet paradoxically conflating woman into one binary, linguistically and ideologically, was employed frequently in medieval literature; more often than not, however, women were portrayed not so much as Ave but as sinful succubae, hosting and reinforcing the message that men were morally superior to them. This explains the facility with which a text like *LEM* denigrates female relationships and uses them to privilege male alliances over all others. The text may be seen to address the concern of failed marriages by revealing several examples of rather unsuccessful, or at least unwholesome matrimoniess always managing to place the blame on the women involved, thereby making an example out of them in order to champion male bonding. Mining the misogynistic tradition, the text shows how, even when the marriage bond is disrupted by adulterous females, male communities can prevail and society endure. This is elaborated in the text's frame tale; its marital crisis is ultimately resolved by the male community, the nuances of the story accentuated by intercalated tales about unfaithful women and important male-male relationships.

Pivotal to this theme is the frame tale's lustful seductress, who embodies desire as a property of the female and is destructive to the social order represented by marriage. Her ability to ruin contrasts with the steady solidarity represented by her opposition, a group of men (the prince and the king's counsellors) bound by their allegiance to one another. This situation—the attribution of corrupting desire to women, and the dynamic of redemptive male allegiances—lends itself to an interpretation that employs concepts of love as analytical tools that elucidate gender and loyalty relations within the text.

A classification of four types of love—*agape* (selfless or spiritual love), *philia* (friendship), *storge* (familial love), and *eros* (lust)—were appropriated from Classical tradition by the Church Fathers. Medieval Christians would have been well aware of the differences between them, if not of the actual terminology, then of their hierarchical order, with *agape* as the highest ranking, *philia* after it, followed by *storge*, and then *eros* as the least esteemed. *Agape* is not sufficiently mentioned in *LEM* merit its use in analysis here, and *storge*, although integral to the father-son relationships of the intercalated stories, is subservient to the *philia* of the frame, in which the Prince is supported by several non-consanguineous paternal figures (Çendubete, and the seven sages), and *philia*, not his father's *storge*, is ultimately responsible for saving his life. In the text, *philia* is privileged and contrasted with *eros*; in effect, we see the difference between *eros* and *philia* manifested through thematics that accord *eros* to females and *philia* to males. This is in line with medieval gender paradigms that represent women as wanton, and men as steadfast.

If we look closer at the function of these gender paradigms and the types of love with which they are associated, we see how this text may be read as a subtle propaganda for nation-building based on male alliances, as unruly *eros* is shown to spell out downfall and orderly *philia* is presented as a force that unites male kin, even in the absences of blood ties. Beyond denigrating women by way of seemingly simple tales, the text conveys a larger, more meaningful message in that it exemplifies the value of male

collaboration and communicates the necessity of such for the successful functioning and longevity of the state.¹³³

To demonstrate how *eros* is attributed to women in *LEM* the best approach seems to be to examine the frame tale and the interpolated adultery tales 2 (“Avis”), 5 (“Gladius”), 9 (“Senescalculus”), and 23 (“Abbas”). These four intercalated tales feature blatant adulteresses, each of whom are willing participants in their affairs. All of the women in these stories therefore have a commonality; they are shown as sexual creatures whose desires necessarily demand that they commit illicit sexual acts. Although many exempla demonstrate the *deceit* of women, these specific tales best show how female desire (*eros*) may be seen to operate as a narrative principle that motivates the volatile situation of adultery, and they more closely parallel the concerns of the frame story.

While there are other tales that contain the theme of adultery, the abovementioned four are the only ones in which sexual desire may be seen as the reason that motivates women to commit adultery and fulfil that desire through acts of sexual consummation. Tale 10, “Canicula,” is therefore not used since the woman’s adulterous pursuits are motivated by the fear that she will transform into a dog (not because of her desire); likewise, tale 13, “Pallium,” is not used since the woman has no wish to commit adultery, and she is tricked into participating in sexual relations that in any case amount to rape. Similar to the interpolated tales “Avis,” “Gladius,” “Senescalculus,” and “Abbas,” the frame tale, while not strictly an adultery tale since there is no sex, can be considered

¹³³ *LEM* not the only text associated with the Castilian royal family that may be read in this manner; indeed, in his *Libro enfenido*, “obra con fines didácticos y destinada a su hijo, el adusto don Juan Manuel dedica un capítulo al amor, donde la ausencia del elemento femenino es absoluta. ¿Qué es el amor para este noble señor, según se deja ver en sus consejos? Básicamente, el grado de amistad y lealtad entre los hombres” (Wirkala 111).

along with the four inserted tales since it features a woman motivated to initiate adultery through *eros*. It is, therefore, a tale of betrayal. Let us see how the depravity of the *madrastra* is reflected in the four sages' tales about other women's infidelities.

The female figures of the four interpolated tales effectively echo the lust of the seductress of the frame story. These women delight in fornicating with (sometimes multiple) men other than their husbands, often going to great lengths to manufacture creative excuses and feign their innocence. In tale 2, "Avis," we see a man who suspects his wife has a lover and decides to use a parrot as a spy. He positions the parrot to watch over his wife, and sure enough, after the husband is gone, "entro su amigo della en su casa do estava. El papagayo vio quanto ellos fizieron" (Keller, *LEM5*). The parrot tells all, and the wife unleashes her fury on her maid: "Tu dexiste a mi marido todo quanto yo fize" (Keller, *LEM 15*). The maid tells her the parrot is to blame, and the woman takes measures to fool the parrot the next night; she is successful, and her husband gets rid of the parrot, thinking it a liar. The woman is free to continue her adulterous activity.¹³⁴

In tale 5, "Gladius," we see another woman who obviously has a long-standing extra-marital sexual relationship: "era una muger que avia un amigo" (Keller, *LEM 20*). This woman is lustier than the previous one, however, since she not only has her "amigo" but, when her lover's servant comes to her door to check whether or not she is alone so his master can visit, she is aroused by another man: "pagose del...porque era fermoso; e

¹³⁴ This is the only tale in which we might point at any level of amicable collaboration between women, since the maidservant is faithful to her mistress and maintains the secret of her affair; however, it would be difficult to label this as camaraderie or female bonding. It amounts to a relationship that operates only in function of a sexual economy, as do the female-female relationships of tales 10 ("Canicula") and 13 ("Pallium"), in which the *alcahuetas*, although they assist other women, are certainly not "friends" with their victimized clients.

ella llamolo que jaziese con ella” (Keller, *LEM*0). Unsatisfied with just her husband and her lover, this woman, on the spur of the moment, and obviously motivated by nothing more than physical attraction, decides to invite another paramour into her bed.

Tale 9, “Senescalculus,” is the one story in the set in which adultery is arranged for the wife by the husband; a corpulent prince pays a visit to the man’s bathhouse and gives the bath keeper some money, telling him to find him a woman with whom to sleep. Thinking that the prince is too fat to have intercourse and that he can easily make a profit, the man hands over his wife; he later regrets his decision when the prince does indeed manage to bed his wife, who apparently goes with him willingly. In fact, when the bath keeper tells his wife to come home, she refuses, asking, “¿Commo yre? ca le fiz pleyto que dormiria con el toda esta noche” (Keller, *LEM* 28). Aside from the smugness in her reply, one notices that the woman obviously did some negotiating of her own. At no time did the prince say he wanted to sleep with another woman *the whole night*; therefore, the woman has obviously taken advantage of the situation to make arrangements of her own and fulfil her own sexual desires.

Finally, we can briefly consider tale 23, “Abbas.” In this exemplum the adulteress is involved in an affair with an abbot. One day, as soon as her husband goes to work, we are told “ella enbio al abad a dezir quel marido non era en la villa e que viniese para la noche a su posada” (Keller, *LEM*3). Once again, we see that the woman is associated with *eros*; she is the one who commits adultery and makes the effort to continue her extra-marital relations. Additionally, we cannot help but notice that although in each of these tales there are obviously men that are willing to make the women’s illicit liaisons successful, all of the male lovers are either unmarried or their

marital state goes unmentioned. The blame therefore falls squarely on females for ruining marriage contracts; no *husband* actually commits adultery by sleeping with someone else's wife.¹³⁵

If we ask whether or not there exists any semblance of *philia* between *any* of the women in any of the tales, the answer must be no. There is very little interaction among women, and when women do collaborate they only do so to serve lustful purposes and to transgress the boundaries of wedlock. Women are not shown forming kinship alliances. Furthermore, whereas men's relationships are shown including and excluding relationships with women, women's relationships are always shown as dependent upon their ties to men; women only have use for relationships with each other if those relationships lead to establishing connections to men. Women are depicted as unidimensional, motivated only by *eros* and incapable of *philia*, which is shown (as we shall see) to require multi-faceted collaboration for the greater good. Women do not represent a coherent social unit; this is perhaps best exemplified by the solitary seductress queen who, once accused, must defend herself and is offered no aid from others. All of this indicates that women tear at the fabric of society through the chaos they cause as a result of having a proclivity for being ruled by *eros* and becoming adulterous wives; they disrupt marriage, the heart of the social body.¹³⁶ In addition to this, their desire renders them incapable of establishing productive, harmonious alliances even with one another.

¹³⁵ Even the pimp launderer of "Senescalcus" cannot be faulted, for although he arranges for his wife to commit adultery, he sees the error of his ways and recants. Still, his wife participates in adultery all the same, and the blame is shifted to her for being willing and malicious enough to do so. "En realidad," notes Rita Wirkala, "el adulterio masculino poco se trata en la literatura medieval" (102).

¹³⁶ We of course might also argue that *eros* is attributed to males; admittedly, we see examples of male *eros* in stories 1, "Leo"; 10, "Canicula"; 13, "Pallium"; 17, "Nomina";

A review of these tales shows something else, moreover. Recalling the Manichean paradigm of Eva/Ave, and in terms of the application of the binary analysis of *eros* vs. *philia*, the seductress queen of the frame tale and the adulteresses in tales 2, 5, 9, and 23 are, unsurprisingly, associated with Eve. Their sexuality and infidelity take care of this; however, to avoid offending or contradicting Christian sensibilities by tarnishing the sanctity of motherhood, any extraneous hint of compatibility with the Holy Mother has been erased by corrupting, downplaying, or eliminating maternal roles. This is achieved in the frame first of all by marginalizing motherhood, mentioning the prince's mother only as a biological imperative; the woman conceives, "E quando fueron conplidos los nueve meses, encaesçio de un fjio saño" (Keller, *LEM*). After this, however, we hear nothing about her being a care provider, nor is there a wet nurse. In fact, there are *no* scenes depicting female care giving in the frame tale.

Motherhood is then debased in the rest of the frame tale through the confusion between the king's "favourite wife" of the first exemplum (the prince's mother), who is referred to as "aquella quel mas queria" (Keller, *LEM*) and his "favourite wife" of the second exemplum (the seductress), referred to as "la qual mas amava" (Keller, *LEM1*). Since the women are insufficiently differentiated up to this point in the text, motherhood is

18, "Ingenia"; and 20, "Puer 4 annorum." Yet in these tales, the king of "Leo" realizes his error and does not commit adultery; the man who desires the betrothed woman of "Canicula" disappears and his lust is no longer a theme; the man of "Pallium" is a rapist, not an adulterer; the married man of "Nomina" has a mistress who is a she-devil, and therefore "not real"; the philanderer of "Ingenia" is led astray by a female and in the end does not commit adultery; and the man with the wandering eye in "Puer 4 annorum" is dissuaded from his amorous intentions. In short, these stories indicate—with the exception of the rapist, who in any case is a deviant—that men can resist *eros* and maintain loyalties.

complicated and defiled by an Oedipal theme.¹³⁷ Finally, in the four interpolated adultery tales, 2, 5, 9, and 23, as we have just seen, motherhood is all together eradicated.

Although there are various matrimonies, there are no children; therefore adulteresses, it seems, cannot be mothers. Again, women are disassociated from maternity.¹³⁸

The status of “mother” was an important part of a medieval woman’s familial role, since it was one which afforded her respect in the social sphere and influence in the private realm. After all, “In relation to Christ, women’s privilege is of *conceptio* as his mother” (Blamires, *The Case...* 97). That women are scarcely presented as mothers in the work as a whole, and are never portrayed as mothers in adultery tales, speaks further of the devaluation of women in terms of their relationships to others and to larger communities. Indeed, the general lack of the maternal theme in the text contrasts quite markedly with other texts of the period, such as Alfonso X’s *Cantigas*, for example, in which 29 of the 125 poems are related to maternity, in accordance with the concept that “La mujer-madre es una imagen muy querida para todo el mundo medieval” (Pérez de Tudela y Velasco 64).

Thus, while we may say that women are associated with *eros* and are curiously separated from the maternal sphere, we may also affirm that *philia*, the amicable love second only to *agape*, emerges as an attribute of men in *LEM*. This manifests itself through the frame tale and six tales involving children. In contrast to women, men are shown achieving socially beneficial goals such as caring for others, providing mutual

¹³⁷ Only after the 18th story, “Ingenia,” on the eighth day, do we see the second woman referred to as *madrastra*.

¹³⁸ This is in spite of the fact that marriage and the production of offspring were highly encouraged and esteemed in medieval society, “*proles*,” or offspring, being one of Augustine’s three pillars of good marriages (the other two being *fides* and *sacramentum*).

companionship, saving lives, avoiding sin, or securing justice. We shall first examine how the necessary and useful role of women as society's caregivers is denied them and relegated instead to men.

Although, as we have seen, in the frame tale the prince's mother is barely mentioned, the child does have *paternal* caregivers. Immediately after his son is born, the king takes him into the community of men, calling together his sages to view his new son and cast his horoscope. The king's presentation of the child to his counsellors is the boy's initiation into the male domain. The close-knit nature of this domain is affirmed by the king when he solicits a tutor for his son from among the sages, saying that whoever can teach his son shall always be in good favour: "E dalle he quanto el demandase, e avra sienpre mi amor" (Keller, *LEM* 6). Çendubete is the one selected to tutor the prince; when this is decided, he declares his intentions to be a superior tutor, and he also makes a demand for something in return. The king welcomes his request, which is: "Tu non quieras fazer a otrie lo que non queries que fiziesen" (Keller, *LEM* 7).¹³⁹ The sage's words are ones that look toward promoting and maintaining peace in the royal court.

Çendubete is something of a maternal figure in that, first of all, he will metaphorically give birth to the prince by inducting him into the world of knowledge. He claims he can do it in just six months, far quicker than a female can produce a healthy child. Çendubete's first contact with the prince is characterized by a caring physical gesture that recalls the image of a mother with her child: "Çendubete tomo este dia el ñino por la mano, e fuese con el para su posada" (Keller, *LEM* 8). Çendubete continues to nurture his young charge by providing him with shelter and sustenance: "fizo fazer un

¹³⁹ This line is often noted in the criticism for its Old Testament source.

gran palacio hermoso de muy gran guisa...E asentose con el a mostralle, e trayanles ally que comiesen e que beviesen” (Keller, *LEM* 8-9). We continue to picture Çendubete instructing the boy with motherly concern, modelling for him, and shaping the child after himself, as he tells him, “Esta es mi silla e esta la tuya fasta que aprendas los saberes todos que yo aprendi” (Keller, *LEM* 8). Maternal themes dominate all the way to the end of the description, reinforcing the exclusivity of the bond they are forging: “ellos non salian fuera, e ninguno otro non les entrava alla” (Keller, *LEM* 9). Although his primary objective is to educate the prince, Çendubete also caters to his material needs, and exercises complete jurisdiction over him, keeping the boy within his physical and psychological sphere of influence at every moment. Their time together is evocative of a gestation and aftercare period.

This maternal relationship culminates in a bond of trust evident when the Prince is consigned to silence in order to avoid the ill fate that is prophesized, and he tells his teacher: “si me mandas que nunca fable, nunca fablare; e mandame lo que tu quesieres, ca yo todo lo fare” (Keller, *LEM* 9). After Çendubete has gone into hiding, when the mute prince is subsequently accused of attempted rape, the king’s seven counsellors decide to speak on his behalf, warning the king of action taken in haste and stressing the inherent wickedness and unreliability of women. Now it is they that take care of the prince; coming to his aid, they build a case against the queen by using the example of womankind, elaborated as Eve.

Having seen how maternity is denied women and attributed to men in the frame tale, we might now turn to consider the theme of children and parents in the inserted tales. The 23 interpolated stories of *LEM* include six tales in which children —all male,

incidentally—appear as characters.¹⁴⁰ Although these tales, like the frame, are deficient in maternal images, there are some doting fathers and male caretakers—and where there are not, the lack of mothers is not presented as an insufficiency. Two out of the six sons mentioned are grown (stories 6, “Striges,” and 8, “Fontes”), two are in the exclusive care of their fathers (stories 3, “Lavator,” and 12, “Canis”), and two are wise beyond their years and do not need mothers (stories 20, “Puer 4 annorum,” and 21, “Puer 5 annorum”). Mothers are conspicuously absent in all but one of these stories, “Puer 4 annorum,” in which the mother is belittled, as we shall see. Male children are shown as either independent of or superior to their female parents; or else they are pictured as being looked after by extremely devoted fathers.

The stories “Striges” and “Fontes” feature two grown princes in the custody of kings’ counsellors. Although the stories are told to show that the counsellors fail their charges by allowing them to become lost and abandoning them, the young men are shown able to take care of themselves and escape their predicaments, eventually being reunited with their fathers at home (again, mothers are not even mentioned). In the story “Lavator” and “Canis” we see younger sons, however. In the former tale, a *curador de paños* has a small son who accompanies him as he works. Despite the fact that the child amuses himself by playing dangerously in the water, we are told that the *curador* “non ge lo quiso castigar” (Keller, *LEM* 17). Eventually, the day comes when “quel niño se afogo; e el padre, por sacar el fijo, afogose” (Keller, *LEM* 7). Effectively, this father, so devoted to his son that he cannot tell him not to play near the water, dies for him. The latter tale, “Canis,” tells of a young boy whose mother goes away to visit her family (it

¹⁴⁰ There is one *hija* but she is never seen (“Striges,” story 6), and she is mentioned only because she is to become the wife of a prince.

seems strange that she does not take her son with her). She goes, “e fue con ella toda su compañía” (Keller, *LEM*3). In the mother’s absence, the father has custody of the sleeping child, who is later endangered and then saved; a snake enters his room, and the family dog kills it.¹⁴¹ In this story, the father is negligent, but the tale ends happily and, notably, without female intervention.

The stories “Puer 4 annorum” and “Puer 5 annorum” both depict young boys—ages four and five, as the titles say—who have outgrown the need for their mothers and in fact exceed them in all ways. Of these two tales, “Puer 4 annorum” is the only one that shows a mother—and indeed it is the one interpolated tale that features a mother who pays any attention to her son.¹⁴² However, in this story, it appears that the woman’s only thematic function is to highlight her son’s intellectual superiority to her and to illustrate that he has no need for what she might offer maternally. Although she feeds him, he controls the action of the feeding by crying whenever he wishes to be served more food. As he later tells his mother’s lover, “Yo non lloro sinon por mi pro...E sana mi cabeça e; mas mandome mi padre por el mi llorar arroz que coma quanto quisiere” (Keller, *LEM* 55). His father has taught him how to manipulate his mother. Maternal authority has dissipated, replaced by that of the father who, even when physically absent, is invoked and obeyed.

Finally, we might note that in this selection of tales there *is* one anomalous maternal image, provided by the one pregnant figure in the text: the male demon of

¹⁴¹ Kantor points out the connotation between the serpent and women, “...que no puede estar ausente para los relatos que pertenecen a la tradición judeo-cristiana” (89).

¹⁴² It is unclear in the text whether or not this woman still has a husband; however, it is implied that she is licentious; she has told her new lover, who waits to be seen to while she feeds her son, that “queria fazer la quel toviese por bien” (Keller, *LEM* 54).

“Fontes” who transforms himself into a female to provide companionship to a prince who has also been turned into a female. S/He is, however, with child. It is immediately striking, considering the number of children in the text, and most of all considering the motif of the “lack of an heir” in the beginning of the frame story, that we should finally see a pregnant figure in the form of someone who does not actually become a parent. Aside from this, we notice that, since the pregnant demon is really a male, as is the “prince-woman,” the underlying motifs of male friendship, solidarity, and community are actually the focus. There would have been no need for the demon to have become a female if not for the fact that he took pity on a fellow male and sought to provide him companionship.

Returning to the theme of the male children, then, it is remarkable that out of all the tales concerning them, none illustrate the strong bond expected and typical of mother and child. That is, none of them support relationships of reliance or allegiance between mother and son, even though during the medieval period it was accepted that “Mothers should nourish and care for children under three years of age and fathers are responsible for those above that age” (Stone 100). Mothers were supposed to be involved in the lives of their children—not to *rear* them, but to *nurtur* them, as the *Siete Partidas* clarifies.¹⁴³ Yet in this text, the sometime necessary maternal role is deemphasized and demystified, and either father-son relationships, or male self-sufficiency is foregrounded.

¹⁴³ Child nurturing is differentiated from child rearing in the *Siete Partidas* 4.20.2: “E segu<n> dixiero<n> los sabios antig<u>os departimie<n>to ha entre nodrimie<n>to y crianc’a” (qtd. in Stone 112). However, until children reach the age of three, mothers should do both, in 4.19.3: “nodrescer y criar deuen las madres a sus hijos que fueren menores de tres años” (qtd. in Stone 100).

We have discussed how the interpolated tales about adulteresses help to echo the theme of lust and seduction in the frame tale and further establish a relationship between women and *eros*. We have also seen acts of kindness, nurturing, and friendship among men in the interpolated tales. These stories associate males with *philia*. We will now return to the frame tale, which is informed by the message of the intercalated tales and which demonstrates with finality that *LEM* supports systems of brotherhood in the interests of maintaining communities founded on the ties between men.

When the mute prince risks execution for allegedly raping his father's wife, he is protected by the community of men.¹⁴⁴ By the time his seven days of silence are over, and he can finally speak for himself, not only has the Prince learned that he may find refuge in that community, he has also learned the order of the chain of command, and the necessity of obeying it, in a male-dominated society. He shows that he understands the dynamics of the male group by sending for the sage closest to the king in order to request an audience; on the eighth day, "llamo el ynfante a la muger que lo servia en aquellos dias que non fablava, e dixo: "Ve e llama a fulano, ques mas privado del rrey, e dile que venga quanto pudiere" (Keller, *LEM*9).¹⁴⁵

Appearing before his father, the Prince demonstrates that he deserves an elevated status in the male elite by telling four tales that convey his superiority to the counsellors as well as illustrating the categorical superiority of men over women. *Only he* is able to

¹⁴⁴ Notably, his "birth mother" does not appear to defend him. Surely the Prince's biological mother would have had something to say about her son being sentenced to death?

¹⁴⁵ Unexpectedly, we do see a female here; but the text clarifies that she is a mere servant, not a caregiver in the maternal sense. This is further emphasized when, without a word, she goes "muy corriendo," hastening to do as he bids.

definitively convince the king of the wife's guilt; for the first time in the text, he orders that she be executed. Again we recall that *storge* was not enough to prevent the king from ordering the execution of his son at the beginning of the story. By the end of the text, it is *philia* that is proven not only to have provided a sanctuary for the prince but to have dissolved the king's *ira regia*, his royal anger.¹⁴⁶ Harking back to what we have seen in the interpolated tales, the prince is shown as being self-sufficient, and he is reunited with his father.

“As a complement to familial and conjugal ties, male friendship is often depicted as transition and counterweight to collective allegiances” according to González-Casnovas (“Male Bonding...” 157). In this case, male friendships may be understood as collectives necessary to and representative of the greater community of the State. They are a counterweight to the chaos caused by medieval man's natural “opposite,” woman, whose uncontrollable *eros* could upset the status quo by threatening the most significant of society's institutions, marriage and kinship relations. A strong male community is beneficial to the nation as it secures its survival, as the text proves when the prince lives and the kingdom maintains its heir apparent.

The text significantly does not end in or make any mention of the prince marrying, which might be expected of a frame tale that began with a king's preoccupation about the future of his kingdom, and indeed would be typical of folkloric

¹⁴⁶ The *ira regia* is one of the “...manifestaciones de la autoridad real por las que el rey retira o concede su amor en un acto voluntario y arbitrario” (Lacarra, “La representación del rey...” 183). The capriciousness of this royal prerogative awards full agency to the king, who is the fulcrum between right and wrong, positive and negative, or simply that which he does or does not wish.

material, as Propp has shown.¹⁴⁷ The prince's marriage, and along with it the inherent promise of yet another future heir, would have served as a further guarantee of the survival of the royal family and realm. Instead, the text ends with the sentencing of the offending queen, exalting above all else the triumph of the male community after having prevailed over and moved to expunge her from its midst. It is logical to suppose that in medieval societies based on feudal or semi-feudal order—in any case, on the fealty of men—men's relationships with each other had to be shown to supersede those relationships in which women were involved. The vassal-lord relationship kept the state alive, economically and politically. In addition, due to constant warfare, frontier societies had a vested interest in encouraging brotherhood since they relied upon the strength of men's military collaboration and warriorship to defend their communities. The exaltation of *philia* among men was a tactic of survival.

In the preceding pages, we have seen how exempla could use constructions of love to fix the parameters for a politics of gender that upholds the politics of the state. Alfonsine Spain was in fact a state that astutely dictated the role expected of men in their kin relationships with other males of their line: the fourth *Partida* conveys the message “that men gain love by the act of childrearing, ‘Crianc’a es cosa porq<ue> gana<n> los ombres amor’” (Stone 106-107).¹⁴⁸ However, although this love between father and child, *storge*, was valuable, bonds among men were also expected from males that were not

¹⁴⁷ Propp's final function was that of marriage.

¹⁴⁸ It is noted that not only were the *Partidas* not promulgated until the fourteenth century, but also the four books of the *Fuero Real* (1252-1255); the text contained royal legislation operative in certain municipalities “to whose needs it was directed” from 1255-1272, but only became part of Castilian law in 1348 (MacDonald, “Alfonso X...” 67-68). However, the texts written during Alfonso's reign may be taken to reflect the ideology of his state during his rule.

related by blood. In law IV of the *SP*, which details varieties of friendship—which we can also interpret as kinds of love—the first type of *amistad* described is that of *natura* (or familial love, which we can understand as *storge*); moreover, the text goes on to say that the “segunda manera de amistad es más noble que la primera, porque puede seer entre dos homes que hayan bondad en si; et por ende es mejor que la otra, porque esta nasce de bondad tan solamente, et la otra de debdo de natura, et ha en sí todos los bienes” (Solalinde, *Antología...* 169). This type of friendship, or love, is *philia*, and the text plainly states that it is a more important bond than *storge*.

Yet, in case there is any doubt that the Alfonsine writers were talking about this type of *amistad* in relation to men, as opposed to men *and women* (i.e. allowing *home* to stand for both male and female), let us also consider the last type of love that this section of the law details: “Et aun y ha otra manera de amistad, segunt la costumbre de España que posieron antiguamente los fijosdalgo entre sí, que se non deben deshorrar nin facer mal unos a otros” (Solalinde, *Antología...* 169). In this phrase, we hear the voice of the state directly admit: male-male bonds have historically been, and continue to be, a vital element of the proto-nation. This recalls the Old Testament aphorism Çendubete used in his request to the king, “Do not do unto others that which you would not have them do unto you.”

In the preceding pages, we have seen that in the fictional tales of *LEMocio* - political practices are inscribed within the literary portrayal of love, which becomes gendered and politicized as *eros*—here associated with females and their spheres of influence—is overcome by *philia*, which is ascribed to the males of the text. The former love is prone to creating difficulty and disorder while the latter invites unity. The

contrast articulates the reiteration of social and gender constructs through literature as it reinforces state values which show that, even when the institution of marriage is shown to fail, the male-dominated social order can be reinforced through male allegiances.

This close reading has demonstrated how *LEM* may be read as a misogynous text . It has shown how the exempla may be interpreted as denigrating females and using misogyny to advocate men's interests over women's. In the next chapter, we will do an about-face, and read *LEM* as a "not-misogynous" text. In order to do so, we will delve deeper into the ambiguous nature of the work; first, however, we will scrutinize the events and characters of the frame tale.

Chapter III: The Spanish Shahrazād and Her Entourage Speak

The Frame Story of *LEM*

LEM begins with a frame story in which we meet the despairing King Alcos of Judea, who has no son to succeed him; despite the great quantity of wives he has at his disposal (ninety in all), “non podia aver de ninguna dellas fijo” (Keller, *LEM* 4).¹⁴⁹ Thus the text begins with the theme of some kind of reproductive, or sexually-related dysfunction involving the regent.¹⁵⁰ On its way to resolving this, the narrative introduces us to one of the king’s many *mugeres*, which we can suppose are his “wives” or “concubines,” although it is never clear in the text; as we have seen previously, however, the title of *muger* usually indicated that a woman was married, so in keeping with that, and for practical purposes, we shall take *muger* to mean “wife.”¹⁵¹ As numerous as they may be, however, the first one we encounter is distinguished from the others in that she is

¹⁴⁹ Comprising an amount of land that fluctuates frequently in the Bible, its boundaries at one time stretching so far south that they bordered Arabia, Judea, previously called “Judah,” was so named after the return of the Jews from their seventy-year exile in Babylon. Always inclusive of Jerusalem, it existed as a distinct territory until 70 CE. The setting of Judea, and its attendant Jewish backdrop, problematises the presence of a polygynous king in *LEM*—the only version of the text to contain “Judea.” Other versions of the text within the *Seven Sages/Sendebar* cycle “say that the story relates to a king of India or China, or name no country. Comparetti suggests that the Spanish scribe copied Judea for India by mistake, and palaeographers admit the likelihood of this” (Keller *LEM* xvi). As for the quantity of wives mentioned, it is perhaps a testament to *convivencia*, or to Fadrique’s tolerance, that polygamy has not been written out of the 1253 version.

¹⁵⁰ The motif “Potiphar’s Wife” usually only refers to the seduction that takes place in the frame story, but there is also a parallel between Potiphar and Alcos aside from their seductive wives; as Potiphar was a eunuch, this is another similarity between him and Alcos—the theme of “lack” related to sex.

¹⁵¹ It is noted, however, that this woman really does not fit any of the many categories of medieval women as outlined by Dillard in *Daughters of the Reconquest: Women in Castilian Town Society, 1100-1300*. Neither *muger* nor *barragana* exactly serves to denote a woman who was one of ninety sexual partners to one man.

“aquella quel mas queria, e era cuerda e entendida e aviala el provado en algunas cosas” (Keller, *LEM*). The two of them have, therefore, established a prior relationship of some exclusivity, one that comprises affection and trust. Therefore it is nothing out of the ordinary when this particular *muger*, seeing that the king is perturbed, takes it upon herself to act as his advisor, entreating him to confide in her, as she must have done on previous occasions, since the king addresses her with, “Piadosa, bienaventurada, nunca quesiste nin quedeste de me conortar e me toller todo cuydado quando lo avia” (Keller, *LEM* 4). It is the result of experience, then, that she has an awareness and understanding of the king’s emotional state, as evident when she discerns his melancholy and endearingly soothes him, reassuring him of his popularity with his subjects: “Ilegose a el,” we are told, “por quel veye estar triste e dixol que era onrrado e amado de los de su rregno e de los de su pueblo” (Keller, *LEM*).

Her most valuable words of counsel, nevertheless, are delivered in reference to the king’s lack of an heir: “Yo te dare consejo bueno a esto: rruega a Dios, quel que de todos bienes es conplido, ca poderoso es de te facer e de te dar fijo” (Keller, *LEM* 5). This female speaker establishes a certain authority with her language: her “yo te dare” sets up and accentuates the hierarchical relationship between listener and speaker, giver and receiver. This is tacitly emphasized again when we consider that the woman is referring the matter to God—she is thereby assuming something of an intermediate role. God, the most powerful element in the chain of command, is the one who can grant the son to the king, the one who seeks. Moreover, the woman assures the king that not only is she giving him counsel, but it is, she asserts, “consejo *bueno*.” She then offers to help him further, inserting herself into her recommendation: “Mas tengo por bien, si tu

quesieres, que nos levantemos e rroguemos a Dios de todo coraçon e quel pidamos merçed que nos de un fijo con que folguemos e finque heredero despues de nos” (Keller, *LEM* 5). This offer is carefully worded to hinge entirely on the king’s terms—“*si tu quesieres*”—with the result that the command form in the ensuing verbs *levantemos*, *rroguemos*, and *pidamos* is sufficiently toned down to appear as no more than soft suggestion. She has paved the way for herself to become an integral part of his endeavour, and not only that, but if they are successful (such success being implicitly guaranteed since God is cast as the all-powerful answer to the problem), then she will also share in the glory, since not only will they both enjoy their son, but he will be heir not just to the king, but rather to *them*.

The outcome of this private consultation is to the woman’s advantage, and it substantiates the soundness of her counsel. The king, appeased and optimistic, “sopo que lo que ella dixo era verdat; e levantaronse amos, e fizieronlo asi, e tornaronse a su cama; e yazio con ella el rrey, e enpreñose luego...E quando fueron conplidos los nueve meses, encaesçio de un fijo saño” (Keller, *LEM* 5). The king, we are told, is delighted; “e la muger loo a Dios por ende” (Keller, *LEM* 7). The woman’s newly acquired and much-awaited maternal role is over and done with at once. Indeed, this is the last we hear of her, and it appears that she fades back into the harem.

According to the paradigms we explored earlier, this is a “good” woman, as we realize from the kind, admiring adjectives the king uses to describe her, as well as her depiction as well-meaning and god-fearing. Furthermore, this woman is loyal, as the text itself seems to want to assure us; the oddly superfluous move of stating that the child was born after a nine-month period makes it seem as if the narrative wishes to ensure that the

audience knows that the child arrived at the typical, expected time—no sooner. She is also, as she herself says, able to deliver “good” counsel, as the outcome of her advice, when followed, yields the desired result.

Bolstered by the presence of the “yo” at the beginning of her counsel, we see that we have here a woman who puts herself on a par with the regent. She speaks and gives counsel; the king follows her advice. She ascribes to herself the quality of insight. This woman fits the classification of *consejera* that we have seen previously. She also, intriguingly, commands the king—and is obeyed. Yet this does not seem to be enough for us to say that she completely breaks free of the mould of archetypal woman; indeed, critics designate her as a “good, chaste woman” and contrast her with the exemplar of the oft-labelled “bad” woman that we will see next. We shall leave this line of inquiry for now and return to it shortly. We must first introduce the *madrastra* and see how the seduction of the prince takes place.

We read that the prince matures, and “creçio e fizose grande e fermoso, e diole Dios muy buen entendimiento. En su tienpo non fue omne nasçido tal commo el fue” (Keller, *LEM*).¹⁵² However, it appears that he is unable to retain anything he learns; he is therefore given over to the tutelage of Çendubete, who the king decides is the most suited to the charge. When the prince’s education is complete, the sage casts his horoscope and, given that “vio quel niño seria en gran cueyta de muerte si fablase ante pasasen los siete dias” (Keller, *LEM*), he instructs the prince not to talk for a week. Rightly fearing the king’s wrath, Çendubete goes into hiding, and the prince returns to the

¹⁵² This description recalls the figure of Joseph, who is traditionally described as, if not semi-divine or angelic, always as beautiful; “...it is his handsomeness that is most often highlighted” (Goldman 79). His physical beauty in some versions of the story reaches such an extreme that even Potiphar lusts after him, Goldman explains (24).

court, where his muteness causes his father to conjecture to his audience of sages, “Quiça, por aventura, ha de mi miedo e non osa falar” (Keller, *LEM0*). The royal counsellors, however, propose that the boy has been poisoned. The king slips back into his previous melancholy. It is shortly after this that the second woman to be mentioned in the text appears.

We will recall that the prince’s mother was referred to as “aquella quel [the king] mas queria” (Keller, *LEM*). Now, a second woman is referred to as “la qual mas amava” (Keller, *LEM1*).¹⁵³ In the title of the first part of the frame, we see the possessive pronoun denoting the relationship between the king and the female speaker: “Enxenplo del consejo de su muger.” In this second part of the frame, we observe the use of the definite article in the title: “Enxenplo de la muger...”. That the second wife is “la muger” differentiates her from others; she is not just one of many (although we know she is), rather she exceeds her own category and is of singular importance. Moreover, as we see, she is indeed contrasted with the other women in the court, since the king “onrravala mas que a todas las otras mugeres quel avia” (Keller, *LEM1*). This woman, who has now been awarded a higher status than that even of the prince’s mother, hears of the prince’s silence and goes to the king and tells him: “Señor, dixieronme lo que avia acaesçido a tu fjio. Por aventura, con gran verguença que de ti ovo, non te osa falar” (Keller, *LEM1*). From her first words, we learn that this woman has something in common with the prince’s mother from whom she is discriminated. The prince’s mother is described as being attuned to the king’s moods; she is also “cuerda e entendida.” *La*

¹⁵³ Since the women are insufficiently differentiated, the text becomes plagued by an Oedipal theme which is only resolved after the 18th story, “Ingenia,” on the eighth day, when we are told that this second woman is actually the prince’s *madrastra*.

muger's suggestion that the prince is silent because he may be in awe of the king deserves attention. First, it reiterates what the king himself has suggested; this shows her understanding of the king. Secondly, her words also reveal a degree of manipulation of her listener's emotional state; surely the king will be more disposed to listen to and agree with her if she reaffirms his opinion? Let us compare the two statements:

“Quiça, por aventura, ha de mi miedo e non osa falar” (king)

“Por aventura, con gran verguença que de ti ovo, non te osa falar” (*la muger*)

The wording of the second phrase echoes the first, disclosing an emulation of vocabulary, syntax, and sentiment that highlights the woman's empathy and inevitably carries favour with the original source of the idea. This woman, who approaches the king demonstrating an understanding not only of his feelings but also a feel for the way he articulates grammar (we remember that *she was not there* for his speculation about his son's silence) is also “cuerda e entendida,” just like the first woman we read about.

With her listener's grateful attention guaranteed, *la muger* proceeds to secure a private audience with the prince, telling him: “mas si quesieses dexarme con el aparte, quiça el me dira su fazienda, que solia falar sus poridades conmigo, lo que non fazia con ninguna de las tus mugeres” (Keller, *LEM1*). Here, we first of all notice that she is persuading the king to let her be alone with the prince, using the temptation of a possible uncovering of the prince's reason for muteness, and therefore a resolution to the problem, as an inducement. But more importantly, the reason why she thinks the prince will disclose the cause of his silence to her is because they have had a prior relationship. *La muger* claims an intimacy with the prince, and a history of being his confidant and sharing his secrets; not only that, but she reveals that the prince favoured her over all

others—even his mother. She sees this claim validated by the king when he tells her to take his son to her palace and speak to him alone. The monarch apparently does not doubt her.¹⁵⁴

When she is alone with the prince, the woman finds that he continues to be unresponsive. She expresses frustration and disbelief: “Non te fagas neçio, ca yo bien se que non saldras de mi mandado” (Keller, *LEM1*). Not only do her words reveal that she considers the boy’s silence as some kind of act, but also that she is quite confident that she knows him well enough to be sure that he will do as she says. Furthermore, at this point in the text, we find reason to believe that the woman has been telling the truth about her relationship with the prince, and that they do share an exclusive relationship; he has apparently gone with her willingly, and he does not protest or contradict her confident assertion that he will do as she commands.¹⁵⁵ Naturally, he cannot speak; but he is not precluded from action, and so far his actions indicate no discord with her. This is about to change.

The woman’s confidence now leads her to expose the greater motive for her wish to be alone with him, and she makes a daring proposal (she apparently is so self-assured that she has not seriously considered rejection as an option): “Matemos a tu padre, e seras tu rrey e sere yo tu muger, ca tu padre es ya de muy gran hedat e flaco, e tu eres

¹⁵⁴ It may have been the case that the stepmother was much closer in age to the prince than she was to the king; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber points out that it was common for husbands to be senior to their wives by ten years (297).

¹⁵⁵ Curiously, there is evidence on the eighth day, when the prince speaks, that he does have a rather close relationship with his stepmother. As he tells a king’s counsellor to go and secure him an audience before his father, he says, “quiero que vayas corriendo a mi padre e que le digas mis nuevas ante que llegue la puta falsa de mi madrastra, ca yo se que madrugara” (Keller, *LEM* 49). How is it that the prince knows this?

mançebo e comiençase el tu bien, e tu debes aver esperança en todos bienes mas que el”(Keller, *LEM* 11).¹⁵⁶ This is a grave departure from acceptable conduct and intention; the parental aspiration that offspring will exceed the success of their forebears is here perverted in its conflation with the Oedipal desire to eradicate the father and replace him with the son as the (step)mother’s cohort. Whether the incitement to commit patricide is inspired by a longing to be rid of the king (her complaint about his physical condition recalls the issue of his possible sexual inefficacy raised in the first part of the frame story), an aspiration to the exclusivity of rights gained as the sole spouse instead of one of many, or some other political or material motivation, the woman’s brazenness is too much for the prince. He speaks.

So incensed that he forgets what Çendubete has told him, the prince retaliates against the covert seduction, the betrayal of his father, the homicide plot, the request for collusion: “Ay, enemiga de Dios! Si fuesen pasados los siete dias yo te rresponderia a esto que tu dizes!” Of course, the prince effectively *does* respond to what the woman has said; he has shown his horrified disapproval of her plan, and he has also disclosed some critical information about the duration of his silence.¹⁵⁷ For the next seven days, she is

¹⁵⁶ This scene between the queen and the prince has the overtones of a betrothal, on her part—even though it does not amount to one since the consent of both parties is required—if we consider that medieval “Betrothals were made orally and could refer to the present time or to some future time” (Stone 35). Further, the prince is now fifteen years old, and males and females could be betrothed at age seven and married at ages fourteen and twelve, respectively (Stone 36).

¹⁵⁷ Of course, if he had not rejected her, the penalty would have been severe: According to the *Siete Partidas*, “Si alguno yoguiere con muger de su padre faganle como a traidor: e si yoguiere con la barragana...o con aquella que sopiere que su padre...echelos de la tierra por siempre: e sus bienes hayandolos sus herederos” (qtd. in Stone 78). Strictly in economic terms, therefore, the Prince would lose all of his inheritance.

one of an exclusive, intratextual group of only three—she, the prince, and Çendubete—who know why the prince is silent.

What follows is one of the first calculated, dramatic performances by a female in Castilian literature: “entendio ella que seria en peligro de muerte, e dio bozes e garpios, e començo de mesar sus cabellos” (Keller, *LEM2*). These actions produce results commensurate with that which might be expected when a woman had suffered an attempted, or completed, rape; while in the town of Uclés, in the twelfth-century, a man who mussed a woman’s hair was heavily fined, in other towns, “...the murder fine was called for when a man hit or dishevelled a married woman...a man’s [not the husband] mussing of a wife’s hair was said to be part of the injury she sustained when he attempted to lie on top of her” (Dillard 175). *La muger*’s tearing out of her hair would have simulated the “mussed look.”¹⁵⁸

Called before the king to explain what has transpired, *la muger* tells him: “Este que dezides que non fabla me quiso forçar de todo en todo, e yo non lo tenia a el por tal” (Keller, *LEM2*). If we examine this sentence, we can first of all deduce that by calling attention to the fact that the prince was not supposed to be able to speak, she is insinuating that he has indeed spoken; otherwise there would be little reason to point out

¹⁵⁸ She does not go to extremes, however, as she would have had to if she had claimed the rape had actually been able to take place: “All across the Peninsula, from Aragon and Navarre through Castile and León into Portugal, a woman who had recently been raped was identified from her clawed face...The facial scratches were self-inflicted injuries, secondary but essential evidence that the woman had been assaulted...Clawing her cheeks, a rape victim made the customary sign of a woman in mourning, but now she grieved for the loss of her chastity and her honour...*The veracity of a woman who accused a man of raping her but failed to claw her face was highly questionable...*” (Dillard 183-184) (emphasis added). *La muger* simply accuses the prince of *attempted* rape (“me quiso forçar”) and therefore she does not have to claw her face. However, would the medieval audience have understood that the fact that she did not do so further obviated her guilt and foreshadowed the outcome of the ensuing trial?

that he is “*Este que dezides que non fabla.*” It is to her advantage to have the king think his son has spoken, for two reasons: first of all, because it makes the prince’s silence appear to be a fabrication, which damages his credibility; secondly, the idea follows that if he can speak, he has indeed spoken to her in order to proposition her. Her “surprise” that he putatively does *not* speak lends further credence to her account of events (along with her self-bedraggled hair, no doubt). Also evident here is an additional element of the woman’s planned performance: her feigned astonishment at the prince’s deviant behaviour. Her carefully chosen words and her claim that she did not think he was “the type” helps her illustrate her disgust, and sense of betrayal. Her statement, “yo non lo tenia a el por tal” again sets up the condition of “the expected” versus “the unexpected” while it also defines the prince as something everyone thought he was not; the “tal” of the sentence relegates him to an unspeakable, unnameable category. We can assume all of this provokes the king’s shame at what he understands his son to have done. This embarrassment quickly turns into rage and aligns the king with his “favourite wife,” “E el rrey, quando esto oyo, creçiol gran saña por matar su fijo, e fue muy bravo e mandolo matar” (Keller, *LEM2*).

The climax of the story reached, the rest of the text must now resolve this predicament; and so it is that the king’s *siete pryvados*, astonished that he has not consulted them, as he usually does, before making a decision about a weighty matter, step forward to tarnish the reputation of the *madrastra* by using the example of all wily women so that the king will recant. Indeed, the first counsellor’s two tales do make the king abolish the spectre of execution that now hangs over his only son: “E mando el rrey que non matasen su fijo” (Keller, *LEM6*). As a rejoinder, however, to this narrative

event and its outcome, we now witness the wife come crying to the king on the second day, insisting to him, “Señor, non debes tu perdonar tu fijo, pues fizo cosa por que muera; e si tu non lo mates e lo dexas a vida, aviendo fecho tal enemiga, ca si tu non lo matas, non escarmentaria ninguna de fazer otro tal; e yo, señor, contarte e el enxemplo del curador de los paños...” (Keller, *LEM7*). The woman ends her fictional story by warning of the real peril facing the king: “E señor, si tu non te antuvas a castigar tu fijo ante que mas enemiga te faga, matarte a” (Keller, *LEM7*). At the end of her speech act, which inverts the truth, since it is she that poses a threat, not the prince, she is rewarded with a reversal of the last decision concerning the prince’s execution: “E el rrey mando matar su fijo” (Keller, *LEM 17*).

The narration proceeds in this manner, the frame tale now coexisting with eighteen interpolated stories before the prince’s seven days of silence are completed, and the king wavering between executing and sparing his son. The seven sages tell stories that make examples out of deceitful, often adulterous, women, and they tell of the folly of precipitate action—thirteen tales in all, since only one of the men does not tell two. The woman tells five tales; one cautions against the dangers represented by children who go unpunished, and the rest warn of kings’ counsellors’ malignant deeds and erroneous advice. Both the woman and the group of men must spar in a duel of wits and words as they represent themselves in a trial that will determine whether or not they survive (the sages stand in for the prince, but they also speak for themselves, as they know their lives are jeopardized if they let the king kill his only son).¹⁵⁹ As the king, presiding over the

¹⁵⁹ The fact that the woman represents herself was most likely readily accepted by the audience; the *Fuero Juzgo* allowed a wife to represent herself in court (Dillard 91).

trial, alternately metes out the prince's death sentence (which also equals the counsellors' end) and then grants his son's release from that ruling (which portends certain demise for *la muger*), and the accusing and defending parties find brief intervals of reprieve, one recognizes that the woman telling stories to save her life emulates to a certain extent the Arab queen Shahrazād of *Alf layla wa layla* (*One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*: hereafter, *ALL*). Shahrazād, observes Toril Moi, is a powerful female narrator, one who "is *duplicitous*, precisely because she has something to tell: there is always the possibility that she may choose not to tell—or to tell a different story" (Moi 38). Shahrazād's position is one of privileged agency.

La muger, then, is similar to Shahrazād in that she must tell tales to stay alive. To recognize that, we may call her the *Spanish* Shahrazād. Yet she exceeds the Arab exemplar, however, in the same way that she surpasses the persuasiveness of the sages; she *performs*.¹⁶⁰ Although Shahrazād tells tales each night, her words are unaccompanied by actions. The Spanish Shahrazād, however, discursive strategies *and* histrionics to impress her version of the truth upon the king: she cries, shouts, gesticulates, and threatens suicide, employing kinesics as she uses her entire body to speak. Her techniques range from the traditionally narrative to the theatrically pathetic.

What are we to make of this woman? Her actions are certainly not "good" but they seem to go beyond the simple designation of "bad." She surely goes beyond the

¹⁶⁰ The speaking sages never actually do manage to defeat the woman; it is the prince who wins the case in the end—and, although it may be said that he prevails because "His male speech, the correct source of meaning, defeats feminine versions of reality the wife has been proposing..." (Ho 104) we must also observe that after he gives his account, the woman is not given a chance to reply. She is silenced before she can challenge him. Would he have been unable to match her rebuttal?

simple designation of “wicked”; she thinks, plans, speaks, and acts. Is she a *consejera*? She does not fit that definition since she is not shown advising the king at any point prior to her trial, in contrast to the first woman, who does counsel the king and has done so on previous occasions. She appears to have once acted as the prince’s confidant, but that does not qualify her as a *consejera* either. We might also reflect on her reasons for having tried to seduce the prince. As Goldberg states, it appears to have been attempted “...for what one suspects are political moves rather than sensual ones” (“Sexual Humor...” 76). This is particularly convincing if we remember that *la muger* has supplanted, according to the text, *una muger* as the king’s “favourite”; we can deduce that she has acquired her position—and maintains it—with some planning and a certain amount of anxiety, since there are eighty-nine other women that most likely offer her some competition. She enjoys a privileged spot that she must defend, and she has seen, as has the reader, that the occupant of the position can change (somehow, between the first and second parts of the frame tale, the prince’s mother was unseated). If we consider this in relation to her advances towards the young heir, it widens the gap somewhat between this character and the archetype of Eve-as-temptress; in being political, tactical, even self-interested, she becomes more complicated. We can rule out the title of *consejera*.

Let us return to the Spanish Shahrazād’s words to the prince: “Non te fagas neçio, ca yo bien se que non saldras de mi mandado...Matemos a tu padre, e seras tu rrey e sere yo tu muger...tu debes aver esperança en todos bienes mas que el”(Keller, *LEM* 11). Her words show us a preponderance of direct forms of command: *Non te fagas...Matemos...tu debes*, as well as the implied command communicated in *seras tu*

rrey. She *instructs* the prince, *directs* him; unfortunately for her, her potential accomplice is non-compliant, and she must resort to masquerading before the court in the alternate world she creates for herself, affecting her innocence. It is this that decisively sets her apart from the archetypes and pushes this character beyond the parameters of the binary dichotomy “good woman”/“bad woman.” If we return now to the matter of the first “favourite wife” of the text, contrasting the first with the second (the Spanish Shahrazād), we see more clearly how the first wife fits the mould of *consejera* and how the second exceeds it. The first “favourite” does give a man orders: *nos levantemos e rroguemos a Dios...pidamos merçed*; however, without the accompanying acts of performance, she remains an archetype. She does not direct *and feign*, does not create an alternate reality, is not a performing woman.

Although she may be perceived as a temptress styled after Eve, perhaps even as a *consejera-gone-wrong*, the Spanish Shahrazād is other than that which the archetypal schemata allow. Moreover, she is not alone in the text. There are other directing and performing women that use speech acts to formulate, and obtain men’s compliance with, alternate realities; these phantasms are conceived to hide their adulterous misdeeds in most cases, but not in all. The Spanish Shahrazād’s narrative attendants are found in the tales “Leo,” “Avis,” “Gladius,” “Ingenia,” and “Abbas.”^{161,162} Although they play lesser

¹⁶¹ It is duly acknowledged, at this point, that this is yet another typology and that, being such, it unavoidably reflects a personal choice on the part of its author. In addition, it is noted that while there are other tales that feature women, the selected tales are the only ones in which women are seen both giving instructions to men and maintaining some kind of pretence in accordance with their own agendas—that is, these women stake their own claims to agency and then strive to sustain it through words and performances.

parts than the principal female of the frame tale, they, too, have something to contribute to a reading that seeks to complicate archetypal binarism. Before we go on to meet them all, and observe more of the Spanish Shahrazād's performances, we would do well to incorporate at this point a fuller explanation of the theoretical framework that allows us to better appreciate their textual presence. This is, as explained previously, provided by Bakhtin.

We have said that the Spanish Shahrazād, and the women of five interpolated stories in the text, are performers. The theme of adultery and its association with most of these women has also been noted. Now, we will further explore that theme, as well as the concept of performance, with a view towards dismantling the literary convention of Eva/Ave, in light of an approach to medieval thematics proposed by Bakhtin and discussed in his book *Rabelais and His World*. This text was originally called *François Rabelais and the Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. The Russian title better reflects the subject matter of the work and demonstrates that although Bakhtin is chiefly concerned with a French renaissance text, he also draws heavily upon the literary inheritance of folk culture of the Middle Ages; naturally, it is this aspect of the work that makes it particularly suitable for studying the exempla we find in *LEM*. We will start by summarizing Bakhtin's idea of the "carnival," which is the core theoretical substance of his text.

¹⁶² The traditional Latin, folklorists' titles are used here, as the stories are most widely known by these rubrics, and the titles of the stories in the text, each of which describes the content of the ensuing exemplum, are rather long.

Bakhtin's Theory of the Carnival

In the folk culture of the Middle Ages, according to Bakhtin, “A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture” (*Rabelais...* 4). The common folk that would congregate at the marketplace expressed their unofficial way of life through three forms: visual rituals (such as carnival celebrations), comic compositions, and verbal abuse (billingsgate). Bakhtin uses the word “carnival” to encompass all three of these modes of expression, amplifying the meaning of the word so that it not only refers to specific festivities, “not only as carnival per se in its limited form but also as the varied popular-festive life of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; all the peculiarities of this life have been preserved in carnival” (*Rabelais...* 218). Bakhtin does not view the carnivalesque as simple celebration; he sees it as a social practice that represents change, and defiance of authority, since it is accompanied by a suspension of the official hierarchies—power structures—that are in place under normal conditions. In Bakhtin's carnival, masquerade, humour, and abuse provoke instability and transformation:

All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the ‘inside out’ (*à l’envers*), of the ‘turnabout,’ of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings.

(*Rabelais...* 11)

Bakhtin's merry carnival world is upside down and back-to-front. It resists completion, calm, and stability; instead, it promotes and produces metamorphosis and renaissance. The theme of renewal means that the carnivalesque is an ambivalent force; it speaks at once of both endings and beginnings, of paradoxical "pregnant death."

The carnivalesque is conveyed through images that belong to what Bakhtin calls the "material bodily lower stratum," which is concerned with the tangible realities of everyday life.¹⁶³ According to Bakhtin, the lower stratum is concerned with "The material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" (*Rabelais...* 18). Thus the lower stratum articulates itself through a variety of images, actions, and themes, such as eating, drinking, copulation, defecation, destruction, childbirth, growth, physical and verbal abuse, obesity, and death. In his "material bodily principle" Bakhtin sees not an individualized body, but rather the body of all people: a universal template that is a vessel for the coexisting, positive symbols of death and rebirth. Since this bodily principle expresses the materiality of earthly life, its content is base and grotesque; yet its images of destruction and generation cause an ambivalence, which Bakhtin deems as positive. He therefore arrives at the conclusion that "This principle is victorious, for the final result is always abundance, increase" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 62). Reproductive force exists in material bodily images; even excrement becomes "something *intermediate between earth and body*, as something relating the one to the other. It is also an intermediate between the living body and dead disintegrating matter that is being transformed into earth, into manure," (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 175). Since manure fertilizes, and produces new life, the "death" inherent to

¹⁶³ The lower stratum contrasts with what Bakhtin calls the "holy spiritual upper level," which is the abstract level of authority and official power.

excrement is linked with regeneration. All material images belonging to the “lower stratum” can be seen as renewing the world through an accompanying characteristic that is a contradictory combination of death and rebirth. This is a salute to human immortality and constant evolution; it is a deep awareness of earthly elements and surroundings, of the cosmos and humankind’s participation in it.

Carnival uses its grotesque material images to provoke laughter; this mirth is a subversive force. Laughter is impractical, unregulated, unofficial, and unrestricted; it obeys no rules and makes none of its own. In this respect, it is antiauthoritarian, it goes against the grain. As it unseats power, carnival laughter also defeats fear. “The acute awareness of victory over fear is an essential element of medieval laughter,” says Bakhtin (*Rabelais...* 91). The medieval fear is “cosmic terror” caused by the unexplainable and immeasurable forces of nature, by all earthly authorities and their forms of oppression, by the *mysterium tremendum* inspired by God, by death, by hell’s fire and brimstone. The conquest of fear through laughter, although fleeting, must have greatly appealed to the medieval mind. Laughter liberates and purifies, splinters monolithic thinking, and is as egalitarian as death. In folk literature, when cosmic fears are expressed, they are accompanied by images of the material bodily lower stratum, which is debased and made grotesque, and fear becomes hilarious. Terror is converted into nothing more than “a gay carnival monster” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 335).

These are Bakhtin’s thoughts on the role of carnival, the grotesque, laughter, and fear in popular folk culture. Yet before we turn to our specific text, it would be appropriate to reveal how Bakhtin addresses the status of women, since this reading employs Bakhtin’s system to interpret female roles in *LEM* Although he does not openly

address feminism, Bakhtin does mention the historically negative medieval attitude towards females. He conceives of this attitude as a bifurcation, with one part comprising the positive mode of thought that is “popular comic tradition,” and the other being the negative mode of “the ascetic tendency of medieval Christianity” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 240). Bakhtin maintains that popular comic tradition views women as an integral part of the material bodily lower stratum, as destructive and regenerative, as an ambivalent being; this interpretation gives her a positive image. This image can be debased, he says, in *fabliaux* and other types of literature (and we could surely include exempla among them), when “it presents a wayward, sensual, concupiscent character of falsehood, materialism, and baseness” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 240). Yet he stresses that even when females appear presented in this way, this should not be taken as a terminal definition of women—both positive and negative renditions articulated within the popular tradition should always be considered for what they contribute *together*. This, again, is Bakhtin’s classic combination of positivity and negativity, which allows him to undermine misogyny by pointing to ambivalence.

This is only the case, however, when misogynous tradition is considered within the parameters of Bakhtin’s theorizing, and only in terms of popular tradition. He admits that outside of the carnival atmosphere, when the ascetic Christian tradition borrows themes and symbols from the popular comic tradition, they become warped and misrepresentative of their original sources (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 241). Bakhtin, as noted, does not attempt to enter into a discussion about feminism; he is merely trying to situate misogynous attitudes towards women within his system of thought. His conclusion on that point is that in the popular comic tradition, the female “is the principle that gives

birth. She is the womb” (*Rabelais...* 240). For all the positive symbolism that may be intended, however, this does no more than reduce the female to a grotesque body part. For that, we shall discard the idea; we can, however, appropriate Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival for a feminist reading of *LEM* that does not reduce the female but rather magnifies her significance as an active, speaking subject.

The Carnival in *LEM*: From Crownings and Masquerades to Billingsgate and Hyperbole

The description of Bakhtin’s carnival and its revolutionary character paints a picture of folklore as uninhibited. Yet this is not entirely the case; although popular culture has nothing to gain from stabilizing and preserving monolithic official culture and can therefore afford to defy it, medieval laughter had to exist amid medieval sobriety. Carnival is subversive and nonutilitarian, but it is not organized confrontation (indeed, its nature would not permit it to be such). The crushing forces of medieval ideologies weighed heavily upon daily life, and although popular culture was a threat to official culture, it was no more than that. Thus the official and the unofficial existed alongside each other, and “In medieval man’s soul attendance at official mass could coexist with a gay parody of truth in which a world is ‘turned inside out,’” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 95). The sacred could exist with the profane. Literature such as the exempla demonstrate this by showing that didacticism can go hand-in-hand with entertainment.

LEM provides us with a fine example of how popular, or folk culture could be encased by officiality. As sapiential literature, the text has a practical, legitimate purpose and therefore fits within the sphere of official culture. Moreover, it finds itself veritably

ensconced at the upper limits of the medieval power hierarchy; it was patronized by a prince, and it issued from a court whose king honoured and upheld absolutism. The indelible mark of the regulating forces of official culture is further made apparent by the text's translation from the renegade language of Arabic into the state-authorized vernacular of Castilian.¹⁶⁴ Yet the form and sources of *LEM* mark it as also being part of unregulated, unofficial folk culture; it is carnivalesque.

There are many specific grotesque images—images that recall the material body—in the text. Concrete images are provided by the story “Panés,” in which a young woman uses the dough poultices used to soak pus from her father’s wounds to make bread to sell at the market; the pregnant *male* demon—an aberrant image—of “Fontes”; the corpulent prince, “tan grueso que non podia ver sus mienbros por do era” (Keller, *LEM* 27) in “Senescalco”; and the man who “echol mano de los cojones del ximio e apretogelos tanto fasta que lo mato” (Keller, *LEM* 9) in the sexually charged tale called “Simia.” These are just a few possible examples of blatantly grotesque images typical of the “lower stratum.” However, more abstract elements of the grotesque are also present; they are abstract because they are unaccompanied by detailed visuals, yet they nevertheless still represent and are associated with the material body and its earthly functions. We have, for example, the slaughtering of the faithful dog in “Canis,” the string of multiple, connected deaths in “Lac venenatum,” and the incest theme in the frame tale. The abstract theme that may be said to occur most frequently in *LEM* that

¹⁶⁴ It should be noted that Bakhtin sees vernacular languages as unofficial, as struggling against and finally overcoming the authority of the Vulgate. He says that the vernaculars “brought new forms of thought (ambivalence) and new evaluations” (Bakhtin 466). This is indisputable; however, as we have seen, in the medieval Spain(s) of the thirteenth century, the vernacular was used as part of an effort to consolidate *official* power and therefore cannot be considered an unofficial language in this context.

of copulation, which is usually articulated through acts of adultery. We shall now examine this theme as it occurs in the frame tale and in the interpolated tales “Leo,” “Avis,” “Gladius,” “Ingenia,” and “Abbas,” and observe the roles that women play; we will first see that they participate in a series of crownings and masquerades.

Cuckoldry is an ambivalent “uncrowning of the old husband and a new act of procreation with the young husband” says Bakhtin (*Rabelais...* 241). When we use this concept to analyze the Spanish Shahrazād’s relationship with the king, we observe that she seeks to “uncrown” King Alcos by seducing his son. Reasoning with the prince, she tells him, “Tu padre es ya de muy gran hedat e flaco, e tu eres mançebo” (Keller, *LEM* 11). Had her manoeuvres been successful, the result would have been a literal, not just a figurative uncrowning; that is, if she had been able to persuade the prince to overthrow his father, she would have effected the tangible removal of the king’s crown from his head. She then not only would have procreated with the new husband and recrowned him metaphorically, but she would have been responsible for having literally crowned him, and would have given him new life. Her actions in the initial part of the frame tale, and the associated imagery that results, can be interpreted as agreeably consistent with Bakhtin’s ideas regarding the generative power of cuckoldry; moreover, they situate the woman in a position of authority.

The Spanish Shahrazād’s relationship with the king in terms of a regenerative crowning and uncrowning does not end there, however. After her attempt to literally uncrown him fails, she continues to figuratively uncrown King Alcos by convincing him to recant his decision not to kill his son. Each time one of the king’s seven counsellors tells a story, the king is persuaded to spare his son, and he gives orders to that effect.

However, after each of the woman's stories, he reneges. Whenever she is present before him, we read that "el rrey mando matar su fiyo." The vacillating king is uncrowned every time she speaks.

Bakhtin asserts that the carnival has a special meaning for the sovereign, for "In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people" (*Rabelais...* 197). In *LEM* while everyone officially obeys the king, the Spanish Shahrazād makes a mockery of him by continuing to manipulate him even after we know she has tried to betray him. As she makes him flip-flop back and forth, she implicitly ridicules his efficacy as a ruler; his character and wisdom (surely he must be insane if he believes the word of a woman) are called into question. Although the seven counsellors are there to help him regain his senses, it takes only one woman to undo him. Sheer numbers betray the weight of her influence.

In the first example of the king's uncrowning through cuckoldry, the carnival image of death and renewal is clear. If we accept the second example of uncrowning as another part of the carnival, we should expect the "death" of the king through the fluctuation of his authority to be related to rebirth and renewal. Given the initial set-up of the story, we might expect the prince to be the one to receive the crown in his father's stead. However, the attempted adultery has failed, therefore the new lover cannot be crowned. Besides that, the prince is absent during the narration of the woman's interpolated stories, reappearing only at the very end of the text, where he converses with the sages and the king, while the returned Çendubete listens in.

The prince's silence owes to his observance of a prophecy—yet this does not detract from the pattern that he, like many of the men (lovers and would-be lovers) we

shall see in the other stories, is silent while a woman speaks and performs. Although when the seven days of danger specified by the prophecy elapses, the prince speaks to *men*, at no point does he enter into conversation with the *woman*. The young man is hushed into the background while his father holds dialogues with a woman whose words lead him into self-debasement. With the potential lover rendered speechless and removed from the majority of the scenes in the narration, it is not immediately apparent who is being crowned in place of the king; until we realize that the Spanish Shahrazād is crowning *herself*. Here is the renewal that the king's uncrowning has engendered. Each time she speaks, the woman convinces the king to spare her life by taking that of his son. By figuratively removing the king's crown and placing it on her own head, the Spanish Shahrazād lives again, reborn each time. In accordance with Bakhtin's system, this represents an increase, for she regains her life. Aside from this, the woman is constantly regenerated as the leading protagonist of the narrative, since each recrowning re-establishes her authority over the men in the text and over the outcome of the narration as it is perceived at that moment.

Aside from crowning and uncrowning, the Spanish Shahrazād also immerses herself in the carnival world by performing; thus she participates in the masquerade, another typical popular festive form that turns official hierarchies "inside out" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais...* 245, 270). She pretends that she is going to coax the prince out of his silence; she feigns shock and invents the story that the prince tried to seduce her; she maintains a façade of innocence; and on several occasions she gives the appearance of intending to commit suicide. As she uncrowns and recrowns, she also masquerades. The more minute details of her various performances will be analyzed separately in the next

section; for now, let us keep in mind the performing Spanish Shahrazād and observe some other females in the text.

As mentioned before, the stories “Leo,” “Avis,” “Gladius,” “Ingenia,” and “Abbas,” which also contain the adultery theme, feature female protagonists that manage to get the better of men. The first story, “Leo,” also presents us with a performing woman who uncrowns a king. The woman of this story attracts the attention of the king because she is a “muger muy hermosa” but she is also “muy casta e muy buena e muy entendida” (Keller, *LEM2*). When the king sends her husband away to war, and then solicits her for sex, she pretends that she will comply. Although she has no official form of authority, she manages to use the unofficial form of power granted by masquerade in order to effect a performance that fools him. “Señor,” she says, “tu eres mi señor e yo so tu sierva, e lo que tu quesieres, quierolo yo; mas yrme he a los vaños afeytar” (Keller, *LEM* 12-13). Her actions reveal otherwise, however, because as she goes to prepare herself for him, she gives him a book about the reprehensibility of adultery. She tells him to read it while she is getting ready. This is not a submissive request: “Señor, ley por ese libro fasta que me afeunte” (Keller, *LEM* 13). In instructing, *not asking*, him what to do, she is already assuming power over the situation, directing the man so that he will play the part she wants him to assume. After opening the book and reading from its first chapter, the king is shamed into leaving—and he is so caught off guard and in such a hurry that he even forgets to put his shoes back on.

The woman in this story, like the Spanish Shahrazād, also manages to influence the circumstances in which she finds herself. She does not commit, or try to commit adultery because she apparently does not want to; but she does seize control of the

outcome of events and uncrowns the king by manipulating and disempowering him. Once again, a king—the earthly vessel of supreme authority—is mocked and debased, and a woman crowns herself. The increase, or gain that results may be said to be hers, as she has obtained that which she desired—to *not* have sexual intercourse with the king. Moreover, her talent and accomplishment is recognized at the conclusion of the story when her grateful husband, after learning the truth, “se fiava en ella mas que non dante” (Keller, *LEM4*).

A performing, masquerading woman goes to greater lengths in the story of “Avis.” This time, the woman is an avid adulteress; her suspicious husband attempts to monitor her actions by installing a parrot as his night watchman. In order to trick the attentive eye of the bird, the woman simulates a thunderstorm: “començole a echar agua de suso commo que era luvia; e tomo un espejo en la mano e parogelo sobre la gabla, e en otra mano una candela, e paravagelo de suso; e cuydo el papagayo que era rrelanpago; e la muger començo a mover una muela, e el papagayo cuydo que eran truenos” (Keller, *LEM 15*). She maintains the appearance of actually *being* a thunderstorm—articulated through the instruments she wields and the movements and noises she makes with her body. Her presentation works; she fools the parrot, who reports the news of the storm to the husband the following day, only to be killed for “lying.” The woman is rewarded with the trust of her husband, who decides that she must have been faithful to him all along. She is free to continue uncrowning him, and seeing her lover, who she can now recrown—along with herself, as ruler of the situation.

Similarly, in “Gladius,” the woman protagonist is enthusiastically unfaithful. As the story opens, we learn that the married woman’s lover sends a messenger to her house

in order to check whether or not her husband is there. The woman takes a fancy to the envoy, who she invites to sleep with her. As his manservant delays, the lover goes to the woman's house himself, and when he knocks on her door she directs the scared servant, "Ve e escondete aquel rryncon" (Keller, *LEM0*). No sooner has her lover entered when her husband knocks on the door, and she once again instructs the paramour: "Toma tu espada en la mano, e parate a la puerta del palacio, e amenazame, e ve tu carrera e non fables ninguna cosa" (Keller, *LEM0*). Having placed both men in the places where she wants them, she then has to explain to her husband what has happened. She employs a performance; she informs her husband that the sword-bearing man was chasing his servant, and says, "despues quel se arrimo a mi, pareme ante el, e apartelo del que non lo matase" (Keller, *LEM1*). Her trusting husband beckons the servant from his hiding place, sends him on his way, and congratulates his wife for her integrity.

This adulteress not only masquerades for her lover and for her husband, she also gives directions that are obeyed, as does the woman in "Leo." The "Gladius" woman gives orders to the two male lovers, informing them as to how they should participate in her planned performance. Furthermore, not only does she dictate the physical behaviour of her two paramours, she also silences them. By telling the first to absent and conceal himself, she implicitly suppresses his speech; then, she explicitly orders the second one to be quiet. This sends the clear message that *she* is the speaking subject in this masquerade. She is the author of the created product. This can also be taken as a crowning. Her deceptive actions uncrown the men—she has out-thought and outwitted all three of them—and award her the honours.

The story of “Ingenia” likewise mines the theme of adultery, although as in the frame tale and in “Leo,” there is no real attempt at, or actual fulfillment of, adultery. Along with the cuckoldry motif, we again see an uncrowning and recrowning, as well as a performance. In this story, we meet a young man who has studied so much about the ways of women that he believes he can never be outwitted by them. We then meet the woman who decides to prove him wrong. When they are alone together, she tempts him with a false invitation to bed her, saying, “mi marido es muy viejo e cansado, e de muy gran tiempo pasado que non yazio conmigo” (Keller, *LEM7*). Her pretense works, and when he accepts, she instructs him to remove his clothes. When he is naked, she screams and shouts for help, and before her neighbours enter, she gives the man further directions: “Tiendete en tierra, sinon muerto eres,” (Keller, *LEM7*) and places a piece of bread in his mouth. She then continues her act by telling her neighbours that her and her husband’s guest has choked; the neighbours help to revive him, as she has planned.¹⁶⁵

In this story, it is the would-be lover, not the husband, that is uncrowned. The woman once again shows her talent for staging by telling the man what to do, ensuring that *she* is the one that will be speaking. In this case, the woman even blocks the man’s physical ability to vocalize, by placing an obstruction in his mouth. She is the cause and the star of the performance, and she plays her role in a multiple-part masquerade not only by pretending that she wants to have sexual intercourse with the young man but also by leading him to think that she will cry rape, and then ending with an act designed for the neighbours that come to her aid. She, too, deftly swipes the crown from this male’s head

¹⁶⁵ The text does not explain the neighbours’ reaction to, or expected questioning of, the man’s nakedness; this is assumedly one of the errors that critics have bemoaned in the narration.

and places it squarely upon her own. Her taunting question, “Amigo, ¿en tus libros ay alguna tal arte commo esta?” (Keller, *LEM8*) wins her an answer in the negative that confirms her triumph, before the defeated young man further responds by burning all of his books.

The final interpolated tale that fits within the current framework of analysis is “Abbas.” The last tale of the collection, this story again describes an illicit relationship, this time between a woman and an abbot. The adulterous couple are at home when the husband arrives in the middle of the night. The woman tells her lover, “Vete e escondete en aquel palacio fasta de dia” (Keller, *LEM3*). When the husband joins his wife in bed, he suspects nothing. The following morning, the woman leaves to enlist the help of a friar friend of hers, asking him to bring an extra habit and help her remove the abbot from the house. The friar returns home with her, makes small talk with the husband, and then leaves, “E en egualando con el palacio, salio el abad vestido commo frayle, e fuese con el fasta su orden, e fuese” (Keller, *LEM3*). Once more, a woman shows herself well-versed in the art of staging and performance. Although this woman performs less than the others, she nevertheless coordinates the ruse, controls the action, directs both the abbot and the accommodating friar, and keeps up the pretense of behaving as if nothing were out of the ordinary. She uncrowns her cuckolded husband and ensures the continued future crowning of her lover, as well as herself.

The theme of copulation is one of “the three main acts in the life of the grotesque body” along with death and birth, says Bakhtin (*Rabelais...353*). The three are intimately linked in Bakhtin’s system, with each one of them playing its part in a regenerative cycle that ultimately points to a positive outcome. When copulation is featured in *LEM*

through the theme of adultery, it is accompanied by the other carnivalesque elements of uncrowning, recrowning, and masquerade. Women occupy centre stage and are authoritative subjects; they are shown strategizing, feigning their actions and reactions, staging not only their own comings and goings but also those of men, and ordering and enforcing the silence of their lovers, in order to ensure their successes in accordance with an agenda to obtain supremacy in male-female relationships. While the specific goal of each woman in each individual story may vary—they may wish to maintain infidelity, to prolong life, or to prove a superior cunning—the general outcome in each case is that women define themselves as speaking female subjects with agency. Women use the carnivalesque to revise and transform the narrative, to perform; to draw men into their extra-official worlds and make them participate in their own uncrowning; and to alter or maintain the balance of power in their favour.

Aside from the theme of copulation/adultery and the associated performances, uncrownings, and recrownings, we can see the carnival atmosphere being linked to the women of *LEM* two additional ways: through praise and abuse, and exaggeration. As noted above, in Bakhtin's system, billingsgate and hyperbole are other modes of carnivalesque expressions because they both exceed the boundaries of what is expected.

Bakhtin speaks of the free, familiar speech one would hear from the common folk in the marketplace. This nonofficial idiom contains indecent expressions, profanities, cries, and insults; Bakhtin understands this oral abuse as being “grammatically and semantically isolated from context” and refers to it as “a special genre of billingsgate” (*Rabelais*... 16). It is outside of the norms of official speech. Abusive language is ambivalent because while it is offensive and disparaging, it is also creative and life-

generating. It signifies renewal by breaking with the order of established symbols and giving birth to new ones.

In *LEM* we do not hear oaths or profanities. However, we do hear billingsgate conveyed as simultaneous “praise and abuse.” This concept does not pertain to official culture, since in that culture praise and abuse are never combined, each one is a separate entity that has nothing to do with the other; this corresponds to official culture’s system of immutable hierarchies, which disallows the higher mingling with the lower. Such a mixture is permitted, however, in folk culture. The language directed at women by the king’s sages, and the final sentence issued by the prince at the end of the text, may be seen as belonging to this billingsgate idiom; it is both praise and abuse. There are many examples of this in the narration. They are best illustrated by the following chart:¹⁶⁶

Table 1: Praise/Abuse Directed Towards Women

Declaration of Praise/Abuse	Speaker
“...las mugeres, que son muy fuertes sus artes e son muchos, que non an cabo nin fin” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 6).	First sage’s 2 nd story
“las mugeres ayuntadas en si an muchos engaños” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 21).	Second sage’s 2 nd story
“aquel engaño de las mugeres que non an cabo nin fin” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 1).	Fourth sage’s 2 nd story
“los engaños de las mugeres non an cabo nin fin” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 34).	Fifth sage’s 1 st story
“el engaño de las mugeres que son muy grande e sin fin” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 37).	Fifth sage’s 2 nd story
“quel engaño de las mugeres es la mayor cosa del mundo” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 1)	Sixth sage’s 1 st story
“E tal es el engaño e las artes de las mugeres que non han cabo nin fin” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 42).	Sixth sage’s 2 nd story

¹⁶⁶ The text samples on this chart underscore another of the text’s well-known discrepancies; the third sage tells only one story, and the second is missing. Fradejas believes it to have been a misogynous story (*Sendebarr* 80). If it were, it may have contained epithetical phrases concerning women similar to those delivered by the other sages. This is mere speculation, however.

“las maldades de las mugeres non an cabo nin fin” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 45).	Seventh sage’s 1 st story
“aunque se tornase la tierra papel, e la mar tinta, e los peçes della pendolas, que non podrian escrevir las maldades de las mugeres” (Keller, <i>LEM</i> 64). ¹⁶⁷	Prince’s 5 th story

We see here that the sages speak in unison on their subject: women’s deception exceeds known standards. It is evident that this is “abuse.” But is it also praise? It is indeed, for in saying that women have countless wiles, that women’s deception is the greatest in the world, that it has no beginning and no end, they are also saying that this quality of women is of the highest degree, supremely powerful, ever-enduring, and eternal. This superlative language is bizarre admiration: women are the best in the world at being the most wicked in the world. The prince, in his fifth story, also joins in the general volley of approval-cum-invective and ends the chain of interpolated tales by presenting the final word on the subject: “dize el sabio que aunque se tornase la tierra papel, e la mar tinta, e los peçes della pendolas, que non podrian escrevir las maldades de las mugeres” (Keller, *LEM* 64). This statement pits the *entire universe* against womankind; yet even so, she is inimitable, matchless.

Amidst this blend of praise and abuse we see the other element of carnival mentioned above: hyperbole. “Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style,” says Bakhtin (*Rabelais*...303).

Exaggeration is one of the most salient aspects of the quotes cited above. The constant hyperbolic refrain of “non an cabo nin fin” puts women’s potentialities on a par with

¹⁶⁷ Irving Linn identifies this figure in the “...early literature of India, tracks it to the near East, finds its appearance in Hebraic literature in the sayings of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, founder of the academy at Jabneh in the first century of our era” says Epstein (35).

monstrous infinity. It therefore speaks of the grotesque—the distorted, the unnatural, the absurd. In Bakhtin’s carnival world, “Generally speaking, all the quantitative definitions expressed in figures are vastly exaggerated; they transgress all limits. They are intentionally rendered immeasurable” (*Rabelais*...464). The magnitude of women’s *engaño* is of unimaginable dimensions. To describe it requires numbers that go beyond the limits of the known; the calculation becomes fantastic, unfathomable, larger-than-life.

Concurrent praise and abuse, and exaggeration, are both forms of renewal. The constant renewal generated by praise and abuse comes from “the conception of the world as eternally unfinished: a world dying and being born at the same time, possessing as it were two bodies. The dual image combining praise and abuse seeks to grasp the very moment of this change, the transfer from the old to the new, from death to life” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*...166). Similarly, a state of non-completion is evoked by the idea of infinity, which is an abomination. Anything grotesque, in Bakhtin’s system, signifies renewal, since the grotesque is not only negation, but also affirmation. Bakhtin’s “gay carnival monster” is constantly dying and being reborn in these examples of billingsgate and hyperbole in *LEM*, which are both directed at and associated with women. Once again, females are allied with the carnivalesque, and sites of renewal. They are the fulcrum between life and death. This liminal position underscores their importance in the narrative. The theoretical ideas that Bakhtin presents in *Rabelais and His World* may be suitably adapted for a feminist reading that shows that the female is granted a place of authority (not just positivity, as a life-bearing womb) through her association with carnivalesque elements in fiction.

To conclude, we note that amidst the burdens of official medieval culture, popular culture constantly upset systems of authority through its topsy-turvy world. The images and themes related to the bodily lower stratum in *LEM* from popular culture and serve to threaten the hierarchies of the official, established world—hierarchies belonging to the political, social, and domestic spheres portrayed in the text. The material bodily lower stratum upturns absolutes, therefore women can be ranked at the top and men at the bottom. Its logic is ambivalent. Popular culture has been preserved in *LEM* and has reached us through the official channels of state-authorized literature. With the hindsight of history, we may say that the carnival was a part of social consciousness and as such served a social function. As it is represented in *LEM*, the carnivalesque may be viewed as part of a literary response to society if we interpret it as reacting to the changing social roles played by Spanish women in the thirteenth century.

In the 1200s, the Reconquest required more than ever in terms of (re)population and (re)settlement, land administration, and economic development. It was a time when greater female participation in the workings of society not only could not be denied, but was absolutely essential. As mentioned previously, women laboured and exerted influence in many professional areas; their activities had an impact on social realities in the Spanish Christian kingdoms. It must have been challenging for the medieval male mind to reconcile the idea of the female as delicate, weak, and incapable with the actual working women who harvested olives, peddled goods in stores they owned or rented, bought and sold property, and managed convents, among other activities. To link the threat of active, thinking women to the social function of the carnivalesque in a thirteenth-century misogynous work we may center on the text's preoccupation with the

theme of adultery and understand it as an expression of anxiety caused by the fear of ever-shifting political and economic conditions and social arrangements that appear to have granted women an increased amount of public power.

A manner in which to alleviate the fear of this added modicum of female power was to belittle women's most significant role in society: as partners in marriage. Matrimony, as we have said before, was the single most important social structure during the Middle Ages; for the Medievals, "domestic society, that is, the family and house (*familia* and *domus*), is the basis of civil society. In this domestic society the married couple is in a dominant position with respect to single women and men" (Lacarra, "Notes on Feminist Analysis..." 17). Both sexes stood to gain from being part of a marriage, and their joint contribution to the fabric of society was recognized in both religious and secular realms. The most dangerous threat to this institution was of course adultery. Adultery symbolized the death of a partnership, of a nuclear family, and beyond that, of society; the demise of a marriage was a loss shared by all.

LEM can be understood as a rejoinder to the fear of the female's evolving social position that operates by criticizing women through the theme of adultery (if women could not be good wives, then how could they be good at anything else?). Marriage is made grotesque, and women's role in enacting adultery is made pivotal. The fall of society's most sacred structure is expressed through the carnivalesque, and the dismemberment of matrimony becomes a bizarre and ridiculous source of amusement. The fear of adultery is defeated by laughter. However, in this expression of fear, the special place awarded to women can be seen as empowering rather than denigrating. Women signify the thrill of renewal in that they uncrown and recrown, and generate new

symbols by holding their own coronations. Through carnival, the female suspends the official authority of the male. As an extra-official figure, she represents a form of liberation from authority, from the “official truth.” Her involvement in the transfer of power makes her part of a transformative process. In spite of any attempt to tarnish their collective reputation, *LEM* admits the importance of women and defines their agency by making them principle actors in the narration. Under normal conditions, men would be the dominant, active protagonists and women would be the silent and passive objects of their actions. In *LEM* the carnival atmosphere turns this on its head, so that instead of women’s voices being silenced by men, men’s voices are silenced by women. This clears the way for new possibilities in the analysis of female roles in the text, particularly since the importance of the speaking subject is acknowledged by the text itself: “quel mayor saber que en el mundo ay es dezir,” as Çendubete proclaims at the end of the narration (Keller, *LEM* 1). In this text, it is undeniable that females possess this “mayor saber.”

Carnival temporarily dismantles existing rules by poking fun at them. Bakhtin links carnival laughter to procreation, birth, renewal, fertility, abundance, earthly immortality, and the future of things to come (*Rabelais...95*). Carnival cannot be used to support a reading that works against women and upholds the systems of authority that keep them subjugated, since carnival is anti-establishment. Therefore, although it may be used to defeat fear, it cannot be used to defeat women. In this analysis, we have appropriated Bakhtin’s system and used it to elucidate a feminist reading of *LEM*. Admittedly, Bakhtin’s system does not escape from an inherent, foundational binarism, since ambivalence is the alternation between positive and negative; however, we can use his theorizing to show a break with authority, and a becoming of something else. In

exploring ambivalence to generate a new interpretation of this text, we may also go beyond the use of the carnivalesque; in the next section, we will do so, by examining the speech acts and accompanying performances of the Spanish Shahrazād and demonstrating further how she escapes the binary categories of Eva/Ave through these devices.

The Shahrazāds: A Comparison

To contextualize a reading of the Spanish Shahrazād that empowers her as a female source of agency, let us recall the story of Shahrazād: She is the vizier's daughter who, against her father's wishes, volunteers to marry the spurned King Shahriyār, even though he makes a daily sacrifice of his virgin-brides because he no longer trusts women after being cuckolded by his wife. Shahrazād, however, has a plan to stay alive; at the end of her evening with the king, she asks him if she may bid farewell to her younger sister, Dunyāzād. The king agrees, and Shahrazād is joined by her sibling, whom she has instructed beforehand to request of her a bedtime story, which she does. Shahrazād's intriguing tales keep the king's interest in hearing more, and night after night she saves herself through their telling. Eventually, Shahriyār falls in love with Shahrazād and spares her life; in most versions of the story, "Tradition has it that in the course of time Shahrazād bore Shahrayar three children and that, having learned to trust and love her, he spared her life and kept her as his queen" (Haddawy 248).

When Shahrazād awakes after having been cast into the pages of a nascent Spanish literature, she at first does not recognize herself, her situation has changed so severely. Yet in essence, she realizes, she remains the same: Reincarnated as the

Spanish Shahrazād she must again use narration to prolong her days, pitting her stories now against King Alcos’ viziers, to prevent the king from killing her. *LEM* retains the narrative fingerprint of what is most likely a distant textual relative; the Arab Shahrazād, having given birth to herself, creates intertexts with her avatar in the Spanish text.¹⁶⁸

The archetype of Shahrazād is an icon of female agency. Arabists have affirmed that she is a domineering force in Arabic literature, and she problematises misogynistic readings of *ALL*; as Daniel Beaumont says, “Feminist readings...tend to emphasize how the mastery of Shahrazād counters patriarchy in the story” (“King, Queen...” 336). Rosenthal, for example, points out that “Shahrazād demonstrates in a very compelling way the enormous power of narrative—not merely to prolong her own life, but to teach and change the king” (124); Robert Irwin acknowledges that Shahrazād has “life-sustaining power” (124);¹⁶⁹ and Judith Grossman argues that “...the text concerns male recognition of female subjectivity, presenting a frame and tales in which men struggle with women’s demonstration of their capacity for autonomous life” (qtd. in Ho 94). In

¹⁶⁸ The story of *LEM* may or may not be a genuine part of the *ALL* tradition. Opinions among Arabists vary on this point, and some are unfavourable; as an example, Richard van Leeuwen, an *ALL* scholar attending the 2003 convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association in Boston, MA, informed me that in terms of its relationship to *ALL*, *LEM* “...nothing, it is an aberration” (this is a text that suffers critical abuse from every quarter, it seems). The relationship is hard to determine, particularly since *ALL* is as Daedalian a cycle as the *Seven Sages/Sindibād* tradition—if not more so; there are several different versions of *ALL* from different time periods and continents, and the issue of which ones are “authentic” is terribly complicated by Orientalism (Edward Said). Some sharing of sources or influences may be supposed— it is certain that *ALL* borrows from *Kalila wa Dimna* (the Arabic version of *CD*) for example, and from the Pahlevi *Hazar Afsaneh*, which may also have been a source text for *LEM*. Aside from this, however, the association between the texts and its related network of pastiches is an enigma.

¹⁶⁹ She ultimately saves not only her own life, but also the lives of the rest of the female population in King Shahriyār’s realm, since no more virgins need to be sacrificed.

the final analysis, Shahrazād stands up to the king and has an irrefutable power of her own; consequently, he is not absolute ruler as he must share his power with a woman.

As Eva Sallis points out, “The relationship between Sheherazade and her father is revealing, for within it paternal authority is invoked but ultimately rejected” (93). In fact, the vizier tries his best to dissuade his daughter from her plan to marry the king by telling her stories of his own; but they do not work to convince her. Shahrazād does as she wishes, marries the king, and then proves herself as a beguiling, unstoppable force who does not cease talking—in fact, she is encouraged to keep doing so—and has complete control over whether or not to continue doing so. When she eventually wins the king over, she gains not only her life, but also a say in the future rule of the realm. *ALL* consistently shows that absolute power is divided in the world of Shariyār and Shahrazād.

We will see that the Spanish Shahrazād has several things in common with her Arab counterpart, starting with appearance. Notes Sallis, “Sheherazade is not given to the reader as a beautiful heroine. She is simply not described in physical terms at all...” (101). Likewise, we note the absolute lack of physical description attributed to *la muger* in the frame story. Is this just an economy of words? If so, the description of the prince, who is “grande e feroso” contrasts starkly with the depiction of the Spanish Shahrazād as nothing other than the king’s “favourite.” Surely she was beautiful, as the king would have had his pick of the women in the land.¹⁷⁰ Yet why does the text omit this detail? Perhaps because, like Shahrazād, the Spanish Shahrazād is more than a simple seductress; she “...fulfills much more complex literary functions and the description of her gives an immediate sense of this...it is her brain, not her body which is going to be central to the

¹⁷⁰ We recall that Alfonso X, in his *Siete Partidas*, recommends that the wife of the sovereign “sea hermosa” and yet also acknowledges that beauty is ephemeral.

ensuing action” (Sallis 101). The Spanish Shahrazād is much more remarkable in terms of her narrative, as opposed to her physical, charm. Both women are, moreover, confident in their ability to narrate her way to safety; just as the Arab woman self-confidently ventures forth to marry the king, the Spanish *muger* must be positive, in approaching the prince, that he will not reject her.

The two “Shahrazāds” also may be read as equally ambitious. They each have their own agenda of upward mobility gained through marriage. The Arab Shahrazād, against her father’s wishes and advice, and against even common sense, seems highly motivated to steer herself towards what appears to be certain death. Could it be the case that she is actually in pursuit of power and “...hopes to become queen, and thereby half-ruler of the kingdom” (Broome 3)? As mentioned above, we may say the same of the Spanish Shahrazād, who may be understood as desirous of a position as the sole spouse of the young future king. She does, after all, contrast the prince with his aging father, telling him, “tu eres mançebo e comiençase el tu bien, e tu debes aver esperança en todos bienes mas que el”(Keller, *LEM* 5). One of these “bienes” is of course *her*. It is also clear that she aspires to share regal power with the prince: “seras tu rrey e sere yo tu muger” (Keller, *LEM* 5). She sees herself as his logical—and only—counterpart.

Both Shahrazāds also defy the power of kings; by challenging the king and influencing the course of events through narration, Wendy Faris contends, the Arab Shahrazād “overcomes absolute power” (813). As we saw above, the Spanish Shahrazād uncrowns the king; the monarch, under her influence, is portrayed as *lacking* the strength, coherence, and conviction of a worthy monarch. King Alcos is dithering and schizophrenic; the Spanish Shahrazād intrudes upon and usurps his power to dictate

reality. Not only that, but she also “...steals the language of the male child,” says Ho (93). That is, in speaking for the prince by describing his (fabricated) actions, she overrides his authority also. With regard to both father and son, we see “..male identity subsumed by the feminine” (Ho 104). Even when at the end of the text she is gone, her presence remains stronger, in the reader’s mind, than the king’s, if not also the prince’s.

The two women are not completely alike, however. Whereas Shahrazād is *the* wife and, as such, may be described in the terms of Hegel’s master-slave dialect as “...a master because she is the wife of the king,” (Beaumont, “King, Queen...” 341) the Spanish Shahrazād is merely *a* wife, one of ninety, and therefore, with her lack of wifehood, is denied authority, is master over no-one. Besides this, she is simply a *muger*, despite the fact that she should be called queen, since even non-noble women, according to the *Fourth Partida*, acquired “the rank and title of their husbands, ‘maguer la muger fuese de vil lineaie si casare con<n> Rey deue<n> la llamar Reyna’” (Stone 46). The Spanish Shahrazād has neither rank nor title.

Moreover, when it comes to comparing the two women with respect to their titles, or lack thereof, there arises the conspicuous detail that *Shahrazād* and *Shahriyār*, husband and wife, both have names—that they begin with similar phonemes, end with the same long vowel, *ā*, and are each divisible into three syllables emphasizes an equality even at the linguistic level. However, the Spanish Shahrazād has no name, in contrast to her partner, the king, whose name is established with the very first line of the text: “Había un rey en India que tenía por nombre Alcos” (*Sendebār* 45). The syntax of the sentence points towards his possession of his name and his status and power; *tenía por nombre*, instead of *se llamaba* (which would indicate that there were others, those *who*

did the calling, and which would displace the attention given to him). Him “having” his name seems to stress the absoluteness of his position.

This distinction between King Alcos and the Spanish Shahrazād may be seen as delimiting her female authority, as the absence of a name even questions the validity of her existence. Then again, the king is only one of two characters, along with Çendubete, that has a name in the text. This makes the stepmother’s lack of a name less troubling, particularly since the prince is not named either. It also equates the woman with the young man whose voice she appropriates as she tells the “truth” of what happened between them.¹⁷¹ Moreover, we might say that since “Power does not arrive in the form of a name...A name tends to fix, to freeze, to delimit, to render substantial, indeed, it appears to recall a metaphysics of substance, of discrete and singular kinds of beings,” (Butler, *Excitable Speech*...35) that it is better that the woman *not* be named. As a closed system, a name is binary: the king’s name sets up the opposition of either “Alcos” or “not-Alcos.” The unnamed woman cannot participate in this type of symbolic order. Her not having a name opens up all possibilities of identity, makes her ambivalent.¹⁷²

Finally, the most crucial difference between these two women: Shahrazād finds success at the end of her story, and the Spanish Shahrazād finds failure. Although

¹⁷¹ Aside from this, she is further equated with him in that they each tell exactly five stories.

¹⁷² The same goes for her status as simply *muger*, which we have already noted fails, within the terminology available, to fully convey exactly *what* she is. Lacarra calls her “una concubina real” (“Panorama del cuento... 30). We know that kings did have concubines, since “Los amores extraconjugales del rey con barraganas no están ausentes de la crónica del período de expansión reconquistadora y son mencionadas con toda naturalidad como uno más de los atributos del monarca, como signo de virilidad” (Firpo 336-337). However, they would not number ninety concurrently. Again, this system of “marriage” is outside our bounds of description, and so is this “type” of woman.

Shahrazād may live, the Spanish Shahrazād is not so fortunate: on the eighth day of *LEM*, when the prince’s vow of silence comes to an end and he gives his testimony against womankind, the king orders that the woman be burned alive in an empty cauldron.¹⁷³ She is finally silenced...or is she? The Spanish Shahrazād is ordered killed, but we do not see her being killed, nor are told that she *was* actually killed; we are informed only, in the very last line of the text, that the king “mandola quemar en un caldera en seco” (Keller, *LEM* 64). Can we really take the word of this king, who has done such a fine job of proving his fickleness throughout the narration? Is there not a good chance that he will change his mind? The text has well demonstrated that *fra regia*, or the king’s love, is all too easily displaced by *ira regia*.¹⁷⁴

LEM in fact suffers from the same lack of closure that is also attributed to *ALL*, despite the popular ending of Shahrazād and Shahriyār living peacefully together until the end of their days. Not all versions of *ALL* give this ending; “...in fact closure of the tale ranges from not at all (it is indefinitely deferred in the Leiden text) to extended and diffuse narratives on the festivities generated by the satisfactory outcome...The unsatisfying element of the close to the frame tale is that we have several choices and so all endings are partly questionable” (Sallis 97). Although *LEM* may be designated as

¹⁷³ Curiously enough, by the time the prince tells his tales, he has already communicated to the king what really happened between him and his *madrasta*. That he must now tell tales too seems rather extraneous; however, the prince is insistent: “Menester es de entender la mi rrazon, que quiero dezir el mi saber” (Keller, *LEM* 71). Does his great need to speak stem from the desire to place himself on a par with the woman (and the sages)?

¹⁷⁴ The *ira regia*, says Lacarra, serves “...para subrayar el poder incontestado del soberano” and is one of the “...atributos inseparables de la realeza” (“La representación del rey...” 183). Here, however, the king enacts and retracts his *fra regia* and *ira regia* to the point of making himself look ridiculous, which undermines his power.

one of many *different* texts (we have already said that the stories vary widely across versions), instead of, as is the case with *ALL*, many versions of what is generally thought of as the *same* text (they all bear more or less the same name, for example), both works fracture into countless others that enrich and produce readings and, with regard to endings, remain elusive. The Shahrazāds prolong the present indefinitely.

The Power of the Performing Word: Speech Acts and Influence

Through her stories, the Arab Shahrazād constructs meaning for the king, and she “introduces him into the symbolic order” (Beaumont, “King, Queen...” 335). She clearly has the upper hand as she keeps him waiting and dependent on her from one night to the next. Yet lurking between them there is always a potential violence, ever deferred, yet always possible: Shahriyār has the power to kill. Of course, Shahrazād always manages to postpone that violence.

Likewise, the Spanish Shahrazād lives one step ahead of the shadow of an immanent brutality. Like Shahrazād, she delays it; yet she even exceeds her namesake’s efforts by having recourse to her unmentioned, self-possessed body. This is a body that no-one has named and that no word in the text describes: we know she has hair, because she herself tears it out; we know she has a mouth and a larynx because she herself uses them to speak and to shout. In effect, she has a corporeality to which she alone has access. This is best of all demonstrated in her speech acts and physical performances, which illustrate that her response to the doom that awaits her is to co-opt the power of the threat of death and use it to try to save herself. Her speaking is her participation in an act that contradicts traditional notions about female submission and passivity; as Catherine

Belsey states, "...to speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power. To speak is to become a subject. But, for women, to speak is to threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy" (qtd. in Sandoval 86). We have seen that the women of *LEM* appropriate men's power to command and direct, by telling men what to do and by making them re-enact the scenes of reality that they (the women) create for them. Let us now see how the Spanish Shahrazād, through her words and actions, represents herself and communicates self-custody—thereby distancing herself from the binary of Eva/Ave. We must first define two types of speech act.

Speech Act Theory was formulated by philosopher John Austin who, in his elaboration of the theory in *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), posited two types of speech acts that are of interest to us here. The first is the illocutionary act, which Austin describes as being used

...to assert that something is true, but it may instead be one of many other possible speech acts, such as questioning, commanding, promising, warning, praising, thanking, and so on. A sentence consisting of the same words, such as 'I will leave you tomorrow,' may in its particular verbal and situational context turn out to have the 'illocutionary force' either of an assertion, a promise, or a threat. (Abrams 240)

The other type of act is the perlocutionary speech act. This refers to an illocutionary act that "...has an effect on the actions or state of mind of the hearer which goes beyond merely understanding what has been said... Thus, the utterance 'I am going to leave you,' with the illocutionary force of a warning, may not only be understood as

such, but have the additional perlocutionary effect of frightening the hearer” (Abrams 240). This act may also cause pain, anger, intimidation, joy, and so on—and the effect may be intentional or not (i.e. the perlocutionary speech act causes effects beyond itself).

In *Excitable Speech...*, Judith Butler refers to Austin’s definitions of speech acts and builds upon them. We will first consider what she says as she explores the injuriousness of language, which may take a variety of forms and can cause devastating effects. Butler comments that:

To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is *unanticipated* about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control...To be addressed injuriously is not only to be open to an unknown future, but not to know the time and place of injury, and to suffer the disorientation of one’s situation as the effect of such speech. Exposed at the moment of such a shattering is precisely the volatility of one’s ‘place’ by such speech, but such a place may be no place. (*Excitable Speech...4*)

Among injurious speech acts, the most obvious is name-calling. This offence, which is both demeaning and subordinating, occurs many times in *LEM*. Most notably, there is the *reductio ad absurdum* tirade of the sages against womankind (and at the end, the prince joins in too), as they indirectly label all women *engañosas*, *mentirosas*, and *tramposas*. There is the direct (but not face-to-face) name-calling of the prince as, on the eighth day, he rages to the king’s counsellor about “la puta falsa de mi madrastra” (Keller, *LEM*9). This abusive name-calling is not unidirectional, however; as the men

in the text call Woman into being (construct her), She calls back (re-construction) through the figure of the Spanish Shahrazād. Butler says that name-calling is “enabling vulnerability” (*Excitable Speech...2*) since, in calling names, the speaking subject constitutes both self and Other. In returning the name-calling, the Spanish Shahrazād emphasizes the position of those whom she names while she reasserts herself as a being with linguistic agency who occupies a position from which she is able to name and call. The king, the woman, the prince, and the sages are interdependent beings in this respect.

In her own contribution to the name-calling in the text, the Spanish Shahrazād brands the counsellors as *malos* and, when she is alone in the company of the silent prince, addresses him with “Non te fagas neçio,” (Keller, *LEM1*) explicitly referring to him as stupid. More importantly, however, she implicitly dubs the king as obtuse, by uncrowning him throughout the text and revealing him to the reader as a *bobo*. This mode of name-calling is more significant than what the men of the text achieve, because the Spanish Shahrazād manages to provoke this without words. In effect, the king is “put in place, given a place, through silence, through not being addressed,” (Butler, *Excitable Speech... 27*) and he exists as a *bobo* even without being told that he is one.

The Spanish Shahrazād, as if in response to the name-calling of the males in the text, therefore not only seizes hold of language in order to narrate, but she also co-opts its power to injure. To be called a name is to suffer linguistic harm; the Spanish Shahrazād, herself injured through language, fights back. However, her appropriation of this “male” mode of speech (if we hark back to the prologue of the text, we find that the first instance of name-calling is directed at females, in “los asayamientos de las mugeres,” and is decidedly male) is more than just a mere case of the victim turning the weapon back on

her aggressor; the fact that she name-calls the king without naming him, that her use of speech is accompanied by her use of silence, shows that she is more resourceful than her opponents. Silence being a dimension of language typically associated with females, we might say that the Spanish Shahrazād is doubly powerful, is “bilingual”: She speaks the language of both men *and* women. She is aware that silence does not have to equal the absence of communication. The prince, on the other hand, does not seem to understand this; he has no impact on the text whatsoever during the telling of eighteen tales.

Apparently paralyzed without speech, he stands by and allows the woman and the sages to speak for him. He does not know how to act, and for this he does indeed deserve to be called *neçio*; after all, “Toda la historia podía haber seguido otros derroteros si el Infante hubiera decidido expresarse por escrito, con lo que hubiera podido mostrar su sabiduría” (Lacarra, *Sendebār* 30).

Moreover, inasmuch as we may understand silence as “...the performative effect of a certain kind of speech, where that speech is an address that has as its object the deauthorization of the speech of the one to whom the speech act is addressed,” (Butler, *Excitable Speech...* 137) the Spanish Shahrazād deauthorizes the language of the king. That is, although the Spanish Shahrazād is authorized to speak, she is not authorized to use speech to call the king names and to thereby openly challenge his authority by demeaning him. Yet she sidesteps that prohibition and manages to deprecate the king and call him a name without even enunciating it, and, patently, without him realising it.

In calling the king a name, the Spanish Shahrazād does not have to resort to any kind of speech act. She does, however, utilize an abundance of perlocutionary statements during her contact with the king. Many of these perlocutionary speech acts amount to

threats; these cause the king to worry and fear either for his life or for hers. According to Butler, “In a sense, the threat begins the performance of that which it threatens to perform; but in not quite fully performing it, seeks to establish, through language, the certitude of that future in which it will be performed” (*Excitable Speech*...9). The threat anticipates the act, but, Butler points out, it is wrong to relegate the threat to the linguistic arena and the act to the tangible: “Implicit in the notion of a threat is that what is spoken in language may prefigure what the body might do; the act referred to in the threat is the act that one might actually perform” (*Excitable Speech*... 10). Moreover, speaking is physiologically an act of the body, which at some level connects the speech act with corporeality; “The threat prefigures or, indeed, promises a bodily act, and yet is already a bodily act, thus establishing in its very gesture the contours of the act to come. The act of threat and the threatened act are, of course, distinct, but they are related as a chiasmus. Although not identical, they are both bodily acts...” (Butler, *Excitable Speech*... 11).

The Spanish Shahrazād threatens the king several times in terms of what will happen to *his* body (and, worse, his soul) if he does not do as she says: “si tu non te antuvas a castigar tu fijo ante que mas enemiga te faga, matarte a” (Keller, *LEM7*); “estos tus privados son malos, e matarte an asi commo mato un privado a un rrey una vez” (Keller, *LEM2*)¹⁷⁵; and

Si me non das derecho de aquel ynfante, e veras que pro ternan estos tus malos privados. Despues que yo sea muerta, veremos que faras con estos tus consejeros; e quando ante Dios fueres, ¿que diras, faziendo atan gran tuerto en dexar a tu fijo a vida e non querer fazer del justia, e commo lo

¹⁷⁵ Actually, in the story she tells, the counsellor endangers a prince but does not kill anyone.

dexas a vida por tus malos consejeros e por tus malos privados, e dexas de fazer lo que tiene pro en este siglo? Mas yo se que te sera demandado ante Dios... (Keller, *LEM*2)

These threats spell out certain death for him if he does not listen to her; they also indicate that she will somehow be vindicated either way, and also that she will certainly survive her bodily death (“*veremos que faras*”) and be a witness to the king’s judgment before God. This is underscored by her self-proclaimed divine intimacy, seen in *Mas yo se que te sera demandado ante Dios*, which also speaks of her knowledge of what God will do. This is just one of several occasions on which she assumes righteousness; she does the same on days four and six, affirming “yo he fiuza que me ayudara Dios contra sus malos privados” (Keller, *LEM*6) and “Yo fio en Dios que me anpara de tus malos privados” (Keller, *LEM*9).

Aside from menacing the king with his own counsellors, and invoking celestial help in her fight against them, in the quote above we see one of the Spanish Shahrazād’s several references to doing herself bodily harm: *Despues que yo sea muerta*. Indeed, this is another course along which her line of threats proceed, as she begins to use suicide as leverage: “Si non me dieres derecho de quien mal me fizo, yo me matare con mis manos” (Keller, *LEM*3). In conjunction with this, the physical self-awareness she demonstrates at the beginning of the text by finding a way to be alone (body-to-body) with the prince, and then again later by tousling her hair, increases, becoming evermore corybantic as the narration goes on. On the second day of the trial we are told, in the title of the exemplum, “*commo vino la muger al segundo dia ante el rrey llorando,*” (Keller, *LEM* 17) and on the third day that she “*lloro e dio bozes ante el rrey*” (Keller, *LEM* 22).

The chicanery of crocodile tears and shouts is exceeded on the fifth day, when the woman accompanies her words with a carefully-selected prop; she tells the story of the “puerco e del ximio” (“Aper”) and then it so happens that “quando esto ovo dicho, ovo miedo el rrey que se mataria con el tosigo que tenia en la mano, e mando matar su fijo” (Keller, *LEM* 32). The story she tells concerns a monkey in a tree who throws a fig down to a pig; once the pig tastes how good the figs from the tree are in comparison with those on the ground, he remains at the foot of the tree, head raised expectantly, waiting for the monkey to throw more down to him. The monkey never responds, however, and the pig dies from the exertion: “le secaron las venas del pezcueço e murio de aquello” (Keller, *LEM* 32). After hearing this tale in which a subject causes its own death, and seeing the poison in the woman’s hand, the king fears for her life.

Towards the end of the text, in her final and most dazzling appearance, the Spanish Shahrazād finally integrates language with action for a unique, bipartite performance of threat: On day seven, we read the (otherwise unnamed) “Enxenplo de commo vino la muger al seteno dia antel rrey, quexando, e dixo que se queria quemar; e el rrey mando matar su fijo apriesa antes quella se quemase” (Keller, *LEM* 3). The woman then does the following: “Todo quanto aver pudo, diolo por Dios a pobres, e mando traer mucha leña, e asentose sobre ella, e mando dar fuego en derredor, e dizir que se queria quemar ella; e el rrey, quando esto oyo, ante que se quemase, mando matar al moço” (Keller, *LEM* 3). Although the king takes her sudden philanthropy as a sign of kindness and innocence, and he believes once again that he will lose her, it is obvious to the reader that she is not *really* going to kill herself. In the first place, she has hollowly threatened suicide twice before (once by saying she will do it with her own hands and

once silently, by brandishing poison); besides which, why would she bother telling others and making such a ceremony out of her upcoming death unless she intended to attract the king's attention in the hopes that he would intervene?

Through these techniques of threat enacted by the Spanish Shahrazād (both oral and nonspoken, making use of the mouth, larynx, and the rest of her body), we comprehend that a threat "...not only announces the act to come, but registers a certain force in language, a force that both presages and inaugurates a subsequent force" (Butler, *Excitable Speech...* 9). The Spanish Shahrazād exercises power through name-calling and the force of threat. These concern both speech and performance, which oblige that she manipulate her own body. Indeed, she is conscious of, and fully able to do this, as she herself seems to adamantly recognize when she declares to the most powerful man in the realm: *yo me matare con mis manos*. She will continue to repeat this affirmation of self-possession with each successive suicide threat. Her body is within her control; she *owns* it. Aside from this being a commentary on her body, however, this is also a commentary on the body of the king.

When the Spanish Shahrazād threatens, and whether she is foretelling the king's impending doom or her own, she addresses the king; therefore, "...it is not merely the body of the speaker that comes into play: it is the body of the addressee as well" (Butler, *Excitable Speech...* 12). As the woman speaks to the man, she parades both the fact of her own corporeality as well as his. When she delivers her threats, the situation is such that, "As an 'instrument' of a violent rhetoricity, the body of the speaker exceeds the words that are spoken, exposing the addressed body as no longer (and not ever fully) in its own control" (Butler, *Excitable Speech...* 13). Again, as with the mutual name-calling

between both sexes in the text, this is a relationship of dialogue and of interdependence. The Spanish Shahrazād's body is endangered (by possible execution, by herself), but so is the king's (by his counsellors, and by himself—for since the counsellors are his, if he listens to them this also will be a self-inflicted wound). This has the effect of questioning the authority of one body in relation to another.

This is not what the Spanish Shahrazād wants to communicate to the king, however, as it does not benefit her. Far more propitious is for the king to feel sympathy towards her for the predicament that only he has the power to remedy. Although she clearly is in control (she really could, after all, commit suicide), she must appear as if she were utterly at his mercy. She must demonstrate that he threatens her. Nowhere is this more apodictic than when she goes about making preparations to have herself set ablaze.

To understand this, let us first see how a non-speaking, inanimate sign can become an addressed threat. This may be achieved through metonymy, as Butler explains by way of the example of a cross set aflame. Although the burning cross may be taken as an expression of someone's (racist) opinion, it may also act as a "perlocutionary performative" that may be understood as the command "Burn!" and as such may be perceived as "...an injunction that works its power metonymically not only in the sense that the fire recalls prior burnings...but also in the sense that the fire is understood to be transferable from the cross to the target that is marked by the cross..." (*Excitable Speech*...57). If we adopt this perspective, we may see non-verbal actions as threats to injure. This is supported by what we have seen above, in the actions of the Spanish Shahrazād; her hands exist to kill her, always, after she has spoken the threat to use them for such a purpose. In scenes subsequent to the one in which she announces the

homicidal potential of those hands, they are forevermore an accessory that denote murder, as is the *tosigo* and of course the *leña* with which she obtains a pyre. It is axiomatic that these “props” are non-verbal signs that augur her death. Her choice of a fire, however, in her final death threat, seems particularly clever.

The Spanish Shahrazād sits herself upon a woodpile which she orders to be lit. This uncannily resonates with the method of execution that the king later proclaims will be her fate. At the present moment in which it occurs, however, it achieves the effect of designating the king as the direct cause of her death. We remember the words of Çendubete as he vies with the other sages to become the prince’s tutor at the beginning of the text: “los rreyes tales son commo el fuego: si te llegares a el, quemarte as, e si te arredrares, esfriarte as” (Keller, *LEM*). This correlation between the king and fire in the text cannot help but produce a metonymy when the woman begins to burn herself upon the bonfire; the *leña* is the king and he is killing her. Again, through an act of silence, the Spanish Shahrazād communicates; but now she creates *another* speaker, this time putting her non-sounding words in the mouth of another. *She recreates the king* as another subject who produces silent discourse; she gives him silent life within her realm by making him (metonymically represented as *leña*) “destroy” her. Again, as a female, she is the only one that knows how to use silence to speak, or to allow others to “speak” through it/her. As the king recognizes his metonymical self “speaking” through the burning wood, he goes, *apriosa*, to halt his non-verbal action.

Returning to voiced spoken words, we see that Austin claims that the illocutionary speech act is often ceremonial (as in “I now pronounce you husband and wife”). Butler complicates this, pointing out that this kind of speech act

...performs its deed *at the moment* of the utterance, and yet to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The ‘moment’ in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance...the temporality of linguistic convention, considered as ritual, exceeds the instance of its utterance, and that excess is not fully capturable or identifiable... (*Excitable Speech*...3)

This precludes thinking of the speech act as a totality. With this in mind, we again must question the illusion of finality that is imparted at the narration’s end. It is safe to say that the king speaks without producing effects: when he orders that his son be killed, his son is not actually killed; and when he orders that his son be spared, his son is not actually spared (since he is only spared until the next time he is ordered to be killed). When he orders that the *madrastra* be burned in a cauldron, then, and the text does not show us this, we doubt the efficacy of his words—and the totality of the message. The aura of the Spanish Shahrazād, redivivus and laughing, lingers felicitously on the last line of the text.

There is just one more speech act to which we must attend. On the seventh day, before she orders that her fire be built, the Spanish Shahrazād has a moment of reflection. In it, she says to herself: “‘Si este mançebo oy non es muerto, oy sere descubierta.’ E esto dixo la muger: ‘Non ay al sinon la muerte’” (Keller, *LEM3*). This, more than any other sentence in the text, exposes what continuously has been replayed here as the agency of the Spanish Shahrazād and this character’s departure from binarism. Her contemplation reveals what we would think of as a Cartesian self-awareness that neither

the king, the prince, nor the sages exhibit. This is not to say that we should think of this as admitting any sense of an “I,” which would be anachronic. However, it does express a certain female *subjectivity* and a sense of autonomy that, moreover, may be read as resistant to attempts that others, be they intra- or extratextual, might make to paradigmatically define her. This character has persistently told us, through words and actions, that she is self-contained. Throughout *LEM* we have seen the Spanish Shahrazād produce effects with her speech and other performances: the prince reacts to her, the king reacts to her, and the sages react to her. She, in turn, reacts to the prince (when he reveals he will tell the truth in seven days), to the sages (as they defame her), and to the king (whenever he decides to spare his son). As both someone who exerts authority and reacts to it, she may boast of a parity with the men in the text. As she lives being named by others, and under the threat of death, so does she use the power of name-calling and the power of threat to generate a rejoinder.

This woman is neither Eva nor Ave; nor, for that matter, is she Mary Magdalene, *sabia*, *consejera*, or Shahrazād. This speaking and performing woman does, however, exemplify Çendubete’s aphorism that “Que a en poder las manos con los pies, e el oyr e el veer, e todo el cuerpo, tal es el saber con el coraçon commo el musgaño e el agua que salle de buena olor; otrosi el saber, quando es en el coraçon, faze bueno todo el cuerpo” (Keller, *LEM*). With all of her self -possessed body and mind, the Spanish Shahrazād may be said to be emblematic not of an ideal Woman, but simply of an ideal: *mens sana in corpore sano*. Indeed, this reflects a wider current of thought within the medieval world, in which *gestus* was regarded “...as the outward (*foris*) physical expression of the inward (*intus*) soul. This concept of the expressivity of gesture (whether its referent is

philosophical, religious or psychological), and the dual idea of the person that underlies it, are patterns constitutive of Western culture” (Schmitt 13).¹⁷⁶ The Spanish Shahrazād’s calculated, coordinated efforts to apply logic—expressed through speech—in conjunction with the dramatics she employs as she masquerades, are indicative of a harmony between mind and body. Far more than a simple binary, once again, through both speech acts and performance, this woman exceeds even herself, and becomes emblematic of a stage of intellectual evolution that was transpiring in the Europe of the Middle Ages.

Conclusions

Early Spanish medieval society was structured by the trio of orders that fuelled the growth of feudal cultures: the *oratores*, the *bellatores*, and the *laboratores*. It is true that, officially, “Women had no place in the tri-functional scheme” (Le Goff 22); Spain’s brand of feudalism was unique in Europe, however, and the ever-present Reconquest meant that vassal-lord relationships were constantly jeopardized by warfare and changing allegiances among landowners. By the thirteenth century, then, along with agrarian reform and the development of urban life and mercantilism, several factors began to shape the societies of the medieval Spains, and among them was the urgent need for re-population. This exigency, along with the attendant socio-historical processes at work, may be seen to have slowly begun to change the place of women in medieval Spanish society. Thus it is possible, as Jacques Le Goff asserts, that “...the realization that

¹⁷⁶ *Gestus* denotes the general movements and postures of the body, rather than specific gestures; ideological views regarding *gestus* vary widely from Antiquity to the middle of the Middle Ages, being regarded suspiciously in the early Middle Ages but then, by the time didactic literature was en vogue in the twelfth century, it is once again of interest (Schmitt 136).

society was becoming more complex brought men of the Middle Ages to prefer schemes that were more fully articulated than a simple binary one” (10). That evolution of thought perhaps contributed to the creation of new spaces for women where before there had been none. In palpable terms, through their access to land and wealth, females gained increased significance in the functioning of society.

Although the world of medieval women may have been multifaceted in reality, in the literature of the time it was often conveyed much more narrowly. Following the precedents set by a long line of writers, philosophers, and statesmen from Antiquity, medieval writers—often clergymen—tended to reiterate stock themes and motifs in regard to females. With a *Weltanschauung*, or world view, heavily conditioned by a fervent Christianity, they frequently turned to the popular medieval palindrome of Eva/Ave, which used wordplay to posit Eve as the lexical undoing of Mary, and vice versa. Women could easily be related to the world of men by way of these paradigms, and, as paragons of either vice or virtue, could be extolled or disparaged accordingly. Male writers of the Middle Ages seem to have had a proclivity for representing women through the lens of misogynous thought, more often than not. Even writings on Ave could denigrate women; although the Virgin, and the examples of other “good and virtuous” women on the one hand served as a riposte to those who faulted Eve for the woes of the world, on the other hand, “...to cancel Eve’s ‘sin’ was in fact a strategy which levelled the score against women only at the cost of leaving presumptions about originary guilt intact” (Blamires, *The Case* 112). Writers found inspiration and corroboration in medical, religious, and legal quarters; yet this was not always the case.

An examination of the sociohistorical condition of the female during the Middle Ages reveals, most often through those same legal writings that sometimes confine her, certain allowances and even privileges. Legislative texts do more justice to illustrating the increased significance granted to women than do religious and medical writings. By and large, although women were still suppressed by a variety of conditions, women—*real* women, not ideological representations of them, and not those medical specimens about whom physicians speculated—were afforded certain legal protections that appear to have led to their enjoying tacit liberties.

Thus the nature of medieval literature regarding misogyny is swathed in ambiguity, for it is beleaguered to some extent by convention and does not readily admit the more complex ideological aspects of medieval women's participation and presence in the world.

This predicament easily ensnares us when we turn to analyze medieval texts and allow ourselves to read according to rigid conceptions regarding females; we are submitted to binarism. However, if we accompany ourselves with what we are able to glean from historical research on medieval social practices, we may formulate alternate views to those most saliently offered in the literature. This increases, albeit to a limited degree, our opportunities to apply nonconventional interpretations; while we may never arrive at categorical judgments, we are nevertheless thereby permitted to conjecture *ad infinitum*.

Thus, with the onus upon us to read in new and invigorating ways, we may choose to explore the literary portrayal of women in terms of the information available to us about the unofficial power of females in medieval societies; for while the tripartite

division of medieval society assigned no official place to women, it still left an abundance of space for them to occupy. Within this space, women could exercise unofficial influence. Women living in Iberia's warring thirteen, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries do not appear to be the passive and weak members of society they supposedly were; on the contrary, they must be counted as "...importantes miembros colonizadores de las nuevas comunidades" (Coria-Sánchez 21). Although women were not seen as agents of state power, they might have unofficial power as—for example, as *arbiters* (Erler and Kowalski "A New Economy..." 6).

The idea of women as intermediaries with influence brings to mind the figure of Mary Magdalene, who appears to embody the power of speaking, and who presents a partial resolution to binary notions of women. Mary Magdalene, as well as the *sabias* and *consejeras* that we often see in medieval Spanish literature, exemplifies a power that is difficult to regulate, even when it comes to women: that of speech.

In the Middle Ages, speaking was associated with great power. Medieval physicians acknowledged that words could both heal and do harm (Solomon 38). Discussion and debate—forms of speaking that required the use of reason—were regarded and practiced as art forms.

Women were denied speech in the public sphere: medieval men tried to protect words, and restrict women's access to them. But women came to appropriate words anyway; and to use the agency inherent in them. After all, "...it is clearly possible to speak with authority without being authorized to speak" (Butler, *Excitable Speech...* 157). We can see this phenomenon manifested in literature: "With limited opportunities to exercise real power over their own or others' lives, women in medieval literature and

sometimes in real life find subtle or hidden ways to exercise such power, to manipulate people and situations, and to spin out fictions” (Ferrante, “Public Postures...” 213).

Several such women are found in *LEM* this text, while it does not necessarily reflect a *non*-misogynous viewpoint, nevertheless can be read as offering strong evidence of female subjectivity. In all ways a quintessentially medieval, fragmentary text, it remains ever contradictory, and no one ideology may be seen to guide its telling. We are therefore able to understand the narrative in several different ways. In this dissertation, we have understood it through the voices of the Spanish Shahrazād and her entourage, who both speak and perform.

Female speech is usually cast by males as verbosity; yet the women of *LEM* do not waste a single word. Moreover, they plan, strategize, and *think for* men, who they instruct and command. It is little wonder, then, that the prince relates the truth of his experience with the Spanish Shahrazād to his father in horror: “Mas de la muger te digo de quando me aparto, que me queria castigar” (Keller, *LEM*0). *Castigar*, to instruct or teach, reflects an interesting choice of words used to describe what is usually understood as a seduction, and it betrays the masculine fear of that moment: the woman’s wielding of the powerful word, to define, to authorize, to say what is.

The females of *LEM* employ speech acts in order to effect their desires. Beyond that, they also articulate themselves, through words and actions, as being in command of their own bodies. The idea of a woman being able to dictate the parameters of exchange and electing to share her body with a man of her choosing—assuming the power to dispose of her own self as a commodity—complicates the patriarchy and the traditional sexual economy of the medieval period. This encourages us to re-read misogyny in

literary works, and to reconceptualise medieval literary women in ways other than those fettered intransigently to Classical or Biblical models; if we allow the women of these exempla to speak to us in different ways, we may hear them echo, along with Çendubete, “quel mayor saber que en el mundo ay es dezir” (Keller, *LEM*1). This is certainly what the Spanish Shahrazād has told us, as she has used the power of speech, silence, and gesture to “say” herself and, in doing so, to assume a variety of identities of her own choosing, appearing to us when she likes as counsellor, seductress, thespian, strategist, philanthropist, polemicist, and, not least of all, teller of tales.

To recapitulate: I began this dissertation by exploring the idea that medieval works are often regarded as misogynist if they present females as having the characteristics associated with Eve—disobedience, deception, hubris, and so on—and pro-feminine if they present females as having the characteristics of Ave—if they are loyal, nurturing, pious, and so forth; and that as a result, it is difficult to conceive of medieval literary women as anything other than one of these two categories of “female.” Both constructions, Eve and Mary, appear misogynistic, as they both serve to proscribe women’s roles, to define and limit them, and to subject them to a patriarchal system of order designed to categorize and control.

My argument has been that female subjectivity in *LEM* may be perceived independently of binary constructions of women. To demonstrate this, I have attempted to identify elaborations of the dichotomy Eva-Ave and then look beyond them. This has first led to a consideration of other females commonly represented in Castilian literature and/or society; Mary Magdalene, the *mujer sabia*, and the *consejera*.

Mary Magdalene seems to be a promising alternative to the dualism of Eva-Ave; however, she does not surmount the positivity-negativity inherent to the motif. In fact, she too becomes a part of it: as a prostitute she is cast as Eve, and as a penitent she is like Mary. Her value as a woman hinges upon the interplay between “good” versus “evil,” and she therefore takes her place alongside Eve and Mary as a model woman who serves to induce women (and men) to devotion. Eve, Mary, and Mary Magdalene all inspire their audience to avoid evil, to devote themselves to righteousness, and to repent their sins.

Aside from these religious figures, the other females also serve as part of this dogmatic agenda; neither the *sabia* nor the *consejera* are far removed from the ideals of “good” versus “bad.” The *sabia*, although “atypical,” is recognizable in that she reinforces the idea that most women do not match up to her; like the Virgin, she surpasses any woman, and as the Donzella Teodor shows us, she can even surpass men. The *sabia* is another ideal female, an unattainable model who may even betray a hostile attitude towards females when she speaks the words that males think she should say, so that, even though she may be portrayed as superior to them, she in no way degrades them or presents any kind of real threat, particularly when she uses her wisdom to authenticate their ideology. Likewise, the *consejera* is also a reaffirmation of the status quo, as she provides good counsel (and in her kindness aligns herself with Eve), and upholds, bolsters, and honours male agendas and protagonism.

None of these women have agency of their own; if we read them as Eva, Mary, Mary Magdalene, *sabias*, or *consejeras*, we can always interpret them as symbols indentured to patriarchal doctrine, or as subordinate aides in the service of their male counterparts or

superiors. It is not difficult to find these archetypes reiterated in *LEM* the king's first wife fits neatly into the definition of *consejera*, and his second into that of Eva; the other women in the text can likewise be organized into familiar categories. The facility with which we can support interpretations based on the paradigms of Eva and Ave is exemplified with my reading of females of *LEM* representative of *eros*. These literary women are in the service of an agenda that reaffirms the supremacy of males through a foregrounding, and implicit celebration, of the bonds of *philia* that unite them. This accords with the socio-political ethics of the Alfonsine state.

It is more of a challenge to locate female subjectivities in the text that do not fit within the lines of the age-old types and ideals. To find them, one must examine what is in the text and listen to what else the narration offers, other than that which is readily recognizable. In the case of *LEM*, I attempted to find "something else" in the text first of all by retracing the text's origins, and then by problematising its misogyny. Textual history steered me towards the complexities of the cycle to which the work belongs, and inevitably towards its Oriental origins. Therein, another text could be perceived; the palimpsestic outline of the *ALL*, and its female heroine, insisted that they be remembered. The intersection of the two texts—*ALL* and *LEM*—provided the important starting point in a line of inquiry that was to acknowledge oppositional thought yet hope for something more.

As I studied Shahrazād, I appreciated what she had to offer to an understanding of her Spanish sister, and more: the Spanish Shahrazād speaks, cajoles, strategises, feigns, threatens, and subverts male power; she has agency as a narrator—an independent authority—and is a female creator of meaning in the text. Aside from this, although she

has the title of *madrastra*, this character is not depicted as a mother—or even as maternal in any way—and she does not collude with anyone else in the narrative: she stands alone. This demands that we take stock of her in her own right.

How can this woman be the same one that also may be described as complicit with the patriarchal agenda? Is *engaño* vilified or celebrated in *LEM*? The search for an answer to this question required that I explore the ambivalence of the text, my understanding of which I found could be enriched by Bakhtin's ideas about the carnivalesque, Butler's injurious speech act theory, and feminist perspectives. These critical parameters supported a reading of the female characters that would not allow them to be simply—and rigidly—one way or another, but *both*, and they also helped to illuminate "intellect" as a quality that resists categorization as "good" or "evil."

Intelligence: this is the characteristic that is most consistently displayed by the Spanish Shahrazād and the women of the interpolated tales that form her "entourage," and in my opinion it articulates a female subjectivity that is alternate to that expressed by the archetypal women mentioned earlier. Intelligence, although it can be used to effect good or evil, cannot be classed as inherently right or wrong. It is another unstable element of the text, and as such it eludes binarism. The females of *LEM* cannot be viewed as categorically "good" or "bad." This assertion hinges on the recognition that their acts of speech and performance reflect their intellectual practices.

Aside from the identification of intelligence as a means of side-stepping and exceeding binarism and Manichean female constructs within the text in order to envisage a non-binary female subjectivity, this analysis has also produced another supposition about the depiction of women in *LEM* insofar as the Spanish Shahrazād is a subject

whose speech acts and physical performances are coordinated in order to attain effects, she demonstrates a synchrony between mind and body that epitomizes the maxim *mens sana in corpore sano*. This principle was one that was evolving and appreciated in medieval Western tradition. If we accept it as applying to a *woman* depicted in medieval Spanish literature, we may conjecture that *LEM* intimates that females might possess and exercise the same faculties as do males. If this is the case, then *LEM* makes a valuable, albeit indirect and apprehensive, contribution to medieval commentaries on gender.

In writing this dissertation, it has been my aim to show that we need not rely exclusively on binary constructs in order to understand and to write about medieval women; in fact, I venture to say that if we do so, we risk encasing them within a static framework that re-inscribes them according to the patriarchal values that women across the centuries have fought so hard to interrogate and transform. This is not to say that medieval women were not bound to the forces of patriarchy, as their lives were so enmeshed with and ordered by that system; however, when we analyze medieval narrative we might do so with the awareness that official ideologies existed alongside the unofficial and that humankind's conceptions regarding gender roles and existence shift through time and texts. With this in mind, we might see the theme of *engaño* as something that is problematised, not finalised, in *LEM*. This, in turn, might be understood as medieval man's coming to terms with something that contradicted what the dominant religious, medical, and social discourses of the day told him: that he had not proven the inferiority of women, and that he would have to begin to reconceptualise the ir place within the symbolic order.

Appendix

List of Stories in *Libro de los engaños de las mugeres*

Prólogo: Enxenplo del consejo de su muger. Enxenplo de la muger, en cómo apartó al Infante en el palacio e cómo, por lo que ella le dixo, olvidó lo que le castigara su maestro. Synopsis: In the first exemplum, King Alcos, desperate for an heir, is counselled by the favourite of his 90 wives (“aquella a quien él más quería”) who later bears his son. The king presents the son to his sages, who predict misfortune. The maturing prince is sent away to become educated by the wisest sage, Çendubete. Before releasing him, Çendubete checks the boy’s horoscope again and instructs him to observe a seven-day silence. The prince returns to the court, and the sage goes into hiding. In the second exemplum, the King’s favourite wife (“la cual amaba y honraba más”) uses the pretext of coaxing the Prince out of silence, tries to seduce him, fails, then accuses him of attempted rape. Since he is mute, counsellors intervene on his behalf to prevent the king from executing him. A trial ensues, with the wife versus the sages, and eventually, the prince. (The 23 interpolated tales begin.) At the end of the frame tale, the king makes his final judgment and orders that the wife be burned in a dry cauldron.

Cuento 1: Leo [This tale is included at the end of the prologue]. Synopsis: A king who desires a married woman sends her husband away to war and propositions her. She manages to indirectly shame him into leaving.

Cuento 2: Avis (Enxenplo del omne e de la muger e del papagayo e de su moça). Synopsis: An adulteress tricks a tell-tale parrot in order to deceive her husband.

Cuento 3: Lavator (Enxenplo de cómo vino la muger al segundo día ante el Rey llorando e dixo que matase su fijo). Synopsis: A launderer's son falls into the water, and the father, in his attempt to save his son, drowns with him.

Cuento 4: Panes (De cómo vino el segundo privado ante el Rey por escusar al Infante de muerte). Synopsis: A woman bakes and sells bread made from dough seasoned with the pus from the ulcers on her father's back. The men that buy it are disgusted when they find out.

Cuento 5: Gã dius (Enxenplo del señor, e del omne, e de la muger, e el marido de la muger, cómo se ayuntaron todos). Synopsis: An adulteress colludes with two paramours to deceive them and her husband.

Cuento 6: Striges (Enxenplo de cómo vino la muger al Rey al tercero día, diziéndole que matase su fijo). Synopsis: A king's son goes out hunting with one of his father's advisors, pursues a deer and finds himself alone. He rescues a crying female, who turns into a demon and chases and taunts him. He manages to escape.

Cuento 7: Mel (Enxenplo del tercero privado, del caçador e de las aldeas). Synopsis: A chain of deaths are caused, domino-style, by a drop of honey.

Cuento 8: Fontes (Enxenplo de cómo vino la muger e dixo que matase el Rey a su fijo, e dióle enxenplo de un fijo de un rey, e de un su privado cómo lo engañó). Synopsis: A king has a son who drinks from an enchanted fountain and is turned into a woman. A male demon, feeling sorry for him, joins him by also turning himself into a woman, but the demon becomes pregnant and cannot change himself back.

Cuento 9: Senescalcus (Enxenplo del quarto privado, e del bañador e de su muger).

Synopsis: A man arranges for his wife to commit adultery with a prince; when the husband reneges, the wife refuses to break the negotiation.

Cuento 10: Canicula (Enxenplo del omne e de la muger e de la vieja e de la perrilla).

Synopsis: A go-between tricks a woman into agreeing to have sexual relations with a man, who disappears. The go-between finds the woman's husband on the street, and brings him to her instead. When the woman finds out what he has come for, she becomes infuriated.

Cuento 11: Aper (Enxenplo de çommo vino al quinto día la muger, e dio enxemplo del puerco e del ximio). Synopsis: A pig dies from straining its neck while waiting for a monkey to throw it some food.

Cuento 12: Canis (Enxenplo del quinto privado, e del perro e de la culebra e del niño).

Synopsis: A man is looking after his child while his wife is away visiting family. His dog saves the child from being killed by a serpent. The man mistakenly kills the dog.

Cuento 13: Pallium (Enxenplo de la muger, e del alcaueta, del omne e del mercador, e de la muger que vendió el paño). Synopsis: A go-between arranges for a client to rape a woman, and she covers up the deceit when the woman's husband grows suspicious.

Cuento 14: Simia (Enxenplo de cómmo vino la muger al sescito día, e diol'enxenplo del ladrón e del león, en cómmo cabalgó en él). Synopsis: A thief rides on a lion for one whole night, then in the morning he kills a monkey. The lion runs away in fear of him.

Cuento 15: Turtures (Enxenplo del seseno privado, del palomo e de la paloma, que ayuntaron en uno el trigo en su nido). Synopsis: A male dove pecks its mate to death after mistakenly thinking she has eaten all of the wheat they have stored.

Cuento 16: Elephantinus (Enxe[n]plo del marido, e del segador e de la muger e de los ladrones que la tomaron a traición). Synopsis: Two thieves play a trick on a woman and she lies to her husband about it.

Cuento 17: Nomina (Del enxemplo de la diableza e del omne e de la muger, e de cómo el omne demandó los tres dones). Synopsis: A man is tricked by his wife into wasting the three wishes his demon ex-mistress granted him.

Cuento 18: Ingenia (Enxenplo del mançebo que non quería casar fasta que sopiese las maldades de las mugeres y De cómo al otavo día fabló el Infante e fue ant'el Rey). Synopsis: A man who thinks he knows every evil of women is tricked by one who tempts him.

Enxenplo de cómo vino la muger al seteno día antel rrey, quexando, e dixo que se quería quemar; e el rrey mando matar su fijo apriesa antes quella se quemase. Synopsis: The king's wife threatens to kill herself.

Cuento 19: Lac venenatum (Enxenplo del omne e de los que conbidó, e de la mançeba que enbió por la leche, e de la culebra que cayó la ponçoña). Synopsis: A domino-style chain of deaths occur after poison falls from the sky.

Cuento 20: Puer 4 annorum (Enxenplo de los dos niños sabios e de su madre e del mançebo). Synopsis: A small boy cries in order to get his mother to serve him more food, delaying the woman from seeing to a lover. He credits his father for having taught him how to do this.

Cuento 21: Puer 5 annorum (Enxenplo del niño de los çinco años, e de los conpañeros que l' dieron el aver a la vieja). Synopsis: A parentless 5 -year-old gives legal counsel to an old woman who was tricked by a thief.

Cuento 22: Senex caecus (Enxenplo del mercador del sándalo, e del otro mercador). Synopsis: An oldwoman helps a sandal merchant withstand the deceits of the men of her town.

Cuento 23: Abbas (Enxenplo de la muger e del clérigo e del fraile). Synopsis: An adulteress colludes with a friar and her paramour to deceive her husband.

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