

A Marginal Woman on the Loose: Revisiting Don Juan Manuel's Beguine

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In Chapter 42 of the *Conde Lucanor*, “De lo que contesçio a vna falsa veguina,” a deceitful Beguine infiltrates a household at the behest of the Devil. She is punished in the end, but not before causing the destruction of the husband and wife, their kin and much of the town. Patronio uses this tale to teach Count Lucanor to beware of *gatos religiosos*, religious hypocrites who pretend to piety while doing the Devil's work. Many parallels of this tale exist, some of which predate Don Juan Manuel by centuries,¹ but none gives the protagonist a religious identity. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel suggests that the new corporate identity of the protagonist in the *Conde Lucanor* reflects the anti-heterodox influence of the Dominican Order on Don Juan Manuel's thought (161-62).

Lida's interpretation privileges the supposed intentions of the author and implies we can access those intentions simply by opening the book. But which book do we open? Print editions of the *Conde Lucanor* give the illusion of a uniform and stable text that reflects the author's intention. However, when we look at the surviving manuscripts of the *Conde Lucanor*, we find a messy resistance to this supposed uniformity.² Neither the tale's title nor even its location can be depended upon to remain stable from manuscript to manuscript. Chapter 42 in S becomes in P, “Capítulo xlv. de commo vn buen omne e su muger fueron bueltos por dichos de vna falsa muger” (P:47r), and in H, “Enxiemplo xxxviii delo que contesçio al diablo con bna pelegrina” (H:81r). Out of the five manuscripts, the designation *beguina* only occurs in S. The other manuscripts refer to her as a *peregrina*³ (M, P, G, H), a *beata* (H),⁴ or as a *vieja* (P).⁵

What to do with these variants depends upon one's stance. Until recently, *Conde Lucanor* criticism tended to privilege the intentions of the author, uncertain as they may be. While I do not reject the author as irrelevant, for purposes of this study it is more profitable to take the approach of John Dagenais, who notes, “we can understand

¹ DeVoto (440-42) supplies a list of parallels, as does Ayerbe-Chaux, who provides texts for several versions (334-50).

² The five surviving manuscripts that contain the *Conde Lucanor* are: Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional 6376 (S): 15th century; Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional 4236 (M): 15th century; Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional 18415 (G): 16th century; Madrid, Real Academia Española 15 (P): 15th century; Madrid, Academia de la Historia 9-29-4/5843 (H): 15th century. For more references on these MSS, see *PhiloBiblon* (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Philobiblon/phhm.html>). When I cite a manuscript I will use the common letter designation followed by the folio number. All abbreviations have been silently expanded in my transcriptions from the manuscripts.

³ I will normalize the spelling of *beguina* and *peregrina*, except in direct quotations from manuscripts.

⁴ MS H alternates between *peregrina* and *beata*.

⁵ While MS P refers to her most often as a *vieja*, at one point she is referred to as “una vieja que dezjan que era pelegrina” (P:47v).

medieval authors best by seeing them as a special (and especially interesting) case of ‘reader.’ How does our view of medieval literature change [...] when we take as our premise the idea that the impetus for producing texts moves from reading and is conditioned by reading rather than from and by ‘creative’ authors?” (1994, 24). The reality of manuscript culture is that the writing process followed by “authors” to a great degree consisted of commenting on and adapting earlier texts. “Authors,” therefore, were readers of earlier texts, as were scribes, and in both cases their readings resulted in new texts, what Dagenais calls “scripta” (20). When we recognize this reality, which implies that even Don Juan Manuel wrote by reading, we can privilege variations in the text as other readings instead of dismissing them as departures from the “correct” text. As Dagenais asserts, they are “constitutive rather than destructive of the object we study” (1994, 18).

Taking as my premise, then, that manuscripts embody a paradigm of active, adaptive reading, I propose in this paper to examine the variants of the Beguine story as readings, each of which was “conditioned by and elaborated according to its *circunstancia*” (Dagenais 1994, 17). I will do this with two aims in mind. First, I suggest that each variant participates in distinct, but similar, discourses of marginality; each presents us with a marginal, possibly heterodox protagonist who is a danger to the community, although not for the same reasons. Second, I will suggest that this richer reading of the Beguine tale is only available to us if we move beyond the print paradigm of the stable text and embrace the instability of the manuscripts.

Dealing with variants

Don Juan Manuel’s own preemptive explanation for variants in his texts lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of sloppy scribes:

Et por que Don iohan vio e sabe que en los libros contesçe muchos yerros en los trasladar por que las letras semejan unas a otras cuydando por la una letra que es otra en escriviendolo mudasse toda la razon e por aventura confondesse e los que despues fallan aquello escripto ponen la culpa al que fizo el libro Et porque Don iohan se reçelo desto Ruega a los que leyeren qual quier libro que fuere trasladado del que el compuso o de los libros que el fizo que si fallaren alguna palabra mal puesta que non pongan la culpa a el fasta que bean el libro mismo que Don iohan fizo que es emendado en muchos logares de su letra [...] Et estos libros estan enl monesterio de los frayres predicadores que el fizo en peñafiel. (S:126rv)

Scholars have tended to see this as evidence of Don Juan Manuel’s self-awareness as an author (for example, see Sturm and MacPherson), and there is thus a tendency to treat the *Conde Lucanor* as the author’s work and defer to his supposed intentions. All print editions of the Beguine story privilege the reading in S, and depending on their

intention or their rigor, may or may not acknowledge the variant readings.⁶

From a philological point of view, scholars may be correct to privilege this manuscript. In his study of the *Conde Lucanor* manuscripts, Alberto Blecua attributes the variants in the Beguine story to scribal error due to “razones mecánicas” (29). He argues that because S abbreviates *beguina* as either *begⁱna* or *vegⁱna* it is likely that copyists of the other manuscripts tried to resolve similar abbreviations to a more familiar form: *vegⁱna* would have been resolved to *vieja*, and *begⁱna* may initially have been resolved to *pegⁱna*, a shortened form of *peregrina*. Thus, in contending that S most likely contains the correct reading, Blecua validates Don Juan Manuel’s view. Germán Orduna insists that Blecua’s argument disproves any notion that the variations might reflect the ideological interests of the copyists: “El estudio magistral de las variantes *beguina-vieja-peregrina* en el Ex. XLII revela una vez más la importancia de acudir a la crítica textual antes de aventurar comentarios textuales fundados en causas ideológicas” (Orduna 47). Indeed, if one begins with the assumption that what matters is what Don Juan Manuel intended, and that these intentions can be determined, then it seems natural to dismiss textual variants as careless or malicious distortions of the author’s text.

But while Blecua’s solution is compelling, and may adequately describe how *peregrina* and *vieja* found their way into their respective manuscripts, such an explanation says nothing about how those terms would have functioned once they got there. *Peregrina* and *vieja* are similar, but not synonymous, and each functions in the story in a way that a mere orthographical mistake cannot explain. Indeed, implicit in Blecua’s argument is the admission that scribes could have altered the text because they were unfamiliar with the term *beguina* or its abbreviations. For all their faults, scribes were attempting to make sense of the text for themselves and for future readers through their reading of an unfamiliar abbreviation. These scribal readings include a host of connotations that function perfectly well within the context of the overall story. Blecua’s solution leaves open the possibility that *beguina*, *peregrina*, and *vieja* all represent the intention of readers. Further, Blecua ascribes the presence of *beatas* in H not to “razones mecánicas” but to “contaminación” (29). This, too, could be taken as evidence of adaptive reading, as would the extra material found in M (see below). In adapting a text to suit a particular need, these scribes were not defying or diluting Don Juan Manuel, but were conforming to a model of reading that he himself had followed. After all, Don Juan Manuel was himself a reader who adapted prior material in

⁶ Juliá, Martínez Menchen, and Santana & Ruano do not indicate any variant readings. Sotelo outlines Lida de Malkiel’s theory of the term’s Dominican origin, but also mentions the alternative appearance of *peregrina* in Puñonrostro and Gonzalo de Argote’s 1575 print edition (Sotelo 245-46). However, he neither indicates the variants in the other manuscripts nor mentions that P usually refers to the woman as a *vieja*. On the other hand, Knust (181), Serés, and José Manuel Blecua all give serious treatment to the variants. Serés, especially, gives a lengthy source explanation (167-68), details on the Beguines (396-97), a few variants and a lengthy citation from Alberto Blecua (309-10). José Manuel Blecua treats the variants in his 1983 Gredos edition of Juan Manuel’s works, but does not in his 1969 Castalia edition.

creating the *Conde Lucanor*, as Ayerbe-Chaux demonstrates (13-20). But where Ayerbe-Chaux sees in Don Juan Manuel's use of source material evidence of a creative author,⁷ we should instead view him as an active, adaptive reader.

While Don Juan Manuel may have intended "Beguine," what word actually appears in the manuscript is another matter. Regardless of what Don Juan Manuel intended, or whether variants crept in through scribal intent or error, these scribes first and foremost were readers. With that in mind, I would like to examine the Beguine, the *peregrina*, the *beata* and the *vieja* as readings conditioned by their cultural contexts.

The Story

Let me first review the story as it appears in S. Lucanor asks Patronio, "qual era la manera que vn omne malo podria aver para fazer a todas las otras gentes cosa porque mas mal les veniesse" (S:165v). To answer this question Patronio tells a story about an evil Beguine who makes a deal with the Devil to ruin a happy marriage. The Beguine infiltrates the household by convincing the couple that she is a servant of the wife's family. Once inside the household she gains the confidence of the wife and begins to sow discord, telling the wife that the husband is being unfaithful and convincing the husband that his wife doubts his faithfulness. Finally, the Beguine tells the distressed wife that to win back her husband she will have to make a magic potion containing a hair from his neck. She then warns the husband that his jealous wife plans to kill him in his sleep. That night the husband pretends to fall asleep on his wife's lap and waits while she takes out a knife. As soon as he feels the blade on his neck he grabs it and cuts her throat. The murder leads to successive acts of retribution until the entire village is annihilated. When her role in the calamity is discovered the Beguine is cruelly executed: "Fizieron della muchas malas justicias e dieronle muy mala muerte e muy cruel" (S:166v). After finishing the story, Patronio interprets it for the Count:

Et vos señor conde lucanor queredes saber qual es el pior omne del mundo e de que mas mal puede venir a las gentes sabet que es el que se muestra por buen cristiano e por omne bueno e leal e la su entençion es falsa e anda asacando falsedades e mentiras por meter mal entre llas gentes Et conseivos yo que siempre vos guardedes de los que vierdes que se fazen gatos religiosos que los mas dellos sienpre andan con mal e con engaño.
(S:166v)

Then so that the Conde might know these hypocrites, Patronio quotes the biblical injunction "por las sus obras los cognoscereis" ("You will know them by their fruits," Matt. 7:16). He adds, "ca çierto sabet que non a omne enl mundo que muy

⁷ As does Guillermo Serés, who writes that "en ninguna de tales versiones antiguas alcanza la narración la maestría de que la dota don Juan Manuel [. . .]" (167).

luengamente pueda encubrir las obras que tiene en la voluntat” (S:166v).

In its general form this tale resembles several parallel versions that antedate, co-exist with or post date the *Conde Lucanor*. These include, among others, the *Libro de las delicias*, by Joseph Ben Meir Ibn Sabara (Chapter 11), Etienne de Bourbon (no. 245), the *Speculum Laicorum* (no. 463), the “Poema de Adolfo,” and the *Scala Coeli* (no. 610).⁸ In each of these versions, the protagonist is a repugnant old woman who not only consorts with but bests the Devil at his own game.

In the hands of Dominican preachers, the story is essentially a warning that lying tongues do the Devil’s work better than the Devil himself, as in the *Speculum Laicorum*; in this version the Devil promises the old woman a pair of shoes as payment, and when it comes time to deliver he gives them to her at the end of a long stick. When she asks him to come closer the Devil responds that he does not dare because he is afraid she will deceive him (quoted in Ayerbe-Chaux 339). The husband and wife do not necessarily die in these other tellings. In the *Poema de Adolfo*, roughly contemporary with the *Conde Lucanor*, when the husband feels the knife against his throat he leaps up and beats his wife repeatedly. The poem then adds: “A los que unió la divinidad los separó Venus” (quoted in Ayerbe-Chaux 342). The old woman standing as a surrogate for Venus will become important for us later. Although the old woman is shown consorting with the Devil, none of these parallel versions of the story—Dominican or otherwise—identifies the old woman as a Beguine; as mentioned earlier, Lida suggested that the Beguine was an innovation either of Don Juan Manuel or of his more immediate sources (162). Giving the woman a religious identity allows S to transform a generic (even comic) tale about lying into a somber warning of the menace represented by the heterodox Beguines. To understand the threat posed by the Beguines we must take a closer look at how they were perceived in the Spain of the 14th century (when the *Conde Lucanor* was written) and the 15th century (when S was copied).

The Beguine

The Beguine and Beghard movement began in the Low Countries in the second half of the 12th century and later spread across Europe, including into Spain. Robert E. Lerner, writing in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, distinguishes between the Beguines and Beghards of Northern Europe, and the Beguins, “male and female members of the Third Order of St. Francis [...] who lived in Languedoc, Catalonia, and neighboring areas of southern France and northeastern Spain in the late thirteenth century and first quarter of the fourteenth century” (162). Antonio Oliver does not make that distinction, and where Lerner reports that the Beguin movement had been “wiped out by around 1330” (Lerner 163), Oliver notes that there were *beguinas* and *beguinos* in Spain, including Castile, long after that date. Oliver writes that in Spain,

⁸ See DeVoto 440 and Ayerbe-Chaux 13-14 for more parallels. Ayerbe-Chaux (340-42) provides a Spanish version of the Latin “Poema de Adolfo.”

“el nombre designa a los terciarios franciscanos, auténticos o no, que abrazaron las ideas de los fraticelos” (162); the *fraticelli* were Franciscans who sought to separate themselves from the Order to live a more spiritual life (160-62). Although associated with the Franciscan Third Order, Beguines were not cloistered. They did not have to live in communities and could live in their own homes if they desired. They could also return freely to the secular world (Cuscó i Clarasó 51; Cortijo 57).

Their association with voluntary poverty movements made them suspect. To quote Lida, “la pobreza absoluta que predicaban los fraticelli, la renuncia a la propiedad individual en favor de la comunidad evangélica que practicaban valdenses y beguinos, equivalía a una condena implícita del orden social establecido” (158). The suppression of what the church viewed as the more heterodox forms of Franciscan spiritual movements began under Pope John XXII in 1317. Indeed, writes Hauf i Valls, by the 15th century Beguines represented a “paradigma de corrupción” (17). Juan Manuel’s Beguine tale thus represents a “claro rechazo del ideal ascético de renuncia” practiced by the Franciscans (18).

The popular image of the Beguine in the fifteenth century seems to be one of an uncloistered woman who has taken no vow, is bound by no rule, belongs to no community, who actively seeks to subvert social norms while wearing the mask of piety. If official disapproval was accompanied by a popular backlash against people who were seen as acting “holier than the pope” (Lerner 163), then it makes sense that

Don Juan Manuel would use *beguina* to signify hypocritical and false piety.

Assuming that it was Don Juan Manuel who inserted the Beguine, then we have to recognize that, like a Dominican preacher, he has adapted a well-known story to his own –or his audience’s– needs. Patronio’s interpretation of the tale can be read as a condemnation of specific practices associated with the Beguines. The worst possible person, according to Patronio, is one who pretends to be a good Christian while sowing evil among the people, precisely the sort of criticism leveled against the group. This shifts the focus from the dangers of lying tongues to the dangers posed by religious hypocrites. Changing the woman’s identity to that of a Beguine allows Patronio to cast the story in such a way that it answers the Conde’s question: What is the worst kind of person? A religious hypocrite. S, or perhaps Don Juan



Beguina. *Des dodes dantz* (Lübeck, 1489)

Manuel himself, has taken an earlier popular tale and in reading it has restructured it.

The *peregrina*

While Don Juan Manuel may have chosen the word *beguina*, the fact that every other manuscript refers to the woman as a *peregrina* cannot be disregarded. Like *beguina*, the word *peregrina* also carries with it centuries of baggage, in this case associated with the Europe-wide phenomenon of pilgrimage and resistance to it, both in ecclesiastical and popular culture. Also like *beguina*, *peregrina* functions as verbal shorthand, a signifier that signals to the reader that he is dealing with a recognizable type.

The protagonist is depicted in M as “vna muger destas pelegrinas que andan por el mundo ¶ de romeria en romeria et de roma a iherusalem e a santiago e a las otras perdonanças” (M:74v). She is not only a pilgrim, but a serial pilgrim. The scribe’s tone of animosity reveals his disapproval of this excessive display of piety. This animosity is reinforced when we arrive at the woman’s eventual punishment. MS S reports simply that “fizieron della muchas malas justicias e dieronle muy mala muerte e muy cruel” (S:166v). But in M the woman’s demise is depicted with grisly detail: “E [...] fizieron della justicia e dieronle muy mala muerte e muy cruel cortandole pies e manos e sacandole el coraçon e ala fyn fue lançada en vn grant fuego (M:76v-77r).

To account for this fierce condemnation, we must reflect that MS M (along with H, G, and to a certain extent, P), is participating in a discourse on pilgrimage and opposition to pilgrimage that had been underway for nearly 1,000 years by the time this manuscript was copied. As far back as Merovingian Gaul, together with the notion of pilgrimage as a saving act of devotion, a parallel discourse criticized pilgrimages undertaken for the wrong reasons (Constable 127). Even in the early middle ages, there was a sense that many pilgrims were moved more by a desire for adventure or even what we would call tourism than religious devotion. Particularly strong criticism was directed toward monks and nuns who sought sanctity on the road instead of in the cloister: the Benedictine Rule strongly condemned *gyrovagi*, monks who “spent their entire lives wandering from place to place following their own wills” (Constable 130).⁹ Further, the practice of assigning pilgrimages as penance eventually became co-opted by secular authorities who assigned pilgrimage as a punishment for crime. Thus, the image of the pilgrim became tainted with these unsavory elements that the road attracted. As Marta González Vázquez relates, instead of pious travelers, pilgrims begin to be seen as vagabonds, misfits, and criminals (50).

Pilgrimage was deemed especially dangerous for women. In 747, St. Boniface “urged the archbishop of Canterbury to prohibit pilgrimages to Rome by women, many of whom became prostitutes in the towns of Italy and France” (Constable 127). González Vázquez notes that “Bertoldo de Ratisbona, franciscano, consideraba que las peregrinaciones realizadas por mujeres no eran en absoluto positivas, ya que llevaban

⁹ For more on *gyrovagi*, see Dietz 88-105.

consigo más pecados que indulgencias” (48). Pilgrimage continued to be popular, “but serious folk were more inclined to stress the dangers and difficulties than the benefits of pilgrimage” (Constable 144). Good women, it was felt, were better off attending to their duties at home.



‘Pilgrims’, Santa Croce (Augsburg), altarpiece by Hans Burgkmair the Elder (15th c.)

The pilgrim woman depicted in these manuscripts, going from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, never returning to the home or community that ought to anchor her, is tainted by association with the unsavory types that lived on the move. The warning against “gatos religiosos” would still seem to apply. As with the Beguine, we are confronted with a woman at large, bound neither to home nor to cloister. If religious, she is outside the bounds of her community, ignoring the recommendations and exhortations that those who have taken vows should not leave their cloisters. If a laywoman, she is tainted as a woman traveling alone by association with the criminal element on the road. In each case, though, she is a woman who is outwardly pious, but unrestrained by society’s conventions.

The *beata*

The *beata* occupies a curious middle ground between Beguines and *peregrinas*. H alternates between *beata* and *peregrina* as if the two terms were synonymous, which, in a sense, they are. Covarrubias describes a *beata* as “mujer en habito religioso, que fuera de la comunidad en su casa particular professa el celibato y vive con recogimiento, ocupandose en oración, y en obras de caridad” (202). Angus MacKay

notes that *beatas*, like the Beguines, “were pious women who were not bound by formal vows” (32). These were laywomen of religious vocation, but who were not nuns, perhaps because they lacked the resources to become nuns. The parallels with the Beguines are obvious, but just as obviously, when the old woman from our story is described as a *mala beata* or a *mala peregrina* or a *falsa beguina* the connotation is not that of a holy woman who does works of charity. According to Teófilo Ruíz, by the 15th century, when H was copied, the *beata* had become a recognizable type: a religious groupie who would travel from shrine to shrine in the retinue of a popular preacher, much like the serial pilgrim described above. He further suggests that *beatas* were associated in the popular imagination with *alcahuetas* (109). MacKay also shows how the language used to describe these lower-class women is the same as that used to describe prostitutes, and suggests that in the popular perception, a *beata* actually is a former prostitute (36).¹⁰

The *beata*, then, is a woman with the outward appearance of piety, but associated in the popular mind with prostitutes and *alcahuetas*. Like the Beguine, she is a pseudo-religious, who wears a habit and sometimes lives in a community, but is not bound by a rule to that community. Like the pilgrim, there is the taint of the woman on the move, inattentive to her home duties. We also have the implication of sexual impropriety. We have the sense, then, that the religious habit is a mask meant to conceal a much more predatory person.

The *vieja*

While religious hypocrisy plays an important role in the story, especially in light of Patronio’s advice to Lucanor about *gatos religiosos*, there is another element to this woman that bears investigation. She is a *falsa beguina* or a *falsa peregrina* or a *mala beata* to be sure, but as P makes clear, she is first and foremost a *vieja*.¹¹

An elderly woman in late medieval or early modern Spain is likely to be a widow. MacKay writes, “all traditional societies contained more widows than widowers. Put another way, there were more women than men aged over forty. Consequently, by the time a woman reached the age of forty she might have had two husbands and, if she survived, was likely to remain a widow” (30-31). A widow of limited means would have to work for a living; the “obvious trades” mentioned by MacKay include “domestic service or the laundry” (31-32). It is worth noting that in the Ibn Sabara version of the story, the old woman is, in fact, a laundress, who meets the Devil by the riverbank (Forteza-Rey 213). It also must be pointed out that “at least for some users of the language *lavandera* and *camisera* were synonyms for *puta*” (MacKay 35). These tenuous connections, of course, are not enough to merit the opprobrium the

¹⁰ MacKay quotes a proverb to buttress this assertion: “Put a primavera, alcahueta otoñal y beata invernal” (37).

¹¹ Riggs notes that the *vetula*, or elderly go-between, dates back to Ovid and became a popular stock figure in medieval Latin and vernacular literatures (367).

woman attracts in this tale, although they begin to point us in an interesting direction.

To investigate further we need to take look again at the outline of the tale as told in P: an old woman makes a deal with the Devil to infiltrate a household; she gains entry to the household using deceit and begins to sow doubt; she recommends the use of a magic potion, which ultimately sparks a grotesque act of violence that destroys an entire community; she is punished. As already mentioned, there is a sense in which *beatas* were associated in the popular imagination with *alcahuetas*, and I suggest that a focus on the protagonist's activities as an old woman (rather than as a *gato religioso*) makes that association all the more clear. Whereas an *alcahueta* gains access to homes by stealth in order to arrange illicit unions, the old woman in this story gains access by stealth in order to destroy a licit union. The ends may be different, but the means are the same. Further, she achieves her end through the promise (though not the delivery) of a magic potion, which suggests that she is also a *hechicera*.



The professions of *alcahueta* and *hechicera* were exercised by women on the margins of society who were fully aware that what they were doing was subversive and could result in death. Heath Dillard writes that “the *alcahueta*, unlike the prostitute, threatened to subvert hearth, home and the arranged marriage, the very foundations of municipal settlement. Thus she, unlike the prostitute, frequently merited the death penalty, often a most ignominious execution on the pyre” (201). The *hecichera*, who “dealt in sympathetic, incantatory and pharmacological magic” was another woman who “likewise undermined the social stability of urban communities” (Dillard 201). Dillard goes on to write that those women convicted of practicing the “black arts” were burned (202). What Dillard describes seems a likely explanation for the punishment we saw in M. The savage punishment described in P rivals that found in M: “E fizieron della tantas justiçias fasta quelos pedaços sele cayeron bjua (P:48v). Let me suggest that the gruesome death described in both manuscripts is merited not by the woman's suspect religiosity, but by her profession.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to address two points. The first is a specific point having to do with the story I have been discussing. Whether she is a Beguine, a *peregrina*, a *beata* or simply a *vieja*, we have a marginal woman, thought by popular perception to be actively subverting social norms. The Beguine, *peregrina* and *beata* shade this woman as a religious hypocrite, while the *vieja* makes it clear that this heterodox

woman strongly resembles the *alcahueta* and *hechicera* so vividly brought to life later in the *Celestina*. Despite the addition of a religious identity in some versions, the crux of the story remains the danger represented by certain women who are unrestrained by society's conventions.

A woman at large is a suspect woman. As Cristina Segura Graíño points out, public spaces in the middle ages are male territory, while women occupy private spaces: "Los hombres y las mujeres que no aceptan esta situación, que no se adecúan al modelo establecido y pretenden actuar fuera del ámbito al que están destinados son unos transgresores, rebeldes, seres peligrosos en suma" (Segura 54). Thus, women who opt not to confine themselves to private space and instead venture into public spaces are, almost by definition, bad women.

Among these bad women who pass from private into public space are those who "pretendan expresar su pensamiento de forma oral o escrita" (Segura 60). Segura paints with a very broad brush and is perhaps too categorical in her depiction of medieval home and public life. Nevertheless, it is useful to note that of all the characters in the Beguine story, the one who most effectively uses her voice is the old woman herself. It is she who uses deceit to charm her way to the house, invading the private space occupied by the good woman, and proceeds to wreak havoc on all concerned. Recall that in the original story, the moral admonition against lying tongues is epitomized not by a lying man, but by a stereotypical bad woman who straddles the public and private spheres, belonging to neither and subverting both.

My second, and more general, point is that in order to be able to explore those dimensions of the story one must move outside the print paradigm, which assumes a stable text written by an author, and into a manuscript paradigm, which assumes an unstable text constantly modified and rewritten by readers.¹²

As we have seen with the fluctuations among *beguina* / *peregrina* / *beata* / *vieja*, we are not dealing with a single, uniform text. Blecua's "mechanical" argument notwithstanding, we need to recognize that all three terms represent readings (or misreadings) of the text. If we assume that Don Juan Manuel is the one who made the woman a Beguine, then he did it as a reader who took a story about the danger of lying tongues and adapted it to fit the prejudices of the Dominican Order, not as an enormously talented writer who added nuance and psychological depth absent in the earlier stories (as Serés and Ayerbe-Chaux would have it). Later scribes, conditioned by the ongoing discourses on pilgrimage, *beatas*, and *viejas*, adapted it further. All these readings have taken a short, even comical tale and made it more harrowing. The almost charming old woman who can outfox the Devil becomes in the *Conde Lucanor* a malevolent witch and *alcahueta* whose actions spell doom. While some versions give us a heterodox villain, the common thread that ties these versions together is the danger presented by marginal women who have no ties to a husband or community.

The texts we call the *Conde Lucanor* are participants in a vibrant manuscript

¹² For a discussion on different approaches to 'manuscript culture', see *La Corónica* 26.2: 133-94, with a response from Dagenais (*ibid.* 258-69). See also *La Corónica* 27.2 (171-232).

tradition in which readers play a vital role. Critical attempts to privilege Don Juan Manuel as author focus on his intention and tend to ignore that the model established in the text (and followed by Don Juan Manuel himself) calls for an active reader who transforms the text in the process of reading it. While it is important to recognize Juan Manuel's efforts as an author we must also recognize the irony inherent in his failed attempt at textual preservation. His master copy no longer exists. That we have the book at all we owe to the very processes he took such great pains to prevent. The reading practices that Juan Manuel most feared were those of scribes who, as he points out, often made mistakes. Whether through mistakes or deliberate choices, each manuscript version of the *Conde Lucanor* exists in the form it does because readers made it that way. When we turn to the manuscripts, the abstract construction of the function of the reader becomes a concrete expression of how real readers responded. In the end, the *Conde Lucanor*—like every text—is only what its readers make of it.

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