

**The *Libro de buen amor*:
Work of *Mudejarismo* or Augustinian Autobiography?¹**

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The enigmatic nature of the fourteenth-century *Libro de buen amor* has long left critics at odds regarding crucial aspects of the work.² It has been read both as a clergyman's seduction manual and as a moralizing treatise designed to lead the sinner to salvation. The work's formal characteristics, which include its pseudo-autobiographical narration and its combination of lyric poetry and *mester de clerecía*, instead of clarifying how the work is meant to be read, have further problematized attempts to definitively categorize the work and the author's intent. Uncertainty surrounding the identity of the author and intended audience has complicated attempts to ascertain the intended meaning of the work. Clues to the author's identity and also the possible audience of the *LBA* come exclusively from the text itself. Beyond the fact that he was a learned, fourteenth-century inhabitant of Castile little can definitively be said regarding the work's author. While I have chosen to refer to the author in the singular, it must be pointed out that the *LBA* could, in fact, be several independent compositions by several different authors incorporated into one text over time.³ The erudition displayed in the *LBA* provides important clues to the author's identity and cultural frame of reference, revealing that he was familiar not only with Biblical texts, popular lyric poetry, the art of the sermon, and possibly Latin elegiac comedy, but also with dialectical Andalusí Arabic, Jewish dietary customs and ritual traditions, as well as Arab music.⁴ *LBA* criticism, which, over the last hundred years, has tended to focus on the work's indebtedness to Latin scholastic culture and posit its author as a product of the Christian tradition of medieval Europe, is divided regarding the extent to which Arab or Hebrew works may have served as models for the *LBA*—questioning the extent to which such works would have been part of the cultural legacy of the work's fourteenth-century Castilian author.

¹ This study has its origins in the N. E. H. Summer Seminar, the "*Libro de buen amor* in Cultural Context," organized by Michael Gerli at the University of Virginia (June 9-July 12, 2003). Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this study do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment of the Humanities. A preliminary version of the paper was prepared for the panel, "Locating al-Andalus in Ibero-Medieval Studies," sponsored by the Ibero-Medieval Association of North America at the 2004 International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo. Because of weather and flight delays I was unable to give the paper.

² The title most often used to designate the work, *Libro de buen amor*, is that proposed by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *Poesía árabe y poesía europea* (139-45), based on the work's reference to itself as "libro de buen amor" (*coplas* 13 and 933). John Dagenais (xix) points out that the work was referred to as the *Libro del Arçipreste de Hita* by medieval and Renaissance readers. For a discussion of the three manuscript witnesses, MSS S (Biblioteca de la Universidad de Salamanca MS 2663), T (Biblioteca Nacional Va-6-1), and G (Real Academia Española), as well as the fragment in Portuguese, MS P, see G. B. Gybbon-Monypenny, "Introduction," (79-80). Subsequently, I refer to the *Libro de buen amor* with the abbreviation *LBA*. All references are to Gybbon-Monypenny's 1988 edition.

³ A series of articles over the last 30 years has yet to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt the identity of Juan Ruiz, author of the *LBA*. The possible candidates include Juan Ruiz de Cisneros (Sáez y Trenchs, Márquez Villanueva), any one of a number of Juan Ruizes professionally active between 1380 and 1382 found in archival sources by Ansgar Kelley (1987, 1988), and the *madrileño* named Juan Ruiz who served as witness to a 1330 document found by Francisco Hernández (1984, 1987-88). The issue of a possible Latin scholastic audience for the *LBA* is addressed in Jeremy Lawrance.

⁴ In the *LBA* there is a reference to the Jews' guarding of the Torah scrolls (*copla* 78) and their dietary customs (1183), a dialogue containing vernacular Arabic (1508-12), and a detailed discussion on Arab musical instruments and musical styles (1228-34).

The influence of the Arabic *maqāmāt*—a genre of rhymed prose narratives—on the *LBA* was first suggested by the Arabist Francisco Fernández y González in 1894, and critics such as Américo Castro and María Rosa Lida de Malkiel again pointed out the *LBA*'s debt to the Semitic-Andalusī genres of the *maqāmāt* and the *risalā* (specifically Ibn Ḥazm's *Tawq al-Ḥamāma*) in the 1950s and the 1960s. Américo Castro (1948) describes the *LBA* as a unique and innovative work of *mudejarismo* combining Moorish and Christian elements: "Su arte consistió en dar sentido cristiano a hábitos y temas islámicos, y es así paralelo al de las construcciones mudéjares tan frecuentes en su tiempo" (360). He again addresses Arabic influence on the *LBA* in 1954 with *La realidad histórica de España*. Then Lida de Malkiel shifts focus to the Hebrew Literature of Iberia in *Two Spanish Masterpieces* (1961) and "Nuevas notas para la interpretación del *Libro de buen amor*" (1966). However, Medieval Iberian Studies has done relatively little to follow up the cross-cultural dialogue Lida de Malkiel and Castro opened with their pioneering studies of the 1950s and 60s. In the meantime, several of the major studies of the last forty years (for example, those of Gybbon-Monypenny, Marina Brownlee, Catherine Brown, and Michael Gerli) have continued to study the *Libro de buen amor* in the context of Latin scholasticism.

In this study I will first briefly discuss these contemporary critical opinions that seek to explain both the form and authorial intent of the *LBA* as modeled upon certain canonical works of the Latin scholastic tradition, chiefly St. Augustine's *Confessions*, *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Magistro*. I then present equally compelling parallels between the *LBA* and *Sefer Taḥkemonī* (c. 1208), a collection of fifty *maqāmāt* by the thirteenth-century Judeo-Spanish author, Judah al-Ḥarīzī.

The Prose Prologue and the Augustinian Approach

Most critics who have posited a relationship between the *LBA* and the works of Augustine do so on the basis of the *LBA*'s ninety-seven line prose prologue found in MS S, which includes the following:

Fiz esta chica escriptura en memoria de bien, e conpuse este nuevo libro, en que son escriptas algunas maneras e maestrías e sotilezas engañosas del loco amor del mundo que usan algunos para pecar. Las quales, leyendo las e oyendo las omne o muger de buen entendimiento que se quiera salvar, descogerá e obrar lo ha [...] Enpero, por que es umanal cosa el pecar, si algunos, lo que non los consejo, quisieren usar del loco amor, aquí fallarán algunas maneras para ello. E ansí este mi libro a todo omne o muger, al cuerdo e al non cuerdo, al que entendiere el bien e escogiere salvación e obrare bien, amando a Dios; otrosí al que quisiere el amor loco; en la carrera que andudiere, puede cada uno bien dezir: 'Intellectum tibi dabo, e çetera.' (109-10)

The author states that his work will serve both the good and the bad reader, albeit to achieve different ends.

Pierre Ullman's 1967 study is one of the first relating the *LBA* to the works of St. Augustine. Ullman maintains that the *LBA*'s prologue is modeled upon the Augustinian concept of voluntarism, i.e. Augustine's advocacy of the use of free will, not determinism, in the

attainment of salvation. It is up to the reader to avoid inordinate desire ('amor loco').⁵ While Ullman examines the relationship between Augustine's idea that inordinate desire (*cupiditas*) leads the soul to sin and Juan Ruiz's similar treatment of sin and carnal desire, Michalski focuses on the *LBA* as a parody of the autobiographical form of Augustine's *Confessions*. Michalski thinks the *LBA* is, in fact, a type of anti-*Confessions*, i.e. instead of being told the story of how the narrator came to salvation, we are told how he fell into a life of sin: "Juan Ruiz...imaginó escribir unas *Confesiones* cuyo protagonista contaría la progresión de su vida en el sentido contrario del de San Agustín" (69). The protagonist's actions in the rest of the book belie what he tells us in the prologue. Michalski is careful to state that he does not believe Augustine's *Confessions* to be the only source for the *LBA*'s autobiography: "Me parece bastante obvio que en el poema convergen muchas influencias literarias" (n 33 70).

While Ullman and Michalski's early studies exploring the relationship between Juan Ruiz and Augustine's works address the similar manner that the *LBA* and the *Confessions* (both autobiographical accounts that include erotic adventures) treat sin and man's proclivity for it, the most significant studies of the last two and a half decades (Gerli 1982, 2002, 2005; Brownlee 1985 and 1989) have focused on Juan Ruiz's supposed adoption of an Augustinian hermeneutic, a conception of interpretation influenced by contemporary scholastic debate regarding appropriate methods of correcting bad behavior (Haywood 29).

This approach is first taken by Michael Gerli (1982b), who posits Augustine's *De Magistro* as the model for Juan Ruiz's theory of teaching and language. The instructor's role is not to teach the truth, but to guide the individual to discover his own inner truths: "For Augustine, each person possesses an inner light, an inherent sense of moral truth [...] They must be presented with situations apt to lead to the discovery of inner wisdom [...] which every rational soul seeks out" (503). According to Augustine, wisdom will reveal itself to the person who seeks it "according to his capacity to grasp it by reason of the good or evil disposition of his will" (Augustine *De Magistro* 11, 38, qtd. in Gerli 1982b, 503).

Gerli takes up this idea again in 2005, focusing on the concept of *invenire*, "el tropo maestro de la retórica y hermenéutica medievales, sobre todo las que derivan de la tradición agustiniana de la enseñanza de la lectura y la oratoria sagradas" (72).⁶ According to Gerli, the *de inveniendo* of Augustine, i.e. the continual need to look for and discover the meaning of the text in the act of reading, was the motivating force behind the exegetical tradition of the Middle Ages (72-73). The active role of the reader—a reader faced with continual choices between "good" and "bad" readings / understandings of the text—was an integral part of the conceptual model developed to explain the reading and thought process itself. Gerli posits that it is in the writings of Augustine where the meditative method of reading most fruitfully connects with the idea of the *ductus*—the mental model that was used in medieval European rhetoric to structure the thought and memory processes as if they were *loci* or spaces within a structure through which the intellect passed (69-70). Juan Ruiz, following Augustine, uses the path as a metaphor for the mental path the reader or thinker takes to navigate through the different spaces or geographies of thought (Gerli 75). In Gerli's opinion, the prose prologue found in the S manuscript of the *LBA*, Juan Ruiz's own gloss of Psalm 31 which he offers as a guide to his readers, requires a knowledge of the hermeneutic model of *de inveniendo*, which is best articulated in Augustine's *De Doctrina Cristiana* (76).

⁵ For a similar position see Luis Jenaro-MacLennan.

⁶ I would like to thank Michael Gerli for his kind assistance in attaining a copy of his article and other material from the collection *El libro de buen amor de Juan Ruiz, Arcipreste de Hita* that appeared in print only days before I finished this article.

According to this theory, a “good reader” of the text will arrive at a “good” reading; “A través de Cristo, la palabra encarnada, llegamos al conocimiento de Dios, definiendo así nuestra meta, y en nuestra lectura privilegiamos las interpretaciones de ‘buen entendimiento’” (Gerli 77). This good reader seems necessarily to be a good Christian, i.e. someone who wants to find Christ.

Catherine Brown also maintains that the *LBA* must be read within the realm of medieval Christian exegesis. Like Gerli she focuses on the process, “theory and poetics of textual teaching” (17). The basis of this hermeneutic is Biblical contradiction or polysemy, which demands an active and attentive reader—in fact, it demands exegesis. For Brown, “Augustine...is quite clear that the thing evoked in a scriptural figuration may signify in contrary ways, being used in one place in a good sense (*in bono*) and another in an evil sense (*in malo*),” concluding that “one thing may have significations which are not contrary but diverse” (29). As Brown puts it, “the more interpretations, in this view, the merrier—so long as they are made in double allegiance to the faith and to the text” (31). The *LBA* is, for Brown, similar to the Scriptures because of its contradictory nature—espousing both love of the flesh and love of God (117). In this however, Brown admits that the *LBA* departs from Augustine’s *Doctrina*, which maintains the two as mutually exclusive and as existing in opposition (116).

For Marina Brownlee (1985, 1989), the prose introduction of the *LBA* is a rewriting of Augustine’s *Confessions* such that it reveals Juan Ruiz’s own theory of reading. For Brownlee both works are erotic memoirs that underscore the importance of memory. The *Confessions* is a narrative of memories, particularly those of Augustine’s past life as a sinner, designed to persuade and “convert” the reader. However for Juan Ruiz, “[m]emory lacks the corrective power with which Augustine invests it. And as a result, the Archpriest decides to write a book entirely from the perspective of a sinner, whose poor memory makes him continually susceptible to earthly temptation” (1985, 30-31). As Brownlee acknowledges, “the Archpriest does not engage in persuasive Christian rhetoric, he is not explicitly trying to convert his readers because for him reading cannot logically perform this function” (1985, 32). Additionally, while Augustine confesses to having been a successful lover, Juan Ruiz presents himself as a bumbling failed lover (quite unlike Augustine) (1985, 33). In spite of some rather significant differences between the *Confessions* of Augustine and the *LBA*, Brownlee clearly believes the *LBA* is a product of the Latin scholastic tradition—what she calls the “Christian literary tradition.” However, she does not deny the validity of Castro and Lida de Malkiel’s position, stating that her own position privileging the Latin, Christian tradition, “does not deny the potential importance of the Libro’s use of Semitic models” (1985, 17).

Gerli, in his 2002 article, revisits Brownlee’s study, claiming to have found a textual link between the episode of the Greeks and Romans and Augustine’s *De Doctrina*. In the *doctrina* we find Augustine discussing the fact that a letter can mean one thing to the Greeks and something else to the Romans, as for example the letter *beta*, which to the Greeks is a letter of the alphabet, but for the Romans means vegetable. In the Augustinian version two different opinions regarding the same sign are arrived at by Greeks and Romans, yet there still exist several differences between the Augustinian passage and the episode of the *LBA*, namely there is no debate, nor any narrative structure. Much closer written textual analogues—both narratives—include Accursius’s thirteenth-century gloss of Book 1, Tit. 2 of the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, Justinian’s law codes, and the thirteenth-century French work, *Placides et Timéo ou li secrés as philosopes*. Several studies suggest the episode (and most likely Accursius’s thirteenth-century version of it) springs from an ancient and widely disseminated oral tradition that includes jokes, riddles and stories designed to

illustrate the ambiguity of language and communication (De Looze 138-41).⁷

Now, if we doubt that there exists a direct textual link between the episode of the Romans and Greeks and the *De Doctrina*, we are faced with the fact that, despite the proliferation of studies comparing Augustine's work and the *LBA*, there still exists no proof that the author of the *LBA* ever read Augustine. Gerli himself admits:

Although until now no direct textual connections to Augustine's writings have been established, today the conclusions concerning the likely Augustinian underpinnings of the *Libro de buen amor* seem to be generally accepted and constitute a necessary point of departure for research into the *Libro's* medieval intellectual roots. (2002, 413)

The lack of direct textual evidence linking Augustine's work and the *LBA* has not proven an insurmountable obstacle to the consideration of influence. As Gerli points out, we can still accept the likely influence of the one upon the other. The line of inquiry that Peter Ullman opened in 1967 and that Michael Gerli has continued to develop over the last twenty years has, in fact, produced some of the most significant studies of the *LBA* in recent criticism.⁸ Where though are the corresponding studies developing the theory of the work's *mudejarismo* as first suggested by Castro in 1948 and then taken up in the 1960s by Ullman's contemporary, Lida de Malkiel? The works indebtedness to the culture of al-Andalus is not taken up in a serious way until Francisco Márquez Villanuevas' study, *Orígenes y sociología del tema celestinesco* (1993), and then only in so far as it relates to the *Celestina*.⁹ On the other hand, critics such as Gybbon-Monypenny, Alberto Blecuá and Richard Burkard dismiss Castro and Lida de Malkiel's theory, insisting it is unnecessary given the existence of "Western" works (Iberian works written in Hebrew and Arabic have seemingly been excluded from this category) that could serve as models for the *LBA*.¹⁰

⁷ See Laurence De Looze for a detailed discussion of the episode in European and world folklore, as well as a discussion of how the *LBA* version compares to the Old French and Accursius's gloss. The episode conforms to the folkloric motif of sign language used to deliver a message (Z175 in Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*). As De Looze points out, Reinhold Köhler traces the tale's origin to India.

⁸ John Dagenais' book is one of the series of studies resulting from this line of inquiry. He points to inspiration in Michael Gerli's 1982 article comparing the approach to reading found in Augustine and in the *LBA*: "Gerli's reading of 'Augustine's ethics' points the way to the *Libro* that I discuss in this study, a book that engages its reader in a dynamic process, a process that, because it involves choices and actions, is necessarily ethical" (22). Dagenais, however, and more appropriately given his position regarding medieval authorship and the impossibility of determining it, does not restrict the medieval hermeneutics of reading to Augustine or the Latin literature of Christian Europe, but speaks more generally of reading and glossing in the Middle Ages as an almost universal phenomenon: "Ethical reading is not the only form of medieval reading, but it is the most characteristic and the most common" (8).

⁹ There have been at least two articles that briefly discuss al-Ḥarīzī's work in relation to European literature in Latin and / or Romance vernacular. Audrey A. P. Lavin, who does not relate *Sefer Ḥarīzī* to the *LBA*, looks at al-Ḥarīzī as a translator and cultural mediator and as "una version judía de un trovador ambulante medieval" (13). While Forteza-Rey does mention Lida de Malkiel and Castro's proposal of the *maqāmāt* as model for the *LBA* (82), she does so only as a final note and without discussing a connection between the Hebrew *maqāmāt* and the *LBA*.

¹⁰ Montaner Frutos recent study focuses on the use of colloquial Arabic in the *LBA*, including the dialogue between the *mora* and *Trotaconventos* (*copla* 941), the intention (and effect) of the article is to further distance the work from the Arabic and Hebrew traditions of medieval Iberia. Montaner asserts that while the author of the *LBA* reveals knowledge of dialectical Arabic, this does not mean he was capable of reading the Classical Arabic of the *maqāmāt*. However, not only were the *maqāmāt* most often performed orally, by the thirteenth century there was a large

Gybbon-Monnypenny (1957), attacks Castro for privileging the Arabic over the European literary traditions as model for the erotic autobiography of the *LBA*, claiming “Castro’s assumption that Arabic literature of the Middle Ages was so much richer in ‘autobiographical’ themes than European literature (due, presumably, to the lack of available research on the subject) is unfounded and misleading” (64). Blecua, for his part, claims: “[L]a estructura del *Libro de buen amor* puede explicarse por la conjunción de tradiciones literarias occidentales sin necesidad de acudir a las *maqāmāt*.” (xxxix). Neither Gybbon-Monnypenny nor Blecua, however, offer a “European” model that is an erotic pseudo-autobiographic collection of tales with interpolated poetry prefaced by the author’s own philosophy of reading and interpretation such that we find in the *maqāmāt* genre—in both its Arabic and Hebrew manifestations (discussed in detail below). Burkard, in his 1999 study of the pseudo-Ovidian sources of the *LBA*, shares Gybbon-Monnypenny and Blecua’s sentiment that the *LBA* is the product of exclusively Western European (i.e. non Arabo-Hebrew) traditions, maintaining: “There is however a certainty: all the model texts that have contributed indisputably to the formation of the *Libro* derive from the Western Latin legacy” (138). Burkard, in the same study, acknowledges that Juan Ruiz’s knowledge of Ovidian and pseudo-Ovidian material was most likely indirect, acquired either by having read or heard about such works (138)—again bringing us face to face with the lack of direct textual influence.¹¹ Considering the extreme difficulty of proving direct textual relationships almost seven centuries after the fact (given the multiple political, economic, social and personal crisis and upheavals that have resulted in the destruction of millions of written and oral texts), as well as the fact that even more salient and usually more easily answered questions about the *LBA* such its date of composition and the identity of its author still remain unanswered, I do not think either theory, that of Augustinian influence or that of pseudo-Ovidian influence, should be dismissed because we have no textual evidence linking the *LBA* to the works of Augustine or the pseudo-Ovidian elegiac comedies.

While the lack of direct textual evidence has not proven to be a problem for the Augustinian and Ovidian line of inquiry, based as it is only upon suggested thematic, formal and philosophical similarities between the works of Augustine and the *LBA*, the same can not be said for the case of Semitic influence on the *LBA*. Much of contemporary criticism has been unwilling to consider the work’s indebtedness to the Arab and Hebrew traditions of the Iberian Peninsula. I think it is a disservice to a work that includes dialectal Arabic, descriptions of Jewish and Arab customs and communities, as well as tales of Arabic origin, to dismiss out of hand possible

corpus of *maqāmāt* composed in dialectal Arabic and performed in public (Drory 2000, 191-95, Moreh 108-09). So, while his dialectal Arabic would have allowed him access to these performances, since no popular Iberian *maqāmāt* survive we cannot say with any certainty how much the popular forms were modeled on the Classical *maqāmāt* that have survived. In all likelihood the *maqāmāt* originate in early medieval Arabic *hikaya* (“a play performed by actors, sometimes dressed in accordance with the requirements of the ‘dramatis personae’ and sometimes using props as well”, Moreh 104). The *maqāmāt*, are in fact, the cousin of the popular medieval shadow drama, whose works were composed in dialectal Arabic and whose existence in medieval Iberia is testified to by Ibn Hazm, but of which no actual text remains (Moreh 124). As in the rest of the medieval Muslim world, in medieval Iberia the *maqāmāt* were also performed at court with social functions, “[C]omposition of occasional *maqāmāt* became part of Andalusī epistolary practice in the courts of the party kings and their Berber successors . . . [T]hey were usually composed to celebrate social occasions or promote courtly interactions and interests” (Drory 2000, 190). Given the different social contexts and functions of the *maqāmāt* (as popular drama and court performance) one can imagine a large number of *maqāmāt* designed for popular performance that have been lost, i.e. that have left no textual legacy.

¹¹ For a detailed study of the pseudo-Ovidian material and a possible Hebrew analogue see my forthcoming study in *Speculum* Jan. 2007.

connections with Arabic and Hebrew literary genres cultivated on the Peninsula itself.¹² The fact that the work was composed in fourteenth-century Castile, in fact, requires us to at least consider the work in light of twelfth and thirteenth-century Iberian literature—whether it be composed in Latin, Romance, Hebrew or Arabic.

Reading and the Muslim and Jewish Traditions

The studies of Gerli, Brownlee and Brown examined in the first part of this article conclude that Augustine's and Juan Ruiz's philosophy and methodology of reading are basically those of medieval European exegesis, agreeing that it is the active participation of the reader who creates his/her own meanings in the act of reading that characterizes both the *LBA* and the works of Augustine. Glossing and commentary as part of the active reading process, and as an activity that leads to a multiplicity of interpretations is not, however, unique to the Latin scholastic environment of medieval Europe. Exegesis is also central to the work of Jewish and Muslim scholars, not only to those of medieval Iberia, but to those working in earlier centuries. In fact, "European" scholasticism, does not develop from exclusively Latin sources, but is itself the product of the incorporation of Arabic and Hebrew learning (and learning styles) into the medieval European monastic and university culture (Madigan 37; Makdisi 309-16). The Christian European scholastic's rationalist approach to religion, with its roots in the Greek philosophical-scientific model, was also at the heart of medieval Muslim and Jewish thinkers' philosophical and literary theories and debates. And the large corpus of Jewish and Arabic works on aspects of this problem that were translated into Latin and thus entered the medieval European canon initiated a period of "intense engagement" which ultimately had the effect of changing the nature of the European scholastic system itself (Roy 22-26). One of the best examples of this process is Averroes's (Ibn Rushd's) commentary on Aristotle and its reception by the great scholastics (including Aquinas), which ultimately resulted in a redefinition of the European scholastic epistemological stance vis-a-vis God (Fakhry 129-64).

The role and nature of exegesis was central in medieval Islam as well as in Christian Europe. In medieval Muslim Iberia, Mu'tazilah (Mutazilites)—adherents of a doctrine that believed in man's free will and in the necessity of allegorical interpretations of the Quran—had made inroads in the Taifa kingdoms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (one of which, Córdoba, is the birth place of Averroes in 1126). As James T. Monroe points out, the Mu'tazilah position is a central theme of the Arab *maqāma* genre (3-4). He has found evidence of Mu'tazilah leanings in the Arab works, including the *maqāmāt*, of the twelfth-century Iberian author, Ibn al-Ashtarkuwi (38-41, 71-73, 280-81). The Mu'tazilah underpinnings of the *maqāma* genre, when combined with the subjective nature of the first-person narration, are designed to continually force the reader to judge the tale's veracity (6). Like the *LBA* and medieval scholastic glosses, the *maqāmāt* were intended to engage the reader in an active reading process.

As in medieval Christian Europe and the Islamic East, exegesis was also a central issue among the medieval Judeo-Iberian community, with innovative thinkers like Maimonides and Moshe Ibn Ezra attempting to reconcile rationalism to the traditional exegetical models of the Midrash and Talmud, the living or oral law that was also a way of life and hermeneutic model

¹² For further studies regarding Jewish and Arabic literature and tradition in the *LBA* see David Wacks 2003 and 2007 (forthcoming).

for medieval Jewish communities.¹³ In fact, rabbinic hermeneutics, based on Talmud and Midrash, shares the same goal as that of Augustinian hermeneutics as described by Brown and Gerli, namely, leading the reader to his / her own truth. Emmanuel Levinas clarifies the essential role of the reader or interpreter as conceptualized in rabbinic hermeneutics:

Some people, understanding rabbinic hermeneutics superficially, think of it as neglecting the mind; but the intention of the signified by the signifier is not the only way of indicating significance. In its other modes, the significance of the signifier responds only to the mind that seeks it, thus becoming part of the process of signification; interpretation necessarily includes that seeking without which the non-said, inherent in the texture of what is declared, would be extinguished by the weight of the texts and sink into their letters. Such a search emanates from persons, eyes and ears alert, attentive to the entire work from which the extract derives, and equally open to life—the city, the street, other people; it emanates from persons in their oneness, each capable of extracting meaning from signs, which are always inimitable; it emanates from persons who are themselves part of the effort to find the signification of the sensible. (497)

Just as Gerli and Brown describe Augustine's philosophy of the creation of meaning arising when the reader engages the text, a process described in *LBA* scholarship as a typically scholastic method of reading, here in this description of rabbinic hermeneutics the reader is also portrayed as an active participant in the creation of meaning—the reader brings to the text his / her own, unique experiences and uses them as a tool to seek meaning from the text.

The Hebrew *Maqāmāt*

With the Hebrew *maqāmāt*, we have, as Maria Rosa Lida de Malkiel first suggested, another important and relevant literary tradition offering a model of pseudo-autobiography that espouses an approach to reading, teaching and interpretation very similar to that of the *LBA*. While Lida de Malkiel examined parallels between Ibn Zabarra's *Sefer Shashuim* and the *LBA*, in the present study I look instead at al-Ḥarīzī's *Sefer Taḥkemonī*, which in turn was written in imitation of the Arabic *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī. Because it is modeled on an Arabic work, it is in the *mudéjar* vein, being not an Arabized Christian text, but an Arabized Hebrew text.

Judah al-Ḥarīzī was born in medieval Christian Castile c. 1170 (probably Toledo). Like other contemporary Castilian Jewish intellectuals his literary frame of reference was predominantly the Jewish and Muslim thinkers of al-Andalus. In addition to *Sefer Taḥkemonī*, his literary production includes a collection of short didactic poems, *Sefer ha-Anak (The Necklace)*, as well as Arabic to Hebrew translations of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, *Epistle on the Resurrection*, *Introduction to the Mishnah*, and the latter's commentary of the first five parts of the *Mishnah Order Zeraim*. In addition, al-Ḥarīzī translated other scholars' works, including Hunayn ibn Ishaq's *Dicta of the Philosophers*, 'Ali ibn Rudwan's *Epistle on Morals*, Galen's *Dialogue on the Soul* and al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* (Drory 216, Del Valle Rodríguez 16-20). Commentary, exegesis and interpretation mark al-Ḥarīzī's literary production, be it his personal

¹³ On the Maimonidean Controversy that divided medieval Jewish communities according to the acceptance or renunciation of the rationalist-scientific approach to commentary advocated by Maimonides see Septimus (64).

creative works such as the *maqāmāt* and didactic poetry, or his translations of commentaries by the most important rationalist theologian of medieval Judaism, Maimonides. His familiarity with current Arab philosophical and theological debate is further underscored by the fact that he translated Galen's *Dialogue on the Soul* and an Arab *dicta philosophorum*, summarizing the saying of Greek philosophers (Mirsky 627-28).

Judah al-Ḥarīzī is the most famous Judeo-Iberian composer of Hebrew *maqāma*. The genre, cultivated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries among Jews of North-Eastern Spain and subsequently in Italy, conformed to the expectations of the genre as epitomized in the Arab *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (Drory 2000, 200-06). In the introduction to his own Hebrew *maqāmāt*, *Sefer Taḥkemonī*, al-Ḥarīzī claims that he was inspired to compose the work in response to his own translation of the epitome of Arabic eloquence, al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* (14). While the role of the reader as active participant in the creation and understanding of a multivalent and linguistically playful text is central to the Arab *maqāmāt*, which, like the *LBA*, experiments with the authenticity of narration and accountability, the language of al-Ḥarīzī's *maqāmāt*, a Hebrew derived from Biblical texts adds a new level of exegetical material to this literary tradition—that of the Torah and Talmud, as well as the secular Hebrew poetry of medieval Iberia. While al-Ḥarīrī's Arabic *maqāmāt* is full of allusions to pre-Islamic poetry, Quranic scripture and commentary, Arab philosophical and legal debates and vocabulary, and *adab* treatises on anything from grammar to horse manuals, al-Ḥarīzī's *maqāmāt* includes not only similar allusions to works of the Arab tradition, but also allusions unique to the Jewish tradition and the Hebrew language. He presents the poetic values and debates central to Judeo-Iberian poets such as Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, and Judah ha-Levi in Gates Three and Eighteen. In Gate Twenty-Four he takes up rabbinic interpretation of the *Amidah*, and in Gate Seventeen he provides the reader with the basic philosophical-theological differences between two prominent strands of thought in contemporary Judaism, Karaism and Rabbinism. At the core of the Rabbinic-Karaite debate is the role of language / text, commentary and tradition in the practice of Judaism. Karaism advocates the use of reason (over tradition) in the “free and independent individual study of the Scriptures,” and thus Karaites could “tolerate differing interpretations of the Bible” (Heller and Nemoy 766-67).

The theme of the Torah and the role of commentary within Judaism are not restricted to Gate Seventeen, but pervade the entire work because of the author's choice of Hebrew as language of composition. Like the Hebrew poetry and rhymed-prose works of medieval Iberia, *Sefer Taḥkemonī*, is composed in the so-called “mosaic style” or *shibbutz*. Peter Cole describes how the use of this mosaic style, with its origins in Arabic poetry's use of Quranic passages, was not a staid, rote repetition of Biblical passages, but a process that increased the complexity and richness of the text. Cole defines the “mosaic style” as

one of the most conspicuous ornaments in medieval Hebrew literature, the kind of biblical allusion that has come to be known as *shibbutz*, which means “setting” or “inlay,” whereby elements of the biblical text are woven through the “fabric” of the verse. In that nineteenth-century term, a parallel to the German for “mosaic style,” we have a classic case of distortion in East–West transmission, a failure of sympathy. For the term itself, *shibbutz*, implies an effect that is static while the use of biblical phrasing was brought over, in part, from Arabic literature, where it was based on the Quran and was known as *iqtibas*, “the lighting of one flame from another.” It implied a source and transfer of energy. Far from constituting a

rote application to an otherwise useful but plain poetic surface, biblical quotation and the other ornaments of this poetry act like tiny turbines to the current of the verse, thousands of finely constructed stations-of-power set out along its flow. (13)

The way in which al-Ḥarīzī contextualizes Biblical verse in new, fictional (and often absurd) situations leads to a necessarily multivalent text that begs the reader to continually create new meanings out of some of the most frequently and copiously commented Biblical passages of the Old Testament. The ideal reader would, in the act of reading, bring to these Biblical allusions, a vast repertory of exegesis (from the Talmud and Midrash, as well as the commentary of contemporary thinkers such as Maimonides), creating networks of meaning relating *Sefer Taḥkemonī* to the maze of medieval Hebrew (and Judeo-Arabic) literature with which the reader was familiar, and which he / she brought to the text.¹⁴ The text thus speaks to each reader differently according to the individual reader's own reading experience and memory. Therefore, *Sefer Taḥkemonī*, like the *LBA* also then necessarily requires an ethical reading. The reader must sift through his / her catalogue of the various opinions regarding the meaning of a Biblical verse used in *Sefer Taḥkemonī* to determine how the verse is meant to be read in this new context. Such active reading and interpretation, so similar to that ascribed to by Augustine, is also at the heart of traditional Jewish exegesis—a tradition with which al-Ḥarīzī was intimately familiar since he had, after all, translated some of its key texts, including the commentaries of Maimonides.

Because of *Sefer Taḥkemonī*'s "mosaic style," questions of interpretation and meaning are implicit throughout the work and confront the reader in the myriad of choices he / she will make in deciphering the meaning of the biblical allusions. In addition, al-Ḥarīzī includes in the prologue a description of how and why he composed the work, explicitly articulating his own hermeneutic:

And I gathered together in this book many parables and sweet themes. Among them various poems and striking riddles, words of instruction, songs of friendship, proverbs of right things; words of admonition, events of the time and tidings of the years [...] The delights of love and songs of love. The betrothing of women, bridal canopy and marriage [...] And wonderful songs and epistles written in a marvelous way-in order that this book may be as a garden in which are all manner of dainties and pleasant plantations. And in it each seeker will find his heart's desire and will attain of his longing sufficient for his need of that which he lacks. [...]

And in it I have prepared for every one his nook and his book, every one to his service and his burden: He who fears the word of the Lord will find in it reproofs and prayers and the fear of the Lord. And he that regards not the word of the Lord will find in it delights of the world and its good things [. . .] And whoever composes poems and has hewn out broken cisterns whose waters are bitter, through this book he will open his eyes. And the Lord will show him a tree, and he will cast it into the waters, and the waters become sweet. (36-38)

¹⁴ For a study of the relationship between exegesis and the Hebrew *maqāmāt*, see Judith Dishon.

Al-Ḥarīzī's theory of interpretation, teaching and reading here expressed is strikingly similar to that expressed in the prose prologue of the *LBA*. While Juan Ruiz describes how one reader may find "good love" and another "love of the world," al-Ḥarīzī similarly describes how various readers will find either fear of the Lord or the delights of the world according to his/her own disposition. Like Juan Ruiz al-Ḥarīzī acknowledges the multivalent nature of the text and that every reader, in fact, will discover in it his own book. In the prologue to *Sefer Taḥkemoni*, al-Ḥarīzī articulates a theory of reading and teaching very similar to that used to establish the work's Augustinian underpinnings.

Conclusion

In the Hebrew literature of medieval Castile, specifically the *maqāmāt* of Judah al-Ḥarīzī and the Jewish (and Arab) hermeneutical tradition in which this Judeo-Iberian author was formed and to which he contributed through translations and his original works, we have yet another analogue to the *LBA*'s hermeneutics, as well as, in the case of *Sefer Taḥkemoni*, a possible model text for the work's pseudo-autobiography, *frametale* structure and narrative interweaving of prose and poetry. While there is no direct textual evidence relating *Sefer Taḥkemoni* to the *LBA*, this has not prevented similar possible models (such as the pseudo-Ovidian elegiac comedies or the works of Augustine) from being seriously considered as viable options for explaining the *LBA*'s thematic and formal characteristics.

I do not think we can dismiss the *maqāmāt* as a possible model for a work that reveals its author's knowledge of Mozarab customs and language, as well as a familiarity with Jewish dietary customs and the local Jewish community. The *LBA* reflects the *mudéjar* and Mozarab cultural milieu of its medieval author/s, and the Hebrew (and Arabic) *maqāmāt* of medieval Iberia should be considered as an important part of that milieu. The *maqāmāt*, a genre popular among both Jews and Muslims in medieval Iberia, was, by the thirteenth century composed in dialectical Arabic for popular performance as well as written in Classical Arabic for court social events in medieval Iberia. Far less is known about the performance and transmission of Hebrew *maqāmāt*, although their large presence in preserved manuscripts indicate their popularity. Given the author of the *LBA*'s knowledge of and interest in Arabic poetry and musical performance and the fact that he adopted poetic forms very popular among learned Muslim and Jewish poets of medieval Iberia (the *zajal* for example) to *castellano*, we should at least entertain the idea that he may have also modeled his narrative in part on one of the most popular narrative genres of medieval Judeo- and Arabo-Iberian literature, the *maqāmāt*.

The choice of the *maqāmāt* would be natural since exegesis and the role of the reader are central to the *maqāma* genre. Juan Ruiz, of course, adds his own touches—those of a fourteenth-century cleric—including some Latin glosses, *fabliaux*, Classical anecdotes and references to Scholastic authorities, just as Judeo-Iberian authors a century before had made the *maqāmāt* particularly their own when they translated it to Hebrew, and then adapted it to Jewish literature. Unlike the case of al-Ḥarīzī, who explicitly states his indebtedness to al-Ḥarīrī and the Arab *maqāma* tradition, in the case of the *LBA* we have no such statement of direct influence. But, without al-Ḥarīzī's introduction, would we then be able to definitively classify *Sefer Taḥkemoni* or the works of other Judeo-Iberian *maqāma* writers such as Ibn Saqbal, Ibn Shabbetai and Solomon Ibn Sahula as clearly modeled upon the Arab *genre*, since they do, inevitably, have unique "Jewish" characteristics as dictated by the Hebrew language (and contingent culture, i.e. Judaism)? I suggest that we are faced with something similar in the *LBA*, namely, a "Castilian"

pseudo-autobiographical frame tale with rhymed prose interspersed with poetry designed to confound the reader and make him/her conscious of the reading process and their role in it. Despite a lack of direct evidence linking the *LBA* and the *maqāmāt*, the latter are very much part of the medieval Iberian milieu in which the *LBA* was composed, and are still a likely candidate for modeling that merit further comparative studies. The Semitic traditions—the Arabic and Hebrew *maqāmāt*—must also be considered, like the European Latin tradition, as “a necessary point of departure for research into the *Libro*’s medieval intellectual roots” (Gerli 2002, 413).

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