

Louise M. Haywood. *Sex, Scandal and Sermon in Fourteenth-Century Spain: Juan Ruiz's Libro de Buen Amor.* The New Middle Ages. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. xii + 209. ISBN: 9781403977557.

Louise M. Haywood has in three chapters produced a pithy study on the *Libro de buen amor* (*LBA*), placed between an "Introduction" preceded by two pages of Acknowledgements and a "Conclusion," all comprising 151 pages. An additional fifty-six pages—slightly more than one-fourth of the entire work—offer "Notes," "Works Cited," "Index of Stanzas," and a "Subject Index." The author, who has well tilled the field of *LBA* studies, stands on the shoulders of luminaries from Aristotle to Lacan and brings to bear a well-reasoned perspicacity on a medieval Spanish text which years of criticism have failed to define beyond the parameters of the specific gaze of the particular critic. Haywood's scholarship, additionally and especially supported by close readings of the text, offers her reader a cornucopia of ideas which provide insights not only into the *Libro* itself but also into a wide variety of texts both medieval and beyond of both the Iberian Peninsula and of all Europe.

Haywood's monograph follows her recent anthology of ground-breaking studies, coedited with another *LBA* luminary Louise O. Vasvari and titled *A Companion to the Libro de Buen Amor* (Tamesis, 2004). In light of this collaboration, Haywood proposes in her "Introduction" to amend two gaps she views in *LBA* studies: first, an absent systematic analysis and contextualization of *LBA* humor; next, a study of the role of the visual in the work within the context of the tension created between Juan Ruiz's role as preacher performed through his other role as minstrel/poet.

Chapter one "Humor and Humours" examines the text, especially the beginning, as establishing man's postlapsarian humoral condition which could lead him by yielding to his appetites to the bestial. In this chapter, a close reading by Haywood and many episodes within the *LBA* substantiate her position regarding mankind's fallen condition. Perhaps the two most important are, first, the most critically considered anecdote of the entire work, the debate between the Greeks and the Romans which exemplifies the *translatio studii*. She views the misunderstanding resulting between the two nations as a part of man's fallen nature, just as, in the second, is the incompleteness of the interpretations of the five astrologers when asked by King Alcaraz to provide a horoscope for his newly born son. She further supports her perspective with a wide array of readings, both those contemporaneous to the *LBA*—a number of *cuaderna via* poems and Chaucer, by way of example, and a wide selection of secondary studies exquisitely digested and brought to bear on her topic.

Chapter two, “The Gaze and the Grotesque,” treats scopophilia as intimately bound to memory vitiated by the Fall, but memory essential to choosing appropriately for salvation. She begins by recalling the vision of the Archpriest in the go-between’s description of him as well as the vision offered in Don Amor’s *descriptio puellae*. She describes Alda de la Tablada and the crucified body of Christ presented in the *LBA* as establishing a progression from the divine to the bestial: through Christ God becomes human, and through the mountain woman, the human verges on the bestial. Alda is shown to have characteristics similar to those attributed to Juan Ruiz in the go-between’s description of him which calls into question the mountain woman’s femininity as well as the Archpriest’s masculinity. In further close readings Haywood examines the three tales of the Young Miller who wishes to marry three women, the woman who amuses herself with the two lazy suitors, and finally, the Pitas Payas anecdote. The common denominator between all three accounts is men who fail to measure up. All the men in these anecdotes suffer from a *méconnaissance*, again owing to the Fall. Haywood applies René Girard’s triangular desire to all three accounts rounding out the chapter with another detailed reading of three anecdotes which have “a particularly marginal and inharmonious animal, the ass” (79) as protagonist. Throughout this chapter her gaze contemplates the gaze that anthropomorphizes animals and zoomorphizes humans whereby she examines the potential bestial characteristics of human behavior.

Chapter three, appropriately titled “The Stand-Up Archpriest,” examines the amorous affairs of the Archpriest which provides the binding thread of continuity in the literal medieval cultural warehouse that is the *LBA*. She notes that this work is not an *ars amatoria* as it does not teach one how to succeed in affairs of the heart noting the Archpriest’s failures in practically every encounter, fourteen in all. Haywood exempts a potential fifteenth encounter—the old woman who visits an ailing Archpriest (st. 945–49)—even though he grabs her and speaks foolishly to her as he himself relates. Haywood treats the four mountain women—the *serranas*—separately as they do not follow the Girardian pattern of triangulation that so well fits the other ten encounters of which all but two are chosen by sight and by which he seeks to recover from the pain of a previous affair, to avoid loneliness, or to imitate the habit of young men. The names of the four *serranas* connote masculine vigor, animal wildness, an inversion of the standard power dynamic between men and women, and finally diminution and weeping. The mountain adventures offer a reversal of male/female roles, in effect, tantamount to what the Archpriest has presented in the three anecdotes of the Young Miller, the Lazy Suitors, and Pitas Payas

discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter Haywood also observes how the Archpriest plays a double role as preacher, a representative of the institution of the Church, and an Everyman, a Fallen sinner who pursues women like other men. As priest and poet, through the role of preacher he is a combination with an often blurred distinction between preacher and minstrel, a stand-up preacher and a stand-up poet or comic even. Here Haywood follows a trajectory long established by Vasvari in which the Archpriest “by adopting the identity of tonsured cleric . . . becomes himself the fetishistic object that replaces the phallus in stand-up comedy . . . a kind of talking *glans*” (142). One could simplify terribly the thrust of Haywood’s argumentation regarding the Everyman *persona* of the Archpriest via the following syllogism: The Archpriest sins; women sin; therefore, the Archpriest is a woman. Thus a certain emasculation occurs when, by pursuing his nature as defined by the stars, the Archpriest pursues women.

Haywood has accomplished a Herculean intellectual endeavor in this work systematically treating humor and the visual in the *LBA*. This work does not constitute anything resembling facile reading. Similarly there is so much of it that cannot be presented in a review such as this. And whereas in our postlapsarian world we are confined to misreading only, I must admit that my own misreading does not even begin to do justice to the far-reaching, academic brilliance ensconced between the two covers of this work for which one can only beg the author’s forgiveness along with the reader’s understanding and encourage the reading of this work for oneself.

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