

Retelling the Future: Don Juan Manuel's "Exemplo XI" and the Power of Fiction

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Juan Manuel's *Libro del conde Lucanor* (*CL*), is often characterized as being the first work of Castilian prose and holds pride of place in the canon of medieval Spanish literature.¹ The work, as known in modern editions, consists of 50 *exempla* or short, self-consciously didactic narratives that illustrate points made in the larger frame narrative, namely the interactions between the Conde Lucanor and his adviser, Patronio.² Many critics read the *CL* as a collection of short stories that reflects a closed vision of Castilian hegemony in the fourteenth century, and that, while seemingly adapting some content from the Arab traditions of the Peninsula, nevertheless derives its ethos primarily from the Latin ecclesiastical *exempla* tradition, thus, ultimately reflecting its author's ties to the Dominican Order (María Rosa Lida de Malkiel 158-63; Deyermond 17-24; Ferreiro

¹ Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo claims the *CL* is "la obra maestra de la prosa castellana del siglo XIV, a la que comparte con el *Decamerón* la gloria de haber creado la prosa novelesca en Europa" (1:144) and María Jesús Lacarra claims that some of Juan Manuel's *exempla* are among the best stories of all time (167). María Rosa Menocal discusses how the *CL* reinforces the ideals of Castilian hegemony so favored by nineteenth-century philology (475-76).

² The work as conceived of by Juan Manuel, and as it exists in the manuscript tradition consisted several of different sections of which the 50-51 *exempla* now known as the *CL* is the first. The subsequent sections include proverbs and illustrations and are not found in modern editions. See Laurence De Looze discussion of the origins of such divisions in the *CL* in both the manuscript and modern traditions (1-90).

Alemparte). Juan Manuel's infamous attempt to keep scribal errors and variant readings from creeping into the manuscript tradition by encouraging readers to consult originals he safeguarded in the Dominican monastery of Peñafiel, underscores Juan Manuel's desire to control his work despite his own liberal use of previously existing material.³ María Rosa Menocal points out that despite Juan Manuel's attempt to "fix" both his version of the *CL* and the frame tale tradition from which it derives, the *CL* is but one version in the long and still developing tradition. "The *Conde Lucanor* is itself but one version, one rendering, one storytelling session, within the vast framed narrative tradition of medieval Spain and Europe" (473). By looking at the *CL*, with special focus on one tale within the collection, "Exemplo XI" ("considerado por todos los críticos como la joya de la colección" Lacarra 166), not as the unique creation of Juan Manuel (despite his wishes for us to do so), but as the combination of a series of earlier Iberian story traditions adapted to Castilian to address the concerns of this fourteenth-century nobleman, we can read this story as product and reflection of a complex multi-faith and multilingual society and not that of the hegemonic nationalist ideals more characteristic of the last century than the fourteenth.

"Exemplo XI," which portrays cultures in contact through the encounter of two individuals, don Illyán and the dean of Santiago, reflects the complexity not only of medieval Iberia, but also of the frame tale tradition. David Wacks characterizes "Exemplo XI" as "one of the best-known, most frequently anthologized and university class-

³ "don Johán vio et sabe que en los libros contesce muchos yerros en los trasladar, porque las letra se semejan unas a otras . . . Et porque don Johán se receló desto, ruega a los que leyeren cualquier libro que fuera trasladado del que él compuso . . . que si fallaren alguna palabra mal puesta , que non pongan la culpa a él fasta que vean el libro mismo que don Johán fizo" (8).

friendly tales in Don Juan Manuel's work" ("Don Yllán" 413). Lida de Malkiel and several critics since have proclaimed this *exemplum* as the jewel of the collection, and Menéndez Pelayo, John Keller and David Wacks credit Juan Manuel with introducing narrative fiction into the Castilian *cum* Spanish tradition (Lida de Malkiel 158, Lacarra 167, Valbuena Prat 171, Menéndez Pelayo 1:144, Keller 45, "Don Yllán" 413-14). This celebrated Castilian *exemplum* begins with a member of the Church's middle management--the dean--seeking out the necromancer, Don Yllán, at his home in Toledo and requesting that the latter teach him his "sciencia" (53). Don Yllán first makes the dean promise that, even if he will achieve great success, he would not forget don Yllán's help, "el deán le prometió et le aseguró que de cualquier bien que él oviesse, que nunca ál faría sinon lo que él mandasse" (54). However as the story, Don Yllán's illusion, plays out, we find this is exactly what the dean does. Each time he is promoted up the Church hierarchy Don Yllán's asks the dean to grant his son the position the dean would vacate, but to no avail. Once the dean finds himself named pope and has established himself in Avignon, seat of the papacy during the schism of 1309-1377 and all still part of Don Yllán's illusion, he feels confident enough to finally rebuff Don Yllán's petition for a position for his son, threatening to expose him for being a necromancer and heretic, "diziéndol que si mas le affincasse, quel faría echar en una cárcel, que era ereje et encantador, que bien sabía que non avía otra vida nin officio en Toledo, do él morava, sinon vivir por aquella arte de nigromancia" (57). After this final rebuff, Don Yllán and the author don Juan Manuel break the spell and reveal to both the Dean and the reader that it has all been an illusion. Juan Manuel, the author, continues to refer to the dean as

pope as he brings us (the reader) back to Don Yllán's living room and to the first evening of their encounter—underscoring simultaneously the former's success and ingratitude:

Estonce don Yllán dixo al Papa que pues ál non tenía de comer, que se avría de tornar a las perdizes que mandara assar aquella noche, et llamó a la muger et díxol que assasse las perdizes. Cuando esto dixo don Yllán, fallósse el Papa en Toledo, deán de Sanctiago, commo lo era cuando y vino; e tan grand fue la vergüença que ovo, que non sopo quel dezir. (57)

This is an *exemplum* in which Andalusí knowledge (Yllán's science) confronts clerical ambition (the dean's greed) with the goal of instructing authority; the uneasy but exciting contact of different traditions and bodies of knowledge is at the heart of "Exemplo XI." By using his sorcery, don Yllán exposes the cleric's self-interest and unwillingness to recompense him for his training. The Christian cleric is the morally corrupt character, while the necromancer reveals himself to be both shrewd and courteous. In this story not only does the narrator require that his Castilian speaking audience put themselves in the shoes of a necromancer and antagonist of an ecclesiastical rising star, who manages to become, apparently, nothing less than pope, ruler of the Christian West, but, in so doing, the narrator (and by extension the author, Juan Manuel himself) asks us to consider a world in which Churchmen are driven by the most selfish and evil of desires and sorcerers are capable of being models of moral behavior. The dean hails from the center of Iberian Christianity, Santiago, which, by the fourteenth century, was a centuries old center of pilgrimage respected across Europe and the symbolic home to the spiritual inspiration for Christian Iberians' attempting to conquer Andalusí lands (Reilly 734-35). Don Yllán, on the other hand, hails from the iconic city of Iberian multi-

faith coexistence, Toledo, the melting pot for Christians, Jews and Muslims (Gerli 789). Both men emblematic not only of the cultural climate of their native cities, iconic themselves of two versions of medieval Spain—one the spiritual heart of the Christian Reconquest recognizable to and part of the medieval Christian West, the other the center where Andalusí/Eastern knowledge was translated and consulted by Western scholars--but also of their respective bodies or systems of thought.

In this paper I look at how “Exemplo XI” is both product and reflection of the various traditions and cultures of medieval Iberia and how Juan Manuel forges a new version of this story from these inherited traditions in order to showcase problems of concern to his fourteenth-century audience, namely, the tension between ecclesiastical and Andalusí systems of thought and their representatives and how the author’s manipulation of the frame and the power of fiction itself echoes Don Yllán’s manipulation of magic to test the dean’s mettle. Then I turn to the lessons of “Exemplo XI” regarding the transmission of knowledge and who controls it, as well as the function of speculative fiction and its ability to explore alternative realities and potential futures for both fictional audience (Conde Lucanor) and contemporary twenty-first-century readers.

Telling Traditions

The *exemplum* form was by the first half of the fourteenth century in its clear heyday in Western Europe.⁴ Its rise in popularity in Western Europe can be attributed to various forms of contact with the Muslim world in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and to the creation of the lay clergy.⁵ For Joan Young Gregg the *exemplum* were a genre of tales used by the clergy to illustrate the points made in their sermons and as such they functioned to inculcate “the largely unlettered medieval populace with the societal norms of European Christianity” (3).⁶ The Dominicans, to whom our author Juan Manuel had deep and well-documented ties, were foremost among the clergy in their use of *exempla*.⁷ Several scholars have noted similarities between “Exemplo XI” and Latin *exempla* about magicians and their students included in medieval European collections (De Voto,

⁴ For James Murphy the *exempla* are both product and vehicle of the “homiletic revolution” that began in the thirteenth century (*Rhetoric* 310). See also Burgoyne 27. For Menocal, “[T]he *Conde Lucanor*, the *Decameron*, and the *Canterbury Tales* constitute the trilogy of 14th century framed narratives which all explicitly reflect back on a vast tradition, their own histories, which can only be sketched out here but which must be understood as a vital part of the texts themselves” (478).

⁵ For Joan Young Gregg, a scholar of medieval English literature, this contact with the Muslim world is both military (Crusading) and cultural (the translation of Indian and other Eastern works into Arabic and then Latin). David Wacks offers a case study of the latter in the case of Moses Sefardi (Petrus Alfonsi) a representative example of how al-Andalus served as the essential cultural matrix for the production of frame tales in Western Europe. On the *exempla* and the Franciscans and Dominicans see Gregg 8.

⁶ Gregg stresses that the clergy accepted entertaining *exempla* because they were “regarded as a legitimate means of making profound and complex theological doctrines more accessible to the untutored” (11). Gregg points out that while the *exempla* were made realistic by offering specific recognizable local details, homilists admonished against depicting negative characterizations of religious figures or recognizable contemporary political figures (12). Don Juan Manuel’s use of real Andalusí rulers and negative portrayal of clerics, such as the Dean of Santiago in this *exemplum* show his collection does not conform to Gregg’s description of the Western European *exempla* tradition.

⁷ See Burgoyne 27; María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, 156. Dominicans such as Etienne de Bourbon (d. 1261) (*Liber de septem donis*); Humbert de Romans (d. 1277) (*Liber de dono timoris*); and Arnold de Liège (*Alphabetum narrationum*) all produced anthologies of *exempla* in Latin.

Deyermond, Lida de Malkiel). However, the focus of these tales in the Latin tradition stress the dangers of studying the science of necromancy and the tales are populated by demons and evil spirits, and not the hospitable and patient Don Yllán. In the Latin tradition necromancy and the black arts were often associated with Arab learning, and in this tradition Spain features prominently as a site for the study of astrology and magic (Ferreiro Alemparte 207-208).⁸ Among the examples of tales of clerics going to Spain to seek instruction in the art of Arabized magic are those of Gerberto, tutor of Hugh Capet the Elder's son, around whom a legend arose that as a monk he fled to Toledo and Seville to learn the Sarracen arts, including adivination and magic (207). Legends also abounded regarding Pope Gregory VII, who was publically declared a necromancer by some 30 bishops in June of 1080—this presumably because he studied said art in Toledo (208).

The dean of the “Exemplo XI,” like real fourteenth-century Christian clerics and noblemen, did not need to cross the Mediterranean to learn the sciences of the East. The translation projects of the Iberian Peninsula made such learning, and the experts in it, much like don Yllán, available on Western European soil. In “Exemplo XI” we have a Church figure, much like Gerberto and Pope Gregory VII, except that Juan Manuel makes him an Iberian, specifying he is from Santiago, as mentioned, a center not only for Iberian Christians, but also for Northern Europeans who were familiar with it as a center of religious pilgrimage (Ferreiro Alemparte 208-209). The selection of Toledo in “Exemplo XI” may, in fact, point to a particular instance in which Juan Manuel adapts the

⁸ These examples lead Ferreiro Alemparte to state that, “A comienzos del siglo XIII la ciudad de Toledo aparece ya como asiento de la ciencia diabólica” (208).

Latin ecclesiastical story tradition concerning students and necromancers to his vernacular version of an earlier Judeo-Arabic tale.

As discussed above the rise of *exempla* in Western Europe is often read almost exclusively in the context of Christian ecclesiastical culture, however, in Iberia *exempla* were a popular form, not only among the clergy, but also among learned nobles such as Juan Manuel (Lida de Malkiel 155-163, Deyermond 22-24). Maria Menocal points out that the intellectual milieu of his class, and even within his family, privileged the Arab and Hebrew traditions of the Iberian Peninsula (481-87).⁹ His uncles, Alfonso X and Don Fadrique, as well as his cousin Sancho IV, oversaw the production of *exempla* collections designed to instruct their readers on ethics and politics—several adapted from the Andalusí and Jewish traditions.¹⁰ Alfonso X (“El Sabio”) is perhaps the best-known medieval Spanish consumer and recycler of Arab literature. Not only did he commission the translation of one of the best-known and oldest collections of frame tales or *exempla*, *Calila wa Dimna*, his oversight of the creation of histories, law codes and original poetry that adopted generously from works he had translated from the Arabo-Iberian traditions is well documented (Márquez Villanueva). Many of the Alfonsine translators were Arabic-speaking Jews. Juan Manuel would have been familiar with Alfonso’s *exempla* collections and with that of Alfonso’s brother, Fadrique. Menocal discusses in detail the *CL*’s relationship with the *Sendebār*, one of the Arab frame tale collections translated for

⁹ Deyermond, in fact, suggests that Juan Manuel derived his ethos from the Dominicans, “Los dominicos enseñaron a Juan Manuel que no hay necesariamente un conflicto entre las dos finalidades de la salvación del alma y el mantenimiento—y hasta el aumento—del estado y de la honra” (23).

¹⁰ On *Sendebār*, *Calila wa Dimna*, *Bocados de oro*, *Libro de tesoro*, *Castigos de Sancho IV* and the *Libro de l consejo e de los consejeros* see Gómez Redondo 1: 182-231, 455-63, 853-88, 913-58.

Fadrique. Like his uncles, Juan Manuel seems to have looked to the Arab tradition in Iberia, in both written and oral form, as a valid source for his own work. Not only does he include Arabic phrases in three of the *exempla* in the *CL*, several of the *exempla* adapted from the Arab tradition are clearly marked in the text, with Patronio stating that they occurred in a particular place in the Arab world or featured a particular Arab historic figure (Hoyos Hoyos, Deyermond 28-29, Lida de Malkiel 158).¹¹ In fact, "Exemplo XI" is not the only *exemplum* in the collection in which Andalusí cultural models are held up as examples over and against Christian Spanish models.¹² Ermann Caldera points out that in "Exemplo XXIV" an Andalusí monarch ("rey moro") is represented as a paradigm of wise conduct, unusual because in the *CL* Christian kings are consistently criticized (38). Additionally, in "Exemplo XLVI" valuable advice on luck is put in the mouth of "un muy grant filósofo que vivía en Marruecos" (in Caldera 39). These *exempla* in which the protagonist, model of wisdom and moral character, is Muslim, in addition to the several other *exempla* that allude to real Andalusí monarchs such as al-Mu'tamid (Abenabet) ("Exemplo XXX") and al-Hakim ("Exemplo" XLI), the latter in an *exemplum* which is a Castilian adaptation of an Arab legend, ground Don Juan Manuel's work in the Andalusí cultural milieu as critics such as Ermanno Caldera, Carmen Hoyos Hoyos and Alan Deyermond have long noted.

¹¹ Colloquial Arabic is included in tales XXX, XLI, XLVII. Alan Deyermond points out that in the *Libro de los estados* the narrator claims that don Johán conversed with wise Moors, "ya obiera él departimiento con algunos moros muy sabios" (28). Deyermond also points out that Juan Manuel was close friends with Nasir, Muslim king of Granada and subsequently Gaudix.

¹² "In Don Juan Manuel's case, his use of Arabic language and Andalusí narrative material invokes the cultural authority of the Andalusí Caliphate (and later *Taifa* kingdoms) populated by the protagonists of his *exempla*." (*Framing* 149)

Despite Juan Manuel's documented knowledge of, access to, and respect for the Arabo-Andalusi tradition and assertions by critics such as Menéndez Pelayo and subsequently Angel González Palencia that "Exemplo XI" derives from a tale from the *1001 Nights* tradition, Lida de Malkiel, Daniel Devoto and Wacks point out that there is little similarity between the tale suggested and "Exemplo XI" (Menéndez Pelayo 1:148, Lida de Malkiel 158; Devoto 383; Wacks "Don Yllán" 417 n18). As Lida de Malkiel points out, the tale that tells of Naker el-Chamy, Abd ar-Rahmen's cousin, shares few points of comparison with "Exemplo XI" (186 n7). As discussed above, other critics, such as Reinaldo Ayerbe-Chaux and Ferreiro Alemparte, look instead to the Latin *exempla* tradition, offering several examples of stories in which clerics that have come to Spain to study magic are taken away by demons. However, Wacks shows convincingly that, despite Lecoy, Ayerbé-Chaux and others assertion that the source of "Exemplo XI" can be found in the Latin *exempla* tradition or Menéndez Pelayo's that it can be found in the Arabic, the closest analogue is to be found in the Judeo-Iberian tradition, in a Hebrew *exemplum* included in Ibn Sahula's thirteenth-century work, the *Meshal Haqadmoni* ("Don Yllán" 418-32).¹³ Whereas in Latin *exempla* that depict the conflict between students and teachers of magic, the focus is on the evils that arise from studying necromancy, the necromancer being, along with evil spirits and/or the devil, simply an agent of those evils, in the Hebrew version, as in Juan Manuel's, as Wacks points out, the issue is the insolence of the would-be student and their suitability for learning (Ferreiro Alemparte 209-211; Wacks 420-22, 429-30).¹⁴ In the Hebrew version, the would-be

¹³ For an English translation of the work see Scheindlin, "The Sorcerer."

¹⁴ Ayerbe-Chaux gives three medieval Latin examples of the ingratitude of a students, including an *exemplum* in the collection of Etienne de Bourbon (238-39). He also offers

student does not respect the necromancer's intelligence (Wacks 419-20). Likewise in "Exenplo XI," as discussed above, the dean reveals that he too does not respect don Yllán, but is willing to betray him rather than compensate him for his trouble. The moral of Juan Manuel's version is similar to that of Ibn Sahula, but the setting is different. In Ibn Sahula's tale the student leaves Jerusalem to study in Egypt. Wacks argues that the existence of this tale in a thirteenth-century Judeo-Iberian collection and a fourteenth-century Castilian version points to a "common vernacular culture" (433). While Egypt, the setting for Ibn Sahula's tale, was a place associated with magic in both the Latin ecclesiastical and Jewish traditions, Don Juan Manuel's choice to set the tale in Toledo offers us a perfectly natural progression of the tale, as it passed westward with the Arabic tradition into the Iberian Peninsula.

Toledo, like Egypt, is a commonplace selected for the work's intended audience. Both are associated with foreignness—far away exotic locales and bodies of knowledge. While both Egypt and Jerusalem would be distant locales for Iberian Jews reading Ibn Sahula's version, the latter would be identified as the geographical and symbolic, spiritual homeland of all Jews, as, arguably, Santiago would be identified as both physical and spiritual center for Iberian Christian readers of the *CL*. Toledo, though, is much more problematic. While clearly identified with non-Christian and foreign/exotic wisdom by European (non-Castilian) clerics, it was, however, since 1085 CE, also a center of Christian Iberian intellectual and royal authority. The choice of Toledo, while marking Juan Manuel's version as a specific vernacular development in the not insubstantial story tradition of the magician and his ungrateful students, also, however,

as analogue a tale from the *Tabula Exemplorum* in which a magician tests his student's claims that he will give him riches (241-2).

points to the ambiguities of medieval Iberian society and culture. Toledo is not a (wholly) foreign, exoticized space, but, rather, at the intellectual heart of Juan Manuel's vernacular culture and reveals not a black-white dichotomy between good and evil, but a murky place where such categories are dismantled. In Juan Manuel's version of the tale, Toledo and Santiago, like the professions of the main figures, necromancer and cleric, are, like the words of the story itself, signposts that ultimately misdirect. "Truth" is not to be had from the cleric, even if he hails from Santiago.

Lessons and Frames

As noted above, the stated lesson of Juan Manuel's version of this tale differs from those of the Latin tradition warning against necromancers, and reflects a moral more in line with Ibn Sahula's lesson about teachers and students. According to Patronio the lesson of "Exemplo XI" is that if the person you have helped does not help you in kind, you should stop assisting him ("pues veedes que tanto fazedes por aquel omne que vos demanda ayuda et non vos da ende mejores gracias, tengo que non avedes por qué trabajar nin aventurarvos mucho por llegarlo a logar que vos dé tal galardón commo el déan dio a don Yllán," 57), while according to Don Juan Manuel in the final rhyming couplet, the lesson is that your friends, once they achieve success, will not help you should you need it, "Al que mucho ayudares et non te lo conosciere, / menos ayuda avrás dél desque en grand onra subiere" (59). These pithy rhymed couplets, however, fail to do justice to the complex work done by the preceding prose. This slippage between stated lesson and the larger ambiguities of the narrative characterizes the entire collection and seems to be

symptomatic of frame tale collections as a whole. Menocal, in reference to the *Disciplina Clericalis*, points out that the moral stated in the frame tale collection is almost always undone by the frame tale structure itself—which, for Menocal, is the true lesson:

[F]rom the very beginning our notion of didacticism is tested, and, in the end, debunked . . . [I]nterpretation , and thus the potential variability in meaning, is just as strongly brought to the fore: when we see and hear the listeners of stories and their interpretations, we are pushed to meditate directly on the many contingencies of meaning—and the implied infinity of frames implicated by interpolation makes ever more obvious and radical such orality and its relativism. (479)¹⁵

Laurence De Looze points out that the ambiguity of language is at the heart of the *CL*, as it was for many fourteenth-century works in the wake of Ockham’s discussion of nominalism and reality (118-119). De Looze succinctly underscores the ambiguity at the heart of the Don Juan Manuel’s work:

Manueline didacticism does not call for a lack of ambiguity, the potential duplicity of human signification becomes one of the elements about which the didactic work must teach. The uncertainty inherent in all human signification may create moments of aporia in the *Conde Lucanor*, but this is hardly a defect, and

¹⁵ Seidenspinner notes (applying Iser’s reader-response theory to the work), even though Juan Manuel gives us a possible solution to the conflict presented in the text, requiring us, the readers, to “adopt an attitude toward the one offered” (in Seidenspinner Nuñez 262). “The acceptance or rejection of the solution(s) offered in the *Conde Lucanor* depends directly on the degree of the reader’s identification with the work’s repertoire and with the fictitious reader in the text” (262). Seidenspinner-Nuñez maintains that since Juan Manuel was such a socially respected nobleman his authority as author (and fictitious interpreter) would cause the audience to “readily assimilate the moral teachings of his book” (263).

only a post-Enlightenment association of instruction with logical clarity would be embarrassed to find that this is the case. The need to hone one's powers of interpretation—the very need, if you will, of a Lucanor to have a Patronio—is because signs (whether language or actions) may or may not truly represent intentions. How to distinguish the rhetorical manipulation of signs from the genuine reflection of one's inner feelings and character through signs? (119)

“Exemplo XI” is a perfect example of the above expression of Don Manuel's ethos. For De Looze the “problematic nature of human signification,” i.e. slippages of meaning, either because of different positions of utterance or because of willful misrepresentation (*engaño*) characterize the overwhelming majority of *exempla* in the first part of the *CL*. This is, in fact, the case for “Exemplo XI,” in which the reader (like Don Yllán) is faced with looking beyond and/or manipulating the circumstances of language/the production of signs to discern the dean's “real” intentions. Don Yllán's creation of an illusory world in order to discern the dean's intentions, reflects not only the inherent ambiguity of signification De Looze explores, but also how the particular context of this ambiguity—the details of Iberian realities Don Juan Manuel includes—the geographic specificity of the setting and the respective professional expertise of the characters--function as modes of signification for the reader, both fourteenth-century and contemporary.

And while many critics think the specific details of fourteenth-century Iberia found throughout the *CL*—the concern for honor, social position, the Church hierarchy and cultural realities of Castile--alienate this text from contemporary students, it is precisely those details that underscores Juan Manuel's mistrust of signs and meanings. Whereas Ian Macpherson finds the *CL* to be something of a “period-piece,” claiming that

the “social and geographical limitations of *CL* are severe” geared mostly for a fourteenth-century Spanish nobleman and that the overriding lesson that the *CL* “strives to show [is] that self-interest and worldly success are not incompatible with the salvation of the soul,” a lesson primarily for a soldier (37), I would argue that such a lesson—the moral for the reader who does not go beyond the work’s overt or stated didacticism to contemplate signification and interpretation—is not lost on our own students, familiar with contemporary popular leaders and beliefs that similarly link religious belief and worldly success.¹⁶

The details of the story, such as the locales—Toledo and Santiago—and the men’s professions—cleric and necromancer—details Macpherson finds alienating, while not necessary to understanding the story’s central *engaño*, do allow for a subtext that brings additional meaning to the tale and reward our students who read deeper. Each man can be read as representative not just of a place, but of a system of belief, of a way of making sense of the world—of interpreting signs. The dean is driven by desire for worldly success and self-interest and yet he is the antagonist—the dupe. Don Yllán who minds his own business and proves the more intelligent of the men comes out the better role model in this *exemplum*. The status of either man’s soul is not discussed, but the ambiguity of presenting a protagonist whose field of specialty is the black arts seems to fly in the face of Macpherson’s reading. By all indications the lesson for the reader is to follow don Yllán’s method and to not trust outward signs—not to trust in the dean’s moral character despite his ecclesiastical office—even (or especially) once he becomes pope.

¹⁶ This ethos echoes the so-called “prosperity theology” of many contemporary American evangelicals (David Van Biema and Jeff Chu).

It is the frame that allows the author to seduce the reader into this position. The author manipulates the power of fiction much as the character Don Yllán manipulates his science, magic. Guillermo Serés points out that in this *exemplum* Juan Manuel echoes Yllán's trick of illusion in his narration of the story:

La citada maestría del autor se aprecia especialmente en la disposición de la historia de don Illán, con su ilusionismo sutil que engaña al deán (y al lector), con su narración sabiamente demorada, con la evocación miniaturista de la cámara del nigromante. Ello es así porque el autor dispone el relato de tal forma, que, análogamente a cómo el nigromante don Illán juega con el deán para demostrar su ingratitud, don Juan Manuel lo hace con el lector, pues no le advierte en ningún momento de que también le ha integrado en el tiempo ilusorio del deán; de igual modo juega Patronio con el Conde Lucanor. (note 52-53)

While we, the readers, like the dean, are victims of don Yllán's illusion, we are then asked to identify with Don Yllán in the *moraleja* that follows, in which don Johán tells the reader that if someone you help isn't grateful, he will be less so if he attains a better social position. This shift in the character with whom the reader is asked to identify is, in fact, part of the aesthetic experience of the story—this final surprise that causes us to rethink all that has gone before. Patronio is purposefully ambiguous in the opening of the story, asking Lucanor to listen to what happened to the dean of Santiago when he encountered don Yllán, the master of Toledo, “mucho querría que sopiésedes lo que contesció a un deán de Sanctiago con don Yllán, el grand maestro que morava en Toledo” (53). The fact that Patronio tells the count to listen to the story of the dean in order to help him with his situation implicitly suggests that the parallel will be between dean and

count, i.e. that these two will have a similar problem with an ungrateful acquaintance. The dean is privileged by the grammatical construction; it is the dean's story ("lo que contesció a un déan") and Yllán is subordinated, being object of the preposition linking him to the dean (not the possessor of the story) and relegated to the position of supporting character—"with" Yllán ("con don Yllán"). Thus, the reader naturally identifies first with the dean, the student, who gets to realize his dream—attaining worldly power. But, in fact, as we only discover once the illusion is revealed (or perhaps as we progress in the story and realize who is asking favors of whom) that it is Don Yllán with whom the count (and the reader) ultimately identifies, once we are given the opportunity to see how the dean reacts when given the chance to fulfill his dreams.

The modern Argentine writer, Jorge Luis Borges, further exploits this tale's potential for misrepresentation and for relocating the reader vis-a-vis not only characters, but also author. Borges's version of the story, "El Brujo Postergado," pulls the narrative out of the frame into which Juan Manuel places it, and from which he manipulates our reading of it. By offering only the story of a sorcerer and dean, Borges forces the learned reader to explore issues of authorship and contingency/context and to what extent both effect interpretation. For those contemporary readers unfamiliar with Don Juan Manuel's fourteenth-century version of this story, reading it without Juan Manuel's frame clearly pointing us to the lesson about ungrateful friends, the central focus of Borges's version of the story is not ingratitude, but the wonder of magic, the feat of mastering and manipulating time. The last image the reader has is the arrival of the housekeeper announcing dinner is ready and of the hasty dismissal of the shamed dean. In this modern version, such a feat is relegated to the distant almost mythical past, Iberia in the Middle

Ages. Like Juan Manuel (and Yllán), Borges is realizing his own trick (*engaño*)/ casting his own spell over his reader/s—he presents this material without any indication that it is not his own—he simply confirms and continues the story-telling tradition. Unlike Juan Manuel and Don Yllán, however, he does not include a final revelation scene—an acknowledgement of the illusion and of his own role as its creator. If the reader does not know Don Juan Manuel’s version of the story, he/she will forever be under the spell of Borges, assuming that he is the author and that this story is a modern creation. However, this also is also what most readers familiar with this work as a part of the medieval Spanish tradition believe when thinking of the tale of “Exemplo XI” as the creation of Juan Manuel—as representative of the first Castilian prose—not the creation or adaptation of Ibn Sahula or the medieval Judeo-Iberian tradition; So Borges’s version forces us to face the very question that Juan Manuel’s, locked away by the author to avoid others’ enmmendations, sought to suppress: Does authorial originality really matter in the appreciation and enjoyment of this or any work? Borges, in fact, violates Juan Manuel’s wishes and calls attention to the nature of storytelling—relocating the narrative of “Exemplo XI” in his own collection of short stories. In so doing, Borges arguably introduces the story, which was not created by Juan Manuel, who himself mined the many traditions of story collections with which he was familiar for material, to a modern audience. In so doing Borges simultaneously insults and pays homage to Juan Manuel, and copies Juan Manuel himself who adapted the story either from an earlier Hebrew version or from a medieval vernacular Iberian oral tradition as Wacks maintains.

The Future of Fiction

All the iterations of the tale we have examined thus far--Ibn Sahula's thirteenth-century tale, Juan Manuel's fourteenth-century tale and Borges's twentieth-century tale--anticipate the genre of speculative fiction called by Anglo-Americans "science fiction." The protagonist, don Yllán uses his knowledge of what was considered at the time the most cutting-edge science to manipulate the laws of the natural world—to change what today, post Star Trek and Einstein, we would call the "space-time continuum." Leon Ghilgione has recently proposed that speculative fiction is a better vehicle than scientific or academic studies for predicting the future, that it offers "a way of examining what is neither impossible nor verifiably possible—a way of considering present possibilities by working out their consequences" (2). This is exactly what Yllán does in this tale. Like the author of speculative fiction (Juan Manuel in this case)—Yllán allows the dean and the reader to explore and experience one possible future. Technology is key to contemporary speculative fiction, but as the science fiction writer Arthur C. Clark points out, "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (413). As discussed above Yllán's science (necromancy or black magic) was part of the Judeo-Arabic cultural milieu of Iberia, which was the center of technological advancement for fourteenth-century Europe. Toledo was famous as an intellectual center where Western Europeans could access the knowledge of the East via the Arabic tradition, including the then cutting edge fields of mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, astrology and, of course, don Yllán's field, magic. Given this confluence of factors it is easy to see how this tale may be read in this same vein of speculative fiction, and shows that writers have long used fiction to explore the future and its possibilities for the present and its inhabitants. In Juan

Manuel's fiction, as in Ibn Sahula's, access to the potential technology of the future is possible in a foreign land and a foreign system of knowledge. Borges's tale achieves travel to a foreign land not just by geographical, but also by temporal displacement—setting the entire tale for his Argentine audience in medieval Spain. For the contemporary audience the distant past is a strange land, full of signposts we can no longer decipher.

Reading this tale in the three versions discussed above—Judeo-Iberian, medieval Castilian and twentieth-century Argentine--forces the modern reader to think about contemporary culture's debt to the past, and about the very process of cultural transmission—not just from one culture to another, but from one language to another and from one generation to another. The ways in which these ideas resonate with contemporary debates concerning intellectual property rights, including (but certainly not limited to) the issue of sampling in music, the issue of plagiarism in literature, the issue of music downloading, and the idea of fair or academic use, are too numerable to list. Also, and perhaps most importantly, Borges's version of don Yllán's tale, being the most recent, forces the issue of authorial identity and of the role of originality in fiction. While Borges's better-known story on the role of the author, "Pierre Menard," explicitly addresses the issue of authorship, originality, and context (how, when and where a work is composed affects interpretation), "El Brujo postergado" is more subtle, and requires more of its reader. But like Don Juan Manuel and Don Yllán, Borges asks us to consider these topics via fiction—the realm in which we the reader, like the characters of this story, can explore alternatives in order to learn something about ourselves as interpreters,

arbiters of meaning, and our interpretation, that creation of meaning, as a reflection of our moral make up.

In our current era in which a liberal arts education may seem superfluous, this lesson is important not just for our students, but also, arguably, for us, the educators who design and shape that education and determine what it hopes to achieve. Chris Hedges has recently attacked the Academy for its complacency in the modern era, describing American universities as complicit in what he describes as “moral nihilism”:

We live in an age of moral nihilism. We have trashed our universities, turning them into vocational factories that produce corporate drones and chase after defense-related grants and funding. The humanities, the discipline that forces us to stand back and ask the broad moral questions of meaning and purpose, that challenges the validity of structures, that trains us to be self-reflective and critical of all cultural assumptions, have withered. (truthdig Mar 23, 2009)

Hedges makes a compelling argument that it is precisely the type of thinking that characterizes the humanities, which not coincidentally is that encouraged by Juan Manuel in “Exemplo XI,” that is required to mitigate this process, brought about in his opinion by those bureaucracies and systems of power that may no longer be the Church and the nobility, but any one of several contemporary entities that wield power and influence globally. For Hedges, as it is for the contemporary thinkers he cites, including Theodore Adorno and Immanuel Kant, such patterns of thinking—of asking the deeper questions regarding institutions of power, bodies of knowledge and the elite who control them—are the moral prerogative of everyone. “Moral autonomy, as Immanuel Kant wrote, is possible only through reflection, self-determination and the courage not to cooperate”

(Hedges truthdig). Hedges, laments, however, how few of us are exercising or encouraging others to exercise such moral autonomy. Juan Manuel's tale of the rogue necromancer who has the foresight and wisdom to question the figure of institutional authority who comes to his door making false promises allows us not only to offer our students a model of such behavior, but to put them, however briefly, into the uncomfortable position (via the reading process) of questioning cultural assumptions and forcing them to ask these broader questions. What this tale about humans and the institutions they live and work in, the knowledge they seek and its possible applications, as well the possibilities of fiction, allows our students to do is not only think about their role in the world and in the institutions in which they function, but also about what they are learning and why. Most importantly, perhaps, is that this story will also allow them to imagine other possibilities, which, in the end, is the unique gift that fiction offers, and which allows this medieval work of fiction to continue to speak to us today.

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