

5. Images of the Here-and-Now in Gonzalo de Berceo's *De los signos que aparecerán ante del juicio*

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Until the thirteenth century, the poetry of medieval Spain was dominated by two main genres, the *mester de juglaría* (minstrels' craft) which produced the great epic poems celebrating the feats of the conquistadores, and the love lyrics exemplified by the Mozarabic *jarchas* and the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas*. Gonzalo de Berceo (c. 1190-1264), the first Spanish poet known by name, helped usher in a new school of poetry, imitative in part of the minstrels' appeal to a broad audience, but priding itself on its much more demanding metrical scheme and loftier subject matter: the *mester de clerecía* (clerics' craft).

By Berceo's times, the pilgrim route from France to the shrine of Saint James in Compostela was a well-traveled one indeed, and passed just ten miles north of the monastery of San Millán de Suso, at the foot of the Sierra de la Demanda mountains, where the poet was raised from boyhood. It has often been suggested that Berceo's poetic activity was connected with this pilgrim route and that his audience consisted of travelers interested enough in the sepulcher of Saint Emilianus (or San Millán de la Cogolla, co-patron with Saint James of the Spanish Reconquest) to stray from the pilgrim route as it passed between Nájera and Santo Domingo de la Calzada. These pilgrims might have attended recitations of Berceo's poems on the Virgin Mary, her miracles, on other local saints (Saint Dominic of Silos, Saint Oria, or Saint Emilianus himself) or on other devout subjects, such as the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, or on the end times and the last judgment.

Berceo's brief poem on the end times, *De los signos que aparecerán ante del juicio* (On the signs that will appear before Doomsday), has the same popular appeal shared by much medieval apocalyptic writing: depending on the mood of the reader's historical moment, it seems either quaint archaism or haunting augury. However, in its curious use of imagery reflective of concrete quotidian

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reality, or imagery of the here-and-now, *De los signos* is decidedly unlike other apocalyptic writing. The poem has been the object of study of several prominent critics José L. Pensado, James W. Marchand, Brian Dutton, and Arturo Ramoneda none of whom have failed to note, to a greater or lesser extent, Berceo's unusual use of local color and rustic imagery. None of them, however, has discussed the multi-faceted significance of such imagery. Berceo's imagery of the here-and-now, though typical of his poetic *opus* in general, is especially significant in *De los signos* on several levels. First, by continuously making a fantastic and other-worldly tale seem possible within one's immediate personal space, Berceo achieves one of his primary goals, that of terrifying his audience into doing good. Second, Berceo's frequent references to the familiar and commonplace set the poem apart from his sources and indeed from all other treatment of this well-known literary topic. Third, by examining more closely Berceo's imagery of the here-and-now we better understand that very here-and-now, and the myriad ways, now largely lost to us seven centuries later, by which Berceo's text was received by his audience. Finally, a careful consideration of the way Berceo points toward the elements of his immediate physical surroundings offers a deeper understanding of the poem's performative context.

The poem begins with a description of the last fifteen days of life on earth. On the penultimate day the whole world will be consumed by fire: gold and silver, fine silks and satins, and the precious regal canopies of the thrones of

emperors will be burned. So utterly complete will this final destruction be that not a single rabbit will remain in the underbrush:

El día quarto décimo :: será fiera varata,
ardrá todo el mundo, :: el oro y la plata,
balanquines e púrpuras, xamit et escarlata,
non fincará conejo :: en cabo nin en mata.

(On the fourteenth day, there will be great confusion/ The whole world will burn, all its gold and silver/ Regal canopies, purples, all samite and scarlet/ Not a rabbit will be left in rabbit-hole or thicket.)¹

In 1977 James W. Marchand observed that the reference to the poor rabbit, surrounded by the flames of the final cataclysm, might have called to the mind of the peasant the yearly brush-burning and its effect on the wildlife that hid in the hedgerows.² Marchand's assumption that Riojan peasants practiced brush-burning is certainly a safe one. The *incendium* prescribed by classical writers on agronomy (such as Palladius³) was a common means to enrich the soil and clear land of the stubble from the previous crop or fallow; the practice is attested to also in Gabriel Alonso de Herrera's early sixteenth-century treatise *Obra de agricultura*.⁴ On the other hand, one might conjecture that Berceo's

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covering rabbit called to mind less the fire that surrounded the poor thing than the fur on the creature's back. Such an earthy allusion could well echo the enumeration of fine cloths in verse c of the same stanza. Royal purple (*púrpura* of verse c) was a cloth, usually of wool, dyed in the ink secreted by a certain mollusc. The dye was so rare and held in such high esteem that this cloth became associated exclusively with prelates, kings, and emperors.⁵ Samite (*xamit*) was a heavy silk fabric interwoven with gold or silver.⁶ Scarlet (*escarlata*) was cloth colored by another highly-prized dye. Rabbit fur was probably used for lining the apparel of rich and poor alike. Perhaps Berceo chose to end his list of allusions to wealth and power with a potent reminder not only that such textile symbols will be reduced to nothing, but that they never amounted to much more than the humble rabbit in its hole in the first place.

Whether the reference is to agriculture or hunting, the rabbit of verse d is clearly imagery of the here-and-now, and for a very specific purpose. In the first three verses Berceo's listeners consider the eventual destruction of earth, but they do so from a great temporal and social distance: the flames of that most distant future will consume the most highly prized possessions of the most powerful and mighty. Then, from these lofty heights of fancy and imagination, Berceo yanks his listeners down to the here-and-now with his final verse, reminding them that the final cataclysm will indeed be so complete that not even the most insignificant creature in its hole will be spared. The frightened rabbit is not merely homey detail: it is an unexpected and effective jolt back to the very reality that must eventually be destroyed. One might say that by invoking in this context a prosaic element in his listener's rural landscape, Berceo facilitates the *invasion* of that landscape by the very forces he is describing. This pattern is typical throughout the poem, and illustrates Berceo's use of concrete imagery to achieve his purpose, announced in stanza four and discussed fully by Pensado, of instilling fear in his listeners.⁷

In stanza 19 Berceo utilizes another image taken from the agricultural reality of Spain for essentially the same purpose.

Non será el dozeno :: qui lo ose catar,
ca verá por el Zielo :: grandes flamas volar;
verá a las estrellas :: caer de su logar
como caen las fojas :: quand caen del figar.

(Not a soul will there be who'll dare behold the twelfth sign / For flames will he see flying all across the sky / He will see the stars all falling from their places / As fall the leaves when they fall from the fig tree.)

Here the image in question completes a simile: the falling of all stars from heaven on the twelfth day is likened to the simple dropping of fig leaves from a fig tree. Since fig leaves are rather large and heavy, they make a relatively short

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and direct yearly fall from these rather low trees.⁸ This concrete image would be so utterly familiar to his listeners that it would effectively usher them into that distant and hard-to-imagine moment when all celestial bodies fall to the earth in flames. Make no mistake here: while in Berceo's two verses c-d we may indeed have a biblical echo, the allusion is not without its originality. Revelation 6:13 ("the stars in the sky fell crashing to earth like figs shaken loose by a mighty wind") and Mark 13:28 ("Once the sap of its branches [the fig tree] runs high and it begins to sprout leaves, you know that summer is near")⁹ are of course closely related and oft-repeated biblical images, and Berceo here makes a clear allusion to both. Nonetheless, the biblical verses differ significantly from Berceo's verse. The latter, I would argue, derives from the commonplace, the almost too-familiar here-and-now of his regional agricultural reality, and reminds his listeners that it all will happen right here.¹⁰

Many other images from Berceo's immediate reality could be given, all equally poignant, and all effective in driving the message home in the sense of making his warnings penetrate the most intimate domestic spaces. After the treatment of the signs foreboding Doomsday, Berceo describes the judgment itself, and its subsequent rewards and punishments. A strikingly violent tone of vengeance and bitterness characterizes his description of the pains inflicted on the damned in hell (numerous examples appear below); and nowhere is this tone more grating on modern sensibilities than in stanza 46, where the punishment for envy is described:

Los que son invidiosos, :: aquessos malfadados,
qui por el bien del próximo :: andan descolorados,
serán en el infierno :: de todos coceados
ferlis án lo que facen :: madrastras a annados.

(Those whose sin is envy, those ill-begotten ones! / Who go around all red in the face after their neighbors' goods / Once they get to hell they'll be kicked at by everyone, / They'll be treated the way that stepmothers treat their stepsons and daughters).

It should probably come as no surprise that the stereotypical stepmother of medieval times was endued with a bigoted lack of charity toward her stepchildren.¹¹ Furthermore, Berceo's expression "lo que facen madrastras a annados" may actually be less an original turn-of-phrase than a paremiological echo.¹² Whether this expression reflects a stock of

popular proverbs or an all-too-familiar scene of domestic discord, it is clear that Berceo has borrowed a well-known image from his immediate present to describe the supposedly unimaginable torments of a distant future.

The secret deeds of all humankind will be out in the open on that fateful day. The lives of the good and the evil will be rigorously reproached, as if they were

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dwellings stripped of their doors. So begins one of the concluding stanzas of the poem (stanza 71). By this point it will have been noticed that Berceo's most poignant and earthy imagery usually comes as an emphatic conclusion in the final verse of each stanza, and the same is true in this stanza: the lives of all will look like walls that have been badly plastered!

Las vidas de los omnes :: allí serán contadas,
de malos e de buenos :: seran fuert porfazadas;
como seran abiertas :: sin puertas las posadas,
pareçrán las paredes :: que fueron mal tapiadas.

(The lives of all mankind will there be plainly told/ the lives of good and evil ones, scrutinized and weighed / All will be flung open, like dwellings without doors / the walls will then appear as if they'd all been poorly plastered.)

The process of closing up walls is *tapiar*, which requires an appropriate mixture of sand, lime, and water. Instructions for safeguarding against ruining the *tapia* of walls can be found in Ferrer Sayol's fourteenth-century translation of Palladius. Walls which have been poorly plastered quickly decay from the rain and weather,¹³ baring the skeletal frame of the dwelling and revealing its hidden contents. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that many of the poet's listeners battled the elements unceasingly to maintain their dwellings *tapiadas*. Here we sense at its strongest the teluric nature of Berceo's imagery, in spite of the fact that his topic is not even of this world!

If one examines the many examples of signs of Doomsday given in William W. Heist's landmark study of this European tradition, one notes that Berceo's imagery is markedly unlike other apocalyptic writing in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ This difference is especially striking in the occasional instances when Berceo's imagery borders on levity. In stanza 22, for example, when the final trumpet sounds calling all the dead to judgment, each one will hear it from within his "little box" (*capseta*) and will run to the judgment each carrying his or her own little "suitcase" (*maleta*):

El día postremero, :: como diz el propheta,
el ángel pregonero :: sonará la corneta;
oírlo án los muertos, :: quisque en su capseta,
correrán al Juicio :: quisque con su maleta.

(On that final day, as the prophet has declared, / The angel of the Lord will make the trumpet sound / The dead will hear the call, each in his little box / And all will run to the Judgment, with suitcase in hand.)^{14a}

Since *capseta* is not the standard word for coffin, and since on this final voyage no one takes any luggage anyway (except of course for one's deeds, both good

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and bad), we have here an unexpected touch of humor one that borders on the inappropriate or at least eludes the well-worn ruts of traditional treatment. The Final Judgment is, after all, among the religious topics most utterly devoid of humor; and if we compare Berceo's stanza with its probable Latin source or with other traditional treatment of this part of the legend, we find a stark absence of any such playfulness. While Marchand implies that such humorous elements detract from the "supreme artistry" and grandeur of the poem,¹⁵ I would argue that the poem's grandeur lies in Berceo's ability to pour the airy, celestial clichés of his topic into the concrete imagery of his immediate surroundings, even when to do so seems out of place and humorous. This is precisely what sets *De los signos* apart from its predecessors. A look at Berceo's creative process is now in order.

For nearly all of Berceo's poems, including the *Signos*, specific source texts have been identified by critics from the corpus of Latin hagiographies and other religious writing that circulated throughout Europe at the time. For example, Berceo's most famous poem, the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* ("Miracles of Our Lady"), has been shown to derive from a source similar to that of *Les Miracles de la Sainte Vierge* of Gautier de Coincy. Berceo's rhymed "Life of Saint Dominic of Silos" derives from the Latin hagiography by the abbot Grimaldus, and his Life of Saint Emilianus derives from another by Saint Braulius.¹⁶ *De los signos* can also be traced to a probable Latin precursor, *De signis ante Judicium*, itself a reworking of several distinct medieval versions of the signs: those of Peter Comestor, Peter Damian and Pseudo-Bede.¹⁷

The *mester de clerecía* form by which Berceo versifies his sources invites and indeed requires a considerable degree of *amplificatio*, or expansion and elaboration of source material. Also known as the *cuaderna vía* or "fourfold way," the *mester de clerecía* stanza consists of four verses of fourteen syllables each, rhyming consonantly. To fill out each verse, to maintain perfection of rhyme and meter, to complete each stanza, and to fully render each translation, Berceo cannot rely merely on a literal conversion to his Riojan dialect; he must make recourse to his peculiar inventory of poetic techniques. Therefore, his originality resides to a large extent in the way he elaborates and enriches the Latin legends that served as his sources, infusing them with his lively rustic personality. In some stanzas his *amplificatio* accounts for fully half the material, as in stanza 22 above, which Dutton derives from the Latin verses "et post hec angelica :: tuba resonabit, / et sic omnes mortuos :: Deus suscitabit."¹⁸ In others his elaboration is more subtle. In nearly all cases, however, Berceo's *amplificatio* employs imagery of a most familiar vein, turning the dry monotony of the source into a vibrant, imaginable, even somewhat humorous horror.

The third of the fifteen signs to precede the final judgment, for example, will amount to nothing less than pandemonium among all birds, fish, and animals. I quote stanzas 8 and 9:

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En el tercero signo :: nos conviene fablar,
que será grant espanto :: e un fiero pesar,
andarán los pescados :: todos sobre la mar,
metiendo grandes voces, :: non pudiendo quedar.

Las aves esso mismo, :: menudas e granadas,
andarán dando gritos :: todas mal espantadas;
assí farán las bestias :: por domar e domadas,
non podrán a la noche :: tornar a sus posadas.

(And now we must address the sign the third day will announce / Which truly will be frightening, a grievous weight for all / The fish of all the oceans will walk upon the waves / raising high their voices, unable to calm down. / The same with all the birds, the smallest to the great / they'll all go round with shrieking / they'll all be so afraid / so will all the animals, those tamed and yet untamed / they'll be unable, at night, to return to their dwellings.)

These two stanzas derive from the following Latin verses:

Pisces die tertia :: super fluctus stabunt,
et mugitus maximos :: versus celum dabunt;
congregate Volucres :: plangent et clamabunt,
cuncte quoque bestie :: planctu resonabunt.[19](#)

In Berceo's version, all the fish of the ocean will rise to the surface and holler wildly, unable to contain themselves ("metiendo grandes voces, non pudiendo quedar"). In like manner all birds of the air will go about screaming ("andarán dando gritos"), as will the beasts of the field, both those yet untamed and the domesticated ("por domar e domadas"). The latter will be unable, at nightfall, to return to their shelters ("non podrán a la noche tornar a sus posadas"). By comparing both languages we see the extent to which Berceo expands his source with peculiar earthy and somewhat humorous details, in order to finish out each of his eight fourteen-syllable verses. First, he makes the odd attribution of "voices" ("voces"), along with a peculiar inability to calm themselves down, to fish, as if they might in some other circumstances be inclined to greater self-control. He then underscores the totality of the chaos within the animal kingdom by extending it from the obvious, i.e., those animals "yet to be tamed" to the less obvious, i.e., those already domesticated, lest the latter be somehow deemed a more resistant lot. Finally, he suggests a spatial disorientation among the animals at nightfall, of which there is no trace in his source. These details become especially significant when, with the aid of a complete concordance of his works, we speculate on what Berceo could have written but did not. Instead of giving fish "voices" in verse 8d he could have written something more insipid like "faziendo un grant gemito" (making a

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great groan); this would have been much closer to the source phrase "et mugitus maximos versus celum dabunt" (and they will make a great bellowing toward the heavens). He could have also refashioned the whole verse to end in the verb *far* to maintain the consonance of the stanza.[20](#)

A complete analysis of the imagery in the poem taken from Berceo's immediate surroundings would highlight further the uniqueness of *De los signos* vis-a-vis other medieval writings on the signs, would further reveal the author's design to reduce his audience to piety, and would yield many more insights into the frame of reference of his audience. What is more, as is implied in all the analyses above, the here-and-now, or a certain blunt directness and earthy

informality not only characterize Berceo's imagery but permeate his poetic language as well. An analysis on this level, beyond the scope of this essay, would take us even deeper into an understanding of Berceo's genius. In place of more detailed discussion, I offer the following list of further references to Berceo's immediate geographical and cultural milieu. They include:

1) the good deeds which the Supreme Judge (God) claims could have been put up or stored away ("condessada"),²¹ as if God was some great canner of summer fruits and vegetables (stanza 34);

2) the itchy tunic ("áspero sayal") with which the damned are cloaked in hell (stanza 37);

3) the deceitful craftsmen, untrustworthy laborers and thieving shepherds who will inhabit hell (stanza 43): a bitter echo, undoubtedly, of proverbs such as "So you want complete perdition and not feel it? Take along some laborers and don't watch them" ("Quieres te perder y que no lo sientas, lleua peones y no los veas"²²);

4) the hypocrite clergymen who live worldly lives and make off with the offerings of the people; these will receive the "offering" of merciless stings from snakes and scorpions (stanza 44);

5) the corrupt civil servants ("merinos") in charge of collecting tithes who will go about begging in hell all bent over like crooks (stanza 45)²³;

6) the likening of the pains of hell to smacks on the back of the head ("pescoçadas"²⁴ stanza 47c);

7) the fact that the blessed inhabitants of heaven will be so free from worry that they won't even need to watch the color of clouds for signs of bad weather (stanza 59);

8) the use of the legal term "desfeduzado" ('deprived of one's property rights') to refer to the state of eternal disenfranchisement that will characterize the damned (stanza 68);

9) the complete and utter expose of every soul's sins (except those washed away by repentance), as glaring as that to which the goods of the marketplace are subjected (stanza 70c); and

10) that ineludible worm that gnaws away at one's core (an allusion to the ruin of fruits?), and whose presence will be all the more acutely felt should one

attempt to hide from the proceedings of the Final Judgment (stanza 74).

These references are only the more obvious attempts on Berceo's part to call up images from his own immediate reality. Many others, less obvious, suggest themselves in a careful reading of the poem.

Berceo's striving for immediacy is explainable first and foremost by considering his didactic purpose. But whom was he attempting to teach, and in what circumstances? Many critics have voiced opinions about his audience throughout this century. The majority hypothesize that Berceo's poems were read to a socially mixed group, either pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. James at Compostela in Galicia, or those attracted to the tomb of Saint Elilianus in San Millán itself. Most critics likewise accept that the unlettered masses would have made up a significant part of this group. As regards the question of *where* his poems were read, the most startling reference of all to Berceo's here-and-now seems to answer the question definitively, at least for this poem. In stanza 18 Berceo makes reference to the very walls that surround him and his audience, and by the mention of the tombs contained in them we see that the walls are certainly those of a church or monastery appendage:

El del onzeno día :: si saberlo queredes,
será tan bravo signo :: que vos espantaredes;
abrirse án las fuessas :: que cerradas veedes,
istrán fuera los huessos :: de entre las paredes.

(The sign of the eleventh day, if you really want to know, / Will be a sign so awful, that you'll all be terror-struck / The tombs that you see closed will all be opened up / And from within the walls, the bones will issue forth.)

I have cited this stanza elsewhere in an attempt to show how the sculpture and painting of a church may have influenced the structure of this poem.²⁵ The evidence the stanza provides in favor of public recitation in a church setting has, to my knowledge, never been considered before. For purposes of the present study, this stanza manifests the extreme diectic quality of Berceo's constant appeals to his immediate surroundings. While up to this point I have suggested that Berceo's imagery is strong and effective because it belongs to the concrete reality of his listeners, in stanza 18 we go a step closer to concrete reality. In the verse "The tombs that you see closed before you will all open up . . .," it is as if Berceo were actually pointing at the tombs that were present and visible to all as he read to them from his manuscript. Perhaps he was doing just that.

In light of this diectic tendency, we might do well to reinterpret the opening verses of the poem. Right from the outset Berceo employs the minstrel's formulae for gathering together his audience and focusing their attention on his topic: "Sennores, si quisiéssedes :: atender un poquiello, / querríavos contar :: un poco de ratiello / un sermón . . ." (My friends, if you'll gather and

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listen just a bit, a sermon I'd retell for you, it won't take but a while . . .). The minstrel's posture in itself is not remarkable, since Berceo makes use of it for many of his poems, but in the second stanza, after making the traditional (and erroneous) attribution of the legend to St. Jerome, Berceo ends with a curious comparison. He likens the experience of listening to his own apocalypse to having a bite to eat: "For whoever wishes to hear it, it will be like a nice snack" ("qui las oír quisiere, tenga que bien merienda"). This is indeed an odd comparison, since there is little in the poem that might have comforted a medieval audience, and it has proven problematic to critics in the past.²⁶

Perhaps a literal reading should be considered here, one that takes into account Berceo's frequent references to the immediate circumstances in which his poems were presented. Perhaps the "snack" (*merienda*) to which Berceo refers was a real repast of some sort, which all knew would immediately follow the cleric's performance. The sense of the verse would then be precisely as given by Canales Toro "For whoever wishes to hear it will have a good snack,"²⁷ but it will be "good" only because that person will be eating with a clear conscience, having duly considered the fate of his soul before caring for the needs of the body. Considering that Berceo's *Milagros* have been tentatively associated with the entertainment and instruction of pilgrims coming to San Millán for certain feastsdays in March honoring the Virgin Mary, such an interpretation would seem to merit further study.²⁸

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*"artistry of the highest order," as Marchand claims?²⁹ If the poem can be seen as having intrinsic literary merit, that merit certainly derives in part from the power of Berceo's references to his particular historical moment, to the human condition as perceived by his society, and to the material reality that surrounded him and his audience, precisely when least expected. These direct references succeed because they are so unusual, humble, unexpected, and earthy. Berceo makes poetry out of the commonplace, out of the dirt itself. Although typical of the poet's entire work, this quality takes on special functions in *De los signos* and sets it apart from the entire European transmission of the legend. For these reasons I would argue that the poem deserves a higher critical assessment than that which it continues to receive by some, even to this day.³⁰ It merits inclusion in undergraduate literature survey courses (there exists a modern Spanish version, by Clemente Canales Toro),³¹ especially since it is of quite manageable length. Together with a sampling from Berceo's better known works, *De los signos* can provide the modern reader with a vivid picture of the customs and practices of the thirteenth-century Riojan world, and an unexpectedly vivid picture of how that world was expected to end.*

Notes

1. Gonzalo de Berceo, *Obras completas I-V*, ed. Brian Dutton, 5 vols. (London, 1967-1981), 3: 124, hereafter cited as *Signos* with stanza number. My translation here and throughout attempts to preserve something of the original rhythm, remain faithful to the sense of the original and, when close literality is impossible, find equivalent expressions in Modern English. [The complete works are now available online at [Obras completas de Gonzalo de Berceo](#) ("Obras completas de Gonzalo de Berceo, primer poeta culto conocido de la Literatura Española (s.XIII); se incluye, además, vocabulario completo, bibliografía, transcripción") Ed. note, September 12, 2003.]
2. James W. Marchand, "Gonzalo de Berceo's 'De los signos que aparecieran ante del juicio.'" *Hispanic Review* 45 (1977), 283-295, at p. 292.
3. Palladius Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus. *Opus agriculturae. De Veterinaria Medicina. De Insitione*, ed. Robert H. Rodgers (Leipzig, 1975), *Opus agriculturae*, 1.6.13, at p. 11.
4. Gabriel Alonso de Herrera, *Obra de agricultura*, ed. José Urbano Martínez Carreras, Biblioteca de autores españoles 235 (Madrid, 1970), p. 15.
5. *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, 20th ed. (Madrid, 1984), s.v. *púrpura*. Hereafter, *DRAE*.
6. Arturo M. Ramoneda, ed. *Signos que aparecieran antes del juicio final. Duelo de la virgen. Martirio de San Lorenzo* (Madrid, 1980), pp. 307-308. See also *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 5th ed. (Springfield, Mass., 1945), s.v. *samite*. 7. José L. Pensado, "Los 'Signa Judicii' en Berceo." *Archivum* (Oviedo, Spain) 10 (1960), 229-270, at p. 251. Such fear was for the good of each soul, as is clear from stanza 4: "Por esso lo escripso ::

el varón acordado, / que se tema el pueblo :: que ande desviado, / mejore en costumbres, :: faga a Dios pagado, / que non sea de Christo :: estonz desamparado" (That's why this upright man put it down in writing / That God's people, gone astray might come to fear the Lord / Change their evil ways, seek to please their God, / That in the end they not be abandoned by Christ Jesus). This issue of arousing fear and thus piety in the audience of the signs traditions is treated in James R. Sprouse's "An Alternate Medieval Apocalyptic Tradition: The Fifteen Signs Before the Day of Judgment in Scholastic Commentary and Middle English Popular Sermon" (unpublished essay, 1993).

8. They grow to three meters. See Oleg Polunin, *Flowers of Europe* (London, 1969), pp. 56-57.

9. *The New American Bible* (New York, 1970).

10. Pensado speculates that *fojas*, 'leaves' of verse d might have been corrupted along the way from *figos* 'figs', which would render the verse a mere biblical echo. Such speculation is unnecessary, however, and encourages the error especially regrettable, with regard to Berceo's imagery of attributing too much influence to scripture. Even if *fojas* were a scribal error for *figos*, when one considers the widespread cultivation of the fig in many parts of Spain (Alonso de Herrera's 1513 *Obra de agricultura* dedicates six

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pages to instructions on its care [78r-80v]), one must concede a local frame of reference for this image.

11. The abusive stepmother is a commonplace in the Middle Ages. For example: "Assi como la muger viuda que ha hijos & casa con otro marido que tiene hijos a los vnos es madre & a los otros madrastra - & grand diferencia es entra los hijos & antenados, ca los hijos con grand affecion et diligentemente son criados & los antenados con negligencia et muchas vezes con aborrescimiento se tractan" in Victoria A. Burrus and Harriet Goldberg, eds. *Esopete ystoriado (Toulouse, 1488)* (Madison, 1990), p. 9. My translation: Just as the widow who has children and marries another man who has children is mother to some and to the others is stepmother - and there is a great difference between her children and her stepchildren, because she rears her children with great affection and diligence, while her stepchildren are treated with negligence and often with abuse.

12. Such as that which is suggested in Erasmo Buceta, "Un dato para los Milagros de Berceo," *Revista de Filología Española* 9 (1922), 400-402.

13. Palladius Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus, *Obra de agricultura: Traducida y comentada en 1385 por Ferrer Sayol*, ed. Thomas M. Capuano (Madison, Wisconsin, 1990), p. 18. See also Alonso de Herrera's 1513 *Obra de agricultura*, where *tapia* walls are rejected as enclosures for gardens because they need to be repaired every year (fol. 99r).

14. See the many citations given from other poems and treatises on the signs in William W. Heist, *The Fifteen Signs Before Doomsday* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1952), pp. 2-20, 24-28, 80-88, and *passim*.

14a. My translation of the word *maleta* is probably in error here, and I am grateful to J. Roldán for pointing out my error in an email comment to the editor. Joan Corominas had already warned against the anachronistic appeal of *maleta* in the first edition of his *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana* ([Berne: Francke, 1954], 3: 205b lines 24-37). However, the warning came to late, for the meaning "valija" ("suitcase") had already been registered in the *Tentative Dictionary of Medieval Spanish* by Boggs, Kasten, Keniston and Richardson (Chapel Hill, 1946), and the error ("maleta") was repeated in the translation by Clemente Canales Toro of *Signos del juicio final* (Santiago de Chile: Universitaria, 1955), p. 89, and again (maleta glossed as "fardel") in Brian Dutton's notes to his edition of the same text (*Obras completas III: El duelo de la Virgen. Los himnos. Los loores de Nuestra Señora. Los signos del juicio final* [London: Tamesis, 1975], p. 133). Even if *maleta* is translated as "sin" or "transgression," however, the stanza seems not without a distinct touch of humour, or perhaps picturesqueness, in the image of each dead person hearing the call, arising out of his/her coffin, and running to the judgment. (Note by T.C., August 2000--Ed.)

15. "In spite of an occasional humorous touch in deference to his audience, the supreme artistry of this, Spain's first named author, comes through." Marchand, "Gonzalo de Berceo's," p. 295.

16. Juan Luis Alborg, *Historia de la literatura española*, 4 vols. 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1986) 1: 117, 125-126.

17. Dutton, *Signos* 3: 139.

18. Dutton, *Signos* 3: 142.

19. Dutton, *Signos* 3: 140. "The fish on the third day will stand upon the waves. / They will make a great bellowing toward heaven. / All birds gathered together will cry out and beat their wings / And indeed all the other beasts will make a resounding lament." I thank David Christiansen for help with this translation.

20. See the hemistichs "faciendo gran ieiunio" from Berceo's poem *La vida de Santo Domingo de Silos*, in *Obras completas IV*, ed. Dutton, *Obras*, 4: 397c; "e faze un grant gemito" from his poem *La vida de San Millán de la Cogolla*, ed. Dutton, 1: 229c; and "como la devién far" from *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, ed. Dutton, 2: 398c. For this section I have benefited from the use of a copy of the computer-generated concordance to the works of Berceo created by Professor Dutton some years ago. Since no

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concordance has been published to date, this print-out has been an invaluable tool for which I have long been most grateful to Professor Dutton.

21. For this meaning of *condessada* see Joan Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana*, 4 vols. (Berne, 1954), 2: 125b (line 57)-126a (line 15).

22. Diego Gutiérrez de Salinas, *Discursos del pan y del vino del niño Jesús*, a summary of which ("Sumario," 203r-217r) is bound with *Libro de agricultura* by Gabriel Alonso de Herrera (Pamplona, 1605); see folio 216v, column a, lines 7-8.

23. For a discussion of the term *merino* see Ramoneda, *Signos*, p. 292.

24. DRAE s.v. *pescozada* gives this meaning. Corominas 3: 756a lines 21-22 cites the meaning "bofetada" ("slap in the face") from Nebrija.

25. "La correspondencia artística entre 'De los signos que aparecerán . . .' de Berceo y la escultura del siglo XIII," *Hispania* 71:4 (1988), 738-742 at p. 741.

26. Pensado cannot decide how to interpret this verse, and with good reason. First he suggests that Berceo is referring to the briefness of his poem, since a *merienda* is a brief meal ("...ha de ser ligero y rápido como el de una merienda"). Then he detects a note of humor in the verse, since the poem is not exactly a delicious, easy to swallow dish ("... no es un plato de gusto, suave y de buen paladar . . ."). Finally he suggests that both readings might need to be rejected, leaving the hemistich as a simple Latinism ("... dejando el sintagma en un simple latinismo: 'tenga

que bien merienda' = 'crea que ha de merecer bien.'"). The syntax of the hemistich is indeed problematic, and deriving merienda from mereo, merui "to deserve, merit" besides yielding the quite plausible meaning "He who wishes to hear it, consider himself well deserving" may lead to an explanation of why the subjunctive form tenga precedes the clause marker que (no such sequence is found in any other subjunctive clause containing tener in Berceo's work), and how the adverb bien came to modify a supposed noun such as merienda. See Pensado, p. 245.

27. Clemente Canales Torre, trans., *Signos del juicio final* by Gonzalo de Berceo (Santiago de Chile, 1955), p. 85: "Quien las quisiere oír tendrá buena merienda."

28. Brian Dutton, ed., *Los milagros de Nuestra Señora*, in *Obras completas II* (London, 1971), p. 12: ". . . parece lógico suponer que las obras marianas de Berceo formaban parte del culto de la Virgen, sobre todo para el entretenimiento e instrucción de los peregrinos que llegaban al monasterio, los mismos indicados en la copla 500 de los Milagros" (My translation: *It seems logical to assume that Berceo's Marian works formed a part of the ritual associated with the Virgen, especially in the sense of entertainment and instruction for the pilgrims that arrived at the monastery, the same*

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*pilgrims mentioned in stanza 500 of the Milagros). For yet another hypothesis concerning the performative context of Berceo's Sacrificio de la misa, see my "The Seasonal Laborer: Audience and Actor in the Works of Gonzalo de Berceo" *Corónica* 14:1 (1985), 15-22.*

29. Marchand, "Gonzalo de Berceo's," p. 295.

30. For a negative appraisal of this poem see Arturo M. Ramoneda, ed., *Signos que aparecerán antes del juicio final. Duelo de la virgen. Martirio de San Lorenzo* (Madrid, 1980), p. 28.

31. Clemente Canales Toro, trans., *Signos del juicio final* (Santiago de Chile, 1955).