

Don Juan de Serrallonga: An Analysis Through the Lens of a Biographical Poem

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Introduction:

Don Juan de Serrallonga (1594-1634), born Joan Sala i Ferrer, has captured the public imagination by embodying the archetype of the romantic Spanish bandit. Born in Catalunya in the late 16th-century during a time of political upheaval, we can view the biographical poem *D. Juan de Serrallonga. Historia escrita en trovos*. and compare it to our modern understanding of his life and other famous earlier Spanish literary works. While *Historia escrita* is a minor 19th-century work with no known singular author, stories about Serrallonga have been told in the Spanish world for centuries in books, plays, and movies.

A large part of this study was spent translating the poem itself. Following that was an analysis of what little we accurately know of Serrallonga's life, including the records of his arrest and subsequent execution. After removing what was somewhat factually accurate, this study compared it to other famous chivalric romantic literature, which clearly heavily influenced the poem; a part of this was studying the actual structure of the ballad and how the orator might have memorized it for future retellings.

- Real Life Comparison
 - Birth, Life, & Death of Joan Sala i Ferrer, better known as Don Juan de Serrallonga.
 - A look at his actual wife in comparison to the romantic heroine, Juana
 - A look at the real-life infighting in Catalonia between the Nyerros and Cadells.
 - Discussion on the listed birthplace of Serrallonga in the poem.
- Literature Comparison
 - Define what constitutes romantic chivalric literature and give a brief history of where it came from.
 - A look at *Tirant lo Blanc* as another example of romantic chivalric literature in Spain.
 - A look at *Don Quixote* as a criticism of romantic chivalric literature in Spain.
 - An analysis of the poem itself and how it's structured.

Real Life Comparison:

This is a chart depicting the comparisons between Serrallonga's real life and what the biographical poem depicts his life as.

| Reality: | Poem: |
|--|--|
| Apr 21, 1594: Joan Sala I Ferrer was born in the Masia La Sala in Viladrau, Girona, Spain to parents of possibly noble heritage. | Born in the Caróz pueblo (possibly bastardization of Carros de Foc?) to noble and honorable parents. |
| 1618: Married Margarita Talladas of Serrallonga. | Gets married (?) to Juana from the Torrellas family. |
| 1622: Kills his neighbor, Miquel Barfull. | Kills Felix Torrellas in Barcelona over a game. |
| 1627: Becomes leader of a large gang of bandits in the Guillerías. | Heads the gang after he returns from France. |
| Serrallonga joins the Nyerros faction against the Cadells faction in Barcelona. | His killing of Felix Torrellas starts the Narros-Cadells gang war. |
| 1630: He and his lover, Juana la Maciza (a widow from a Cadells-affiliated family), flee to France. | He meets Juana after he goes to France. |
| Oct 31, 1633: Serrallonga and Juana return from France and are captured. Juana claims that she was kidnapped by Serrallonga. | Serrallonga willingly gives himself up. Juana is not arrested alongside him. |
| Jan 8, 1634: Serrallonga is executed. | Serrallonga is beheaded and Juana swears revenge. |

Literature Comparison:

- This poem is a ballad, which is a specific type of poetic structure that, in this case, corresponds with a repetition scheme.
 - This scheme is written out in my translation of the poem.
- Chivalric Romantic Literature is a narrative genre that typically covers romance concerning knights. It was an incredibly popular genre in Europe during the medieval period.
 - It is generally understood that this genre came to Europe during the Crusades and is directly related to the Middle Eastern Courtly Love poetic genre.
 - One of the famous writers of chivalric romantic poetry is Chrétien de Troyes, who created the character Lancelot and brought the themes of courtly love to the Arthurian canon.
- *Historia escrita* covers many of the same themes and archetypes that appear in chivalric romantic literature:
 - Main character has a noble background and is a local hero.
 - Dashing knight who saves the love interest from danger.
 - Runs away with her from her arranged marriage.
 - Has some form of side character who calls upon the noble knight's heroic heart to right wrongs, throwing the main characters back into the central conflict.
 - Tragic ending where the two lovers are torn apart, usually through death.
- *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490) is a famous Valencian chivalric romantic story that exhibits many of the same characteristics that appear in *Historia escrita*. There is a very large chance that the original writer of the ballad was inspired in some way by it.
- *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), while being a criticism of chivalric romantic literature, was written by Miguel de Cervantes, who saw *Tirant lo Blanc* as one of the best stories ever written.
 - *Don Quixote* was, in fact, published and became famous during the lifetime and criminal activity of Juan de Serrallonga.

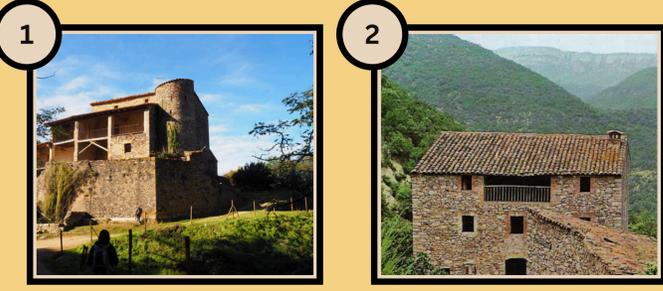
Conclusion:

There are a few notes on the limitations encountered over the course of this project. For one, time and lack of international resources. If this project were to be expanded, it would explore in more detail the following:

- Detailed provenance of *Historia escrita*
- A look at the Occitan region and its literature/balladic tradition
- More details on the chivalric romantic genre in Spain
- A more professional translation of *Historia escrita*
- An in-depth look into other Serrallonga-focused literature, including plays written by his contemporaries
- More research is needed on the impact his death may have had on the political situation in Catalonia, possibly impacting the Revolt of 1640/Reapers' War

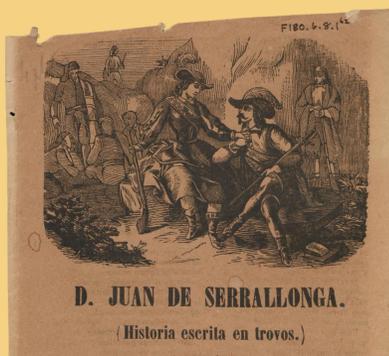
Another aspect of this research that must be acknowledged is the dearth of available work done on Serrallonga that has been translated into English. Part of this has been a lack of interest by English-speaking scholars in this subject. Another part of this was that during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the Catalan language was banned. This ban was only overturned after his death in 1978, meaning work on Catalan literature has been neglected for a very long time.

Today, Don Juan de Serrallonga has become an important figure for Catalan, both culturally and politically. On the one hand, he has become synonymous with the archetypal dashing hero fighting against tyranny, earning him a place as a symbol of Catalan independence from Spain. On the other hand, however, it is well understood that he was a murderous criminal. Analyzing these two incongruent portrayals of the man is critical to understanding not only him as a historical figure, but also understanding how we as humans mythologize and, occasionally, sanitize of complexity our historical figures.



Acknowledgements:

I thank my UROP instructors, Kara Lane-Lightfoot and Kutler Morgan, and my mentor, Professor Dodds, for their continued support in this project. All three helped me in providing advice for not only this project but for my future endeavors in my chosen field.



...pasados ascendentes, contra el muro demudado, valientes, y descendientes de padres nobles y honrados y insurrectos de Dios. Tienen su hogar en Carós y habitan en Barcelona, siendo el pueblo a su vez, humildes cual la paloma y temerosos de Dios. En el juego de pelota Félix Torrellas murió, por que la justicia por eso a Francia marchó, Su cuerpo que está a gata, siempre fueron enforcados

